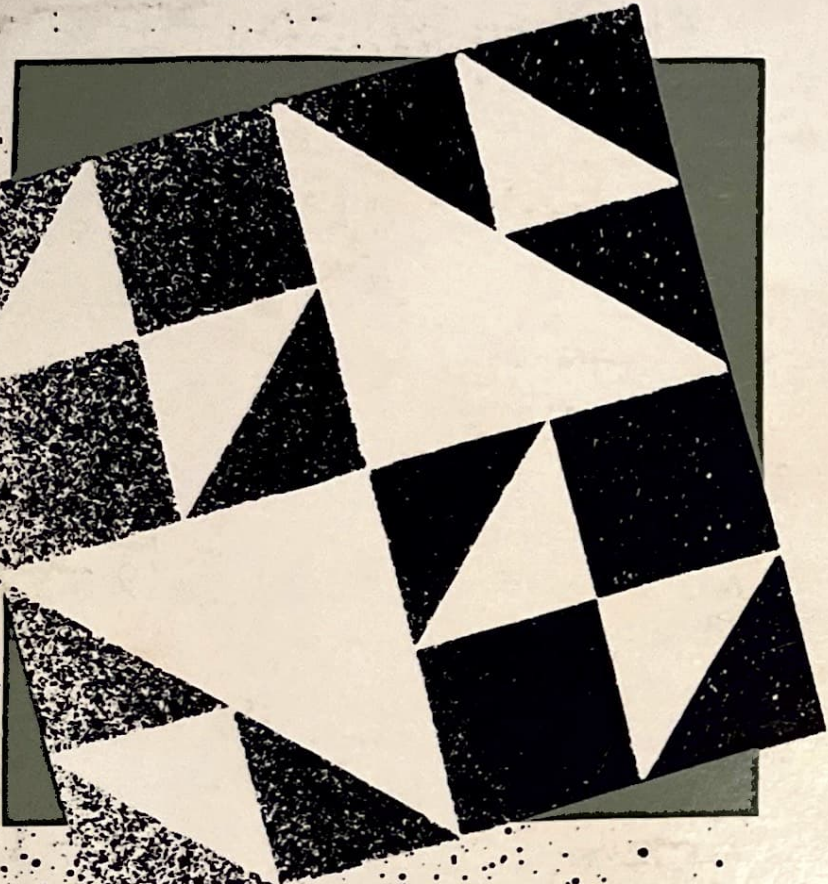


# *Lesbian Ethics*



Volume 4 No. 1

***Lesbian Ethics***

Editor: Jeanette Silveira

Consultant: JMax

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*Lee*



# *Lesbian Ethics*

**Volume 4, No. 1**

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## Editor's Introduction

We have in this issue some wonderful pieces, starting off with three very fine papers on parthenogenesis. As you will note when you read them, all the facts are not in. Both I and the papers' authors are interested in responses from other dykes having any data or interpretation to add to the picture.

We're also inaugurating in this issue what will be a regular *LE* feature: a column on race edited by Anna Lee. And we have the second edition of JMax's column on class.

The Readers' Forum topic for this issue was to be Betrayals. You didn't like this topic much, we got only one contribution, see *Nexus*, others were promised but did not arrive. (Cynical friends have suggested this lack of interest might be due to my request that each of us include info about our own betrayals as well about betrayals by others. . . . Nah.) There are in this issue, however, several papers which discuss the foundations for ethical behavior between lesbians. I'm still interested in receiving contributions on the topic of betrayals. You'll notice in this issue some humor, spun off from the humor issue, and I'd like to have humor for each issue also.

The focus for the next issue, *LE* 4:2, for both the Forum and the issue generally, is *Class: How It Affects Our Lesbian Interactions*. The class issue is being guest edited, by Shoney, Lee Evans, and J Max. The deadline has been extended to August 15th, so please take the time to sit down and write that Forum contribution or that article, short or long, that you've been thinking about. See JMax's column in this issue for suggestions for articles.

The Readers' Forum topic for issue after next, *LE* 4:3, is *Our Mothers* (our relationships with our mothers, not the issue of lesbian pregnancy). This Forum will be a place for us to reflect on the quality of our relationships with our mothers and the influence of these relationships on our lives as lesbians. I'm hoping to get a wide range of responses, that will give us the big picture. The deadline for this issue is December 31, 90.

I would very much like to have every other issue of *LE* guest edited, and would love to have proposals from you, if there is an issue you would like to do or one you would like someone else to do. This system would give me badly needed breaks and would enable us to have two issues in the works at the same time. Maybe then *LE* could come out more

often. Perhaps most important, the base of *LE* contributors and readers would increase.

Recently I heard from one reader about a case in which a "bisexual" woman was making harmful use of *LE* in college classes. I've reworded the Author's Guidelines to make it clearer that *LE* is a journal for lesbians, and that any other use must be cleared by the author of the article in question, who can be contacted through *LE*.

Jeanette

**THE CH@SEN FAMILY**

**FASHION FLASH**

attention!! dykes everywhere!! are you aware that often you, unwittingly, dress like a lesbian?

WHY WOULD KENNETH-MARIE WEAR SOMETHING LIKE THAT? IT MAKES HER LOOK LIKE A LESBIAN!

WHAT A COINCIDENCE, AUNTY!!

mum!! what a trooper!



# Lesbian Rebirth

Chris Sitka

There was a time many thousands of years ago when women loved each other openly and freely. These times have been called matriarchal. Let us now reclaim them, for, when the female form was worshipped, when life-giving was revered, when women-only cultures thrived, were these not clearly lesbian times?

We have not always been outsiders within a predominantly heterosexual culture. Originally lesbians reproduced themselves through parthenogenesis. This paper aims towards creating a rebirth of this ability.

What is *parthenogenesis*? Another term for it is *Virgin Birth*: When a woman has a child without the interference of a male. When, after ovulation, a woman's egg spontaneously begins forming a foetus. This foetus then develops and is born as a daughter, who has received all her genes from her mother.

The *Macquarie Dictionary* defines *parthenogenesis* as "a type of reproduction characterised by the development of an egg without fertilization." To *fertilize* means "to render (an egg, ovum, or female cell) capable of development by union with the male element, or sperm." The proven existence of parthenogenesis shows that reproduction is possible without women's needing to resort to "union with the male element." A topic of undoubted interest to lesbians.

Mary Daly, in her *Wickedary*,<sup>1</sup> says that the word is derived from two Greek words: *parthenos*—virgin and *genesis*—birth.

1: process of woman creating her Self. 2: process by which a Virgin brings forth Daughters by herSelf without the interference or input of any male. 3: process by which a Spinster creates unfathered works: SPINNING (p. 154).

Further she defines:

Virgin . . . Wild, Lusty, Never Captured, Unsubdued Old Maid; Marriage Resister (p. 165).

In the *Wickedary* parthenogenesis is more than just a method of reproduction. Parthenogenesis in fact becomes the basis of a philosophical or political stance.

Parthenogenetic Creation 1: work of feminist creation produced by women alone; woman-made work which may use males as resources but never as progenitors (fore-fathers), spiritual fathers, mentors or models. . . . 2: "method of Philosophia: method which seeks to construct a female train of thought, working with primary and secondary sources *only* by women; method which focuses more on actions of women for our liberation from patriarchy than on dissection and critique of patriarchy."—Emily Erwin Culpepper . . . (p. 154).

## Fragments

Astute observers of nature have always known that some animals reproduce parthenogenetically. The obvious existence of continued generations of only female members of a species is evidence enough. Last century followers of the new male religion—science—began to come to grips with the mechanics of reproduction.

In the pursuit of this new hobby they began to 'discover' (similarly to the manner in which white men 'discovered' Australia) that there existed all female populations of some animals. In 1935 a Russian zoologist collected 5000 Caucasian rock lizards and not a male among them. Another chappy in Germany followed up on observations from beekeepers that bees often reproduce parthenogenetically. He sought to disprove the observation. However, after years of observing numerous wasp nests, he became an advocate for the existence of parthenogenesis.

Of course, this information was not welcomed by scientists establishing the still fledgling theory of reproductive biology. They had only just figured out how it works, i.e., sperm fertilizes ovum, and here was a startling contradiction.

Further scientific study included the capture of female whip tail lizards. They were kept under observation in captivity. For generation

after generation they reproduced only females. Such evidence forced scientists to accept parthenogenesis as fact.

So they wrote it into the biology books:

Parthenogenesis—Most animals originate from a fertilized egg cell, though some can develop directly from an unfertilized egg cell. Development of the latter type is called Parthenogenesis. It may be characteristic of a species. . . . In some species parthenogenesis may be a rare but normal occurrence, as has been found to be the case in turkeys. Or parthenogenesis may be the result of an artificial external stimulus, either physical or chemical.<sup>2</sup>

Science lists over 1000 species of naturally parthenogenetic animals. These include some species of lizards, snakes, aphids, ants, turkeys, bees, snails, moths, wasps, apus, gall flies, fishes, grasshoppers, stick insects, crustaceans, rotifers, worms, and salamanders.

This is not to say all lizards, frogs, snakes, etc., are parthenogenetic. Only some species are. Some of the listed animals only reproduce parthenogenetically some of the time—at other times they revert to heterosexuality. Aphids have alternative generations of all female and mixed populations.

