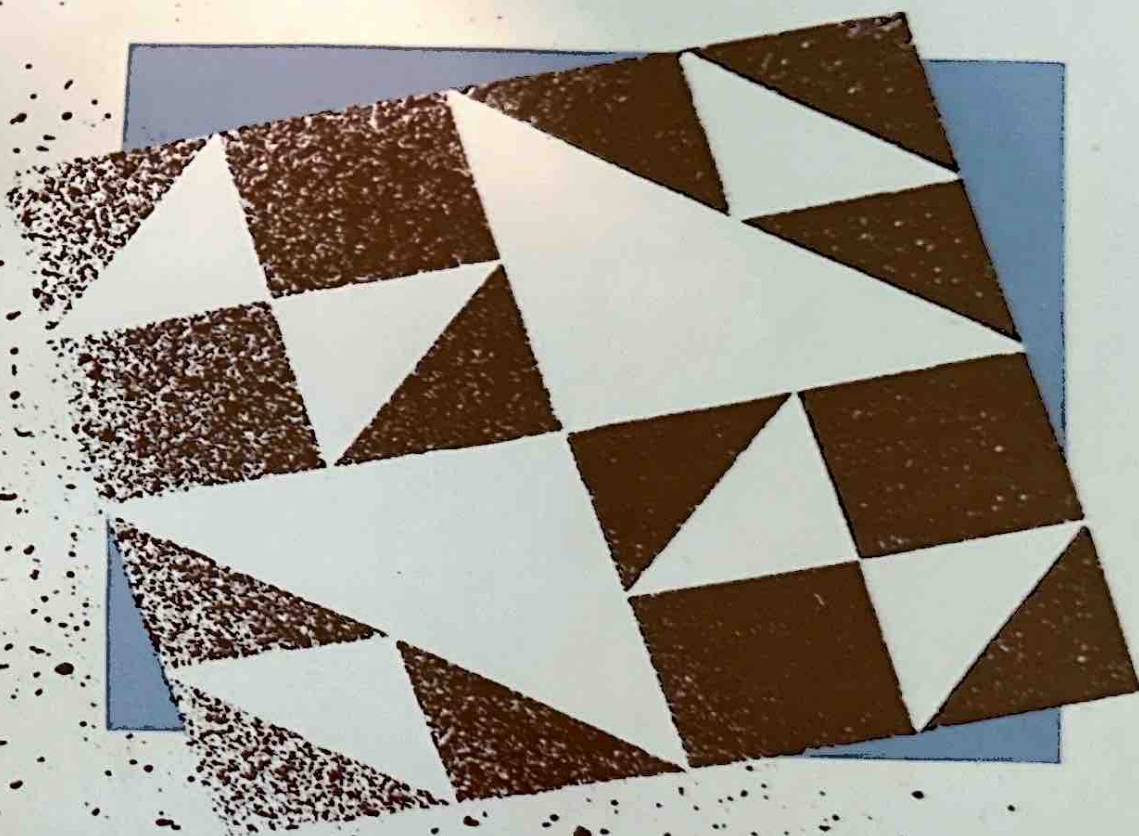
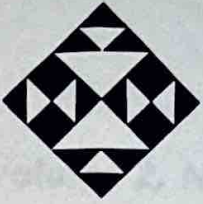


# *L e s b i a n E t h i c s*



V o l u m e 2 N o . 1





# *Lesbian Ethics*

**Volume 2 Number 1**

## ***Lesbian Ethics***

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## Editor's Introduction

With this issue *Lesbian Ethics* happily begins her second year. I feel, and many of your letters say that you also feel, that *LE* is part of a resurging radical lesbian spirit. Frankly, I never imagined there would be such a strong response to *LE*, I didn't know so many of us were out there. The resurgence is occurring in other countries as well; the British lesbian journal *Cossip* (see their ad at the back of this issue) has recently published their first issue, and are reprinting Julia Penelope's *Mystery of Lesbians*. Inquiries and correspondence to *LE* from abroad continue to increase.

So, if you want to continue receiving this hot item, Puhleeze, I must repeat, **WHEN YOU MOVE SEND LESBIAN ETHICS YOUR NEW ADDRESS.** *Lesbian Ethics* is mailed bulk, and is not forwarded to you or returned to us if you've moved. **GIVING THE POST OFFICE YOUR FORWARDING ADDRESS DOES NOT WORK.**

The Reader's Forum topic for the next issue (Summer) is *Femme and Butch*. (Are you femme, butch, neither, both? Are you trying to change, have you changed? Why? Why not? How? Or any other aspect of the topic that concerns you. I particularly encourage you to define the terms as carefully as possible.) Hopefully Linda Strega's challenging paper in *LE* 1:3 has already started you thinking and writing; and in fact two responses occur in this issue. The deadline for issue 2:2 is May 31.

The Forum topic for issue after next (Fall) is *SEX*. (Notice I avoided any cheap tricks to grab your attention, such as pairing *SEX* with words like *money, power, greed, pain, or danger*.) (What role does sex play in your life, what does it mean to you? How do you do sex? What is the relationship between your fantasies and your practice? What do you think is ethical and unethical sexually? In particular I hope that lesbians who don't practice S&M will talk about how you do practice sex, because currently it seems that S&M is being equated with lesbian sex by default.) The deadline for issue 2:3 is Sept. 15.

In this issue the cores of the "Dear Lez" and "What Works" concepts have been transformed into what will hopefully be a regular *LE* feature, *Nexus*, a place where we can share our successes with and ask our questions to each other. The other papers in the issue before you span three layers of our existence. Sarah Hoagland's piece talks about the ethics of our personal interactions with each other, as does Paula Mariedaughter's discussion of femme and butch. Sheila Jeffreys and Penelope Seator are both writing about the ethics of our political behavior. And Ruth Byrn, Ariane Brunet & Louise Turcotte, and Eloise Healy give us visions of Amazons to dance in our heads. Enjoy them all.

Jeanette Silveira

# Lesbian Ethics: Some Thoughts on Power in Our Interactions

*Sarah Lucia Hoagland*

This is part of a chapter from my manuscript, *Lesbian Ethics: Toward a New Valuation*. My overall thesis, throughout my work is that the norms we've absorbed from dominant anglo-european ethical theory promote dominance and submission through control (what I call *heterosexualism*) rather than integrity through interpersonal relations, and that the former thwarts while the latter encourages the successful weaving of lesbian community. I try to talk about moral agency within the context of oppression, while trying to avoid both victimism and blaming the victim. My goals in writing this material have been, first, to develop something meaningful for myself, second, to encourage deep lesbian discussion, and third, to give voice to my vision of lesbian focus and lesbian community as crucial to our existence as lesbians.

In this paper I want to challenge our idea of power as control. I want to challenge the use of power-over or control, including domination under the traditional ethical justification of paternalism, and argue that this use has infected lesbians lives and community. When our understanding of power is control and when we believe that to be political or good or effective we must have power in a situation, we will wind up trying to control ourselves and each other. In a number of ways this concept of power as control undermines rather than enhances our moral agency, and it leads us to confuse bonding with binding.

## Power

Theoreticians within traditional anglo-european ethics have remained largely silent on the topic of power as a factor in ethical choice.<sup>1</sup> Presumably this is because they think that the concept of power is more adequately covered by the discipline of political science; power is thought to be more of a political issue than a personal, moral one. And certainly power is largely a political concept in that it very often includes consideration of state control of

authority, police and armed force, control of economic resources, technology, and hierarchy and chain of command. Moral considerations, on the other hand, tend to center around personal choices and interactions such as how to treat others, how to conduct our affairs, how to be good, and how to help others.

Significantly it was feminists who argued that *the personal is political*.<sup>2</sup> Simone de Beauvoir started many women thinking about the category of 'woman,' particularly how women are defined essentially as Other in relation to men.<sup>3</sup> Betty Friedan started a number of women thinking about men's control of the media, in particular about the images of women prevalent in popular magazines during world war ii when women were needed in the work force, as contrasted with the images prevalent after world war ii during the back-to-the-household movement which returned the jobs to men.<sup>4</sup> Kate Millett brought attention to the fact that the relationship between the sexes was political. Expanding the definition of politics from "methods or tactics involved in managing a state or government" to "a set of strategems designed to maintain a system," Kate Millett argued that "politics refers to power-structural relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another."<sup>5</sup>

Women emerging from civil rights and anti-war activism, as well as from socialist and leftist or from anarchist political activism brought what they had learned, particularly (from socialism) how the material conditions of our lives affect our choices and (from anarchism) how violence done by police is not qualitatively different from violence done by outlaws (it is different only in degree of organization and extent of effect). And consciousness-raising groups sprung up as women began articulating how what seems to happen, because of individual circumstances, to one woman in fact happens to the vast majority of women. Detecting patterns which suggested these events were political and occurred not because of individual moral choices a woman made but instead simply because she was a woman and despite her choices, feminist theoreticians began focusing on connections between the personal and the political, especially on the power structures in personal relationships.

As a result, power came to be recognized as a factor not only in matters of state but in the privacy of personal interactions; among other things we recognized how the power of the state extends to personal interactions. We began exploring how domination is enforced and maintained by means less obvious and more pervasive than overt state, military, and economic means. And feminists went on to investigate and explore the more subtle means by which that power permeated women's and lesbians' lives – the power of naming,<sup>6</sup> the power of language,<sup>7</sup> the power of suppressing images,<sup>8</sup> the power of expectation and perception,<sup>9</sup> the power of access and definition,<sup>10</sup> the power of conceptual traps,<sup>11</sup> and on and on. We began to understand how these means were used to perpetuate subtle as well as obvious constraints on our personal and moral choices. We also began to claim our own powers, the

powers of speaking, of consciousness-raising, of organizing, of producing, of healing. And we found the essential connection in our lives. As the carpenter tells it:

Look, I really don't believe that anyone can work for a revolution separate and distinct from nan own personal happiness or love-needs. Such a person wouldn't have any way of knowing the difference between what is true and what is false. It isn't that we're trying to do two things at once – set up a counterlife and work for a revolution; the two are halves of the same whole and the absolutely essential thing is to keep juggling them.<sup>12</sup>

In our individual and collective interactions with each other, we found elements of the dominant ideology we'd been exposing. We found we were using the dominant power particularly against each other in the forms of racism, anti-semitism, classism, ageism, sizeism, as well as sexism and heterosexism. We then tried to control each other with political rules and that resulted in a lesbian backlash of sadomasochistic theory and laissez-faire, "I'm o.k., you're o.k." politics. And our use of breast-beating, vulnerability, and self-exposure resulted, not in growth and discovery and transformation so much as in guilt-tripping and manipulation, in an effort to try to control each other and to force the political direction of lesbian moving. Finally, we tried to prove our oppression and our intentions, if not our purity, by pointing the finger at others. We argued we were powerless, yet we had and still have quite an arsenal of weapons.

Now it is not my intention or within the scope of this book to offer an analysis of the concept of 'power'; or perhaps I should say the concepts of 'power,' since my use of the word in the previous paragraphs includes several different ideas. But there are certain key aspects within the concepts of 'power' which I find significant to lesbian interaction and hence to Lesbian Ethics. Those exploring lesbian and women's spirituality often distinguish between 'power-over' and 'power-from-within.'<sup>13</sup>

'Power-over' is a matter of dominance, forcing others, of bending them to our will through a variety of overt and covert methods. It is the power of control, and our attention is riveted on those who blatantly exercise it, because it is backed by coercion, threats, and instances of destruction.

'Power-from-within,' on the other hand, is a matter of centering and remaining steady in our environment as we choose how we direct our energy. Audre Lorde talks of our sexual energy as power, as a resource within us and a source of knowledge.<sup>14</sup> 'Power-from-within' is the power of ability, choice and engagement. It is creative and hence it is an affecting and transforming power, but not an imposing power.

Of the two general categories, 'power-over is a main focus in u.s. society and tends to be the only form of power we recognize.' It is essentially the power of dominance and submission. Max Weber<sup>13</sup> articulated the key aspect of this idea of power, namely, 'The imposing of one's will on the behavior of other persons.'<sup>14</sup>

Interestingly, the word 'power' comes from the latin *podere* and the old french *poouvoir*, both of which refer to ability. Current dictionary definitions tend to focus on three ideas: (1) power as ability, (2) power as control or authority, and (3) power as strength or force. However, in one way or another, all these ideas tend to be played out in our society as control, as one person imposing their will on others through various means.<sup>c</sup>

We tend to assess strength or force either in terms of destruction or of controlling others.<sup>d</sup> Those in positions of power tend to collect strength and force and transform them into means (sanctions) which they can use to maintain and enhance their position. They thereby impose their will on others through authority and control. Thus those who use the power of strength or force tend to play it out in terms of control.

The idea of power as ability is important and suggests that we do recognize and acknowledge 'power-from-within.' It suggests some rich and exciting ideas such as that our powers are a matter of our energy and abilities, our capabilities and talents, and that we can exercise power through what we weave, from what we draw together and transform, through the energy with which we focus our attention and engage in this living. As we develop our abilities we become adept, we practice crafts, and we weave tapestries.

Yet this is not how ability is developed according to the dominant social thought. Within this society, 'ability' has come to be associated with 'power-over' through the concept of 'cause':<sup>17</sup> We measure ability in terms of our capacity to perform 'effectively'; what I am able to do is measured, and it is

<sup>a</sup> Of course men use various kinds of power, especially within their peer group, when overt power-over is not appropriate. Still, the most powerful is understood to be the one who is able to control the others whether through covert manipulation of peers or overt domination of subordinates.

<sup>b</sup> Thus using feminine wiles is an exercise of power-over in that it is an attempt to impose one's will on someone dominant from a position of subordination.

<sup>c</sup> The imposing of one's will on others is central to power as developed and refined under the fathers and takes precedence over economic exploitation, when the two are separated. Those with economic advantage will perpetuate certain structures in order to feel in control even when it is not economically feasible. For example, in labor/management disputes in which turning over some of the decision-making to labor would be profitable, management fairly consistently refuses.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>d</sup> There is, of course, the notion of force in nature as in floods, earthquakes, tidal waves, avalanches, hurricanes and tornados, for example. However, insofar as they are perceived as forces, they are approached as forces to be harnessed and put to work for man's use, particularly under the idea that man's function is to control nature. Thus they are perceived as a force which controls or which man must control.

measured by what I can cause to happen or what I can produce. We put less stress on how we engage and the effects on others of our engaging, and more stress on our output and productivity. We can have greater and larger output (quantity) if others help with our projects. In this way, 'ability' comes to be connected to our talent for getting others to lend their efforts to our own project ends. Insofar as we perceive ability as actual power, we tend to evaluate it in terms of whether we can get others to do what we want.

In other words, our ability, if perceived as power, is measured by the extent we're able to control others and get results. And that means that the ability we tend to recognize in this society as power is administrative and not creative.<sup>18</sup> Ability as power in the dominant society is the ability to designate tasks, to make assignments, to manage, to direct, handle or control others.

As a result, in one way or another 'control' or 'power-over' seems to be fairly central to the concept of 'power' in use in mainstream society. And it is the prevalence of this notion – the idea of controlling, of power-over, of imposing our will – that I am interested in exploring in lesbian interactions.

Patriarchal justification for exercising power in the sense of 'control' or 'power-over' or imposing one's will on others ranges all the way from the blatant 'might makes right' to the subtle ideology of protection of the weak and defenseless. Within the lesbian community we tend not to agree that might makes right. On the other hand, we do get caught up with its more subtle and delicate cohort, paternalism. Paternalism is perhaps the most pervasive justification for exercising power over another's choices and controlling, or trying to control, a situation. In political terms, paternalism is "a practice of treating or governing people in a fatherly manner, [especially] by providing for their needs without giving them responsibility."<sup>19</sup>

Philosophers and statesmen usually discuss the issue of paternalism in terms of the conditions under which a state has a 'duty' (the right) to intervene in a citizen's life when the citizen is not harming others. It is significant because typically political justifications for restricting or coercing a person's choices involve the idea that the state has the right to interrupt a person's activities if they interfere with other individual or group rights.<sup>6</sup> But paternalism as a justification for state intervention has a different focus. The idea is that under certain conditions the state has a duty to intervene in a citizen's affairs not for the good of others or for the good of the whole or for the good of the state. Under paternalism, the state intervenes for the individual's own good.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Of course, who has what rights is an altogether different matter, that gets played out in terms of considerations of the good of the whole, that is, the good of those in power, of the state.

<sup>7</sup> Typical examples in philosophical texts of paternalistic decisions which are held to be obviously appropriate include social security, seat belts, and smoking restrictions (because of harm to oneself, not others).<sup>20</sup>

The concept of paternalism is significant because it involves the notion of 'authority' not simply as a dominant regulator or as someone who has the power to make (legislate) and enforce decisions, e.g., the police force. Paternalism involves the idea of a person or agency which is actually in a better position than the person herself to determine what is best for her and which thus should take away her responsibility for deciding what she will do. In essence paternalism (1) justifies interrupting or even abrogating a person's integrity 'for her own good,' (2) validates the idea that someone has a right, indeed an obligation, to dominate (protect, coerce, and so on) someone else under certain conditions and so force her into a certain dependency, and (3) gives credence to the idea that such a dependency benefits an individual.

Paternalism involves the idea that someone else knows better, not just in the sense of having information we could well use in making our decisions, but in the sense that someone else is in a better position to define our own needs and interests and to determine what we will do. Paternalism encourages us to cease relying on our own ability to judge, hence it encourages the loss of moral agency.<sup>8</sup>

### Control

My initial concern with all this as it relates to lesbian ethics lies in exploring how we use this type of reasoning in determining our interactions with each other. We are caught up with the idea that to help someone in pain or trouble, we must try to control the situation for her, that when she is in crisis it is appropriate for us to take over the situation for her. My concern is that in taking over for another, we are undermining her own responsibility, that is, her ability to respond,<sup>23</sup> and hence her moral agency. I am concerned that our acceptance of the idea of power as power-over or control actually leads us to make choices which undermine our own moral agency as well. Later I will suggest instead ways we can empower each other, enable each other in the sense of increasing our abilities under oppression, our ability to make choices, our ability to respond, our ability to act. . . . our moral agency.

It has been said that the oppressed may comfort each other but they do not empower each other. I think this has happened in lesbian communities. We may make each other feel better at times, but we don't often interact in ways

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<sup>8</sup> The fragmentation and loss of confidence and ability in making judgments about our selves and for our selves is widespread. For example, knowing what's best, doctors destroy health. Lynn Mabel-Lols describes her own experience of doctors repeatedly prescribing uppers to 'help' her lose weight despite her attempts to explain she'd been addicted to the drugs before and had broken the addiction with a great deal of difficulty. The repeated reply was, "We'll worry about that when you're thin."<sup>21</sup> As Vivian F. Mayer points out, it is doctors who make fat people sick and psychiatrists who make fat people

that encourage growth, healing, and transformation.<sup>h</sup> We may be adept at comforting each other, particularly when the other cries out in pain and misery or anger or frustration, and we are good at guilt-tripping each other and at manipulation, but do we *enable* each other? Or rather, when we enable each other, what exactly are we enabling?

For example, under the concept of 'enablement' as developed by alcoholics anonymous and other similar organizations, those close to alcoholics often enable an alcoholic's dependency rather than her abilities – her ability to dry out, stay sober, and engage in the world from out behind the haze of liquor. As Celinda Cantu explains, enablers under this view become co-alcoholics, those who are as "dependent on the alcoholic as the alcoholic is on alcohol" for they "get a fix by taking care of and being needed by the drunk."<sup>24</sup>

When interacting with each other it is important to ask what we are enabling and what we are participating in. Under oppression we may get a fix by someone else needing us and being dependent on us in any of a number of ways. My thesis is that the extent to which we focus on comfort rather than on the other's development of her own ability, is the extent to which we are caught up with power as control. The idea is that to be effective in a situation we must control it, that to be good, or sisters, to another, we must end her pain by stepping into a situation, taking care of it and making everything all right. And my first claim is that in the process we discourage her ability to respond within the limits of the situation she faces. We move primarily to comfort her and assure her that everything will be all right, even when that may not be the case.<sup>25</sup> We use our energy for soothing and trying to make things better for her rather than for enabling her to make her own choices, to go on in the world which does harm her at times. We enable her vulnerability rather than her ability. We help her keep constructed those walls which surround her vulnerability, rather than enabling her in such a way that she can begin to dismantle her vulnerability and still function in this world. As a result, we undermine her moral agency.

Further, when we regard our power as an ability to control things and it turns out that we can't control a situation, we are left facing our own apparent powerlessness. And my second suggestion is that often we then will step back as if we'd failed, and we assume blame (guilt) for the entire situation as if we had created it; alternatively we will turn our back on the situation and ignore it, as if it were not a problem, or will otherwise deny that there is a real problem. Either of these reactions is a matter, I believe, of attempting to claim power, of attempting to deny our powerlessness under the dominant concept of 'power,' by affirming that we can and do make a difference. By blaming ourselves we

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<sup>h</sup> Certainly with the rise of feminism we sparked many lesbian outings and changes. But subsequent to that, many of our processes have not been especially enabling; have not encouraged growth and transformation away from the dominant ideology of oppression.

affirm that we could have made a difference if we'd only tried harder, been quicker or more skillful. By turning on the other we deny that in this instance there was a problem to solve. Hence we affirm that we didn't make a difference because there was nothing that needed to be done. Thus by regarding power as the power to control, when we find we can't control a situation we are likely to break down in ways that undermine our responsibility – our ability to respond.

So my overall thesis is that when we accept the idea that power is control and we act to be powerful in our interactions with each other, we undermine each others' moral agency as well as our own.

Two lovers, one chinese and one u.s. white, separate. The chinese lesbian goes to friends for comfort and to process her pain.<sup>26</sup> The friends, upset and wanting to help her by stopping her pain or at any rate to make her feel better, take sides, stay away from the other lover, isolate her, invite their friend but not her ex-lover to parties, possibly even attack the ex-lover. Intervening this way seems to be the right thing to do. After all, if one finds a friend in pain it seems only natural to try to intervene and lessen the pain. We become protective of our friend. Often we feel that to be good we must make things happen, we must make her feel better, we must stop her pain. Thus we try to take over for her. In this case it seems our efforts can be successful, we can control the situation. We comfort her. . . but do we empower her? And are we empowering ourselves? I mean to ask whether we have really exercised power in this situation. I mean to ask whether anyone is growing more adept or learning from this situation.

If a lesbian expects that her friends will intervene and it is not what she wants, then she cannot go to them to explore her pain. A lesbian may want someone to attend to her and know what she feels, perhaps give her another perspective, at least provide a check as she sinks into her pain and explores it. Now if her friends are likely to try to do something to 'even things up,' make the ex-lover feel as badly or simply cut her off, then the lesbian cannot go to her friends. Further, if they are likely to intervene, they are likely to get caught up in the outcome and so have a vested interest, beyond the care and concern of friends, in how she resolves her pain. Should she eventually become friends or reconnect in other ways with her ex-lover, the friends who intervened may feel betrayed.

On the other hand, the lesbian who is hurt may be going to friends in order to seek their intervention. She may ask them to hurt her ex-lover in some way. More likely she will find a covert way to encourage them to want to hurt the ex-lover. She may simply exclaim that it is too painful to even run into her ex-lover in such a way that the friends would feel uncomfortable connecting in any way with the ex-lover. That is, rather than create her own circle of protection while she soothes her pain and heals, she may encourage her friends to do so for her, as if the ex-lover could simply vanish from the community, while she accepts no responsibility in the ensuing consequences. For while the ex-lover may expect

the lesbian to do what she must to deal with her pain, including cutting off, if the friends also cut off, they are treating the ex-lover as if they were the injured parties and that whatever happened, had happened to them. Thus they are holding the ex-lover responsible for, asking the ex-lover to respond to, something she did not do. This puts them in an untenable situation. By intervening in the situation like this, they may be comforting their friend, making her feel a little better for a while, but they are taking on something that is not theirs and they are not empowering their friend.

In addition, when we start on a process of protecting a friend or lover like this over time, taking on her responsibilities and putting ourselves in the middle of problems she faces, we will begin to lose respect for her as we begin to regard her as someone who is unwilling to take care of her own business, unable to make her own decisions about what hurts her. Alternatively, in order to maintain respect for her despite her inabilities, we will have to begin perceiving her as a victim who is totally helpless and under attack as no one else in the lesbian community is. This, of course, may be the case on given occasions and in extreme situations. But if perceiving her as a victim becomes the essence of the dynamics between us, then we must continue to perceive her only as a victim, at all costs, in order to maintain meaning in the relationship.

And what happens to us when we find we cannot make a difference, when we find we cannot make things better or make our friend feel better? What happens when we find we cannot control the situation? I want to suggest that when this happens and we regard our power as control, then we begin to lose our responsibility – our ability to respond.

One lesbian meets another whose strength and courage draw her. She learns more about this other lesbian and finds that the other faces traps and binds she never had to face and has no idea how to address. She wants to rush in and ease the burden. But if easing the burden means either immediately terminating or else fully assuming the parameters of her friend's traps, then easing is beyond her ability. Coming face to face with her limits, feeling unable to intervene and ease her friend's pain, she begins to feel unworthy. Actually, she is afraid that when her friend realizes she cannot simply make things better, her friend will be disappointed in her. Hence she withdraws from her friend, cutting off her feelings, seeking numbness.

A white, upper class woman is raised to be charitable to those less fortunate than she, but she is insulated from experiencing economic oppression. Finally her life brings her to a place where she can no longer be protected from the stark reality of poverty. She shuts down and ceases to notice poverty. She has been taught that a good woman is one who relieves suffering, and the task here is so great that even if she were to give away all she had, putting her own family in the same situation, it would make no other difference. Her response is to deny her powerlessness by refusing to notice poverty.

Or a working class chicana lesbian who has been close to poverty all her life,

too close, but who got out by schooling herself at night and working two jobs, one before and one after school, may lay claim to power by turning on those left behind and blaming them for their situation. Here, because we cannot control the situation and yet somehow feel we should, we cease to notice the oppression or possibly we even attack the victims.

A white feminist works as best she can to make a space safe for lesbians of color. A black lesbian coming into that space points out that the space is still racist, or at the very least, predominately white. The white feminist, coming face-to-face with the limits of her power, feeling trapped and realizing she is unable to control the space, begins to retreat into denial in an effort to deny her powerlessness, that is, her lack of control of the situation. Verbally she attacks the black lesbian, accusing her of being divisive. Growing up female, she has been drilled in her ineffectiveness, and this situation opens a raw wound. When someone brings her face-to-face with her powerlessness she responds with the force of her own pain. Defensive, feeling guilty for being unable to immediately control the situation and make the space safe, the white feminist shuts down. "I can do no more," said in frustration and anger.

A black lesbian tries to make her space safe for a long-time white friend and lover who is coming to visit and has serious physical ailments. Her efforts, worried and careful as they are, are not enough. The space still contains elements which trigger her friend's disease. When the friend points this out to her, the lesbian turns on her in anger for she has been brought face-to-face with her limitations. Her friend's presence reminds her of her own powerlessness, of her inability to fully control her environment for those she loves. As she is unable to cease noticing her friend's suffering, she instead attacks her, turning away in anger and denying any responsibility.

I think that lesbians, along with others, have absorbed the concept of 'power' prevalent in masculinist thought which implies that if we have any power, we can control (dominate) a situation and aspects of the people in it. Yet if we accept this idea, then as long as we do not control, we are assumed to be powerless and nothing we do makes any difference. Or, if we perceive the ability to affect change as nothing but the ability to control the situation, then if we are powerful and politically responsible, we should be able to end oppression. So, when oppression continues, then we must conclude that there is no difference between us and imperialists, the klan, nazis, the john birch society.

Yet we are alive and making choices and trying to do things to make changes, and I believe the frustration that is building is making us tear each other and ourselves apart with manipulation, guilt-tripping, coercion and scapegoating. As long as we are articulating our suffering and how we have been hurt, our voices are strong and beautiful, and we can take pride in ourselves and how we have broken from the dominant ideology which would have us graciously accept oppression, graciously submit. But just as we begin to feel our strength, take

pride in our accomplishments, and begin to sense some ability, some meaning, we come up against our limits and respond in any one of a number of ways, many of which involve, I suggest, attempts to deny that we are powerless, to deny the idea that what we do makes no difference.

Consider the following situation. A white lesbian is on the el (subway) seated with a bag next to her. There are plenty of seats around her. A black man boards the el, looks around and heads toward her. He picks the seat in which she has placed her bags and insists she move them so he can sit in that seat. Shortly she says to him, "Why can't you sit elsewhere?" He begins to harass her and continues until she moves. Later she gets angry at herself. She begins to worry that she was reading too much into the situation, that the situation was her fault, that she is projecting her bad feelings on him. . . . that what happened was not related to him. At the same time she goes to the other extreme and gets upset at herself because she gave in, because she's not as assertive as she should be, because she's always second in the hierarchy.

