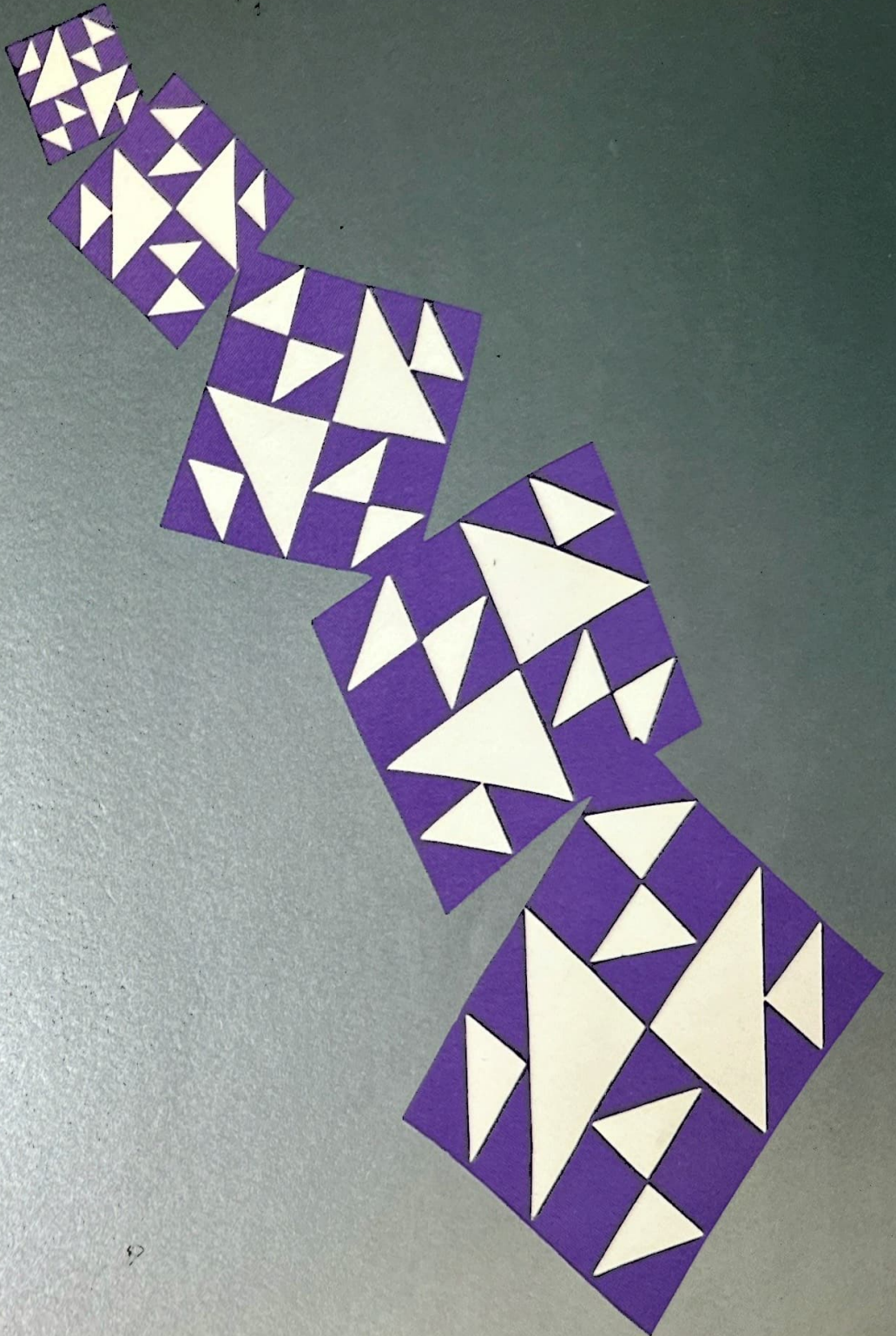


Lesbian Ethics



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Lesbian Ethics

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Editor's Introduction

Finally we get this issue to you! The delay was caused by unforeseen events (as happen in the lives of Lesbians) but also by the search for good material to print. Many Lesbians I talk to assume that *Lesbian Ethics* has piles of manuscripts to choose from, but this is not the case. The sort of material that *LE* prints can be difficult and time-consuming to write and there is not a lot of it around. So let me encourage those of you who are sitting on an idea or a half written piece to finish the piece and send it to us. Significant, original, radical lesbian content is the primary thing I look for. There is no need to limit yourself to the Readers' Forum topic for an issue, as I don't want to constrain issues to a single theme.

In this issue the Readers' Forum and two articles are on femme and butch. I don't see this issue of *LE* as the full or definitive statement on that theme (in fact, I'm working on an article myself!); and while I don't plan another focus on femme and butch in the near future, I am interested in seeing material which contributes further to the discussion. I suspect some readers, with varying positions, will disagree with or be angered by some of the femme and butch material in this issue (and others will think it's a waste of time). In fact, what is printed here is almost all of what *LE* received. We are at a point on this topic, I believe, where it is better to say things that anger each other than to hold back our true thoughts and perceptions. One approach I might suggest that you the reader take is to read the Readers' Forum as data or evidence against which to evaluate the analyses, by Ruston, Bev Jo, and Linda Strega, and by Julia Penelope.

The Readers' Forum topic for the next issue, *LE* 2:3 is Sex, and there is still time to send in a contribution, if you get it to us by February 28. The Forum topic for *LE* 3:1 is RADICAL (underlined twenty times) Lesbian Spirituality, which I believe exists. I hope it is time for it to surface. May 31 is the tentative deadline for that Forum.

I've heard from several sources that some readers did not realize that Penelope Seator's article, "Liberation in the Eighties: A Found Document," in *LE* 2:1 was a satire. Some say the mark of excellent satire is that it is not recognized as such, and excellent I think Penny's was. The target of her piece was pro-pornography "feminists" but the satire could be applied to any once radical group selling-out.

Finally, another reader told me that she and other older readers she knows find the type in which *Lesbian Ethics* is set difficult to read. I would appreciate hearing from others on this question.

Jeanette Silveira

The author intends this essay to be read by Lesbians only.

Biophilic Lesbian Separatism: Lesbian Freedom in Our Lifetimes*

Sidney Spinster

Opening

There is no Lesbian bandwagon to jump onto in the u.s. in the eighties. All the Lesbians here these days, whether we're newly out or not, have to make our own political choices, rather than choosing to support what is exciting or popular. There is no political ideology that draws Lesbians in large and enthusiastic numbers out of their homes to hear a speaker or performer.

I came out in the mid seventies, as a teenager, and like many of the recently out Dykes of the time hoped for a sense of belonging which I had never experienced before. I think I was more naive than Lesbians who came out pre-1970 or post-1980. I hungrily devoured the Lesbian Culture of the period which was full of wonderful ideas. Because I was isolated, I created my image of the Lesbian world from my readings in *Amazon Quarterly*, *Lesbian Connection*, Alix Dobkin records, and the like. I grew up on the ideas of the outspoken Dykes of the time. I thought all Lesbians were serious, sincere, and radical. I had no experience to prove otherwise.

So, as soon as I could I set out for the Lesbian Nation. I expected I would soon be welcomed into the fold and begin my life with Lesbians. . .digging potatoes, hugging, having intense discussions, and making passionate and joyous love with many beautiful wimmin.

I found that there was no fold and no welcoming. Many of the wonderful ideas I'd read and heard were light years ahead of the reality that now faced me. If I wanted to see them happen, it became apparent that I would have to

* I would like to thank Faith Lubitz, Amy Blythe, my spirit friends, and the Lesbian Separatist Gatherers of Minneapolis, MN for their significant influence on my progress in these areas. My special thanks to Jenna and Jo for our conversations, and for making their longterm dream a reality on Gathering Root Farm.

make them happen. And I have made those things happen, because I'm stubborn. But the pleasure I got out of it has been limited by my own resentment. I didn't come out expecting to be a groundbreaker, and I resented being in that position. Washed up by the second wave and left beached when the tide receded. Groundbreaking is hard work, and I felt like it already should have been done.

Other wimmin responded differently to reality shock. Some retreated to heterosexuality or "went home to get a lover and a job" (as the CLIT papers put it) when they became disillusioned with what living as a Lesbian, with Lesbians, was really like. On the other hand, some looked at it as a challenge, a creative opportunity to start building from the ground up.

Let me illustrate these three ways of coping with an example from my own community. We have a wimmin's coffeehouse where I live. It's very difficult to meet Lesbians you don't already know there. Wimmin tend to come with their friends and stay with them. It's very rare to get a nod, a hello, or an offer to dance from someone you don't already know. It's hard to feel welcome, especially if you're new and don't know anybody.

The three general ways of responding to this situation go like this. You can: 1) Never return. Instead many (who are able to) go to the bars, and when the coffeehouse is mentioned make a face and say "that place is so cliquey." 2) Attend resentfully. Sit in a tight knot with your friends at a table, and never speak to anyone else. Stare hostilely at the other Lesbians and whisper to your friends behind a cupped hand about how cold and cliquey it is. 3) Be friendly and warm yourself. Try to figure out ways to help Lesbians feel included. Assume an open body posture. Say hello. Show an interest in the welfare of the coffeehouse and the Lesbians who attend it.

The first two responses are the most common, whether or not a Dyke began her involvement in the Lesbian world with disillusionment.¹

These days few Lesbians (new or old) have the illusion that they will be swept up into the warm embrace of a close knit – but healthy – Lesbian tribe. This illusion of belonging was once the primary political motivation for many. Perhaps they believed that if they embraced the political line which was most popular and exciting, they in turn would be embraced.

So, it is without the hope of popularity that we choose now, whether or not to choose. Among the Dykes I come in contact with, those who choose not to choose² are liberals, and those who choose to choose (to politicize their lives, and to risk change) are radicals.

For this and other reasons, the eighties haven't just brought anger, disillusionment, and sadness to my door . . . the times have forced me to clarify what I really believe, and what I want to accomplish with this life. I feel a more grounded excitement about my life as a Lesbian now, one that comes from a more internal source. I have recognized that I have something special to offer, not just arduous lessons to learn while I live.

Necrophilia

Lesbian Necrophilia and the State of Living Death

After I came out I had burning questions about Lesbian politics and culture which I wanted answers to. Questions like – what can we do in our day to day life to bring an end to patriarchy.

I looked for role models among Lesbian writers and musicians. Unfortunately, I found something wrong with almost every written or recorded work of Lesbian culture available. I got very angry and often wrote long letters in response.

I'm much too critical, it's true. But there was something wrong with most of the things I criticized. And with me. What was wrong was a set of attitudes which I saw in evidence in each of these Lesbian's work, **attitudes which I shared**. Looking back on it, I was really angry at myself for my necrophilic point of view that I had learned growing up in patriarchy.

[The] attraction/need of males for female energy, seen for what it is, is *necrophilia* – not in the sense of love for actual corpses, but of love for those victimized into a state of living death.³

I've found that I've assimilated not only the passivity of the feminine role, but some of the necrophilia of the masculine role as well. And I don't think I'm alone in this. I've felt both attracted to wimmin in a "state of living death" and too passive myself to change my necrophilic attitude. Also, in some ways I embraced and justified beliefs, about myself and the world, that hindered my full escape from the state of living death.

There is, however, a vast difference between Lesbian necrophilia and the original necrophilia of the boys. Pricks destroy female lives and try to suck us dry to fulfill their need. Lesbians may instead glorify, or become obsessed or infatuated with wimmin who have been terrorized and violated to the point that they are wholly or partially absent to their own body, who have lost that power to act and be that we call life. A woman in this state may be chosen as a friend or lover because she is not capable of an intimate and equal relationship at that time, therefore the risks involved in such a relationship are avoided.

We may also be attracted to wimmin in this state because we want to protect and take care of them. When I have this feeling I have to ask myself why. Is it coming out of a genuine desire to help a woman recover, or out of necrophilia? If necrophilia is my motivation, then I have an investment in her not coming back to life. By taking care of her and protecting her I am hurting her.

One of the "fates worse than death" recognized by wise wimmin the world over is soul loss. In soul loss a severe fright causes the soul to suddenly leave the body. It may not be able to find its way back to reenter. The woman involved may experience anxiety, loss of appetite, tiredness, weight loss, and sleeplessness.

I'm a healer, and I've been mystified at my inability to help (so far) the wimmin who come to me with this set of symptoms. In the white u.s. alternative health vocabulary this collection of symptoms would be called candidiasis, or worn out adrenals, or severe multiple food allergies. Regular physicians would diagnose anorexia, depression, or chronic pain syndrome. The woman herself may describe a feeling of emptiness or coldness inside, and a helpless/hopeless feeling that nothing they can do will help. This feeling is reinforced by visits to many different healers who, with great hoopla, emerge with one of the above diagnoses. The treatment then fails, and the woman feels more hopeless than ever.

In traditional cultures the shaman uses ritual and magic to call the soul back. This is a highly advanced healing skill which requires years of study to learn, and may or may not be successful in cases where the soul has been lost for a long time.

Soul loss is sometimes instigated by an enemy sorcerer. The body of the lost soul is then put at the service of the sorcerer for his own use.

Perhaps this is an extreme version of what males perpetuate against females everyday in patriarchal culture. They try to wrench us from our bodies by using terrorism to scare the living daylights out of us.

Short of complete soul loss, the soul may exit or retreat from only parts of our bodies. Withdrawing from the places we have been violated, such as the throat of a woman told to shut up, or the vagina of a woman told to put out.

Obstacles to Soul Return: Internal

Many Lesbians have come out and learned to be angry at men. We may have ceased to subject ourselves to boy medicine, religion, politics, culture, etc. . . . to whatever extent possible. But we did not get well. We may continue to feel lousy, maybe even lousier than before.

Lesbians have embraced the word *survivor* and begun to look back on the ways men and their collaborators have abused us and the impact that abuse had on us. For example Lesbians with different experiences may name themselves "incest survivor" or "rape survivor."

A couple of years ago a Lesbian I knew died, probably from suicide, and Dykes asked "what happens when a survivor doesn't survive?"⁴ I began to wonder what "survival" really meant.

But if the word *survivor* is limited to those who have largely recovered from violation or terrorism, what do we call ourselves when we still hurt a great deal much of the time? Healing is necessary before Survival with a capital S.⁵ Healing and recovery are good and necessary and can take a long time. In this culture there are no grieving rituals for injuries to wimmin. This part of the process is not validated. I was taught to be ashamed, pull myself together and pretend to be instantly O.K. again.⁶ It's hard for me to admit for example that

I'm still recovering from growing up in an alcoholic household, that perhaps I'm not a survivor yet. Yet there's nothing wrong with that.

If we feel dissatisfied with the progress we're making in our healing it is often difficult to tell where that feeling comes from. Are we being unjust to ourselves by demanding that we heal sooner than the natural length of time required? Or is the process really taking longer than necessary or just not moving at all? Each Lesbian must determine this for herself. One way to do this is to examine ourselves for internal obstacles to recovery. The biggest of these obstacles are our own beliefs about who we are and what we deserve and expect from life. We may discover that after being hurt again and again we start viewing ourselves as someone who gets hurt, and presenting ourselves to the world that way. Perhaps we believe the lie that we "deserve it." In subtle and not so subtle ways we may set things up to get hurt again.

There is no doubt in my mind that this happens, but Lesbians get understandably angry when our responses to abuse are talked about in this way. It stings when therapists use the word *victim* to describe a woman who radiates passivity, vulnerability, and powerlessness. The word *victim* (*victimy*, *victimism*) implies that the woman has become the sum total of the injuries done to her. No one woman is that far gone. Her inner spirit, although it may have retreated far from her body, deserves and **requires** recognition.

Obstacles to Soul Return: Our Lesbian Friends

When faced with a Lesbian friend who feels empty, passive, and not fully alive we need to try to call her back to life and the earth. Instead we often reinforce a Dyke's role as a powerless shell in two ways. The first is to blame her for her situation. The other, which is not challenged as often, is to treat her as if she is a passive object, incapable of action.

Say, for example, that a Lesbian is sick for a long time and is not getting better. Her relatively healthy friends may respond in two unhelpful ways. One is to tell her that it's her fault she got sick because she wasn't taking care of herself in some way. This is blaming the victim. The other is to treat her as a passive object which is being attacked by a mysterious invader that she could not possibly resist by any action of her own. This is the regular medical model. Once again the sick Lesbian is viewed as a victim, a reactor rather than an actor. Many a Lesbian has fled the pseudo-holistic health shamers/blamers right into the welcoming arms of the victim 'loving' necrophilic medical profession.⁷ Out of the frying pan and into the fire.

Sound familiar? The same attitudes and dynamics carry over into Radical Lesbian politics.

Radical Feminist Necrophilia

A while ago there was an anti-pornography uprising led by Lesbians that came about in my town. One of the Lesbians who organized the (anti) Pornography Center here did a slideshow at the coffeehouse, with the usual awful pictures of porn magazines and album covers. It was a painful experience to watch it. She was very articulate about how porn values infect our whole lives, including our sexuality. The solution she proposed was to take action direct and indirect, legal and illegal, against the pornographers . . . and to make ourselves and others more aware of how degrading and violent porn is.

I found a lot lacking in that talk, as I do find in the anti-porn movement in general. The focus was entirely on wimmin as the victims of pornography/patriarchy and men as the perpetrators. The Lesbian element was missing – even in a predominantly Lesbian movement.⁸

Lesbians have absorbed pornography and we act it out in our sexual interactions. But we have the potential to do it differently. Heterosex is rape in the context of a male dominated society. Lesbian sex can be a violation as well, but it doesn't have to be. We can do it differently with each other without waiting around for the boys to stop pumping out porn. Certainly direct attacks on male power are necessary, but if our peace and happiness are completely dependent on them changing for the better . . . forget having peace and happiness for many lifetimes to come (at minimum).

Where is the hope in this brand of Radical Feminist politics? Why are so many Lesbians attracted to a politics that sees being female as a totally no-win situation? Thousands of Lesbians have marched publicly against pornography, against Reagan, Falwell, and violence against wimmin. How many have done so **for Lesbianism?**

Ultimately, it's none of my business what these Lesbians do with their lives. By getting even more turned off by Radical Feminism than I had been already I got turned on to the fact that I need more from politics than an awareness of the atrocities men commit. I need hope, and the kind of self-love and inspiration that come from putting Lesbians first and creating Lesbian culture.

Separatist Martyrs

Lesbian Separatism fills those needs. Yet necrophilic attitudes are not absent among Separatists any more than among other Lesbians. Since Separatists have gotten quite a lot of crap printed about us by non-Separatists I've felt the need to remain silent about my difficulties with certain attitudes found among us that I don't like. Solidarity has been called for.

At this point I feel that Julia Penelope's widely read essay, "The Mystery of Lesbians" (*Lesbian Ethics*, Vol. 1, #s 1, 2, 3), has cleared the air of the anti-Separatist smog that has been clouding it for years. It is in this clearer

atmosphere that I offer the following to Separatists who are choosing a life-affirming path.

Think about the following:

If patriarchy is everywhere, and Separatists are the only ones who oppose it in a meaningful way, and I don't entirely agree with anyone else (really), then all news is bad news. I can analyze anything, especially what non-Separatist Lesbians do or say, and tell you what's wrong with it. It's a terrible world filled with atrocities against females, both Lesbian and non-Lesbian, committed by men. What's worse, most females collaborate with pricks. And to top it all off, Dykes are *betraying us left and right and selling out to the boys.*

Fortunately, me and my friends continue on in the face of tremendous abuse, even from other Lesbians. We sure take a lot of shit. It just makes us more determined.

This is not a quote, but a paraphrase of a set of attitudes I have heard some Separatists (including myself) express. Does it sound familiar? It should. It could be any religious martyr talking, if you just substitute in a few words. The Separatist martyr will describe herself (ad nauseum) in terms of all the oppressions she has faced, the shit she takes, and the somber efforts she has made not to be oppressive to other Dykes.

You can't argue with a Separatist martyr. First of all they're usually right. The analysis is sharp as a tack. It's the attitude that stinks. And if you challenge that attitude they respond that you aren't a real Separatist, because they can't see the difference between their necrophilic attitude and Separatism itself.

One of the attitudes I've definitely had to let go of was that to be a real Separatist I had to be miserable. Standing in a beautiful forest it had become my obligation to focus on and grieve the candy wrapper on the ground, or the automobile noise in the distance. The joy was lost.

In my book, a "real" Separatist won't settle for misery, doesn't take any shit, and strives to love life. The process of giving up martyrdom has strengthened my Separatism.

Betrayal!

In the past few years many of us have experienced our Lesbian friends and ex-lovers resigning from Lesbianism. They either begin or resume fucking boys, or being open to fucking boys. My emotional reaction has been overpowering. I experience not just anger and sadness, but I also feel that deep old emotion called betrayal. And don't tell me feeling betrayed isn't a real emotion, because if you think that you've just never felt it yourself. It tears my guts out.

There are explanations for why I should feel betrayed that make political and personal sense. To betray means "to give aid or information to an enemy of; to

commit treason against or to be a traitor, to *betray ones own nation*."⁹ Males have certainly made themselves the enemies of females including Lesbians, and a female who chooses to give aid and information to males (especially after declaring her allegiance to the Lesbian Nation) is betraying us politically.

On a personal level I feel like I've been a sucker when it happens. Like all the Lesbian things she told me, that I believed, were lies. I wonder about the intimate information about myself and other Lesbians I trusted her with. Will she share it with boys?

At one point in my life I also felt sexually competitive with the males she would fuck, or even those who my lovers had fucked previously. I no longer feel that way, because I now know that sexual climaxes don't make or break a relationship – and all the ex-heterosexual Dykes I know tell me that Lesbian sex is infinitely superior to hetosex anyway. But perhaps way down deep in those feelings was the belief that I was to blame for the ex-Lesbian's resignation.

Being a victim and being arrogant are two sides of the same coin. You've got to believe that you are the center of the universe and everything revolves around you to believe that the bad choices wimmin make in their lives are somehow directed at you. I can't make anyone come out, nor am I responsible for making them quit.

We each carry certain metaphors around with us which describe our approach to life and give meaning to everyday occurrences. If I believe that *Life is a war with men*, then the resignations of ex-Lesbians will feel like a deep betrayal to me, and that's all. But life is also a *Lesbian journey of discovery*, an *education*, a *mystery*, a *Dyke comedy*, and so on. If I hold these understandings of life, a woman going straight is not felt as a betrayal of me. I may feel spiritually enriched, educated, intrigued, or even amused by the experience. All these responses are appropriate.

And yet I'm sure somewhere there are Lesbians who will feel betrayed by my not feeling constantly betrayed.

The Hipness of Hopelessness

It is decidedly out of fashion to have hope and imagine the Lesbian future we want to see. Friends of mine have described having other Dykes turn away from them in disgust when they tried to share their optimistic imaginings of what's in store.

TV. has taken to showing visions of nuclear annihilation, and this is supposed to be progressive. I suppose many people need something to jolt them out of their denial about nuclear weapons. But if everyone believes we're going to die in a nuclear catastrophe in the next fifty years, that brings us closer to nuclear war, not farther away.

Who's making visions of a future with no nuclear weapons? Certainly not homophobic male TV. producers. They're probably jerking off over *The Day After* and *Testament*.¹⁰

It is often said that if we can't imagine something happening, we can never make it true. I agree. I want Lesbians to imagine a world where men have no power. Perhaps this means a Lesbian only world, perhaps it doesn't. What would it look like? Can you hold one scene in your mind for even fifteen seconds, or does one picture of destruction just replace the next?

I had mixed feelings of sadness and amusement when I read the following statement made by a Separatist:

It is high time we get our heads out of the feminist utopias and face reality. Only by force of a mass migration and armed conflict can we acquire our liberty.¹¹

That's facing reality? Come on now, a mass migration of females willing to kill men (and risk being killed) is no more likely than the creation of a "feminist" utopia. Why not aim for the future that doesn't involve violence and suffering?

My Journey

When I wrote the first couple of drafts of this essay you're reading I didn't share much about my own process of blooming into a happy and healthy Dyke. My editor, my lover, my ex-lover, and a Lesbian who wrote me who I don't even know all agree that I should tell more of my story.

It's difficult for me to write about something so personal in a Lesbian public forum setting. So now I'd like to come into your home and talk with you one to one about getting un-depressed, un-betrayed, un-arrogant, and un-abandoned. Embracing my Lesbian life with love.

Overcoming Powerlessness

Only three years ago, in the spring of 1993 I reached an all time low in my depression and my necrophilic outlook. I was hardly able to get out of bed or prepare food for myself. I was weak and pale and spacy. My spirit was floating somewhere nearby.

Looking back on it, many things contributed to this overall state. Unresolved feelings, attitudes, and bad habits from growing up in an alcoholic home. A history of poor nutrition. Not enough fresh air and sunshine. The final blow to my life force came when I received corticosteroids briefly for mono while I was in college, which "cured" the symptoms of mono by making me sick on a deeper level of my being. Also, as a young Dyke I experienced heterosexism, homophobia, sexism and ageism.

Oh, poor, poor me.

I tried various ways to deal with my overall low level of health. . . by paying people to try to "cure" me. They touched me (massage, naprapathy, chiropractic), channeled energy to me (psychic healing, polarity therapy),

taught me (nutrition advice, supplements, foods, herbs, foods to avoid). I also received brief periods of counseling. These things helped me to get by for several years, but eventually I crashed.

I happened to be going to see a Lesbian therapist at the time my depression bottomed out, to get help for some sexual concerns I had. After a couple of months she told me that I was so severely depressed that she could no longer work with me unless I went to a psychiatrist to find an antidepressive drug to take and/or checked myself into the hospital. I told her that drugs were absolutely unacceptable to me unless I was suicidal (which I've never been) and had exhausted all other possibilities.

Now for several months I had been studying, and falling in love with, homeopathic healing. So I left the therapist and went to see a Lesbian homeopath. Two weeks later the all-consuming depression lifted. I had a brief relapse that summer, and I've been basically well ever since.

I've continued to study homeopathy in depth, and am a practicing homeopath. In homeopathy we evaluate the whole person (mental, physical, emotional) and find a remedy that will stimulate your basic energy force.¹² Your body then heals itself. This kind of healing is not based on the assumption that you are a machine and illness is a faulty mechanism that needs to be corrected (drugs, surgery) or compensated for (nutritional supplements, hormones).

I do not believe that a healer can cure me. Our Lesbian bodies can heal themselves, sometimes with the assistance of a skilled helper. Unless there is organ damage beyond repair (not according to a doctor, but according to our inner voices) we can **always** heal. All the body asks for is fresh air, sunshine, love, pure water, exercise, and a diet that nourishes you and does not poison you. Sometimes it can do amazing things even without these resources.

A healthy lifestyle is a tall order for a Lesbian who lives in a polluted inner city, or is living hungry, or is unable (or not allowed) to prepare her own food, or who's health suffers from hazards on a job she can't afford to quit.

What ways have you Lesbians who are living on a low income, or in an institution, or on the street, found to heal your bodies and spirits? Is it possible to love your life despite your situation?

For those who have had the resources to make lifestyle changes, if you're not approaching radiant health at the speed you would like to be, then going to see a healer who can help you get your energy moving (homeopath, psychic healer, acupuncturist, etc.) might work.¹³ But the biggest thing is to receive from your highest authority figure – **you** – permission to go ahead and get well. In my case this occurred when I got pissed off at the therapist. **Like hell I'm going to turn myself over to the prick medical empire! I'm going to get well!**

So I took my power back and came down into my body again. Thud. There I was with total responsibility for my own health and happiness. As I began to come alive I found that I had a lot of messes to clean up. I discovered, for instance, that some of the relationships that were acceptable to me when I was

absent to myself were not when I landed. As for an addict getting clear, everything felt new and raw, and I had a whole bunch of carryover from the old world which I didn't quite know what to do with.

Greeting My Own Imperfection

When I think about what my friends and lovers offered me that helped me leave necrophilia and depression behind, the first thing that comes to mind is love. Lesbians who loved me saw me floating nearby and called me back so that I could be close to them. Saying my name, saying they loved me and they were glad to see me . . . touching me.

Initially I desired friends and lovers who would give me unqualified support and adulation. As I got better I found I needed to have a set of friends who shared values that we should be honest and direct with each other. For the first time I felt able to live among Lesbians who expected their friends to re-assess their attitudes, assumptions, and patterns of behavior continually. They and I created a context for honest self-examination.

My friends gave me hell, too. I had, for example, completely unexamined classist attitudes which hurt the working class and poor Lesbians in my community. These Dykes let me know directly how they felt when I cut down people who read *Reader's Digest*, or used rapid fire academic style argument to "win" an argument, or acted superior.

I began to learn, not only about my classism, but . . .

- That I could mistakes in front of others and not die as a result.
- That I could create an unassailable intellectual argument for something I believed and still be wrong wrong wrong.
- That I make mistakes and that's O.K.

Letting Go of Resistance and Control

A couple of years ago a friend did some bodywork with me – a kind called Trager work. It was unlike anything I'd experienced before. She moved my body around for more than two hours in a rhythmic, rocking, gentle way – totally without pain. I let her do it freely for a while, and then I felt my "resistance" overtake me, and I clamped down, stiffening. I could feel how I bind myself. . . how I limit my own freedom beyond the limits that the patriarchy attempts to impose on me.

Resistance was what I spent most of my time doing. *Life is a war with men* was a metaphor I used to describe my existence.¹⁴ I don't want to use that metaphor anymore. Boy talk is full of military metaphors.¹⁵ *Strategies, tactics, maneuvers*. In my first few years of Separatism I used those words often. I felt I was holding sway against patriarchy with every fiber of my body.

Now I trust that the lifeforce in me pushes me toward health, happiness, and wholeness. My resistance holds me back. I didn't come to that trust easily. I got

sick pitting myself against all the forces in the universe, and I had to let go and just see what would happen. To my surprise things worked out O.K. anyway.

When I began to realize all this it became possible for me to go to an Alanon meeting for the first time. I had been unable to stomach the idea of attending any recovery program based on the twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. One of the reasons was that the first step is, *We admitted that we were powerless over alcohol – that our lives had become unmanageable.* I, like Caryatis Cardea (LE, 1:3, p. 64) read this as promoting adjustment over revolution. Now I read this as saying that I cannot control the alcoholic (or anyone), and that I've gotten into trouble by trying to.