Initially, the possibility of parthenogenesis in women was also considered. However, as the implications of such an independent form of reproduction for women sank in, discussion of this possibility was suppressed. In 1872 a scientist, in a paper reviewing parthenogenesis, asked about "those cases of ovarian cysts found occasionally in the unfertilized human female, and containing hair and teeth—a phenomenon which we should be glad to see further discussed and investigated, since, as far as we can remember, the origin of the contents of such cysts from irregularly developing ova is probable."<sup>3</sup> Doctors and scientists determinedly call the parthenogenetic foetus a "cyst," or an "undeveloped twin" left in the other twin's womb since their conception! And other such fantastic explanations.

There may be studies or speculations existent in the straight world. However, I am unaware of them. In London, in 1955, a doctor, Helen Spurway, publicly proclaimed parthenogenesis in women to be a regular, if infrequent, occurrence.<sup>4</sup> Her estimate was 1 out of 1.6 million births. As a result of the publicity, women were asked to come forward and be tested if they felt they could make such a claim. Out of 19 who did so, scientists said they could definitely disprove 18 of the claims (by

methods such as blood tests). According to them, these results did not mean that the 19th woman *had* parthenogenesised.

The lack of scientific proof for women's parthenogenesising should not worry us. If male society chooses to deny the existence of something, then, for them, it doesn't exist. Lesbianism doesn't exist in China and parthenogenesis doesn't exist among women.

We, on the other hand, can take a contrary philosophical stance and say: if we believe it exists, then it does. There is no 'proof' that it doesn't. From an occult point of view, the sincere belief in something brings about its existence in fact. Even if parthenogenesis in women has not happened lately, if we believe it can, it will.

Immense leaps of faith are not necessary, however. I will go on to explain all the logical reasons in favour of the existence of parthenogenesis.

## Ways and Means

### An Ovum Is Not a Sperm

Let's look at a basic summary of what happens, or is said to happen, in the process of creating a baby.

All the cells in a woman's body are diploid, i.e., they contain a full set of 46 chromosomes, arranged in 23 pairs. On these chromosomes are arranged the approximately 200,000 genes which determine the woman's physical make-up. The two chromosomes of a pair contain genes for the same traits, e.g., a gene for eye color would be found on both members of the chromosome pair.

While the egg cells are still in the female foetus's ovaries, each chromosome duplicates itself. The two halves, called *chromatids*, remain linked together. Many years later, at ovulation, roughly mid-way between a woman's periods, her ovaries exude an egg. As the egg travels down the fallopian tube it begins a special cell division process called *meiosis*. The egg splits in half, each half containing 23 doubled chromosomes. However, one egg is usually much larger. It has taken the bulk of the nutrients with which it can feed the growth of the foetus. The other egg is called the first polar body, and apparently disintegrates. Biology texts generally give the false impression that these two processes (chromosome duplication and the first split of meiosis) occur almost simultaneously, so that they seem to parallel the male reproductive events.

The conventional description continues to misrepresent the truth, in a most interesting way. According to the conventional scenario of heterosexual reproduction, the egg goes on to split once more, into an egg and the second polar body. This time without first doubling its chromosome number. The chromatid pairs split up, leaving the egg, known as the ovum, in a haploid state with only 23 chromosomes. Alone it cannot develop into a child because it has only half the necessary number of chromosomes. The other 23 chromosomes are provided by a sperm. The egg, once it possesses the 46 chromosomes, returns to the normal cell division process called mitosis, doubling and dividing into body cells of 46 chromosomes. This reproduction of cells forms a foetus that grows into a woman full of doubling and dividing skin cells, hair cells, etc., all containing that particular mix of 46 chromosomes.

However, according to Jesse Cougar's paper, in this issue of LE:

Only men's arrogant predisposition to generalize from their experience to pretend it includes the female experience has enabled them . . . to describe only the male version when describing meiosis . . . Thus the complex meiotic processes of both the egg and the sperm have been lumped together as if both simply exist to reduce the number of chromosomes in each gamete (sex cell, i.e., ovum or sperm) to the haploid number . . . If you read very carefully the texts do admit that the egg has the full amount of chromosomal material . . . They fail to mention that the egg becomes truly haploid if and only if 'fertilization' occurs. The egg doesn't reject the second polar body unless or until it is penetrated by sperm. It seems obvious to me that the sperm causes the rejection of half the egg's genetic material to make room for its own 'contribution' (pp. 30-31).

In other words, the ovum does NOT become haploid when left on its own. Parthenogenesis, development of the unfertilized egg into a foetus, remains a possibility until the egg is fertilized.

Sometimes, in fact, the ovum does not reduce itself even when fertilized by the sperm. The result is an egg containing 69 chromosomes. Instead of 23 pairs there are 23 triples in the nucleus. These foetuses spontaneously abort. Though such triploids are known to exist and thrive amongst some plants, they are not viable among humans.

After fertilization the ovum usually reverts to mitosis. However, in the case of identical twins the meiosis phase continues for one extra division. Identical twins are a regularly occurring phenomenon. They are

socially acceptable. They are, after all, the product of a woman's egg after it has been fertilized by a man. The twins will resemble both their mother and their father. However, their creation is an aberration of the stated norm for sexual reproduction. If sometimes the egg divides once too often before beginning mitosis, isn't it logical to assume that the egg may begin mitosis 'too early,' before being 'fertilized'?

It is now known that parthenogenesis, here meaning mitosis in an 'unfertilized' ovum, occurs naturally in women as well as other mammals. As this fact is not usually discussed, there is little indication of its frequency. Laurel Galana, in her 1975 article, cites one male author's estimate that 3/4 of one percent of maturing eggs become parthenogenetic.<sup>5</sup>

One of the few clues I have found is a brief excerpt from the book on Reproductive Technologies by Gena Corea, *The Mother Machine*. Parthenogenesis is a topic that even feminists investigating the horrors of male madness in the reproductive technologies industry are shy of. However, Corea describes the report of the first time a woman's egg was fertilized outside a woman's womb.

The experiment was performed by Dr. Edwards, who later was involved in engineering the first 'test tube baby.' Before then, while Edwards was trying to fertilize eggs in a test tube, he kept a number of eggs which he did not expose to sperm. Using such a 'control population' is a common scientific practise. He found that "5% of these underwent cleavage like parthenogenetic development [my emphasis]"<sup>6</sup>

He, of course, did not conclude from this that parthenogenesis might be common. He merely ruminated that the eggs he thought he had fertilized might be undergoing some other changes instead. He concluded that he was failing to control fertilization—instead of noticing that creation was happening spontaneously.

This story is echoed in another I have heard by word of mouth. A woman worker in an IVF (In Vitro Fertilization, i.e., test tube baby) laboratory noticed an egg undergoing parthenogenetic reproduction. She sought to nurture it and bring the process to fruition. She was ordered by her bosses to destroy it. When she refused they took the matter to court. The court ordered the parthenogenetic egg destroyed.

How often, we may well wonder, in the thousands of experiments being conducted in IVF laboratories throughout the world, is parthenogenesis being observed and then ignored or destroyed as an aberration, since it is outside man's realm of control?

**DNA fingerprinting.** In attempting to estimate the frequency of parthenogenesis, we may find the new method of DNA fingerprinting useful. Genes are comprised of DNA, and each person is thought to have a unique DNA pattern, which can be read from any body cell.

Ironically men are using the method to provide proof of paternity (for the first time in history). However, we could use it to provide proof of parthenogenetic maternity. Such a daughter would test as possessing only the genes of her mother.

An interesting sidelight is that this new technology of DNA tracing has led scientists to the hypothesis that all humans descend from a single woman, who they call 'Eve.' They are busily searching for Adam—who they say is harder to find because genetic variabilities are harder to trace in the male line. It hasn't occurred to them that they might be unable to find him, because he doesn't exist.

### **Cloning**

Cloning is a technique which is not parthenogenesis. I include it here because its result can be similar. It is a way a woman could have a daughter composed of only the mother's genetic material. The technique has been used on animals. The technology to clone humans exists and men may already be using it secretly to reproduce themselves, by means of surrogate wombs.

Cloning involves removing the nucleus (which contains chromosomes) from an ordinary body cell and inserting it into an ovum which has had its own nucleus removed. Men are busily at work perfecting this technique because it would mean they could genetically reproduce themselves—merely using a woman's egg and womb as a carrier. None of the woman's genes would be present. Their ultimate aim is to use frozen, stored eggs and an artificial womb—so making women redundant. You can see that this is a dangerous scientific technique, one we should be opposing and not encouraging.

One reason women may wish to pursue this technique is that it may be possible to adapt it to join two women's split eggs (containing 23 chromosomes each) together and therefore create a daughter with the genetic make-up of both women.

This prospect is one in which many women are interested. For that reason some women may want to set up fancy laboratories, super-ovulate themselves with drugs, flush out their eggs, put them in glass dishes, peer through microscopes, prod and prick them with glass pipettes and re-insert the doctored eggs into their wombs. These delicate operations

use the ultimate in male science to rid us of the necessity for males. Something of a contradiction! Apart from the reality that men are not so naive as to give women access to technology which will make men redundant, it can be seen from the tone of my description that I am not enamoured of this last prospect.

**That is because I don't believe you ever create a revolution by utilizing the methods of the oppressors.**

### **How to Make It Happen—Scientifically Speaking**

The parthenogenetic wasp *Habrobracon* causes its own eggs to parthenogenesise by squeezing them while in the oviducts. The Amazon molly fish uses a gynogenetic technique herself. That is, she mates with males and the sperm triggers the egg into dividing. However, she rejects the sperm's genetic material and the daughter is a reproduction of the mother's chromosomes.