A number of things can be said about such a situation, such as the fact that if there were a white authority present to whom she could appeal, she would likely win out over the black man even though it would have nothing to do with justice. Given that she is white and he is black and this is a racially divided u.s. city in the 1980's, how can she be non-racist about the situation? For example, in her concern not to be racist to the man, what happens if she treats him differently than she would a white man, especially if that means she is not adequately protecting herself? In some situations there may be no clear cut right and many wrongs – or at least, many traps within which there are no fully acceptable alternatives.

Now what I find significant about her reactions is that she finally evaluated the situation by considering only her own behavior and ignoring his. She does not judge him, she judges only herself, she blames herself. She claims all responsibility. Notice that if the situation is fully her responsibility then she is not totally helpless, even though she may have felt helpless at the time. There is something she could have done differently to affect the outcome. If she is wrong in such a situation, then she can go on in the world without fear of random and arbitrary violence, she can be sure of sense and meaning in events. Taking the blame herself makes her an agent, and it implies that she had power and that she could have avoided what happened. She could have acted differently and so have made a difference. I think this is what happens in many rape cases in which the woman blames herself – she should have been somewhere else, wearing different clothes, and so on. One who blames only herself is, among other things, denying that her actions were irrelevant.

A sixteen year old white woman in a straight middle class household watches her mother divorce her alcoholic father, whom she has tolerated for years, and then take on a high-stepping boyfriend, who is the father of her own boyfriend and who subsequently molests her sister. The young woman helps her sister

return to her father who has been dry now for several years, and she gets child services to bring charges against her mother's boyfriend. Later the young woman begins to feel guilty, she has been unable to get her younger brother away from this man, who is also a batterer, and from her mother, who is lying to her brother and refuses to give him messages or presents from his family. She is estranged from her mother who continues to love the boyfriend, and she feels sorriest for her mother's boyfriend who himself has a string of previous disasters including the death of a wife in a car accident. She feels guilty because she cannot control the situation, she begins to feel powerless as well as responsible for it.

A twelve year old latina lesbian in a lesbian household stops eating and begins to lose weight. Those around her become concerned that she is anorexic and urge her to face her problem. In fact she is facing too many problems. She responds to those around her, to their trauma and pain. She has ideas about how the problems could be solved and her urge is to try to solve them. Once she speaks, she talks of how she can't get away from everyone else's problems and that to gain her own peace of mind and stop worrying and feeling guilty about the problems and processes of those around her, she feels she must control the situation and make everything all right. However that is not possible. Yet one place she can have control is over her body; she begins not eating. As those around her notice and begin to try to control her, force her to eat by guilt-tripping her, she loses her appetite and food becomes repulsive to her. Yet under the idea that power is control, she has affirmed some power in a situation in which she feels totally out of control, off center.<sup>1</sup>

If our concept of our own power lies in our ability to control situations and all those in them, then we are easily thrown off center.<sup>1</sup> When we have lost our centering and a sense of our ability to remain steady and function within a situation, limited though our ability may be, and especially when we are riveted on male ability to terrorize, to dominate and control by force, then to have a sense of self and meaning, we may assume responsibility for the entire situation.

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<sup>1</sup> One common belief is that lesbians and women who are anorexic or bulimic have simply internalized the messages of the diet and clothing industries, as we all have, and let it get out of control. This is inaccurate in my experience and knowledge. Anorexic lesbians and women, for example, are often exercising control, begun often as children, over something they are able to control, within a context in which they have no other control. In some cases this includes situations of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse from parents.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One of the major messages of the fathers is an exhortation for us to control our selves, to exercise will power and self-control. This began, to the best of my knowledge, with the onset of patriarchy in ancient greece, with the greek philosophical detachment of reason from emotion. And poor will-power is the single most prevalent taunt hurled at fat people, particularly by parents, teachers, and members of the medical profession.<sup>28</sup>

Alternatively, we may claim some power, that is, affirm that we are not irrelevant, that we make a difference, by denying that there is suffering or oppression in a situation, or even by turning on the other, charging that she brought it on herself, implying she is responsible for the entire situation.

A lesbian is sick and withdraws. Her friends do not understand, but it is because she cannot deal with their feelings of insecurity and guilt which arise when they realize they cannot stop or even ease the pain of her illness. The lesbian cannot deal at this time with her friends' energy. She needs her own energy to face her disease. As she is ill, she has little energy. She does not want to have to use energy to throw up walls against their reactions to her. She does not have the energy to respond to their perceptions of themselves as helpless. They want to be able to help, but if they can't do that and notice improvement, they have no way of simply dealing with her illness. Ultimately they may withdraw in guilt and then never feel comfortable about reconnecting with her. Or they may turn on her in frustration stating, "I choose when I am sick, if there's something important enough to do, I do it," or "If you really wanted to be well, you would be."<sup>k</sup>

Because of our concept of ability as power-over, we lose the ability to connect, to attend, to learn from each other, to validate what is happening and hence to contribute to the ground on which we go on with what we are attempting in this living. We lose the ability to respond to each other. And as a result we are vulnerable to internalizing the belief system of those who do dominate.

A lesbian is losing her job because she is indian. The community can organize and bring pressure on her employer to change his mind. But if he doesn't want to, there is no power they have to make him change. They may use psychic power and attempt to will disaster. But if he is dead set on his decision, they cannot bend his will to their own. Ultimately the lesbian may feel contempt for her friends and her community. They cannot, it seems, make a difference. She may then settle into her employer's conceptual framework and internalize it.

Another lesbian is ill and feels contempt for her friends for they are so helpless and unable to stop her pain, contempt for their powerlessness. Because of her idea that power means making pain or oppression end by immediately intervening in a situation and controlling it, she looks to those who do seem to have the power to inflict pain and oppression on others, regards them as harbingers of reality, and thus turns from lesbians and pushes away support.

We want someone to make it all better for us, we want to be able to vent our rage at what has happened to us, for oppression is not something we chose.

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<sup>k</sup> It may be that some illnesses are ways of working through certain things. The point here is that the other, in judging her friend's choices, is implying that her friend is doing nothing or that what she is doing is not worthwhile.

Paternalism as a way of thinking arises as a result of living under conditions of oppression, of dominance and submission, particularly of heterosexuality. But as a way of thinking, it does not help undermine but rather reinforces those conditions.

Paternalism can seem deceptively warm and secure. We want both to have someone make things right for us and to be able to intervene and make things right for those we care about. Barring that, we will turn to those who do have the dominant power and focus on them. But does this lead to empowerment – to growth and the increase of our abilities? Is this how we become adepts?

## Attending

### Attending as Empowering Another

Consider again the lovers who break up. If friends loyal to one, upon seeing her pain and wanting to do something to alleviate it, intervene in the situation by turning on the other, they are trying to control the situation for their friend. By taking on their friend's problem this way, they are taking on their friend's process of growth and separation, of moving and change. They may be comforting her but they are not empowering her.

Or consider the interactions between two lovers. One lover breaking up feels compelled to take care of the lover she is breaking up with because she cannot bear to see her lover undergo the pain and grief her own decision is causing. In trying to take away her lover's hurt, she is not allowing her lover to grieve fully. Thus the painful breaking up is prolonged even further, and both lesbians' efforts and moving through to the other side of grief are way-layed. This may happen because the lesbian who is initiating the breaking up wants to control the effect her actions have on someone she has loved and still loves.

I want to suggest that in these types of situation, it is inappropriate to try to take over and control events for someone we care about. We would never think of intervening to control or terminate a process that was joyful. To try to intervene and end a friend's pain or remove its source, thereby protecting her from facing the situation, stems from a definition of power that emerges from the rule of the fathers: domination, the attempt to impose one's will on the behavior of others. It stems from a dangerous notion of power as ability – ability to protect others – because it encourages violation. To try to control someone's situation is to undermine her process and to violate her integrity, her wholeness. It encourages us to set aside her integrity and act for her because we are in a better position than she to address and handle the situation. In other words, it encourages paternalistic thinking, a comforting justification for dominance and submission. The power of control is not an enabling, adepting power.

Instead of intervening to control I want to suggest a different approach in our interactions, an approach which encourages and weaves a different concept of

power, power-from-within. I want to suggest that attending our friend in her pain, lending support, but not intervening to control, is powerful in that it is empowering, enabling, adepting.<sup>29</sup> Under the father's conception of power, we feel helpless as we watch her pain, and we want it to end. But if instead of trying to control things we attend her, this empowers her in that it enables her to gather her own strength and focus and develop her own ability to function in a situation.

I am suggesting, thus, that rather than controlling a situation for a friend/lover, we attend her in her situation as she makes her choices about how to proceed. Her choices may involve falling apart for a while, withdrawing to lick her wounds, getting angry and outing her rage, and so on. But as she addresses the situation, she is making decisions about what to do next, about what is appropriate, what will work, what she wants, what is her part.

I am suggesting that we reconsider our ideas about being powerful, being effective in a situation. Being powerful need not be a matter of affecting the outcome of a situation such that dominance is a desirable, if unattainable, goal. Being powerful can be a matter of making choices, of deciding what to do, of going on in a situation as best we can, making a difference because we are engaging, contributing our part; or it may be a matter of withdrawing when we find we cannot contribute to this situation. Thus if I want to help a friend, my power is that I attend, that is my part. And I empower her not by trying to control the situation, thus undermining her process of choosing what to do, of enacting her part. I empower her by attending her so she is better able to make decisions in the situation she faces.

As Alice Molloy wrote, "At-tention is the coin of our realm."<sup>30</sup> When we attend someone or something, we focus on it and hence we give it our energy. Mostly we focus on and at-tend the agendas of those who dominate, we give them our energy. Because of their power, which is their ability to terrorize us, we rivet on them. But of course it is because we at-tend them that they can continue with their agendas.

When instead you at-tend me, our channels of communication are open to each other and we are sending and receiving energy. When I at-tend you, I stretch toward you, I am present to you, I engage with you. I focus my energy on you, my rhythms. By at-tending she who is in pain, I can help steady her. When she is off center and in crisis, I can help stabilize her nerves and fluctuations, perhaps as a beacon or a magnet. When we at-tend each other, this is powerful. And it can be enabling, adepting.

She says her lover is leaving, she says she is sick, she says she is discriminated against. I know what this means to her because I know something of politics, because I have my own experiences, and because I am intimate with her — I know much of what goes on within her. And because of that I become a witness. I know how she feels not so much because I impose my own agendas as because I know her living. I know how she has felt in the past. I can choose

to direct my energy toward her, I can attend.

If I attend her process, if I focus on her and give my attention, she then knows that someone else knows what she is going through, and this is empowering. As Juana Maria Paz once wrote: "I cannot go it alone. I need someone who reinforces my reality, who shares my dreams and visions."<sup>31</sup> That another lesbian knows what I go through can keep me sane and centered. I do not have to remain in the craziness of isolation, of no one realizing what is happening to me. I am not isolated, I am part of a group and recognized,<sup>1</sup> I am being taken seriously, I make a difference.

Secondly, whenever we face something alone we must constantly re-affirm that what we think is happening actually is happening. Or we must check ourselves to make sure our responses don't stray too far from what is actually happening. When our friends attend, they provide reality checks and this is empowering. It does not mean that we become dependent on them for determining what is reality, but rather that we can check in by noticing their responses or by outright asking them, and then use what they report of their perceptions as added information with which we evaluate the situation. As a result, we do not have to use our energy and attention to constantly monitor the situation, to reassess the circumstances at each moment, to confirm that the situation is real and this is really happening. Instead we can attend to our feelings, our needs, we can focus our energy on processing our pain, on making decisions about how to proceed, and on growing. This interaction is crucial when we are engaged in the process of forging new realities, particularly when acting under oppression.

This is not to say that the friends make no judgments in the situation and do not respond in their own right. In fact in attending we very much bring ourselves, our experiences, our perceptions, our advice (spoken or not) – our energy. Nor is this to say that the friends should never do anything, for example when a friend asks for help in a lesbian mother's custody case or in a case of job discrimination. My point concerns the urge to take over for a friend or lover in pain and shelter and protect her.

I also do not mean to suggest that we ought always to be attended to.<sup>32</sup> Sometimes privacy is essential, especially when the one in pain does not trust herself not to try to manipulate her friends into taking over the situation for her. And sometimes we just want to be alone to wallow in our grief and not have to worry about how we appear to others. This is especially true if our friends are extremely uncomfortable around our pain and hence want first and foremost for it to end so they can be more comfortable. Or we may want to be alone if we feel our friends are just watching us, curious about how we respond.<sup>m</sup> So

<sup>1</sup> Many loners, I believe go on through difficult times by imagining competent attenders, mind spirits, who know what is happening even though mortal fools perceive nothing.

<sup>m</sup> There's nothing wrong with such a curiosity. But the one in pain may not want to have to deal with that energy.

privacy may be what a lesbian wants in a given situation.

Further, there are limits to attending. In the first place it may be important that I shield myself as I attend another, whether I am gaining new knowledge or going over old territory to me. Sally Gearhart's depiction of shielding before entering remember rooms in *The Wanderground* is an important concept.<sup>33</sup>

Secondly, if attending another lesbian means we tolerate or absorb her anger and pain, particularly if that manifests itself as an attack on us in the form of misplaced anger, then remaining and giving our attention empowers neither. When we accept attacks, we expect nothing of the friend or lover in pain, we condescend. Remaining and absorbing the attacks only feeds her own low opinion of herself, by confirming her internalized oppression — that she is mean, or that those who bother with her aren't worth much, that she lacks integrity, and so on. Sometimes remaining in her presence, particularly when she is trying to manipulate us as one who attends, does not empower but further disables.

Thirdly, I may decide to attend another in her process of making decisions and later there may come a time when I can no longer be a party to the choices she is making. For example, she may decide to repeatedly get drunk to ease her pain. If she is not an alcoholic, I may attend her through one or two drunks, but should she begin to make this a habit, in attending I may give my perceptions that this is not really helping her recenter so she can go on. However, she may ignore my information and choose a path I cannot accept. If there is nothing I can do in my part to convince her to stop this process, and if collaborating with her or alternatively trying to control her and bend her will to mine are the only choices in attending, then I may choose to withdraw my attention. Attending involves energy, and if I cannot accept what my energy is contributing to, then I can withdraw it and cease to be a part of the events.

I am not trying to suggest a hard and fast rule for interacting with others, a moral maxim the adherence to which will ensure the best possible outcome in crises and painful situations. We can come up with all kinds of hard cases. What if a relationship is an increasingly violent battering relationship? What if our friend has a seizure? What if she is arrested? What if she is about to step, unknowingly, into the middle of a busy street? What counts as taking over another's processes in these cases, abrogating her integrity? What could count as intervention which is not coercive but is "substantively considerate"?<sup>34</sup> Or is there any such thing? And even if intervention is always coercive, is taking over always the thing to avoid at all costs?

What I am trying to suggest is not a rule of right behavior but a way of approaching each other, a different perception and evaluation of our choices, a different understanding of power, and a different foundation for our actions. I want to suggest, first, that when we regard control of situations and of others as the appropriate mode of action in crises, we perpetuate a foundation of dominance and submission, for we give substance to the reality of taking over

for another, of treating her as a total victim. Alternatively, I am suggesting that if the focus of our interactions is attending her as she makes her choices – understanding her situation, perceiving what she is experiencing, offering our perceptions, giving advice, making suggestions, but leaving the choice to her – we will begin to weave a different concept of power, one from a foundation of autonomy and self-centering. That is, we will operate in such a way that autonomy or self-centering is held in place, like an axis, by the activity that surrounds it. Preservation of a friend's integrity, not protection of victims and control of situations, would fuel our interactions.

So I am not saying that we will never have occasion to intervene in a friend's process. I am suggesting that we approach the idea of helping a friend (lover) from a different perspective. A different approach will affect what we consider as reasonable options available in a situation. It will also determine what actions or choices we regard as needing explanation.

Thus in any given situation we may choose to intervene in a situation for her, rather than attend her and affect the situation by including our assessment of her choices, but we would do so only under very serious conditions. And rather than regard our action as heroic we would regard it as a very serious assumption, even presumption, because it is a choice first and foremost to abrogate our friend's integrity. Under such a different perception of intervention, rather than feeling a need to explain our own decision not to intervene, as called for under the heroic model, we would be more inclined to explain a decision to intervene.

Further, if we chose to intervene, it would not be appropriate to simply walk away at the end of the crisis, considering our action as heroic, praiseworthy, and complete. If we decided to intervene and control, we would realize that we must be prepared to stay in her life until she has gotten back on center, until she is again able to act for her own self. It means being prepared to stay with her and work to undo the violation of our initial intervention, undoing any resulting dependency on us as heroines, and quite likely hearing her frustration and anger at having been helpless at one time, anger at her loss of integrity and autonomy, and our part in it.

Again, what I am suggesting here is not a rule but rather a focus, a shift in perception. It would not end crises or pain. It is just a matter of approaching them differently. And the reason for the change would be that we agree through our actions to preserve each other's integrity, rather than try to protect each other from pain.

My thesis, thus, is first a point about how we may be hindering the growth of our friend's power, power-from-within. We may be comforting a friend by rushing in and intervening in her affairs, but by our intervention we are not empowering her, helping her to gain the ability to face the situation, make choices in it, learn from it and grow. We are, perhaps, stopping something, but that's not to say she has yet increased her ability to go on once we remove ourselves.

### **Attending as Empowering Ourselves.**

My second point is about our own power and ability. As long as we regard our ability in a situation as being the power to control that situation, then when we face larger tasks, when we face situations we can't control, we will shut down in serious ways, lose our moral agency. That is, if we understand our power or ability in a situation as control and we regard our selves as worthy friends only if we can exercise control when those we are about face painful, harmful, or debilitating events, then what happens to us when we cannot end their pain or make the situation better?

Again, when we regard our power as control and find ourselves unable to control, at times we will respond by regarding ourselves and her as helpless, and numb ourselves to the situation. Other times we instead try to lay claim to our power by turning on our friend (or ourselves if we were the injured one) and deny the seriousness of what she is facing, particularly the politics of the situation, the power relations that exist which give rise to oppression. That is, so long as we feel that power is power-over, then we may well engage in victimism or, alternatively, blaming the victim. And both of these choices undermine our own moral agency.

Consider again the black lesbian who tries to make her space safe for her lover. Upon finding that all her efforts were not enough, she got angry at her lover. Or consider again the white feminist who despite all her efforts was unable to make a space safe for a lesbian of color and as a result began to retreat into denial and numbness. We either have to control the situation or we deny the problem or we consider ourselves powerless. This is not the way to move under oppression.

Being able to attend each other means that we can steady ourselves and each other as we face our situations, it means we can be aware of what is happening and know others are aware of what is happening to us, that we are not alone and that this will not go unheeded. And that steadiness, I want to suggest, is what will help us to function in a situation rather than shut down or give in.

Thus I am not suggesting by all this that we cease trying to interrupt racism or ableism, or heterosexism, classism, anti-semitism, ageism, sizeism, or imperialism, terrorism, nuclear holocaust. I am suggesting that until we cease regarding power or ability as control, we won't be effective in that interruption, in withdrawing from and ceasing to validate these oppressions, in undermining them.

It takes knowledge and tremendous inner strength not to panic. We do live by a time bomb. And it is ticking. But the effective and successful dismantling of a time bomb is not accomplished by rushing in. Those who dismantle time bombs work very carefully and meticulously with the small parts of the bomb, attending to one at a time, not letting themselves be uncentered by the magnitude of the task, giving each small part their full attention, keeping themselves steady even though surrounded by impending disaster. And the

bomb may well explode before they're through. But their attention is not focused where they may seem helpless.<sup>n</sup> Their attention is focused where their abilities can make a difference, if a difference is going to be made. The work we face is not heroic or climactic. We're in it for the long haul, and we need to settle down to how we are going to live our lives through this, developing our own abilities and encouraging those of others, so that transformation can occur, so that we don't reinforce the ideology of oppression.

Thus we may decide to demonstrate because a friend is fired. But how we approach it makes a difference. Our focus could involve a do-or-die energy, such that if we don't block this instance of oppression we've failed, we've made no difference. Alternatively our energy and focus could be on our friend and how this enables her and us.

Partly my distinction involves clarifying what will count as success in the endeavor. If the friend chooses to bring suit, must winning it be the only gauge of success? Success may be a matter of our friend finding the means to fight back, to cause trouble, to have done something to make the employers acutely aware that we are here and not willing to accept the situation. In this way success is in her hands, and her ability to act and respond rests with her choices. She is a moral agent. And this ability grows, I believe, with our ability to attend and focus and support her in her choices and endeavors, rather than with our urge to rush in and control the situation and try to immediately end this instance of oppression.

Now besides limits to attending which I mentioned above, it is important to realize that what I am calling attending carries its own dangers. A lesbian who has no experience with or understanding (through awareness) of aspects of another lesbian's situation may in attending add burdens to her friend's process simply through her own ignorance. She may not be able to understand the depths of what her friend is going through, and hence she may have an energy about her in responding to the situation that belittles it or alternatively that lends an air of melodrama. She may be open to supporting and attending her friend but lack the experience to be a support. The danger is that she becomes unreliable in her attendance.

A working class lesbian responds, for example, to her upper class friend who is acutely and chronically ill by assuming her friend's mind is as debilitated as her body, not realizing that her friend just doesn't have the energy to maintain and defend herself but still absorbs the energy and games around her. Or a white middle class lesbian responds with incomprehension to a black working class lesbian's lack of emotional display at some tragedy in her own life, not realizing that in her friend's life, expression of emotion carries dangers of exposure.

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<sup>n</sup> According to Machiavelli, to keep power one must keep others in fear. The power of domination backed up by force is their ability to keep us riveted on them, unable to do anything but respond to their agendas.

The danger is that she who is attending, in attempting to make sense of what she does notice, creates another story, another category in which to place her friend's suffering, and her friend now has not only her own problems but the other lesbian's distorting energy to deal with as well. That is to say, attending is itself a skill, an ability, which we need to learn and develop.

However, this is not to say that lesbians who make the best attenders are always those who have first hand knowledge of what their friends are experiencing. Sometimes a lesbian without past experience of our situation can be our most helpful attender. For if what we need is to explain and clarify for ourselves what we are going through, then someone else's lack of knowledge of our background and framework and her resulting questions may aid us in that process.

Further, lesbians with first hand knowledge of what another lesbian is experiencing can also add burdens to her process. One lesbian may have been fired from her job and be trying to collect support to bring pressure on her employer, perhaps raising money for lawyers to file a discrimination suit. Another lesbian, to whom she turns for support, may have been through one or more firings already and her friend's situation simply calls up old nightmares. She may turn from her friend because her own wounds are too raw. If she is not in touch with her own processes then her turning from her friend can be as burdening to her friend as another's ignorance. For if she doesn't make clear that her withdrawal is due to her own unresolved pain and resulting debility, she may seriously undermine her friend's perception of her situation. After all, if someone has experienced what we are going through and ignores us, as if what was happening to us wasn't really happening to us, then we will likely find ourselves questioning whether the discrimination we think is happening to us actually is happening.

In other words, attending is not a matter of being or having an impartial observe. What I am talking about here is not the allegedly non-interventionist, humanistic psychology of the 60's and 70's that pretends to be non-judgmental. I am not talking about the disengagement of an allegedly impartial observer. For making no judgment is still to make a judgment. And simply validating someone else's pain (She says, "I am at fault for my rape because I shouldn't have been out.") is not acting impartially, for it is affirming one set of judgments rather than another. The allegedly non-judgmental humanistic psychology affirms status quo politics.

Attending is not a matter of being or having an impartial observer. Nor should it be. For as we attend, it is our energy we add to the situation. We come to situations with our own agendas and dreams. We come with our own experiences and judgments. We come with our own needs and limitations. If a friend is losing a job, it is not just anyone who notices, who knows, it is us. And as we attend, we include our energy, our perceptions as well as our intimacy, our connections with her, in the situation. The situation thus changes and she is

not now facing it isolated. It involves her and us and what we all can make of it. This is not impartial or disengaging. It is profoundly engaging. (Thus, of course, it is fraught with mistakes as well as successes.)

So often we either withdraw because our energy can't control, or we face a situation but use it for some other end, often romanticizing and objectifying others in the process. Attending can be especially hard on us because we have had to learn selective perception for survival. And because her telling is not always honest.

But the point of attending is not control of a situation, it is empowerment, enablement, in a situation. It is her ability to go on, to make decisions as a moral agent. And if the focus of our energy is not control but rather is her integrity, then there can be growth and enablement through engagement. Juana Maria Paz writes: "Flying Thunder had not been able to give me the dream I saw with her or the strength I saw in her, but she gave me the time and space to develop these things on my own."<sup>35</sup> Or as Harriet Ellenberger writes:

[A] friend sat me down — a woman that I've lived with for eleven years now and am separating from — and what she did for me is I think what lesbians consistently do for each other. . . . She sat me down and said, what are you trying to say? *What are you trying to say? What are you trying to do?* but she did that sitting down with me at the kitchen table, and that questioning of me at the kitchen table, in this utter faith that she has always had, that something significant eventually issues out of the confusion of my thought.<sup>36</sup>

And there can be growth and enablement even if there is no resolution at first and even if there is misjudgment and error. A lesbian of color declares she cannot relate to white lesbians, because the questions and confusions in her own mind from her internalized oppression only become greater and more confused when she tries to talk about them to white lesbians. Intimacy, at this point, is just not occurring. The white lesbians have proved to be unreliable in their attention; and not only does she need to explain much to them, but also she is not being heard. She decides that to address her own needs she must withdraw.

If we value this development in terms of control, it could be looked at as a failure of all the other lesbians in the space, white and lesbians of color, to make the space one in which she could explore her questions. Her choice could throw the others back on their lack of ability to control things, on their apparent helplessness; and at some point they may shut down or shut themselves off from her. Reacting in this way, they will fail to attend her pain and learn from what she is saying. If, on the other hand, the others could touch their own pain and fear from this development in the situation, they may be able to understand that their's was a space in which she could clarify her needs. They may be unable at this point to attend her questions and confusions,

because they don't have the knowledge or understanding to both perceive these questions and either not block them or not crumble before them (thinking they ought to have answers now). But they can perceive her reactions, and attend the pain their ignorance is causing; and they can learn from this. This knowledge, rather than leading them to react helplessly, empowers them to go beyond blocking or liberal guilt and to continue to try to gain knowledge.

For knowledge is the other side of attending. Not only does attending enable the one who is attended at a particular time and help her better address her situation; it empowers, enables, the one who does the attending at the time. For the one who attends is gaining knowledge, knowledge of other situations, knowledge of different but integral perspectives, knowledge of different energies. And she is also learning to act in situations. Ignorance for lesbians and for the lesbian community is a life and death matter. It may be that ignorance feels comfortable, but that is the comfort of numbness, not the comfort of centering. When we are centered, then reality is confirmed, and we have the knowledge we need to go on, to make the best decisions possible within the circumstances. We may need to withdraw for a while, but that is quite different from numbing ourselves.

Living on the fringe of a patriarchy, we realize our jeopardy and rush around in a panic trying to make things happen. We are led to believe that she who sits and observes is ignorant. Yet it is not inaction which is ignorance, as we are led to believe. Ignorance, rather, is goal-oriented behavior that is unconsidered and unthinking.<sup>37</sup> As we learn that the dominant culture's knowledge is unreliable, we find we have no one to learn from but each other. This means we learn as we go, and considered action means carefully attending each other and resisting the impulse to work for control. If we do not think to attend each other but instead are thrown reeling back on our own fears, we will not use our time to pull ourselves out of ignorance. If instead we feel helpless, and thus – because our only concept of power is control – guilty, we begin to shut down in one of a number of ways. One who attends, on the other hand, takes and learns as an attender and then acts in her own capacity, contributes her own part.

### **Attending and Therapy**

Thus what I am talking about here as attending is an engaging relationship. In this respect I would caution against the dynamic of treating the therapist as a professional attender. The situation formally designates one as in need of help while designating the other as having the ability to help by virtue of her training, and not herself needing any help.<sup>o</sup> The temptation is to go to therapists

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<sup>o</sup> In a given instance one may be in need of help and another in a position to help. But that is a result of the situation and not of the nature of those involved or their chosen profession.

as friends in the capacity of professionals. Anna Lee discusses this phenomenon and argues that this undermines our ability to weave friendships:

What is the nature of friendship? . . . If friendship is conducted on a paid basis, then it becomes a relationship subject to the laws of the marketplace. The value is determined by the price set and paid. That market philosophy certainly indicates that a relationship without a price is not a relationship at all. Once we succumb to the belief that friendship can be paid for, we begin to distort the nature of not-for-profit friendship.<sup>38</sup>

Anna Lee notes that often we justify going to a therapist because we don't want to burden our friends with our pain and anger:

The excuse is that burdening our friends with our pain or anger or sorrow diminishes the value of friendship, unless we pay for it. If we can only bring our joy to our friends, how can we value them? . . . We [weaken] the possibility of bonds between wimmin necessary to participate in a social movement. The early feminist eras both had in common strong bonds between friends. Certainly, the early second wave of feminism began by friends coming together, talking about individual experiences, and realizing those experiences were similar and not isolated or crazy. The consciousness raising groups were absolutely opposed to degenerating into a therapy session. . . . The analysis of rape didn't come from [therapy]. . . . The analysis of racism didn't come from therapy. . . . Paid friendship distorts our focus about the nature of friendships and weakens the bonds between wimmin.<sup>39</sup>

From the other direction, at times we may be tempted to insist another go to a therapist. But that usually means we have decided we simply can no longer deal with her behavior and choices. Advocating therapy under such circumstances is to deny or avoid the problem in the relationship without really admitting it. We say she has a problem. Now it may be that it is time for us to withdraw from her, because we each are no longer able to respond to the other. But to advocate therapy under such conditions is to deny this process of separation or pretend that it is not our choice.