I joined an Adult Daughters of Alcoholics Alanon group. There I've learned many things, especially about this control thing.

I'd always felt responsible for the behavior of others. For years I sat in Lesbian community meetings feeling great anxiety because some other Lesbian might say something oppressive. I felt responsible as a white Dyke, for example, for racist words that came from other Dyke's mouths.

It is my responsibility to try to make sure that the racism is confronted as soon as possible, but not to control or prevent the incident.

In other words, I carried the weight of the world on my shoulders. What I've found out through Alanon is that not only is it more comfortable to let down that weight, but it didn't do anyone any good for me to have it there in the first place.

In fact, sitting there anxiously awaiting something bad happening may have contributed to creating an energetic pattern which gave rise to a racist comment being made.

Goodbye Self-Defeating Beliefs

We create the world with our beliefs.¹⁶ These beliefs are conscious, and we can change the ones that limit us. I sat down and thought about my beliefs about reality last year, and came up with some that were holding me back. Here are some examples of what I came up with:

I have a solitary path in life.

I can't create works of great skill and excellence.

Inconsistency in the behavior of those I'm close to is a betrayal directed at me.

I will always be physically weak and scrawny.

I deserve to be punished for my mistakes.

My lovers will abandon me.¹⁷

I don't need help with anything.

Saying I am healthy is asking for trouble.

These came out of my experience, my attempts to survive by bracing myself for the worst to happen. If I am prepared, I reasoned, it won't hurt so much when it happens. But, alas, it hurt more when I was all revved up for it. **Why does this always happen to me?** In large part I made it happen to me. Since I've said goodbye to this set of beliefs, for example, none of these realities have been manifesting themselves in my life.

Sometimes the self-defeating attitudes progress to such an extent that we find ourselves believing that there is no way out of a given situation. Every option is a bad one. I recognize this attitude primarily in addicts, alcoholics, and codependents. And most Lesbians are one or the other of these things. The conclusion is that since every choice is bad, then there is no purpose in making choices/changes in our lives. And we can make some very rational sounding and convincing arguments for this.

For example, there are those who proclaim that all food is carcinogenic, so you might as well eat burger king and dairy queen. As if the toxicity of a tiny amount of pesticide residue blown over from someone else's field onto your organic farmer's (or garden's) life-energy-filled and nutrient-filled carrots is equivalent to that of antibiotic-filled decaying cow flesh.

Perfectionism. All is equally bad when compared to the ideal. The relative severities are not recognized. The good parts of the imperfect are not recognized. We may have the belief that we deserve to be punished for our mistakes, so we avoid taking risks to avoid punishment. Therefore changes cannot be made.

Another reason that change is difficult is that we may have put a great deal of energy into adapting to what we believe is an unchangeable bad situation. It is upsetting to hear it could be better because we've struggled so hard to make it O.K. as it is. Was all that suffering and work for nothing?

It is courageous to ask ourselves: What is obstructing the next level of my evolution?¹⁸ This is a wide open question – allowing us to freely create a better future for ourselves and other Dykes. We become aware of possibilities that had been completely unavailable to us when we were bound by past pain. We begin to believe that the world we are creating may have good in it, even though things may not be happening the way we planned/imagined it. Yet the imagining is more important than ever.

Biophilia

Hello Biophilic Beliefs

Biophilic energy is a term coined by Mary Daly.¹⁹ It names what the boys lack. Biophilic means life-loving. It is not in the dictionary.

Biophilic lesbian beliefs are beliefs that free us, allow us to embrace life more fully, to love more intimately, and to change for the better. As a Lesbian people,

biophilic beliefs increase our spiritual power – our power to affect change on a local and a worldwide level.

The straight world wants Lesbians to be dead, or in a state of living death. We all too often fulfill their desires. We are the greatest threat to males as life loving Dykes, and the greatest blessing to each other.

Being biophilic does not mean being a Pollyanna. Avoiding anger at the crimes of men does not help. Neither does whistling a happy tune, or putting on a happy face. Much of the crap that goes down in the name of "positive thinking" in phallogentric new age or xtian circles is whitewash of the crimes of men.

Once we have uncovered the beliefs that are obstructing our growth, it's time to imagine the future we want and to affirm our movement toward that future. These affirmations have tremendous power, and can be made in language that is seen, felt, or heard.

I've been enlivened by making lists of words that I don't hear used enough in Lesbian culture. As I use them more in my vocabulary I feel the possibilities they symbolize enter my life. LESBIAN. . .

freedom	touch
building	movement
creating	opportunity
reviving	evolution
beginning	sensibilities
spreading	enculturating
wildness	spontaneity
victory	success
accomplishment	realization

Or, my favorite new expression, *sally forth*, which means: "to emerge spiritedly as from a resting place."²⁰

I'm sure many of you have different words, because of your different backgrounds. If you make a list for yourself I would love to receive a copy.

One of the things that stands out from this list is that we seldom give ourselves credit for what we have accomplished. If we don't recognize and name our victories we forget we have them, focusing only on our losses. Perfectionism, again, comes into play. If the producers of the music festival make mistakes, the whole damn thing ought to be thrown out.

Or the things we do just seem like a drop in the bucket. Well, if our successes are a drop in the bucket, then our failures are too. And if both our successes and our failures are insignificant, that means our whole lives are. We need to stop trivializing our lives and start Trivializing them.²¹ Recognizing inside the goddess of infinite influence.

We lack rites of passage as Lesbians. There are no welcoming/initiation rituals for those just coming out. There are no ceremonies that bring us into adulthood.

In my local community some Lesbians celebrate their anniversary of sobriety. And one lesbian recently had a Croning ritual on her fiftieth birthday. A friend had a Spiral Party to commemorate her second anniversary of coming out, and I had an open house to mark my tenth anniversary, called "A Decade of Spinsterhood." We're moving in the right direction. These are public affirmations.

As I've said, it's important for me to do affirmations of my progress for myself on a continuing basis. I've written mine down and I read them to myself from time to time. It is important, if you start doing this, that the ones you use be true to you.²² I want to share some examples of mine that fit some of my areas of difficulty.

I am creating work of great skill, wholeness, and beauty.
I am maturing into an inwardly rich and powerful existence.
Abundance is with me always.
I am meeting kindred wimmin who will stay with me.
I am a strong Lesbian who needs help from others sometimes
to be all I can be.

And these additional affirmations are offered to any Lesbian who is drawn to them:

I am part of a community which is creating change
in the best possible way.
Through magic and work Lesbians are bringing into being
a new reality, much better than the old one.
We can be grateful for all we have accomplished with the
help of the great spirit (goddess). It is only the beginning.

Being a Dyke is an Opportunity

For me, being a Dyke is a spiritual path.²³ I agree with the French and Canadian Lesbian Radicals when they say that one is not born a woman.²⁴ We are born wild as females, and some are corralled, coerced,²⁵ and seasoned²⁶ into entering the class of women, and the institution of heterosexuality. Some choose wildness instead, either at the beginning or at some point in their lives. Perhaps we choose before we enter into this life.

Being a Lesbian is trusting our inner voices, our own life-force. Believing in ourselves, at least to some degree. We feel sometimes like we are inventing our lives fresh, and we are. Some look upon this as a terrible burden. Most of the time I look upon it as an adventure.

This opportunity for adventure is available to all Lesbians, and this potential is actualized through Lesbian Separatism.

We learn to sense things for ourselves without unquestioningly accepting the filtered versions (perceptions) that are handed us by the boys. Timber becomes a forest.²⁷ The area called "clitoris" changes definition in an expansive way to include a much greater area than the anatomy books indicate.²⁸ Bacteria, fevers, and other symptoms in illness are recognized as the expression of our healing force rather than as enemies.²⁹ And so on. In this way we actively create our own Lesbian reality.

The courage of Separatists is the courage to explore uncharted territory, as well as the more recognized courage to hold radical beliefs in the face of great opposition, with little support. The most common answer I am given when I ask Lesbians what makes them Lesbians is "it makes sense." Even the most conservative Dyke may acknowledge this "coming to her senses" as a part of the coming out process. The Separatist does not shy away, but sallies forth and attempts to make sense of the entire world.

We have discovered painful, horrible truths which have been hidden. An often more difficult task is to reclaim the truths of free females. . . to find what is true to our Lesbian sensibilities. How do we know? Sometimes research, sometimes innersearch, sometimes we have teachers. Always we try these truths on for size. We try new rituals, new ways of touching, of having fun, communicating, and so on.

Sometimes we blunder and make mistakes, and are confused. Other times we feel the spark of recognition surge through us, and know that this fits.

Then the sparks coalesce into a larger flame of change in our language and consciousness. All who tend the fire are transformed. A Lesbian culture is being created. We recognize our connections with Dykes of every era, across the world.³⁰

Closing

Each of us can view our Lesbianism as limiting, encumbering and binding. Or we can look at our Lesbianism as expansive and freeing. Our attitudes are not determined by outside forces. It's up to us to choose. A Biophilic Lesbian can change both the nature of her world, and her understanding of it.

So that's what I mean when I say that Lesbians can have freedom in **this** lifetime. When we release ourselves into Biophilic Separatism we can have spiritual freedom now, and the outward manifestations will expand as a result. You and I deserve the best. Let's step forward and claim it.

Notes

- ¹ I say Lesbian "world" here instead of "community" because there are many different Lesbian communities, sometimes within the same geographical area. We are still separated into largely separate Lesbian communities based on race, age, language, class, and cultural background. I think it's important to credit ourselves for the accomplishment of creating and maintaining these communities, imperfect as they may be. So when I speak about my community I am referring to a specific bunch of Dykes in Minnesota who I encounter frequently.
- ² Who choose not to recognize their choices as political, not to think through what they do with their lives in terms of the impact they could or do have.
- ³ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978) p. 59.
- ⁴ J. Haggard, conversation.
- ⁵ Daly, *op. cit.*, p. 9.
- ⁶ I am from an upper class WASP background. Naming men as the perpetrators (ultimately) of these violating acts is against the rules for all wimmin, but this particular stoic behavior is characteristic of protestant xtians and not of all the branches of patriarchy.
- ⁷ See Denise Donnell Connors' excellent article "Sickness unto Death: Medicine as Mythic, Necrophilic and Iatrogenic," *Advances in Nursing Science*, Vol. 2, #3, April 1980.
- ⁸ "people ask, well, don't sweet things happen? yes, indeed, many sweet things. but sweet doesn't keep you from dying." Andrea Dworkin, "The New Woman's Broken Heart," from the book by the same name, (East Palo Alto, CA: Frog-in-the-Well, 1980). Dworkin read this story to us several times at anti-pornography events. It is a very moving story about living in starvation level poverty, and the economic violence and coercion wimmin face. In the context of the story the line makes sense. But as I listened to it over and over I thought, does she mean that life is all suffering at the hands of patriarchy with short breaks for "sweet things" which are of little significance? And, as someone who has never been in that economic position and probably never will be, who am I to say it doesn't have to be that way?
- ⁹ *The American Heritage Dictionary*
- ¹⁰ At the movies we see the whole scene played out so often it is impossible to count. The most blatant example I've seen is *Brazil* by Terry Gilliam. Winner of the best picture of the year award by a national film critics group, it instead should win the award for the most necrophilic picture of all time. The director attempts to make you find humor in the complete hopelessness of his despairing vision of a future in which the patriarchal techno-sado-state has attained complete rule. The whole thing is interspersed with the

protagonist's pornographic dreams to make sure that the thing was a turn on for men as well as a good sarcastic chuckle. When he finally gets to fuck the woman of his dreams, he announces he has saved her from torture and execution by the State by telling the computer that she was dead. Her response is "Care for a little necrophilia?"

¹¹ "amazon nation" by Sarah, *Big Apple Dyke News*, April/May 1984, Vol. 4, #3, p. 6.

¹² For more information about homeopathy see my, "Homeopathy for Dykes," in *Maize - A Lesbian Country Magazine*, No. 2, Fall 1984.

¹³ As things stand now, these kinds of healers are expensive and mostly found in cities, so access is difficult for many Lesbians.

¹⁴ For an example of how I used to talk see "Warriors of the Luniform Shield," in, Frederique Delacoste and Felice Newman, Eds., *Fight Back!* (San Francisco/Pittsburgh: Cleis Press, 1981).

¹⁵ Thank you to Julia Penelope for sharing her thoughts on the power of conceptual metaphors, thoughts I've drawn on throughout this paper. For one discussion see her "Mystery of Lesbians: II," *Lesbian Ethics* Vol. 1, #2, p. 64.

¹⁶ This is one truth. "We are the objects of oppression in this society" is another truth. They sometimes clash.

¹⁷ Abandonment is a word like betrayal, which has seemed like an overdramatization of the situation at hand, yet real. There are childhood reasons for these feelings. For a discussion of abandonment feelings see Janet Woititz, *Adult Children of Alcoholics* (Hollywood, FL: Health Communications, 1983).

¹⁸ Faith Lubitz, conversation, January 1986.

¹⁹ Daly, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

²⁰ *The American Heritage Dictionary*.

²¹ "TRIVIA, deriving from 'trivium' (crossroads), was one of the names of the Triple Goddess. As such, it describes the matrix of our creative power, the gatherings of wise women in which our ideas originate and continue to live." *Trivia: A Journal of Ideas*, #1, Fall 1982, p. 4.

²² There is a list of examples in *Creative Visualization* by Shakti Gawain (New York: Bantam Books, 1982).

²³ See Paula Gunn Allen "Lesbians in American Indian Cultures," *Conditions* 7, especially p. 81. She discusses the Dyke as Ceremonial Lesbian. So does Judy Grahn, *Another Mother Tongue* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

²⁴ "One is Not Born a Woman" by Monique Wittig, *Feminist Issues*, Vol. 1, #2, Winter 1981. For a clearer explanation see "Separatism and Radicalism: An Analysis of the Differences and Similarities" by Ariane Brunet and Louise Turcotte, *Lesbian Ethics* Vol. 2, #1.

²⁵ "Compulsory Hetrosexuality and Lesbian Existence" by Adrienne Rich, *Signs*, Vol. 5, #4, Summer 1980.

The following four cited authors do not write from a Lesbian-identified point of view. Some are, some aren't Dykes. We get knowledge where we can.

²⁶ *Female Sexual Slavery* by Kathleen Barry (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979, p. 79) discusses how pimps force females into prostitution through the seasoning process. This can be easily extended to describe the indoctrination of females into heterosexuality and marriage.

²⁷ *Woman and Nature*, by Susan Griffin (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

²⁸ *A New View of a Woman's Body* by the Federation of Feminist Women's Health Centers (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981).

²⁹ "Disease is an abnormal condition which results from violating the laws of Nature, and every disease is evidence that the body is attempting to purify, cleanse and repair itself. . . Healing is a function of life itself and cannot be forced from outside the body." *Homemaker's Guide to Foods for Pleasure and Health* by Hanna Allen (Oldsmar, FL: Natural Hygiene Press, 1964), p. 7.

³⁰ "Across the World" is a song from my tape *Dyke Pioneers* (1982) which is available from Radical Rose Recordings, P.O. Box 8122, Minneapolis, MN 55408. There are many other Dykey tapes available from us, too. If you want to write to me, this is where.

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Heterosexism Causes Lesbophobia Causes Butch-Phobia

Part II of *The Big Sell-Out: Lesbian Femininity*

Ruston, Bev Jo, Linda Strega

We have written this sequel in order to explain in more detail why femininity is harmful to all Lesbians and why the commonly repeated Butch-hating stereotypes are untrue. It is essential that Lesbians first read the beginning article, "The Big Sell-Out: Lesbian Femininity," by Linda Strega, in LE Vol. 1, No. 3.

Patriarchy never does anything without a reason. The alarming increase in femininity in the last few years among Lesbians and het women, in all countries we know about, is part of the backlash against the growth of world-wide Lesbian movements.

As Dykes,¹ we do love each other. Our joy in life is finding other Dykes we like well enough to be friends and lovers with. We often devote ourselves to improving our relationships, trying to understand each other, trying to right injustices and inequalities. We have our failings, but for the most part we are, as a people, exceptionally principled. Why, then, do so many of our friendships, lover relationships and political groups cause us so much pain and frustration?

Why do we often feel that we are still struggling against that old, horrible pain that wrecked so many of our relationships with other girls when we were younger – betrayals, manipulations, exclusions from favoured² cliques, flirtations followed by condemnation and slander, ostracism, ridicule, dishonest communication, etc.? We already know some of the reasons: racism, anti-Semitism, imperialism, classism, fat oppression, ageism, looksism, ableism. There's another that is seldom discussed and that holds the key to understanding many presently "mysterious" disasters among us: heterosexism among Lesbians.

In part I, Linda described Fem³ Lesbians' acceptance of feminine training as girls, and Butch girls' resistance to it. Feminine training originated with men's pressures on females⁴ from the beginning of patriarchal rule, pressures to

conform to men's desires and to teach and police other females in the anti-female "arts" of femininity. Through the forgotten millenia, women who have accepted the feminine role have devised ways to manipulate the male oppressor through that role, as much as is possible within the narrow limits of a very oppressed position. What is appropriate when dealing with the oppressor is, however, very inappropriate and even cruel when used against other Lesbians, particularly Butches, who are at the bottom of the heterosexist hierarchy.

Beginning in girlhood, the most feminine little girls are at the top of this hierarchy, and are already active in punishing Butch and less feminine girls through the many hostile games we all remember from our own pasts. They form exclusive cliques to ostracise and attempt to isolate the undesirables; ridicule the less feminine and the determinedly unfeminine; initiate and control "let's play house" games with Butch girls, with themselves as the focus of attention, admiration and command. They slander less privileged, less feminine girls and thereby damage those girls' chances for friendships and acceptance by others, and they show off their feminine accomplishments and attributes in ways that make everyone else feel like clods.

These are the girlhood versions of what we call Queens – the super-feminine Fems, sometimes blatant and sometimes quite subtle, who treat Butches as if they^s were men and treat less feminine Fems as if they were of no consequence. As Lesbians, Queens don't always wear extremely feminine clothes and trappings, though they are the most likely to. It is their behaviour that most distinguishes them as Queens. Because their femininity makes them more acceptable, more normal-seeming by het standards, and because most Lesbians have deeply internalised het standards, Queens' power^a and manipulations are usually not recognised as such. A Queen usually has many friends and staunch defenders, some of whom are hurt by her over and over. Somehow she is seldom perceived as being fully responsible for the pain, ruined relationships, and damaged political work she leaves in her wake. One ex-het Queen we met, surveying the swath of heartbreak and self-hatred among Lesbians she had manipulated and abandoned, and the collapsed political alliances she had contributed to, remarked mildly, "It's really different with Lesbians than it is with men, isn't it?" Despite this minimal realization that Lesbians are not men, several years later she is still up to her old tricks, is considered very Lesbian-identified, and still has friends who feel she is a fragile soul who needs their protection. Lesbians don't have to keep being vulnerable to this kind of heterosexist abuse from other Lesbians. If we can analyse and understand what is going on, we can refuse to participate in it.

Although not all Fems are Queen types, all Fems do identify with each other as being other than Butch. This kind of bonding occurs within every privileged group, because there cannot be an in-group without an out-group, and it takes in-group cooperation to maintain the lie of superiority. That is why a Fem who

calls attention to Fems' oppression of Butches, and is determined to fight that oppression, angers other Fems and is subject to their efforts to silence her. Fems who break Fem bonding get punished. Even less feminine Fems always have the option of "pulling rank" and engaging in an occasional Queenly display, and many do so. The unquestioning, arrogant, smug assumption of superiority over Butches is an extremely oppressive quality shared by almost all Fems, and that alone supports lesbophobia among us to a degree that is damaging to all Lesbians and devastatingly cruel to Butches.

If we realise that femininity confers privilege, and therefore power, and not nurturance, fragility, softness and warmth, we won't fall for feminine games. If we realise that resistance to femininity, though it is punished by oppression and loss of status, makes openness with each other, honest directness, emotional intensity, passion and Lesbian loyalty **more possible**, we can build more of those qualities in ourselves and in our communities. If we don't reject femininity and the Lesbian-hating, self-hating politics it reflects, we will never have just and equal personal or political relationships, because we will never be able to love and value each other as **Lesbians**. Discussions about Lesbian ethics will remain an abstract fantasy as long as love and friendship are based on unethical game-playing, manipulation, and objectification.

A Lesbian-focused analysis of roles has to be based on what we know about heterosexism and lesbophobia. Who first accused Lesbians, especially Butches, of being "like men?" Who first accused Lesbians of imitating heterosexual couples? Who is the most invested in destroying our self-esteem and making us appear repulsive to ourselves and others? Who is the most invested in discouraging girls from resisting femininity and heterosexuality? Who uses Lesbians, especially Butches, as scapegoats to divert attention from his own rapaciousness and hard-heartedness? We know men's lies, and we know we can extricate ourselves from yet another network of lies that damages us at the very core of our Dyke identities, and at the very heart of our relationships with each other. Butches are **not** like men. Lesbians do **not** imitate het couples. Analysing "roles" among Lesbians is more accurately expressed as analysing Fem privilege and Butch oppression; analysing the heterosexist hierarchy that exists among Lesbians. Instead of assuming that Butches are in a role while Fems are just "being themselves," we need to recognise that it is **Fems** who have accepted the artificialities of a role, while Butches have resisted accepting those artificialities.

Question Fems, Not Butches

Fem Lesbians are those who accepted the feminine role, to various degrees, as girls. There are differences among Fems, ranging from extreme Queens who internalise male ideals of womanhood (which requires continually viewing oneself as if through men's minds until their ideals feel like one's own) to Dyke-identified Fems who are repulsed by most aspects of femininity. Fems reject

heterosexuality, sometimes as girls, more often later in life, and their Lesbianism is obviously a major resistance against male values and male appropriation of females. But their basic femininity and recognition by the het world as women remains. They can choose to grow less feminine in thought, action, manner, and clothes. However, nothing can change the fact that Fems grew up feeling accepted as real girls and real women, and so were spared the agony, punishment, abuse, and self-doubt of being ostracised as "abnormal." Most likely, the reason girls become feminine is the same reason Lesbians choose to remain feminine, go back to being more feminine, or pressure other Lesbians to become feminine, that is, so they can fit in, feel acceptable, and not think of themselves as different. What may have begun simply as an act to please adults becomes a way of life.

Butch Lesbians are those who, as girls, rejected feminisation, refused to play the role designed by men for women. A Butch's resistance brings down extreme punishment: she is described as abnormal, queer, a woman-who-wants-to-be-a-man; she is often beaten, raped, institutionalised, psychiatrically tortured (including with electroshock, drugs, and psychosurgery), and/or disowned, for not "acting like a woman." Her resistance **does not ever** win her the privileges that men keep for themselves. Because they know she is indeed a female, and a most rebellious one, she is made an example of for all females contemplating resistance. Butch oppression originates with men saying, in effect, "This is how patriarchy punishes resisters."

Meanwhile, feminine females, accepted and rewarded for cooperating, are given the job of teaching and enforcing male-invented womanliness in other females. So, het women praise femininity and punish resistance to it, on behalf of men. Fems, to varying degrees, carry on this female-policing behaviour in Dyke communities, punishing Butches and pressuring them to become feminine, while at the same time enjoying both the benefits of Butches' Dyke intensity and caretaking in close relationships and the relief of getting less Queer oppression because Butches – in the front lines – are getting the worst of it.

Asking why Butches are Butch is the same as asking why Lesbians are Lesbians. The question itself is coming from the attitude that Butches are "abnormal" and Fems are "normal." (For instance, Fems become obsessed with thoughts of male hormones when they see a Butch with facial hair, to the point where they forget that just as many Fems have beards, not to mention all the het women who have had electrolysis. Why don't those Fems make the mistake of thinking of male hormones when they see very thin Fems with small breasts? That's because the lack of female fat is admired by men, and female facial hair is not.) It makes more sense to start from the conviction that Lesbianism is every female's natural, inborn state and that there are relentless attempts to condition it out of us by the greatest propaganda machine in existence: The Institution of Heterosexuality. We should instead ask, "Why do most females turn out het?" It

then becomes obvious that Lesbianism results from resistance to, and rebellion against, heterosexual indoctrination.

Heterosexuality is a vast and complex institution, and heterosexual conditioning has many facets. In order to become a **successful Real Woman**, a girl must become feminine, het, wife, and mother (the latter two preferably, but not necessarily, together). At some time in their lives, most Lesbians choose one or more of those roles. Many were wives, and some are mothers; some chose to be het but resisted marriage and motherhood. Some were never het, but did accept femininity enough to fit in as "normal." There is certainly a tremendous pressure to be het, but the fact that some Lesbians totally resist it and are **never** het makes it clear that being het is a choice. (This is further proven by many Lesbians choosing to go back to being het.)

Acceptance or rejection of femininity is also a choice. Although most Fems we've talked with say they don't remember choosing the feminine role in girlhood, most Butches we know clearly remember rejecting femininity as early as two years old. We're not trying to blame feminine little girls for making bad decisions. After all, they had no political support and could not know yet the full meaning of their choices. We're saying that Fems must stop scapegoating Dykes who refused the easier path of "normality" and who have been viciously punished for that. We're saying that ex-het Dykes (both Fem and Butch) must now face the consequences their choices have meant for never-het Dykes, and Fems must face the consequences their choices have meant for Butches. Ex-hets and Fems shouldn't wallow in guilt and self-recrimination: they should change their politics and truly support never-het Dykes and Butches, who have been forced to pay for the acceptance that ex-hets and Fems bought.

Lesbians should treat these uniquely Lesbian issues with the same importance we treat issues recognized by the Male Left. Lesbians usually give more validity to issues acknowledged by men and het women than we do to issues such as heterosexism which affect Lesbians in particular. Unless we take the power, initiative, and courage to name and acknowledge our own Lesbian issues and create our own Lesbian analyses of all issues affecting us, we will continue automatically to accept the lesbophobic world view that even "radical" male and het groups hold.

The Original, Real Role Players: Hets

It is **men** and **het women** who truly play roles. **Their** roles are so much a part of dominant male culture that they are taken for granted and considered to be natural. Men project onto females all of their own deficiencies (cowardice, illogic, inanity, dishonesty, treachery, pettiness, etc.), and they push on females an array of male-invented feminine mannerisms and styles that encourage weakness, dependence, submissiveness and general fuckability. Such is the role of "woman," yet we're supposed to believe it's **natural** to want to mince along on

stilted shoes, face masked with stinking, lurid chemicals that simulate constant sexual excitement, nails bloody talons, dieted-jazzercised-depilated-operated bodies encased in exposing dresses, voices unnaturally high, gestures "cute" and aggressively flirtatious, and minds focused on pleasing men at any cost.

Meanwhile, men, while raping female-kind, destroying life on the planet, and in quieter moments simply boring everyone to death, pretend exclusive possession of all valued qualities: strength, courage, nobility of heart, directness, honesty, wit, loyalty, intelligence, independence. They also steal all comfortable, freedom-giving and decent-looking clothing for themselves.

These are truly grotesque, exaggerated roles – reversals of reality, complete shams, invented by men to maintain control over females, and accepted by their collaborators, het women.⁷ Lesbians do not "play roles" like hets do; we are not "like men and het women"; we are Lesbians living in a het world.

If het women didn't cooperate with the teaching to be het, all females would be Dykes. Similarly, if no Dyke accepted the teaching to be feminine, we would all be Butch. We believe Butchness is much closer to our inborn, natural state, and that only a minority of little girls refuse to let go of it and refuse to sell out to male demands. Butches, like Fems, live in patriarchy; we're not saying Butch is our natural state, but that it is much, much closer to our natural state. We can't know what we'd be like if we lived in a Dyke-only world, but in the absence of het conditioning, we would all be more similar to how Butches are now, and there would be no such thing as femininity.

"But I Don't Play Roles"

It makes sense that some Lesbians don't want to acknowledge that we're all either Butch or Fem, because: 1) Hets use this propaganda to obscure their extreme role-playing; 2) Dykes don't want to admit doing things that seem to confirm het stereotypes of us; 3) That's the stereotype of Old Dykes (who came out before the Women's Liberation Movement) who are looked down on by the newer ex-het feminist Fems; 4) The even newer ex-het Fems who came out after the support of the WLM (and who are therefore much less oppressed as Lesbians) often think it's campy, cute, and trendy to play with roles. After all, hets and the right wing have made a return to the 1950's, with its racism, Queer-bashing, and stagnation, into a nostalgia game. So, unfortunately, some politically radical Dykes think that identifying as Butch or Fem is part of that corrupt sell-out. The truth is that the damage done by Fem role-playing continues anyway. Pretending it's not happening only increases the injustice. The only way to finally have Dyke-identified communities is to dare to name the problem.

While many Fems deny being Fem, some claim to be Butch, and others claim to be neither Butch nor Fem. How can any Dyke consider herself role-free? If a Dyke has some awareness of roles, she can easily identify the role of even someone she doesn't personally know, like a Lesbian feminist performer, just

from a photograph – often not because of clothing so much as body language and facial expression. (The vast majority of international Lesbian feminist stars are clearly Fem, although that was not so true twelve years ago.) Most Fems can resist perceiving their role partly because they fit into "reality" better. This allows them to think of their Femness as their own natural style. Similarly, upper and middle class Dykes will usually be less aware of class than poor or working class Dykes, who can't avoid feeling the effects of class oppression. When you're privileged, you can take your position for granted, but when you're oppressed, you can't avoid noticing it. Still, whether or not a Dyke chooses to identify her Femness, she should be aware that **Butches are treated as Butches no matter how they identify**. She should at least notice and fight the ways she is treated as more normal (Fem) by both hets and other Lesbians.

Some never-het Fems associate Femness with heterosexuality and are understandably unwilling to identify with hetness; but they still benefit, to a lesser degree, from Fem privilege. A sound analysis of heterosexism among Lesbians would clarify both issues – that of Butch oppression and that of never-het Dyke oppression.