In non-parthenogenetic species the sperm is normally the trigger which sets the ovum off into the process of mitosis. However, numerous experiments conducted on non-humans show it need not be the sperm. The stimulus can be chemical, mechanical, electrical.

Artificial parthenogenesis was first induced by chemical treatment of sea urchin eggs; later it was found that almost any eggs which are accessible to the experimenter by being laid into the water—including those of sea-urchins, starfish, worms, snails and even frogs—can be made to develop unfertilized; and that fatherless young thus produced can be as healthy as those arising in the ordinary course of nature.<sup>7</sup>

One scientist alone, a Dr. Peacock, found 371 ways to get sea urchin eggs to reproduce parthenogenetically.

The use of chemicals seems to be a well tried and effective method. Sea urchin parthenogenesis was induced by a large number of chemicals. These include: salts, fatty acids, alcohol, ether, benzene, strychnine, chloroform, magnesium chloride. The eggs of frogs have also often been treated with chemicals with parthenogenetic result.

Frogs eggs, which are large, have been covered with the blood of nonovulating frogs, then pricked with a fine glass needle. Ions and antibiotics have also been used with frogs. Frogs and sea urchins both have been subjected to mild electric shocks which set off spontaneous reproduction.

Silk worm moths have had their eggs treated with friction. Heat or shaking will do it in starfish.

In most of the cases just mentioned, the stimulus caused both the second phase of meiosis (reduction to the haploid number of chromosomes) and the development of the foetus. A few foetuses were carried to term because in these species a foetus with the haploid number (half the normal number) of chromosomes is viable.

In mammals, the foetus must have the full diploid number of chromosomes to be viable. It is important to know, then, that cold and heat have both been used with rabbits—applying ice to their fallopian tubes and heating eggs in test tubes—to produce a developing egg with a full diploid set of chromosomes.<sup>8</sup> (These embryos did not become live rabbits, however. See the discussion under “Carrying the Foetus to Birth,” below.)

Our aim is to discover what can set a woman's egg off. There are many complicated procedures and chemical/hormonal events taking place in the womb. A particular set of circumstances may set off parthenogenesis. Among humans there are also chemicals, drugs, viruses, and radiation which can affect chromosome movement during reproduction. Applied in a particular way they might induce or retard cell division at a crucial phase, resulting in parthenogenesis. Let's consider some possibilities.

We could try ice cubes on the ovaries, or hot water bottles, or electric shocks, or diets, or chemicals, or hormones or any and all of the tricks that have been tried on animals' eggs. Or we could search for more natural ways to imitate these processes.

I am sure that we could learn how to set off parthenogenetic cleavage in our eggs. It needs only the willingness to infiltrate the most monstrous laboratories that men have ever devised. Quite probably there are women who have already acquired the necessary knowledge. Women do all the real work in the laboratories anyway. As usual doing the shit work for 'man' in his attempts to conquer nature.

Scientists are already manufacturing artificial genes and constructing artificial chromosomes. In the service of this construction they have found out how enzymes and plasmids in DNA retard and aid chromosome separation and non-separation during cell splitting. This means they know how to induce the egg to retain all its 46 chromosomes and not to split when stimulated. And they know how to stimulate the egg into foetal production without using sperm. Sperm pricking is just a chemical interaction that can be replicated.

### Lesbian Lizards

As I said before, I am not in favour of using IVF lab techniques in attempts to re-create parthenogenesis in our lives. We need only to study their acquired knowledge, reading between the lines, to find clues to what mechanisms and techniques will be useful. I believe we will then be able to adapt our knowledge to methods more akin to natural healing—methods such as diet, acupuncture, massage, meditation, trance, rituals and visualisation.

The parthenogenetic whip tailed lizards of New Mexico need to engage in lesbian sexual activity in order to parthenogenesise. Just what do these girls do? (That is the perennial question isn't it: What do lesbians do? ) To get down to the nitty-gritty of it, they take turns, depending on which phase of their cycle they are in. Preovulatory is time for being on the bottom. The lizard who has already laid her eggs, lies on top of the other and licks and nibbles her around the neck and shoulders, also stroking her sides with arms and feet. Then, as things hot up she curls her tail under her friend, and, being flexible as they are, they press their cunts together. Then the one on top curls her head around and sucks the other one's cunt. The lizard on the bottom just laps up this treatment. Later, when she has laid her eggs, she has her turn at making love to her friend.

Those interested in pursuing procreational experimentation could wear badges saying "I am a lesbian lizard."

Perhaps we need only to find appropriate ways to ritualise our sexuality. Free it from the invasion of heterosexism in methods and expressions. Free our minds and our bodies may follow. Many cultures of the world work up sexual frenzies during fertility ritual celebrations. Could this be a remnant of matriarchal parthenogenetic ceremonies? This is for us to research and re-discover.

Men may or may not have tried to produce parthenogenesis in women. However, I would doubt it. They are far more interested in cloning. It is a race between them and us. Men are busily at work trying to perfect an artificial womb. Now they are able to collect ova to freeze for future use. Once they have an artificial womb, women will become dispensable objects in a world in which men have total control of the means of reproduction.

Already the ratio of males to females in countries including Japan, India, Britain, is acknowledged even in the mass media to be increasing. Methods for detecting and aborting female fetuses are spreading.

I question deeply whether it will be possible to grow a viable person solely within the glass and metal environment of an artificial womb, without the physical and psychic nurturance of a mother's presence. However, men may resort to using ape bodies, or women enslaved in pens as poultry chickens are, or other such grotesque scenarios. We, especially as lesbians, are in grave danger from the spread of pre-fertilization and post-fertilization sex selection techniques. Imagine a world in which there are 2, 5, 10, 50, 500 men to every woman.

Perhaps parthenogenesis may come about as a result of climatic changes caused by the greenhouse effect and ozone layer depletion. This is pure speculation. But environmental changes have biological effects. It is not impossible that our time will simply come—as a spontaneous result of the cataclysmic destructions heteropatriarchy is inflicting on Nature. Survival is a strong instinct of Nature. A resurgence of wombonly culture over the seminal is certainly in the interests of planetary survival.

How will such immense psychic transformations occur?

## **A Matter of Belief**

Many of us believe that parthenogenesis can occur, even that it does occur. Many of us dream of it happening to us, long for it to happen to us. But there are different levels of believing. There is intellectual acceptance and there is a deep emotional belief that penetrates to the very core of our cells. Even though I advocate parthenogenesis passionately as a solution to a host of lesbian and womanly woes, it remains that I have no experience of parthenogenesis. It has no emotional reality in my life as a known event.

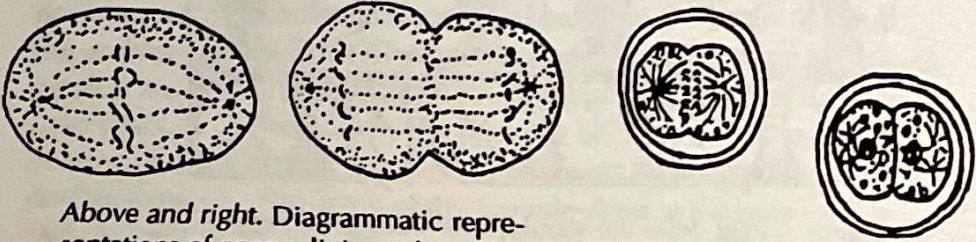
It is quite possible, however, that less scientifically indoctrinated women parthenogenesise and don't think anything of it.

Tribal Aboriginal women, for example, do not think of pregnancy as necessarily a result of copulation with men. They say that spirit babies may enter them through their vaginas at certain spiritually active waterholes. Perhaps tribal Aboriginal women know, understand and practice parthenogenesis. I'm not saying that is how they always reproduce. If they possess such knowledge it is completely up to them when and if they might choose to tell other women. Meanwhile there are the legends and myths that have been published: Of how the Djangawwal sisters carried the totems of creation in their dilly bags and travelled about the land peopling the countryside with tribes from their bodies, before the men

stole their dilly bags and forbade women ever to look upon the totems again.

As a white woman, I believe I would be still better served by traveling into my own mythological past. Into the times of the Celts and beyond. My gynestory. The time of the matriarchies before the patriarchal takeover.

This evidence I have found primarily in the work of Marija Gimbutas,<sup>9</sup> for the Matriarchal culture of Old Europe which existed in a swathe stretching from the Dniester River in Ukraine, through Transylvania, Yugoslavia and down through Greece to Crete. Look at the

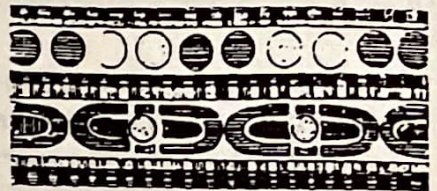


Above and right. Diagrammatic representations of eggs splitting, taken from a biology text.

Right. Double eggs crossed or joined by a snake, symbol of becoming. Cucuteni ceramics, W. Ukraine, c. 3500 b.c.



Below. Ruptured egg motif on the hem of a skirt worn by the goddess. Late Minoan.