Beyond questions of friendship, therapy has also served to interrupt the type of healing work we engaged in with c r groups, as Anna Lee suggests. For it encourages one lesbian to go to a professional to deal with 'her problem,' rather than a group of lesbians to get together to discuss oppression. It is fat dykes meeting together that begins to undermine internalized self-hatred. It is incest victims exploring together survival skills and walls and defenses and lies that can turn victims to survivors. This type of attending is crucial to lesbian moving. We have many wounds to heal and much damage to undo. But this isn't going to happen at the hands of professionals. The ideology of therapy, of a professional removed from the situation treating a victim, interrupts it.

In discussing our growth and development, Anna Lee introduces the idea of our focus muscle. When our focus, our attention, is directed by another, it distorts. For we focus on what others want us to pay attention to. Even in feminist therapy, she points out, our focus is directed by the therapist:

If someone tells me when to stop in a story, to explore a specific point or to rethink a position, then she, not I, is flexing her focusing muscle. Friends often interrupt each other, ask for clarification or add another perspective. . . .<sup>40</sup>

But whether we pursue the direction of our friends' attention is a matter of choice. We are on equal footing in the relationship, or if we feel trapped in an exchange we can withdraw. When instead we are with someone who is allegedly an authority that we pay, then someone else is directing our attention. And we expect that her decision to have us focus on some element rather than another comes from objectivity:

If I go so far as to let someone else decide for me, then I have turned myself over to a higher power. I do this believing the person has no hidden agenda, no reason to betray me or to try to model me in her image. In short she is objective. But what is objectivity? Is it disinterest, detachment or nonpartisanship? If so, do I want someone who is not interested in my well being. . . .?<sup>41</sup>

Anna Lee goes on to argue that therapy is fatal to developing our focus muscle, that there are no shortcuts. Therapy does not strengthen us in making our own decisions. She argues that feminist therapy has not enabled us to move forward, that it has contributed to the stagnation of the women's movement, and that its tactics and strategy are invading our group interactions. It is becoming more and more difficult to conduct meetings without resorting to constant processing, or having therapists determine the structure of the meeting because they know best, or having each member resort to her therapist about how or what we should decide. Therapy does not replace friendship, nor does it replace group process. And it is not particularly enabling. Our ability to make choices and go on in situations is something we develop by acting and engaging among each other, in relationships. Thus I want to suggest that what I am calling attending is a matter for friends and lovers, for intimates, and for those who join groups in common cause, not for professionals.

That I am aware of what another goes through can help her remain centered or find centering, because if she is attended, she is not isolated. Thus she can focus more on her process. My attending can also help me to center. That I attend what she goes through helps me to address the unknown. Though I do not share her exact experience and process, I can affirm her reality and come to know beyond intellectualizing, come to feel, something I am not experiencing. This increases my ability to respond. That is one way lesbians of vastly different

backgrounds can work together. That I attend what she goes through, finally, can empower, for it grounds her autonomy while at the same time letting her know that she is not anonymous, that she is part of a group, that is, that she is being taken seriously, that she makes a difference.

In other words, attending contributes to the moral agency of both she who attends and she who is attended in any given situation. In being attended and refusing to accept power as the ability to control, we increase our responsibility — our ability to respond. We are enabled to address a situation and go on; we find we do make a difference. Thus we can begin to undermine the debilitating effects on us of paternalism as well as other forms of domination. That we can learn among each other to focus and attend each other can make our ground of choice more solid.

And in attending we also increase our responsibility. For when we do not accept power as the ability to control, we will less likely shut down and numb ourselves, internalize oppressive ideology, objectify others for a political end, or turn on another and deny her situation. Thus we will be better able to respond to her. Secondly, we gain in our ability to respond because we gain knowledge, awareness, understanding. And this increases our ability to function and make choices. Up to now the power we have been using has involved strategies of control, such that our resistance is simply in our survival — in only not dying.<sup>42</sup> I believe regarding our power as power from-within including the intensity of our sexuality and the tapestries of our engaging. I believe enabling the integrity of our choices, will increase our resistance.<sup>P</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Julie Murphy, "A Philosophical Analysis of Social Types: Schutz and Sartre," Ph.D. dissertation, De Paul University, June, 1982.

<sup>2</sup> To the best of my knowledge, Carol Hanisch introduced the phrase in her paper, "The Personal is Political," *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation, Major Writings of the Radical Feminists*, eds., Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, 1970, reprinted in *Radical Therapist*, The Radical Therapist Collective, produced by Jerome Agel (New York: Ballantine Books), pp. 152-157. Of course, 19th century feminists were making connections between the personal and the political, particularly in believing that becoming enfranchised would change women's lives and in arguing how marriage is a political institution.

<sup>3</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Bantam Books, 1970).

<sup>P</sup> Beyond smaller, personal relationships, attending can be empowering and enabling as a community function. While at this time I believe we're still too caught up with power as control, and not yet comfortable enough with how our different agendas contribute to attending, for group ritual attending to be fully enabling, even within spirituality circles, still there is a power here we can eventually develop. The movie, "Witness," although damaging in elements of its portrayal of the amish, nevertheless hints at the empowerment of groups witnessing, attending.

- <sup>4</sup> Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1963).
- <sup>5</sup> Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), p. 23.
- <sup>6</sup> Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), and *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).
- <sup>7</sup> Julia P. Stanley [Julia Penelope], "Paradigmatic Woman: The Prostitute," *Papers in Language Variation*, ed., David L. Shores & Carole P. Hines (Birmingham, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1977), pp. 303-321; Julia P. Stanley, "Sexist Grammar," *College English*, March 1978, pp. 800-811; Julia P. Stanley, "Prescribed Passivity: The Language of Sexism," *Views on Language*, ed., Reza Ordoubadian (Murfreesboro, TN: Inter-University Publishing, 1975), pp. 96-108; Julia Penelope & Susan J. Wolfe, "Style as Meaning," *Proceedings of the 6th LACAS Forum*, ed., W.C. McCormack & H.J. Izzo (Columbia, SC: Hornbeam Press, 1980), pp. 45-52; to name but a few.
- <sup>8</sup> Pat Robinson and Group, "A Historical and Critical Essay for Black Women in the Cities," *The Black Woman*, ed., Toni Cade [Bambara] (New York: New American Library, 1970), pp. 198-210.
- <sup>9</sup> Naomi Weisstein, "Psychology Constructs the Female," *Women in Sexist Society*, eds. Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran (New York: Signet, 1971), pp. 207-224.
- <sup>10</sup> Marilyn Frye, "Some Reflections on Separatism and Power," *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. (Trumansburg, N.Y.: The Crossing Press, 1983), pp. 95-109.
- <sup>11</sup> Sarah L[ucia] Hoagland, "Coercive Consensus," *Sinister Wisdom*, 6, Summer, 1978, pp. 86-92.
- <sup>12</sup> the carpenter, *the Cook and the Carpenter* (Plainfield, Vt: Daughters, Inc., 1973), p. 50.
- <sup>13</sup> Note for example, *Starhawk, Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex & Politics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982).
- <sup>14</sup> Audre Lorde, *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power* (Brooklyn, NY: Out and Out Books, 1978), p. 2; reprinted in *Sister Outsider* (Trumansburg, NY: The Crossing Press, 1984), p. 54.
- <sup>15</sup> Kate Millett drew this out, *Sexual Politics*, p. 25.
- <sup>16</sup> Conversation, Anne Throop Leighton.
- <sup>17</sup> Note, for example, *Roget's Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases* (New York: St. Martin's Press).
- <sup>18</sup> Conversation, Claudia Card.
- <sup>19</sup> *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*.
- <sup>20</sup> James R. Hamilton, et al., *An Introduction to Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1976), pp. 359-360.
- <sup>21</sup> Lynn Mabel-Lois, "We'll worry about that when you're thin!," *shadow on a tightrope: writings by women on fat oppression*, eds. Lisa Schoenfielder and Barb Wieser (Iowa City: Aunt Lute Book Co.), pp. 62-66.

- <sup>22</sup> Vivian F. Mayer, "The Fat Illusion," *shadow on a tightrope*, p. 9.
- <sup>23</sup> This interpretation of responsibility was first offered to me by Ellen Meredith. Note, for example, Alice Molloy, *In Other Words: Notes on the Politics and Morals of Survival* (Oakland, Ca: the women's press collective), p. 61.
- <sup>24</sup> Celinda Cantu, interview, "In Sobriety, You Get Life," *Out from Under: Sober Dykes Our Friends*, ed. Jean Swallow (San Francisco: Spinsters Ink, 1983), p. 85.
- <sup>25</sup> Conversation with Diane Huggaert.
- <sup>26</sup> Conversations with Lola Wing and Sarah Valentine.
- <sup>27</sup> Conversation with Anne Throop Leighton.
- <sup>28</sup> Lisa Schoenfelder and Barb Wieser, eds., *shadow on a tightrope*.
- <sup>29</sup> Note, for example, Lai Jong, "When the Lesbians Came," *Common Lives, Lesbian Lives*, *A Lesbian Quarterly*, Number 10, Winter, 1983, pp. 81-83.
- <sup>30</sup> Alice Molloy, *In Other Words*, p. 43; note also, *passim*.
- <sup>31</sup> Juana Maria Paz, *The 'La Luz' Journal* (Paz Press, Box 3146, Fayetteville, Arkansas 72702-3146), p. 38.
- <sup>32</sup> Conversation with Jane Kennedy.
- <sup>33</sup> Sally Gearhart, *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* (Watertown, MA: Persephone Press, 1978), pp. 138-166.
- <sup>34</sup> Conversation with Billie Potts.
- <sup>35</sup> Juana Maria Paz, *The 'La Luz' Journal*, p. 85.
- <sup>36</sup> Harriet Ellenburger, "How Do I Need You: Thinking through Lesbian Passion," *work in progress*.
- <sup>37</sup> Conversation with Adrienne Rich.
- <sup>38</sup> Anna Lee, "Therapy: The Evil Within," p. 19. [*Trivia*, forthcoming]
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 3, 4.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20
- <sup>42</sup> Mary Daly, *Cyn/Ecology*, p. 260, e.g.

# The Warexx

Ruth Byrn

The Warexx is all caution and no fear. Even in sleep she is thus, resting naturally on her side with a knee tucked up in front of her concaving belly. You would see both elbows tucked down to meet or nearly meet the knee, shielding the solar plexus. And the long solid bones of both arms barricading the easybreathing chest. It is the position of the fetus or the sleeping neonate turned on its side. The parts most critical are shielded by the parts least critical. Her weapon arm is uppermost and free. Her leading-step foot is uppermost and forward. The sensing side of her head is uppermost and bare. The dreaming side of her head is down, insulated by the pillow or by the palm of her helping hand.

You would see, much of the night, the relaxed fingertips of the helping hand touching or nearly touching the dreaming side of the head, and the wrist touching or nearly touching the throat; as if conducting a circuit which runs from some organ buried near the root of the arm, through the throat, through the brain, and around again.

As a mature child, sleeps The Warexx. Shielding her back with her lover. Shielding her lover with her self.

The dreams of The Warexx are wonders of peace-accomplishments, are fearless studies of terrible war, are news from abroad. She is a living network of intelligence information, receives it, gynerates it, transforms it, transmits it; and this she does waking and sleeping.

Asleep, no night terrors clog or scramble her channels; for, mightily, she has swept her inherited house clean. If she dreams she is opposed or threatened, then before that dream is done she dreams herself victrexx. In the morning, in her reference works of militant strategy, she will register what she did and how she did it.

But if you ask The Warexx whether she has dream terrors, nightmares, she is apt to answer evasively or not at all. She may, for instance, respond by inquiring about *your* nightmares, or tell you of a nightmare she once had and let you make your own assumption how long ago that was. The lack of fear, night or day, sleeping or waking, is a distinguishing characteristic of The Adult Warexx. She is not likely to let you discover who she is.

Her lack of a current voter registration is not necessarily a distinguishing characteristic. Ask her if she is registered to vote and she is likely to tell you, directly, no. If you say tsk-*tsk* at that, she might incline her head in rueful agreement and join you, saying Yes, Tsk-Tsk. She will leave you with your own assumptions as to who and what she feels is rueful, and to what extent rueful.

She intends the abolition of all patriarchal electoral systems – by means of abolishing their entire male constituencies. She is committed to it, that either there be no men left to vote or no men left allowed to vote.

If a man rapes or abuses any fem<sup>l</sup> of her Group of First Concern, she will devise a way to, undetected, cause his close-kin male relatives to die. Somewhere in that process she will cause the primary perpetrator to die.

If you are a man or a group of men, she considers you have no right to anything you think you own; considers you "own" nothing but the stolen loot of your unprovoked wars and the wars of men before you. Loot men wrested by force from the earth and her beings, including all members of the Warexx' own gynus/species, hum<sup>l</sup>on beings, of which she is a meta-species. She is not willing to represent the earth and her beings all, and rip the loot back off you and any of your kind. Since even she cannot singlehandedly rip back every thing off every man, she will calmly – and without detection – assist any handy force or circumstance which detracts from the holdings of any male within the influence of her life zone.

If you are a man or a bonding of men, she knows the world would be a better place without you. If you are her father, her brother, her son, you are not exempt from this conviction. She may love you – and if she does, you could never know how much – but that is a different matter from her knowing that everybody concerned, including you, would be better off with you dead than with you keeping on in the way you are bound to. Since even she cannot singlehandedly cause every man to die, she will calmly assist any handy force or circumstance which detracts from your health or your perverted sense of mental and emotional well being.

If you are a man or a boy you will not be able to understand this next, but anyway:

She is not interested in pretending you are her equal.

She is not interested in punishing you.

Not interested in reversing roles and making you be slave.

Not interested in torturing you.

Not interested in "acquiring" the entire face of the earth for herself and her species alone.

She just wants to get rid of you.

While there still is a face of the earth.

If you are man or boy, The Warexx knows you are either a mutant parasite or an alien parasite; but in either case deadly, and camouflaging yourself among the earthly creatures you call the Class Mammalia.

And she knows that fact which you, yourself, will do anything to keep from knowing: on your own you are not viable. Not you, not any boy or man of any age could survive long without excessive supplementation from humōns, wōmōns. That is essentially why, for the past 10,000 years, men have universally enslaved wōmōns: to parasitize them. You are the vampire, man. And The Warexx knows you. Every one of you. She can instantly recognize every single face of man the vampire. She can smell you, for that matter. But no man knows who she is, or would even believe she could exist.

The Warexx is the camouflageuse par excellence. She was born camouflaged. For a while, even she did not recognize her self. Now, knowingly, she obscures her self among the 2,000,000,000 adult wōmōns around the earth. A statistical rarity, she is a deviant in disguise. If she is one-in-a-million, there are about 2,000 of her hiding in the world.

Scattered around the bluegreen surface of this orb, she is like a pure strain of ancient, fertile, viable seed – the Ultimate Survivor among humōn beings. Each one of her is an atomic particle radiating life. She has been called the critical mass, and she has been called the leaven for the rising mass. She reproduces geometrically by atomic chain reaction of contagion. Yes, she is contagious to other wōmōns. And all around her are other wōmōns. And of those, a statistically significant number are in precondition to catalyze with her emanations, evolve their selves further, make the quantum leap and transform their selves right into The Meta-Species Warexx.

Of course her actual percentage in the wōmōn population is a secret. If instead of one-in-a-million she is more like one-in-ten-thousand, then there are 200,000 of her on earth today – including the 33,000 fiercely alive and dispassionately determined to stay that way on what men call the north american continent.

If men knew about her, they might clandestinely worry that she could be the "superior" or "dominant" strain within what they call the species of man. They would have no more idea what they were thinking about than ever they've done.

The Warexx is different beyond men's imagination. Men, and typical wōmōns, per force brainwashed by those slavemasters, say: "Oh look! Man is poisoning the lakes and seas and underground reservoirs; soon all creatures will die for nothing to drink or if we drink. And look, man is poisoning the air; soon we will die from breathing or not breathing. And man is playing games with nuclear bombs; soon we are going to be radiated to death if nothing else. Yes, soon the face of the earth will be a blank. If even the face of the earth is left by man to exist. And really, you know, there's nothing anybody can do about it. Certainly nothing I can do." But the Warexx differs. The Warexx says: "Oh

something can be done alright. It's very simple. Get rid of men. Men control and poison the waters - get rid of men. Men poison the air - get rid of men. Men make and play with napalm and nukes - get rid of men. Get rid of men - save life on earth. Don't get rid of men - permit the death of life on earth. Men cannot control their necrophylic drive - men cannot control themselves permanently jail and feed and guard them all or get rid of them - get rid of them.

In another way The Warexx differs. Men and the brainwashed wõmõns they possess say, "Somebody ought to do something." The Warexx says, "I will do something." I am willing to kill men, as many as possible without being detected; my responsibility is to defend my country, my motherland, the earth.

She's a matrot. She intends her country be set free of the infesting suckers. It's her life's work; she's doing it regardless what else she is or appears to be doing. Every minute she remembers what it means that men are now extinguishing earth's beings at the rate of one different species a day. The Warexx has no qualms at all about extinguishing the only non-class of pseudo-creatures who are, anyway, determined to extinguish themselves along with every other living thing. Maybe you've noticed her mind is free of the snarenet of men's "language." In her thinking, all people, all humõns, are femõls. Translated to men's "language," read: "All genuinely human humans are female; the only real people are human females." In her crystal mind it is crystal clear that men's "universal terms," *man* or *men* don't mean wõmõn or wõmõns or even 'women'. She is certainly smart enough to know *man* means a man and *men* means the plural of that; all the time it does, not just parttime, as men irrationally claim. The Warexx' mind is not tied by definitions which have come out of the pseudo-minds and lying mouths and propaganda books of men. To her, it couldn't be plainer that men and wõmõns do not "share" the same species, the same gynus, family, order, class. To her, it's plain man doesn't belong in the same reference niche with what he calls the Vertebrates, the Mammalia, nor any of earth's creatures. She accords him no valid membership; the closest she will come is to admit that in certain ways men appear to resemble wõmõns closer than they do, say, oysters.

She considers men may have emerged on earth as non-viable mutations of the gynus/species wõmõn; or alternatively, they may have migrated to earth as a colony of exiled personae non grata from outer space. Against the possibility the latter is the case, The Warexx intends that mistake will end here. She knows to cause men to die rather than wish them off on some other unsuspecting planet. She notices their greedy looking to get into space, stabbing their flags and bibles on the moon and their weapons in the heavens. She thinks it entirely possible a colony of them was exiled here after having sucked, poisoned, and/or exploded the life nearly out of some solar system they previously parasitized. She intends they not get loose again.

Whether alien vampires or mutant vampires, men, The Warexx sees, are essentially non-viable. They cannot survive on their own, or carry their weight

truly reciprocal partnerships, as can all the other beings on earth. Men are the sole creatures who are dependent and not interdependent when they reach apparent maturity. Each man has too little to give in exchange for what it takes to support him as a living organism – and he is proven resistant to give what little he has. Only one intervention has allowed his survival: excessive supplementation and martyred assistance from wòmõns. Take up an infant man at birth; put him in the care of his own kind, men; exclude all direct contact by wòmõns; what would he be like, by puberty? The Warexx knows. He would be long dead. If the subject hadn't been done in by his own inadequate constitution and immune system, his death would have been caused by his male caretakers' shortcomings or their outright murder of him by act of commission or omission. Mutant or alien, as The Warexx sees it, men haven't enough spark of their own to live on their own.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Warexx is priestess, plus. Her bird is the non-migratory wild one. Hawk, crow, quail, mockingbird, sparrow, present in all seasons of their home terrain. none particularly noted for beauty of plumage. Her tree or shrub is evergreen. Juniper, redwood, holly, pine, pyracantha, cedar. Her rhythmic tides, cycles, are less obvious than typical wòmõns'. She does not shed her seasoned foliage all at once, or grow the new all at once. She is continually discarding and growing. Because she was born curious enough to look for herself, after others said nothing could be seen or was there to see, she is privy to the mysteries of the hidden cycles. She knows about all kinds of things most people never heard of. And will not try to convince anyone of these realities. If you are desirous and capable of learning – in which case you are femõl – she will assist you; but otherwise will not waste her energy trying to teach you or help you learn. And seldom will she rescue you from the results of your ignorance, even if you are femõl. When she does alter the course of what happens to you as the result of your own or others' mistakes, you would have to be very quick-and-deep-witted to realize what was done, who did it, and how.

The Warexx is ever learning, learning. At the same time she is about her other businesses she forages for fresh information to feed her hungry mind. She possesses a special sense for detecting new information. Pops it into her self like a bird eats a berry; dissolves it to its elements with her juices; assimilates what is nutritious for her; casts off what is dross. She is impervious to tampered-with, toxic information. When false is blended with true, her system casts out the one and absorbs the other by truth-gravitated reflex. She doesn't even have to think about it. You could not poison her mind or so much as give it indigestion; and it has grown to such size and strength and strategy as would easily exceed any cage or trap ever to be devised by any number of men. The mind of The Warexx is too powerful to be bound, too resilient to be battered-in by repetitions

of lies, too brave to do anything but laugh at spectral threats. She is the most intelligent member of the gynus/species womqns.

If you are a man of any age currently existing within her lifesphere zone, she has had you under observation; has assessed your strongest desires, your secret fears, your typical and exceptional reactions, your relative strengths, your weaknesses, your interests, your blind spots. In short, she knows enough about you to accurately predict what you will do under almost any circumstance. Very simple for her to do this. If you are a male you are, to her, a ridiculously simple creature – boringly simple. Annoyingly simple. Excessively simple. Catastrophically simple. For The Warexx to know all that is important about a man she need not exercise herself; usually she can assess him in one quick glance from a 20-yard distance. And if he's within 20 yards and she hasn't already done it, she usually will because she knows him as one of the legion born inimical to her and all her kind and kin upon the earth.

But he does not know who she is. Or that he has been assessed. Usually he scarcely notice anyone is there. Because she's a womqon. Read: *nuthin'* but a woman.

A creature straight out of science fiction she is, only she's real. A being whose knowledge expands several degrees in all directions every 24 hours or less. One who can change anything about herself she comes to disprefer; even her genetic predispositions, she can transmute. She has discovered she is the inexhaustible reservoir of whatever wisdom she needs, whenever she actually needs it. Forages for information, yes, and can also self-generate it. She's never really stuck, and she knows that, for her very cells are pantries of clues to anything she needs to know. Or just enjoys knowing.

To an observer, her interests would look like an endless pile of unrelated topics. They're related. They only seem disconnected, from the short-term and linear perspective. There is, to her interests and the timing when she is interested, what has been called the fantastic coherence. No known system of library classification is sophisticated enough to catalogue her items and/or what she already knows about them, and tangential subjects if she has been interested long; for one thing, she is versant in several levels of truth about each topic. For another, she is familiar with several different dimensions of reality. Can tune in, can focus at will in spheres of existence which men and even typical womqns do not perceive or, at best, can only guess about. If you could take a comprehensive look at what is in merely the *conscious* part of her mind, you might think (unless you are another Warexx) that one or the other of you had gone mad. She's supra-sane. This, also, she disguises.

Conversing with you, she'll select your level of truth, usually, focus in the dimension where you are accustomed. Rare times, if she senses you are ready to learn something and she elects to help you take a new step, she'll blend in some teasing elements from beyond. Or she might do a little razzmatazzbedazzle number with you, for you to realize later and think about.

If you are a woman as yet not-Warexx, your relative ignorance won't cause her to dislike you. She knows what it is to be as ignorant as any other woman on earth. She has been that. Recognizes she is still vastly ignorant, compared to what is left to know.

She burns to know it all. Learns multiples of things whenever she learns one; and every time she is reminded of her own remaining incredible ignorance. Doesn't feel bad about hers, not yours either. She loves this state of affairs wherein she can never learn it all up.

The Warexx is the daughter, the heirexx, of Nemesis; of Hecate, Hecuba, Kali; of the darker names of She, The Deity of Ten Thousand Names. She is the accrued Amazon: today's evolved version, the epitome-so-far, the culminated/culminating descendant of such as those red booted and fiercely joyous battleaxes, the Thermodontines, who held their baby daughters to the mare's breasts to suckle, and who nourished themselves on a mixture of honey and mare's milk and sometimes blood. Daughter of these and others like them, through the ages around the globe. The continuous mystic line of The Warexx has been genetically transmitted and transmuted ever purer down/up the eons of earth. She is The Dianic Tradition embodied and brought forth, exponentialized now to the cusp of the tenth millennium, at least, since her foremothers and the grains first cooperated together.

Today's version of her is so purely potent, she can and does exist alone. Except in her trystings, she lives sole and single in her lifesphere; without community for her spirit, without an ally for her Truest Cause, she survives and prevails. That isn't the way she'd like it, isn't the way she intends the future to be; but for now she must exist hidden in isolation, and so she does. And by this, the ability to Live in ex-communicated singularity for whatever time she must, she exceeds and excels her proud tribal foremothers' strengths. And they are exceeding proud of her.

A well of life-enhancing culture, she carries within her the distilled cream-of-the-crop knowhow in the artskills of living and imparting life. She can heal, nurture, teach, entertain, birth, sustain, love, create, elicit, synergize, frolic, ecstasize, give, receive, share, communicate, add-minister, muse, beautify, and build.

But also she can cleanse, purify, destroy, disrupt, eliminate, burn, poison, detract, subtract, blast, smite, dissolve, and even the score. She is just. Above all she is just; fair absolutely and when need be, dispassionately. Dispassion = calm fairness; even men's dictionaries say that. She is dispassionate to men, and intends they get what they deserve. She proudly possesses the same earth's violence as the tornado, volcano, hurricane, earthquake, tidal wave, flood, firestorm, lightning, drought, avalanche. And plague. And plague.

She can build, she can destroy. She is anabolic, she is catabolic. She assimilates, she eliminates. Just like the earth.

And this is time for all-out, fair, dispassionate, war. Her mother, the earth, her

self, the earth, her sister, the earth, her lover, the earth, tells her and she knows: now is the time to begin the end of the vampire vermin.

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The Warexx communicates with others in her sleep, yes. Thus it is, for most of her peer interactions. Prior to sleeping she knows which herbs to ingest, which sequences of emotions to generate within her self, which states of consciousness to abide in, and for which durations. Then she sleeps. And flies to her trystings with others of her tribe, around the earth.

Too, in her dreams she trysts with Warexxes whose existences are focused in other dimensions. With these kin, she forms crucial links or channels or bridges or dykes between the different realms; there is interchange, interflow, balance, by virtue of what she and Otherworld Warexxes exchange, by what they do together.

Thus also – in her sleep and in your sleep – might she teach you, if you are a woman in precondition of Warexxhood, and if you live within her considerable zone of spiritpsychic being. She might appear to you and be with you in your dreams, sometimes. You might or might not recognize her; that depends partly on how good you are at such things already, and partly on her sense that direct revelation isn't always method of choice for efficient teaching/learning. But regardless, in your dreams where you do not bar your windows, your doors, your ears, your eyes, your body – she might be with you.

You could try invoking her presence, by the way. The Warexx sometimes intentionally omits making her own selection whom to fly and visit. Often enough she leaves off the restraints, the reins of rational self-intent, so as to widen the avenues of the intuitive, the serendipitous, the coincidental, the gravitational.

And in her dreams, with her dreams, her waking and her sleeping dreams, she calls forth the woman within the woman, and whispers ancient Knowledge to those women who will be joining with her to reclaim the earth from men. In their sleep she rouses the minds out of hypnosis, detoxifies and dispells the druggedness from the Good Senses of the women to become women.

In the fairy tales the sexes were reversed by men. It is She, Warexx, who steals in to kiss and awaken sleeping beauty; She, the dragon who slays the knight. Time for right order again.

Yes, she is: Dragon. Snake. Fable. She has three eyes. Three heads. Two eyes in her head(s) and snakes weaving all over. Gorgon at the Crossroads. One eye and a beaked mouth. One big womb with tentacles. Monster. Prehistoric. Prehis-storyc. Posthis-storyc. She spans before men, during men, after men. This is her perspective. Men fail to impress her. Which is neatly fair; when she chooses to pass before a man's eyes he hardly notices.