Some Fems claim it is masochistic to identify as a Fem. They perpetuate the lie that "Fems are oppressed by Butches like women are oppressed by men." The truth is that Butches are oppressed by Fems similarly to how Lesbians are oppressed by het women. Accusing politically responsible Fems of self-hatred because they acknowledge Fem privilege is just another way of trying to silence discussion about Butch oppression. Talk about a male attitude! Should everyone just grab whatever privilege they can with no concern for who pays for it? Lesbians who refuse to use their privilege, and who fight injustice – whether about roles or any other issue, such as class – should be respected for their courage instead of being called masochistic. Fighting inequality benefits **everyone**. Who wants to live in communities where some feel good about themselves at others' expense?

Many Fems claim that Butches are more privileged and admired in Lesbian communities. Dykes encouraging other Dykes to stop being feminine, and to be Dyke-identified in appearance and behaviour is good, when it happens, but it doesn't mean Butches are considered superior (not to mention, it doesn't happen as often as it used to). Similarly, working class culture occasionally getting respect doesn't mean that the working class now have privilege over the middle class. Also, it's much more acceptable for Fems to reject femininity than it is for Butches, who are perceived as "going too far." In fact, **the Lesbians who are the most praised for being "Butch" are usually less obvious Fems. These same individuals are the ones we've noticed being the most likely to make nasty anti-Fem comments and jokes**, which is not the same as honest resistance to Femness. A Fem we knew used to make frequent anti-Butch comments. After we explained why this was oppressive, she tried to make herself appear more Butch and began making anti-Fem statements. Our

experiences have been that there is much more anti-Butch than anti-Fem sentiment among Lesbians. At a Lesbian forum, the audience cheered when it was announced that several members were Fems, and they cheered again when another Lesbian described herself as a "recovering Butch." It is also very common in U.S. gay papers to see personal ads stating "feminine Lesbian wants pretty Lesbian who looks like a woman," or "no Butches, please."

Butch Oppression

Lesbians are scapegoated, by men and het women, for male crimes. Lesbians are portrayed as girl-molesters, when it's **men** who are the rapists, and when Lesbians ourselves are among the many girl victims of rape by male relatives and strangers. Men have succeeded in diverting attention away from their own violence, teaching women to displace their real rage at and fear of men onto Lesbians. Scapegoating Lesbians enables the het who shrinks in revulsion from a Dyke on the bus, or who shouts insults at a Dyke at work, to live with, look after and **defend** a man who beats her and rapes her daughters.⁸

We consider this scapegoating to be central to Lesbian oppression. It has become clear only recently that most females are victims of family rape (a better term than "incest," which implies consent), making it obvious that most males are rapists. The enormity of this terrorisation is why males find it necessary to divert attention elsewhere, in order to maintain het women's devotion. Butches personify Lesbianism, so the most rage and fear is redirected at them. Butches are portrayed, by hets and Fems, as hardened abusers of females, when it is men who are callously gynocidal, and when Butches themselves are prime targets of male violence, as well as abuse from het women and Fems.

The existence of roles has been so distorted and lied about by hets, and Butch identity is so deeply linked with Dyke identity and Queer oppression, that just mentioning the issue often calls forth denial, raw pain, anger and confusion among long-time Dykes. Too often, it also calls forth a spew of anti-Butch stereotypes from reactionary ex-het Fems who have not gotten rid of the lesbophobia of their het years.

Butches have the right to come out as Butch, yet when one does, reactions are often identical to how hets react to any Lesbian coming out. In spite of all the pressure, there have always been Dykes who identify as Butch, as well as Butches who won't (just as there are Lesbians who are clearly out and others who prefer to be called "women."). Although Butch and Fem identity go much deeper than the superficialities usually talked about, many Butches convince themselves that they're not really Butch, because they like to cook, make a cozy home, do craftwork, hate sports, and are intimidated by mechanical tasks.

So how does one know who is Butch or Fem? **You can usually tell by how Queer or normal a Lesbian makes you feel.** You can notice who has the power

in social and intimate relationships. (Fems' privilege gives them real clout in Lesbian interactions.) Also notice how well or badly a Lesbian fits the image of how a woman is supposed to appear — how she moves, uses her voice, the ease or unease she feels with feminine apparel, and how easily she could pass for het if she tried.

Butch oppression is simply a more extreme version of how all Lesbians get treated by a heterosexist world, including being in a minority position. Since most of the many Lesbians who came out through the Women's Liberation Movement are Fems, Butches are in a minority. Nowadays, it's possible to go to a Lesbian event and find yourself in a crowd of a hundred Fems and five Butches.

"P.C." and "P.I."

Fems who write "let's-be-swishy-ladies-in-our-dresses" articles are showing off, and trying to increase their privilege by demanding approval from the Dykes that they oppress. The totally-feminine look is the epitome of male identification. It's no coincidence that many of the emaciated high-fashion models in women's magazines are actually men in drag.⁹

Politics that support femininity either assert that Femness is an oppression ("One should have a political right to be feminine"), which makes it difficult for politically responsible Dykes to argue against it; or they assert that femininity is simply a matter of personal taste and preference, which implies that anyone objecting to it would have to be a dictatorial powermonger. (By the way, no Dyke has the power to stop others from selling out. As the oppressed, all we can do is object.) This offensive, militaristic, male imagery is furthered by describing Dyke appearance as a "uniform." Again, the truth is reversed: the true uniform of femininity, required for many jobs and to simply be accepted as looking "proper," is considered original and unique.

The irony of talking about being "P.I." ("Politically Incorrect") is that it implies that reactionary politics are actually courageous rebellion. Lesbians who admire and conform to any male-defined politics, such as femininity, supporting "Lesbian" porn and "Lesbian" pregnancy, or protecting boys' and men's "rights" to be in Lesbian space (meanwhile ignoring Lesbians' rights), often pride themselves on being "Politically Incorrect." Those who protest the selling out are considered oppressors, and the collaborators are considered "revolutionary." The few truly brave Dykes who are fighting the patriarchal and feminine onslaught against our communities are treated as if we were in power. Again, it's a typical male reversal. **It is the Lesbians who are following men's directives who are "Politically Correct" in a male-run world,** and they derive privilege from that correct role. It's as if they came into radical Dyke communities wearing crosses and "I love Reagan" badges, saying, "We're so brave to stand up to you all." There is nothing courageous in wearing the feminine uniform (whether the old conservative or the new "outrageous" punkish styles), repeating the ancient

heterosexist propaganda, doing just what women are supposed to do in patriarchy. Meanwhile, as many Queens and het women eagerly dress up like drag queens, old sexist dress codes are reinstated and both Fems and Butches who can't or won't pass are unable to get or keep jobs. (And yes, there are a few Butches who do try to pass as feminine for jobs, but they don't really convince anyone.)

Fighting the Lies

Dykes who are not trying to gain privilege by looking het are often mistaken for men or boys, because we don't look like men's definition of "women." Even quite feminine Fems (in manner, actions, etc.) if they are wearing Dyke clothes, short hair, no cosmetics, no earrings, etc., are occasionally called "sir" by hets; yet it is Butches who are accused by Fems of "trying to be men." Clearly, something very unfair is going on when there is one standard for Butches and another for Fems. Looking like a Dyke does not mean one is trying to look like or be a man. Being taken for a man is deeply insulting and Queer-baiting. It does not mean that the Dyke is getting any privileges or power that men get. If Fems defend themselves against the "Lesbians are men" attack by explaining that it is one of the many anti-Lesbian stereotypes, why can't they defend Butches in the same way? Why can't Fems understand that Butches get more of this treatment because Butches have been the most obvious Lesbians for decades — in fact, for centuries? Why can't Fems grasp that what is happening to Butches is only a more extreme version of how all Lesbians are treated?

No Fem can say she doesn't understand at all what it's like to be Butch. If she does say that, she's revealing how much she considers Butches as Other, alien and beneath her. Many Fems, particularly never-het and other Dyke-identified Fems, are treated as more Queer by queenier Fems. Even the queeniest Fems know what it's like to be treated as a pervert by het women. That gives them a taste of Butch oppression, which is, after all, simply condensed and undiluted Lesbian oppression.

Butches are not like men. Butches do not think, look or act like men. Butches do not have the privileges and power of men; in terms of the heterosexist hierarchy, they are the least privileged of all Lesbians. When men, het women, or Fem Lesbians treat Butches as if they were men, or call Butches "male," they are being extremely cruel and oppressive. Most Fems take part in this mass, community abuse of Butches, which has disastrous consequences, causing Butches emotional pain, deprivation, isolation, fear, and illness.

Butches are in fact treated as the queerest of the Queers. In the patriarchal hierarchy, men are at the top, next are wives/mothers, then single het women, then celibate het women; next are Fem Queens who emulate and identify with men and het women, next are Dyke-identified Fems, and finally Butches are at the bottom. (We are in no way minimising the significance of racial, ethnic,

class, nationality, physical ability, fat, looks, and age oppression. Dykes who are oppressed in any and all of these ways are additionally oppressed if they are also Butch.)

Because of oppressive stereotypes, privileged Dykes are more likely to think of racially, ethnically, class, fat, and looks oppressed Dykes as Butch. And because of male thinking, oppressed Dykes, especially Butches, from all backgrounds, are more likely to be objectified as sexual servicers. That's why, when two Fems are in a couple, the one who is darker, larger, poorer, and/or older, etc., is more likely to be in a Butch role within a couple.

Just as, among Lesbians, the "normal" Lesbian image is a middle-class stereotype, the "queer" Butch image is often classist. When Butches are said to be "like men," the image presented is certainly not that of a lawyer, doctor, or business executive. It's more likely to be that of a working-class mechanic who hangs out in bars, is uneducated, uncultured, rude, tough, cold, and possibly violent. They're not just anti-Butch, anti-Lesbian lies, but classist lies as well. Meanwhile, the image of femininity is based on the upper-class "White Anglo-Saxon Protestant" het woman stereotype.

A few Butches may appear to have a fractional share of something that is usually reserved for men, such as a non-traditional job, but the vast majority of females who have moved into such high-paying work are het; a few are Fem Lesbians. (And the Butches in those jobs are much more oppressed on the job, just as they are everywhere else.) The only women who seem to have attained executive, upper-class positions as the heads of companies – often by being daughters or wives of powerful men – are again, het women.

Butches who have tried to or have passed as men, or who are taken to be men, or who have done any or all of the things used to "prove" Butches are "male-identified," don't prove anything except that, in patriarchy, there are only two genders, one of which (male), as we said earlier, is associated with positive qualities, and the other (female), with negative qualities. There is no such thing as sexual neutrality in a man-plus-woman world. There is no "third sex" for Lesbians to fit into, past or present. There are only the categories devised by men to maintain their power: man and woman. If you don't accept the role of "womanly," you are given no option but to be labelled "manly." Parents, peers, schools, etc., who treat a Butch girl as a boy aren't **causing** her to be Butch: her resistance to femininity was chosen by her much earlier in her life. What they are doing is abusing her by refusing to acknowledge her as a female.

In what way is a Butch girl's thinking she's "not a woman" different from adult Dyke Separatists' and radical Lesbians' rejecting the term "woman" for ourselves as a political act? (Except that **choosing** to reject a mis-definition is easier when you've had a chance to acquire a clear analysis and political support.) Can't the young Butch's early rejection of femininity be seen as an intuitive awareness that feminine means heterosexual and all the other disgusting things that go

with it? Is she not simply realising much earlier (and without political support) that all the outward symbols of womanliness, and the internalised values that support them, also mean fuckable, dependent, unthinking, submissive, and ultimately passive? Young Dykes who perceive that shit for what it is and rebel against it without support, and in spite of constant punishment, are to be admired and respected. **That's COURAGE!**

Who's Calling Who Male?

Because a few Butches have occasionally bound their breasts, Butches are called "male." But we think the things het women (and the Fems who copy them) do in order to fit into men's female-hating fantasies should be what gets called male. In a world where men and boys stare at and grab at female breasts on the street, making disgusting and humiliating comments, it is not so odd that a Dyke would want to conceal and protect her body. Isn't it more questionable to wear padded, push-up bras in order to elicit sexual attention from men? Who but the truly male-identified would: wear apparatus that pushes her breasts out and up into men's faces; painfully remove the fur on her body or face; wear make-up that looks like bruises across her cheeks; poison herself (and anyone within breathing distance) with chemicals that disguise her female aroma; or wear a dress that makes her more vulnerable to rape? Who else would deliberately starve and torture ("exercise") herself to look weak, powerless, unfemale, and THIN enough to please men?¹⁰ It is no coincidence that fatness is both a Lesbian and Butch stereotype. Men, particularly in cultures based on the xtian Northwestern European model, terrorise females into being emaciated so their bodies will look more male and be weaker and more defenceless. They hate, fear, and punish fatness because it is deeply associated with essential femaleness and female power.

The Lie that Butches Bond with Men

This is a particularly offensive stereotype, considering that men are Butches' enemies. A few Butches may think men are their friends, but it is het women as a group who literally, physically bond with men. What of their collaboration? Het women are intimate with men in a way that no Lesbian could ever be. They welcome men into their bodies, create them, nurture them, and some even collaborate with males in the beating, rape and murder of Lesbians and other females. If any Lesbians are going to bond with men, it's more likely to be ex-het Fems than Butches. Fems are also more likely to become bisexual or return to being het. (Of the many Lesbians we've known who've gone het, all were ex-het Fems.) Also, men and hets are more comfortable with Fems than with Butches, because that is how they want us to be: the more Fem a Lesbian is, the more het-identified, the more comfortable patriarchy is.

The Lie that Rape Causes Roles

"Girls who were raped when little become Butch." "Girls who were raped when little become Fem."

The first lie reinforces the stereotype that it takes something horrible to create a Butch. It's difficult to disprove since most Butches are victims of family rape and other assaults. The fact that most Fems also are victims makes the second lie sound plausible, but it is particularly offensive because it implies that Femness is created by oppression and Butchness is more privileged. The fact is that both Butches and Fems are attacked as little girls (as are het women). To focus on one denies the experiences of the other, and obscures the reality that most girls are sexually assaulted.

Butches as Sexual Objects

Butches are stereotyped as objectifying Fems (again comparing Butches to men), when the reality is that it is usually Fems who sexually objectify Butches. When a Butch and a Fem are lovers, it is much more likely for the Butch to take the risk of initiating the relationship, and to make love to the Fem than vice-versa. Many Fems never reciprocate their lovers' passionate attentions. Some do, but not often with the same intensity and presence that they enjoy from their lover. Is it any wonder that some Butches become reluctant to accept lovemaking from Fem lovers, when all have experienced rejection, indifference, and half-hearted going-through-the motions? It also doesn't help that many Fems are attracted by the stereotype of the "stone Butch," without any awareness that Fems have created and maintain the stereotype for their own benefit, and that it causes a great deal of pain to Butches. Many Fems want to believe that Butches enjoy their role and that they get something out of inequality in love-making. Some Fems even insist that a Butch doesn't need to be made love to because the Fem's orgasm mysteriously causes her Butch lover to have an orgasm at the same time! (Wryly referred to by an Old Dyke Butch friend as "the Phantom Orgasm.") Again, the Fems are perceiving Butches as being some kind of man. After all, don't men prefer to be the active partner in sexual encounters with women? Doesn't it give them power over women? **But Butches are not men.** Femininity teaches women to imagine themselves the center of sexual attention, the alluring flower meant to attract rewards from excited, attentive and loving admirers. Of course, that's het fairy tale crap. The het women's ruffles and perfume are meant to attract men, and men's attentions are far from loving. Most Fems do not want to attract men (though some Queens have gone bisexual or het), but many have internalised the fairyised¹¹ image of themselves as an alluring centre of sexual attention, and they simply substitute Butches as those they want to attract.

But Butches are not men. They are females, they are Lesbians, and their lovemaking has absolutely no connection or resemblance to men fucking women. A Butch focuses her attention and care on her lover's pleasure, fulfillment, orgasm, etc., and her lovemaking is also a way of creating strong emotional and psychic intimacy with her lover. Men don't make love – they use women's bodies to masturbate themselves and to establish dominance over them; in other words, they fuck women. The physical realities of the two activities are completely different. Even if you don't consider the profound emotional and psychic differences, comparing Butches to men in intimate sensual relationships is glaringly illogical and insulting. If any comparison has to be made, it would be more accurate to say that, in many cases, a Butch making love with a Fem can be similar to a Lesbian making love with a het woman. The Butch is set up as **The Queer**, as the one who really wants "IT," and the realities of the Butch's female needs and desires – physical, mental emotional, and beyond – are ignored, **because she is not perceived as being female.** Does this sound like a safe situation for a Butch to say, "I really want you to make love to me the way I make love to you, even though a lifetime of Queer and Butch oppression would make it hard for me to believe you really mean it"? Not likely.

Some Fems are pushed into unequal lovemaking by lovers who are more Fem. As mentioned before, this usually happens to Fems who are more oppressed than their lover in other ways. These Fems experience some of the pain, frustration, humiliation, loneliness and self-hatred that unreciprocated passion creates, and they can understand from that what Butches go through all the time.

By being lovers with a Butch (or pushing a Fem lover into an oppressed Butch role), a Fem can avoid her fear of her own Lesbianism. She tries to pretend to herself that **she's** not really Queer, which makes her lover "the **real Queer.**" The common het stereotype of Lesbian couples is that one is "the **real Lesbian**" (the Butch) and one is a het woman who's been forced or seduced into the relationship by the Butch. This oppresses the Butch, **not** the Fem. Fems who are involved with Butches and **do nothing to fight the oppression of Butches** are going along with the stereotype whether they really mean to or not. Either way, they profit from it: when they go out into the het world with their lover, they will be seen as not responsible for the relationship; they will be seen as het and temporarily involved with a Lesbian instead of with a man. As insulting as that is to the Fem, it is far more insulting and **dangerous** to the Butch. This unequal situation can be avoided only if the Fem takes equal responsibility for being a Lesbian and for having the lover relationship, which means **acting and looking like a Dyke.**

Think about how het women flirt with us, act scared of us, make us feel like perverts, believe and spread lesbophobic lies about us, patronise us, treat us like "arrested children" – that is how Fems treat Butches. Some Fems have said that it took them a long time to come out because they met Butches and were

terrified, so they went back to men. Now, that's really taking responsibility for yourself! Weren't they scared of men? Why not?

Some women who have lived with or been married to men, when they come out as Lesbians and get involved with lovers actually **want** their lover to be in a "male role"; they may push her to act like the ex-husband/boyfriend, to make love in a way that feels like fucking, because the ex-het hasn't stopped thinking like a man's woman. Since Butches have much less power than Fems, especially ex-het Fems, they are vulnerable to being pushed around by them, including being forced into the Fems' fantasies. (Part of the Fem role is authoritativeness toward Butches.) For example, it is usually ex-het Fems who talk about liking to be "fucked hard" and liking their Butch lover to use a dildo. An Old Dyke friend recalls, with pain and anger, being made to feel "like a walking dildo." She tells of the countless times such Fems have said to her, "I'm a Lesbian at heart, but my body is still heterosexual and wants a prick."

When a Butch is told all her life that she's not **really** a woman, and is taught to hate herself, is it surprising that she would take a "real woman's" word for what women like in lovemaking? Some of the ways Butches are stereotyped come not from the ways Butches look or act, but from the fantasies, desires and pressures of het-identified Lesbians. These are the ex-het Fems who, when they talk about "past lovers," include men. They didn't come out because they love Dykes and feel like Dykes (Queer); they came out because it was trendy for a while, or because they "happened to fall in love with a woman," or because they hate men (yet don't really love and desire Lesbians), or because they want some power over others that they can't get with men, or because they have male-pornographic fantasies of Lesbianism. (Most Lesbians we've known who like to read porn have been Fems.) By never making love to their lover, but only being made love to, they can fantasise that they're really with a man. Then they turn around and accuse their lover of being "male-identified"! It is horrible that Lesbians like these, who operate totally out of male and het values, and fuck over Lesbians, are accepted as nice role-free Lesbians while Butches (and, to a lesser extent, Dyke-identified Fems) are persecuted for their **Lesbianism**, by other Lesbians.

Fems sometimes ask (usually with hostility), "Well, why are most Butch lovers with Fems, then?" The answer is **internalised oppression**. Resistance to femininity comes at a high price, and total lack of support breeds self-doubt and self-hatred. In such a situation, the more privileged and acceptable are always more highly valued than those who remind you of yourself. Some Butches do succeed in becoming lovers with each other, and those we've met have said that theirs was the most equal relationship they'd experienced, and that they'd been able to help each other nurture self-love.

Who's Sex-Obsessed?

Queens are often remarkably callous towards Butches and Dyke-identified Fems. Many Dykes have experienced Queens' het-style sexual games, but they can be very difficult to confront. Queens' sexually suggestive comments and jokes can seem like harmless play. A Queen commenting on the vulval appearance of food or flowers may appear charming, while a Butch saying the very same words is likely to be called "sex-obsessed." Any Dyke who asks directly if the Queen is flirting is likely to be termed "sex-obsessed." Meanwhile, the Queen gains popularity through manipulation, pretending attraction to Dykes she's not interested in. She may "accidentally" rub her breasts or pubic region against a Dyke or place her knee between the legs of a Dyke while dancing, her manner flirtatious. The Dyke may feel vulnerable and confused, wondering, "Am I imagining this? Does this mean she's attracted to me? If I respond with interest, will she deny what she's doing?" The Queen will very likely respond with surprise, feigned fear, ridicule or anger. This type of covert sexual manipulation borders on molestation, in the sense of being an uninvited invasion of physical boundaries that's done in order to gain a power position. It is especially harmful to family rape victims or any Dyke who has had her reality repeatedly denied. Queens also set up competition by flirting with several Dykes at once and then enjoying being fought over. A Queen may also maintain power by stringing along several lovers at once without giving any her full attention, acceptance, or intimacy, and then harassing her hapless followers for their completely natural jealousy.

There is much more to be said about Queens' power and about Butches being objectified as sexual servicers by Fems. We will write in more detail when we are able to print our article for Lesbians only.

The Lie that Butches are Tough, Closed, Mean, Violent, Unemotional

Every Lesbian has to be tough to survive. We are threatened and attacked, verbally and physically, **because we are Dykes**. The more out we are, the more likely we are to be attacked, especially physically. Even when we are not being overtly attacked, we are stared at, made to feel like outcasts, and are the objects of angry, disgusted, hating, patronising, leering or ridiculing looks. Even if no male or het woman is being horrible at a particular moment, we are still assaulted by a het, pornographic, male world, with male fantasies of women in store windows and on billboards, etc. A Dyke cannot walk the street with a soft or open face, all fluffy and loving when she is walking through a virtual minefield. Fems also have to protect themselves physically, emotionally, mentally and psychically against this assaultive het world, although to a lesser extent, and could be subject to accusations of being "mean, closed and tough" as a result. But when a Butch is similarly self-protective, her behaviour is used to prove those male lies about Butches being hard.

It is a basic political principle that it is not all right for those with more power to name and define those with less power. A Fem who accuses a Butch of being "suspicious" (a common accusation), for instance, should ask herself instead what it is in her own behaviour that the Butch has reason to not trust. There is plenty, if the Fem is doing nothing to fight Butch oppression, and is making all the usual assumptions that it is the Butch with "the problem." **Treating someone as "abnormal" is an excellent reason for her not to trust you.** Fems treat Butches this way all the time, with very rare exceptions. Butches have more than enough reason to relate to the general world with great distrust, and they also have plenty of reason to not trust Fems the way things are at present in Lesbian communities. While Butches are frequently and publicly insulted in Lesbian publications, etc., with almost no one speaking out in their defence, they would be most unwise to completely trust Fems.

Butches are told they're "unemotional, tough, cool," etc., **because they are not Fems.** These accusations have very little to do with what each individual Butch is actually like. Fems, being feminine, are perceived as "soft, vulnerable, emotionally expressive," etc., which is often far from the truth. (We're not saying Fems are oppressed by this stereotype of women; Fems have on some level chosen to live it because of the privilege it gives for appearing to be "normal women.") We find Fems tough, closed, less emotional, or mean more often than Butches. Queens who won't even try to be close to other Fems, and who try to make Butches fill all their needs, are especially emotionally distant. Fems who will only be close to lovers or to Lesbians they are attracted to are impossible to be friends with.

Queens sometimes behave in stereotyped feminine ways by throwing scenes, screaming, using tears to manipulate others, or generally acting like drama Queens. This doesn't prove that Fems are open and Butches are closed. Throwing scenes isn't real emotion; it's pushing other Lesbians around, intimidating and silencing them by using displays of emotion that are in fact **learned** behaviour, deliberately used for effect. It's not from being genuinely upset, which all of us feel sometimes and need to express. Many Fems learned this behaviour from their mothers and use it as a technique to get their own way, especially when someone stands up to them or wants to do things differently from them.

None of the Butches we've met conform to the "tough, closed" stereotype. Butches are often "more there," more warm and emotionally supportive than many Fems. Their solid Dyke identity gives a personal realness that no amount of femininity will ever confer. To be more Lesbian is to be more true to our natural female selves., while to be less Lesbian-identified (more het-identified) is to be further from one's real self. The further you are from your real self, the less capable you are of behaving with honest directness, and the less capable you are of being really close to another Lesbian. To portray an entire group as all having the same characteristics is to objectify and to deny their real

personalities and individual differences. Just as there are many sorts of Dykes, there are many sorts of Butches. As long as Fems are projecting stereotypes onto them, Fems will never be able to truly communicate and be close to them. This is the Fems' failing, not the Butches! It is also the Fems' loss, and the Butches' oppression.

Unfortunately, being bombarded with hatred causes self-hatred. Many Lesbians do end up believing Lesbian-hating lies. They may think they are Queer because of emotional or hormonal problems. Some Butches believe the same. A few may even agree with some of the Butch-hating lies, but no one should use Butch's internalised oppression to believe the lies are true. Also, no Dykes should be repeating those lies any more than they should repeat stereotypical lies about any oppressed group. Saying "but some Butches are like men" is equivalent to saying "but some working class Lesbians are dirty, lazy, stupid slobs." **Just because someone says something derogatory about themselves or about someone else, does not mean it is true.**

Butch Oppression Hurts All Dykes

No matter how often the stereotypes of Butches (and Lesbians in general) are proven to be untrue, the lies are still told, and the damage is still spread. Why? It's because Lesbians are the only threat to the world-wide rule of patriarchy, and Butches are the most out and obvious of Lesbians – the Dykes who most clearly refuse to cooperate with male domination of the world. And why do Lesbians themselves participate in the male assaults on this Resistance struggle? One of the reasons is that patriarchy is based on hierarchy and inequality, on divide and conquer. Females are split up into many different groups and are taught to be antagonistic, ridiculing and hating towards **anyone** who is apart from the crowd. We learn this as little girls in our schools, families, religions, etc. Part of the conditioning to become "Real Women" is being taught to police and bully other girls on behalf of the male power structure. That's why even young girls can be so horribly cruel to anyone who is different.

Why is it that het women, who exemplify feminine deluxe, are perceived as emotional, loving, open, soft, expressive, etc.? It's because they get **close** to, are **open** to, and **love males**. They sure as hell aren't that way with Lesbians. The feminine stereotype is a lie. Het women are **closed** emotionally, because they can't be really intimate with other females. Lesbians, especially Butches, are falsely stereotyped as "closed" because Lesbians are **not available for intimacy with men**. No matter how intimate and warm we are with each other, we are still called "distant, closed, emotionally frozen," because closeness between Lesbians does not count; only loving men and boys (especially sons) is counted as "feelings." Individual hets can be as cold and vicious as they like, but as long as they are a wife and mother, they qualify as "soft, warm, feeling. . . womanly."

Non-Separatist Lesbians, though they don't hate and avoid men like Separatists do, don't fuck with men; not fucking with men is basic to Lesbian identity. No matter how nice non-Separatists are to men, they will still be viewed by men and het as the mean, hard Lesbians of the stereotypes. Even more so Separatists, who are so "cruel and harsh" as to have the guts to perceive men as the rapists and murderers they are. We supposedly "lack compassion" because we hate males. This makes us "hard and vicious," while the rapists and murderers are the objects of universal admiration, loyalty, and love. Yet het women, who feed, clothe, clean for, fuck, love and support those murderers and rapists, are considered "loving, natural, open and **womanly**," instead of being accurately perceived as the Lesbian-hating, female-hating collaborators they really are. Meanwhile, Lesbians who dare to challenge het women's hatred towards us are called "woman-hating" – the tired lie of reverse discrimination.

The world we live in calls hatred and cruelty "love"; it calls courage and wit "cruelty." Lesbians, especially Butches, are set up by men to be the universal scapegoats for male crime. All this should make it clearer why we are stereotyped as harsh, cruel, mean, etc. Stereotypes should always be analysed to find out who they profit – then we find out why the stereotype exists. That process is more important than picking apart every individual component of each stereotype. Once we grasp why it exists, the entire body of lies automatically loses credibility. So whenever a Fem is tempted to treat a Butch as the stereotype, she should realise that, whether she wants to or not, she is doing it on men's behalf. Hopefully that will make it clear to her that she must stop. **If she refuses to stop oppressing Butches because she doesn't want her own Fem privilege to be threatened, she should realise that her actions are ultimately supporting men to go on abusing her, herself.**

Lesbophobic Lesbians – those who have not challenged their internalised anti-Lesbian attitudes, are less able to be emotionally open and intimate with other Lesbians, because of the fear that lesbophobia causes. This is as true of any Fem as it is for a Butch, and can be more so, because the more Fem a Lesbian is, or the more het-identified, the more lesbophobic she will be. Real intimacy with a Dyke friend or lover requires deep acknowledgment and acceptance of, and pride in, one's Lesbianism and the Lesbianism of one's friend or lover. To remain lesbophobic is to leave in place barriers to intimacy that no amount of therapy or drugs can ever get rid of. Only Lesbian-identified political thinking, support, work, and really caring about other Dykes will ever remove those barriers.