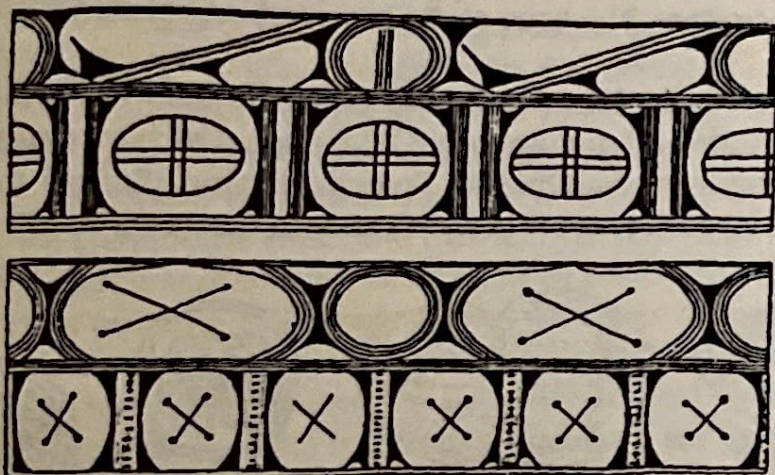
Left. Two pairs of 'caterpillars' are in each of two separate compartments. Cucuteni, NE Romania, c. 3500 b.c.



Above. Egg-and-germ-splitting motif, on a vase, Royal Tomb of Isopata at Knossos

diagrams taken from artifacts of the 4th millennium b.c. (from Gimbutas). See the constant re-occurrence of the Egg and the egg splitting motifs. Note the similarity of the egg splitting motifs to the diagrammatic representations of eggs splitting taken from a modern biology text.

Eggs are decorated in these patterns to this day in Ukraine by women at Easter (the festival of the Goddess Oester). It was not only the egg, but double egg motifs that were immortalised in their art. There was a proliferation of double-egg shaped bowls and vases.



Bands of eggs, from the shoulders of Cucuteni B vases. W. Ukraine, 3900-3700 b.c. According to Gimbutas, the cross or X indicates inherent energy.

All the goddess figures have protruding bums. There are no pregnant bellies. It was the egg, the potential within woman, that was worshipped.

... The symbols of becoming—eggs, crescents, horns, and crosses within circles and concentric circles—were engraved and painted over her body or on votive vases. Both an egg split into two halves and twins were concepts emphasized throughout her many representations. Around 4000 BC a layered and split egg became the emblem of the goddess and continued in evidence throughout the Minoan and Mycenaean period. The constant portrayal of twin crescents, or two does with opposed bodies reflects the magical potency of a splitting pair.

As a supreme Creator who creates from her own substance she is the primary goddess of the Old European pantheon. In this she contrasts with the (later) Indo-European Earth-Mother, who is the impalpable sacred earth spirit and is not in herself a creative principle, only through the interaction of the male sky-god does she become pregnant (p. 196).

It was in the patriarchally corrupted Indo-European era that the pregnant bellied goddess figurines began to dominate. In those earlier times it was the bum, the pelvis, the twin ovaries, that were eulogised.

Another particular feature of the Cucuteni Era figurines is the absolute predominance of bird and snake figurines. The bird goddess laid her egg. The snake coiled her spirals. The quarters of the moon were crossed upon the egg. Vulvas were carved on eggs.

Animals were also much represented. The bee goddess—an insect which modern science acknowledges as being parthenogenetically capable, the chrysalis, the cocoon were represented. Moths too are parthenogenetic. Minoan women dressed in cocoon-like dresses and held forth the butterfly wings of the labyris.

. . . These schematic butterflies are the prototypes of the Minoan 'double-axes' which we find portrayed between the horns of a bull. The emblem of the Great Goddess in its origin had nothing to do with the axe; it antedates the appearance of metal axes by several thousand years. . . . When finally the butterfly became a double-axe, the image of the goddess as a butterfly continued to be engraved on double-axes. . . . The Tomb of the Double-Axes at Knossos was, in fact, a shrine of the goddess . . . (p. 186-7).

A lesbian sign, the labyris, is itself a symbol, not of war, but of parthenogenesis.

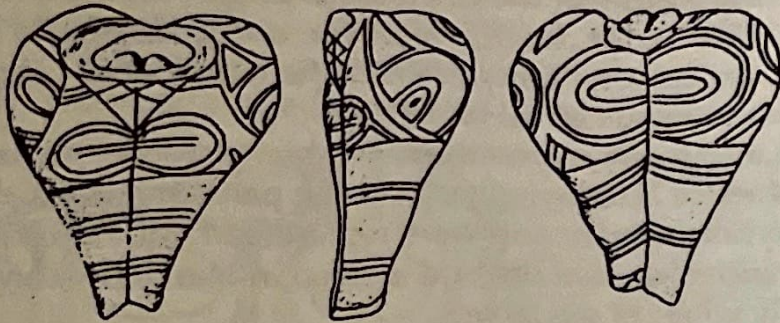
And perhaps the scientist's sign for infinity,  $\infty$ , is too.

The double-egg symbol found on the back or the front of the East Balkan and Cucuteni figurines is one of the most frequently encountered. . . . If such a figurine is sectioned one actually finds a double-egg inside. They stand here for a universal life source, not for human foetuses. Countless anthropomorphic vases carry the twin egg symbol . . . (p. 165).

The parthenogenetic Great Goddess continued on into Greek and Roman times.

. . . The Lady of free and untamed nature and the Mother, protectress of weaklings, a divinity in whom the *contrasting principles of virginity and motherhood* are fused into the concept of a single goddess, was venerated in Greece, Lydia, Crete and Italy. She appears as Artemis and under many local names . . . and Diana in Rome [my emphasis] (pp. 189-90).

This 'egg worship' was not simply some pagan mystification and adoration of eggs as symbols of life. There was a clear depiction of the



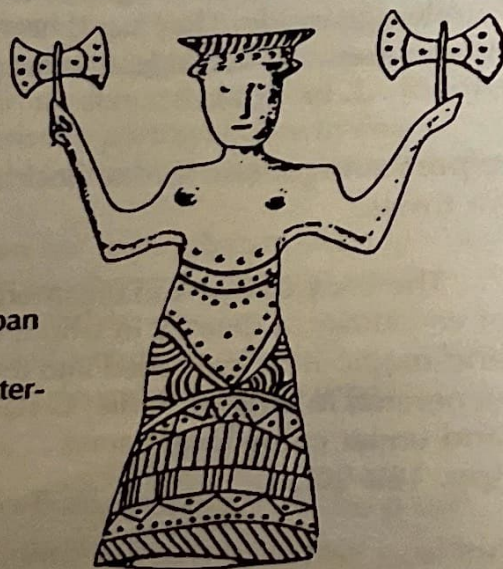
Above. Figurines with double-eggs inside and double-eggs carved on buttocks and thighs. Classical Cucuteni, Soviet Moldavia, c. 4500 b.c.



Above and Below. Paintings of the goddess with wings in the shape of a double axe, resembling butterflies. Middle Minoan above, Late Minoan below.



Above. Seal from Crete. Goddess with the wings of an eyed butterfly. Middle Minoan.



Right. Minoan goddess holding butterflies.

two eggs within the pelvic region of a woman's body. Surely this is a reference to the ovaries, as the source of woman's life giving eggs. The constant re-occurrence of egg splitting motifs indicates an awareness of the egg dividing to multiply itself. We may wonder how women were aware of this biological process 6000 years ago. They obviously had anatomical knowledge. And we cannot discount deeper forms of Knowing.

Just as the finer points of astronomy were known to women long before men claimed to have invented the telescope—so the finer points of women's biology were known to women before men utilized the microscope.

Water, moon crescents and spiraling snakes were the symbols most closely associated with the depiction of the double eggs. In these symbols we can look for psychic clues to how parthenogenetic splitting is set in motion.

The Ancient Great Mother of All Living gave birth parthenogenetically, without a male, to Herself and the entire Cosmos. She was the World Egg, containing the two halves.<sup>10</sup>

Upon the cosmic egg spirals the snake, the spiraling universes, the whorl of the waters, the in and out breath of the cosmos. This is the real form of creation. This was how the universe was seen before the big bang theory of the linear-minded male.

## **Y Heterosex?**

Among most of the higher animals reproduction, the origination of new individuals, is inseparable from sex. It takes two to make any addition to the race. But that is by no means true of life generally. Nearly all living things have some kind of sexual process, but most of them have also sexless ways of increasing their own kind. In biological language, reproduction is often asexual. Our own strict adherence to a single generative technique is in fact to be regarded as the exceptional thing.<sup>11</sup>

Some beings, such as bacteria simply double and split their whole body. Some, like the amoeba, divide themselves into lots of small pieces who grow up to do the same. Flat worms split themselves in two, jelly fish bud little jelly fish who eventually break off and swim away. Sponges collect several little bundles of cells in protective egg sacs. When the

mumma sponge dies they burst out and continue sponging. Some animals switch between various forms of reproduction—such as the many species which are sometimes parthenogenetic and sometimes not.

Many plants reproduce by simply sending out creeping underground stems that send up shoots which become grown up plants. As anyone who has ever tried to clear bush scrub like lantana or bracken will well know.

### The Heterosexuality of Maleness

It is the male of the species who has imposed heterosex on us for his own reasons. Because he cannot survive without us he has tried to convince us we cannot survive without him.

Humans have 46 chromosomes. These are arranged in 23 pairs. The 23rd pair of a woman's is a pair of X chromosomes—a pair like all her other 22 pairs. The 23rd pair in men contains one X chromosome and one y chromosome. The one y is what distinguishes men from women. It is a small, stunted, broken X chromosome.

The y chromosome carries few genes, and, unlike any other chromosome, these genes are not paired with those on the X chromosome, the other member of the chromosome pair. This abnormality makes the male susceptible to nearly sixty known abnormal conditions governed by X linked genes in humans. Among these are colour blindness, hemophilia, some sexual abnormalities, muscular dystrophy and the production of certain blood antigens. If a woman has one of these bad genes on one of her X chromosomes, she will often have a counteracting gene on the other chromosome, so that the harmful trait does not manifest itself. The male, however, does not have the second chromosome that could carry the counteracting gene.