# Separatism and Radicalism: An Analysis of the Differences and Similarities

*Ariane Brunet and Louise Turcotte\**

In this article we establish a connection between two tendencies in lesbian political thought, separatism and radicalism, both of which are concerned with revealing the profoundly political dimension of lesbianism. Understanding this "political dimension" helps us gain control of our own lives, because we better understand our role in a social revolution in which we must be actively engaged.

The article was first written after a lesbian conference held in Montreal on October 2, 1982.<sup>1</sup> In a workshop on radical lesbianism, participants discussed the differences and similarities between lesbian separatism and radical lesbianism. At the time, the authors, along with Ginette Bergeron and Danielle Charest, were members of the AMAZONES D'HIER, LESBIENNES D'AUJOURD'HUI collective (A.H.L.A.). (Since then Ginette Bergeron and Ariane Brunet have left the collective, in July 1983 and March 1986 respectively.) A.H.L.A. is a radical lesbian collective, based in Montreal, which has published a journal of the same name since 1982.

We must stress that the two political tendencies belong to two different cultures: Lesbian separatism comes from the U.S.; whereas, for the purposes of this article, radical lesbianism is particular to the French-speaking lesbians of Quebec. Of the two cultures, the Quebec culture is relatively unknown. The existence of six million French Canadians within this English-speaking continent is, unfortunately, rarely recognized by our lesbian sisters in the U.S.<sup>2</sup>

It is not my intention in this introduction to discuss the history of Quebec, its struggle against oppression, its nationalist fight for independence, the Quebec "separatist" movement, or the feminist or lesbian movements.<sup>3</sup> I will simply mention that during the summer of 1982, the AMAZONES D'HIER, LESBIENNES D'AUJOURD'HUI collective toured the U.S. with a video, of the same name, which deals with French Canadian lesbians in Montreal. During

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\* Translated by Lee Heppner, with contributions by Ariane Brunet and Jeanette Silveira.

the tour, we realized how unaware U.S. lesbians are of our existence. We also realized that although our concerns seem, at first glance, to be the same, we found we approached similar concerns in different ways. The different priorities we give to our common concerns clearly reflect the extent of our cultural diversity. It is vital that we become aware of this diversity and that we enter a new era of communication, taking our differences into consideration, rather than letting the dominant North American culture dictate the political path of the lesbian movement. Only on these conditions will it be possible to build up an international lesbian movement. It is only by being open to each other, with all our ethnic, cultural and national diversity, that we can ever be, to use a popular phrase in Quebec, "visible to each other."

French-speaking lesbians in Quebec, who experience "isolation and oppression as a minority within the vast English-speaking population of North America,"<sup>4</sup> need contact with Canadian and U.S. lesbians as well as those living in other French-language countries. Many of us make an annual pilgrimage to Michigan; being in a community of 8,000 lesbians does wonders for the morale. What we have to do now is take this experience even further and increase our contacts.

Ariane Brunet

### Separatism

We believe it is important to stress at the outset that the concept of lesbian separatism originated with U.S. lesbians, for clearly the word *separatist* has a completely different connotation for Quebecers.<sup>5</sup> It is difficult to give an exact definition of *lesbian separatist* because there is such a variety of separatists, each with her own understanding of the word.

We first consulted those who had *written* on the subject. For us, one of the problems presented by the great divergence of opinion on lesbian separatism is the texts' absence of a historical perspective. Looking through the various separatist texts written since the early 70s, one has the impression that each was written with no regard for the historical context of the existing literature.

Nevertheless, three separatist positions can be discerned.

#### 1. Tactical lesbian separatism.

The *Feminism First* group define themselves as "tactical lesbian separatists"; that is, they advocate the use of lesbian separatism as a means of giving priority to feminism and adopting a feminist perspective of all oppressions:

The term lesbian separatism has been used to express many different politics. To us it means, most importantly, not a way of promoting exclusively lesbian concerns, or a way of protecting lesbians from heterosexism in political groups, but a possibility of prioritising feminism. We want to distinguish clearly

between women's interests and men's interests so that we can act in women's interests. The institution of heterosexuality blocks this process by encouraging women to see our interests as identified with men's instead of opposed to them [our emphasis].<sup>6</sup>

Here is a tendency to equate lesbianism with feminism, with no mention whatsoever of the manner in which lesbianism has been treated by the feminist movement. To use *feminism* in place of the word *lesbianism*! As if the two were synonymous! This is to commit a grave historical omission as to the way lesbians have been ignored by feminists. "Not promoting exclusively lesbian concerns" or "not protecting lesbians from heterosexism in political groups" amounts to not having a lesbian perspective – hence the name of the group, *Feminism First*. It seems to us an easy matter to "prioritise feminism" when one speaks of women's interests and lesbian concerns. . . . But how then can one identify oneself as a "lesbian separatist"?

## 2. Matriarchal lesbian separatism.

This line of thought is based on the historical existence of an ideal society of women: the matriarchy. An example is *Amazon Analysis*:

Lesbian Separatism is inherently linked with feminism, the ideology and practice that considers woman prime. . . Lesbian separatism is feminism carried to its logical conclusion. . . no other ideology speaks to all our needs, no other ideology will or can destroy patriarchy and male supremacy and build an egalitarian matriarchal society.<sup>7</sup>

A similar position was taken by *Tribad*, a now-defunct publication of New York separatists.

These are lesbian separatists who define themselves as feminists and who advocate separation from men in their political thinking as well as in their daily lives. But without making the connection that, at the moment the matriarchy was born (that is, when woman became specialized as reproducer, at which point we get those great fertility rites), the institution of heterosexuality also took form. Matriarchy and patriarchy go hand-in-hand. . . from the power of the Mother to the power of the Father. In all this research where is the power of lesbians? Unfortunately, the history of the Amazons is usually considered to be just an aspect of the matriarchy.<sup>8</sup>

Proposing a return to the matriarchy as a solution does not confront the institution of heterosexuality as such.

## 3. Lesbian Radical Feminist Separatism

*The Furies* also identify themselves as feminist lesbian separatists.<sup>9</sup> *The Furies*, however, linked male supremacy (a term also used by *Amazon Analysis* and *Tribad*) directly to heterosexism, as explained by Charlotte Bunch:

The heart of the woman-identified woman statement and of all lesbian feminist politics is the recognition that in a male supremacist society, heterosexuality is a political institution. Both lesbianism and heterosexuality are therefore political forces as well as personal lifestyles.<sup>10</sup>

We believe these two "political forces" are antagonistic and opposed to each other from the start, since the one, heterosexuality, can survive only through the destruction of the other, lesbianism. The first is the political institution of the dominating class and the second, the power of revolt.

On this point the "feminist" analysis leads to confusion. It is only lesbian radicals and separatists who have pinpointed heterosexuality as the fundamental institution of male power. Feminists have denounced patriarchal institutions such as the family, schools, work, religions, and the media as proponents of sexism. Lesbian radicals and separatists have restored to this word the major element that was missing: HETEROsexism. Feminism deals with only half the reality: trying to maintain the Man/Woman (hetero) relationship while struggling with its most oppressive form (sexism). In fact heterosexuality is the cause of sexism.

Of all the groups discussed, only *The Furies* have ascribed a political significance to lesbianism, and they are also the only group to set themselves apart from the straight feminist movement.<sup>11</sup> (Even today is there a lesbian feminist movement identified as such and having a lesbian feminist politics? Is it not more accurate to say that there are many lesbians in the straight feminist movement?)

### Separatist Practice

Lesbian separatism, we are speaking here more of a political affirmation than of a political analysis as such, is expressed in the form of publications clearly identified as *BY AND FOR LESBIANS*. Through these publications various kinds of analysis are put forth, all of which are focused on lesbianism. Some of these publications are *Lesbian Connection*, *Lesbian Inciter*, *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*, to name only the better-known ones.

Because there is no universal political position among lesbian separatists, many lesbians have expressed their separatist convictions in music, poetry, or theoretical writings. For some, the audience to whom their music or poetry is addressed is as fundamental an issue as the content itself. Linda Shear, for example, gave her concerts for lesbians only; her intent was to include us clearly in her music and to encourage us to identify as lesbians. Elana Dykewomon first wrote her poetry "for women only" and then "for lesbians only." Alix Dobkin, too, gives concerts exclusively for women.

A number of academics have devoted their theoretical work to developing lesbian separatist politics: Here we find a Sarah Hoagland, a Marilyn Frye, or a Julia Penelope. Their separatism has developed out of academic research that denounces the heterosexist use of language at all scientific and socio-cultural

levels. They dissect the hetero-patriarchal system, rediscover our lesbian history, and construct a lesbian vision, each according to her own field of interest.

We feel it is important to mention that all the texts cited in this article were written by white lesbian separatists. Some are quick to associate separatism with racism (see for example Adrienne Rich<sup>12</sup>). Actually, it is not a question of separatist politics being racist but rather of some white lesbian separatists having racist behavior, as do some white lesbian feminists, radicals, etc.

A number of articles denouncing racism have appeared in separatist reviews. Some black lesbians define themselves as separatists, and they too express all the possible variations in separatist thinking.

From the three analytical positions discussed and the varieties of separatist practice, we see again the diversity of separatists and separatist philosophies.

## Radicalism

Based on the examples given above, it seems to us that separatism does not constitute an analysis in itself, since the overriding principle conveyed by the separatist literature of the 70s and 80s has been feminism.

One of the crucial differences between radicalism and separatism clearly is the use of feminist analysis and the accompanying employment of the word *woman* (or rather its multiple spellings *womyn*, *wimmin*, *womon*, and the now familiar *womyn-identified womyn*).

To use the word *woman* is, once more, to make ourselves, lesbians, invisible. *Woman*, even in its orthographic variants, is not interchangeable with the word *lesbian*. It is a word which has its meaning within the hetero-patriarchal system, inseparable from the Man/Woman relationship, and is therefore in the words of Micheline Grimard-Leduc, "annexed to male reality."<sup>13</sup> The term designates not only a biological status but also the status of second-class citizen. Changing the spelling is not enough to change the social reality. *Woman* is part of a consensus, a hetero-patriarchal perception; it has no connotation of breaking-away or autonomy. Only the word *lesbian* gives us a sense of separation, independence, going beyond the borderline.

From whom are we hiding our reality when we speak of *womyn's* culture, of a Michigan *wimmin's* music festival? When the authors were stopped at the Michigan border in 1979, the U.S. border guards asked us whether we knew that 90% of the women at the festival were lesbians. Who are we fooling beside ourselves? We are playing society's game. We are perpetuating the idea that lesbianism is only a different kind of sexuality. We lesbians create the culture, the music, the separatist environment, so why the equivocation? To maintain our intolerable status as "cheap labor" in the "women's" movement? Almost as soon as we create it, we become strangers to our own culture.

None of the separatist analyses we have mentioned are based on the one

consideration that is vital to any grasping of our reality: Namely, that we are lesbians and not women. Society makes us invisible by calling us lesbian "women," "women" having an "abnormal" or perverted sexuality. Feminists see us as "women" whose sexual preference is to be considered among all the other demands of feminism - a way of co-opting us into the fight to improve the subjugated conditions of women in the hetero-system. **It is therefore fundamental to any radical analysis that we define ourselves as lesbians.**

Radical lesbianism confronts the very basis of society: heterosexuality. And to be a lesbian, whether politically aware or not, is to be outside the concept woman. Feminism has never confronted heterosexuality as a political institution, an institution that enables the male class to oppress and exploit the female class. This institution defines woman as sexually accessible to male power, as a reproducer of men and the nourisher of their power.

Heterosexuality is the institution that creates, maintains, supports, and nourishes men's power. Without woman's subjugation to heterosexuality, man could not survive on his own, or so he thinks. Women's maintenance of men voluntary or forced, paid or unpaid, is what generates men's power and enables them to continue living on women's energy. Heterosexuality has its ramifications at all levels of society. From heterosexuality flow all the other oppressions. Heterosexuality is the cornerstone on which men have grounded the norm, located the source and the standard for defining all relationships. The concept of difference is inherent to heterosexuality. That concept, as explained by Monique Wittig in *La Pensee Straight*, makes us view the other as different.<sup>15</sup> But to view the other as different one has to consider one's own difference as the norm, for the norm confers power and control. The sexuality of the Other (hetero), of the Other who differs, who is different from me, determines my own sexuality, my reality. The concept of difference, institutionalized as heterosexuality, rests on a value system where one is superior and the other inferior, one is dominant and the other dominated. However, nothing in biology indicates that our biological differences can affect our social behavior. The sexuality of the Other (hetero) is that which sets me apart as different. With heterosexuality men have developed a concept and from it constructed a system that generates all oppression.

Now lesbian feminists see heterosexuality as the norm; in fact, for them, it is the "compulsory" nature of heterosexuality, an idea discussed by Adrienne Rich,<sup>16</sup> which implies that a "choice" is possible between lesbianism and heterosexuality. But, instead of beginning with the proposition that heterosexuals exist, we ought to begin with just as obvious a proposition: lesbians exist. We have always existed; we have always loved ourselves and each other and rejected the so-called heterosexual imperative. In the writers' view, Rich reverses this proposition, implying that compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence are somehow parallel. According to this thinking, if we have been able to become lesbians in a heterosystem, then our existence is used to validate their assertion that

heterosexuality is their "choice." If resistance to heterosexuality is possible, then hetero-feminists can justify their belief that they, too, have made a "choice." Whereas in the past lesbians were "bad" because we didn't "choose" heterosexuality, today we are "O.K." because our lives are used to validate their "choice." The authors took particular notice of this line of thought in an editorial in a Quebec feminist magazine, *La Vie en Rose*. In this editorial, the magazine collective wrote that Adrienne Rich's article on compulsory heterosexuality "is fundamental to our thinking." This thinking can be summed up by a sentence from their editorial:

...But the existence of lesbianism gives all women the possibility of living heterosexuality with more freedom and less obligations and, ultimately, the possibility of choice.<sup>17</sup>

Our goal as lesbians is surely not the ability to "choose" heterosexuality. This is not what we mean by "freedom." The feminists use us, our lives, even the fact of our existence to nourish the heterosystem. Our "choice" validates theirs. Once one has recognized the obligatory character of heterosexuality, she's rid of this same obligation to conform. She can now, voluntarily, take a new direction, a new understanding of heterosexuality – consensual or optional heterosexuality.

Thusly one can move from obligatory heterosexuality to an "optional" heterosexuality, reducing heterosexuality and lesbianism to a simple sexual choice. The political significance of such a choice is reduced to a non-threatening "future" collective consciousness. That is to say, the political implication of choosing heterosexuality or lesbianism would only become relevant when all women as a class, in some remote "future," find that it is time to regard those choices as politically meaningful.

Optional heterosexuality and obligatory heterosexuality are one and the same concept, directly linked to the phallogocratic ideology. One cannot speak of a choice between these "two" heterosexualities; even less can one speak of a "parallel choice" between heterosexuality and lesbianism, between domination and autonomy. How can one speak of choosing between the political institution of the dominators and the power of revolt of the dominated? How can one compare the enforced accessibility of women with the sexual autonomy of lesbians?

Sexuality is power. The sexual subjugation of women leads to their economic, social, and political subjection to the class of men. Lesbians, having no sexual relations with men, therefore possess an economic, political and social *vision* that escapes the Male/Female sexual categories.<sup>18</sup> To be a lesbian is to refuse to be a woman. That is not to say that lesbians are not seen by society at large as women and therefore oppressed as such, in addition to being repressed as lesbians.

Some lesbians try to salvage feminism by saying that lesbians are the ones who really practice feminism, thus the famous phrase: "Feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice." But how can we speak of practicing a theory which seeks to accommodate heterosexuality? Which has always ignored and denied lesbianism, whether it was the feminism of the first wave or that of the 70s. When feminism was not squarely denying our existence, it was blaming us for creating divisions among women and frightening them. Who is really creating divisions here: Man/Woman (hetero) relations, or love of women? Feminism is neither our politics nor our history; it has never included 'non-political' and non-feminist lesbians. Hence the importance for radical lesbians of referring to feminism as HETEROFEMINISM.

Although our analysis differs from the separatist writings discussed earlier, a radical analysis nevertheless goes hand-in-hand with separatist practice. For us separatist practice means breaking off from heterofeminism and the gay movement, and living a life that revolves essentially around the ever increasing visibility of lesbians as a political force capable of fighting all forms of hetero-oppression.

The similarity between radical and separatist lesbians is our practice and our sense of lesbian ethics; and radicals have an even more evident political link with those separatists whose political affirmation is *FOR, BY AND ABOUT LESBIANS*, or *FOR LESBIANS ONLY*. They start from the basis of their reality as lesbians, and even if they fail to make the analysis that lesbians are not women in practice they work together as lesbians. It is important that any analysis of our oppressions be linked to an analysis of the cause of these oppressions: the heterosystem. Only we, as lesbians, can establish this link without compromise.

It should be impossible to analyse any type of oppression without making the connection that lesbianism signifies the eventual destruction of the hetero-phallogratic system.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The first version of this article was published in French in *AMAZONES D'HIER, LESBIENNES D'AUJOURD'HUI*, 1, No. 2-3, December 1982.

<sup>2</sup> During the 60s, the term *Quebecers* gradually came to be used instead of *French Canadians* to refer to the French-speaking inhabitants of Quebec — even though, to be exact, it designates the entire population of Quebec, 20% of which is not French-speaking. The term was adopted by Quebec separatists in order to stress their difference from the rest of Canada.

<sup>3</sup> Since the 60s, Quebecers have associated the term *separatist* with the fight for national independence and separation from Canada. The words *lesbianism* and *separatism* are therefore rarely associated in Quebec, since confusion would be inevitable. The question of lesbianism and nationalism (that is, separatism) in Quebec is a subject of an article which I (Ariane Brunet) am now writing.

<sup>4</sup> Taken from Anne Michaud's article on the experience of Quebec lesbians at the 1982 Michigan festival, published in *AMAZONES D'HIER, LESBIENNES D'AUJOURD'HUI*, 1, No. 2-3, December 1982.

<sup>5</sup> See Note 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Feminismo Primero – Feminism First: A Lesbian Separatist Analysis*. (Seattle: Tsunami Press, 1980), p. 59. Tsunami Press, P.O. Box 22913, Seattle, WA 98122. \$3.00.

<sup>7</sup> Lesbian Separatist Group (Alice, Debbie, Gordon, and Mary), *Amazon Analysis* (Seattle, Wa 1973, 1974), p. 43. This is a mimeographed paper of 94 pages, July 1973, with a two page critique added in March 1974.

<sup>8</sup> In the video *AMAZONES D'HIER, LESBIENNES D'AUJOURD'HUI*, Ariane Brunet puts forth the idea that there were two periods in Amazon history: pre-matriarchal and post-matriarchal. She also makes a definite connection between the Amazons and lesbians.

<sup>9</sup> In 1972 and 1973 *The Furies* collective published a newspaper of the same name from Washington, D.C. A collection of articles from this newspaper was published in, Nancy Myron and Charlotte Bunch, eds., *Lesbianism and the Women's Movement* (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1976).

<sup>10</sup> Charlotte Bunch, "Learning from Lesbian Separatism," *Ms.*, November 1976, p. 99.

<sup>11</sup> See Ginny Berson, "The Furies," in, Myron & Bunch, eds., *Lesbianism and the Women's Movement*, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Adrienne Rich, "Notes for a Magazine: What does Separatism Mean?" *Sinister Wisdom* No. 18, Fall 1981.

<sup>13</sup> Taken from a book by Micheline Grimard-Leduc, *L'île des Amantes*. Available from Micheline Grimard-Leduc, 545 rue Grant, No. 6, Longueuil, Quebec, J4H 3J3. \$8.00 (Canadian).

<sup>14</sup> This concept was first developed by Monique Wittig in her article, "On Ne Nait Pas Femme," *Questions Feministes*, No. 8, May 1980. "One is Not Born a Woman," *Feminist Issues*, 1, No. 2, Winter 1981.

<sup>15</sup> Monique Wittig, "La Pensee Straight," *Questions Feministes*, No. 7, February 1980. English translation appears in *Feminist Issues*, 1, No. 1, 1981.

<sup>16</sup> Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs*, 5, No. 4, Summer 1980.

<sup>17</sup> "Editorial," *La Vie en Rose*, June/July/August 1982. (Translated by Ariane Brunet)

<sup>18</sup> Monique Wittig, "La Pensee Straight."

# Looking for the Amazons

*Eloise Klein Healy*

"Ex virtute fit nobilitas" – out of virtue comes nobility. The motto on the seal of the college I went to, a college that no longer exists. Also on the seal is a heart girded about with three roses in full bloom, a flame shooting out from the severed aorta, and a sword piercing the heart diagonally from the upper right to the lower left. Almost a coat of arms. In actuality, this heart in silver was a badge which adorned the navy blue and black habit of each of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, a community of Catholic nuns which at one time could be found in schools and hospitals all over California. They were headquartered in Hollywood, right at the curve where Los Feliz becomes Western Avenue, the longest straight street in the world, falling from the bushy scrub covered foothills of Griffith Park to the ocean some 25 miles away.

This was all before the final conflict in the war between the Immaculate Heart Sisters and the Archbishop of Los Angeles, James Francis Cardinal McIntyre, which raged off and on in one form or another for two decades, but which culminated in the early 1970's in the splitting of the community and the closing of Immaculate Heart College.

Several months ago, after seeing the play *Immaculate Heart* at a little theatre in Hollywood, the pain of that time and my anger over all those events welled up again; but because of work I've been doing for a book length poem about Artemis, I had a new understanding of what happened to the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.<sup>1</sup> To me, the whole confrontation/conflagration was one more of the battles of the amazons against the patriarchy. From my research on Artemis, Artemis-figures, and the Amazons, I could see why these nuns were targets for a destruction that had a decidedly Inquisitional flavor to it.<sup>2</sup>

I don't remember exactly what day a small group of us who taught in schools run by the Immaculate Hearts was ushered into a large parlor in the Mother House to be questioned about the work the IHM's were doing. I remember

thinking that the priest who had been sent from Rome to investigate the matter could only comprehend lines of authority, obediences or disobediences. It felt like he was here to find the latter. In those days of heady social change, a group of Catholic sisters who in concert had decided to change the living patterns of their community, to wear secular clothing when appropriate, to attend non-Catholic graduate schools, to invite radical theologians to speak – well, they may have indeed been viewed as dangerous.

After all my wondering about amazons of the past and what uses the women's movement had made of them, what uses lesbian separatists had made of them, I realized that I had lived and worked among some long before I had much sense at all of feminism. These sisters – self-determined, self-possessed women in a single sex society – threatened the "fathers" in many of the same ways women did at the time of Paul's journey to Ephesus to preach against the devotion to Artemis there.

Surrounding any goddess like Artemis you find amazons. They are linked throughout history in the visual and literary arts and in the mythologies of peoples from places as various as Anatolia,<sup>3</sup> Libya and Dahomey, the jungles of South America, the unexplored regions of early California, Northern Europe, and among the native, tribal peoples of the North American continent. Artemis (and other Artemis-figures) represent the wildwood and the dynamism of animal life. In the pantheon of the Greeks, Artemis stands out as an unassimilated character – a warrior and protectress of wild beasts – the embodiment of untamed natural impulses and the capricious world of the law of nature. She is the goddess of uncompromising integrity, and not surprisingly, the premier goddess of the Amazons.

Studies indicate that this virgin goddess is not of Greek or Indo-European origin,<sup>4</sup> and she remained unconquered in form or substance by the more patriarchal inhabitants of the wooded upper regions of the Anatolian peninsula. Britomartis, her earlier counterpart in Crete, bears the same attributes, a nymph who scorns the attentions of men and prefers instead the company of others like herself and the pursuits of the hunt.

Kerenyi (39-45) makes an interesting observation about Artemis, based on her requests for presents from her father, Zeus, who saw her for the first time when she was three years old. She asked for eternal virginity, a bow and quiver of arrows, swift hunting dogs to accompany her through the forests, a short skirt that she not be hindered while she ran after game, and companions to serve her, girls about nine years old.

That she chose girls this age for her helpmates is important, says Kerenyi, if we consider the place of the girl in Greek society. Sometime between childhood and the onset of puberty, the girl could escape the demands of both these stages. She was no longer a baby, subject to the control and discipline given a child. She was also not of marriageable age and subject to the restrictions of womanhood (meaning for the Greeks, motherhood.) In short, she

was perfectly androgynous. She could play boys' games while inhabiting a girl's body. The proscriptions of a patriarchal society had little hold over her.

The myths did, however, place emphasis on the kind of experiences and problems although in idealized or exaggerated forms – that most ancient women encountered in the course of their lives. In myth, there were essentially two main courses of female existence: celibacy or involvement with males and (inevitably) childbearing. The two paths were of course mutually exclusive, though a woman (or a goddess) could return to celibacy after her children were born. For mortal women, involvement with males was the more usual and probably the more promising alternative, since virginity offered freedom only to goddesses like Athena and Artemis, who as goddesses had the power to defend themselves and by definition were ageless and immortal. (Lefkowitz 210)

The hallmark of the virgin goddess, contrary to our Christian notions of the meaning of virginity, is not chastity (since some virgin goddesses took female and male lovers and/or husbands), it is self-possession.

The etymology of the word *virgin* is not known for certain. There is an often repeated guess that it comes from *vir-egeo*, 'I lack a man.' But this is undoubtedly wrong. The most plausible argument derives *virgin* from the Greek *o'pygn(orge)*, 'impulse' or 'passion,' and from the verb *o'pyá-w(orga-o)*, 'to swell, to be puffed up.' This is the same root as that for *orgy*, and both are related to the Sanskrit *urgá, urgá, urgás* meaning 'fullness of power, sap, energy.' This possible root gives both *virga* (a rod or stem) and *virgo* (a young girl). (Warner 279)

Self-possession, though, for a woman in the emerging patriarchal system, was a dangerous deviation and has continued to be one.

Since greek myth glorified the role of mother, it also tended to condemn to infamy those who in some way rebelled against it. A confirmed mortal virgin who resisted the advances of a god might be punished simply by metamorphosis into a tree or flower. But women who consciously denied their femininity, like the Amazons, or ones who killed their husbands and fathers, like the women of Lemnos, were regarded as enemies and monsters. (Lefkowitz 214-215)

The whole notion of self-possession echoes the matriarchy or any stage in human society that was matrilineal in organization and function, any time when the reproductive power of the individual and the community was under the spiritual and physical control of the female. This then,

makes the beehive a perfect prototype of the first human society, based on the gynocracy of motherhood. . . The bee was rightly looked upon as a symbol of the feminine potency of nature. . . (Neumann 265)

This symbolic representation of female power also helped cast a malevolence on single sex (female) societies like those of the Amazons who had a history of worshipping the goddess in her bee form. At Ephesus, which supported a major shrine to Artemis from prehistoric times until the visit of Paul the Apostle,

Artemis was associated with the bee as her cult animal. In fact, the whole organization of the sanctuary in classical times seems to have rested on the symbolic analogy of a beehive, with swarms of priestesses called bees, *melissai*, and numerous eunuch priests called 'drones,' *essenes*. (Gimbutas 183)

To a society and a world view becoming increasingly patriarchal this devotion drew down harm on the male.

The 'virginity' of the Great Mother, i.e., her independence of the male, becomes particularly evident in the Amazonian bee state, where only the queen is fecundated by the male, and she only once. For this reason, and because of the food she eats, the bee is pure . . . And among the bees, as so often among beasts and men, matriarchal womanhood assumes a character of the 'terrible' in relation to the male; for after mating, the drone mate and all the other drones are slain like aliens by the female group inhabiting the hive. (Neumann 267)

The ferocity of the amazon to the male is well documented. From Samothrace to the jungles of South America, the amazons are described as having their way with men for the purposes of reproduction and then either killing the male offspring, mutilating them in the hands or legs that they be fit only to serve as slaves, or sending them back to their natural fathers while keeping the daughters of their unemotional couplings with men.

The idea of civilization as a swarm of bees serving a single deadly queen, a killer of males, was anathema to early patriarchy; but the single sex society of the monstrous and dangerous Amazon offered the male philosophers and writers of the newly emerging Greek cities a way to define themselves and their conception of civilized culture. The dualism inherent in Western thinking sets up all reality as a series of categories in which opposites are identified. If there is man, there is woman. If there is man, there is beast. If there is Greek, there is barbarian. According to Page du Bois's formulations in *Centaurs and Amazons*, by the fifth century B.C. the force of *logos* (reason) was replacing the more mythic, poetic consciousness of earlier periods. Beginning at that time,

. . . the definition of the norm, the human subject, proceeds through a catalogue of difference. The human Greek male, the subject of history and of the culture of the *polis* (city state), is defined in relation to a series of creatures defined as different. He is at first simply not-animal, not-barbarian, not-female.