Endnotes

- ¹ We use the term *Dyke* for both Fem and Butch Lesbians. However, it's important to remember that *Dyke* used to be applied only to Butches.
- ² Since Ruston is a Dyke Separatist of Aotearoa (New Zealand), we use New Zealand spelling in this article. Dykes of Aotearoa and other Pacific Nations have little visibility in Northern Hemisphere Lesbian publications. Hopefully our decision will begin to right that imbalance.
- ³ Since *Femme* is the French word for woman, we use the spelling *Fem*. We consider it insulting and conferring a false sense of normality to call any Lesbian a woman. *Fem* will also hopefully be less jarring to French-speaking readers. (Because of French imperialism, French is widely understood throughout the world.)
- ⁴ Although it is not a satisfactory term, we use *female* to mean our gender. *Female* does not have the same meaning as *woman*, which is a man-made social construction; also, *female* is not age specific.
- ⁵ For clarity, we use *they* instead of the more accurate we when referring to Butches and Dyke-identified Fems. We belong to both groups.
- ⁶ When we use the term *power* in this article, we are talking about the power to oppress, derived from privilege. Ideally, all Dykes should have increasing Personal power as we fight lesbophobia. That is, true or inner power, and not the kind based on someone else's pain and oppression.
- ⁷ Remember *S.C.U.M. Manifesto* and Valerie Solanis's brilliant, witty description of this male deception and het women's collaboration?
- ⁸ Recently there was a news story about a woman who pressured her daughter to not report the mother's boyfriend for raping the daughter. The man was convicted, but the mother still defends him and was crying as he was taken to prison. (Now what will she do to her daughter?) Such stories are numerous. We have a friend who plans to testify in court to prevent her brother from continuing to rape his baby daughter. This so angered our friend's mother (renowned as a feminist in her community) that she told her daughter, "I wish you'd never been born," thus betraying both her daughter and granddaughter in her effort to protect her rapist son.
- ⁹ Wilson Key, *Media Sexploitation* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976), pp. 24-26.
- ¹⁰ Who else but male-identified women would also pressure their daughters to be unnaturally weak? Four-fifths of fourth-grade girls in the U.S. are now on diets, according to *Time Magazine*, January 20, 1986. Thus a new generation of even smaller, more controllable females are being formed. (Fourth-grade girls are eight and nine years old.)
- ¹¹ In Aotearoa, Old Dyke culture refers to Fems who don't make love to their lovers as "flat-on-their-back-fairies." (*Fairy* is a New Zealand word for *Fem*.)

Found Goddesses*

as revealed to
Morgan Grey and Julia Penelope

Introduction

Once upon a time, not very long ago, a Witch and a Linguist lived in extreme circumstances called Lincoln, Nebraska. As it happened, the Witch (Morgan) knew something of the Craft of Language and the Linguist (Julia) knew something of the Craft of Magic. Both believed in the generation of new realities through radical transformations. One day, they found themselves in a carload of dykes circling a parking lot for the umpteenth time (not a magic number!) when one of the dykes remarked that we really needed a goddess of parking lots. "Yeah!" everyone agreed enthusiastically. No sooner had this chorus subsided than a car pulled out and we were able to park. The conversation ended as the dykes scrambled out of the car, but the Idea was in the air. A dyke had voiced her desire; the world had changed.

The Witch had become disillusioned with the focus among women's spirituality groups with "lost goddesses." After several years of studying lost goddesses, talking about lost goddesses, teaching classes about lost goddesses, the Witch began to feel that these lost goddesses, while interesting, had no real bearing on her life as a lesbian in the latter part of the twentieth century. Those goddesses were defined mostly through their relationships with men and gods, even in feminist writing that tried to re-create older, less male-centered myths, and most of them weren't Lesbian-identified. Furthermore, not a one of them had ever tried to find a parking space in Manhattan, or wondered what to bring to a potluck.

The Linguist, on the other hand, had not shown one iota of interest in "lost goddesses," with the possible exception of Eris, the Discordian goddess of chaos.

* Excerpted from *The Book of Found Goddesses, from Asphalta to Vulva, as revealed to Morgan Grey and Julia Penelope*, to be published 1987.

She was into fun and nonsense, being a dyke in the latter part of the twentieth century, and figuring out how we can use language to create a reality that's more comfortable for us.

And so, the Witch and the Linguist got together, and started playing with the idea of creating our own FOUND goddesses, goddesses who not only respond to the specific needs of 20th century dykes but whose NAMING calls into being a reality grounded in the will and gynergy of dyke envisioning. We had a lot of laughs and a lot of help. We had a lot of fun working together and brainstorming Found Goddesses with all our friends all over the place. Then we started finding parking spaces with noticeable regularity, money appeared when we needed it the most, and we knew that our naming and invocation really were making a new reality immediate and visible in our lives. Linguists and Witches both, after all, practice the ways language can be manipulated to create and alter the world as we perceive it. What we conceive we name, and the naming makes it so. Our experience with these goddesses has been an empowering one, perhaps because we've had so much fun. Hail, Hilaria!

It is in the spirit of fun and love of lesbians that we offer you these, a sample of our found goddesses. Play with them, discover their secrets. If you don't like our goddesses or don't find one that you've been looking for, make up your own. We did. However you respond to these goddesses, finding and naming those that reflect your experience is an active exploration. We can't sit around and wait for our goddesses to find us! We need the creative imaginings of all dykes in our lives. Transforming reality through visioning is the essence of Wicca. Share your dis-coveries and re-searches with us. We'd love to hear what you find. So mote it be!

Anima

ANIMA is the goddess who gives us paws in the busy-ness of our daily lives, renewing our spirits, so that we may rise above the litter scattered within our minds. It is She who watches over the connections Lesbians share with animals of all types, both those who live with Lesbian companions and those who live apart. The devout are said to eat only the small cookies blessed by ANIMA's priestesses, appropriately called Anima Crackers. So rigorous is this regimen that some have been known to go Crackers, entering into a state of permanent bliss.

Lesbians, especially Healers, have long been known for their connections with animals. While traditional wisdom links Lesbians with cats, for many of us live with one or several cat companions, it is also true that many Lesbians form strong ties with animals of all species: dogs, goats, rabbits, birds, fish, snakes, lizards, spiders, gerbils, and turtles, but especially those that share with us the Lesbian reproductive process known as Parthenogenesis. So widespread is the worship of ANIMA that covens devoted to Her worship, sometimes called "teams," bear the names of Her beloved companions: the Wildcats, Cubs, Tigers,

Lions, Dolphins, Redbirds, etc. Those touched by the love of ANIMA are recognized by their animal spirits, and often experience a trance called Animation, during which they come within a whisker of melting into Her Be-ing.

ANIMA is known by many names in many aspects. As FELINA she teaches us the ways of true luxury and the abandon of playfulness, and in this aspect may be familiarly addressed as "Kitty, Kitty." It's not unusual late at night to hear devotees of FELINA walking the streets calling out, "Here Kitty, Kitty," for She loves the cover of night and the darkness, often retiring to Catacombs for Her naps. She is particularly fond of shag rugs and soft pillows, especially in the sunlight, and Her followers often make pilgrimages to Catalina in order to catch the rays. These devout are sometimes called "Crispy Critters" when they indulge too much in such observances. One of Her most popular rituals is called The Catnap. Awakened abruptly from one of these rituals, She has been known to go into Catnaption Fits, hurling hairballs in every direction. Those struck by these missiles are said to be "Hair Today, Goon Tomorrow."

From Her we learn to remain watchful in rest, and to move quickly from deep sleep to full alertness in danger. Her priestesses, widely known for their inscrutable wisdom, are often said to be "catty," a psychic state induced by one of the herbs sacred to CHEMIA, known to initiates as Catnip. These adepts, who, it is said, have grasped the mysteries of Cataclysms and Catalytic converters, weary of the world and retire to temples of meditation called Cathouses.

Her most favored devotees can be recognized by the dusty paw prints that adorn their cars, and the many tiny scars they bear proudly on their hands and arms, which, they say, are earned in observances called Cat Fights, which the mousey avoid because of their Animosity. In Her ferocious appearances, FELINA is shown with arched back and raised tail, a stance often adopted by Her worshippers during Catastrophes. Objects sacred to this aspect of ANIMA include catamarrans, catalysts, and Her rituals are said to be most successful if observed in a grove of catalpas. Incantations to FELINA, Catcalls, are used to invoke Her for tranquility or rage, depending on the need of the devotee.

To call upon FELINA in a meditative mood, the following incantation is said to be purrfect:

Felina, Felina, don't be a tease,
Come lull me, lull me, my purrpose is peace.

Felina, wise fur purrson, I ask you:
Bless me with calm, this I know you can do.

Some thearists have suggested that a ritual now sacred to UMPIRA was originally linked to the worship of FELINA because of her love of playfully

batting balls about, but the doubtful insist that more fieldwork must be done before such a connection can be asserted. Others perceive an ancient relationship between FELINA and CHOCOLATA in the fat, bearded statues sometimes referred to as "Santa Claws."

Followers of other aspects of ANIMA, such as the toothsome CANINA, enjoy subjects and objects they can "sink their teeth into" and "chew on," and are known for their love of ideas and lengthy analysis. It is said they are dogged in this pursuit, and one of their rituals begins when a participant says, "I have a Bone to pick."

It has been suggested that CANINA, in fact, may have been a friend or lover of VISCERA, an intimacy still celebrated in observances during which emotions are unleashed and run wild, called Puppy Love. In this state of Anima Magnetism the celebrants are mysteriously drawn to one another, and much Heavy Petting is said to go on. So intense are these rituals, which can last for weeks, that devotees have been known to emerge from them dog-eared and dog-tired. Offerings to CANINA, called Scraps, or Dogma, are carried about in paper containers, known to the devout as Doggie Bags. One adept priestess has invented a machine for processing these Scraps, the Dogmatic, which is started by pushing buttons. Once the offerings to CANINA have been prepared dogmatically, they are woofed down. Rituals to CANINA are most successful when performed during that season sacred to Her, the Dog Days, or within a grove of Her beloved Dogwood trees. The devout are said to howl blissfully for hours when the Moon is at Her fullness. Few stray.

Virtually every city or town has at least one temple to ANIMA, called the "Humane Society" (why, we don't know) or the "Anima Shelter," where the creatures sacred to Her are given care until they pick out a Lesbian companion suitable to them. Should you wish to become a companion to ANIMA's chosen, particularly those called the Paws that Refresh, you must visit one of these temples frequently, no matter how far you have to go, making the appropriate cooing and cuddling noises that attract her favor. Eventually, one (or more!) of Her creatures will choose you and come to live with you, for a small cash offering. The Sign of your Choosing will be a Lick and a Promise, Blessed ANIMA!

Asphalta

ASPHALTA, goddess of all roads, streets, and highways, and guardian of those who travel on them, is best known for her miraculous powers of finding parking places. The formal Parking Place Invocation to ASPHALTA, chanted by Her devotees around the world, and never known to fail when sincerely uttered, even in impossible-to-park-in cities like New York and Montreal, is

Hail Asphalta, full of grace:
Help me find a parking place.

This invocation should be intoned at least two blocks before you want a parking place, but it has been known to work on very short notice. A brief version of the invocation, developed by followers of ASPHALTA in Chicago, "Asphalta, do Your Thing," has also proven to be effective. In the event ASPHALTA has created an ideal parking place for you and some rude motorist is attempting to take it away from you, chant the protective spell,

Hail, Asphalta, full of grace:
Keep that pud out of my space.

Asphalta is one of the most widely-worshipped of all modern found goddesses. Her highways and streets form complex intersecting webs which join her many thousands of temples and shrines, and connect the lives of Lesbians. Her major temples are located wherever road construction is underway, and are attended by her high priestesses, who usually wear jeans or overalls, boots, hardhats, and colorful scarves or handkerchiefs about their necks or heads, as well as vestments of her sacred color, day-glo orange. They often carry flags or signs as symbols of their high office. All motorists slow down when passing through one of Asphalta's Sacred Places, and stop when instructed to do so by a priestess, who should always be addressed as "Most Esteemed Flagwomon." Failure to heed the signals of a priestess has been known to have fatal consequences, but those especially cherished by Asphalta may be given the Sacred Baton to pass to a traveler going in the opposite direction. The ritual of Passing the Sacred Baton symbolizes the diversity of our paths.

Asphalta's shrines, marked by heaps of concrete and asphalt left after a temple has moved, are usually unattended and visited by Her most devoted followers, who sometimes wear a relic from one of these places, a small crystal of asphalt, in a bright orange bag with a yellow cord, around their necks or hanging from the rearview mirror of their car. These relics are said to have great powers, and will guarantee safe passage from one place to another. Especially renowned for their shifting powers are the rare Asphalta crystals that have part of the Yellow Line in their matrix, and these are much sought after by frequent travelers. The Yellow Line is widely held to represent the Order of Society and Social Contracts. For this reason, many thearists suspect that Asphalta is actually a major goddess whose influence extends far beyond roads and travel. Indeed, her intersecting webs connect all that is.

INTERSTATIA is one of ASPHALTA's best-known aspects, although each town and city has its own names for this deity. She sometimes appears as Toll Road or Tollway, and is reputed to be both convenient and expensive, for, at varying distances from each other, one will find small shrines to ASPHALTA. It is said that making an offering to a priestess at one of these shrines, called Toll Booths, insures the traveler's safe passage from one shrine to the next. Some devotees, anxious to travel as quickly as possible from one point to another, are known to

buy Monthly Books of coupons, which they use as offerings. INTERSTATIA's symbol is the Cloverleaf, and many report exceptional effects when MOOLA-MOOLA's favorite color, green, is combined with the Cloverleaf and worn as an amulet.

Gettuffa

GETTUFFA is Our-Goddess-of-Self-Defense, She-Who-Kicks-Quick, and She is known for Her proud stance and wide stride. She moves through time in split-seconds, be-ing neither Her nor There yet always Wherever, Whenever, a dyke calls upon Her in anger or distress. It is Her Name we call when men harass us on the street or at work, in any circumstances in which we feel threatened with violence or harm, physical or emotional. Because GETTUFFA is often invoked at the Last Minute when time is short, many devotees use a clipped (or chopped) form of Her Name, TUFFA, for these syllables slip easily through clenched teeth, erupting in sharp grunts and harsh gasps:

TUFFA, TUFFA, chop, block, leap!
Help me decimate this creep.

TUFFA supports us in our struggles to become strong and swift, and She is frequently worshipped in dojos and womyn's self-defense classes, where initiates learn the mysteries of Sparring and Blocking. Her devotees are much given to cries and howls, noises cherished by EVACUA, as they whirl and spin. She may be invoked in any of Her several aspects, Karate, Tae Kwon Do, Tai Chi, and Judo, and Her observances are called the Martial Arts. Because these offensive and defensive rituals are often performed on floor coverings called "mats," GETTUFFA's hair is reputed to be so matted that it resembles a tangle of angry snakes. It is said she rejoices in the flowing sweat that drenches the bodies of the Exerted, for she who works out becomes a Tuff Dyke, capable of defending herself against those who would do her harm.

Because dykes live surrounded by danger, GETTUFFA responds readily to a variety of invocations, from the thoughtfully elaborate to the tersely immediate.

Come, GETTUFFA, let my aim be true:
This prick's preying days are through!

Hey GETTUFFA! I'm being hounded;
When I fight back, they'll be confounded!

Because it is She who encourages us to act in situations of danger, some invocations are more strenuous than others. When threatened and outnumbered, some Tuff Dykes quickly cry out:

Jab and Poke! Stab and Chop!
Kick the pricks till they drop!

One Tuff Dyke chant, said to be particularly effective when intoned in a threatening, throaty snarl by a group of Lesbians has been known to drive men from the streets. Its simplicity strikes at the source of male presumption. As you walk down the street, chant loudly and repeatedly.

Wither and fall off,
Wither and fall off,
Wither and fall off,
Etc., etc., etc.

On and on. "They" will know exactly what you mean! This invocation to GETTUFFA was once known far and wide, but seems to have fallen into disuse in these latter days as righteous anger has been suppressed and denied. One of the fiercest aspects of GETTUFFA, KILLAMAN, is all but lost to us, but our strenuous researching re-vealed one of Her most powerful invocations:

KILLAMAN, KILLAMAN! Spirit of Frenzy,
Stand beside me, rise within me!

A protective spell, said to surround the Tuff Dyke with an angry aura guaranteed to frighten any presumptuous male, can be addressed directly to the wrong-doer who is threatening you:

I'll Gettuffa and say it true:
I don't want to deal with you.

A strong stance and a can of mace is also helpful. GETTUFFA!

Rotunda

ROTUNDA, the Folded One, is widely worshipped, especially by Her Chosen, the Fat Dykes, who follow Her round-about paths and circumlocutions. She is a kind and generous goddess, lavishly bestowing Herself amid the rolls and folds of Her devotees. On those She enfolds, Her blessings are called "Love Handles," for their esoteric uses in the rituals sacred to VULVA. Her priestesses are reputed to be among the most well-rounded dykes found anywhere, and they are called Zaftig.

Some authorities say there is mounting evidence of Lesbians hostile to ROTUNDA's magnificence, and they cite rumors of clandestine meetings, called

Cambridge Diets, where Lesbians starve themselves for affection. Others mention dykes possessed by male values who succumb to Anorexia and Bulimia, wasting themselves in cruel practices that leave them fat-free. Indeed, we have heard stories of some Lesbians so fearful of ROTUNDA that they are ever pursued by the demons of Weight Watchers, who are much given to the vile ritual of counting Calories, for they aspire to weightlessness.

ROTUNDA heartily approves of full-bodied invocations, and finds most appetizing those who approach Her with guttural rumblings and largess. As the number of Her devotees continues to expand, so, too, do the invocations known to appeal to Her taste. Tired of being the lightest witch in your coven? Call upon ROTUNDA to increase your weight.


ROTUNDA, ROTUNDA, the Wise, the Free,
Please make me fat. Hear my plea!

Or, in extreme cases of underweight, ROTUNDA's generous proportions can be sought by the following invocation:

ROTUNDA, I'm sick of being thin.
I'd rather be fat than bones and skin!

She does not appear to respond to thin or reedy voices, and terms like "roly-poly," "chubby," or "obese" displease her.

ROTUNDA, it should be noted, abhors the sickly aftertaste of Diet Sodas, for these are consumed in great quantities by the followers of the false goddesses, Jane Fonda and Crystal Light. No one dares step light 'n' lively at Her observances, for She attends only to the weighty tread of the elegantly fat, and cherishes their bouncing breasts and generous flesh.



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Chain Letter Massacre

Judy Freespirit

Last night when I opened my mailbox I found an envelope containing three things, a chain letter and two notes encouraging me to participate in the chain. The first note was handwritten on one of those small pieces of yellow note paper with sticky stuff across the top. It read:

Judy, Will you put those famous great hands to work on this energy circle? Seems like there's everything to gain and not much to lose . . . All women keeping it going can't help but make it happen . . . Hope you do it.

By the time I had finished reading the note the hairs on the back of my neck were standing straight out. I decided to read the xeroxed, hand written letter from K and her lover M just the same. After all, don't I owe something to a woman I've worked with on various projects over a period of years? It read:

What are the chances of earning, saving or being given enough money to buy a recreational vehicle . . . especially one which could accommodate two headstrong women, each with her very separate needs and wanting to travel together?

Where is all this leading? Am I being asked to chip in so they can buy a new van?

When we got this letter we wanted to send it back rather than open in our hearts to believe it could work for us, but the enthusiasm of the woman who gave it to us – the fact that her hopes were high and her energy strong for the goal, made us change our minds.

Why are they telling me all this? Are they assuming (and rightly so) that I want to send back the letter? Are they trying to shame me into conformity?

This letter is already working! The dollars we sent are already in the mail.

If I want to keep up with them I'll have to get my act together.

This letter is for the empowerment of women only. We can use this form to raise money for our own goals.

How rare. I'm being given an opportunity not available to men. How can I refuse under the circumstances?

We've decided that, as lesbians, we deserve to have a vacation vehicle so we can enjoy our leisure time rather than give in to a world which would prefer that we fragment ourselves.

I can't argue with that.

We went through our address books and chose the friends who were most likely to keep the positive energy in this letter-chain unbroken. That's you!

Oh boy, once again I'm one of the chosen people. Why couldn't they choose someone else for once?*

If you don't want to do this (our resistance was strong) call us and tell us or send it back quickly.

You must in turn choose women who will feel good about continuing this letter.

I don't feel good about continuing this letter and I certainly don't intend to go looking for someone to send it to.

Feel your intentions and convey your energy as we have done to those you send it to -

May we all benefit from our combined woman energy!

* Not an original joke but I couldn't resist.

The typewritten chain letter was familiar. I've had a half dozen or so of them in the past few years. It began:

**TO THE WOMEN FRIENDS IN MY LIFE
WHO KNOW HOW TO DREAM AND CREATE THEIR OWN REALITY**

Then it goes on to say that So-and-So has sent these "prompt LEGAL letters four times in the last year. The first time she received \$10,000 and the other times around \$7,000. If this letter continues as it should everyone profits."

The letter continues for a whole page, telling me to wrap \$1.00 in a blank piece of paper. I am then to send that dollar to the first person on the list of four names which is at the bottom of the page, and then I am to remove the first name and add mine to the bottom of the list and then send the corrected list to 10 women who I consider "doers". The letter ends with:

Mail it to 10 friends within 48 hours. You will be surprised at the results.

P.S. THIS IS AN ALL WOMAN'S LETTER

Ordinarily I would have thrown it away. It's usually not worth the trouble to argue with people who want to believe that chain letters are going to make them rich. They just respond with, "You have such a negative attitude," or "If I don't get any money from this it will be because of people like you."

I'm angry about the chain letter, but even angrier about the guilt tripping letters sent with it. This time I won't just throw it away. This time I'll write a response and from now on anyone who sends me a chain letter (if they should dare) will get this essay. Here goes.

2.4 Billion Arguments for the Elimination of Chain Letters

A few years ago I worked with a woman who got involved in a chain letter. She was all excited because she was sure she was going to get rich. She talked about it for days and spent a lot of time retyping the letter, sending it to friends and relatives, worrying about whether or not she had sent it to the "right people," and anxiously waiting for the money to come rolling in. She would talk about it to anyone who would listen. If someone said something negative or even questioned her enthusiasm, they were discounted as pessimists. She went on and on about how people who didn't think that chain letters work were just negative, faithless and foolish.

A month later I asked how much she had made. She didn't want to talk about it. When I pressed her she told me she had gotten back \$7.00. She was busy and didn't want to discuss it.

My friend was denying that she had been duped. Denial is common behavior among people who have been victimized as any bunko cop or bunko artist will tell you. That's why they're both still in business.

Let's look at the facts instead of talking about the fantasies for a minute. There is no way my co-worker could have made much if any money and here's why. Chain letters are based on the form of a pyramid, and at times have been called pyramid letters or pyramid clubs. The pyramid starts out small at the top and

May 1984

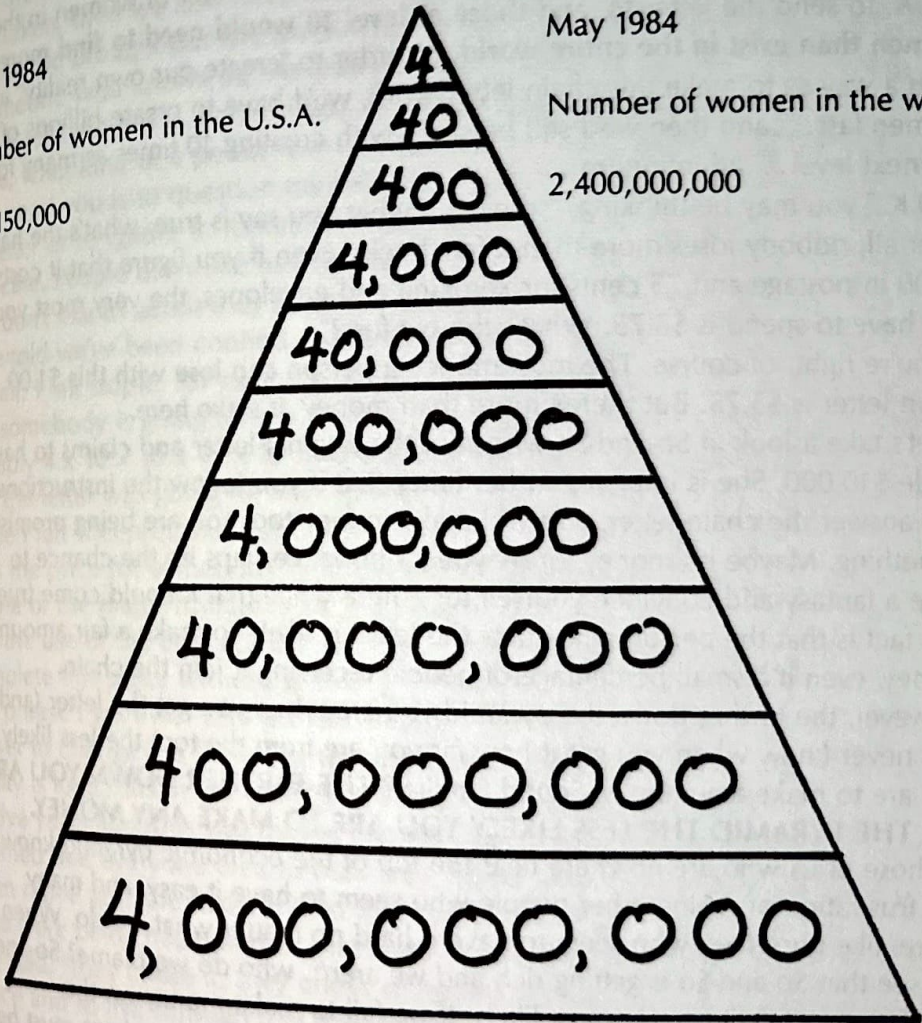
Number of women in the U.S.A.

118,150,000

May 1984

Number of women in the world

2,400,000,000



becomes geometrically larger at each step. The letter I received, for example, had started out with four names. Each of these four women sent it to 10 others who supposedly had each sent it to 10 more. In other words, 4 women, sent it to 40 women who sent it to 400 women. On level 3, then, we have 400 women who need to find 4,000 different women to send the letter to. On level 4, which probably takes place 3 or 4 weeks after the mailing of the first letters, we now

have 4,000 women who need to find 40,000 women at level 5 to send the letter to. Are you with me so far? Getting tougher, isn't it? And if you think that's hard, where do you suppose they will find 400,000 women to send the letter to? **AT THE POINT WHERE 40,000 WOMEN NEED TO GET 400,000 WE'RE ONLY AT LEVEL EIGHT OF THE PYRAMID!**

According to the May 8, 1984 edition of the San Francisco Examiner there are approximately one hundred eighteen million one hundred fifty thousand women (118,150,000) in the U.S., and 2.4 billion (2,400,000,000) in the world.** Women at level eight would have to find twice the number of women in the U.S.A. to send the letter to, and **those at level 10 would need to find more women than exist in the entire world.** In order to "create our own reality" in such a way as to make this chain letter work, we'd have to create billions of women fast. . .and then we'd still be stuck with creating 10 times as many for the next level. . .ad infinitum.

"O.K.," you may be thinking, "so even if what you say is true, what's the harm? After all, nobody loses more than a few bucks. Even if you figure that it costs \$2.00 in postage and 75 cents for xeroxing and envelopes, the very most you will have to spend is \$3.75. What's the big fuss?"

You're right, of course. The most money a person can lose with this \$1.00 chain letter is \$3.75. But there's more than money at stake here.

Let's take a look at So-and-So who sent the original letter and claims to have made \$10,000. She is implying in her letter that if you follow the instructions and answer the chain letter, you will make money too. You are being promised something. Maybe it's money, or maybe it's hope. Perhaps it's the chance to have a fantasy and convince yourself for a little while that it could come true. The fact is that the person who starts the letter is likely to make a fair amount of money, even if a small percentage of people receiving it join the chain. However, the further down the pyramid you are when you get the letter (and you never know when you get it how far you are from the top) the less likely you are to make any money. Sound familiar? **THE FARTHER DOWN YOU ARE ON THE PYRAMID THE LESS LIKELY YOU ARE TO MAKE ANY MONEY.**

Those of us who are nowhere near the top of the economic pyramid know the frustration of seeing other people who seem to have it easy, and many more, like ourselves, who seem to have it hard no matter what we do. When we see that So-and-So is getting rich and we aren't, who do we blame? So-and-So? The system? Ourselves most likely. If we fail to make money on the letter, the letter has told us through a "friend" who sent it to us, *there must be something wrong with us.* We failed where others succeeded. And if it wasn't we who failed, then it must have been the people to whom we sent the letter.

** I got these figures by taking the total U.S. and world populations and dividing by two.

They were not following through. They did not have faith. They were failures and dragged us down with them in their resistance. So we are made to feel like failures when there was no way we could have won in the first place since we did not start the chain. Only those who start the chains can win – at the expense of thousands of people down the line.

A chain letter is a con. It's hard to admit, even to ourselves that we've been taken, so we're likely to try to forget the whole thing when we realize we've been tricked. That's what the con is counting on. If we recognize that we've been taken, then we also have to acknowledge that we are doubly responsible because we brought our friends into the process. When we send a chain letter to someone who knows us, we lend our name to it and give it credibility. After all, if K tells me this is a good thing and I will be helping her and her lover get a house, what kind of a person am I if I question it? To question the chain letter that I send you is to question my integrity. So, it's easier to either participate in the letter or to ignore it. It's really risky, however, to confront a chain letter advocate. People don't like having their fantasies dashed by their friends. And they don't like to admit they've been made fools of. It makes us defensive when we're told we've been conned, and that we are enmeshing our friends in the net as well. I felt stupid, for example, when I realized that in order to understand that somebody is going to lose somewhere down the line, all I had to do was multiply $4 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10$ and I would have seen that there was no way the letter was going to work forever. When someone first pointed this out to me I felt sheepish, but I also knew it was true. Somebody, somewhere always pays the price for somebody near the top making a profit.

One of the major irritations for me about the specific chain letter I received was the use of the concept that we can "create our own reality." I cannot complete this piece without speaking my mind on that topic. Every time I hear this phrase I get livid. Let's get this straight right now. To some degree we have power to change our lives, but to say we have total power to create our own reality is ludicrous in the extreme. I remember having an argument about twelve years ago (this was during the Viet Nam War) with a woman who claimed that everyone creates their own reality. She was telling me that she had been raped and she had decided that she had created it. I asked her if babies who were being napalmed in Viet Nam had also created their own reality. "Yes," she said, "they chose it, they chose to be born to those parents in that time and place and to live through that experience." This type of "blame the victim" attitude keeps people down rather than empowering them. It serves the people who are on top and keeps those who are on the bottom in their place. Who do you suppose invented such a concept anyway?