The y chromosome is a permanently deficient chromosome. Maleness in itself is a disease. Individual males have survived their broken chromosome—they act out its deadliness in the world.

The male is heterogametic since it carries chromosomes for each sex. The female is homogametic, carrying female chromosomes only. Let's look at this biological statement with a pinch of poetic license. To me it says, men are genetically heterosexual. Women are genetically homosexual, i.e., lesbian. Our bodies only want to reproduce ourselves—our wombness. It is the male chromosomes which seek to diversify reproduction into two sexes, to impose on women his yness (whyiness).

It is assumed that the mutant y chromosome is only a carrier for a maleness determining gene. It is not until five weeks old that the human

embryo shows any sexual differentiation. Before then all are female, until the hypothesized gene triggers male hormones. Biologists are currently looking for this gene; a year or so ago they said they had found it, but now say that was a false alarm. (They are hoping to use the gene to turn female fetuses into males—a new form of gynocide.)

The male is in fact a defective form of woman. A person without a vagina, without a womb, without breasts.

All mammalian males are in fact derived from an original female state. All warm blooded fetuses are female up until about 6 weeks of growth, at which point those bearing one Y chromosome receive infusions of male hormones and 'become' male. This primary femaleness of the mammalian foetus occurs for bio-chemical reasons. The birth of live young requires a prolonged intramaternal growth time, and the early foetus would not be able to survive chemically within the womb if it weren't hormonally female, like the mother.<sup>12</sup>

The female body is hostile to sperm. What's more, the male body, being derived from the female body, is *also* hostile to sperm! Amazingly sperm have to have special cells, called Sertoli cells, to protect them from normal human cells.

Now why should one human cell have to be protected from other human cells in order to survive in the human body? Jesse Cougar's answer is: because it contains a deadly virus. This virus has invaded us by mutating a viable fraction—approximately half—of females into carriers of the virus. Males are these carriers. This virus is a very efficient parasite.

Jesse also suggests that, by destroying the original form of reproduction, the parasite caused a form of cancer. Cancer is when a cell is damaged and begins to reproduce itself out of all proportion. The invasion of the sperm-carried virus has caused a form of 'species cancer' on the body of the Mother earth.

Why, then, heterosex? We are currently being told that heterosexual reproduction is necessary 1) to provide genetic diversity, and 2) to carry the foetus to a live birth.

### Genetic Diversity

In heterosexual reproduction the male sperm has two functions. One is to activate the egg cell and make development possible. This function has been shown to be dispensable. The other function of the sperm is to provide genetic material to blend with that of the mother. We are told

that sexual reproduction—which means the blending of male and female nuclei through heterosexual intercourse—is compulsory amongst the ‘higher’ animals, because for “elaborately organised individuals like ourselves, which reproduce themselves relatively infrequently”<sup>13</sup> it is absolutely essential that we swap genetic material.

The mixing of genes has been thought to be the only way to create variety among the individuals of the species. Variety, in turn, has been seen as essential to the survival of the species—increasing its flexibility in responding to changing environments. These principles are deeply embedded in the modern scientifically educated psyche.

And yet even scientists themselves are coming to question the pre-eminence of heterosexuality as a means to variation. Take this excerpt from a 1987 article.<sup>14</sup>

Organisms with one parent, however, are not necessarily identical. Far from it; many species that reproduce asexually—such as some fungi, dandelions and leguminous plants—show enormous variation. There are certain lizards and rotifers that can reproduce either sexually or asexually. The females of these species can produce fertile eggs that grow into female adults capable of producing fertile eggs, without any participation by males. When scientists compared these lizards and rotifers, they found that as the environment varied, the asexual forms were just as common, or even more common, than their counterparts that reproduce sexually.

Why should so many organisms invest time and energy in finding mates and producing special sex cells with half the usual number of chromosomes? Theoretically, asexual organisms—without the distraction of needing to look for a mate—not only use less energy in reproducing but can also reproduce more quickly. We believe that organisms do not need to acquire genes from a second parent for health or variation (pp. 39–40).

That is a Professor of Biology at Boston University talking. The article goes on:

. . . sexuality in animals is a product of a history in which sex became entangled with reproduction. . . . the origin of sex in our ancestors at first was not something necessary or highly adaptive. Rather sex was a historic accident that we continually relive because it became so intimately involved with our development . . . But ridding ourselves of it would be as easy as purging a city of electricity or plumbing (p. 40).

Well maybe they can't, but I can easily imagine purging a city of electricity and plumbing. So it seems that the concept of heterosexuality as absolutely necessary for genetic diversity and thus for survival may be untrue.

The means by which variety is produced in parthenogenetic species are not yet understood. In fact, the whole field of genetics, which once seemed simple and clearcut, has become full of puzzling new data and competing theories.

I would count relatively invariable genes as much less of a threat to women's well being than our continued existence in a world in which women are enslaved to men's desire to reproduce their genes through us.

In any event, methods are now being perfected with which to doctor genes. A dangerous weapon in the hands of men. In a parthenogenetic future it is conceivable that we will use knowledge derived from such techniques to solve genetically inherited problems. Or we could perhaps go in the direction of psychically controlling and even mutating genes. A magical and improbable scenario, which may nonetheless become as commonplace as controlling the chi energy in our bodies through meditation—once our consciousness expands as the yoke of slavery to men is lifted from it.

### **Carrying the Foetus to Birth**

Evidence suggests that women often conceive parthenogenetically yet are not able to carry the foetus to birth. It seems to be fairly common for women to claim that they have become spontaneously pregnant but miscarried. Since I have begun speaking and writing about parthenogenesis, several lesbians have made this claim to me. These reports are confirmed by the scientific evidence that many eggs—up to 5% in Edward's experiment—begin parthenogenetically dividing as a matter of course.

So it seems that there is an inhibitor which prevents successful parthenogenetic pregnancies. I posit that this inhibitor is passed on to us through the genes we inherit from our fathers. (I'm indebted to Jesse Cougar for the origin of this idea.)

Recent research has shown that, in mice, "genes remember their origins."<sup>15</sup> Some of the genes in the sex cells are chemically coded one way if they are in the ovum, i.e., from the mother, and another way if they are in the sperm, i.e., from the father. Genes from the mother are necessary for the development of the foetus, but genes from the father are necessary for the development of the placenta.

Part of the process of male biological colonisation was to infect parthenogenetic females with a chemical message which blocks maternal genetic formation of the placenta—causing us to require the male carried genes to reproduce.

An unsigned letter in the July/August 88 issue of *Lesbian Connection* says that similar problems of fetal and placental development occur in attempts to clone a foetus with chromosomes from two women or two men.

In cases where women do give birth to parthenogenetic daughters, something which women all over the world claim to have done, it is because by chance or accident, the male genetic code for preventing parthenogenesis was lost. The other possibility is that some women using traditional herbal concoctions, either deliberately or by chance, are able to invalidate that chemical message.

Assuming that the situation for humans is similar to that for mice, in order to achieve parthenogenesis, we will have to identify means for inhibiting the male parasite message to the mother's placenta-forming genes.

That the parthenogenetic inhibitor works on placental formation is, in my opinion, connected with the fact that monthly periods are also a phenomenon caused by male colonisation of our bodies. When we were still capable of consciously controlled parthenogenesis there was obviously no need for monthly periods. Such frequent ovulation is only necessary for the male, so that his sperm have plenty of opportunities to invade our ova.

## The Past and the Future

So the X is the stronger healthier chromosome overtaken by the neediness of the defective y. Just as the Matriarchies were subsumed by the aggressive neediness of the male. How and why this happened is a matter for speculation. But it is clear from the herstorical evidence of the matriarchies, and from a logical analysis of biology, that heterosexual reproduction is an unfortunate accident of our past.

The male form, and its consequent psyche, may have been caused by a burst of cosmic radiation from a meteor or supernova. Perhaps women too once meddled with radiation. (There is occult lore saying that nuclear accidents are not new to the earth.) Maleness may be a psychic model that intruded on this planet from elsewhere. Perhaps sent to test us.

In any event the innate sympathy of women allowed 'man' to stay and proliferate. The poorly endowed y chromosome was only just viable enough to be passed on. How were we to know the consequences? That the creeping dominance of heterosex, which came more and more to replace the original lesbian cultures, would eventually almost wipe it out, in the time of the witch persecutions.

In Western culture the only remnants became a few perverted fertility cults. And the twisted myth of the Virgin Mary. The true origin of the reverence towards virgin births was eclipsed by falsely claiming and praising the virgin birth of a man—a biological impossibility.

Dominant as it has become, we need not remain stuck in the heterosexual mode of reproduction. Dolphins are said to have once emerged from the sea onto land and then reverted to aquatic life again. Even if we wombon once chose the heterosex mode of reproduction, we can revert to the waters of another consciousness.

The now dominant form in our minds is the dualistic model, in which men and women are the separate yin and yang of life. Somewhere there is still a psychic model of reproduction by one. We just need to shift our consciousness. As lesbians we have begun. It remains only to research and create models of parthenogenesis with which to infuse our minds. Through a psychic visualisation of what we know intellectually to be true, we will manifest parthenogenesis in our wombonly reality.

We may only be able to believe in it when we have experienced it. We may only be able to experience it when we believe it.