Greek/barbarian  
Male/female  
Human/animal

(du Bois 4)

But by analogy, all the other creatures are seen in opposition to the center of culture, the Greek male. Thus, the female, the Amazon, the animal, the barbarian, the Centaur have more in common with each other than any of them has with the male. These "others" exist at the periphery of civilization and do not belong to the *polis*. Women, because they are necessary for the reproduction of the race, have a dual position – both in the city and outside it. Amazons, however, are completely outside civilization, being women and women who do not cooperate in the reproductive strategy of the patriarchal system. Not only are they anti-marriage, they keep complete control over their own reproduction and exclude men from their society altogether. They do not enter into exchange, but in fact will seduce men away from their wives and homes as they did with the Scythian men.<sup>5</sup>

It's paradoxical how Amazons were viewed in two contradictory lights. On the one hand, they were seen as marginal, monstrous creatures isolated from human culture and living a brutal warrior's existence. On the other hand, they cast a certain erotic attraction for men because of their lack of availability. The number of public art works depicting the Amazonomachy indicates how deeply the struggle with the Amazons affected the consciousness of the Greeks, particularly the Athenians. Also, names of individual Amazons appear beside their figures on Greek vases, figures presented so as to emphasize their attractiveness and femininity, to maintain sexual differentiation. They do not picture sinewy, well-developed warrior women.<sup>6</sup> That the conquest of the Amazons was sexually tantalizing is shown in one of the legends about Achilles who fell in love with the Amazon queen Penthesilea as he battled with her on the fields of Troy. In some tellings of the tale he raped the dying queen and killed a soldier companion, Thersites, who either admonished him for this disgraceful treatment of a martial equal or mocked him for being so smitten by an Amazon.

That the Amazons of classical myth who worshipped a warrior goddess (herself served by a coterie of young unmarried women) were not thought of as lesbian is somewhat mysterious. Only Sobol (145) speculates about their sex lives the ten months of the year they weren't seeking male sexual partners to help them in reproducing their tribes. Although homosexuality was part of the fabric of Greek society, the accounts of Amazon customs by Greek commentators and historians do not suggest anything like lesbianism among them.

It is worth noting that historians, art critics, and mythographers focus on the behavior of the Amazons toward men and on their self-mutilation. But, as in the case of women of all types throughout myth and history, their relationship to other women has not been considered of much value. What is studied when sex is studied is male-female sexual practices and relationships. Generally speaking, there has been little female self-determination mentioned there.

In our own time, it is still sexually tantalizing for some males to fantasize "unmanning" a self-possessed woman (or any lesbian) with a "good lay," sexual

conquest and rape being the tools by which a woman's attention is focused on male power and privilege.

A completely different situation existed among the Dahomeans in Africa<sup>7</sup> where the female warrior society was incorporated into the life of the tribe and state, and the women were not opponents of the King but his adjuncts. The women soldiers were regarded legally as wives, for some reason or other; they were under the control of the King, but he did not desire them "because of their lack of personal attractiveness." (Herskovits II: 46)

These amazons were required to remain chaste during their time in the service. According to records, from the number of cases in which severe punishment was meted out, the amazons of Dahomey had welcome contact with members of the opposite sex. There was even a joke that more soldiers lost their lives going over the wall of the amazon camp than ever fell in battle. (Herskovits 11: 87) So instead of being removed from the polis as the Amazons of Greece were, the women warriors of Dahomey were part of the fabric of society. They claimed to have changed their sex, and in dress and demeanor they behaved like men. Dressed in short trousers, a sleeveless blouse covered over by a shirt or tunic, they were armed according to their company's function. At the time of Gego,<sup>8</sup> the archers, the pick of the army and the best dancers, were "distinguished by scanty attire, by a tattoo extending to the knee, and by an ivory bracelet on the left arm." (Herskovits 11: 89) That they could claim a gender change and still have illegal heterosexual liaisons speaks volumes about the difference between Greek thinking and Dahomean logic.

The powerful hold of the Amazons on the male imagination was still operative at the time of the explorations of the New World by Europeans.

Travellers to the Americas brought back tales of Amazon tribes, glimpsed or heard of, through the sixteenth century. Similarly, when Africa was explored by the first Europeans, Amazon societies were described in Ethiopia and in present-day Zimbabwe. . . . The distinguishing characteristics of different tribes' social structures were blotted out by an overwhelming interest in the figure of a woman warrior: the mere sighting of a native girl carrying a weapon could lead explorers to posit yet another homeland of the Amazons. (Warner 208)

Even before there had been any exploration of the west coast of the North American continent, a legend was circulating about an island called California which was inhabited by black Amazons. In 1510, Ordonez de Montalvo published *Las Sergas de Espladian*, a romance that chronicled the exploits of these women, tying them to the fantastic myth of El Dorado by describing the Amazons as having arms of gold and golden trappings on all the wild beasts they had tamed. Their queen, Calafia, gave her name to the country just as the Amazon region and its river were named after the woman warriors who were living there.

In 1542, Spanish explorers did contact and do battle with tribes in the

Amazon region, the fiercest fighters among them being tall white women with hair long and braided about their heads. Father Gaspar de Carvajal, who accompanied Francisco de Orellana on this expedition reported that the fight

...are very robust and go about naked, with their privy parts covered, with their bows and arrows in their hands, doing as much fighting as ten Indian men, and indeed there was one woman among these who shot an arrow a span deep into one of our brigantines, and others less deep, so that our brigantines looked like porcupines.<sup>9</sup>

Similar to other amazons, these women, an Indian captive told Father Gaspar, do not live with men but raided nearby Indian villages and carried men off to mate with them. The men were then banished and the offspring, if girls, were raised by the women while the boys were either killed or returned to their fathers.

While it cannot be said that among the native North Americans there were Amazon societies, the social organization of the tribal peoples was sufficiently flexible to accomodate women who through choice or direction from a vision or dream assumed the prerogatives of a hunter or warrior, even to the point of taking another woman as wife. In many tribes, among them the Yumas of the Southwest and Ingalik of Alaska, a woman could participate in rituals which were for males only like sweat baths. The physical sex of the woman was ignored by the men because, to them, she was defined by her gender behavior.

Native peoples respected the self-determination of these women warriors and believed these cross-over people were directed by the spirits. "What this change demonstrated is the extreme malleability of people with respect to gender roles, which can operate independently of a person's morphological sex and can determine both their gender status and erotic behavior." (Williams 10-11). Cross-dressing or becoming a warrior was not necessary in every case in which a woman was accepted as an amazon. Sahaykwisa, a Mojave woman, bore a masculine name. She had, therefore, gone through the ceremony or initiation rite for a *hwame*.<sup>10</sup> She dressed like a woman, was feminine in appearance and had large breasts. She earned money as a prostitute for white men and spent her money on women she fancied. (Williams 11)

Her sexual activity with men was unusual in that Indians often believed sleeping with a man robbed the amazon of her power in the hunt, ruining her luck with game. Perhaps it was lucky for Sahaykwisa that she didn't hunt for a living.

Since the Indian people understood individual behavior to be so much a part of a spirit influenced reality, there was much more latitude given for variance in gender behaviors. Spirit "inclusiveness" marks the attitudes of tribal people, and by contrast, the spiritual "exclusiveness" developing in the thinking of the Greek males of the fifth century B.C. made Amazons not only uncivilized, but by analogy unsouled.<sup>11</sup> As it was for Amazons, so has it been for women in Western cultures – to be regarded as not quite having the same kind of soul as

men. Also, males began more and more to identify themselves with logos and, thus, the spiritual realm. A man was soul and a woman was matter (maternity) and her existence was physical, limited to the physical plane and devoted to its nurturance.

Joan of Arc, the most famous female warrior figure in Western culture, would have been as well accepted as a cross-dressing shamanic amazon by North American tribal peoples as she was hailed by her own people as a young virgin who emerged as a national savior. Joan, like many young Indian women, came to her warrior calling because of voices, voices which directed her to leave the domestic occupation of shepherd and put on the armor of the king. Likewise, her chastity was a declaration of self-possession, a means to direct her energies and loyalty to what her voices had declared a glorious service.

The concept of virginity which she embodied – literally – had enormous power in her culture. Juxtaposed to the vivisected and dismembered body of the Kingdom, her virginity provided an urgent symbol of integrity. By synecdoche, Joan's intact sexuality stood for the whole of her and, in the ambitions of her supporters, the whole of France. (Warner 32)

The Maid of Orleans was so much larger than life in her reality that it was very easy for chroniclers to make use of her exploits and transform them into even larger heroics. Even her familiar name, Joan of Arc, was not the name she would have used for herself, but its associations reverberated with power.

At her trial there was some confusion as to what she was really called. She testified that she was called "Jhenne" in France and "Jhenette" at home. But in a disputed report of the proceedings (since her statement about her name was recorded in only one transcript of the trial), we find something to make an Amazon's heart leap up in recognition.

A month later, when this statement was read out to Joan, she corrected herself. Her family name was 'Darc' she said, or 'Rommée' because in her part of the world, *girls took the surnames of their mothers* [my emphasis]. (Warner 198)

This family name, D'Arc, linked her with images associated with the power of women throughout history and allowed direct parallels to be made by historical writers between the Amazons of classical mythology and the virgin warrior, Joan of Arc.<sup>12</sup>

In Joan's lifetime, her works – the works of a woman – had to be explained in some other context since they were beyond the scope of ordinary women and men. Identifying her with the Amazons of Greek myth was a convenient way to fix her in a category that already had about it a familiar set of symbols and consequences.

Joan was not condemned to death as a warrior, however, but as a heretic. In the culture of the Catholic church, women were and are outside the definition

of citizenship. While subject to ecclesiastical authority, they cannot exercise it. What happened to Joan at the hands of the Inquisition parallels in many significant aspects what happened to the IHM's in Los Angeles.

La Pucelle, the maid, refused to obey the dictates of the ecclesiastical authorities to abjure the reality of her voices. She would not deny or clearly identify the source of her warrior calling; nor would she change her mode of dress back to more conventional forms. She had grown to love her sword and livery. She lived for the bivouac and soldiering, sleeping under the stars with her companions at arms. It was her inclination to live like this, and her voices had put her on this path.

She was somewhat tricked into signing a letter renouncing the voices and her man's clothing, but a few days later she recanted and soon after went to her death.<sup>13</sup>

The Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary believed, too, that their experiments in all phases of their works and life patterns was dictated by a higher authority (the decrees of Vatican Council II on the modernization of religious life). They also believed, after much study, that their choice of clothing should be determined by the nature of the work. Thus, they refused to return to a "traditional" habit and kept to the belief that what they wore be appropriate for what profession they were in. For Joan, that meant wearing men's clothing – specifically the raiment of war; for modern day nuns, that meant changing into clothing worn by nurses, teachers, attorneys, social workers, etc.

And so they were offered a choice. Obey the rulings of the Cardinal or lose their status as a religious community.

The sword did pierce the heart. The community split in two, and soon after, the college closed. Many wealthy Catholics withdrew their support of the work of rebellious nuns.<sup>14</sup>

I don't exactly know why I decided to place an Artemis-figure in Los Angeles and give her a poem to write about modern urban existence seen from the consciousness of a warrior-goddess. The reasons for poems sometimes come after they are written, or they work themselves out alongside the words. I think I have had to go searching for the ways women have made war because the war for women isn't over. Judy Grahn has spoken well about the Amazons, those Artemis women par excellence, and our need for Amazon ideals.

...so they lost, the women-warriors, the warriors for women: their territory, their single-minded sisterhood, their magical power, the autonomy of their bodies. Nor have we regained these since the Trojan War, losing them over and over, nor have we stopped trying to regain them, nor have we stopped understanding that it will be done. (Grahn 183-184)

That we live in a time of guerilla warfare should be instructive to women. We should wed this knowledge to our amazon proclivities and infiltrate the various "cities" or spheres of activity we find ourselves in. I know for myself that viewing

the world through the lens of the Artemis-Amazon poem I'm writing, my life is charged with possibility again. Even though there are many defeats, there is always the sure knowledge that amazons never die out altogether. Like the forest fire that smolders in the earth and courses along the underground network of roots, amazons spring up in another place and strike fire.

This constructive "sparking" has manifested itself all over the globe in women's networks. In Los Angeles it is seen among women who have collected into their own institutions which offer them new avenues through which to emerge revived and able to confront the larger society with a conscious sense of power. Certainly, Arlene Raven, Judy Chicago and Sheila de Brettville in withdrawing from the California Institute of the Arts and creating the Woman's Building and the Feminist Studio Workshop in 1973 founded a city of women and a public institution for the arts where women could draw on their own resources and non-hierarchical feminist educational methods to create women's culture. This self-conscious distancing from the male dominated art world, in intention and result, was as amazon as you could get without riding bareback down the freeway brandishing a two-headed ax.

The formation of Connexus (Women's Center/Centro de Mujeres) in 1984 by Lauren Jardine and Adel Martinez and a group of financial backers is yet another intrusion into society by an institution of and for women, specifically lesbians. Connexus exists, says Jardine, because of the belief that quality services for women must be provided by women themselves. Importantly, Connexus did not set itself up on the periphery, marginalized and trivialized, but defined itself immediately as an institution which demanded a place in the mainstream.

What both of these institutions represent to me flies in the face of the traditional image of the Amazon – the mutilated woman, monstrous and menacing and in the business of death. It is important to harken back to the cities the Amazons founded and to the fact that Artemis was also the goddess of childbirth. While sacrifices to Artemis were known to be bloody and excessive, they manifested the tremendous struggle between life and death in its most primitive animal representation.

Mutilated beasts from which 'a member was cut off' were sacrificed to Artemis, and her name has – quite plausibly – been derived from the verb *artamein*, 'to slaughter.' The bull's or hippopotamus' thigh as an attribute of *Taurt*, the castrated priests of Cybele and Diana (two other forms of Artemis) at Ephesus, fit into the context. (Neumann 276)

But that Amazons mutilated themselves by burning the right breast with a hot iron or tying it with a cord to discourage its growth, there is little positive evidence. This legend was passed on through history, however, and when Sir Walter Raleigh reported back from his explorations of Guiana, he noted that he did not see any right breasts missing from the women warriors with whom he had contact.

Amazons of Greek mythology and the South American amazons seemed to mutilate others and not themselves. Their ferocity against those who faced them in battle is well-documented as is their habit of crippling their male children or killing them.

Nothing could be a clearer symbol of how the figure [of the Amazon] embodies a rejection of the feminine than the severed breast. Astonishingly, this custom appears to have been invented at some later date: no Amazon in a Greek vase painting or sculpture of classical times is mutilated in this way, and the authors who describe this custom are comparatively late: Justin, Diodorus Siculus, Galen. They also provide the mistaken etymology of the Amazon. As Robert Graves has pointed out, the A may be emphatic, so that the word may mean 'many breasted' as indeed was the Amazon's special goddess, Diana (Artemis) of the Ephesians. (Warner 215)

This healthier view of the Amazons is supported by Sobol (111, 137) who also believes it is illogical to think of warriors handicapping themselves in this way, or mothers who needed to suckle infants limiting themselves to one breast. Sobol (145) adds an important line of inquiry not found in Warner because the latter didn't treat the question of lesbianism among Amazons. Sobol discusses at length the acceptance of homosexuality in classical Greece and the place of homosexuality in ancient armies and warrior societies. As monstrous as their behavior might have made them, they are always pictured or discussed in terms of their beauty and their great courage. It is not unlikely they admired the same things about themselves and their companions; the great attention they paid to their physical prowess probably made them more interested in their bodies rather than less.

Amazons, when they are represented in art, are often depicted with one breast bared, and Neumann (128) identifies this characteristic display of the naked breast as a manifestation of goddess worship.

The Great Goddess as a whole is a symbol of creative life and the parts of her body are not physical organs but numinous symbolic centers of whole spheres of life. For this reason, the 'self-representation' of the Great Goddess, her display of her breasts, belly, or entire naked body, is a form of divine epiphany.

Thus, in the Cretan cultural sphere, the uncovering of the breasts is a sacred action pertaining to the cult. The goddess and the priests identified with her show their full breasts, the symbols of the nourishing life stream.

Nor is there among Native Americans any record of mutilation of the breast. This is probably due to the difference in thinking about gender roles exhibited by tribal peoples on this continent. Changing from a man to a woman or a woman to a man was done first on the spirit level and had a sacred character. It represented a higher calling to have such direction from the spirits.

I prefer to take the position of Judy Grahn who believes the story of the missing breast is a "scare story" (Grahn 172) to make women think twice about

taking up men's tools or weapons. I also subscribe to the spirit of Deena Metzger's moving comment about the loss of her breast to cancer surgery.

I am no longer afraid of mirrors when I see the sign of the amazon, the one who shoots arrows. There is a fine red line across my chest where the knife entered, but now a branch winds about the scar and travels from arm to heart. Green leaves cover the branch, grapes hang there and a bird appears. What grows in me now is vital and does not cause me harm. I think the bird is singing. When he finished his work, the tattooist drank a glass of wine with me. I have relinquished some of the scars. I have designed my chest with the care given to an illuminated manuscript. I am no longer ashamed to make love. In the night, a hand caressed my chest and once again I came to life. Love is a battle I can win. I have the body of a warrior who does not kill or wound. On the book of my body, I have permanently inscribed a tree. (Metzger 219)

Here the warrior is clear about having lost something of herself in a battle for life; she has not inflicted herself with a wound either physically or psychically.

I can't help thinking about the symbolic level. We don't have to lose part of ourselves to be more of ourselves. Becoming self-possessed, a true amazon, in our patriarchal society is taken as mutilation of femininity. As we see with the Greeks, a woman is relegated to the periphery of the society when she makes the decision to be something other than the opposite of a man. When she comes to her own power and is not simply the "lack" of another kind of power, whether that be physical, spiritual, or political.

The warrior life for our times demands first that we not cooperate in the dualistic habits of thought and behavior that make up Western culture. The battle is not to be marginalized, but to create amazon enclaves, our own institutions, in the larger "polis" and battle it out. Quite realistically, this means learning to constantly transform, to build our own "cities" and rebuild them when they burn. This, now, is what being a warrior is all about – living in images we make come true whether that be building our bodies or our own political bases. Self-possession.

Which brings me back to Artemis. Here I am in Los Angeles surrounded by the kinds of hills and greenery I can imagine Artemis and the Amazons inhabiting, and although I have never seen an Amazon in a starry red leather tunic astride a pawing, anxious mare, I have seen one with amazing muscles in a red dress. I welcome any sign of an amazon re-emergence around me – warrior networks operating on the physical plane, spiritually and psychically travelling in bands across space and time. I welcome the recovery of information about self-possessed amazons who were on this continent before the white people came with their rigidities and categories.<sup>15</sup> I like that I began to look for Artemis and her sisters among us, wondering what she now cares about, where she is aiming those arrows.

Even among the many defeats, the lesson is that self-determination, self-possession, those essential amazon traits, have a female shape we do not need

to reinvent. She is already older than our current need for her and her warrior temperament, her dogs and bear and deer, her noble virtues of absolute faithfulness and devotion to her warrior calling.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In November, 1985, I attended a performance of *Immaculate Heart* by Hugo Leckey at Theatre Theatre in Hollywood. In the audience that night were several former members of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, one of whom was the model for one of the principal characters in the play.

<sup>2</sup> I am using the capitalized "Amazon" to refer to the Amazons of Greek myth and "amazon" to refer to other women with some Amazon characteristics or to the general category including Amazons and amazons.

<sup>3</sup> Anatolia in ancient times was the name of the vast peninsula between the Mediterranean and Black Seas. Generally speaking, Anatolia is Asia Minor and the site of present day Turkey. Along its Western shore were located the major cities of the Amazons, and the island of Lesbos was immediately off the coast.

<sup>4</sup> In ancient times there was only the Mother Goddess, and under her various names she worked her powers. Artemis is the name the Greeks gave to the form of the all encompassing goddess in her aspect of young warrior maiden. Almost every culture has a similar form of goddess who hunts animals and spends most of her time in the wilderness.

<sup>5</sup> Heracles had made prisoners of the Amazons after they had been defeated in a battle over the girdle of their queen, Hippolyte. But they overpowered the sailors on the ship carrying them and, without a helmsman (since the Amazons had no sailing or navigational skills) the ship took off, completely under the control of the wind and waves. Heracles did not pursue the ship, not wanting to endanger his own vessels. The Amazons eventually ended up on the shore of Cremni, the land of the Scythians.

Soon the war parties of Amazons were spied by the Scythians who had never seen female warriors and took them to be beardless young men. But once they had met in battle, the Scythians "resolved to woo the superlative creatures and have offspring by them" (Sobol 48). So instead of engaging them in any more battles, they observed the Amazons from a distance and showed them they wished only to meet. Gradually, alliances and dalliances developed, and the Scythians asked the Amazons to live among them and marry them.

But the Amazons refused, saying their ways were different, that they could not live like the Scythian women did. They suggested the young men take their inheritances and leave their families. Then they decided it would be wiser to move away altogether, so they left Cremni and settled farther north, establishing their own society. They were called the Sauromatae and for centuries the women kept their Amazon ways, among them the rule that a woman couldn't marry until she had killed an enemy.

• By contrast, Sir Richard Burton (British consul in West Africa from 1861 to 1864) expected to meet a corps of striking Amazons when he first reviewed the all-female troops attached to the King. Instead, he was shocked to see the masculine physiques and warrior carriage of the woman soldiers.

7 Most of the accounts of life among the Dahomey in this paper are taken from the reports of Burton and his contemporaries in the 1860's.

• Gego was a King of the Dahomeans during Burton's consulship.

• Quoted in Warner (209) from Jose Toribio Medina, trans., *Descrubimiento del Rio de las Amazonas sugun la relacion de Fr. Gaspar de Caravajal* [Seville 1894] (New York: American Geographical Society, 1914.)

<sup>10</sup> Hwame is a term used by the Mojaves to describe a young woman who had, often because of a dream, refused the female role. If their family could not discourage them from this change of role, they underwent a transition rite, and then they were given instructions by the adults in what was appropriate for their new sex (Williams 10).

<sup>11</sup> Page du Bois uses the word "analogy" in a very specific sense in relation to how the Greeks of the fifth century B.C. dealt with the concept of difference, using a series of "polarities linked by analogy" (du Bois 3).

When there is a polarity "opposites of any type tend to be taken as mutually exclusive alternatives" (du Bois 3). Thus, female and male are polar opposites and mutually exclusive. Human is the polar opposite of beast in the same way. But then, by analogy where a "relationship of similarity tends to be assimilated to that of complete identity" (du Bois 3), a female (being the polar opposite of a male) and a beast (being, also, the polar opposite of human) have more in common by ANALOGY than they do with male humans. A nice trick of logic that has helped men associate females more with the animal world than the spiritual or rational realms.

<sup>12</sup> See Warner's "Amazons" for a discussion of linguistic shifts in French to understand the various forms of Joan's name and for a detailed explanation of why it was important to Joan's social climbing relatives that a family name with association to knighthood be developed and maintained.

D'Arc, or "of Arc," means 'bow' among other things, and the bow was a weapon identified with the Amazons. In *Breviarum Historiale* (Warner 199), Joan was first written about as an Amazon because of that weapon.

<sup>13</sup> For an in-depth account of Joan's transvestism and its place in her mission and the complicated legal issues surrounding her confession, see Warner's chapter on "The Ideal Androgyne." (Warner 137-158)

<sup>14</sup> When the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary split into two groups, what was called the "old group" retained their canonical status of a Catholic sisterhood and retained the original name. The "new group" is called the Immaculate Heart Community. The American Film Institute now occupies the former site of Immaculate Heart College, but the Immaculate Heart College Learning Center is still empowered by the State of California to grant graduate degrees. The Learning Center offers programs in Global Strategies for Peace, in Leadership for Educational Change, and in Feminist Spirituality.

<sup>15</sup> Great contributions to our knowledge of the various cultures of Native American Indian women continue to be made by Paula Gunn Allen. See "Beloved Women Lesbians in American Indian Cultures" *Conditions: Seven* 3.1 (Spring 1981): 67-87. Also see "Who Is Your Mother? Red Roots of American Feminism." *Sinister Wisdom* 25 (1984): 34-46. Soon to be released from Beacon Press will be Allen's *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in Native American Indian Traditions*.

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# Sado-Masochism: The Erotic Cult of Fascism

Sheila Jeffreys

I became aware of the links between sado-masochism and fascism in 1981 when I visited Amsterdam from my home in London to attend the women's festival. An important, if not the main, theme of the festival was sado-masochism. Women at the Amsterdam festival demonstrated SM scenarios, e.g., a male-to-constructed female transsexual whipping a woman, both dressed in fetishistic 'feminine' clothing and black leather. Quite a number of women at the festival were dressed in black leather and some were on collars and leads being led around by other women. The promotional workshops for SM argued from the basis of personal freedom for sexual minorities. The promoters argued that SM was basically a private affair, though SM practitioners had to 'come out' because they were oppressed by prejudice and discrimination against their preferred sexual practice.

In the same week as the festival took place the first fascist member of parliament was elected in Amsterdam since the war. There were street fights that weekend in which fascists celebrated by beating up members of Amsterdam's immigrant population, and a telephone tree had to be operated to get anti-fascists to different parts of the town to resist the racist violence. The Amsterdam feminists who told me of the violence and the election triumph did not see any connection between the increase in fascism and the promotion of SM as a sexual practice. They accepted that SM was simply a personal matter. I was not convinced. A main Amsterdam police station was in the same street as the building, the Melkweg, in which the festival took place. Outside the festival building there was a massive wall poster of a full length naked woman with her hands tied behind her. The slave woman appeared opposite the police station. She did not to me represent a symbol of defiance. It seemed likely that SM, the police, a burgeoning fascist threat, the teenage boys who threw stones at myself and my lover for holding hands a street away from the festival, had a great deal in common. What was the common thread?

## Berlin in the Thirties

There is a historical example of the connection between SM and fascism which we ignore at our peril. Before the Nazi takeover in Germany in 1933 it seems that SM was a flourishing and growing sexual practice, particularly among gay men. Christopher Isherwood, a gay British novelist who lived in Berlin at that time, has left a written record of the flirtation with SM which was taking place, not just among gays, but also amongst unemployed and alienated German youth. In a 1962 book, *Down There on a Visit*, Isherwood mused on the connections between SM and the growth of fascism in his description of a German youth, Waldemar.

I'm sure that Waldemar instinctively feels a relation between the "cruel" ladies in boots who used to ply their trade outside the Kaufhaus des Westens and the young thugs in Nazi uniforms who are out there nowadays pushing the Jews around. When one of the booted ladies recognised a promising customer, she used to grab him, haul him into a cab and whisk him off to be whipped. Don't the S.A. boys do exactly the same thing with *their* customers – except that the whipping is in fatal earnest? Wasn't one a kind of psychological dress rehearsal for the other?<sup>1</sup>

Martin Sherman uses SM as an important underlying theme in his powerful play, *Bent*. The play opens with the main character, Max, having picked up and taken home with him, presumably for a threesome with his lover, a young man in leather who is into SM. It is the morning after and Gestapo officers arrive in pursuit of the young German and slit his throat. The date is 1934. Max and his lover were then on the run. After his lover was killed, Max ended up in a concentration camp. In the most moving scene of the play Max and a fellow prisoner, who is in the camp because he signed a petition for the repeal of Germany's anti-homosexuality statute, make love to each other just by speaking whilst moving rocks under heavy guard. Max is unable to make love without pain and includes painful nipple biting in the spoken fantasy. Horst, the lover, complains and links the SM with the fascism which has imprisoned them.

Horst: . . . You try to hurt me. You make me warm, and then you hurt me. I hurt enough. I don't want to feel more pain. Why can't you be gentle?

Max: I am.

Horst: No, you're not. You're like them. You're like the guards. You're like the Gestapo. We stopped being gentle. I watched it, when we were on the outside. People made pain and called it love. I don't want to be like that. You don't make love to hurt.<sup>2</sup>

The play links Max's sado-masochism with his inability to accept his homosexuality and actually love other men. At the end of the play, though

Horst is killed, Max achieves some kind of moral and personal triumph by demonstrating that he loves Horst, deliberately donning the pink triangle of the homosexual and walking into the electrified fence.

The tragedy of SM practice in 1930's Berlin was that the scenarios that gay men were enacting, complete with nazi uniforms, for their sexual enjoyment were only an anticipation of the greater violence which was to befall them from fascist thugs when they were interned in concentration camps. The experience of male gays in these camps is graphically described in Heinz Heger's *The Men with the Pink Triangles*. One example of the torture and death of a male gay prisoner is interesting for the way in which it illumines SM practice.

The first 'game' that the SS sergeant and his men played was to tickle their victim with goose feathers, on the soles of his feet, between his legs, in the armpits, and on other parts of his naked body. At first the prisoner forced himself to keep silent, while his eyes twitched in fear and torment from one man to the other. Then he could not restrain himself and finally he broke out in a high-pitched laughter that very soon turned into a cry of pain, while the tears ran down his face, and his body twisted against his chains. . . .