Let's get back to the issue of the chain letter. The one I received claimed to be legal. I don't know if that's true, but I do know one thing – **it's immoral.** It gives false hope. It involves people in something that is based on a lie: **the lie that you will get something for nothing and that nobody will be hurt.** It

does not tell you that if somebody who is farther down the pyramid than you sends you a dollar and they don't get anything back for their trouble you are getting it from them under false pretenses. If you read carefully you will see that the letter doesn't actually promise you anything, it just says you'll be surprised at the results. It only implies that you *might* get a lot of money if you send the chain letter to the *right* people. If it falls, it's on your head.

If the chain letter is a hoax, a con and a trick, what can we say of the chain letter designated "for women only" except that it's a con and a trick on women? And why would someone initiate this? My guess is that someone who was aware of the need some of us have to have women only space simply put it out as a new twist on an old game. It is just another way of exploiting our need to have something of our own. Our "sisters" (if indeed it was sisters who started this letter) are using our special situation to make a profit on us. They are turning our needs against us and then expecting us to be unthinking and subject to knee jerk responses to slogans. And the sad thing is that some of us are taken in.

Why do we so willingly accept what we are being told without question just because it is labelled "for women only"? There are many reasons why lesbians and other oppressed minorities may get caught up in chain letters and other easy money schemes. Most of us are hard put to get our needs met. We often have to struggle just to subsist, never mind trying to get a few luxuries. We live in a society that shows us "the good life" everywhere we look, in magazines and newspapers, on billboards, TV and movie screens. Everywhere we see people who seem to be enjoying the things we find out of our reach, like a new refrigerator, a vacation, a car or a house. It makes sense that we would want to believe that there is any easy way to get our wishes. We're tempted to think that by simply wanting something, concentrating hard on it, saying a few hundred affirmations, and sending out a few letters and we too can have the things we want.

It is for this reason that many of us gamble, even knowing the odds are against us. We want to be winners. We want to believe that somehow our luck will change and we will be able to "make it big." When gambling for money in a poker game, or slot machine or craps table there is some chance we will win and a much greater chance that we will lose. However, when we gamble it is with the understanding that there are certain odds to the game. We may or may not choose to take our chances at winning or losing. With a con, e.g., a chain letter, nobody but the con has a chance to win.

So there's the problem. We don't get what we want and need and we are searching for ways to get some comfort in our lives. And I'm telling you to give up hope in the fantasy of an easy solution. What do I have to offer you in its place? Not much. Just the suggestion that before we can solve our problems we have to stop fooling ourselves.

Before we can change our material conditions we have to look closely at what they really are and what we really need. Then we need to find out who and what is keeping us from getting it. We should be looking at who's profiting from our situation and who's being kept down, then do something to change that. It's not enough to dream and think our dreams will come true just because we want them to. The first step is to have the dream. The next is to ask the questions that will get the answers as to how to attain the dream. And finally we need to find ways to take the actions that will change the conditions that are keeping us down.

Chain letters and their ilk are individual solutions to larger social and political problems. They solve nothing. Only when people join together to change oppressive institutions which hold us down will we be able to regain our full sense of our own power. We have the ability to improve our lives. Let's begin by breaking the chains.

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Heteropatriarchal Semantics: Just Two Kinds of People in the World*

Julia Penelope

Introduction

After struggling for most of this year with an essay I'm calling "The High Cost of Femininity," (my own effort to deal with the issue of "Lesbian femininity"), I read the responses by Paula Mariedaughter and Mary Crane (in *Lesbian Ethics* 2:1) to Linda Strega's essay, "The Big Sell-Out: Lesbian Femininity" (*Lesbian Ethics* 1:3), with increasing dismay. I couldn't imagine why any Lesbian would defend "femmeness," as Mariedaughter did, or attack "butches" as Crane did.

I don't understand why Lesbians feel so **comfortable**, so "right" with themselves, when they justify Lesbian "femininity" or attack Lesbian "masculinity." I have trouble listening to Lesbians who use these words as though they are **meaningful** in a Lesbian context, because both *femininity* and *masculinity* are heteropatriarchal (HP) terms that set limits on what is "acceptable," "permissible" appearance and behavior for females, Lesbians included. Heteropatriarchal semantics (HS) equates femininity with femaleness and masculinity with maleness, as though behaviors and personality traits were determined by biological sex. On the basis of that equation, HP values femininity in females and masculinity in males. Only feminine females are considered "good" in HP.

At the same time what is labeled "masculinity" is held up to us as the ideal of what it means to be "human," so the female who embraces the femininity

* I'm grateful to Jeanette Silveira for creating a journal where this discussion can take place, to Linda Strega and Bev Jo for their support, encouragement, and critical comments on an early version of this essay, and for on-going analysis, to Sorca O'Connor and Catheryn Edwards for a stimulating luncheon debate that clarified for me what I was trying to say, and to Sarah Valentine for reading and re-reading this essay during each phase of its development.

forced on her by HP is, by definition, less than "human," **sub-human**. Femininity is made to seem attractive because females who act "like a man" are deviant, and, therefore, "bad." There's no way for a female to live by the rules of HP and be considered "good." Lesbians who are committed to personal and social change must not only rid ourselves of the HS dichotomy, but the HP misogyny that values femininity as a female attribute.

The real issue, it seems to me, as opposed to the areal way it's usually framed, is: what does it mean to be a Lesbian in a Lesbian context? That discussion must begin, I think, by identifying how Lesbians **differ** from everyone else and acknowledging that our oppression is based on that difference. Just as Blacks begin to establish their identity as distinct from their white oppressors, as Native Americans identify themselves in opposition to the white men who seek to eradicate them, so Lesbians must make our difference the focus of our identity; it is, after all, the reason we're outcasts. We cannot ignore the heteropatriarchy or its values anymore than we can pretend that we weren't born into, raised, and live in HP, and the fact that many of our ideas and assumptions are heteropatriarchal in origin.

These facts form the crux of the debate between Strega and Crane and Strega and Mariedaughter. The issue in a Lesbian context has two parts: Which values, assumptions, and attitudes are heteropatriarchal, and which are Lesbian? We are arguing in order to define Lesbian identity: What does it mean to be a Lesbian, live as a Lesbian, **think** as a Lesbian, **in a Lesbian context?** so we have to begin by identifying our difference from heterosexuals and making our deviance the core of our identity. Then, because we each have different experiences and backgrounds, we have to name and acknowledge the HP assumptions and values we bring with us into a Lesbian context. We must do this before we can begin to struggle to rid ourselves of the HP elements that divide us from one another. We have to own those attitudes of HP we still possess before we can unlearn them. White Lesbians unlearning our internalized racism is a good example of this process; ageism is another. Linda Strega has named and acknowledged Lesbian femininity as an aspect of HP she's struggling to unlearn, and she has shared her own process and insights with other Lesbians.

I, for one, don't believe that femininity can be positively valued in a Lesbian context, and I hope to persuade other Lesbians that Linda Strega's analysis is essentially accurate in the pages that follow.

Identifying the Problem

As I pondered Mariedaughter's and Crane's responses, I realized that both Lesbians had read and interpreted Strega's analysis as though they had understood what she was saying. Crane, offended by Strega's use of *butch* to refer to a Lesbian with a developed political consciousness, hastened to remind us that there are misogynistic butches, neglecting to acknowledge that Lesbian

femininity is a type of misogyny, while Mariedaughter's defense of her "femininity" ignored Strega's analysis of the privilege feminine Lesbians gain because they're "more normal" than nonfeminine Lesbians. In her own way, each Lesbian placed herself outside the conceptual framework in which Strega was writing. Apparently, they could not, did not, hear what she was trying to say.

It's time that someone said this, and it's going to be me. Lesbians are divided from each other by the descriptions of "the world" we accept as valid and accurate. Many of our differences can be traced to the degree of our belief in the version of reality HP presents to us. Some Lesbians believe that the HP description of reality is essentially accurate, while others believe that it's utterly false. Some Lesbians accept portions of HP reality that other Lesbians have rejected. Our commitment to the assumptions of HP is reflected in the ways we use English.

Our experience with acquiring a first language deceives us into believing that there is a single reality, the one encoded and described to us by that language. Many U.S. Lesbians learned English as our first language and, with it, the U.S. version of reality. English, like any language, describes the version of reality preferred by the majority of speakers in a society, and forces us to accept the reality agreed upon by those speakers. The United States is a heteropatriarchal society, a culture that assumes that heterosexuality is "natural," that male dominance is "natural," and that female subordination is "natural," and English provides its speakers with ways of expressing these assumptions as though they were incontrovertible facts. The words *masculine* and *feminine* exist only because they express concepts essential to the maintenance of HP reality. But the existence and continual use of these words doesn't mean that they denote "real" or actual things.

The English language is a grid, a conceptual frame, that a society imposes on the experience and perceptions of its speakers. There are ways of getting around that grid, ways of expressing values and perceptions not validated by the culture, but that takes work and thought that most people are unwilling to invest in talking and writing. As long as a Lesbian uses words sanctioned, supported, and accepted by heteropatriarchal (HP) culture, she risks being understood and interpreted within the limits of the reality described by English. To imagine that we can use English and totally avoid its HP assumptions is a delusion that's especially dangerous for Lesbians.

Lesbian speakers have a "semantic problem," but it isn't one of our own creation. It was imposed on us when we learned to think and talk in English. (I don't think dialect makes a difference here.) I'm aware that lots of disfunctional communication in the HP is swept under the rug with comments like "It's **just** a semantic problem," "It's only a question of semantics," or "Don't play semantic games with me," as though semantics were irrelevant, or an excuse to muddy the waters that someone else thinks are "clear." I want to say that semantics **is** important. We cannot adopt as workable the HP assertion that semantics is

trivial, and we cannot continue to ignore the ways that semantics enables miscommunication among Lesbians. This semantic problem stems from the version of reality we accept. We get into trouble when we assume that using the same words means we're talking about the same things.

That is, I think what has occurred in the pages of *Lesbian Ethics*, Mariedaughter's and Crane's responses to Strega's analysis are derived from her use of the words *butch* and *femme*. Strega tells me she uses those two terms because they are a part of Lesbian tradition, because they already have meaning among Lesbians. But those two words carry with them a lot of semantic baggage that distorts and confuses Strega's analysis. What the terms have meant in the past, and the way Lesbians like Paula Mariedaughter and Mary Crane continue to use them, isn't the way Strega is trying to use them. Their use of the same words makes it seem as though they're talking about the same aspects of Lesbian living, but they're not. Strega is trying to talk outside the HP version of reality described by the semantics of English, Mariedaughter is trying to give *femininity* a positive value that contradicts its value within the heteropatriarchy, and Crane devalues both positions and rejects Strega's equation of *butch* with a higher Lesbian consciousness.

In order to understand the sources of this confusion and, I hope, work through it, I think we need to begin with its sources in the heteropatriarchal semantics (HS) of English. Once I realized this, I sat down to do the semantic analysis I've been avoiding doing for a long time. "Someone," I'd think to myself, "should do this." (I cleverly avoided imagining *who* that "someone" might be.) These recent publications, with a push from Bev Jo, have forced me to examine our inability to communicate to each other our feelings about *butch*, *femme*, *masculinity*, *femininity*, and to attempt an explanation.

Heteropatriarchal Semantics

Diagram 1 presents the basic semantic dichotomy of HP and its logical structure. It represents an important piece of the semantic system called "consensus reality," known to some Lesbians as Heteropatriarchal Ideology. "Consensus reality" is a bit of jargon that means "reality is what a majority of people want to believe it is." The diagram is a way of visualizing how this portion of semantic "space" is stored in long-term memory, a picture of the grid heteropatriarchy imposes on our experiences. I'll talk through my visual representation in Diagram 1, explaining the levels and categories as I go. (I've substituted words at each level for semantic features.)

The semantic grid of Diagram 1 represents the HP version of what "being human" means. The essential dichotomy that gives this grid its meaning is based on the much-touted sexual dimorphism of "our" species. That is, *homo sapiens* [sic!] is described as having two sexes which differ from each other in primary and secondary sexual characteristics. But this is only a partial description of the

world we comprehend through our senses. For example, the existence of hermaphrodites exposes the inadequacy of the grid as a description of the world, while the word *hermaphrodite*, a compound (*hermes* [+ male] and *aphrodite* [- male]) based on the dichotomy, isn't much more than a clumsy attempt to preserve the HP semantic structure in spite of contradicting evidence. What we have here is a description of reality that isn't accurate, one that tries to account for aspects of reality not covered by its dichotomy by simply repeating the dichotomy itself.

Sexual dimorphism is the foundation of HP semantics, politics, and personality. Personality, according to HP, is based on biological sex. Biology determines behavior, mannerisms, appearance, emotional style, and how one thinks. This is a monocausal ideology. Sexual dimorphism is the reproductive strategy for numerous species, but it's neither necessary nor inevitable, nor is it

LEVEL	CATEGORY	FEATURE	
		+ MALE	- MALE
I	BIOLOGICAL	Male	Female
II	FUNCTIONAL (Breeders)	Man Father	Woman Mother
III	BEHAVIORAL	Real Man Masculine Manly	Real Woman Feminine Womanly
		Womanish	Mannish

Diagram 1. Heteropatriarchal Semantics

biologically superior to other reproductive methods as is commonly believed. Many species in addition to our own are now known to reproduce parthenogenetically (lizards, fish, seagulls, and some plants). Only humans seem to be obsessed with their reproductive capacity, as though they'd invented and perfected it. Contrary to popular thinking, it's not at all obvious that biological sex or reproductive potential should be the basis of personality. One might just as well posit height, weight, or the position of constellations with respect to the earth at the time of one's birth, as astrology does, as the source of personality. (Conventional astrology incorporates sexual dimorphism in its descriptions of personality types.)

Heterosexuality doesn't appear overtly in Diagram 1 because it's integral to the HP description of the world. The logic of HP assumes that heterosexuality necessarily follows from sexual dimorphism. In common terms, this assumption

is usually expressed as "The Stick-in-the-Hole Theory of Behavior" or, "Function Follows Form": 1) Men have pricks, women have vaginas; 2) pricks exist to be stuck in vaginas. The possession of genitalia of a specific kind is believed to necessitate its usage in a specific way. This primitive assumption is deeply ingrained. It's rarely explicitly stated, but one student said, "Heterosexuality feels natural to me." When I asked her what she meant by "natural," she responded, "It's necessary." When I asked her what heterosexuality was necessary for, she answered, "reproduction." Many Lesbians as well as heterosexuals were taught to believe this specious logic, but Lesbians are its victims. That which is assumed, primary, and implicit is difficult to get at. The fact that we are not heterosexual we have accepted as our defining characteristic. Heterosexuality is so hard for Lesbians to question because our outcast status depends on it.

Heterosexuality and its "naturalness" cannot be questioned. These ideas aren't "open to question," like yours or mine, and aren't supposed to be challenged. If you doubt this, put a bumpersticker on your car (or bike or skateboard) that says, "If Abortion Is a Crime, Fucking Should Be a Felony." A female's right to terminate a pregnancy is open to question; the "necessity" of heterosexual coitus (fucking) isn't. Other cultures deal with sexual dimorphism differently, and this is reflected in their languages. I am concerned here **only** with the culture imposed in the continental United States. Some Lesbians, in an effort to deny the privileges they get for being feminine, get into "cultural relativity," and how this or that behavior or mode of dress differs from one culture to another (as in *Lesbian Connection* 9, #1, July/August 1986, p. 17). I'm not talking about saris or mu-mus or the kilts worn by men of the Scottish clans.

Sexual dimorphism underlies HP semantics, along with its corollary assumption, heterosexuality. Dividing a species into male and female is only the first step. If one accepts the idea that biological sex is a significant feature, one might suppose that that distinction would result in semantic features like +MALE and +FEMALE. But this isn't the case in English. Instead, sexual dimorphism is coded as +MALE and -MALE. That females are -MALE in the semantic structure of English might not be immediately apparent to my readers, so I'll explain.

In English, the male sex is regarded as the norm, the standard, the female sex is that which is non-male ("other"). The set of terms for occupations is a familiar example of how maleness is assumed unless the label is explicitly modified by a female term. Persons addressed as doctor, lawyer, artist, author, engineer, surgeon, sculptor, mayor, jockey, etc. are assumed to be male unless a special form of the label is used, e.g., woman doctor, lady lawyer, authoress, or sculptress. This is true of all prestige occupations. The occupational labels assumed to be inherently female, which require overt modification if the person is male, refer to low prestige, low pay occupations: secretary, prostitute, nurse. When a male holds one of these occupations, he is called a "male secretary," "male prostitute," or "male nurse." Assuming that the male sex is normal and the

female sex deviant also underlies the use of pseudo-generic *man*, men being "the measure of all things," and of the pronoun *he* as though it encompassed females in its reference.¹ In English, all "persons" are assumed to be male unless otherwise specified.

The leftmost, vertical portion of Diagram 1 divides HP semantic "space" into three discrete levels: BIOLOGICAL, FUNCTIONAL, and BEHAVIORAL. I chose this particular order because the internal logic of HS posits an entailment relation between each level: Given that one is (usually) born either MALE or FEMALE (*female*, from the French *femelle*, was re-etymologized in the 14th century to make it look as though it was derived from *male*), it follows from this biological trait that one is either MAN or WOMAN in FUNCTION (FATHER or MOTHER). This entailment is expressed, for example, in the following quote from a TV news story on infertility: "If you're not fertile, you're not macho, you're not a real man." From this functional description, it follows that one's BEHAVIOR will necessarily be culturally appropriate to one's FUNCTION and BIOLOGY, MASCULINE or FEMINE. If one happens to be born female, as many are, then one is also necessarily a woman and, being a woman in this HP culture, one is also necessarily "feminine" and "womanly." This entailment relation makes the two words synonymous in English, as when "being feminine" is used as though it meant "being a woman." This relationship among the three levels is also the reason Linda Strega is essentially right in her analysis. The meaning of being a female in the U.S. is being *feminine*. A female who is nonfeminine is an unacceptable contradiction in HP terms. Strega understands the structure of HS and its purposes.

Most heterosexuals, and Lesbians as well, accept as "fact" the description of reality forced by English semantics. They assume that the descriptive limits of English are, in fact, the limits of reality. One is or is not a man, men are the standard of comparison. This assumption is expressed in a current television advertisement for a magazine aimed at a female audience, *Savvy*: "If a woman wants to succeed in business, does she have to act *like a man*? You can allow yourself to be a woman." It's also the reason some Lesbians are repeatedly addressed as "sir" by heterosexuals. When we present ourselves at restaurants, gas stations, post offices, and other public places, whoever is dealing with us scans us for what they consider "relevant features": size, weight, height, body posture, clothing, and length of hair. This information gives them a composite sex analysis, and, since they have only two categories, + MALE and - MALE, Lesbians who fit the + MALE composite are going to be addressed as "sir." They don't perceive us. They're matching bodies against conceptual maps. An early rock and roll song expressed this operating assumption: "Just two kinds of people in the world." Likewise, Lesbians who describe another as "like a man," "masculine," or "mannish" validate HP reality, and prioritize HP values by negating other Lesbians.

At the BEHAVIORAL level (III), I've placed the most commonly-used adjectives that describe the behaviors attributed to each sex. The significance of the + MALE/ - MALE dichotomy and the rigidity with which HP must maintain it is explicit in Diagram 1 in two ways. First, I've included both "real man" and "real woman," which presuppose "unreal" men and women, i.e., "queers," as possibilities. This is one of the ways we're semantically viable, as a presupposition that reinforces heterosexual superiority. In usage, both expressions assume the accuracy of the logical entailments among Levels I, II, and III. If one is female, then one must be a heterosexual and a breeder, and behave in appropriate, "feminine" ways. If she doesn't, if she fails to symbolically enact (and validate) the logical entailments of Level II or III in some way, she isn't a "real woman." She's "something else" because she's contradicting the logic of the HP semantic system. What she is is a Lesbian who defied every effort to turn her into a fembot! Strega would call this Lesbian a "butch," erroneously, I believe, although many Lesbians who did resist feminization have called ourselves "butches" in the past.

Second, the importance attached to these semantic features is exposed by the final pair of terms, WOMANISH/MANNISH. The usage of both words signals a feature negation (or "violation") within the system. A man who is described as "womanish" is behaving in some way thought to be *like a woman*. He may cry when he's angry, frustrated, confused, or grieving, he may cross his legs at the knee; he may bend from the waist to pick something up off the ground. Whatever it is, he is behaving "inappropriately" according to HS. Likewise, a woman described as "mannish" has negated the feature dichotomy by "crossing the line." She may be aggressive, stoic, or withdrawn; she may wear her hair "too" short; she may be "too" tall, or weigh "too much"; she may take large steps instead of small ones. Whatever the specific behavior interpreted as a negation of her category, the attribute of "mannish" is intended by the user to be both an insult and a warning: don't go "too far," or you're "out." Semantic violation becomes semantic exclusion; semantic exclusion becomes social exclusion.

HP semantic space is so well-maintained that the attempts of some feminists in the past decade to introduce "androgyny" or "gynandry," were bound to fail. First, both terms validate the psychological dichotomy MASCULINE/FEMININE they're intended to replace. If two distinct kinds of behavior didn't exist, one reserved for the male, the other for the female, then there would be nothing to combine. Without the pre-existing distinction, no fusion would be necessary or possible. Second, gynandry (or androgyny), as proposed by such feminists, was operational only at Level III, the Behavioral. They were talking only about personality traits, habits of behavior, as described by HS. Their substitution did not disturb or challenge the entailment conditions between the levels, and it certainly left the foundation, sexual dimorphism, untouched. Finally, trying to promote change "within the system" would work only if they started at Level I and infiltrated Level III by establishing entailment conditions between the levels.

But this strategy, too, is blocked by the adjective pair, WOMANISH/MANNISH. The derogation conveyed by those terms interrupts attempts to blur the distinction carried by MASCULINE/FEMININE.

In "Lesbian Separatism: The Linguistic and Social Sources of Separatist Politics,"² I listed definitions from the *Random House Dictionary* of the words *womanly*, *mannish* and *manly*, *feminine* and *masculine*, then described and analyzed how the very existence of such terms could only be explained by the cultural values they denote and perpetuate. Words become obsolete only when the speakers of a language no longer want to talk about the ideas or objects the words describe. Lesbians weren't listening in 1974 when I read the paper. Lesbians weren't listening when it was published in 1978. I'll repeat myself, and ask you to READ the following definitions and THEN tell me it's OK to be "feminine." I hope that reading these dictionary definitions and my analysis of their cultural significance will prompt other Lesbians to realize that we cannot, like Humpty Dumpty in *Alice in Wonderland*,³ continue to believe that words mean what we want them to mean. Words exist and are created because they serve the values and attitudes central to a culture. When they cease to be useful, they become obsolete. Every time a Lesbian uses a word that carries HP assumptions, she is prolonging its existence because she believes in its usefulness. As one could predict, the "real meaning" of each word is revealed in the definition of its opposite.

womanly – like or befitting a woman; feminine; not masculine or girlish. *Womanly* implies resemblance in appropriate, fitting ways; *womanly decorum*, *modesty*.

manly – having the qualities usually considered desirable in a man; strong, brave; honorable; resolute; virile. *Manly* implies possession of the most valuable or desirable qualities a man can have, as dignity, honesty, directness, etc., in opposition to servility, insincerity, underhandedness, etc. it also connotes strength, courage, and fortitude; . . .

feminine – pertaining to a woman or girl: *feminine beauty*, *feminine dress*. Like a woman; weak; gentle.

masculine – having the qualities or characteristics of a man; manly; virile; strong; bold; a deep, *masculine voice*. Pertaining to or characteristic of a man or men: *masculine attire*.

mannish – applies to that which resembles man: . . . Applied to a woman, the term is derogatory, suggesting the **aberrant possession of masculine characteristics** [my emphasis].

You'll notice that the qualities listed under *manly* and *masculine* are the "good" things an individual might wish to be: strong, brave, determined, honest,

dignified, etc. Notice that not a single one of many negative qualities commonly attributed to maleness are listed here. What happened to qualities like aggressive, violent, narrow-minded, self-centered, defensive, easily threatened, domineering, penis-obsessed, intrusive, predatory, immature, dependent, energy-sucking, or territorial, egotistical, and war-mongering? eh? Where, do you suppose, one might find **those** qualities of masculinity???

In contrast, the adjectives *womanly* and *feminine* are not really defined! Please read them. don't assume that you know what you're going to find there. Look closely at the long list of characteristics in the definition for *manly* compared to the circularity of the pseudo-definition for *womanly*, "like or befitting a woman." That's NOT A DEFINITION!!! The real definition for *womanly* is implied as "oppositions" to "manly qualities": "servility, insincerity, underhandedness, etc." Under *feminine*, we pick up two more adjectives, *weak* and *gentle*, and that's it! Positive attributes commonly associated with females, such as nurturing, kind, and loving, have been omitted, exactly the "feminine" traits that Paula Mariedaughter wants to "reclaim." But those don't even make it into the dictionary! It should go without saying that, as a theory of personality, sexual dimorphism and the adjectives that express its assumptions ignore the fact that anyone can be strong **and** gentle. These traits, and others, aren't mutually exclusive; it's only our acceptance of the HP description of reality that makes it seem so.

Lesbians shouldn't need to defend "femininity" or feel as though being gentle, kind, tender, interested in fabric and texture or a host of other personality traits had anything to do with being a female or a "femme." We can be any and all of these things without subscribing to the HS dichotomy. Similarly, Lesbians can enjoy bicycling, playing softball, repairing cars, riding motorcycles, working in construction, and be hostile to men without calling themselves "masculine" or a "butch." Accepting those labels to describe our predilections is a trap, and it perpetuates HP ideology as though it belonged in a Lesbian context.

The real clencher comes when we consider the definition for *mannish*, "the aberrant possession of masculine characteristics," as though a female who is honest, strong, dignified, forthright, and brave were a FREAK! Men have reserved the positive attributes for themselves, women are "appropriately" weak, gentle, insincere, servile, and underhanded, and any woman who is honest, forthright, dignified, brave or resolute is "aberrant," i.e., *mannish*. HS logic dictates that those born female who reject the HS dichotomy, who refuse to behave in feminine, "appropriate" ways, get labeled "masculine" by semantic default. Those who aren't visibly - MALE must be + MALE. This semantic trick makes it seem as though HS has described behavior accurately, but all it does is maintain HP consensus reality at the cost of Lesbian integrity. It's way past time for Lesbians to stop using HP words as though they were meaningful. Any Lesbian who defends femininity and compares another Lesbian to a man by labeling her "masculine" subscribes to HS whether she admits it or not!

The Ways a Lesbian Can Be

The purpose of semantic structure is to **create meaning**. Without a semantic structure, meaning does not exist. Lesbians aren't "meaningful" in HS, so we have to construct a semantic system in which we become meaningful. In the past, we turned to the only semantic system we knew as a model, Heteropatriarchal Semantics (of the U.S.). Even in the 1950s gay community that I came out into, there was a tacit recognition that Lesbians didn't divided up neatly into "butch" and "femme." We had to make it up as we went along, and, although the resulting continuum of terms used the HS dichotomy to define its extremes, still a range of behaviors was acknowledged and labeled. Diagram 2 represents this behavioral continuum.

MASCULINE FEMININE
diesel dyke – bulldyke – dyke – butch – nelly butch – ki-ki – femme

Diagram 2. The Lesbian Continuum of the 1950s and '60s.

Diagram 2 uses some of the behavioral labels used among Lesbians of my acquaintance during the 1950s and '60s to illustrate how we expressed our perceptions of the continuum, and most of these terms are still in use among Lesbians today. We constructed a semantics in order to "make sense" of ourselves in HS terms, which ignored our existence. Even though it was our denial of the entailment relation between the BIOLOGICAL and FUNCTIONAL levels of HS (Diagram 1) that defined us as "Lesbians," we still accepted as given the validity of sex-specific BEHAVIORS as defined by HS and tried to "fit" ourselves in somewhere. Diagram 2 represents one attempt to construct a coherent, intelligible semantic system for describing perceived differences among Lesbians. Although we recognized a range of behaviors and the purported distinctions were fuzzy, to say the least, we were still bound by the basic dichotomy of HS as an explanation of personality. We used the most general terms, *butch* and *femme*, as though they were meaningful to us. We used them to talk about ourselves, to convey information about ourselves that seemed significant in our social context.

Ignored, however, in previous and current discussions of roles among Lesbians is the "ki-ki." She, along with her label, has disappeared, because our most recent dialogues have focussed on the extremes as though one were necessarily either/or. This isn't accurate historically, and it's unfair to ourselves in the present.⁴ I point this out because the term is obsolete as nearly as I can tell. When the feminist second wave hit the Lesbian shore, *ki-ki* disappeared because it ceased, temporarily, to be "meaningful" among those Lesbians who became feminists. (Maybe it's still used among nonfeminist Lesbians.) The feminist analysis of heterosexual roles, male oppression, and sexism were

adopted by Lesbian-feminists, applied to the roles of butch and femme, and "sex-roles" among Lesbians became "politically incorrect." As Joan Nestle pointed out,⁵ we lost a large part of our past, identities, and our tradition, such as it was. Being proud and honest about our past, however, doesn't mean its assumptions are or should be viable in the present.

Mariedaughter, Crane, and Strega don't mention the term *ki-ki*. I include it in Diagram 2 because it named a kind of Lesbian who called herself that. Lesbians who labeled themselves "ki-ki" did so because they were neither "butch" nor "femme." The "role" they adopted depended upon who they were being sexual with at the time. In so doing, they affirmed the validity of the roles for those who chose them, but refused to make such a choice themselves. They didn't want to be "limited," and some of them regarded those Lesbians who were "into roles" as having made a bad choice.