I am not working on parthenogenesis because I want to have my own daughter. I choose to put my energy into other things than child rearing in this society. Doing so is a revolutionary choice for women today. Motherhood is still an oppressive institution.

I am working on parthenogenesis because it can remove us from enslavement to heterosexuality and patriarchal dominance. Parthenogenesis is a way to recreate the dignity of wombon, to escape the indignity of enforced heterosexuality. Heterosex is a model we were tricked, cajoled or forced into living. It is a way of life which has subjected women to endless rape, torture, impoverishment and spiritual catatonia.

I want us to re-create an archetypical way of life in which wombon can reproduce ourselves with integrity. Through reaching back to what we have known and forward to what we can know, we can re-create our future.

## Postscript

I would like to caution lesbians. Beware of naively publicising efforts and successes. Do not underestimate the opposition you will encounter. Have no illusions: this is the gravest threat that women can pose to men.

Noone working in a laboratory could expect it to survive any revelation of what was going on there. Apart from not favouring scientific methods of parthenogenesis, I believe pursuit of them is futile. Women working on them would endanger no less than their lives. Men constantly murder women for far lesser transgressions of male rule.

Of course an important part of recreating parthenogenesis would be passing word round to women that parthenogenesis is happening. We need this confirmation of our dreams and hopes. So we have the familiar but nonetheless difficult problem of balancing the secrecy necessary for survival with the publicity necessary for success.

I suggest that as a strategy we simply prove the existence of 'accidental' parthenogenesis (among unaware women) through DNA fingerprinting.<sup>16</sup> Then, even consciously controlled parthenogenesis could be put down to chance occurrence. This new 'data' is not directly threatening to men. Yet the reality of parthenogenesis would begin to penetrate women's consciousness and into the very rhythms of their bodies. A psychic model would be recreated.

As male sex selection increases the number of heterosexually born boys, men may not notice that more girls are being born than should be. Strangely enough the sexes will remain in their old ratios.

As women individually realise that they can parthenogenesise and do not need men, lesbianism will flourish. By the time men realise what is happening, it may be too late for them. Parthenogenesis will have taken hold in the collective psyche of womankind—it will be whirling on an evolutionary spiralling upswing. Patriarchy will die out as the matriarchal era blooms again.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Mary Daly in cahoots with Jane Caputi, *The Wickedary* (Boston: Beacon, 1987).

<sup>2</sup>Moore and Slusher, *Biology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1971), p. 127.

<sup>3</sup>Richard Owen, "Parthenogenesis." *Nature*, Oct. 10, 1872, p. 258.

<sup>4</sup>As reported by Laurel Galana, "Radical Reproduction: X without Y." In, Gina Covina & Laurel Galana, eds., *The Lesbian Reader*, originally published by Amazon press (Berkeley: Barn Owl Books, 1975), 122-137.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>6</sup>Gina Corea, *The Mother Machine: From Artificial Insemination to Artificial Womb* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 108.

<sup>7</sup>Wells, Huxley and Wells, *The Science of Life* (Cassell, 1938), p. 504.

<sup>8</sup>Laurel Galana, *Op. Cit.*, p. 133.

<sup>9</sup>Marija Gimbutas, *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974). See also her new book, *The Language of the Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).

<sup>10</sup>Monica Sjöö, *The Great Cosmic Mother* (Norway: Rainbow Press, 1981), p. 15. A greatly expanded version, written with Barbara Mor, has been published in the U.S. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

<sup>11</sup>Wells et al. *Op. Cit.*, p. 497.

<sup>12</sup>Monica Sjöö, *Op. Cit.*, p. 7.

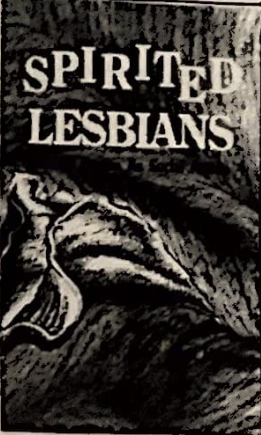
<sup>13</sup>Wells et al., *Op. Cit.*, p. 518.

<sup>14</sup>Dorion Sagan and Lynn Margulis, "Cannibal's Relief: The Origins of Sex." *New Scientist*, Aug. 6, 1987, pp. 36-40.

<sup>15</sup>"Genes Remember Their Origins," *New Scientist*, July 39, 1987, p. 28.


<sup>16</sup>Although the current scientific opinion is that parthenogenic birth in mammals is impossible, I have just recently heard of a book, *Genetic Revolution*, by D.S. Halacy, Jr., that claims proof exists of cases of parthenogenic birth in humons. Does anyone know this book?

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# The Selfish Sperm Theory\*

Jesse Cougar

Two ideas have been bouncing around for some time in lesbian-feminist thinking; one, that men are mutants and, two, that they are parasites. I believe that males are mutants,<sup>1</sup> and that what has caused this mutation is a virus or virus-like parasite which resides in sperm. I here present the idea that males have not evolved for the good of their particular species, but that they function instead to further the advancement of the sperm parasite.<sup>2</sup> I further assert that parthenogenesis is the original form of sexual reproduction, not an offshoot or aberration of it.<sup>3</sup>

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\*My deepest thanks go to Jane Wolfe, without whose collaboration and creativity these ideas would not have blossomed, and to Stellar Jay, for Everything.

Comments, criticisms and collaborations are most welcome. Letters will be forwarded to me through *Lesbian Ethics*.

<sup>1</sup>The female is the blueprint from which the male must differentiate. It is scientifically accepted that in all mammals and in most other species, an organism will develop as female in the absence of any hormonal influence.

<sup>2</sup>I've named this theory in the tradition of the Selfish Gene theory (Dawkins, 1976) and subsequently the Selfish DNA theory (Crick and Orgel, 1980), which both suggest, contrary to previously accepted lines of thought, that within an 'individual' of any species there may be other, non-independent lifeforms existing and functioning not for the good of the larger organism, but for their own ends.

<sup>3</sup>Throughout, I use the term *hetero-sexual reproduction* to denote the bi-sexual form we are accustomed to labeling "sexual reproduction." Parthenogenesis is also a form of sexual reproduction, being mono-sexual, not asexual, as it entails the formation of gametes (cells specialized for reproduction, i.e., ova et al).

## The Sperm Turns

In lay terminology the descriptions of viruses and those of sperm are nearly identical.<sup>4</sup> Both consist almost entirely of genetic material enclosed in a protein shell (the head) which is propelled by a flagellate tail. Interestingly, the viruses called bacteriophages reproduce by injecting their genetic material into bacteria. This new genetic material causes the bacteria to spend its energy producing many many copies of the virus within itself, until the bacteria ruptures ("lyses") and dies, thus releasing new viruses.

Now it is not an impossible leap of imagination to conceive of a virus or virus-like parasite that instead of directly hijacking a cell's reproductive functions, slips into a host organism's reproductive process and mutates the newly developing offspring. When that offspring reaches maturity, instead of reproducing itself normally (by itself, parthenogenically) it instead begins to produce new copies of the parasite. Thus males (of any species) may be mutated individuals that create sperm instead of eggs. In turn, they afflict the next generation of individuals.

In terms of this theory, these mutants often appear much like the female host species (although in some species they do not) but are not designed to give birth and reproduce; they are instead endowed with equipment for infecting new hosts. This equipment varies greatly between species. I'll go into more detail about this later, but, for example, even among those species in which what they call "internal fertilization" is the rule, mammals are the only group in which the males of all species have penises.<sup>5</sup>

First, let's go over a little background on the cellular level. In regular cell division (mitosis), after the chromosomes replicate themselves, one copy of each chromosome goes to each daughter cell. The creation of a reproductive cell (meiosis), however, is a much more complicated affair, and what goes on in the formation of an ova is a quite different series of

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<sup>4</sup>When sperm were first seen under a microscope in 1677, until around 1835, many (at first most) scientists believed that sperm were parasites in the semen, having nothing to do with fertilization.

<sup>5</sup>Even mammals vary widely, some, for instance dogs, ferrets, mink, walruses and whales, possess penis-bones.

Some male birds have penises, others making do with cloaca, external genitalia much the same as the female's.

events than in the production of sperm. Only men's arrogant predisposition to generalize from their experience to pretend it includes the female experience has enabled them to label these as one and the same process and, further, to describe only the male version when describing meiosis, cursorily claiming that the female's is the same, 'with a few minor differences.' Thus the complex meiotic processes of both the egg and the sperm have been lumped together as if both simply exist to reduce the number of chromosomes in each gamete (sex cell, i.e., ovum or sperm) to the haploid number (i.e., one half the normal number). This is why meiosis is also referred to as "reduction division."

It's complicated, but here is what actually happens in meiosis with the egg. The chromosomes in any normal cell of a *diploid* organism are in pairs. (Human cells have 23 pairs of chromosomes.) At the onset of meiosis the members of each pair of chromosomes come together with their partners. For ease of description we will temporarily pretend we are dealing with an organism which has only one pair of chromosomes. Each member of this pair then replicates itself, but the cell doesn't divide, so there are then four strands, each one called a *chromatid*. (It is extremely important to differentiate the initial *chromosome* pair from the *chromatid* pair, which is actually just a single chromosome having replicated itself but not yet separated completely, the two identical strands still being connected at the *centromere*.) So at this time the cell has double the normal (diploid) amount of chromosomal material.