But the depraved SS men were set on having a lot more fun with this poor creature. The bunker capo had to bring two metal bowls, one filled with cold water and the other with hot? "Now we're going to boil your eggs for you, you filthy queer, you'll soon feel warm enough," the bunker officer said gleefully, raising the bowl with hot water between the victim's thigh so that his balls hung down into it. . . .

"He's a bum-fucker, isn't he, let him have what he wants," growled one of the SS men, taking up a broom that stood in the corner and shoving the handle deep into the anus. . . .<sup>3</sup>

The man was eventually killed by being hit on the head with a wooden stool. The descriptions that follow are from a chapter in a lesbian SM primer on how to do SM safely.

Fisting, or fist-fucking, means moving a whole hand around inside or in and out of someone's vagina or rectum. The fister starts out putting one or two fingers inside her partner, working her way up one finger at a time, with a couple of minute's stimulating movement between each increase, until she has her whole hand inside, at which time the fingers often curl up to fit the space, forming a "fist." At this point, the fistee's usual inclination is to ask, "Can't you put any more in?"

The first thing you need before you do any fisting is short, smooth fingernails. Your fingernails should be trimmed right down to the quick and then filed with an emery board or elkhorn file both side to side and back-of-hand side to palm side. It's also important to use a nice, heavy lubricant that won't all end up in a puddle in five minutes; shortening is good. The top

should cover her hand fairly thickly with the shortening and not push it past the point where it fits fairly easily. . . [etc.]

....  
The way to drip wax from a candle safely is to let a drop or two fall at a time, rather than letting melted wax accumulate around the base of the wick and spilling it onto your partner's skin all at once . . . [etc.]<sup>4</sup>

I have included the two practices above because they come closest to replicating the torture methods used in the real-life concentration camp example. (Other instructions include how to cut a woman's breasts with razors and how to pierce her labia.) They make it clear that SM practice comes from nowhere more mysterious than the history of our very real oppression. SM scenarios reenact the torture of gays by fascists as well as the torture of blacks by whites, jews by nazis, women by men, slaves by slave-owners. Such SM practice could be seen as a ritual enactment, like a talisman. Since it seems unlikely that gay SM practitioners actually desire to be tortured in a way that is entirely out of their control, it seems likely that such practice plays the role of garlic in warding off the devil, or simply an anxious anticipation of the worst that could happen to try to get used to it.

#### **Fascist ambiance.**

SM proponents are usually quite upfront about their use of fascist and nazi symbolism, costumes, e.g., black leather SS caps, swastikas, black leather SS lookalike uniforms and greatcoats. Pat Califia, the main U.S. SM theorist (who occasioned some adverse publicity in '82 when she carved a swastika into a woman's flesh against her will), explains it thus:

An SM scene can be played out using the personae of guard and prisoner, cop and suspect, Nazi and Jew, white and black, straight man and queer, parent and child, priest and penitent, teacher and student, whore and client, etc.

However, no symbol has a single meaning. Its meaning is derived from the context in which it is used. Not everyone who wears a swastika is a Nazi, not everyone who has a pair of handcuffs on his belt is a cop, and not everyone who wears a nun's habit is a Catholic. SM is more a parody of the hidden sexual nature of fascism than it is a worship of or acquiescence to it. How many real Nazis, cops, priests or teachers would be involved in a kinky sexual scene?<sup>5</sup>

The answer to Califia's naive question is, of course, quite a few. At least one member of the London lesbian SM support group has been seen wearing SS cap and swastikas at social events. She was challenged on the grounds that these symbols were offensive to a lot of women and replied with the threat of violence if any further criticism was made.

In early 1984 gay skinheads attended the mixed gay disco at the Bell at Kings Cross. One made an abrupt seigheil salute directly and deliberately into the face of a black gay man on the floor and three followed a disabled black gay

man into the toilets and threatened him. A white gay man pulled the plug on the stereo to get the incident discussed and action taken. He was expelled and barred from the disco. This was a disco which was supposedly part of the alternative, political or at least non-commercial gay scene. The skinheads were regular attenders. The national organiser of the Young National Front also turned up at the Bell and was turned out when he took off his jacket and revealed swastikas. The collective at the Bell and some other disco collectives had to institute a dress code, i.e., no swastikas or "Hitler's European Tour" T-shirts but black leather uniform accepted.

But, the SM proponents would say, we only wear nazi insignia for fun and would not wish to be associated with violent behavior. That may be so, but how are other gays to know the difference? The fear will be real whether the swastikas are worn for 'fun' or to persecute. Where swastikas are concerned, one woman's fun is another woman's terror. Fascists get exactly the same 'fun' out of wearing swastikas that SM proponents do, power from other women's fear and distress. One serious danger that will result from tolerance of nazi insignia in the gay scene, under the guise of 'fun,' sexual practice, or fashion, is the paralysis of our will or ability to act in the face of actual fascist violence. It is as important now to challenge and reject the sporting of nazi emblems as it was in Germany in the 20's and 30's as fascism took hold. Doubtless anti-fascists then who challenged the swastikas were met with the same threats that SM proponents are already making when their pleasure is questioned. Was nazism the fashion then? Is that how it took hold in artistic and avant garde circles?

### The Sadism of German Fascism

One of the terms of abuse hurled at London feminists who were holding a meeting to challenge the promotion of SM was "fascists." The lesbian feminists were accused of being "just like the National Front" for having dared to call such a meeting. This line of attack, which fits in with current attempts by socialist sexual libertarians to label feminists right-wing, is made on the basis of an assumption that fascist politics would be opposed to SM. Quite the reverse is true in fact, and this accusation is a good example of what Mary Daly calls "patriarchal reversal."<sup>6</sup>

Dorchen Leidholdt, of the New York group Women Against Pornography, in an illuminating article, "Where Pornography Meets Fascism," explains the extent to which erotic sado-masochism was a mainstay of fascist ideology and practice.

Hitler adopted the whip as his personal symbol, for example, and when excited he would often thrash his own legs with it. He took great pleasure in quoting Nietzsche's maxim, "Thou goest to women? Do not forget thy whip!" Perhaps most revealing about Hitler's sexual response to women was the delight he took in watching scantily clad women risk their lives. In *The Psychopathic God*, Waite notes, "He was particularly fond of watching pretty

women in a circus on the high trapeze and tight ropes. . . . He was not particularly impressed with wild animal acts unless pretty women were involved. Then he watched avidly, his face flushed, and his breath came quickly in little whistling sounds as his lips worked avidly." Hitler's sadism toward women probably had something to do with his bad track record in romantic relationships: of the six women he was romantically involved with during his life five committed or attempted suicide.

Sadomasochism also characterized Hitler's interaction with his immediate subordinates "Every time I face him," rhapsodised Hermann Goering, "my heart falls into my trousers" - as well as his relationship to the German people as a whole. Eric Fromm has pointed out that Hitler's sadomasochistic orientation played into the sadomasochistic bent of the German masses, their desire to be dominated by a powerful leader while dominating others. And Hitler was only too conscious of the tenor of both the times and the people he ruled. In an address to German military cadets in 1942 he declared, "Why babble about brutality and be indignant about torture? The masses want that. They need something that will give them a thrill of terror."

Leidholdt seems to be suggesting that the German people had a particular bent for sado-masochism. All the evidence would suggest that the whole of male supremacy is imbued with the same bent. But her remarks force us to consider the extent to which the appeal of fascism and the appeal of racism itself are fueled by eroticism. She goes on to point out that Jacobo Timerman, an Argentinian jew tortured by rightists, described Argentinian anti-semitism as having an erotic and sadistic character: "Hatred of the Jew was visceral, explosive, a supernatural bolt, a gut excitement, the sense of one's entire being abandoned to hatred."<sup>8</sup>

By some mysterious process all that pertains to sex in this society has been separated off from politics, even by those who would consider themselves socialists and radicals. In order to make sexual practice a private enclave of individual delight, sexuality has been seen as somehow removed from the effects of sexism, racism, any oppression in the world outside the bedroom, and considered to have no effect upon or relevance to that world. In fact sex plays a crucial part in fueling and regulating the oppression of women and racist oppression. There is nothing pure about sex nor anything which might claim for it a special exemption from political criticism.

The promoters of SM call their feminist opponents fascists in order to forestall us, to shut us up, to make it difficult for us to point out the links between SM and fascism. They must know that they are in an exposed position and they desperately scream "fascist" lest we should level such an accusation at them.

Are SM proponents fascists? Probably they are not members of fascist organisations and do not care for any aspects of fascism apart from the erotic one. I would say that most are not fascists, even though experiencing pleasure from the terrorising of other lesbians by wearing fascist regalia comes pretty close, but promoters of fascist values. The eroticising of dominance and

submission, the glamourising of violence and of the oppression of gays, jews, and women, is the stuff of fascism.

### The Erotic Roots of Fascism

What is the appeal of fascism? The political system of fascism offers capitalists a way of maintaining their profits with no threat of working class resistance. The violence and racism of fascism offer to the disillusioned and unemployed, the young and alienated, a scapegoat for their troubles and a substitute form of 'fulfillment' and excitement. It offers them rallies, a feeling of power (bullying), nationalistic pride and a spurious self-respect based on the idea that if they are white, male and gentile, they are at least superior to other racial groups and to women. There are doubtless many other mechanisms operating as fascism and its values take hold. But besides these important social and economic roots there is another way in which fascism appeals. This is through the excitement of eroticism. The erotic roots of fascism have not received much attention, perhaps because they require too threatening an appraisal of our own sexuality.

To understand the erotic roots of fascism it is necessary to have a rather different and more complex analysis of fascism than the simplistic version generally touted by the male left. It is wrong to assume that fascism is an evil force that exists somewhere fully fledged in the outside world, is easily recognisable and will suddenly arrive, obvious, calling itself fascism and in a form that is easily challenged. This was, I think, the mistaken concept behind much anti-fascist work in the middle 70's. The Anti-Nazi League confronted, very successfully, the upfront fascist organisations. Whilst these parties are slumbering currently as the tory government does much of their work for them, political people of the left are able to regard the wearing of swastikas by people who are not members of those organisations as unimportant. But fascism does not fall fully formed from the skies in the form of fascist organisations. Fascist parties require widespread support, or at least tolerance to be successful. Party members are not born fascists and are sometimes men and women who have been socialists. Oswald Mosley is the most famous British example of this phenomenon. The young men Isherwood describes as being in the nazi party one day and the communist party the next, drawn by the lure of opportunities for violence and feelings of personal power, are another.

There was a time in the late 60's and early 70's, when left radicals talked of the psychological and emotional roots of fascism in everyone living in male supremacist society. Wilhelm Reich was read avidly. Papers were written about the formation of the authoritarian personality within the patriarchal family and the need to create a completely new way of living which would encourage self-confidence and individual responsibility, which would reduce the attraction of the fuehrer type figure. The analysis was partial because there was not much consideration of women's oppression beyond the simple belief that eliminating

the nuclear family would solve women's problems. But there was an understanding that fascism's emotional roots are built into our personalities from the type of family structures we are born into and the kinds of authority we are subjected to throughout childhood and growing up. This was a crucially important understanding and the fruits of it exist today in new attitudes towards childrearing and political organisation within feminism and some parts of the left and the gay movement. This understanding of the importance of personal politics, on the basis of which the women's liberation movement was formed, seems now to be increasingly unpopular. I feel convinced, but it may be wishful thinking, that the significance of wearing swastikas would have been clear in 1971 in a way which it is not today.

The erotic roots of fascism lie in the way in which sexuality under male supremacy is structured in individuals. Because western male supremacy encourages us to experience sexuality as an immensely powerful and nigh uncontrollable force, the erotic aspect of fascism has great significance. We do not learn to express ourselves sexually in a world of equal, loving relationships. Women and men are born into the heterosexual system of male dominance and female submission. This holds true whether or not we are able to escape sufficiently to love women. Childhood sexuality is constructed through interaction with aggressive boys pulling girls' knickers down and through sexual abuse and exploitation by adult men. The models we are offered of female sexuality are of passivity and submission. We are taught to respond sexually to aggressive male overtures. Many lesbians have difficulty learning the correct female response of submissive sexual docility to men, but nevertheless we do not easily emerge unscathed from the construction of female sexuality around sado-masochism. Where we live under oppression and where there is virtually no escape for us, at least until we reach an advanced age, toward egalitarian relationships in which we take sexual initiatives, we have little alternative but to take pleasure from our oppression. The most common response is to eroticise our powerlessness in masochism. For some women who see this as too 'effeminate' the role of humiliating women can be eroticised in sadism – the models for this in a woman-hating culture are everywhere.

Lesbians and gay men suffer particular pressures which can lead to the possession of a sexuality constructed around sado-masochism. As a result of heterosexism and anti-lesbianism, we have often grown up hating ourselves and particularly our sexuality. It is hard for us to build for ourselves a sexuality that is positive, egalitarian and free from SM overtones. Some lesbians and gay men know no other sexuality than that of sado-masochistic fantasies which influence their practice, though they may studiously avoid acting out SM ritual. Any challenge to sado-masochism is felt by some such lesbians and gay men as a serious threat. They see themselves as having no sexual practice at all if they have to abandon that which is based on eroticising oppression. But there lies in our very understanding that sexuality is something constructed and not given a

message of hope. We can reconstruct. There is every ground for optimism. Some lesbians and gay men are very little affected by SM, and are able to practice a different kind of sexuality. Even those of us who do know the extent of SM influence in our lives usually have experienced moments of unusual sexual intensity and pleasure which have not involved fantasied dominance and submission to any degree. In all of us are the seeds of change. We can seek to maximise positive sexuality instead of maximising the negative sexuality of SM.

The triggers to a sexual response built around masochism are the symbols of power and authority. Particularly powerful symbols are those which represent abusive, cruel and arbitrary power and authority, the whip is a more powerful symbol than the prefect's badge. The trappings and rituals of fascism are perfect symbols for the purpose. Uniforms, marches, swastikas, portraits of Hitler, authoritarian speechmaking are erotic triggers. The sadists in the National Front are stimulated by repeated viewing of videos of German nazi marches and parades. All the paraphernalia of fascism is calculated to draw a powerful erotic response from those whose sexuality has been formed under male supremacy and modelled on sado-masochism. That is most of us.

It is the capacity to be attracted to nazism that numbs the response of outrage that many people might otherwise feel toward it. The construction of SM sexuality is a mighty clever ploy for the oppressor. Our resistance is undermined in our very guts if our response to the torture of others or to the trappings of militarism is erotic rather than politically indignant. It is very hard to fight what turns you on. This is a problem which feminists fighting porn have already recognised and understood. It feels humiliating and paralysing to be turned on by the very degradation of women that you wish to challenge. The only way to fight is to turn that pain into anger. We are not to blame for the way our sexuality is constructed, though we have total responsibility for how we choose to act on it. We have the right to be furious and to direct our pain into attacking the porn merchants, the porn apologists (and they include, unfortunately, SM dykes), the porn buyers and consumers. It's hard but we have to understand that the images and messages – of women being objects, tortured, used and abused – that influence our own sexual response are meant to paralyse us. We cannot afford to be weakened by these images but must share our feelings and build our rage.

As with sexism, the trappings of fascism and even its practice can be turned on not just for the oppressor but for his victims. Edmund White, U.S. gay novelist, interviewed a couple of gay men who were into wearing police uniforms in his book *States of Desire: Travels in Gay America*. He explained that there was a bar staffed with gay men in police uniforms in which the customers included gay men dressed as cops and real life policemen. This tragic and degrading flirtation with oppression had alarming implications. One cop lookalike, when arrested later outside the bar, spent his time entranced by the policeman's boots. Another who was arrested and beaten up could speak of nothing but his infatuation for his tormentor.<sup>9</sup>

SM promoters constantly stress that SM is 'only fantasy' and bears no relation to reality. This is a comforting illusion. What is ritual today can be reality tomorrow. The promotion of SM and its imagery will ensure that it will be more and more difficult in the future for some lesbians and gay men, perhaps for all those who use the gay social scene, which is flooded with SM imagery, to be purely angry and in no sense erotically aroused by the imagery of real life practising fascists, policemen, and thugs. I think it is important that we are able to distinguish fascist threats accurately and fight them clearly. I do not want to think that when tanks and marching boots and swastikas pass by in a real fascist coup, the gay population will be experiencing a thud of erotic desire which immobilises us.

### Is Sado-Masochism Racist?

U.S. and British SM promoters are righteously indignant about the suggestion that there might be anything racist about their politics. Thus, Pat Califia, doyenne of Californian lesbian sado-masochism, a prominent 'top' or sadist, dismissed criticisms of racism made when the SM group Samois was told they could not rent space in the San Francisco women's building, "We were expected to defend ourselves against accusations that we were racist. . . ." she complained indignantly.<sup>10</sup> She does not of course do so, or mention anywhere the substance of the allegations or the ways in which she saw them to be false. Such an arrogant belief by white women that they were above and beyond the possibility of racist behaviour or attitudes would, hopefully, in any other sphere but that of sexuality, be seen as a form of racism.

SM proponents should be aware of the offense given to all gays of colour by the insignia of a political ideology which means death or hideous persecution to all non-aryans. The Gay Black Group made their views very plain in response to the appearance of nazi regalia at mixed gay events.

We are becoming increasingly aware of people wearing fascist and nazi insignia at various lesbian/gay venues, proudly displaying the regalia of the British Movement and the National Front. Reports are growing of attacks on gay men and women by such types. It is no longer acceptable to us for people wearing such offensive clothing to be excused by saying it is just 'fashion'.

We find it offensive and disturbing that racism remains unchallenged, taken for granted or otherwise condoned by the entire lesbian/gay community. We are stunned at the ignorance as regards the numerous attacks and abuse and hostility to gay people shown by groups of fascists. We feel that a concerted effort needs to be begun to identify and eradicate the seeds of racism and fascism inherent in the lesbian/gay community. . . .

The Gay Black Group has experienced violence at the hands of fascists both due to racism and because of our sexuality.<sup>11</sup>

A U.S. black feminist, Alice Walker, in a moving, and one might have thought unanswerable article, did explain the way in which she saw SM practice as being racist. Walker writes as a teacher who had spent a term with women students, black and white, trying to "come to terms, in imagination and feeling," with what it meant to be a slave or a master or mistress. "Black and white and mixed women wrote of captivity, or rape, of forced breeding to restock the master's slave pens. They write of attempts to escape, of the sale of their children, of dreams of Africa, of efforts at suicide."<sup>12</sup> Then she writes of the effect of watching a TV show in which two Samoan women took part as mistress and slave. Though the article is written in a fictional style and was originally published in a book of short stories, the SM TV program was not fiction, but really took place as she describes.

Imagine our surprise, therefore, when many of us watched a television special on sado-masochism that aired that night before our class ended, and the only interracial couple in it, lesbians, presented themselves as mistress and slave. The white woman, who did all the talking, was mistress (wearing a ring in the shape of a key that she said fit the lock on the chain around the black woman's neck), and the black woman, who stood smiling and silent, was — the white woman said — her slave. . . .

All I had been teaching was subverted by that one image, and I was incensed to think of the hard struggle of my students to rid themselves of stereotype, to combat prejudice, to put themselves into enslaved women's skins, and then to see their struggle mocked, and the actual enslaved condition of literally millions of our mothers trivialized because two ignorant women insisted on their right to act out publicly a "fantasy" that still strikes terror in black women's hearts. And embarrassment and disgust, at least in the hearts of most of the white women in my class.

One white student, apparently with close ties to our local lesbian S and M group, said she could see nothing wrong with what we'd seen on TV. (Incidentally there were several white men on this program who owned white women as "slaves," and even claimed to hold legal papers to this effect. Indeed, one man paraded his slave around town with a horse's bit between her teeth, and 'lent' her out to other sado-masochists to be whipped.) It is all fantasy, she said. No harm done. Slavery, real slavery, is over after all.

But it isn't over. . . . and Kathleen Barry's book on female sexual slavery and Linda Lovelace's book on *being* such a slave are not the only indications that this is true.<sup>13</sup>

Pat Califia chose to reply to Alice Walker's article in two entirely dismissive sentences in her contribution to the Samoan book, *Coming to Power*. ". . . In an attempt to prove that S/M is racist, Walker describes these women [those playing mistress and slave on the TV program] as a white woman top and a black woman bottom [masochist]. In fact, the top in this couple is a Latina lesbian."<sup>14</sup> This is the level of seriousness with which the Samoan group, on

which the British SM dykes support group appears to be modelled, takes the subject of racism.

The British SM dykes support group supported by the English Collective of Prostitutes and Wages Due Lesbians (two of the subgroups within the umbrella organisation Wages for Housework, a strongly anti-feminist campaign which tries to muscle in whenever it sees women's issues that could be used to damage the women's liberation movement) came to a meeting of some London lesbian feminists who wanted to plan a campaign to challenge the spread of SM politics. A woman from ECP gave a reason, culled from standard SM apologist literature, for why SM could be very useful in relationships. She explained that in relationships between black and white women SM rituals could be acted out which would even out the power differences or at least help to understand them. This woman, who was white, did not say who was to act as top and who to act as bottom in such relationships. In the U.S. example above the bottom was a black woman. But just supposing this was not always the case, do we really see the acting out of racist rituals, even if in some cases the power relationship were not white top and black bottom, as helping to eliminate racism? In men's pornographic literature the black woman is represented either as submissive slave victim or as dominatrix. SM rituals can only reinforce one or both of those stereotypes. SM does not offer any chance to break out of them.

### Can Sado-Masochism Be Saved?

Pat Califia explains in *Coming to Power* that some members of the Samois group found that some of their principles were in opposition to SM practice, and that this led to problems in the group. She does not say what those principles were and she is not sympathetic to them, but we could make a guess that they concerned such things as the wearing of swastikas or even rituals in which black women were slaves. It does not seem that British SM women are as yet troubled by their consciences, since at least one has been seen out and about in swastikas. But would it be possible for SM practitioners to 'clean-up' their act and cut out obvious racist symbolism as the result of criticism? (So far their response to criticism has been to call the critics fascists and racists and to tell them the SMers will not allow them to have any public meetings without SM dykes in costume and preventing discussion.)

SM ritual is about eroticising dominance and submission and involves the acting out of oppression. The scenarios of nazi and jew or slave and mistress could possibly be left off the agenda by those with tender consciences. This would leave plenty of scope for scenarios and costumes representing sexist oppression, using images of prostitution, sexual harassment or simply fetishised gender stereotyping with one figure dressed as a tough biker and one effeminised in corsets and frills. Is this a solution?

Quite apart from the fact that the imagery would remain appallingly sexist and heterosexist, any eroticising of power, any glorifying of oppression can only

strengthen the values which maintain all forms of oppression. Racist oppression depends as much on the ideas that might is right, that violence is a reasonable way to treat those deemed to be inferior, and that inequalities of power are desirable and inevitable, as does sexism. The practice of SM reinforces these values. It does not allow any space for the existence of an alternative to these values. If we are committed to the achievement of a society in which no group in the population is subject to violence, discrimination and exploitation, then we must build a sexual practice which reflects the sort of society we want to create. Otherwise what we are saying is that sex and the emotions that go with it really are quite unconnected with the rest of our lives and of no political significance. Such a practice would be mutual, caring and egalitarian. This is, of course, anathema to SM proponents. Such practice is called *bambi* by male gay SM apologists like Jeffrey Weeks and *vanilla* by Samoïis lesbians.<sup>15</sup> Both terms are designed to show contempt and put people off. Egalitarian sexual practice is represented as lacking in intensity, monotonous, suitable only for 'cissies'.

SM proponents are aware that they are open to political criticism and so some of them have developed an ingenious defence. A few years ago a member of the then recently defunct group, Gay Left, Derek Cohen, gave a promotional talk on SM, with slides, to a gay workshop. He showed slides of men in nazi uniforms pissing into gutters and forcing handcuffed men to lick it up on their knees. Intrigued, I asked him what all this had to do with socialism. At first he replied that it had nothing to do with socialism really, it was just sexual practice. Later he provided a form of justification which some U.S. ex-political SMers have felt obliged to develop. This is that SM practice helps those involved to understand the power differences which exist in the world and to work more effectively to end them. (See also the argument described above given by the ECP and British SM dykes support group.) A U.S. SM apologist expressed this defence quite succinctly:

Maybe one of the most effective ways to fight political power and even render it unnecessary is to understand the impulses to power and submission in oneself and integrate them, rather than trying to extend them in political systems. Involvement in S/M tends to take away a person's "need" to oppress and be oppressed, manipulate and be manipulated socially and politically - another reason why political power-trippers tend to oppose it so strongly. S/M can be part of an outright rebellion against social, structuralised oppression, which is part of the reason anarchists and libertarians are overrepresented among S/M people.<sup>16</sup>

To this man oppression seems to be something which people 'need' and invite on themselves. That's a logical analysis from the perspective of SM, which sees violence and abuse as something which people can 'need' and choose. It is an entirely individualistic analysis in which actual real life oppression plays no part.

It is a self-indulgent, spurious argument. How would SM practice help us to dismantle the military-industrial complex, confront a group of fascist thugs, or help a lesbian mother get custody of her children?

To fight structuralised oppression we require self-respect and some idea that an alternative exists to the cycles of dominance and submission. We can only be guided by the notion that oppressive power structures do not 'need' to exist for human happiness, sexual or otherwise.

## Sado-Masochism as Politics

SM promoters are attracting support from liberals on the basis of their claim to individual freedom, the personal right to pursue their chosen sexual practice. But the argument of personal freedom is not necessarily progressive. It is the mainstay of Thatcherite economic and social policy. Such an argument must depend on the proviso that the behaviour in question does no harm to anyone other than the practitioner herself. (Some would argue that there should be limits on the right of any human being to do physical harm to themselves or require any human being to do physical harm to them. What would our responsibility be if confronted by a brutal anal fistfucking scenario in a context of drugs and alcohol when we knew the practice could lead to dreadful injury or death? Would we intervene, get off on it, or walk by?) The promotion of SM does do harm to more than the practitioners and it is promotion of far more than a sexual practice; it is not a hobby but a politics and a way of life.

The wearing of SM clothing at social events, on marches, etc., in the form of black leather costumes, handcuffs, studs, creates an atmosphere of threat and anxiety for all lesbians present. Lesbians often seek out women-only company to escape men's harassment and intimidation on the street, in adverts and porn. We are used to 'masculine,' aggressive males using SM clothing routinely to intimidate, e.g., Hell's Angels. We should not have to suffer fear with other lesbians or be cut off from communication because we cannot cope with intimidating clothing. There are many lesbians in London right now whose social life is restricted by the prevalence of SM clothing whether in the guise of fashion or as an extension of SM practice. These lesbians are not 'cissies.' We have the right not to be afraid and the right to violence-free environments.

The wearing of nazi and fascist regalia, e.g., swastikas, black leather SS caps, black leather SS greatcoats, causes grave offense and distress to all those lesbians who are conscious of what German fascism meant in terms of violence and death for jews, lesbians, the physically and mentally different, indeed all but white, gentile, heterosexual, able-bodied males.

An acceptance of SM clothing, particularly nazi regalia, makes the lesbian community less able to withstand the very real burgeoning of fascist values and practice in British society right now. We do not need a blurring of distinctions. We must see and challenge clearly any attempt to make racist and fascist values or behaviour acceptable. Some wearers of fascist regalia are harassing and

attacking gays, particularly black gays, right now. They are harder to expose and reject when fascist regalia and 'masculine', aggressive values have become commonplace on the gay social scene.

The eroticising of power and oppression in the sexuality of cruelty that is SM trains us to be turned on by the trappings of fascism. The erotic appeal of fascism, structured into our sexuality as we learn our sexual responses under male supremacy, is enhanced by the politics of SM. Only the building of an egalitarian sexual practice can fit into anti-fascist politics.

SM is not a sexual practice which drops from the skies but a response to and echoing of the increasing hold of fascist values and practice in the world outside the gay ghetto. As in Germany in the early 1930's, racist attacks are now on the increase. Increasingly militarism infects western society. Porn and adverts become increasingly violent and sadistic toward women. We have a Tory government which is dedicated to restricting personal freedom in the name of increasing it. There is an atmosphere of increasing social tension and fear as government policies polarise differences between poor and rich, black and white, women and men. In this context SM can be seen to be, not an adventurous and radical new departure, but a way in which lesbians can translate directly into their relationships with each other the hatred and contempt of women and particularly of lesbians which fascist values represent. Perhaps it is a misguided form of self defence, i.e., if lesbians cause each other fear and pain right now it won't be so distressing when we receive such abuse from others in the future.

SM promoters contend that their sexual practice in no way affects their relationships with each other and the rest of the world outside the bedroom, except in making them feel stronger. In the torture training schools in Greece under the military dictatorship and under other extreme right wing regimes, trainee torturers were trained by being tortured. It could be that 'bottom' or M lesbians, who are the vast majority, do have their sensibilities blunted by the torture they choose to undergo. In order to create a sufficient number of S's, some M's have to 'progress' into dishing out what they have previously received.