One could be "ki-ki" in the "old days," (scarcely 15 years ago), when *dyke* and *bulldyke* (*bulldagger* among blacks) were strictly derogatory in their usage, within and without the Lesbian sub-culture. The more blatantly "masculine" a Lesbian was in her looks, dress, and behavior, the more negatively-charged the label applied to her, by heterosexuals and Lesbians. Calling oneself a "butch" might correlate with one's external appearance, but not necessarily. I knew a lot of "butches" who looked and were very "feminine," and we called them "neily butches." "Butch" labeled their sexual behavior, not their appearance. One self-labeled butch I knew was extremely feminine. Not only could she pass as het, she was, in fact, a call girl, and the mistress of a wealthy man.

Also significantly absent from current discussion is another kind of Lesbian I remember well from the 1950s and 1960s: the Lesbian who didn't label herself at all. There were Lesbians, even then, who did not call themselves "butch" or "femme" or "ki-ki." They disapproved of the roles altogether. Furthermore, they looked down on those of us who did role-play, and they said so to our faces. They may have even been a majority of the Lesbian sub-culture back then, or maybe it was 50-50, or maybe role-playing Lesbians were a majority. I can't quantify that from my remembrances. (Maybe it depended on the bars where one hung out, or whether or not one went to bars. I did know a few nonrole-playing Lesbians who frequented the bars I did.)

Along came a female-centered political analysis, at least it claimed to be female-centered, role-playing among Lesbians was "out," and abandoning role-identified behaviors was "in." But — I know, you know, we most of us know — there is still a large, very large Lesbian population who rejected feminism and its analysis from the beginning of its influence among other Lesbians. They said, essentially, "We're happy the way we are, we have no intention of changing, we don't want to change, and you (meaning Lesbian-Feminists) aren't going to make us. Period." This "dialogue" in the Lesbian "community" is being carried on by only a handful of us. Vast numbers are silent either because they don't know it's happening or don't care that it's going on.

With the development of Lesbian self-consciousness about the political meaning of our lives, the reclamation of previously derogatory words began, dyke among them, because the word was so negatively charged for us. That this process seemed to move toward the "masculine" end of the continuum is a result of the HP version of reality, not a result of anything inherent in being a Dyke. Given the HS dichotomy, "reclaiming" femininity is irrelevant because femininity is essential to HP. If Lesbians want to deny the "naturalness" of HP categories and assert the positive value of our deviance, adopting femininity doesn't make any sense. We're still trying to use the word *dyke* in positive ways, usually to mean "high political-consciousness." Other Lesbians say they're "reclaiming" femme and butch roles for themselves, *ki-ki*, as I've said, became obsolete, and we haven't yet tried to reclaim *bulldagger* and *bulldyke*. Maybe there're reasons for this even though we haven't articulated them. I think Mariedaughter's and crane's reactions to Strega's analysis indicate the depth and strength of what many Lesbians still fear: being perceived and labeled as "masculine."

As I said before, I think using *butch* and *femme* in her essay obscured Linda Strega's analysis and facilitated misinterpretation. The lack of a working definition for the label *butch* and a tendency to concentrate on the external traits associated with femininity contribute to confusion. Not a one of these three writers defines what she's referring to when she uses the word *butch*. They seem to assume that the word doesn't need definition or clarification, as though its reference were perfectly clear. The same can be said of their use of the word *femme*, with the exception of Mariedaughter, who attempts a definition of it:

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 'nestbuilding' for herself and her loved ones. Many Lesbian femmes express an interest in fabric, color, texture, and other sorts of sensuous things from silky cats or dogs to handmade baskets. Usually a Lesbian femme values community and our interconnectedness. (pp. 96-7)

It's not at all clear to me that the kinds of interests Paula Mariedaughter associates with being "femme" serve to distinguish her from any other Lesbian, regardless of how she may label herself. When Paula Mariedaughter offered her definition of a Lesbian "femme," she should have listened more closely to herself. First, she began by equating her "Lesbian femme" interests with "areas traditionally associated with women" [my emphasis], an equation which betrays her reliance on the HP description of "reality." Second, when she concluded her definition by qualifying her list of characteristics: "None of this is meant to imply no butch Lesbian has any of these interests" (p. 97), she acknowledged that the distinction she was trying to elaborate was meaningless. In that case, why bother with semantic hocuspocus that doesn't clarify anything? Any list of

Lesbian personality traits is going to contradict the HP dichotomy of masculine/feminine. Why not just give it all up and acknowledge that the dichotomy is meaningless in a Lesbian context?

Bev Jo, Linda, and I have exchanged letters about how to talk about what they're trying to describe, and I urged them not to use the labels *butch* and *femme*. I'd do so again. As I understand it now, having misunderstood them in the past, they're using *butch* and *femme* to refer to **internal**, not **external**, conditions of mind, of personality, the psychological strength to resist HP pressure to conform to its reality. Many Lesbians who resisted HP demands to conform called ourselves "butches" prior to becoming Feminists, but a lot of "femmes" resisted, too. In fact, back in the 1950s I was attracted mostly to what we called "butchy femmes" because they were independent, strong-minded, and outspoken. The external signals, "masculine/feminine," may or may not co-exist with the personality traits Strega is describing. The polarized roles weren't all that clear in the past, they're certainly unclear and nonspecific now, and I doubt we'll learn much by continuing to refer to them as if they were meaningful.

I must be careful here. I don't want to distort or misrepresent what Strega (and Bev Jo) are saying. As I understand Strega's use of the word *butch*, she is talking about a Lesbian who didn't give in to the social pressure to learn the behaviors labeled and perceived in our culture as "feminine." The Lesbians she calls "femme" did. They learned the patterns of behavior and personality collected together under the label "femininity." The Lesbian context is further complicated because some Lesbians try to live as heterosexuals, a fact that produces Strega's distinction between never-het and ex-het Lesbians. In spite of some qualifications, Strega's usage of the word *butch* implies that a butch has never lived as a heterosexual. That Strega's usage of *butch* and *femme* is radically different from past usage is clear when one realizes that *never-het* and *butch* aren't synonymous, nor are *ex-het* and *femme*. Previous heterosexual behavior has never been the determining factor among Lesbians when they choose to label themselves "butch" or "femme." Previous heterosexual behavior may influence self-labeling, but I don't think it's decisive. The issues Strega is addressing derive from one Lesbian's defiance of society and another Lesbian's acceptance of what was demanded of her.

On the telephone a few months ago, Linda Strega made an observation regarding this difference among Lesbians that immediately struck me as a useful, and accurate insight. She pointed out that Lesbians she calls "butches," like myself, clearly remember **deciding not to become feminine**. And I do remember resisting every effort to convert me to "femininity." I had to consciously resist or consciously give in to the persistent demands made of me to change my behavior. In contrast, she said, Lesbians she calls "femmes," like herself, **do not remember consciously deciding** to become feminine. Those of us who defied social convention remember our resistance. It was conscious

action. Those who went along with the social program did not do so consciously or, at least, don't remember making a conscious decision. The Lesbians Strega calls "butch" may or may not have adopted and acted out the butch "role" as we understand it. Likewise for the "femmes." The Lesbians who resist feminization don't "become masculine"! They don't change at all. Because these Lesbians refuse to change themselves in order to fit into HP society as we know it in the U.S., we are considered to be the "queerest of the queer," by heterosexuals and by feminized Lesbians. We never made the effort to become "feminine," nor did we look around, check out our options, notice that the only alternative was "becoming masculine," and set out to "masculinize" ourselves. Nevertheless, we are PERCEIVED by heterosexuals and feminized Lesbians as "masculine" because we aren't "feminine." This perception accounts for what Strega calls "Femme Privilege" and the fact that butches experience queer-bashing by heterosexuals and "feminine" Lesbians more frequently than femmes do. Feminine Lesbians, who come closer to **looking like** women, are perceived to be "more normal" than masculine Lesbians, regardless of their politics.

What is the Locus of Lesbian Identity?

Up to this point, I've left unmentioned **two** important variables: Political Consciousness and a dichotomy, Overt/Covert. How does it happen that Lesbians can write and read in such utterly opposed contexts? I think it's because Lesbians conceive themselves in relation to the heteropatriarchy in conflicting ways, and that's a matter of political consciousness. Some Lesbians think of themselves as living **within** the heteropatriarchy, as being not so very different from heterosexuals, while others conceive ourselves as being **outside** the boundaries of the heteropatriarchy, as being quite different from heterosexuals, and so mistrust any aspect of our thinking and behavior that apes or mirrors the heteropatriarchal world. Because Lesbians don't share a "consensus reality," no widely-agreed-upon description of what it "means" to be a Lesbian in HP, our valuations of specific kinds of behavior are idiosyncratic. Our willingness to challenge HP descriptions varies in terms of where we conceive of ourselves, as Lesbians, with respect to HP society. No Lesbian can ignore HP or pretend that it isn't there, although many try to; none of us can deny its influence in our lives or in the ways we think. To ignore HP or claim that somehow we've "gotten past" it in our thinking is to trivialize the damage HP as done to us as **Lesbians**. I don't think there's a "gray area" between what Strega was saying and the reactions of Marriedaughter and Crane had. There's no "middle ground" in this disagreement for compromise, even if the participants were willing.

For the sake of argument, think of HP society as a circle. At various stages in her development and awareness, a Lesbian positions herself with respect to HP on the basis of her understanding of the meaning of her Lesbian life. Diagram 3

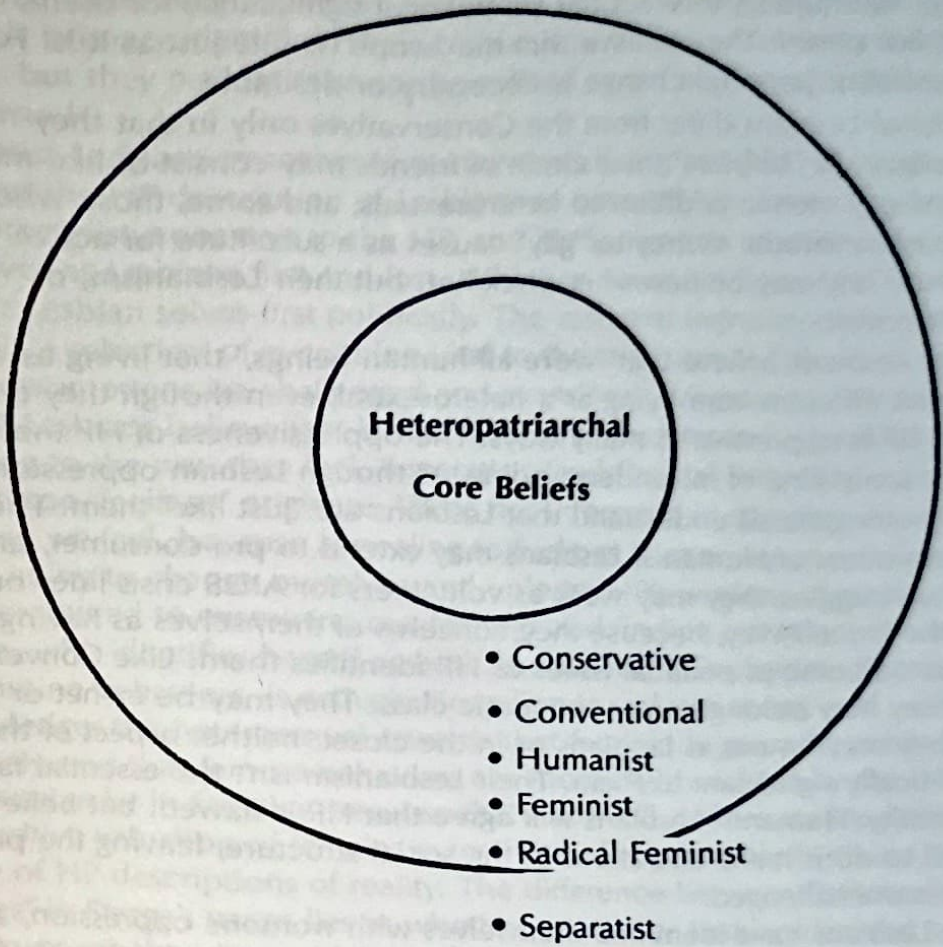


Diagram 3. Lesbian Self-Consciousness as Political Identification.

represents six possible Lesbian stances in her acknowledgment of HP: Conservative, Conventional, Humanist, Feminist, Radical Feminist, and Separatist.

Each point on this continuum represents an approximate, not an absolute political position, and I use current terminology because I think it'll be readily understood by my readers. Conservative Lesbians accept HP descriptions of reality as accurate and all-encompassing, and they live as though the givens of HP were unalterable fact. Such Lesbians are usually white, financially comfortable, and living in the suburbs of large cities. In terms of the way they think, they are virtually indistinguishable from their heterosexual neighbors; they don't think of themselves as "Lesbian," and most of their friends may be heterosexuals. In spite of the fact that many Conservative Lesbians have never lived as heterosexuals, and must, at some point in their lives have rejected the

essential HP assumption, this fact has no political significance for them. They're "never-het" but covert. They believe that the "world" is fine just as it is. For them, no social or personal change is necessary or desirable.

Conventional Lesbians differ from the Conservatives only in that they may call themselves "gay" or "Lesbian," their circle of friends may consist of like-minded Lesbians and gay men in addition to heterosexuals, and some, those who can afford it, may contribute money to "gay" causes as a substitute for active involvement. They may be never-het or ex-het, but their Lesbianism, or "gayness," is covert.

Humanist Lesbians believe that "we're all human beings," that living as a Lesbian is not different from living as a heterosexual, even though they are aware that HP is oppressive in many ways. The oppressiveness of HP they interpret as some kind of misunderstanding, as though Lesbian oppression will end when heterosexuals understand that Lesbians are "just like" them. The political awareness of Humanist Lesbians may extend to pro-consumer, anti-war, anti-nuclear struggles, they may work as volunteers for AIDS crisis lines or on behalf of the United Way, because they conceive of themselves as having a stake in the outcome of political issues as HP identifies them. Like Conventional Lesbians, they may belong to any economic class. They may be ex-het or never-het, and they may be out as Lesbians or in the closet; neither aspect of their lives is politically significant to them. Their Lesbianism isn't the essential factor of their identity. Humanist Lesbians will agree that HP is flawed, but believe that all we need to do is make alterations in the social structure, leaving the primary assumptions unchallenged.

Feminist Lesbians have identified themselves with women's oppression, and they make women's issues the focus of their political activism. They may, for example, work on rape crisis lines, in battered women's shelters, abortion clinics, or teach women's studies. They correctly identify the fact that women are oppressed in this society, and they work actively to struggle against that oppression as they understand it. Most do not, for example, believe that men are the enemy, only some of them, and they attribute their oppression as Lesbians to their femaleness. They are committed to changing the structure of HP to varying degrees, they question some of the essential values and categories of HP, but heterosexuality remains, for them, an unchallenged given. Lesbian-Feminist consciousness is possible for the ex-het or never-het, closeted or not.

Lesbians who call themselves Radical Feminists position themselves somewhere between Feminist and Separatist Lesbians, on the limits of reality as HP describes it. On the one hand, they identify their oppression as primarily women's oppression, not specifically Lesbian oppression, on the other they believe that men are the enemy of all women and have developed some of the best analyses of how HP society perpetrates itself and have proposed various methods of destroying "patriarchy." Although they don't identify as Lesbians first, they understand the threat that Lesbians pose to HP. They stop just short of

identifying "patriarchy" as **heteropatriarchy**. Because Radical Feminist Lesbians base their primary identity in their Lesbianism, being out about it is important to them, but they may or may not have lived some portion of their lives as heterosexuals.

Separatist Lesbians conceive of ourselves as living **outside** HP society. Accepting the HP description of Lesbians as outcasts, we have chosen to stand in an antagonistic position to the HP, and it's Separatists who identify themselves as Lesbians first and last. Whether never-het or ex-het, Separatists put their Lesbian selves first politically. The essential ingredient of Separatist politics is a rejection of everything vital to the structure of HP, which requires that all assumptions be challenged and examined. Whereas Humanist or Feminist Lesbians believe that behaviors and attitudes can be justified by appealing to the way they feel, Separatists (and Radical Feminists) want to know where these "feelings" originate. We're not interested in stopping our analysis with **how** we feel, because appealing to feelings is one way of resisting change. If we're going to change ourselves and unlearn HP's versions of reality, then we're committed to examining our feelings and finding out **why** we have them.

Strega, who identifies herself as both femme and a Separatist, disapproves of her feminine behaviors, is actively struggling to unlearn them, and acknowledges the heterosexual rewards that femininity guarantees her. She accurately says that femme behaviors are more highly-valued by the heteropatriarchy in females, because that's how HS defines reality. Rejecting the HP's positive valuation of female = feminine, Strega's analysis places her outside of HP descriptions of reality. The difference between "butches" and "femmes" in Strega's usage lies in whether or not the Lesbian decided to conform or rebel against social structures. She's talking about Lesbian conformists and nonconformists, the positive value we're taught to attach to conformity, and the negative value we attach to our own deviance. By "claiming," "owning," the label *femme*, Strega is attempting to be responsible to other Lesbians for her "feminine" (heterosexual) behaviors. She believes that these behaviors are oppressive, to herself and other Lesbians, and, by **naming** herself, she means to say, "I behave in these ways, and I don't approve of these behaviors for myself, but I'm not always aware of them. They are habits I'm trying to break."

But Mariedaughter doesn't agree. When she speaks of herself as "femme," it is with pride, and she objects to the negative value Strega assigns to feminine, because she wants to value "female behaviors" positively. (The same may be said for Laura Rose DancingFire's description of herself in *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives* 14, which Mariedaughter quotes.) The categories themselves remain **undisturbed** in all this. Heteropatriarchal semantics has not been challenged, only its valuation of the behaviors is being questioned. Mariedaughter and DancingFire want to ignore the valuation of HS altogether, because female = feminine is valued less highly than male = masculine in HS, and affirm the

positive value of those behaviors they perceive as "feminine." However, it's a reversal that works only if one accepts HS as given and accurate. Reversing the HP's valuation of femininity entails accepting the idea that biology explains personality and the resulting behavioral dichotomy. She is affirming her right to behave in "feminine" ways without censure or disapproval from other Lesbians. The confusion between Mariedaughter and Strega stems from the use of the same words with very different intentions and values. Not only will they not find a common ground for agreement, Mariedaughter won't understand why something that feels "right" to her is described as undesirable by Strega. The difference between them is one of consciousness and self-identification.

Mary Crane states that she does not believe that Strega's "heavy defense of butches" is "justifiable," and she substantiates her disagreement by saying that butches are misogynistic: "Too often, butches are not practicing butchiness out of some deep longing to free themselves from patriarchy, but to join up in some mystical way with what they perceive to be the winning side. . . butches are not interested in overcoming corrupt masculine power" (pp. 102-3). I don't understand what Crane means when she uses the word "mystical," and I won't speculate. What is clear is Crane's equation of what she perceives as "masculine" behavior in "butches" with the possession of "corrupt masculine power." Does Crane really believe that a Lesbian can have the same kind of power exercised by men? Since "masculinity" in a female is despised in HP, as the derogatory label *mannish* indicates, how can Crane ignore the fact that "femininity" is one way females gain access to privilege in HP? She neglects to acknowledge that so-called "femmes" can be and are just as misogynist as role-playing butches, and she utterly misses Strega's point. Feminine power is corrupt, too, and some Lesbians use their "femininity" as a way of denying their deviance. Again, "butches" are singled out and dumped on, as though femininity were beyond question or challenge. Crane identifies her political awareness as Feminist when she rejects the HS dichotomy of MASCULINE/FEMININE, but she rejects Strega's use of *butch* as labeling a "higher political consciousness" by assigning to *butch* the meaning given to it in Diagram 2. This interpretation enables her to point out the "misogyny" of Conventional and Humanist "butches" and ignore what Strega is saying about the heterosexism of Lesbian femininity and the continued oppression of nonfeminine Lesbians within the Lesbian community.

Toward a Lesbian-Centered Semantics

I say I read the responses by Mariedaughter and Crane with "increasing dismay" because I gradually realized that communication among these three Lesbians (and others of us) had not occurred, and was unlikely to occur as long as we remain within the boundaries of HS. Lesbians need **some other way** to talk to each other. But we haven't yet begun to work out our problems

with the English language. The issues addressed by Linda Strega are important and politically-aware Lesbians must understand that femininity cannot be a desirable behavior among Lesbians. If anything, the responses to Linda Strega's work expose the fact that Lesbians don't have a "consensus reality," and any attempt to construct a Lesbian consensus is met with arguments fashioned out of HP reality. Why are Lesbians so quick to resist Lesbian analysis and defend HP categories? Why have so many Lesbians resisted what they derisively call "Lesbian conformity" or "political correctness" while they defend conformity to HP categories? Where does this reversal originate and who does it serve? Lesbians? I don't think so.

The diversity of behaviors observable among Lesbians hasn't changed, but, for Lesbians who conceive of ourselves as living outside of or on the boundaries of HP, our attitudes toward and the values we attach to those behaviors have undergone important changes. It's the changes in Lesbian values and attitudes that Linda Strega documents. In fact, she is proposing an important, and radical, change in the way we value our behavioral differences. As far as I can tell, we have four options:

- (1) We can accept the valuation assigned to the MASCULINE/FEMININE dichotomy by HP, as some Lesbians do, and continue to invest our lives with what those words mean;
- (2) We can reverse the valuation made by HP, as do those Lesbians, like Paula Mariedaughter, who want to "reclaim" femininity as "positive";
- (3) We can muddle along as we do now, sometimes assigning positive value to masculine behaviors, sometimes to feminine behaviors;
- (4) We can reject HP semantics altogether, move further outside the boundaries and terms of HS, and start anew to construct a semantic system of our own.

The first three options are already operational among Lesbians. Whether one values masculine or feminine behaviors and looks, or neither, positively depends, I think on where she places herself along the continuum of Diagram 3. This "makes sense," if one accepts the logic. Many Lesbians have constructed an identity dependent on the terms created and validated by HS; they have an investment in that identity, and any analysis which challenges that identity is suspect. Both Mariedaughter and Crane's responses are framed in HS terms, Mariedaughter objecting to Strega's devaluation of "femininity," Crane to her "defense of butches." Strega's analysis is framed by option four above, but her use of the terms *butch* and *femme*, "familiar" from Diagram 2, makes it seem to readers that she's talking about the role-identity continuum when she's actually speaking outside of it. Strega's analysis points to an altogether different way of valuing our deviance. Traditionally, it's been common to value a Lesbian's ability to conform to HP descriptions, and to devalue deviance from HP reality. Strega is proposing a reversal of this valuation, that we learn to perceive our deviation, our ability to resist HP categorization, in terms of the strength and belief in ourselves that it represents. In short, she's asking other Lesbians to value the

resisters among us, those she labels "butches," instead of trashing them. I can now return to Crane's and Mariedaughter's reactions to Strega's analysis. Paula Mariedaughter responded from Option 2; she wants to value positively those attributes of being female ignored by the dictionary definitions, but she accepts the basic dichotomy of HS. Mary Crane has reversed the positive valuation of "masculinity" implicit in HS, and, in spite of her assertion that she thinks both masculinity and femininity are deplorable, her response reveals that she still perceives allegedly "masculine" behaviors in Lesbians as bad. Since there are, as far as I know, no behaviors that HP semantics can't characterize as "masculine" or "feminine," I wonder what kinds of behaviors in Lesbians Crane would approve of.

If my analysis of Heteropatriarchal Semantics is accurate, and if my analysis of how Lesbians have revised that framework in order to "make sense" of ourselves is accurate, then emotional health, thinking well of ourselves, feeling good about ourselves, requires us, those like me, who wish to change, to take option 4: creating a new semantic system for conceiving of who we are. This is the hardest option of the four. It means we have to think differently about who we are as Lesbians in a world that hates us. (With good reason: a Lesbian who loves herself exposes the arbitrariness of HP consensus reality. If we're real, then their conceptual framework is flawed, partial at best.)

For starters, I'd suggest that we toss out HP semantics along with MASCULINE and the Lesbian labels derived from HS, BUTCH/FEMME. Easy to say, hard to do. I don't believe we can abandon or ignore the label *feminine*, because so many Lesbians believe that HP descriptions of reality are valid, that "femininity" is an inherent trait of their "womanhood," and are advocating femininity as a viable Lesbian mode. Ideally, it should be "OK" for a Lesbian to don a dress or blue jeans, high heels or boots, decorate herself or not, wear her hair long or short, cut her nails or grow them long, but it's not. Those aspects of behavior and appearance labeled "femininity" in HP are dangerous for Lesbians. They're dangerous for the Lesbians who adopt them and, perhaps, more dangerous to the Lesbians who defied HP authority in order to hold on to their identity.

Lesbians are a sub-culture trying to hold our own within the context of a large, hostile, HP society. Whatever we "choose" to wear, however we choose to look, those choices are likely to be interpreted within the HP semantic system by anyone who doesn't know us. Ignoring feminine behaviors in ourselves and other Lesbians will simply perpetuate the ways we oppress each other when we're acting out of the HS dichotomy, consciously or unconsciously. Somehow, we have to acknowledge the existence of HP categories and their influence in order to unlearn them, without letting that acknowledgment become validation and acceptance of them as "real."

I believe Strega's analysis is essentially correct: Lesbian femininity is politically corrupt and degrading, Lesbians perceived as "masculine" because we aren't "feminine" are oppressed and trashed by Lesbians who value femininity. She is

talking about attitudes and behaviors among Lesbians that rely for their validity on HP reality. How can we talk about the real differences among Lesbians, the actual range of our observable behaviors, without accepting the assumptions of HP? In the past, the labels *butch*, *femme*, and *ki-ki* served Lesbians as a way of acknowledging and talking about behavioral differences among us, and they still serve that purpose in some segments of the Lesbian sub-culture. But those of us who want to reconceive ourselves in terms that don't carry with them the assumptions of HS, however, will have to learn to describe ourselves in specific, sometimes lengthy ways that avoid both HS and its values.

In order to do this, we'll need to start with a radically different description of the "world," a description based on Lesbian experiences and perceptions. Since Lesbians don't share a "consensus reality," let's understand first of all that this dialogue is taking place only among Lesbians who are politically committed to social and personal change. Let's find ways to talk to each other in a **Lesbian context**. This will enable us to ignore, for the purposes of our discussion, those conservative, never-het Lesbians who are as Lesbophobic and misogynist as the heterosexuals whose company they prefer to ours.

We can make a significant start, as Strega suggests, by valuing those Lesbians who rejected efforts to feminize them. We can value our deviance from HP reality, perceive Lesbian femininity as negative [- Deviant] and nonfeminized Lesbians as positive [+ Deviant]. Some of us resisted, and to varying degrees, others did not, and to varying degrees. Strega is arguing that Lesbians must learn to value positively our resistance to HP programming and stop rewarding Lesbian conformity to the same programming. HP rewards those who conform; let's leave it to them and set about rewarding Lesbian resistance.

Most importantly, we must stand our ground outside of HP reality, occupy it with determination, and resist efforts to assimilate us and dilute the radical force of our perceptions. I haven't said much about Linda Strega's analysis of passing among Lesbians, but neither did Mariedaughter or Crane. They ignored the issue of passing Lesbians in order to defend their own agendas; I've ignored it because I believe it's self-evident that Lesbians who don't, won't or "can't" live openly as Lesbians hate themselves and hate out Lesbians. I use the word *hate* purposely; hate is the usual way we manifest fear, and the word *Lesbophobia* denotes both hatred and fear of Lesbians. Passing as a heterosexual woman is one of the ways Lesbians express their internalized Lesbophobia. Because self-hatred is destructive, I think, in a Lesbian context, that we want to value positively behaviors that foster self-love [+ Out], and negatively value passing behaviors [- Out].

Lesbians who can pass as heterosexuals must understand and admit that they acquire specific social privileges because they can hide their Lesbianism, and they'll have to stop dumping their own self-hatred on Lesbians who refuse to feminize ourselves. The privileges and rewards of femininity are a false sense of worth and self-esteem because they are grounded in hypocrisy and pretense. In

a Lesbian context, FEMININITY = HETEROSEXUALITY = CLOSETED = PRIVILEGE = LESBOPHOBIA. If they expect Dykes to understand their situation, as they seem to, they must also recognize that mutual respect is a two-way street and stop projecting their own doubts and fears about themselves onto us. Describing nonfeminized Lesbians as "masculine" or "like a man" is ignorant, degrading, and insulting. It's a way of discounting our existence and disowning us. Dykes are described that way by heterosexuals because we **can't pass**. We don't expect or want to hear it from other Lesbians. The fact of the matter is that we **do** understand their fears and doubts, while they've made little or no effort to understand ours. Femininity in a Lesbian gives her access to heterosexual privileges, privileges that are tangible: jobs that bring with them social prestige and money. Dykes know all about femininity, what it is, what it means, and the rewards it offers. In a Lesbian context, femininity as a desirable way to be cannot exist.

Finally, the word *dyke* encompasses for me the Lesbian semantics and values I've sketched here: Being DEVIANT and OUT is good; being NONDEVIANT and CLOSETED is bad.

Notes

¹ This particular HP hoax was legalized by an 1850 Act of Parliament which declared that the pronoun *he* would, thereafter, be "understood" to encompass reference to women as well as men in legal documents.

² In, Louie Crew, ed., *The Gay Academic* (Palm Springs, CA: Etc. Publishers, 1978).

³ See, for example, the Sept./Oct. 1986 issue of *Lesbian Connection*, in which a couple of women maintain that they are "Lesbians" in spite of the fact that they fuck men! As one of them puts it: "I have broadened my definition of what a Lesbian is." Her use of the word *broadening* is, of course, intended to make readers interpret the statement as positive by opposing it to the word *narrow*, which has negative connotations in HS (unless it's used to characterize one's waistline or hips!). This kind of "broadening" is pernicious, hypocritical, and self-serving. And, besides, simply not possible. Like it or not, a Lesbian has sex with wimmin, not men; heterosexual females have sex with men. That's what the words mean. I have no desire to "reclaim" heterosexuality as a lifestyle, and wimmin who do can't call themselves Lesbians. I have a personal investment in that word and I won't have it ripped off or diluted by those whose actions dilute its significance. Another word for *broadening* is *DILUTION*.

⁴ With the notable exception of Merrill Mushroom in an article published in *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives* 9.