This is when the process of *crossing over* occurs. Two strands intertwine, one from each of the chromatid pairs. Those strands connect at various points (called *chiasmata*). When the two chromatid pairs separate, parts of the two chromatids that crossed over will have exchanged places.<sup>6</sup>

Crossing over has been made possible by double the normal diploid chromosomal material being present, but then the cell must get back down to the normal amount. Thus, in the egg, there is the rejection of the *first polar body*. The division of the nucleus (into the first polar body and the remaining nucleus) is not like normal cell division, as the polar

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<sup>6</sup>Crossing over occurs during meiosis in males too. (Of course, crossing over is necessarily very incomplete between the large X chromosome and the tiny, mismatched Y.)

body takes almost none of the cellular mass with it.<sup>7</sup> At this division it is usually said there is a 'failure of the centromeres to divide,' though I've read that this may sometimes not occur. If indeed this failure occurs in the formation of the first polar body, it means the egg, while maintaining the full amount of chromosomal material, has it in *chromatid* pairs instead of *chromosome* pairs. A further division (in which the centromeres would divide) would seem to be necessary. If, however, the timing of the centromeres was not delayed (and they did divide), then the ova after the rejection of the first polar body would contain a normal set of chromosomes.

The traditional (male) interpretation says that for meiosis to be complete, the egg cell must *once again* reduce its chromosomes (rejecting half its chromosomal material in the second polar body) so that it can 'unite' with the haploid sperm to create a new diploid organism.<sup>8</sup> They always say that the egg, like the sperm, is haploid, but, as you can see, this is very misleading. If you read very carefully, the texts *do* admit that the egg has the full amount of chromosomal material (though they say it is in those chromatid pairs instead of chromosome pairs). They fail to mention that the egg becomes truly haploid if and *only if* 'fertilization' occurs. The egg doesn't reject the *second polar body* unless or until it is penetrated by sperm. It seems obvious to me that the sperm causes the rejection of half the egg's genetic material to make room for its own 'contribution.' Why, for example, does the sperm, otherwise so spare in its composition, carry in its mid-piece a *centrosome*—the small body that initiates cell division?

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<sup>7</sup>Under the microscope a rejected polar body looks like a small bud on the side of the egg. It is said that polar bodies have no further function and simply disintegrate, but I read somewhere of one scientist who has been exploring the possibility that they have some purpose relating to the immune system.

<sup>8</sup>Contrary to traditionally used terminology, the sperm's genetic material (the *male pronucleus*) and what is left of the egg's genetic material after rejection of the second polar body (the *female pronucleus*) *never really do 'fuse' at all*, at least in humans and most other species, though *syngamy*, or formation of a fertilization nucleus from the fusion of female and male pronuclei, has been observed to occur in sea urchin eggs). In humans, the male pronucleus merely sidles up next to the egg cell's remaining nucleus (the female pronucleus) and when the first cleavage division (mitosis) begins, the membrane around each pronucleus disappears, the chromosomes mingling as copies of each of the female's and male's chromosomes go to each of the two new body cells.

Crossing over (which occurs in the formation of eggs in a female's ovaries when she herself is still in utero), and the rejection of the first polar body (which occurs in the maturing egg when a woman ovulates monthly) have been defined as *part* of meiosis. By male definition meiosis *also* includes the rejection of the second polar body—which does not occur *at all* unless the egg is penetrated by a sperm.<sup>9</sup> By defining these three separate phenomena (separate in time by 10 to 50 years!) as steps in one process (in sperm production they are one process) men assume that crossing over only takes place as part of hetero-sexual reproduction.

In reality crossing-over takes place in parthenogenic reproduction and is known to be the source of most genetic variation, even in hetero-sexual reproduction, where the combining of a second individual's genes just adds a little extra variation.<sup>10</sup> Scientists have observed that in natural parthenogenesis one polar body is cast off. The genetic variety which they teach and tout as *the* advantage of hetero-sexual reproduction seems to be just a take-off from parthenogenesis.

For my hypothesized system of reproductive parasitism to work, there has to be a means whereby not all individuals of the host species become male, and thus sterile, as this would lead to the extinction of the sperm parasite's host species, on which its life cycle depends. I hypothesize that this is why sperm carry the host's chromosomes. In humans, while each of our normal cells contains the diploid number of chromosomes (46, 23 pairs), the human sperm carries 23 single chromosomes, one of which is sex determinant (each sperm carrying either an X or a Y). With the X, the sperm carries a full haploid set and the fetus will be female (XX). With the Y, which, as older biology texts admit, is an incomplete or malformed X, the sperm carries almost a full haploid set and the fetus will be male (XY).

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<sup>9</sup>It is ironic that they have defined the egg as being *blocked* in its maturation process, or *immature* until a haploid sperm invades it. By this definition men have linguistically created a process which, for females, can in no way in all nature ever be 'complete' without getting fucked. This strikes me as similar to the way men have defined 'sex' as copulation terminating in male ejaculation, ignoring female prerogatives, perspective and even participation, and by definition negating the possibility of the very existence of 'sex' without a male.

<sup>10</sup>See *The Redundant Male* (Cherfas and Gribbin, 1985) for a fuller discussion.

It is tempting to think that sperm are themselves simply the parasite. Sperm are more or less uniform in structure, regardless of the animal that produces them. However, because sperm do carry the host's chromosomes, I think that the parasite has usurped the ovaries (now testes) of a varying percentage of the host species to produce mutated ova (read: sperm) which are like large versions of the parasite, but are adaptable enough to also carry that almost complete haploid set of the host's genes,<sup>11</sup> and to let the host sometimes produce normal (female) offspring.

Even the Y chromosome itself is not the parasite's genetic code, but simply a mutated chromosome that carries the sperm parasite's code in a single gene of the Y.<sup>12</sup> It would be interesting to note if the male-determinant gene is the same in different species. Possibly different species are parasitized by exactly the same parasite, or possibly there is one type of parasite, simply specialized to different hosts, just as there are tapeworms (or fleas, or mites, etc.) specialized for and specific to each host species. Or possibly any of many different parasitical organisms that all reproduce through the reproductive systems in different hosts cause the mutations of maleness and sperm.

Considering all this, we might expect a female's body to react in a hostile manner towards sperm. The human female body is inhospitable to sperm in numerous ways. The acid environment of the vagina makes the

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<sup>11</sup> The meiotic divisions which produce the first polar body (which sometimes itself again divides), the second polar body, and the resulting haploid egg nucleus (upon 'fertilization') in females, in males are used to form four haploid sperm. Sperm are manufactured from originator cells which (like the eggs in females) have already completed their formation when the boy-child is born. No more originator cells are created in a male's lifetime, but these cells must continually form new sperm from puberty on.

<sup>12</sup> It is known that virus genetic material is present in cells, including the reproductive cells, of species including our own, and that this viral genetic material is copied and passed along with the organism's genes into future generations. This type of virus is called *endogenous*, as opposed to what we think of as the more common *exogenous* viruses which survive by successive infection cycles and would then be found in the cells of some target organs, but not in the organism's reproductive cells. Presumably the maleness virus would not necessarily be confined to one location, particularly in species where maleness occurs without the presence of a specific identifiable genetic male-determinant.

sperm's survival difficult; more tellingly, the immune system of the female attacks sperm just as it would any other foreign invader. Some of the 'fertility' drugs given to wimmin are actually immuno-suppressants, as in some wimmin the cause of 'infertility' is a 'too-strong' immune system. And there is very good cause for the immune system to try to fend off sperm. It is known that around the time of a woman's bloods, when the cells of the cervix are particularly thin-walled, it is possible for sperm to penetrate these cells (as they 'normally' would penetrate an egg cell), prompting the cervical cell to begin rapid replication, linked with cervical cancer. Cancer of the cervix (except for adenocarcinoma) rarely occurs in wimmin who do not have intercourse with men. In medicine they are now saying cervical cancer may be a sexually transmitted disease with a long incubation period. As to cause, they mention that smegma and the DNA of spermatozoa have been implicated.

The mature egg starts out from the ovary with a layer of small follicular cells completely enveloping it, which must first be rubbed off before sperm can get access. Even then it takes many sperm pummeling their enzyme coated heads against the egg, weakening and destroying its cell wall, to allow one sperm to penetrate.

Though hetero-sex results in the conception of *more* male than female embryos, more male fetuses are spontaneously aborted than female.<sup>13</sup> The hormone which maintains pregnancy (HCG) by shielding an embryo from being aborted by the mother's immune response, is also created by cancer cells and used to shield *themselves* from the body's immune system.

Perhaps one of the most thought-provoking facts about sperm's origins is that when they are developing, sperm must be protected from the male's *own* immune system. This is accomplished by 'nurse cells,' called *sustentacular cells*, to each of which is connected, by filaments, numerous developing sperm. We might take a fresh look at the well known fact that the reason the testicles must lie in their unusual position outside the body cavities is that *sperm cannot survive normal body temperature*. (Wouldn't you think cells of a body would be able to survive its temperature?) One look at a diagram of the long, convoluted path from the

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<sup>13</sup>The ratio at *conception* is around 130 boys to every 100 girls. With young parents the ratio at *birth* is approximately 106 boys to every 100 girls and it is an even lower number of boys for older parents.

testes, way up into the body and around the pelvis (right through where women's ovaries are) and then back down and out the penis shows that the whole male genital anatomy is derived from the female's and merely jerry-rigged to accommodate the sperm's different needs. One could argue that many aspects of male behavior also seem to be dominated and directed by the simple but demanding imperatives of the sperm.