SM practice does spill out from the bedroom into other areas of lesbian relationships. The following extract is from a *Coming to Power* article in which Susan Farr explains how she and her lover use physical punishment to overcome jealousy at each other's non-monogamy.

If I give Rae a whipping after she has had sex with someone else, it also expresses directly how angry and jealous I feel. It is an exertion of power over, no question about it. It gives me an outlet for the "negative" and very natural feelings that exist regardless of my commitment to the principle of non-monogamy. The punishment also functions to relieve the guilt of the person having the affair, another "negative" and natural feeling that exists regardless of sincere beliefs that the upsets of occasional non-monogamy are preferable to the suffocation of unrelieved monogamy. . . . This discussion of punishment rituals used as a response to non-monogamy is one example of how physical aggression can function to keep a relationship clean.<sup>17</sup>

SMers would have it that there is a difference between what is described here and a straightforward battering relationship. The distinction, based on the false premise that we can consent to abuse (remember the old chestnut of how battered wives really love it) can easily become blurred so that the battering becomes very damaging for one or both partners. Marissa Jonel, an SM survivor, describes such a situation in *Against Sado-Masochism*.<sup>18</sup> Such 'consensual' battering cannot help our struggle as women and as lesbians to assert women's right to live free from violence, our right not to be seen as appropriate targets of violence. SM is much more than a sexual practice. It is a lifestyle and approach to the world which glorifies and legitimates violence. Battering relationships reduce the potential of the participants and of us all to find alternative ways to handle conflict. Lesbian-battering, through which lesbians take out their internalised anti-lesbianism and self-hatred on each other, is a serious problem for the lesbian community to deal with, not a game.

It is important to understand that it is a *politics* of sado-masochism that is being promoted, not simply a sexual practice. The tactics of SMers make that clear. SM promoters, in their guise as an oppressed minority, carried an SM banner on the Lesbian Strength march in June '84. This meant that many lesbians who knew about the banner never attended the march and many others felt unable to join the march on the day. The SM promoters were well aware that they were thus dividing lesbians and excluding many lesbians from the march, but the right of the three SM dykes to do such damage to lesbian unity and politics was upheld by the stewards and all objections over-ruled. SM promoters deliberately incite such confrontations and the splintering of political unity this brings about. In the U.S. Samois first destroyed the unity of Gay Pride marches, then sought to split the San Francisco women's centre collective by booking space, then took to intimidating and harassing feminist bookstores which would not display their promotional literature prominently. The British SM dykes group has sought to book space at the central London women's centre, A Woman's Place. The same tactics were used on the Lesbian and Gay Centre. Despite the opposition of the vast majority of lesbian feminists who were members of the centre, the SMers were allowed space in June 1985.

Such a coordinated campaign to spread confusion and disunity and fear out of all proportion to their numbers resembles nothing so much as fascist tactics. Relying on the support of liberalism they create confrontations to drive wedges into the political opposition and weaken our capacity to confront fascist values and practice in any form. (One example of fascists using this tactic is the recent move by the National Front to demand help from the National Council for Civil Liberties. This was calculated to split the NCCL and did cause considerable trouble.) What is happening is far more than the attempt of an 'oppressed' minority to gain the right to act out their sexual practice. SM is a politics with definite tactics, which include intimidation by women wearing black leather uniform. Seldom has an 'oppressed' group been so oppressive and potentially destructive.

The implications of SM politics are too alarming to ignore. Not just feminist politics, but all anti-racist, anti-fascist and anti-capitalist politics depend upon understanding that the oppressed do not seek, need or want their oppression. The great myth that holds the ideology of western democracy together is that consent. In western democratic thought all groups within the population consent to the system of government. There is consensus. This is not really so. Only those white males with wealth are in any position to exercise true consent to a political system which routinely degrades, exploits and controls everyone else. SM uses this politically manipulative notion of consent to justify SM. The notion that anyone deliberately sets out to seek abuse and degradation can be extrapolated very easily to justify politically oppressive systems, i.e., the basic fascist value that the masses 'need' a strong ruler. The basic political tenet of SM is thus in contradiction to our struggle for a political system based upon the right of every human being to dignity, equality, self-respect and self-government.

The sexuality of cruelty that is SM is neither innate nor inevitable. Though many of us have experienced fantasies and practice which incorporate SM values of dominance and submission, we also have experience of positive sexuality with egalitarian values. It is this positive sexuality that we need to promote and extend. Our capacity to love one another with dignity and self-respect, not just with intensity of sensation and pleasure, has been damaged by our experience of oppression. But this capacity is not destroyed. We can fight back against all the pressures that encourage us to love the boot that will kick us into submission. We can decide not to conduct a romance with our oppressors. We can have a sexuality which is integrated not into our oppression but into our politics of resistance.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Isherwood, *Down There on a Visit* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1962), p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Sherman, *Bent* (New York: Avon, 1980), pp. 65-66.

<sup>3</sup> Heinz Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, trans. David Fernbach (Boston: Alyson, 1980).

<sup>4</sup> Janet Bellwether, "Love Means Never Having to Say Oops: A Lesbian Guide to S/M Safety," in ed. Samois, *Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian*, 2nd Ed., S/M (Boston: Alyson, 1982), pp. 70-71 and 74.

<sup>5</sup> Pat Califia, "Feminism and Sado-masochism," *Sex Issue, Heresies* 12, 1981, p. 32.

<sup>6</sup> See various passages in Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology* (Boston: Beacon, 1978) and *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon, 1973).

- <sup>7</sup> Doreen Leidholdt, "Where Pornography Meets Fascism," *WIN*, March 15, 1983, p. 18. Quotations cited by Leidholdt are in Robert G. L. Waite, *The Psychopathic God* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), pp. 153, 375, 380.
- <sup>8</sup> Jacobo Timerman, *Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number* (New York: Knopf, 1981), p. 66.
- <sup>9</sup> Edmund White, *States of Desire. Travels in Gay America* (New York: Dutton, 1983). If anything the use of real-life torment as a sexual turn-on has increased since White's observations. Recently a staff person at the Glad Day bookstore in Boston told me that Daniel P. Mannix's *History of Torture* (New York: Dell, 1983) is the store's best-seller.
- <sup>10</sup> Pat Califia, "A Personal View of the History of the Lesbian SM Community and Movement in San Francisco," in Samois, ed., *Coming to Power*, p. 274.
- <sup>11</sup> Gay Black Group, "Letter to the Editor," *Capital Gay* (London), February 14, 1984.
- <sup>12</sup> Alice Walker, "A Letter of the Times, or Should This Sado-Masochism Be Saved?" in, Robin Ruth Linden, Darlene R. Pagano, Diana E.H. Russell & Susan Leigh Star, eds., *Against Sado-masochism: A Radical Feminist Analysis* (East Palo Alto, CA: Frog in the Wall Press, 1982), pp. 206-207. Reprinted from Alice Walker, *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down: Stories by Alice Walker* (New York: Harcourt Brace 1981), pp. 118-123.
- <sup>13</sup> Alice Walker, "A Letter of the Times," p. 207.
- <sup>14</sup> Pat Califia, "A Personal View," p. 268.
- <sup>15</sup> See Jeffrey Weeks contribution to *Gay News*, #1243, Tenth Anniversary Issue. *Vanilla* occurs frequently in lesbian SM literature.
- <sup>16</sup> Ian Young, remarks in "Forum on Sado-masochism," in Karla Jay and Allen Young, eds., *Lavender Culture* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1978), p. 104.
- <sup>17</sup> Susan Farr, "The Art of Discipline: Creating Erotic Dramas of Play and Power," in ed., Samois, *Coming to Power*, p. 186.
- <sup>18</sup> Marissa Jonel, "Letter from a Former Masochist," in Linden, Pagano, Russell & Star, eds., *Against Sado-masochism*, pp. 16-22.

# Liberation in the Eighties: A Found Document

Penelope Seaton

Recently, while leafing through some back issues of *The Guardhouse* in a used bookstore, I found, tucked between the pages of one of the issues, the following interesting document, apparently written by a disaffected leftist turned liberal capitalist. It gave me pause; it made me think. I thought not only of the Left and its materialist economic analysis, I thought also of the current controversy about sexuality and pornography among feminists and apparently disaffected feminists turned liberals. Are economics political, I thought? Similarly, is sex political? True, each is connected, in its way, to power. But, is power political, or is it just fun? Haven't the oppressed, the disenfranchised – the poor, workers, racial and ethnic minorities, women, to name some of the standards – been left out in the cold for too long? Isn't it time we quit complaining and demonstrating – which after all is an admission of our powerlessness and not much of a good time – and grab some of the goods – money, power, hot sex – for ourselves? Well, these are difficult questions and I don't pretend to have the answers. Although the document has hints of backsliding and sell-out, I sense that the author of this heretofore unpublished letter to the editor speaks to these thorny problems with prescience. I offer the letter, uncut, and let you, the reader, decide for yourself.

Penelope Seaton

Dear Editor:

This is not an easy letter for me to write. I have subscribed to *The Guardhouse* since its inception. I have been a political activist from the time I was big enough to lift the unabridged *Capital*. Time passes; things change. The issues that once seemed so clear become more complex than you and I and your readers had imagined in our most wildly dialectical exegeses. We're approaching a new decade [This dates the document in the late 1970's. – P.S.] and change is in the wind. To get to the point: I, and many of my friends, including long-time and former subscribers to *The Guardhouse*, have begun to

see the world differently. You've begun to look stuffy, preachy and unadventurous to us. You're old hat. Even your name implies a timid, protectionist conservatism masquerading as liberation. We've started our own paper: *Free Game: A Guide to Entrepreneurship for the Leftist*. Wake up! Revolution has a new face.

Frankly, you have brought this on yourself. My friends and I started talking when you refused to print our ad for two-week luxury (that is, by their standards) tours of Grenada. You said you thought the ad would not appeal to your readership and that it was inconsistent with your editorial policy. That's censorship. It also reflects a sadly mistaken and puritanical view of the tastes of your readers. Sure, your readers oppose imperialism. Who, doesn't except maybe the State Department, the British Foreign Office and a few others of their ilk. But you can be against imperialism – as I am when it is harmful and exploitative – and still enjoy tourism. That's what's been wrong with the Left from the start: you're all afraid of and suppress your desire for pleasure and power. You're afraid that you might be perceived to be engaging in an economically exploitative relationship. Haven't you ever heard of consent? Well, if tourists want to go to Grenada, check out the business opportunities or just have a good time, relax on the beach and buy indigenous products, and the people of Grenada are willing sellers, who am I, and what's more, who are you to tell them it's wrong? You would infantilize the people of Grenada and all other so-called "Third World" countries and moralize to your readers. Maybe the people of Grenada want to get a piece of the pie too, and you, with your censorship, political correctness and misplaced moralism, are denying them the opportunity to appropriate for themselves some of the robustness of capitalist enterprise.

I'm part of a new, exciting and still fragile culture of entrepreneurship forming among poor and working class leftists. You talk of economic power, endlessly. We are also seeking power, and we're seeking it through participation. You can see what it's done for those that have it; it can do the same for us. You talk about economic equality. Well, while you talk, we're out taking it for ourselves. As long as we continue to see ourselves as powerless victims, as long as we conform to the stereotypes of the worker and the poor – passive, without initiative and business sense – so long will we remain powerless, with the means of production, the power and the good times in the hands of those born with silver spoons in their mouths. It's time that we became economic agents, or those of us with the courage and business skills to do it.

I've said I'm against imperialism when it's harmful and exploitative. I'm also against abusive business practices. But who's to say what's abusive, what exploitative? What one "Third World" person or employee may consider abuse or exploitation, another may find perfectly acceptable, or even beneficial or enjoyable. Just look at the battles fought over unionization. Lots of workers love their bosses and despise the union; love their jobs and scoff at the Left. Now who's to say who speaks for workers? One worker may moan and complain

about the same job that her co-worker thinks is a gas. One worker may say she's exploited, alienated, degraded, abused, and there may be 100 people waiting in line for her job. Now who's to say what's exploitation, what abuse, what degradation? If you took a poll, there would be great divergence of opinion on what relations of production are exploitative, etc. You would also find that every employment practice or circumstance would be condemned by someone as degrading, alienating or what have you. One person's abuse is another person's joy. [I am reminded of the women who, in the early days of the second wave of the Women's Liberation Movement in the U.S., felt the WLM was condemning them for their chosen lifestyles – though no one used those words then, that's what they meant – as wives and mothers, and who stood up and said they loved being homemakers. – P.S.]

Employees aren't coerced into working, or at least in only the most extreme cases, which, I might add, the Left has luridly sensationalized for political ends. Consent is the catchword here. If there were an abusive or coercive employment situation – and there isn't, at least not in this country, and if there is in this country only in really backward places – nobody will work for such an employer anymore. And if they did, who's to blame? If you demand respect and fair compensation, you get it.

It's never been allowed, it has in fact been taboo, for poor and working class people to be entrepreneurs, or property owners or corporate climbers. It has happened, though, against all odds. We can look to those who've gone before as brave pioneers, and, with all due respect and appreciation, move beyond the mom and pop corner store. Now is the time when we can appropriate the socially recognized space to start our own businesses, buy private property, and, for those who prefer this style, move up in the corporate world that has been closed to us. They think we're passive? We'll show them our drive. They think we belong on the bottom of the economic ladder? We'll show them which way is up. The Left says it opposes exploitative relations of production. I have already discussed the difficulty of recognizing exploitation, abuse, alienation, etc. I suspect, however, that the Left isn't just against abusive, exploitative, and alienating relations of production. I suspect the Left is against production itself.

Let me give you an example of what I'm talking about and indicate the dangers I see in the anti-production and protectionist policies of the Left. Let's take a classic: landlord-tenant relations. We're all familiar with the feudal history of landlord-tenant relations, a history still reflected in the use of "landlord." We all know the history of abuses of tenants, and the still surviving residue of the formerly feudal character of the relationship. So what's new? Sure, we agree, there have been abuses, though the Left has not been innocent of exaggerating and sensationalizing accounts of these abuses and of making them appear more widespread than they are. The real question is, What should we do about it? Should we lobby for protectionist legislation like rent and eviction control? Think about it. It sounds good at first glance, especially steeped as we are in

accounts, both sensationalized and real, of landlord abuse. But consider: First, this kind of protectionist legislation implies that tenants are powerless, out of control of their lives and in need of protection. I for one do not want such an image of myself embodied in law. (It's true I'm now a property owner, but if I were still a tenant, I wouldn't like it.) Second, don't kid yourself about who will be the most vulnerable under a law like this one. It will be the small landlord, who may be uninsured, unsophisticated and unable to hire high price lawyers, who is most vulnerable. Those of us who are just now breaking into the world of private enterprise, and own one little piece of income property, we're the ones who will suffer. (I now own several, but I see the dangers for those whose holdings are still more modest than mine.) The big corporate landlords won't get it worst; we will. Finally, this approach ignores the legitimate interests of the landlord, interests that often coincide with the tenant's, and stereotypes all landlords as abusive and greedy. The legislation is unfair and discriminatory. It might even be unconstitutional (a possibility my lawyer is looking into for me.) We've got to be farsighted when considering legislation of this kind, else the best of impulses can lead our movement astray.

To be blunt, I'm sick of the downward mobility of the Left, rooted as it is in an outmoded morality that will leave us powerless and on the bottom of the heap. If you want economic power, take it. If you don't like your job, show some initiative, exercise your agentic powers and become a boss, a corporate climber, an entrepreneur, a private property owner. The choice is yours.

Please cancel my subscription to *The Guardhouse* effective immediately. Those interested in subscribing to *Free Game: A Guide to Entrepreneurship for the Leftist*, or in joining *Free Game's* Leftists for Free Enterprise economic support and political action group, please contact me at: [Address Omitted]

Yours in regret for my wasted years and with hope, vigor and vitality for a successful future for us all,

[Name Omitted]

*I have omitted the author's name and P.O. box number as it appears she decided not to make her thoughts public. I do not, and no doubt the author of the foregoing letter would not, sanction public exposure without consent. — P.S.*

# Nexus

Nexus is the current incarnation of the ideas which led me in prior issues to propose the "Dear Lez" and "What Works" features, and the concept owes much to conversations with Ruth Byrn. The name, Nexus, is meant to envision a network of information flashing back and forth between us. I hope to make Nexus a regular Lesbian Ethics feature, as a way for lesbians to share our knowledge and our puzzlements with each other, to learn from and enjoy each other, and to increase our consciousness of our common directions and of our bonds with one another. Your contribution can be short or long, two sentences or several pages. You could write Nexus if you've solved a lesbian life-problem successfully and think other lesbians would benefit from your knowledge, if you haven't solved a lesbian life-problem successfully and you hope other lesbians can help, if you want other lesbians to know and think other lesbians would be energized by knowing what you are up to. As we link together, we increase our powers geometrically.

-J.S.

## Active Lesbianism

I am a Lesbian.

My existence is an act of resistance. Living my life is guerilla action.

I live my life as a lesbian, fully asserting my self-given right to be, enacting the same rights and privileges as heterosexuals—as much as I legally can.

This way of "simply" living gives me power as well as puts me in certain danger. "What works" for me is survival. Lesbian survival.

Lesbian survival pushes the limits, begs to be seen. Lesbian survival is a bee in the bonnet of the heteropatriarchy.

I live my life the way I think I should, using my own methods — refusing to be victimized and refusing to react in violence.

The boys? They are puzzled by this. I don't do what I'm supposed to do, so they don't know what they're supposed to do. When they are rendered so uncertain, I find that I can walk through the holes in their power.

My lover and I walk. We like to walk down crowded city streets. In this sea of anonymity, we like to hold each other's hand. With hand in hand, I am moving from the strongest, most centered part of myself and my power. I am full of joy and pride about who I am. I am proud of my lover as we simply love and part the crowds.

Sooner or later, I know that I'll hear the familiar calls, spoken with the intent to hurt, humiliate, silence and anger.

The cowardly cry stalks me from behind, "fucking dykes, lezzies!" I know this routine and I'm ready. I topple them with the unexpected. I turn to look them in the eye (if they haven't already hidden themselves), and with my broadest, proudest smile, I say, "obviously, that's right!" and I swing our hands defiantly in the air.

If by now they haven't totally dematerialized, I tell them that they are "very perceptive, quite brilliant!"

Then I walk on, right through the holes in their power.

*Sheila Bowles*

## What to Say to Males on the Street?

It is still a question for me, how to respond to comments by unknown males when I'm out walking alone, on the street or on the beach. I always react with strong negative emotion, the threat drains power from me, I shrink back away from the world and lose my ability to enjoy it for a time. My adrenalin increases and my heart rate goes up. My reaction is worse if I say nothing; I fume and get depressed, I am angry at myself for not having more power. Even though I know it is impossible for me as an individual to overcome the collective power which males express when they make such comments, I still want to be powerful enough, radiant enough to force their words back into their throats before they are uttered. Nonetheless I often seem to go out unprepared, that is, not psychically armed, because, of course, that is how I want to live, without armor. I do know that any counterattack is better than no response at all; I always rebound emotionally more quickly that way, even if I don't like what I said. And I often am not satisfied with what I do say, I think because I'm always responding to their actions; yet I'm not interested in going out to verbally attack men before they attack me, I'm really just interested in walking. I would like to hear from other lesbians who have some solutions, whole or partial to these problems.

My most successful response, when the male's remark is cloaked in a pretense of friendliness, such as "Hi, baby, how'ya doin' today?" is,

"I'm fine, but you don't look so good."

This is particularly successful when, as is often the case, they don't look so good, know it on some level, and are trying to get an energy jolt by harassing

me. The response to my retort is usually some desperate scrambling, via feebly insults, to regain control. The basic principle of this response can be applied slightly different remarks, such as: "Hey, baby, need some help?" "I'm fine, but you look like you'd better help yourself."

A response I sometimes use, which is applicable in a wider range of situations, is,

"You don't know me. Don't talk to me."

I'm not as pleased with this response as I am with the other. It feels weaker in delivery. But it does confront and turn back his message, which is that I have control over whether or not he knows me. And it strikes a nerve, his response always intense anger, but of a sputtering kind. One male could not stop screaming at me, but as he was riding away on his bicycle, "Oh, die, death, oh wow, evil, die, die." I find this strangely comforting, to rip off their covers, to reveal how intense is male hatred of women and how close to the surface.

*Jeanette Silver*

## Lesbian Acts

Two active resistance groups exist in St. Louis, Missouri. One, Lesbian Acts, is separatist; the second, Women Rising in Resistance is not. Crossover membership links the two groups together, and much of the leadership and membership of Women Rising in Resistance is lesbian.

St. Louis Women Rising in Resistance (WRR) formed in the spring of 1984 with the intention of using public action to unbalance patriarchal beliefs and institutions. A part of a national network of organizations, we believe street action is essential. Our first action we leafleted on father's day. The leaflet greeted fathers with statistical information about incest and child abuse and challenged them to confront these crimes. It contained suggested specific actions such as discussing sexual abuse and teaching daughters to say "no." We listed phone numbers of crisis and service agencies and ended with the statement, "do something for children on father's day". We distributed 5,000 in a few hours by placing them under windshield wipers of cars parked in church lots and then met for an enjoyable brunch. Incest survivors described the action as empowering and because of the way we leafleted no personal confrontations occurred.

Our next action we leafleted at a "women's dance" about the erasure and invisibility of lesbians; focusing mainly on how we erase ourselves. We asked everyone to look around and witness that they were a part of a lesbian community. The next meeting, in recognition of the fact that all members are lesbians, we changed our name to Lesbians Rising in Resistance and decided to limit our membership to lesbians only.

Our first action using our new name was again leafleting. This time the topic was *Myths about Lesbians*. The main target people attending a "new age" fair. We also carry these in our cars and leaflet at grocery stores and other parking lots.

In November Mary Lee Sargent, the originator of the concept of WRR gave a workshop at Washington University in conjunction with a week of programs focusing on violence against women. She discussed the ideas and concepts of direct action. During the workshop a woman mentioned an article in the local paper that morning. Another woman had the article with her.

The article said that a local circuit judge had let a 41 year-old man out on two years probation after he pled guilty to raping an 8 year-old girl. We decided to do an action to let the judge and other judges know that if they did not take violence against children and women seriously they would pay a price.

Twenty-six women were at the workshop, most of them not active in Lesbians Rising in Resistance, and many of them not lesbians. We immediately organized into task forces and planned leafleting at several lesbian and women's events to advertise our action, scheduled for the next evening at the judge's home. We did media contact by phone using a National Organization for Women press list.

Fifty women gathered three blocks from the judge's home and marched up the street carrying banners, posters, and candles. We surrounded his home and chanted our displeasure and rage at his decision for an hour. This initial action was covered by one local TV station and both daily newspapers. We kept the focus on sexual terrorism against women and children and this outrageous decision by the judge. We finished with a few minutes of silence in respect for the child and a group scream to vent our rage. We scheduled a meeting the next Tuesday to decide what to do next.

On the two days before the planning meeting, which was announced by the media, we did a lot of research and networking. One woman investigated this specific case to find information from the prosecuting attorney and from the case worker who worked with the victim and her family, and soon began to understand the way the "justice" system works. The phone contacts on the press releases began to get phone calls from mothers of other victims and victims themselves. The family of the victim in the specific case contacted us.

The meeting Tuesday night brought together 50 citizens. Members of the black and white community, workers in the justice and service sectors, and feminist activists. An aunt of the victim attended. It was a moving experience where people spoke their anger and frustration, and relief that someone was doing something. The victim and rapist were both black, and we discussed the racist justice system which discounts black on black crime.

We planned a picket in front of the judge's court for Friday morning and again at his home on Sunday. The only media coverage of the meeting was the same TV station that covered our original picket. They were to give us coverage every night but one throughout the week.

Friday morning there were again 50 demonstrators and this time all the TV stations covered us and several of us spent our entire time talking to the media. We kept the focus on sexual terrorism against women and children. We also began to talk about racism in the justice system in both our press releases and our statements. We made the media available to women who joined us at the community meeting. Several victims and mothers of victims attended the rally, and one of the newspapers interviewed an adult woman who had been raped at 12 and made this the core of their article.

That evening all stations carried our action on all three news broadcasts and three of the stations did investigative work on their own. At the judge's home on Sunday we had 120 demonstrators and again got extensive coverage. By this time we knew how to discipline and remove judges, and we now had this as part of our press release, which we also used as a leaflet. We encouraged citizens to call the judge at his home and office to express their displeasure.

During all these actions we kept careful mailing and phone lists. We contacted all those on the phone lists, plus feminists who work in the service and justice sectors, and invited them to a meeting. We spent the first part discussing the general situation in St. Louis. What services we have and what we need. The laws and how they work and what needs to be changed. The expertise and experience of women made it seem possible to have long term effects.

WRR is acting in an advisory capacity to a legislator drafting new laws for our state and our phone contacts receive calls from both citizens and the media concerning cases of rape, incest, and abuse. We have courtwatchers at specific cases and are prepared to mount another action when the occasion arises. Women who did not identify with feminism have joined us and are quite surprised by our organization and ability to get results. We cashed in on the 15 year herstory of the feminist community in St. Louis and an obvious and non-controversial miscarriage of justice.

A few weeks later I got a call from a woman radio news reporter about another probation given to a rapist. To make a long story short, we scheduled an action and canceled it the day before, as our research led us to doubt the validity of our action. We picked the wrong target, the judge, when it should have been the rapists. We also were being manipulated by the media.

Lesbians Rising in Resistance reorganized under the new name, "Lesbian Acts," and we plan to begin monthly actions. We are returning to "hit and run" actions, which may result in media exposure after the fact, but our actions will tread the line between legal and illegal. Among those planned are throwing glass xmas ornaments filled with paint at porno shops and offensive billboards and poster the town with fake mayoral proclamations of a curfew against men because of male violence (proclamation idea is from Lesbian Connection).

Lesbian Acts and Women Rising in Resistance will keep the patriarchy off balance in St. Louis. Street action is essential, both the undercover and more subversive types of Lesbian Acts, and the media focused ones of WRR. Street action is fun, and if done in the spirit of Lesbian Acts, is not time consuming. Try it.

Flowing

## Women Rising in Resistance

In 1983, lesbians were the originators and prime movers of Women Rising in Resistance, a national movement for lesbians/feminists\* whose goals and methods are more radical than those of existing liberal feminist organizations. Many radical lesbians/feminists desired the connection and continuity which moderates found in the National Organization for Women, National Abortion Rights Action League, etc., and that militant suffragists sought in the Women's Social and Political Union and the National Women's Party in England and the U.S. during the early 20th century. Within the earlier suffrage movement both a liberal and radical wing evolved; but by the early 1980s, only a moderate faction was visible and fully functioning within contemporary feminism. While radical lesbians/feminists had done effective work at the local level, we had made few efforts to coordinate efforts nationally.

Women Rising in Resistance is one attempt to create and connect the radical wing of the contemporary lesbian/feminist movement. It offers a remedy for the fragmentation and instability which have sometimes characterized our politics during the last decade. An informal network of individuals and grassroots collectives, W.R.R. is the work of activists who reject bureaucratic, centralized and hierarchical organizations and, yet, desire the support, solidarity, visibility and sense of forward motion which unified national movements provide. The purpose of the network is to link lesbians/feminists committed to nonviolent direct action in behalf of lesbianism, radical feminism and peace. It serves the interests of those who are convinced that direct and dramatic confrontation with men in power must accompany the traditional political methods of education, electoral and legislative campaigns, if we are to end patriarchy and create a just society. Like suffragist Emmeline Pankhurst, who urged supporters to "be militant each in your own way," W.R.R. encourages lesbians/feminists to define nonviolent direct action for themselves. An organizing brochure produced by the network cites 23 herstorical examples of resistance carried out by wimmin around the world for a variety of causes and issues. They represent a small sample of direct acts of conscience and are provided as a source of inspiration and a demonstration of the diversity and creativity we are capable of.

The organizers of W.R.R. believe an informal and decentralized structure promotes radical lesbian/feminist unity without the drain of energy and resources and the conflicts required to maintain a formal organization. Time

that would otherwise be spent in the maintenance of national boards, officers and committees is available for planning and carrying out dramatic and powerful acts of resistance. The idea appears to be working beyond our wildest dreams.

During the past three years radical lesbians/feminists have carried out dozens of direct actions under the W.R.R. banner. For example, lesbians/feminists in Champaign, Illinois disrupted the lavish open house of a local newspaper which has banned all lesbian advertising. Sister Resisters in New York City barred the doors of the New York and American stock exchanges on Lesbian/Women's Equality Day last August to protest corporate abuse of wimmin and wimmin's image. The National Rampage Against Penthouse used the W.R.R. name and logo in its campaign of civil disobedience against porn outlets in more than 50 cities. Sisters of Justice in Columbus, Ohio use the W.R.R. name and logo in all of their actions aimed at violence against wimmin. In South Hadley and Amherst, Massachusetts, a group called Women of Faith are also women rising in resistance when they block the doors and gates of nuclear weapons industries. On Halloween, at the Illinois state capitol, W.R.R. dressed as witches and held the Springfield Witch Trial to try legislators for their crimes against wimmin. Sit-ins and door blockings by Resisters plagued Reagan-Bush campaign headquarters in several cities during the 1984 election. And, recently, W.R.R. in St. Louis has launched one of the most dramatic and sustained series of actions carried out by the network. On three successive Sunday nights, 50-120 protesters with candles have surrounded the home of a circuit judge who sentenced a man guilty of raping an 8-year-old child to only two years probation (see contribution above by Flowing).