⁵ In her article "Butch-Fem Relationships: Sexual Courage in the 1950's," *Heresies* 12, *Sex Issue* 21-14.

Nexus

Leaping Lesbians

I was in the Army. A WAC. A private, just completed eight hard weeks basic training. I was on my way to Fort Nowhere, my next Army Post for, specialty training. It was 1964. I was on the bus for 15 hours, I was traveling with 5 other WACS going to the same post. It was 2:00 a.m. when we arrived at the WAC Detachment. We walked into Company Headquarters to report in. Two men met us, (I thought this was unusual, since all the officers at the WAC Detachment are women). One man asked me for my orders, then asked me to step into this room. Now you have to understand something. I had just completed 8 weeks of basic training, where they proceed to mold you into obeying commands, not to think, just to do what you are ordered to do. Also I was tired, hungry, and confused. Right! Yes Sir! The room was sparsely decorated, a desk, couple of chairs and an overhead light with a 20 watt bulb. There was another man in the room so there were two of them and one of me. I was asked to sit down at one of the chairs and for the next couple of hours I was interrogated. It has been some time, but I think I can remember some of the questions. In fact they're something that is hard to forget.

Question: Do you have any women friends?

Answer: Yes.

Q: Do you like women?

A: Yes, I like everybody.

Q: Just answer Yes or No private. Well, do you like women?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you or did you ever love a woman?

A: Yes.

Q: Yes, you said yes, who? I want names, give me names.

A: Mary Cursi, mother, Patti Cursi, sister, Carol Cursi, sister.

Q: We have a smart ass here.

Q: Do you like to look at women?

Q: Do you like to look at naked women?

Q: Did you ever make love to a woman?

Q: Have you ever thought of making love to a woman?

Q: Do you envision sucking a woman's breast?

I can't remember my answers, but they all had to have been no. This went on and on, finally they said that I could go. I walked out of the room, stunned, scared, numb, in a daze. The Sgt. came up to me and said that she would show me to the barracks. She said, "Report in at 0600 tomorrow." That was it.

I looked around the barracks. It was a typical barracks, rows of beds with lockers and foot lockers. I laid down trying to make some sense out of the whole thing, and I must have drifted off to sleep. I awoke to people around me. Everybody was getting up. I looked around and saw the 5 other WACS that came to the post with me. We just looked at one another, nobody said anything. We knew we had all just gone through the same thing. The barracks Sgt. came in and told us how lucky we were. "They weeded out all the 'Queers' last night." That was it, nothing was ever said, nobody said anything to anyone or talked about their experiences, even months after. Even two years later, when I ran into one of the 5 WACS at another post, we didn't mention Fort Nowhere at all. I'm not sure of the figure now, but out of 250 women, I think about 150 were booted out, because we had 5 barracks which held 50 women and by the end of the week there were just 2 barracks filled.

About three weeks went by. I started to get into the routine of Army life and tried to forget. I guess everyone else was trying to do the same thing. Now I heard talk from the women that were posted permanently to this post that they were afraid to be out of the barracks at night, because "they" were in the trees outside. I said, *they, who is they?* They said that these women would wait in the trees and jump down and attack whoever walked by. Now here I am at a post that put me through the ringer, and has people jumping out of trees. I thought, *everyone is crazy here.*

I didn't know whether to believe the tree story, but one night I was craving a candy bar. The candy machine was in the day room, our recreation room, and it was about four barracks down from my barracks. I thought about "they" in the trees, but my candy urge got the best of me. I walked out and started down the sidewalk, I heard rustling in the trees, but I just told myself it was my imagination. When all of a sudden there was a real loud rustling above me, I see a leg dangling, then this person jumps out of the tree. *Be still my beating heart, stop shaking and stand your ground.* Well standing before me was this woman dressed in black boots, jeans, t-shirt, with a cigarette pack rolled up in her sleeve, and a knife in hand. She asked me what I was doing. I told her I was going to the day room to get a candy bar. She said, "Let's go," and she walked me to the day room, I got my candy bar, she walked me back to her tree, told me to be careful and that was that. I don't know why, but when I got back to the barracks and everybody asked if anything happened, I told them no and never talked about it.

My training lasted 2 months, and when I would have an occasion to be out at night I would always look up, and see legs dangling from the trees, but no more jumping down asking what I was doing. I don't know if they did this to other

women but I assume they did, since everybody was aware of them. My questions are these: If they weeded out all the "queers" how did these get away? And were they up in the trees to protect us? I guess I will never know the answers. I assure you this actually happened, because I still carry the scars of that dreadful night of interrogation, and the wonderment of the "leaping Lesbians."

Jackie Cursi

A Remedy for Frustration

What do you do with the ordinary daily level of frustration? I used to end up fighting with my lover or housemate over some picayune thing that I couldn't even remember later. During one of these crabby episodes she made the brilliant comment "Why don't we take this frustration out on the patriarchy (where we generally got it from) instead of each other?" And a beautiful idea was born.

Earlier that evening 3 teenage boys had been hanging out in the alley where I parked the car. They didn't even need to say anything (tho they often did), just their stares and cocky demeanor made me uncomfortable. It was night and I felt generalized fear that always made me edgy. I wished they had felt that fear instead of me. It became so clear that I should take that frustration out on the patriarchy instead of a friend. Action, not crabbiness, was called for.

So we piled into my old van and started searching for men in the alleys. When we found one we headed the van towards him slowly til we could see the whites of his eyes and more importantly the *fear*. It was wonderful seeing the intimidators feeling intimidated and backed against the wall (literally and figuratively). Some of them were so incredulous that women were on the offensive that they wouldn't move, so we would push them with the van. It was beautifully satisfying to watch their slow realizations of what was going on. We would run them into garbage cans, garages, other people's backyards – slowly, of course. Tho on exceptionally frustrating days Connie became fond of a quick move with the van door that would knock them off their feet in a hurry.

Funniest thing, that action would do wonders for our levels of frustration. We'd smile at each other, go home and brew a pot of tea and go about our evening having left our daily frustrations behind. We later branched out to inching men off the crosswalks and driving at rather than picking up prick hitchhikers. From then on whenever we would get crabby or started picking on each other, one of us would go for the van keys with a twinkle in her eye, and the 63 muscles it takes to frown would ease into the 9 muscles it takes to smile. Even *thinking* of it has the power to bring a smile to my eyes.

J.Max

P.S. Any vehicle will do.

Made in Amazon Nation

Talking about one's commitment to wimmin's issues simply isn't enough; each of us must be willing to live that commitment on a daily basis, and that commitment must determine our choices and how we make them.

Julia Penelope

"The Mystery of Lesbians: I," LE 1:1

I had \$6.69 last Tuesday to last me until the first of next month. I needed typing paper, tampons, and stamps, not to mention groceries and payments on all my overdue bills. I bought Alix Dobkin's new tape "Never Been Better." While I'm a little sorry I forwent the tampons, I couldn't be more satisfied with my decision. I'll let the rest of you know when I figure out how to meet **all** of my needs on a Lesbian Separatist salary. In the meantime I'm forced to make economic choices everyday, which I understand reflect my priorities.

Survival isn't easy in these patriarchal times, yet the reality of Lesbian/wimmin's culture moves me past resistance to a *new place*. If you want to go *there*, do these things: sharpen your labrys and wear it on your chest; chuckle or roar through the spell of a Lesbian feminist comedian; turn the pages of a radical Separatist journal; watch another womyn's face when you turn up the volume on "Leaping Lesbians" or "Ode to a Gym Teacher"; light a dyke candle; pull up a pair of well-made, loud-purple, 100% cotton, perfectly-fitting, Lesbian-produced parachute pants; dive to the depths of Separatist philosophy; send an explicitly Lesbian post card; gather with others to play D.Y.K.E. (Do You Know Enough), the new trivia game; wear an outrageous, womyn-identified button; experience womyn's art; use a Lesbian service (cobbler, lawyer, florist, body-worker, spiritualist, healer, restaurant, bar, travel agency, mechanic); stir up a tantalizing batch of lez-beans and rice. Doing any or all of these things will surely get you *there*.

What these things have in common is the all-important "MADE IN AMAZON NATION" stamp. It may not be stamped in ink, but you will recognize that special quality immediately. You can not get to this *new place* listening to bootlegged tapes, you cannot get there if you sell-out to convenience, you can not get there easily. You **can** get to this new place if you go with others. Recycling money, passing it back and forth between ourselves over and over again, builds the Lesbian economy. When you are *there*, you gain strength by making the new place more secure; you support Lesbians who are taking steps away from heteropatriarchal capitalism; you strip the boys of their economic power over you and others; you absorb the energy through your fingers, skin, mind, heart from the life-giving gift of your sister. This is activism!

Getting *there* requires commitment and sacrifice, as well as action and determination. You must teach yourself to think first, before you buy **anything**

– a book, a greeting card, a gift, a record, clothes, art, services – **can I buy this from a Lesbian?** You must encourage other Lesbians/wimmin to travel to the new place with you. You must **never** take our new place for granted. The following are some directions for how to get there:

– Get the **Lesbian Connection** Winter Catalog:

Ambitious Amazons
P.O. Box 811
East Lansing, MI 48823

– Get the **Ladyslipper** Catalog and Resource Guide of Records and Tapes by women:

LADYSLIPPER
P.O. Box 3130
Durham, NC 27705

– Sniff out the closest Women's/Feminist bookstore in your state, plan a special trip there and stock up! Some of them do mail order business too.

– Many bigger cities have **Women's Yellow Pages** and/or **Gay/Lesbian Yellow Pages**. Find them and always check them first when you let your fingers do the walking!

– Take extra cash to Wimmin's Concerts, they usually sell tapes and records at a table out front.

– Go to any one of the summer Womyn's Music and Comedy Festivals. Save the entire year for this trip, make lists of gifts, and items you will need for the next year. . .and/or splurge. . .Go wild. . .Have fun!

– Order a 1986 and/or 1987 edition of D.Y.K.E. trivia game:

LipService, Inc.
P.O. Box 63362
St. Louis, MO 63163

Amber Lesbian

P.S. I don't sell anything.

Femme and Butch

A Readers' Forum

Five Quick Sketches of a Real Pervert

One

I watched her watching me, pale and serious. Quickly, she turned to me and asked in a hushed voice, "Hi. My name is Mike. Are you gay?"

I thought that she wanted to know if that was my name. So I said no.

Her response was friendly and simple, but she didn't smile. Her eyes reflected the loss of an ally in a hostile place.

"Well, you ought to be."

Her eyes told her something about me that she still believed.

I figured out what she wanted to know just minutes later, but it was too late. I never got to know Mike. Above is our only conversation. She was marched away and punished for talking to me.

The year was 1960. I was fifteen and locked up in L.A. County jail for kids. Juvenile Hall. Or, just Juvy. I was incorrigible. That is a specific charge against young people who are self-respecting, self-determining, and who refuse to be dominated and crushed; usually it also means sexually active. Too bad Haight-Ashbury and all the flower children were 5 years and 500 miles away. Having any place to run to might have helped. (Then again, I was there for the flower children, too, and saw how the men used the women with a whole new philosophy for a weapon; the pushers and the pimps soon followed the amateurs.)

The matrons already knew what Mike wanted to know. I was separated from the main population of girls in a row of single cells next to lock-up. Sure. Nobody asked, but I had two girl-friends on the outside. Within the week, there would be three more on the inside, but not the one I wanted.

Across the hall, kitty-corner to my cell was Jewel's cell. Picking up where Mike left off, Jewel instructed me about the terms and conditions of life inside.

She noticed whatever it was that everyone else seemed to know, too. She informed me that we were "brothers" and being lovers was out of the question: she was "butch." It turned out that everyone was either "butch" or "femme," paired up with only the opposite, and all related through extended, adopted nuclear "families."

So I learned about prison families and roles. The family stuff was just too corny for me, but the roles and rules were really in the way. I said so, as I recall, because Jewel was definitely more interesting than any of the many "sisters." However, there I was — against my will — being "brothers" with this amazing young black woman who righteously thought that *this* white girl was out of her mind.

In desperation, I did the only thing that I could think of to do to get her attention: I took one of her girl-friends away. It worked. But it didn't help. She looked at me like she couldn't believe I'd done it. I couldn't believe it either.

Immediately, there was this *other* person relating to me. Now what?

With major misgivings, I sighed and gave up on Jewel. I quit bucking this new system and fell into my "natural" role like a born-again fundamentalist falling into his congregation of ecstatic believers. It was easy: any girl who could run without tripping, giggling or forgetting what she was doing was butch — the rest were femme. I just went around acting like I always did, except that now I had to keep one hand over one eye in order not to see one-half of the lesbian population. This was sad to me because I was drawn to girls who *could* run, talk-back and fight. I was privately confused. I felt betrayed by this new-found community; it was not to be the last time. This dogma felt like a sexual rip-off to me. It was. Rigid and tepid, it reminded me of what I didn't want in the straight world outside. It replicated heterosexuality, then heterosexism, by forcing me to relate sexually to someone I didn't want. Some would say I chose and consented.

I found out some time later that a few lesbians broke this rule of butch-femme roles. They were ridiculed for ignoring this taboo. This sexual activity or arrangement was given a name (*kiki*) and it was said with a sneer, like the word "queer." That was not a coincidence.

I'm still trying to figure out why this "correct" way to be a lesbian was socially enforced by *lesbians* inside an authoritarian and anti-lesbian institution. Today, it is still defended. The question remains both unanswered and interesting.

Two

In a graceful lunge, the big old Pontiac swung around in the gravel, sliding to a stop facing the valley of lights below. The air was so clear and soft that the glitter seemed to wash up over the foothills. A still, summertime midnight. Small sounds returned to the sagebrush on either side of us: a cricket, then two, a night bird rustling, a mouse. Some old coyote yowling off in the distance made us smile; no chill this night.

I lit a cigarette, tapping it first on the steering wheel with easy, firm strokes. The explosion of light caught her watching my face. I rolled the pack of Camels – matches tucked under the cellophane – back into the left sleeve of my white T-shirt.

We were listening to a stray mockingbird trill and warble, commenting upon our intrusion, when a sheriff's squadcar pulled in next to my window.

Leaning across his frontseat to look out the passenger-side's window, an older man with deep creases in his face asked me,

"Whutter you kids doin' up here?"

"Evening officer. Oh, nothing. Just talking and looking at the lights."

"Uhuh. Well... (pause)... How old are you son?"

"17."

"How 'bout your girlfriend, there?"

"18."

"What's her name?"

"Nancy. Uh, is it OK for us to be up here?"

"Well... sure it is son. You jus' go on an' have yoursef a good time. Nobody's gonna bother you up here this time of night 'cept me; an' now I know whutchu'r up to (chuckles). I was a young man once mysef, y'know."

Cross-dressing in Los Angeles was illegal. Three articles of same-sex clothing were required, so the rumor went. When I dressed to go out, there was a choice to pass or not; from time to time I did. Then older men would adopt me for hours at a time, instructing me on what a straight teenage boy needs to know to get along in the world. The barber was especially helpful, consoling me about my lack of a real 5 o'clock shadow; my voice was deep enough to convince him that it was only a matter of months. We both were pleased with the duck-tail and sideburns. He told me to keep my shoes shined and my "butt outta trouble." We both agreed that girls were worth the trouble most of the time; he was on his third wife and I was carving mental notches.

Three

Little Joe was twice my age. I was 17. She was the only "stone butch" I ever knew, either by rumor or by experience. She worked nights at a Walter's Donut franchise, owned by a 6' tall redhead who was straight except for sleeping with Little Joe. Joe also worked as a handyman, driving her tools around in a battered old station wagon. I think that she was good at it; I don't think she made much money. What she made, she spent at the bar or on the women in her life.

She bought matching men's gold & diamond rings when we got involved. Later, when I gave mine back, she ran over it with her station wagon until it was flat. I was astounded; I did not understand the destruction. I'm not even sure she was all that upset by my leaving. Some, yes. But it was not a big-deal relationship, only a couple of months. She could not have expected a lot more,

seeing as how I was butch, too. Just young. My crisp ducktail, buttondown men's shirts, black levis and boots, athlete's build. . . I mean, gimme a break.

She did like parading me around to the bars, showing me off to her (older) friends, gay and lesbian (although everybody was just "gay" then). It was very boring. They were mostly nice, but burnt out, alcoholic, tired, without ideas, frequently broke or broken-hearted or both. Johnny Mathis was young, hot and gay, then. We hadn't heard of Joan Baez or Bob Dylan yet, but folk music was just about to crack open. Civil rights were being fought for in the south and Watts was just about to burn. No one was talking about any of it. No one talked about politics, art or even gay rights. Feminism was not in the cards. Plastic was the watchword. L.A. in 1963. Water-skiing was a big thrill. Otherwise, deadly. The brightest spot in those dark days was the lit-up fishtank in the bar, almost every bar.

Everyone half-way grown remembers where they were when they first heard that J.F. Kennedy had been shot and killed in Texas: I was with Little Joe on the way to a motel for a quick one. It came over the radio in the station wagon in the middle of Sepulveda Blvd. just as she made a U turn into the motel. I made her stuff quarters into the pay TV so I could understand what had happened. She ran out of quarters.

There was a lot more I didn't understand, like how come Little Joe wouldn't let me touch her. I didn't take it personally; it was just more constriction for no good reason, so I thought then. I never found out different. The sex was ok, but lacked texture, content and context. It felt flat and alienated. The beatniks already knew about this. . . especially the women. At a time when the only meaningful event in our dull lives was a sexual one, this exchange lacked something. It was not my first experience with objectification, just the first lesbian one. It was not to be the last. However, the roles soon reversed. This didn't alter the impact of objectification, although it did alter the act itself for me.

Four

Rosie was the prettiest girl hanging out at the Queen of Hearts that summer. No doubt about it. She had a Dutch accent, processed pornography for a living, was still a virgin and loved my motorcycle. I think I met her at Christine's Fireside, but we liked the Queen better, I played softball for the Queen. Catcher. No one stole 2nd base; only two ever tried. It was a rowdy, no-account good-time bar full of hippies, dopers, drunks and all-around wildness. We'd close the bar, do wheelies up Stanyon Street at 2:30 a.m. heading for the Golden Gate bridge, change our minds midspan, flip a U turn, curse the toll and go to Playland at the beach instead. Somehow we stayed alive. We'd ride up to the river on weekends, only to come screaming back in time for the game on Sunday. (Rosie liked to ride up to the game by streaking across the grassy diamonds precisely as the other team finished warming up. A grand entrance

for a grand lady.) Butch-femme roles were "out" at the Queen of Hearts. We liked it that way. We laughed at the other bars. Old-fashioned. Stilted. Tired. Everybody was butch at the Queen; some of us were just more butch. Except Rosie. Rosie was femme. The only one around. Tough, strong, wild and femme. At 80 mph she used to lean back into that big old sissybar just like she was in a rocking chair and light me up a Player's Navy Cut. Slick as a whistle, every time. A bad mouth, too, looking for trouble. Found it: tough, strong, wild and butch. I hadn't turned 25 yet, but was wearing out the 2nd engine in my 2nd motorcycle. ("Sweet-thing" was the fastest street bike built at the time.)

I rode it into the bar one night and parked it by the pool table; I wasn't looking for trouble, just looking for Rosie. We passed a lot of time that summer, until she got scared and I got tired of excuses. She got left not a virgin, but still a femme. Nobody rode behind better than Rosie, nobody. I still have 8 x 11 glossy photos of us, me trying to teach her to ride that bike.

Five

Ellie-Sue caught my eye purposefully as I began to pass out leaflets. I grinned at the subversion of it all: another perverse act in the making!

Ellie-Sue and I had been comrades on the gay left half a dozen years ago. Sort of. She followed a girlfriend into the group just prior to its demise. This liberal group of gay men and lesbians was dedicated to making "progressive" people out of our decidedly conservative community. We broke up over work priorities: pro-love & sex or anti-racism.

Our love & sex committee distilled an early wave of pro-sadomasochism, pro-NAMBLA, pro-pornography; it was disguised as fun & feminism. The other committee wanted to fight the KKK and the Nazis. Ellie-Sue knew what committee she wanted to be on: she's a feminist for fun (F.F.F.)!

Ellie-Sue was dressed-up this night: reminding me of a cheerleader I once knew in high school, right down to the cute black patent leather shoes. She skipped over to me in the hallway outside of the small auditorium. We always did like each other in spite of our real differences.

"Hi, Suzy-Q!"

I always called her that. . . an old rock and roll lyric. Matched her get-up, too.

"Hi! You know, you *really* won't believe this!! They won't let me have a table in there."

Ellie-Sue was in a snit, pouting and clueless.

"Really. What's the matter with these new pro-pornography/anti-censorship girls, anyway? I guess they don't want your toys and magazines around to make them look bad. Even the leather stayed home tonight, so that Pam Normal and Mamie Token wouldn't have their sterling reps tarred by the disgusting brush of 'erotica,' black leather or silicone, even if 'by and for lesbians'. . . huh?"

Ellie-Sue looked at me hard. Then she said,

"Well, Tina Hardly wouldn't mind; she's used to all that stuff. It's her job."

"Face it, Suzy-Q, they're just prudes and hypocrites for censoring you."
Right about then a figment of my grandfather's imagination appeared, bearing down on us like a wrecking ball. (Granddaddy used to call grandma's loud-mouthed girlfriends "battleaxes." I always snuck out of the house right about then so I never knew how the argument ended.)

This one was bigger than the last one, who had told me, "You can't do that!"

"Sure I can, watch: (handing out next leaflet)."

This one snarled at me, "We're going to take your leaflets away!"

Actually, I was having a hard time trying to pass out two different leaflets at the same time (definitely a technique to develop, if you haven't). I would have preferred a little help. But, multiplying like fruitflies, this one had to go and threaten me. Fools, cowards and thugs: boring inconsistency of formula. With the barest of resistance, she retreated, squealing for building security.

Soon I was informed that leafletting outside the doors was not protected political speech or important dissent or even critical to discerning the truth of the matter; rather this building was private property rented by "anti-censorship" people and — to be sure (although I paid to go in) — ownership came before freedom of speech.

So, arm-in-arm, Ellie-Sue and I strolled downstairs — shamed by rejection — on the way out to the street for me to leaflet on public property. All real perverts belong on the street, anyway. She and I lingered in the lobby together catching up on old friends and watching people straggle out of the to-do upstairs, where tedium was prevailing (bias + censorship = no sexual tension & no pleasure and danger). I passed out the banned leaflets. I even asked Ellie-Sue to help, in the spirit of old times and high camp, seeing as how she was spoofed in one of the leaflets. She giggled, saying that the spoof really was funny; but with a sigh sadly declined, giving currency to the myth that feminists have no sense of humor or adventure. To be fair, she did rally in her farewell: throwing her whole self into my arms with a flurry of drama, she announced in a stage whisper for the benefit of friends passing by us in the lobby,

"I've learned everything I know about being butch from you, you devil!"

I laughed. "That's funny, Suzy-Q. I haven't learned a thing about being femme from you."

Not long after her departure, a dyke came out of the building and asked if she could help me leaflet the now surging crowd. Quickly, the 125 people streamed away into the late summer night with newly felt relief on their faces — and two banned leaflets gripped in their hands.

Just when I thought that no one else was coming out, a local ex-feminist and converted masochist bumped through the doors with a side-kick in tow.

"Hey, scum. I don't think yr leaflet is funny!"

They tried to pick a fight with the other woman standing there with my leaflets.

Turning to me, the side-kick (affecting the 1963 punk style of a 14 yr old boy that she was too young to have known about from real life) sneered, "Hey lookit that, she's wearing a black leather jacket!" To me: "You're a real pervert!"

I kinda chuckled, the leather creaking softly with the movement, "Yeah, it just had its 15th birthday." Stepping towards her, I stroked the sleeve: "You wanna touch it?"

Annie McCombs

My Brief Career as a Femme

This year I bought a T-shirt that said, "Don't Call Me Honey," showing a tough looking woman fixing a car. Underneath the picture it said "Photographs of Women in the Trades." I have started wearing it. My brief career as a femme has ended.

I have a picture of the two of us sitting on the couch after we cooked Easter dinner. She is wearing white pants and vest, and a flowered blouse, the latter because she was trying to get out of roles. She is sitting absolutely straight (you should excuse the expression), unsmiling, one hand clenched in a fist on her knee, the other dropped over my shoulder – "chattel property pose" she later called it. Her leg is crossed at the ankle.

I am leaning into her. I am wearing a blouse, Middle Eastern jewelry and a long skirt. I am smiling. Nancy Henley wanted to use the photo as an illustration of male-female non-verbal behavior. My lover, who is very private, would not allow it.

When I started to go out with her it immediately became apparent that she wouldn't let me pay for anything and opened doors for me. I was taken aback because I thought only working class women, which she wasn't, were still into roles (this was 1979). I bought her the poetry of Olga Broumas and Adrienne Rich to make up for the money she spent.

I am intellectually butch and emotionally femme (my mental health would be better if it were the other way around). So the first stand I took was on not being interrupted when I spoke. I knew from gender and language studies that interruption was a male speech pattern. I had to translate it into lawspeak for her. I said, "You are interrupting my oral argument." She stopped because she was trying to get out of roles. Once she said, "I almost helped you on with your coat." I said that it would have been OK. She said, "It's very confusing." She liked the time she saved by knowing exactly what was expected of her and what she could expect of the women she was with. But even though she defends the efficiency of roles in lesbian relationships, she detests the role depictions in *on our backs*.

She was surprised when I told her that in Chicago the alleged women's community said I was "too femmy." She said, "What does that mean?" I said it means "at all" – any overt sign of vulnerability, for example. She said, "But you

go to Europe by yourself. I know women who wouldn't go in to buy a cup of coffee by themselves." In fact her former lover didn't learn to drive for years because she thought it wasn't feminine.

THE NORMS GOVERNING FEMALE BEHAVIOR IN HER SUBCULTURE WERE SO RESTRICTIVE THAT IT MADE MY LIFE AS A CULVER CITY HOUSEWIFE IN THE FIFTIES SEEM LIKE LESBIAN NATION. I soon realized that, if I followed those norms, within a few weeks all the skills, well almost all the skills, I had developed as a woman functioning in the world without a man would be lost. It is true that it's not like heterosexual relationships. Heterosexual women, at least heterosexual mothers of young children, function competently. We carried our own bags of groceries and forty pound children. She asked someone to carry my portable typewriter and I yelled (a bad habit of mine), "I can carry my own typewriter."

But, you are saying, we thought she was getting out of roles. She was, but it turned out she had TB and so I decided that there were more important things to worry about than who opened doors. But one night we went dancing and she said she wanted to dance with another woman. I told her to go ahead. Not only did she ask the woman's partner for permission, which amused me, but she then passed me on to the partner, which did not amuse me. Since she cooked and cleaned up and shopped a substantial part of the time I didn't feel oppressed, even though I knew that she cooked because her father did and she cleaned because I didn't do it well enough for her 99th percentile standards.

I was bothered by her male sense of entitlement which meant that she didn't think she had to explain the reasons for her behavior. Arbitrary authority always outraged me. I wouldn't take it from a man and I didn't like it from her. She had never had to explain or account for what she did before, but I think that reflected social class variables as well as roles, since almost all her former lovers were of working class origin and her background was upper upper class.

. . . I always wore perfume and was wearing Calèche because Pat Miller asked me to bring some back for her from Paris and I bought some for myself too. Pat, although not in roles, is dykey. If she were in roles she would be butch. But my role-oriented lover didn't like the perfume on me because she said "I could wear it." One of the aspects of roles is not to wear the same thing. At least its not gender neutral!

I thought her clear distinction between friends and lovers, resulting in not being friends with her lovers or lovers with her friends was little short of tragic. She agreed that I was right logically, especially since she disliked being with the other studs since they talked about football. I hated her persona when she was with her stud friends. They acted like my adolescent boyfriends – loud, raucous and obvious in their comments about women. I also thought it was crazy for studs to pay, when women made 53 cents on the dollar. I could not relate to the "ladies" fantasy of being suburban housewives, kept by their studs, although as a sociologist I could understand it (because they were Black and for

the most part did not have my first-hand experience). I had tried it and hated it as had most of my friends. In fact what happened to us in the fifties was part of the reason for the current Women's Movement. I also could not grow fingernails, an important and eroticized part of the self-presentation. Once I had them put on in a nail shop, but picked at them so they were off in a few days. It felt like insects crawling on my fingertips.

I knew that the butch/stud self-presentation as invulnerable and always in control cost them psychologically and somatically, because for women such a self-presentation is a denial of reality. We are all vulnerable as women and our degree of control is much less than that of men. The inability to ask for help, common to lesbians including those not in roles, wasted lots of time and energy. Probably the reason such women found me attractive was that I would offer the help so that they wouldn't have to ask for it.

The most striking analysis of what role relationships do for the "femme" or for traditional women generally can be found in Angela Miles unpublished manuscript on Harlequin novels. She observes that the hero, though seemingly arbitrary, aloof and dominating is in fact a "male mother." He takes care of the heroine in contrast to the other man, a dependent *nebbish*. The hero bosses her around but it's for her own good, just as her mother did. He nurtures her, and women are starved for nurturance, having spent so much energy taking care of others. (The same pattern seems to be repeating itself in lesbians taking care of gay men with fund-raising for aids, etc. Straight women take care of straight men, and gay women take care of gay men. Plus ça change, plus la même chose.) When I read the article I was so struck by the similarity between the Harlequin hero and my former lover that I phoned Angela in Nova Scotia to tell her I realized why the relationship meant so much to me. For example, Angela writes of the Harlequin hero who tells the heroine not to go out riding in a storm. She is caught in a storm, soaked and chilled. The hero takes care of her, drying her off and bathing her feet in warm water.

While I know enough not to go out in a storm, she would do such things as reminding me to take my meds, until I remembered it myself, to nap at around four in the afternoon, when she noticed I became tired and irritable (my Circadian rhythm), and persuading me not to write a nasty note to my then lawyer. She told me not to because she might want to return to Chicago and be law partners with that woman. Later she admitted she had no intention of doing so, but she thought my letter would harm me. My therapist asked me if I didn't feel manipulated; I said "No" because it was only for my own good. More importantly she flew in for a Memorial Day weekend enabling me to make an alleged deadline for my manuscript. She supervised finishing the typing, proofread it, and shipped it off to my publisher. She also packed me up out of San Diego and Boston, and started packing me out of Los Angeles. I said we had a moving relationship. And she told me where to get my hair cut, my clothes altered, my car fixed, which restaurants to eat what at, and also, since

she was an upper-upper class WASP, what the official norms of behavior were. She was always right in those practical areas. Together I thought there was nothing we couldn't do, since our strengths were complementary. For example, I would explain women, "them," to her, and she would explain law to me.