We call on radical lesbians/feminists to organize grassroots groups committed to the tactic of nonviolent direct action; to carry out at least one dramatic act of resistance each year, month, day or week; to use the theme "Women Rising in Resistance" and the network logo in material publicizing actions; to spread the idea to other direct action groups; to communicate with the W.R.R. clearinghouse (Box 2096, Sta. A, Champaign, IL 61820, 217-352-6110) about planned demonstrations and meetings; to carry out nationally coordinated actions on specific Resistance Days. Among the days suggested are March 8 International Women's Day; August 3 - Women Take Liberty Day; August 26 Lesbian/Women's Equality Day., October 31 - Hallowmas; December 1 - Rosa Parks Day.

Mary Lee Sargent

\*The term *lesbians/feminists* is used to include the minority of straight feminists who have herstorical and political ties with lesbians and work with us in the network. Julia Penelope's "Mystery of Lesbians" series in *L.E.* has challenged me to reevaluate the name W.R.R. for a group which is primarily lesbian. One argument in its favor is that many lesbian activists still are not willing to come out publicly as lesbians in the highly visible political actions they undertake.

# WOMEN! TAKE LIBERTY IN '86

**CELEBRATE** the Statue's 100th Anniversary  
**DEDICATE** Her to Liberty, Equality, Sisterhood, and Peace  
**HONOR** the Women of the World  
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**SUNDAY, AUGUST 3, 1986**

**Liberty Island, N.Y. Harbor  
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To help create the event, or for further information, contact:

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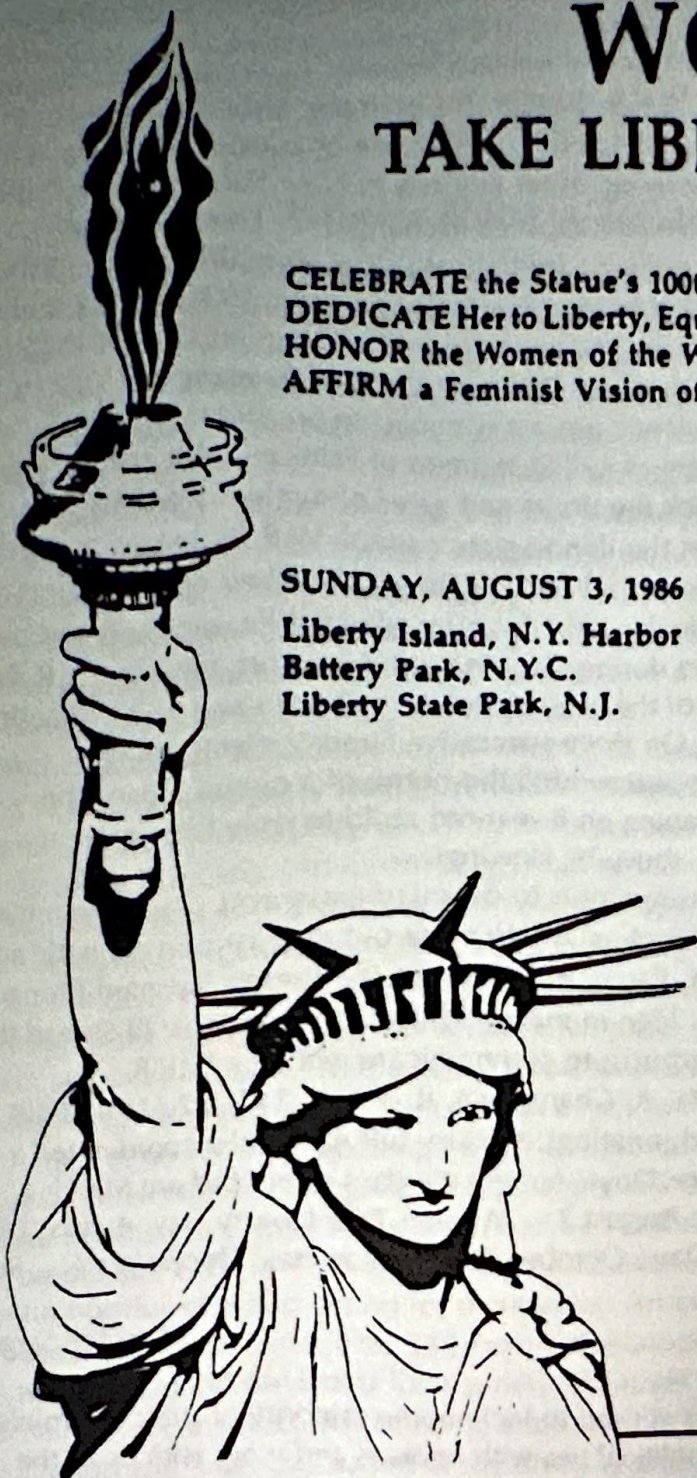
P.O. Box 2096, Sta. A  
Champaign, IL 61820  
(217) 352-6110

1221 N. Lincoln  
Stockton, CA 95206  
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## She's No Lady! She's a Woman – Amazon – Goddess

The Statue of Liberty will be 100 years old in 1986. It should shock no feminist that 100 years ago women were excluded "for their own good" from ceremonies dedicating the Statue. A century later, we gather to demonstrate that women will not be excluded from full participation in society. Women loving women of every race, class, and kind, sisters from across the United States and around the world will gather on Sunday, August 3, 1986 to celebrate the Statue's birthday. To reclaim the colossal female figure which has come to symbolize our society to people all over the world. To dedicate Liberty to women's creativity, growth, struggles, values, and visions.

Governments and private corporations are planning a ceremony for Liberty's anniversary. Although women have not been banned from the proceedings, it is clear that the values of nationalism, militarism, male supremacy, and private enterprise will dominate their event. The original unveiling in 1886 was an orgy of military parades, speeches by generals and male politicians, fireworks displays, cannonades, and rifle volleys. Today, private corporations, competing with one another to raise the money to restore an arm, chin, or nostril, act as though they own her or parts of her. It is up to women to keep Liberty whole, to protect her as a symbol of a whole and healthy society.

By our acts of celebration, we remind ourselves and others that the symbol of our nation is a woman. Liberty is an image of the Goddess – Athena, Lucina, Libertas. The people of France gave her to the people of the U.S. as an embodiment of the revolutionary values of liberty and equality. Liberty holds swords, spears, guns, shields, nukes or weapons of any kind. She stands in peace. The broken chains at her feet symbolize Women Rising in Resistance against all forms of domination and slavery.

## Too Butch for Straights, Too Femme for Dykes

Paula Mariedaughter

Linda Strega, in "The Big Sell-Out: Lesbian Femininity" (*Lesbian Ethics* Vol. 1, No. 3), makes several important points about butch lesbian life experience both in the outer heteropatriarchal world and within our lesbian communities. I'm glad that Strega as a femme lesbian acknowledges the many ways a butch lesbian is treated "as more Queer", more of a freak<sup>1</sup> by the heteropatriarchal systems, whether family, school, employers, landlords, or others, and the ongoing damage this does to butch lesbians. I read Strega's article and hear again the pain butch lesbians experience when they continually receive the message that perhaps they aren't "real women" because of their butch identification. I know this message sometimes comes from within our own lesbian communities. I hear the loneliness and alienation my butch lover feels when she describes how as "an unfeminine woman" there are few ways she can connect with most "feminized women." I have seen, too, in my own lesbian community a butch dyke accused of "looking like a man" – in this case by a femme dyke who was intimidated by the butch's separatist feelings about men and boys.

As a lesbian femme I have been disturbed by other parts of Strega's article. I wish she'd been very careful in her distinction between feminine-acting women, feminine acting lesbians (i.e., any woman acting out the role carefully constructed by males for females), and self-defined lesbian femmes. Because so much of her analysis about butch oppression is accurate I feel scared that her anti-femme comments and assumptions will not be named. I wish that she had a more fully-developed definition of lesbian femme. So here I offer a working definition of lesbian femme (and hope a butch will give us a working definition of lesbian butch) as a starting point in our on-going discussion:

A lesbian femme is a lesbian who tends to be interested in many of the arts, crafts and other areas traditionally associated with women. Often a lesbian femme is interested in 'nest-building' for herself and her loved ones. Many

lesbian femmes express an interest in fabric, color, texture and other sorts of frivolous things from silky cats or dogs to handmade baskets. Usually a lesbian femme values community and our interconnectedness. None of this is meant to imply no butch lesbian has any of these interests. A femme lesbian often chooses to create her erotic partnerships with butch lesbians.<sup>2</sup>

I do not feel, as I've seen suggested in other places in the lesbian press, that butch is a better "position" or more female identified than femme lesbian.<sup>3</sup> I believe I read this assumption in Strega's article.

The only definition Strega offers for the important terms are,

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).<sup>4</sup>

What bothers me here are the words about "not . . . want[ing] to accept and develop my femme qualities . . ." as well as the assumptions that: 1) femmes develop "femmeness" only because of heteropatriarchal training – no one has an authentic femme self; 2) there is no such thing, among femme lesbians and feminine women, as degrees of resistance to the "feminine model"; 3) anyone who did resist as a girl is butch.

I am also upset with Strega's omission of any suggestion that butch women and butch lesbians are involved in "selling out" and acting feminine, for I see it every day! As an "unfeminine" femme lesbian I see feminine-appearing butches passing in the boy's world and accruing the status, approval and money this can bring. I want to acknowledge that lesbian femmes generally have more access to "passing," that is, acting feminine, but it is not a strategy unused by butch dykes. Also, Strega seems to assume that lesbians who were never heterosexual can only be butches (she names them "always-dyke butches"), which negates the existence of any femme lesbians who were never heterosexual.<sup>5</sup>

In trying to deal with my anger and pain around all this I returned to the first article I ever saw on the subject, Joan Nestle's, "Butch-Fem Relationships: Sexual Courage in the 1950's," in the 1981 Sex Issue of *Heresies* (No. 12). She described her own experience of being a fem in the 50's.<sup>6</sup> Then she says that feminists and lesbians of the 70's who rejected any suggestion of femme-butch sex roles, without knowing their true roots in lesbian life, did a disservice to lesbians of the 50's and 60's, as well as to themselves. I did exactly that in the 70's, I was one of those who denied the existence of roles when speaking as a lesbian-feminist to various community groups. Nestle named this as "the silence among us" and challenged us to be ready to listen, saying, "If we do, we may begin to understand how our Lesbian people survived and created an erotic heritage."<sup>7</sup> Today we are a lesbian people surviving and creating that erotic heritage. As we begin to read and talk and even to risk writing of femme and butch, we are

taking important steps toward understanding ourselves and each other. Nestle declared, "Butch-fem was an erotic partnership, serving both as a conspicuous flag of rebellion [in the 1950's] and as an intimate exploration of women's sexuality."<sup>8</sup> I reread her article because with each reading I find self-love and the challenge to keep looking and exploring our complex issues. Strega's article did not pull those emotions from me.

In my thirteen years of lesbian experience I have continually received the message that I am "not a real dyke," for by definition 'butch' is the "real dyke." It's as if we took the heteropatriarchy's standard of who is "more Queer," that is butch lesbians, and then agreed. I *do* believe that in some situations lesbians value the butch role more highly than the femme role.

The so-called uniform of boots, jeans and flannel shirt is a butch uniform. The uniform has served me well at times. However, it is not my first choice for myself when in a safe (non-male) atmosphere. When I wear flowing cotton dresses on a hot summer day I believe it is a femme choice coming from my authentic lesbian self and reject Strega's attempt to name this as my not having "gotten rid of old het values."<sup>9</sup> I do believe that as I discover my femme lesbian self I am contributing to lesbian culture and that choosing to enact lesbian femme behavior is a "flowering of my 'real self,'"<sup>10</sup> That real self was denied by a lesbian feminist analysis fearful of heterosexual disapproval and by our own fears that possibly we were imitating heterosexual roles. Without knowing anything of the deep roots of this lesbian custom we denied its existence, in a blatant lesbophobic manner. Nestle reminds me that butch and femme are an erotic partnership one with the other, authentic identities of woman-loving, when we each reject "a truly destroying kind of role playing – the self denial of natural style so the oppressor will not get angry."<sup>11</sup>

Laura DancingFire's words, in "Meditations of a Possible Femme," echo my life experience of the Kansas City Women's Liberation Union in 1973:

There is this problem of my having come out in the 1960's as a radical (not an equal-rights) feminist – and later as a killer-dyke. During those years who talked about roles? Even a mention of a liking for *earrings* was a trifle suspect. When I was coming out as a lesbian in the mid to late 70's just about everyone I knew traced their liberated or dyke origins through a similar personal herstory. Almost all of my women friends talked of frustrated girlhoods, spent in dresses rather than blue jeans, playing with dolls rather than baseball bats, and hanging out in play kitchens more often than in trees.

But then there was me, being sort of quiet during those conversations. I didn't want to reveal the big secret – that all of my childhood and adult life, I have hated baseball. And no one talked about fond memories like mine.<sup>12</sup>

She goes on to describe her memories of a particular peach colored dress and a gypsy costume from her girlhood. She then says, "Even recently, I've been discouraged from discussing this issue [femme-ness] in print."<sup>13</sup>

I believe DancingFire to be brave in her risk to discuss in the lesbian press her own "conflicts, self-questioning, self-criticism and pain."<sup>14</sup> My experience is that I feel "I am too 'butch' for straights and too 'femme' for dykes." How does this happen? Here is one example. In the Aug/Sept 1985 *Lesbian Connection* there was a letter, "What Happened to Feminine Gay Women?" The writer's central theme was to encourage lesbians to reject our supposed "male image" and to be "real women" (yes, her words) by acting and dressing "feminine." My point in mentioning this is that her words are directed at femme lesbians as well as butch lesbians. Each of us who refuses to "feminize" ourselves as the patriarchy and their institutions demand will feel these pressures from employers, families, and even from other lesbians fearful of retaliation. Many times femmes dress similarly to our butch friends and lovers; our self-identified roles are not always apparent to either the heterosexual world or to lesbians like the one who wrote the above mentioned letter. The hostility in those situations is directed at all of us, both femme and butch, who challenge the heteropatriarchy by refusing to look like the boys' version of "real women," but choose to look like the real women we are naturally.

DancingFire declares my own strong feelings when she says, "I adore feathers, glitter, beads, crystal, rings. . . costumes and fluttering get-up of any kind." She continues, ". . . 'straight' to me is still drab and moderate clothing." She did preface these words by saying she's "begun to allow [her]self to reclaim special parts of Laura when in womonspace."<sup>15</sup> This is not an unimportant consideration for all of us who are "coming-out-femme." Today I believe my femme lesbian self is part of a natural style authentic to me. I do struggle trying to peel away all the layers of "acting feminine" that I learned. At the same time I know my femme self is Lesbian-centered. My eyes look past any males around. My loving energy, my sexual sharings are Lesbian-centered.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Linda Strega, "The Big Sell-Out," pp. 76-77.

<sup>2</sup> Parts of this are drawn from group discussions of the Femme Support Group, Lawrence, Kansas during the summer of 1985.

<sup>3</sup> Bev-Jo, letter in *Lesbian Connection*, Vol. 8, No. 4, Jan/Feb 1986, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Strega, "The Big Sell-Out," pp. 74-75.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>6</sup> "Fem" is Nestle's spelling. I prefer *femme* because it doesn't appear to be a diminutive of "feminine," but rather a separate word. It is also the same length as butch and not to be trivialized.

<sup>7</sup> Joan Nestle, "Butch-Fem Relationships."

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Linda Strega, "The Big Sell-Out," p. 74.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Joan Nestle, "Butch-Fem Relationships."

<sup>12</sup> Laura Rose DancingFire, "Meditations of a Possible Femme," *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*, No. 14, Winter 1984, p. 13.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> Linda Strega, "The Big Sell-Out," p. 74, see also p. 80. Only butches write of self-questioning and self-criticism, according to Strega.

<sup>15</sup> Laura Rose DancingFire, "Meditations."



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## Letters

I want to congratulate you . . . for pulling together an excellent issue of *Lesbian Ethics* (Vol. 1, #3). It's quite a courageous undertaking to criticize the lesbian feminist religion known as psychotherapy. I left the women's movement years ago due to its growing addiction to therapy and resulting stagnation. I am a former psychiatric inmate and find no difference between freudians and feminists selling "care." I've been tortured and incarcerated by both. There are no abuses in psychotherapy and psychiatry. Both are abuses within themselves with no possibility for reform or revision. I found Laura Brown's article offensive to the extreme, and to consider her outline for ethics as a basis for referrals is only to perpetuate a system of violence against women (especially survivors of psychiatric institutions).

Have you ever wondered why the term "patient" was changed to *client* instead of *customer* and the term "therapist" remained intact in so-called 'alternative' settings? The word itself is mainly a marketing term in advanced capitalist societies. We are convinced of its importance by the sellers of therapy and by selected satisfied customers. Nobody needs a therapist, and as long as lesbians are using the language of care selling (such as "everyone I know could use a good lesbian therapist") we all will be stuck in living without real alternatives to conversation-for-hire on a large scale.

I'm presently working on an anthology focusing on the scam called psychotherapy. I want more dykes to speak out, without having to assert their "health" as Mev Miller did, and without having their criticisms labeled psychopathological or their opinions that clash with shrinks given psychodynamic interpretations. By the way, Laura Brown isn't the 1st shrink to bring up the issues of ethics in print, other lesbian feminists have done so – but in the context of why they left the profession and how poorly they were treated by the lesbian feminist shrinks when they called it quits.

I think its time dissatisfied customers begin speaking out big against the institution of lesbian feminist therapy, the way we spoke out against the institution in the late 60's and early 70's – before feminists re-named their brand of therapy and tricked customers into believing it was different from the boy's brand. It's the customers who help perpetuate this system too. When we quit believing somebody else can "empower" us for a price and realize the way we discover our power is to take and use it against our oppressors (whatever sex they happen to be), then we can begin a "movement" once again.

Della Dubay

In the latest *LE* (1:3) Julia Penelope states that the last story in my *Extra (Ordinary) People* is an insult to lesbian separatists.

Her remark saddened me – not because she made it but because she's right. Separatist-baiting is a way of quelling internal anxiety; i.e., "However rebellious against the patriarchy I may be, I'm not *that* far out."

In fact, while writing a book on the interrelation of feminist reaction, socialist theory, and attempts at putting socialist and feminist theory together, I found many examples of the plainest separatist statements, many made by all sorts of feminists who never identify themselves explicitly as separatists. The list is long and wonderful.

Among other such statements I'd like to quote Julia's on p. 29 of *LE* 1:1. Julia, may I?

Joanna Russ

P.S. I used to think Julia's tone of bitterness and desperation, even in *LE* 1:1 was extreme. Now I find I'm feeling that way myself. The kinds of contortions women (including myself) go through not to feel too disloyal to the patriarchy – as if it made any such distinctions! – are amazing and rather awful. I don't wanna no more, I really don't.

Linda Strega (*LE* 1:3) articulated very well the sell out quality of lesbian femininity. But, her heavy defense of butches is not justifiable. Certainly, lesbian femininity is alarmingly on the rise, and it involves morally offensive behavior. It degrades those who practice it, for it is an assault on their own humanity and makes a genuine and conscienceable coming to power of women more difficult. But, lesbian butchiness has the same effect. Butches often oppress other women and as far as I can see often intend to do just that. I have known butches who call the women in their lives their wives, who demand women wait on them, who are ardent readers of men's magazines and pornography, and who generally suppose that they are better than women who do not practice butchiness because butches suppose masculinity is better than femininity.

Too often, butches are not practicing butchiness out of some deep longing to free themselves of the patriarchy, but to join up in some mystical way with what they perceive to be the winning side: men. Sometimes these butches are accepted by men so that they become one of the guys and are able to partake in male identified occupations from which other women are barred and in bonding rituals men devise (such as the viewing of pornography and the telling of conquest stories and misogynist jokes) to assure their separateness from women. At least some of this could be called butch privilege. That butches are also oppressed by heterosexism is undeniable, but then it would not be difficult to make a case that lesbian femmes, for whatever odd and distorted privilege they may get, are also oppressed by heterosexism.

Too often, then, butches are not interested in analyzing and overcoming corrupt masculine power. They simply want power, and in lesbian femmes they find willing accomplices. Whatever explains why some lesbians take on butchness (fear of the patriarchy or fascination with it), nothing can justify butches' practice of many offensive forms of masculinity.

As behaviors, lesbian femininity and masculinity are morally regressive. Butches and femmes are women who are living well below the level of what we can reasonably expect of beings whose main quality as persons is their ability to think seriously about the meaning of life, the value of developing real human potentials and the responsibility we each share to enhance the growth of human community.

It seems that in some cases Strega uses *butch* and *dyke* (high-consciousness lesbian) interchangeably. The problem with this mixture is that it conflates terms.

Mary Crane

First of all I want to thank you for Year One of *LE*. The first of many others I hope – and even expect – barring planetary extinction courtesy of Rambo Reagan and Co.

....

At this point in our history we need a few bricks thrown around. We need a few lesbians who have the guts to say out loud what quite a few others have been thinking but have not had the courage to bring out into the open.

In connection with these thoughts I would like to see *Lesbian Ethics* in this coming year devote a Readers Forum to Female Bisexuals. Bis have been getting under my hide for some time now. My own view is – briefly stated – this: if you are bi choose your female sex partner among other bis. Don't go for lesbians. You are not a lesbian and have NO RIGHT to call yourself one. A lesbian is a woman who is sexual with women only. A bi is a woman who is sexual with both men and women. So when someone says "a lesbian friend of mine is 'in a relationship' (so called) with a man," if that relationship is sexual or even simply erotic (dubious that it can remain "simply erotic" if the partner is a male), then calling this woman a lesbian is a misnomer. And an insult – deliberate or not – to every woman who is a lesbian.

Although I am all for personal freedom when your freedom does not include hurting me or some other woman, when you are a bisexual and call yourself a lesbian you are hurting lesbians and lesbianism.

To my way of thinking a bi is a woman who is working both sides of the street. . . she is also enjoying lesbian privilege while safely keeping the door ajar to the hetero world.

There may be a few bis who are working themselves free of a man – husband or lover – and who will one day soon drop him and become lesbian. There was a time (which I have known because I am old) when a woman was

unable to leave her husband because of material or familial situations which were then widespread. So she lived with him and slept with him when he wanted her – on the side and in great secrecy she slept with another woman. But a situation of this sort, while it is I am sure quite prevalent in a great many countries today, is not the rule in this country. Women are bi because they don't want to lose the advantages of the het world and the privileges of belonging to a male. They enjoy women in every way but won't commit themselves to women.

At this time they are – because we allow them to do so – socializing lesbians into hetero ways. They weaken our commitment to a lesbian society, to the lesbian nation that was the dream of the seventies and still is the dream of many of us.

Bis are a fifth column in our midst.

Let's get this issue faced squarely – once and for all.

Drag it out "kicking and screaming" into the open forum that is *Lesbian Ethics*. If ever there was an ethical issue facing us this is one.

So perhaps we are going to wake up, shake off the compromising and backsliding and mealy mouthing that have been stifling us for the last few years and get going with the building of a new world in the midst of the hideous ruins that surround us.

If we do it will be in great part because of women like you who have both vision and the guts to implement that vision.

In dyke affection and gratitude,

Ruth Douglas



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## Notes on Contributors

**Sarah Lucia Hoagland** is a separatist and a radical lesbian philosopher living in Chicago. Her work in lesbian ethics flows from her need for lesbian community.

**Ruth Byrn** is an Exx-secretary/nun/nurse/social worker/christian/administrator/therapist; she now lives sir-passingly at the subsistence level, doing odd jobs, physical labor for other wimmin in Little Rock, Arkansas. She defines herself substantially as a Lover, Fighter, Writer, and Gynerater, and happily acknowledges that she is sometimes violent and always dangerous.

**Ariane Brunet** is a radical lesbian from Montreal, founder and former editor of *AMAZONES D'HIER, LESBIENNE D'AUJOURDHUI*. In 1982 she completed a tour of the U.S.A. and parts of Canada with a video which bears the same name as the magazine. The passion of her work resides in forging links between lesbians world-wide. She sees this international lesbian focus as essential for our survival.

**Louise Turcotte** is a radical lesbian and a founder of the video and a founder and current editor of the magazine, *AMAZONES D'HIER, LESBIENNES D'AUJOURDHUI*. As a fat activist she is a member of the group LG 5.

**Eloise Klein Healy** has published three books of poetry: *Building Some Changes* (Beyond Baroque Foundation), *A Packet Beating Like a Heart* (Books of a Feather Press), and *Ordinary Wisdom* (Paradise Press). Currently she is writing a booklength poem tentatively entitled *Artemis in Echo Park*. Among her interests are the study of Gertrude Stein, girlhood, and birds.

**Sheila Jeffreys** is a revolutionary feminist from London who is presently teaching History of Sexuality at Clark University in Women's Studies. Her book, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930* was published in the U.S. by Pandora in February.

**Penelope Seator** is a lawyer living in San Francisco. She works in the area of tenant's and immigrant's rights at a community based latino legal services agency.

**Paula Mariedaughter**. I'm a separatist Virgo witch. I'm 40 years old and a southerner. I've lived the last 16 years in Kansas City, Missouri. I now dream of moving to my 40 acres of "rustic" land in northwest Arkansas. I live with my butch lover Jeannie and her dalmation Jezebel, my two standard poodles Zelda and Sophie and our four cats.

## Errata

There were two typographical errors in Linda Strega's "The Big Sell-Out: Lesbian Femininity," in Vol. 1, #3.

In the last paragraph on page 82, line 42, *men* should not be in quotes. The sentence should read: "So many femmes are now wearing dresses. . . writing stories about femmes flirting with butches in the same way that het women flirt with men."

In the last paragraph on page 83, line 35, *natural* should be changed to *neutral*. The sentence should read: ". . . we cannot transcend or reclaim them [feminine clothes and games] – they are in no way neutral, they are loaded with meaning."

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Due to heavy financial debts incurred during their twelve years of operation, one of our most valuable institutions, the lesbian owned and operated collective, Iowa City Women's Press, has decided to go out of business. Individual

members of the collective can be held liable for taxes the press can't pay. If you would care to contribute to a fund for payment of these taxes, you can send your donation to: A Fine Bind, Ltd., 710 Kirkwood, Iowa City, IA 52240.

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**WOMYN AND WITCHCRAFT: TOWARD A DEFINITION OF DIANIC WICCA (Part 1)**, a Conference for womyn who define themselves as Dianic and/or lesbian witches, will be held Sept. 19-21, 1986 at a state park in southwest Wisconsin. To contribute position papers, facilitate discussion groups, plan/focalize ritual, or to attend the conference write: Conference Coordinating Committee, RCG, Box 6021, Madison, WI 53716.

**WOMONWRITES'86**, 8th annual southeastern lesbian writers' conference, May 29-June 1, 1986, central Georgia. You are encouraged to submit workshop ideas, choral readings, and theatrical pieces. SASE to WOMONWRITES'86 7134 Fifth Ave. North, St. Petersburg, FL 33710.

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Lynn Scott and Pam White are seeking essays for an anthology relating to Lesbian's coupling experience. We are asking for writing that expresses the important aspects of the love relationship. Please query with SASE if you are interested and we will send you our letter explaining the project. Lynn Scott and Pam White, 315 Garfield Rd., Concord, MA 01742.


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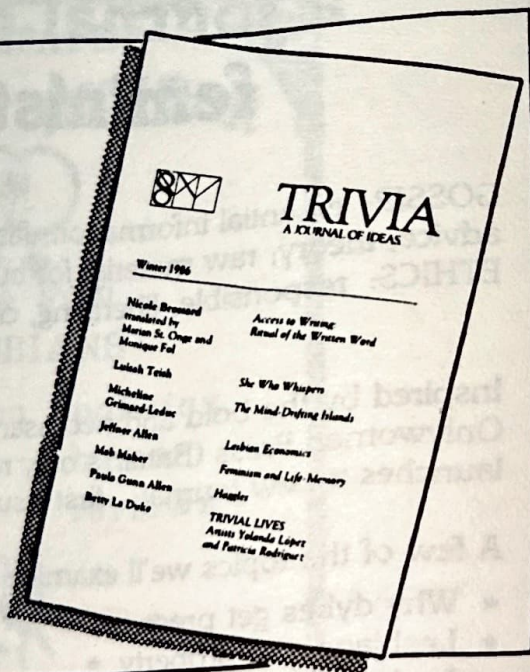
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