AS A DAUGHTER OF IMMIGRANTS THERE ARE LACUNAE IN MY SOCIALIZATION about many norms. I feel alone and afraid in a world I never made (nor did any of my relatives). I am a *luftmensch*, feet firmly planted in the air. And I have no earth in my chart.

Like a mother she would encourage/pressure me to do the "right thing" vis à vis my family, e.g., send my mother clippings referring to me. She insisted I take my mother to lectures when I was in Santa Barbara where my mother lived, and she talked to my father to make sure I would not be cut out of his will. I know that had she been in New York with me I would have visited my aunt in a nursing home in Long Island. Generally she made my reach exceed my grasp. None of my other lovers of either gender would have tried to run my life the way she did, even for my own good, because the men were hippies and the women feminists. . .

A friend of mine says that her lover, who is butch even though they are not in a formal role relationship, is the only mother she ever had.

Eight months after I last saw her, when my purse was stolen in New York, including the keys to the apartment I was sitting, my first thought was, if she were there, she would tell me how to handle it with a minimum of angst and a maximum of effectiveness.

This is about roles. One of my friends, who used to be in roles, said that nothing is worse than a forced relationship. I think lots of things are worse. For many of us, those like my friend, restriction on our autonomy is the worst fact we can imagine. For others, including me, breach of trust, ABANDONMENT, IS OUR PARTICULAR NIGHTMARE. The former, were they in roles, would be butch. The latter would be femme. And we are attracted to each other, usually with disastrous results.

So, you might ask, if such women attract each other, and at least at first meet each other's needs, what is the problem? The problem is that almost no individual woman under patriarchy in fact has the power to guarantee the safety of a woman either from structural (societal) or individual harm. Remember there is no individual solution? It's true. And depending on another person as an individual to take care of you leads to the same learned helplessness, the same lack of autonomy and probably low self-esteem that is endemic in heterosexual women, particularly those with no source of power and esteem outside their love relationship. It is true that Lesbian feminists should not have put down women who were in roles. But there is no need to valorize or romanticize a relationship grounded in dominance and subordination. Dominance is dominance, eroticized though it may be, and whether or not the dominant person is female or male. This is a data based statement!

Pauline Bart

I'm butch. If I've been changing, it's been toward that identity, toward pride and self-acceptance. I've no guarantee that what I mean by it is the same as or even similar to what any other lesbian means by it, but I've done a lot of thinking about it: as a radical feminist, the political analysis of my life's as much a part of living that life as breathing.

"All that stuff" is in the past though, right? I don't think so. I remember about five years ago sitting in on a long and very funny party conversation in which we could get a consensus among a half-dozen dykes on who was butch and who was femme in our town. There were women we couldn't assign of course; but there were very few disagreements. So it's not exactly a historical question.

It's another, yet another, coming out, to admit (catch the verb?) to other lesbians that you're butch and it's a serious, **permanent** identity. You can joke about it all right, but no one really wants to claim it: there's the risk of ridicule, rudeness, miscellaneous social weirdness. I think (along with Linda Strega) that butches are the queers of the lesbian community: we're also the most visible of lesbians, thus either heroes or something shameful to be hidden and denied (depending on the spirit of the times).

I was butch long before I was out to myself; an older dyke who met me during my mercifully brief experiment with heterosexuality immediately said to my best friend (a lesbian also) that I'd "make a fine baby butch one of these days." Fortunately no one repeated the remark to me at the time, but years later I read it for a compliment and accepted it as such. (It can be a harsh criticism, though, from some women's mouths.) I certainly made a bid for being the butch of the pair when I was with men (which confused them).

I've never seen butchdom as a cardboard replica of masculinity; never met a butch who felt to me, socially, like a man; never felt from a butch the sense of impending violence that underlies most male social congress. The women I've met who offensively imitate men have seemed to me to be playing — dressing up to shock and amaze, not **living a life**, if you follow me, but doing an act for an evening. I've heard of butches who were violent, exploitative, etc. — just never yet met one. Many butches of my experience have an almost exaggerated gentleness, an awareness that they are powerful people and have to behave themselves (I contrast this with the all-out violence of which women are capable who believe themselves weak and powerless: feeling that they are too insignificant to do harm, they exercise no self-control and feel no responsibility). Perhaps I've been leading a sheltered life.

Radical feminism forced me out of the closet, though I was queer from earliest childhood. I feel (agreeing with Strega again) that my own butchdom extends back into childhood, that I knew at a very early age that the trappings of femininity were the trappings of slavery and that I wanted no part of them. I knew that I looked ridiculous in "girly clothes," and resisted them womanfully; I was never wholly indoctrinated in female masochism (though it got to me to an extent, as it does to all of us), never learned to enjoy endless pointless

restrictions and imposed fragility and letting the boys win. I longed for two things: competence and dignity. Those two things, for me, are at the heart of butchdom.

I loved a straight woman for three years, which is another old story; all I want to say about her here is that she wouldn't hold hands with me on the street because I looked too butch; and from her I first heard the deadly old song of "you're just like a man," on various occasions and with varying levels of indirection. (Those bruises still hurt badly.) In the end she went back to loving men, which makes the objection a little strange; but my point is the near-universal butch experience of being told you're like a man when you know you're the one person on earth that men hate and fear most: the woman who acts like a full human being.

By which I mean, the woman who wears clothes that she can move freely in, that are comfortable, that she can work in, that last a long time and take little care, that protect her body from the acquisitive eyes of men. The woman who doesn't automatically smile and shuffle for every man she encounters. The woman who walks with her own purpose and not for other people's entertainment. The woman who looks both capable of defending herself and ready to do so. The woman who does not obey. The woman who is in revolt against enforced femininity, who claims for herself the right not to dress and act and talk "like a woman" (meaning, like a toy). It's all been said for me already, but I can't emphasize it enough: butches are what so many, many women would be if women had any freedom at all.

I'm also a man-hater (in the sense that I think we'd all be a lot better off without them and I don't mind saying so), but I don't think all butches are man-haters. Certainly not all butches are feminists. I obviously don't see an inherent contradiction between being butch and being feminist, since I think I'm both. I do think there's a contradiction between being a "femme" and being a feminist, because most of what I call "femminess" is the replication of that servile and manipulative feminine routine they tried to implant in all of us. In general, I don't like femmes. (Paula Mariedaughter has given me something to think about, though, and my best friend in the world has always said she's more femme than otherwise. I suppose I'm saying I don't like 'femmy behaviour' – manipulation, placation, the powerless act, deliberate incompetence, etc.)

You're expected to like femmes, if you're butch; it's part of the "like a man" myth, as far as I can see. You're expected to share men's oppressive beauty standards, and to be charmed by femmy displays of powerlessness and cuteness. Of course, I've been trained (as have all of us) to see femmy women as pretty and desirable, and I'm very susceptible to femmy manipulation, but in the end it makes me angry. It makes me very angry to see any woman acting like a child and wearing full femme drag, whether she be straight or lesbian; I'm no more comfortable with most femmes than with straight women (but then 99% of straight women act femme, and the rest usually don't stay straight for long).

Another part of butchdom for me is visibility: the refusal to hide as a queer. I have skin privilege and middle-class privilege; I'd be a real coward to pass for straight as well. It's very hard sometimes because I hate being stared at, I'm sensitive to hostility and it depresses the hell out of me to deal with it all the time; but I'm also stubborn and I can't give up, I can't let them drive me back into the protective camouflage of the obedient woman.

My perception of feminine paraphernalia as the symbols of oppression was in my gut long before it reached my brain. To me, being butch is an ethical choice, a choice of resistance; but in my heart I feel it's not a choice at all; it feels like something I would be anyway, regardless of all else. It's more than a preference in clothes, jewelry, shoes; more than a haircut. Butches have a cultural identity that embraces but exceeds mere costumes. Judy Grahn has speculated about it (in *Another Mother Tongue*), and I've wondered about it. There are lesbians who "dress butch" for a dance or a party, and it's just a game. In me it's my soul I'm talking about, and I can't clarify that one much further. My spiritual life is vague and mostly I ignore it, but I have the conviction that there's a spiritual dimension to this much-maligned identity of mine.

Are butches protectors, warriors, defenders of women and children (as men pretend to be)? Maybe, but that function has surely been stolen from us. Most of the butches I've known, and the one I've been, have needed a lot of protection themselves from a hateful world; have tried to protect their own vulnerable souls, stand their ground, insist on their dignity, hide their griefs. What does it mean, emotionally, to be butch? I think that varies with every individual woman. Some butches make it through life with a poker face; I cry when I hurt. Some butches want a lover, even a nuclear lesbian family; I want solitude and independence. I don't think you can generalize about emotional needs between butches and femmes: I don't think that "femmes are more committed to monogamy" or that "butches don't talk about their feelings," etc.

I want to mention a few specifics of butch/femme interaction that spring out at me from my own life. A lot of women see butches as a challenge of some kind. There's some heavy covert antagonism around – internalized homophobia, or maybe "you're getting away with something (not submitting to femininity) and I'm jealous, so I'll give you a hard time" – I don't know. Butches come in for a lot of teasing, testing, aggravation of various kinds, in the name of play. To me it feels like queer-baiting, but from dykes. Everyone is always trying to feminize butches, or to see how much we're really prepared to resist feminization (your friend deliberately offers to lend you her most "frou-frou" slippers, just to see if you'll wear them; what do you do now?)

And lastly, it's a kind of violence to refuse a butch her identity, however she defines and defends it: I can remember a lot of pain and frustration trying to explain to a lover why it hurt me when she called me "beautiful." To me that was a femme-word, and on some (gut) level an insult. There's a lot of struggle

and hurt (expressed or not) between lovers about this kind of thing. I am now "single" and plan to stay that way for a while; but one of my biggest anxieties about the prospect of being anyone's lover is the process of coming out to a lesbian, as a Butch, and the fear of being disrespected for it. I think it's even more scary than coming out as queer to straight people; I don't want much from them.

I've left so much out, so many questions: can femmes exploit butches (I think so)? Can two butches be lovers (queers among the queer!)? Have you ever seen a femme turn into a butch? Vice versa (I have)? What about the sense of self-betrayal when you (butch) find **yourself** replaying ingrained femme routines? My love to you all. To no other magazine, no other editors, I think, could I have entrusted this awkward and difficult stream of thoughts.

De Clarke

Most discussions on butch/femme relations get stuck in the problems we create when we copy heterosexual models. I am indebted to Linda Strega (*LE* 1:3) for cutting through that clutter and zeroing in on fundamentals, such as the essential characteristics of butch and femme and the essential politics of our relations. Linda reminds us that butch and femme personalities are determined at an early age in response to the hets' efforts to control us via indoctrination in the feminization process. We either refuse to participate in that process (butch) or acquiesce in it, however reluctantly (femme).

I share this author's assumption that butch personality traits go far beyond mere "tomboy" characteristics or emulation of male roles. The rejection of the feminization process in childhood and early teens is prompted largely by our sexual/sensual/friendship relations with our mothers and sisters. The rebellion of young lesbians is a profoundly political act because it challenges the power of fathers and brothers within the nuclear family. The butch lesbian, by rejecting feminization, affirms her own attraction for other females in her household and in other nuclear families. She sees through the indoctrination process and rejects it. Femmes may be just as unhappy about feminization but we are/were not willing to pay the price of rejecting it.

As a femme who is out publicly, I recognize the importance of butch visibility in finding affirmation of my lesbian identity, especially during the current femme stampede back to dresses, makeup and men. While my essential responses are still femme (I don't believe we can change back and forth), I now realize that I have joined butch lesbians in the front line of dyke freedom fighters, defending myself against the feminization process in order to preserve some essential space for relating to other dykes sexually, sensually and as a friend. I hear Linda calling on other femmes to do the same, and to use our position of relative privilege to take the lead in vacating patriarchally defined roles. I believe this political strategy is 'right on.'

Paula Mariedaughter moves in the opposite political direction (LE 2:1). Her definition of femme would take us right back to oppressive role-playing. The letter by Mary Crane (LE 2:1) is nothing less than vicious anti-butch hate literature. I challenge Jeanette Silveira to explain why it was published.

Isabel Andrews

[Please see my comments in the Editor's Introduction. – JS]

I consider myself butch but I really had to stop and ask myself how/why I came to that idea. What makes up my ideas of butch and femme? Butch – my mind conjures up an image of the butch of the past – the bulldyke. What imagery that evokes! Bulldyke. The word comes to us from our own herstory with the story of Boadica, warrior queen of the Iceni. Roman soldiers in 60 A.D. plundered her country and raped her two daughters. She took revenge by killing the entire legion. Now we see her in the image of the 50s and 60s, dressed in her jeans with the pegged legs, motorcycle boots, worn workshirt open at the neck, short hair slicked down, swaggering across the barroom floor with her arm around a sweet young thing. Images provided for me by cheap novels.

I sometimes have more difficulty these days sorting us all out – we all wear jeans. It's how we wear them that separates the butch from the femme. I wear jeans with my cowboy boots or my high-tops. I wear tailored shirts with button-down collars, sweaters, or chamois shirts. I buy my clothes in the men's department because I like the fit and the style better. I have never felt comfortable in skirts. My stride is too long and my hips don't roll. I look ridiculous in lace and peter pan collars. I feel like I belong in my jeans and walk in them as though they were part of my body. I wear my hair short and without curls or waves. It's that tailored look for me. But looks don't get to the core of the matter.

The other qualities of being butch are more elusive. They are traits that have been labelled "masculine." "Masculine" has often been equated with being aggressive and action-oriented. "Feminine" has been equated with being passive, emotional, and people-oriented.

To me, my butch qualities are evident in two areas: How I relate to the world and how I relate to my lover. In my intimate relationship I like to believe that I am the one taking care of her – not in a nurturing sense but in a more primitive sense (I'll protect you from the boogie woman). I love to "take care of my woman." I want her to feel every bit the special woman she is – my lover. She enjoys being pampered. I know she can take care of herself. She's done a fine job of that for all these years. But I can do those little things for her – opening doors, carrying groceries, keeping the car tuned up. Those tasks carry the masculine label.

Being butch "out in the world" has always allowed me to be as macho as I wanted. It meant I could be tough and keep up my walls. Those brick walls were a great way to keep people at a respectable distance. Alcohol was the mortar that kept the bricks in place. I didn't have to trust or risk much. People made (and still make) judgments about me because of my dress and the way I interacted with them.

Our society's perceptions are changing – ever so slowly. The Women's Movement has brought about an awareness that many traits described as masculine and feminine are actually human traits. . . All of this has made it easier for me to change. I now view the world thru my sober butch eyes and have realized these are all roles we choose to play and they are flexible. I have chosen to modify my role over the years. It is a role I've created for myself. My intimate relationship allows me to develop as the person I want to be – my lover has no rigid images for me to fit into.

I've become a gentler butch and I can allow her (encourage her!) to pamper me with delightful meals, coffee at my bedside, clean laundry, mended pants. While we each play these roles out and talk about them, we discover over and over that we are complementing each other – not playing male or female parts. She really can find a spark plug, she just prefers not to. Feeling that I have to protect her is an illusion I enjoy. She allows me my illusion for she enjoys being taken care of like this.

The wheel of my life has turned. I've gone from the tough butch to the gentle butch. I continue to grow, change, evolve.

Karen Cameron

once i was voted "most femme" on the wimin's land where i lived. other wimin have told me they don't see me as either butch or femme, but i don't believe them for a minute. i think they're trying to be "nice." or they think of "femme" as so disgusting that i, their friend, couldn't possibly be it.

i don't wear makeup except to costume parties; i don't act prissy; the wimin who attract me are not usually butch. i'm fairly assertive, sexually and otherwise. i'm very involved in my work and not interested in playing "wife."

on the other hand, i love clothes that are soft and flowing and glittery. i've cooked and done needlework since i was practically a toddler and am good at both. i'm possessive and finicky about my house, which is the place i most like to be. i don't enjoy work that makes you grunt and get calluses or motor oil on your hands, or where you risk cutting your foot off with some loud, buzzing tool. and i'd rather be the passenger than the driver.

i consider myself femme and i'm proud of it. just like i'm proud to be a woman, and a lesbian. i know many wimin have felt oppressed by the "feminine" expectations that were put on them. i didn't. my parents gave me a

lot of options. i happened to like many of the things that were part of the feminine role. later i found i didn't like doing them in an atmosphere where i had to, nor did i like some of the other things men expected of me, like passivity and deference. so i decided not to deal with men. i came out as a lesbian. as a lesbian i still do not like my role being *prescribed*, which is why i'm not attracted to the butch-femme model. i dream instead of a lover who likes all the femmy things i do.

i don't want to be told i'm not femme or that there's something wrong with being femme, or that i'm "less lesbian" and more het-identified. we all make our own choices for reasons that come out of our individual backgrounds and personalities. i could argue that butches are "less lesbian" because they're "less womanly." instead of playing more-lesbian-than-thou, why not value each womon's individual choices and skills?

i'm very grateful for the lesbian couple who taught me about trading work hour for hour, no matter what the work. we as a community still look upon patching a roof as harder (hence more valuable) than patching a sweater. nurturing, counseling work, which is often extremely draining, is seen as a friendly favor we do for our sisters instead of a task that deserves repayment. nearly all of us, myself included, share these beliefs, so they're hard to break. the patriarchy instilled them deeply in us, along with a lot of other garbage about the worthlessness of females and all that females do.

while we're busy expanding the limits of what wimin can do to include everything, let's not forget the things wimin have traditionally done well. let's not hold as our *only* ideal the womon who can do anything a man can do.

when we fully value everything good that each of us is, then we will have developed a truly womon-loving culture.

zana

Butch Images: 1956-1986

It is sometimes assumed that the current interest in butch-femme roles is simply a recapitulation of the roles characteristic of the old-time lesbian bar scene. I will argue that history does not repeat itself. After the radical lesbian/feminist analyses which began in the '70s, today it is impossible to plead ignorance of the woman-hating elements which permeated the traditional butch-femme identities.

I joined the lesbian bar culture in the mid-fifties. I, like most of my friends, defined myself as a butch and aspired to be a Big Bad Butch. Jo was my role model. Jo was an MP in the Air Force – tan, tough, muscled. She had a cocky walk, a wicked grin, and, if the occasion called for it, she could pout better than Jimmy Dean. Jo wore boots, drove a motorcycle, and carried a knife. No

one messed with Jo's girls unless they wanted to get punched out. And none of Jo's girls messed around with the butches – unless they wanted to get slapped. In the fifties the ideal butch was barely distinguishable from the ideal young working class male. A real butch wouldn't have liked quiche.

At the time, I didn't really have a clear conception of the femme ideal. Who would want to be a femme anyway? To me that meant wasting time putting your hair in curlers, being afraid of everything, and not knowing how anything worked. Femmes were lesbians who were too sissy or inadequate to be butch. (It wasn't just sex researchers who thought real lesbians were masculine.)

Although femmes were generally too silly to be friends with, I sure did fall in love with them – and made love to them – *nicely*. That was the big difference between us and the boys. Butches were much better lovers. We knew just what felt good and we made very few sexual demands in return. I compared notes with my butch buddies. We all agreed that it often didn't work out very well when femmes tried to make love to us – they just weren't assertive enough. One horny afternoon a couple of us tried to make out. After a lot of confusion about who was going to take the lead, we finally had some success, but of course there was no romantic ecstasy without a femme involved.

It's easy to feel nostalgia for the good old, bad old days. (Jo, if you're reading this, give me a call!) There's a thrill to conquest. There's a thrill to overpowering someone, either literally or figuratively. But for me, those old roles were terribly crippling and it took a long time to free myself from their grip.

The hippie-60s brought some changes. If virile young men could go in for beads, long hair, incense, poetry and pacifism, then surely a butch was permitted to embroider her work shirt or even dress ethnic. But the big breakthrough came with the Women's Liberation Movement. It was hard for me to understand those women (like femmes!) who had taken on traditional feminine personality characteristics. "Butch-liberation" was even more difficult. Since I already was assertive and knew how to change oil in a car, for a long time I thought feminism had little to say to me personally. Yet, as it turned out, an agenda of radical lesbian transformations still awaited me. The items will be familiar to readers of this journal – learning to combine strength with sensitivity, and to widen our conceptions of sexuality and sensuality, learning the arts of asking without demanding, of accepting without feeling indebted, of taking care of oneself without being selfish, of expanding one's abilities and accomplishments while simultaneously empowering others.

At this point it seems mad to jeopardize this ethos for the cheap thrills of black leather jackets and dolly dresses. Today, lesbians have dozens of role models, women whose lives leap out at us from record album covers, poetry books, and journals of lesbian philosophy. We no longer have any excuse for letting the popular punk phallic culture define for us what is sexy, what is romantic, what is worth living for.

Noretta Koertge

I have been trying to define Femme and Butch characteristics for many years now, to no concrete avail. I've decided that there is no characteristic or set of characteristics that is Femme or Butch specific. This makes defining someone as Femme or Butch a very abstract thing to do. For me it is a vibes thing. I just get a Femme or Butch feeling about the lesbian.

When I first heard about Femme and Butch my lesbian friends were calling me a Femme. I asked why? Clothes? No, because I dress Butchier than my Butch friend X. Because I'm shy and soft spoken? No, because my Femme friend Y is definitely NOT shy or soft-spoken. Because I am more passive than my Butch lover and often concede to her decisions? No, because my Butch friend Z does the same with her Femme lover. Because I am attracted to Butches? No, because I am also attracted to Femmes. There just isn't a clear reason why. But no doubt I am a Femme. (This is an identity I have resisted for a long time, I'm sure because of the bad rep Femmes get in the lesbian community.)

In my opinion, Femme/Butch is a simulated sexism internalized within our lesbian communities. As products of a sexist patriarchal society it does not surprise me that it happens. I do not like it. I feel it is limiting and harmful to both Femmes and Butches.

I understand that in the 50s this type of role activity was essential to the existence of lesbian community. It was the ticket to a lesbian existence in a strict world where such a thing was forbidden. The similarity that Femme/Butch created between lesbian relationships and straight relationships somehow made it OK for lesbian relationships to exist (minimally only, but nonetheless exist). I see this same het-approval system now. Straights are still much quicker to accept lesbian relationships when they follow the het model than when they are uniquely lesbian.

Femme/Butch still exists. Now the definition is vague, unlike in the 50s when the rules were clear. . . . When I first heard of Femme and Butch the discussion usually left me angered and hurt. Now I know more of where the pain came from. The comments made too nearly approximated sexism. Some examples are: "She throws like a Femme," "Good luck getting her to talk about her feelings, she's such a Butch!" "The last thing I'd ever want to be is a Femme," or "Look out for those assertive Femmes!" Comments like these are hurtful and foster limiting stereotypes about lesbians.

Take "She throws like a Femme." A more helpful comment would be, "She throws like no one has ever shown her how to throw," or "She throws like she is out of touch with her body." Rephrasing the situation in this way takes the stereotype off "Femmes" and more accurately describes the situation such that opportunities for resolve are opened. Throwing poorly no longer is an inevitable condition of her Femmeness.

Judy Brow

Letters

Re: "Separatism and Radicalism" by Brunet and Turcotte, LE 2:1, although I enjoyed and agreed with much of your article, it was hard to get past the initial racism in Brunet's introduction. "The existence of six million French speaking Canadians within this English-speaking continent is rarely recognized by our lesbian sisters in the U.S." [my emphasis] What of the Native Indian women who were there first and are rarely – if ever – recognized? They are forced to speak both English and French instead of their own language? Another sad omission?
Ena

Since you asked for my opinion, I will give it. I think that the "Femme and Butch" and "S & M" debates are both dead ends and a waste of time, and I hope your next issues cover more topics than those.

Feministically yours,

Cherie Lyn

I found the outline for your Readers' Forum on sex worrying in its implicit assumptions. You say, "It is the editor's observation that non-S&M lesbians tend not to write or talk publicly about actually doing sex." From what I've read, Sadists talk about cutting, burning, branding and raping – well, naturally, I tend not to talk about those when I'm talking about sex. I talk about them when I'm talking about violence, mutilation and oppression. It has often been said that rape is not about sex but about men asserting power over women – are you suggesting it's sexual when women do it?

Your outline ends, "It's my belief that if the S&M conflict is to take us anywhere this [no explicit sex] situation must change." Why do we expect Sadism to take us anywhere? Why should we seek desperately for something positive in that nasty business? Why can't we say it's brutal, brutalizing and murderous?

Nor has it been my experience that lesbians do not talk or write about sex. Seems to me our poetry and novels are full of it. I prefer it described in terms which include the abstract and political because I find that a lot more interesting than the old "who puts what." But in any case Radclyffe Hall's dots: ". . . and that night they were not divided" have been amply filled with both metaphorical and literal descriptions by: Jane Rule, June Arnold, Djuna Barnes, Audre Lorde, Lee Lynch, Andrea Loewenstein, Ann Bannon, Elizabeth Riley, Minnie Bruce Pratt, to drop a few (not mentioning the more subtle imagery of Suniti Namjoshi, Adrienne Rich, Judith Barrington or the symbolic Monique Wittig).

The 'no explicit sex' argument is one I have heard most often from liberals who don't like to condemn Sadism and are grasping for something negative to say about lesbians who are horrified by it. There are very short steps between: "at least SM dykes talk openly about their sexual practice" and "non-SM lesbians are too prudish to talk about what they do" and "S&M has grown up because of the silence around lesbian sex": making us responsible for what we abhor.

During an interview, a heterosexual woman journalist brought up lesbian sado-masochism out of the blue. I said I found it oppressive. She said she found it fascinating. I said I found it oppressive, racist, and anti-semitic. She said she found it fascinating and shocking, and she liked to have her thoughts provoked. I was horrified by her insulting voyeurism, and hoped she would not think of telling the N. African women's health group she was seeing next how stimulating she found clitoridectomy. Her later article accused Onlywomen Press, the collective I work with, of not mentioning sado-masochism.

Obviously het journalists have their own problems, but there seems such defensiveness among lesbians towards Sadism, as though we thought we were responsible for it, as though this journalist's "fascination" should have been pandered to. The tone of your Readers' Forum outline reminded me strongly of the *off our backs* review of *on our backs* (July '85) finding lesbian Sadism and pornography a "challenge," stating that "those who have risen up against and written against S/M haven't come up with an erotica to challenge it." This is absolutely ludicrous. Must we manufacture a sugar-free, non-ulcer-producing chewing gum before we tell smokers they are polluting our lungs?

In Sisterhood,

Anna Livia
London

P.S. I find Lesbian Ethics really interesting and supporting and I appreciate all the hard work you put into it.

Notes on Contributors

Sidney Spinster. Dyke homeopath, witch, and girl nurse. I will be part of starting a biophilic sanctuary in the country where wimmin can come and unleash their own healing force, unimpeded by men or medicine.

Ruston. I'm 33, from Aotearoa (the Maori, rightful name for New Zealand). Came out in WLM, 1975, a Lesbian Separatist since 1976. I'm an ex-het Fem who resisted marriage and motherhood. European-descent (Welsh-Irish-English), xtian-raised (protestant), middle class. I met Bev and Linda in 1983 through our shared politics about roles and heterosexism, which we'd developed independently in our respective countries.

Bev Jo. Never-het, working class, ex-catholic, 35-year-old U.S. Dyke of Irish, English, German, and French ancestry (all parents and grandparents U.S.-born), with a hidden disability. I knew I was a Dyke from an early age and came out before the Women's Movement. With political support and with the intention to fight roles, I later came out as Butch. I've been a Dyke Separatist since 1972.

Linda Strega. I am a 44-year-old, working class, Italian-descent U.S. Dyke, ex-catholic, with a hidden disability. An ex-het Fem who resisted marriage and motherhood, I came out through the U.S. Women's Movement in 1972, and have been a Dyke Separatist since 1973. Ruston, Bev and I are working together on a book called *Heterosexism Among Lesbians: The Politics of Self-Betrayal*.

Morgan Grey lives in a Vermont cow pasture with three black cats and dreams of life on a ringed plant.

Julia Penelope is currently a visiting associate professor of women's studies at washington university in St. Louis. She's teaching 20th century Lesbian novels this semester and will teach "Women, Language, and Reality" for the first time in the spring semester. She's also quite busy marketing D.Y.K.E. (Do You Know Enough?), the "trivia" game about Lesbian lives and culture, with two other Dykes, and trying to find financial backing to start a Dyke publishing company. She is happy and definitely not bored!

Judy Freespirit. I live in Berkeley where I work as a secretary in the College of Engineering (under an assumed name, of course). After work I enter a phone booth where I quickly undress (it's not easy for a fat woman in one of those tiny little phone booths) and emerge in my true persona as fat disabled aging jewish-workingclassdykewriter about town who believes that things could be a lot worse, and (Reagan willing) probably will.

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First West Coast Conference by and for Old Lesbians (60 and over) will be held in April 1987 in the Los Angeles area. The committee hopes to hold a free conference, except for meals, and to provide transportation. This is an herstorical opportunity for old lesbians to come together to celebrate our existence, to share our diversity, and to speak to and for ourselves about ageism. Call Kate (619) 481-0375 or write West Coast Celebration, 2953 Lincoln Blvd., Santa Monica CA 90405.

Third International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women, July 6-10, 1987, Dublin, Ireland. The congress is held every three years and brings together scholars and practitioners to explore issues of importance to women throughout the world. 44 Northumberland Rd, Dublin 4, Ireland.

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We invite one page treatments of possible articles. The deadline for *LE* 2:3 Readers Forum (Sex) is February 28, and tentative deadline for the *LE* 3:1 Forum (Radical Lesbian Spirituality) is May 31. Write to inquire about deadlines for articles. Type all manuscripts double-spaced. Send an SASE if you want your manuscript returned, and an SASP if you want us to acknowledge receipt of your manuscript.

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