## Any Which Way

Many of us have absorbed the traditional idea that hetero-sexual reproduction is so widespread and universal that it must have been a development that occurred early in evolution and be inherent in all higher and most lower lifeforms. Actually it is not at all universal, there being many species that reproduce asexually, parthenogenically, or alternate these other methods with hetero-sexual methods, resorting to the latter when nutrition is poor, there is a lack of sunlight, the temperature is unfavorable, etc. And where hetero-sexual reproduction *does* occur it appears to have arisen independently, numerous times. Hetero-sexual reproduction and sex determination and differentiation take a multitude of fundamentally different forms, leading me to conclude that hetero-sexual reproduction is not a "homologous" characteristic. As a quick key, homologous characteristics are those that have arisen from a common ancestral trait: the front legs of a dog, the wings of a bat or bird, and our human arms, for example. This is in contrast to "analogous" characteristics which, while they may appear similar and fulfill the same function, have arisen separately from different sources, such as the wings of a bird and the wings of an insect, the latter not arising from a set of legs. In all sexually reproducing females the reproductive organs may be considered homologous. In males, however, the apparatus varies substantially.

In species where external 'fertilization' occurs, all a male need do is simply release sperm out onto the previously released eggs from the female. In species where the male has specifically adapted sperm delivery systems, it is often not a penis. Spiders have a specialized feeler (called the *maxillary palp*) and octopi have one modified arm (the *hectocotylus*). The male spider must draw the sperm it has excreted up into its hollow palp to facilitate depositing it at the female spider's reproductive orifice, sometimes while distracting her with a bug or other present,

so as not to be eaten by her himself. In octopi, and in many widely different species, the sperm come in a packet (*spermatophore*). The male octopus uses his long modified arm to place sperm packets into the female's mantle cavity. Leeches, which also utilize the *spermatophore*, simply cement the packet somewhere onto the female's back. An irritant in the *spermatophore* causes an ulcer to form under the packet, letting the sperm enter into the female's body, where they then make for her ovaries.

Bedbugs and some other unrelated species have independently adopted a very direct method. The male's duct ends in a sharp spine which he drives through the female's skin, depositing sperm directly into her body cavity. It doesn't sound like the highly evolved system they would have us believe hetero-sexual reproduction is, does it!

More complex (but no less telling) situations occur in some marine animals. In the *Enteroxenos* (a molluscan parasite that lives in the gut of a sea cucumber) the male enters the female's body, attaches in a particular place, and degenerates to become nothing but a live-in testes. (Of course, at first, researchers thought the organism was hermaphroditic.) Then there are the varieties of angler-fish where the tiny male (or males) attach themselves by their mouths externally to the female and degenerate to varying degrees. Her skin grows over them in part, and they live permanently appendaged to the female.

Methods of sex determination are no less varied than methods of hetero-sexual reproduction. In the simplest animals the only difference between 'males' and 'females' is whether they produce eggs or sperm. In other species the females and males may appear vastly different, but not necessarily genetically so, as some alternate their sex year to year, while others are male when young, becoming female as they mature. In some species a new individual will develop into a female unless it encounters an already mature female, in which case it will develop into a male.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>One species in which there is this type of sex differentiation is a marine worm (*Bonillia viridis*). If the young organism settles alone it will grow into an approximately 4 inch long female. If the mobile young locates an adult female it will become a male. The males are only 1/16th of an inch long and covered with fine hairs (cilia). Understandably, they were long assumed to be different species. The male swims into the female's egg sac, attaches to its wall and lives a parasitic life.

There are hermaphroditic species, where all individuals possess female and male reproductive organs.

In species for whom sex is genetically determined there are, yet again, vastly different methods of doing so. In some species, like ours, the female has a matched pair of Xs, while the male has one X paired with a very dissimilar little Y: XX=female/XY=male. In some species the male simply has one *less* chromosome than the female: XX=female/X0=male (he's playing with one card short of a full deck). In what are called haplo-diploid species, the female has the diploid number of paired chromosomes, but the male has only half that, the haploid number (he's playing with only half a deck).<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, though there are many species and groups of species that are haplo-diploid, it is believed that this arrangement arose separately for each group.

Another method of sex determination, which is represented by moths, butterflies, some birds and some fish, is where the *female* has the heterozygous sex chromosomes, XY, while it is the *male* who is homozygous, YY. In this method of sex determination it appears that the female chromosome is so vigorous as to assert its influence even in a singular state, and its absence is normally required for the male to develop.<sup>16</sup> Some organisms (including many fish) have multiple sex chromosomes. An extreme example is the Palestinian beetle, in which the females have what have been dubbed 22 X chromosomes, while the males have 12 Xs and 6 Ys.

All of this does *not* add up to one, smoothly functioning, perfect system that evolved once, in great antiquity, and has been inherited by all subsequent lifeforms. On the contrary, it seems that sex is actually a whole set of analogous situations which allow the host species to keep reproducing while alternately sustaining the life-cycle of a reproductive parasite.

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<sup>15</sup>Ants, bees, and wasps are haploid/diploid. As Susan Mitchelmore (1964) says, they "... all live in a matriarchal society, where the males are smaller than any type of female and live as parasites . . ." (p. 148).

<sup>16</sup>In birds only one ovary develops, presumably due to lack of room, because of the size of their eggs. If the active ovary is removed or destroyed, the latent male chromosome expresses itself and the other undeveloped gonad will develop—into a testes.

## Parthenogenesis Suppressed

So, if hetero-sexual reproduction is a phenomenon caused by a parasite that invades the process of parthenogenesis, shouldn't we expect to find an abundance of naturally occurring parthenogenesis in hetero-sexually reproducing species? Well, maybe, but maybe not.

First of all, there are a number of naturally *all* parthenogenic species, most of them 'lower' lifeforms, but also some 'higher' ones, such as all-female species of lizards, including at least one from the Southwestern U.S. More study of how species like this have stayed exclusively parthenogenic would be exciting (as long as that study wasn't oppressive to these wonderful lizards!)

Secondly, there are species known to alternate parthenogenic reproduction with hetero-sexual, and I wouldn't be too sure that parthenogenic births aren't also occurring in species that are assumed to be limited to hetero-sexual reproduction. Certainly, there has never been a lack of reports from wimmin claiming they've become pregnant without the aid of any man. And it has been enlightening for me to hear that the belief in parthenogenesis that exists in many cultures is not due to any lack of awareness of the dynamics of hetero-sexual reproduction.

It still seems, however, that full term parthenogenesis is not a common occurrence in our species. It seems clear to me that parthenogenesis is somehow being actively suppressed in the interests of the selfish sperm.

The problem does not lie at all in stimulating ova to begin their own independent development. Indeed, 'fertilization' has been known for some time to consist of two separate processes; the activation of the egg is separate from the intrusion of male genetic material. Activating the ova of various species *without using sperm* has been accomplished innumerable times in laboratories for decades. Some of the successful methods have been a slight rise in temperature, a very mild electrical charge, ultraviolet radiation, the prick of a needle, exposure to a saline solution, urea, sugar, solanin (a toxin from potatoes), saponin (bile salts), alcohol, ether, chloroform, acids such as hydrochloric and bytyric, tannin, ammonia, and enzymes. Even sperm from a different species can stimulate an egg to develop without making any genetic contribution.

More importantly, it is now known that eggs often do, naturally, spontaneously begin to develop parthenogenically but are not successfully carried to term, as is usually true of those from labs too. This is known to be the case in many species, including horses and humons; humon

wimmin's eggs 'recovered' (surgically or chemically obtained) for in vitro processes have been found to be in the early stages of parthenogenic development.

So it appears the main problem in successful parthenogenesis is carrying offspring to term. There are a number of ways I believe full term parthenogenesis may be being suppressed. First, there is the pervasive influence of pheromones. Pheromones are the hormone-like substances used by creatures to chemically communicate with and/or influence other animals of the same species. Some animals are known to be able to 'smell' these chemical signals *miles* away. It is said that male wild goats pheromonally induce females to come into synchronized estrus; and it is believed that when wimmin who live in close proximity influence each other to menstruate simultaneously, it is achieved by pheromone action. Male pheromones could very well intrude upon normal parthenogenic cycles of females.

Menstruation itself is quite suspect.<sup>17</sup> The complex hormone and mucous cycles involved could very well throw off our own natural cycles. Perhaps monthly bleeding flushes out parthenogenic embryos before a woman might even know she has been pregnant. Hetero-sex would then only need to evoke the female's pregnancy-benign state by triggering the proper hormonal balance again to allow sperm 'fertilized' embryos to continue development uninterrupted.

One of the ways hetero-sexual reproduction could get the jump on parthenogenesis would be by afflicting young wimmin *before* they're ready to reproduce parthenogenically; as it seems likely to me that wimmin might need to be more mature to become pregnant parthenogenically than to produce babies hetero-sexually: One of the only 'problems' in childbearing that increases with the age of the mother is Down's Syndrome and other conditions arising from nondysjunction (the presence of an extra chromosome due to the 'failure' of chromosome separation during meiosis). Perhaps older wimmin's eggs become less willing to shuck off chromosomes when invaded by sperm.

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<sup>17</sup>No animals menstruate in their wild state (with the exception of some primates, and then not copiously). However, most species do begin to have a periodic bloody discharge when domesticated in conditions of unnatural confinement, unnatural feeding, and for some, unnatural exposure to males of their own species. It is said that wimmin on a wholly natural raw foods vegetarian/vegan diet often stop menstruating, as do very physically active wimmin, like runners.

Recent information tells us that an individual's genes are 'labeled' as to whether they have been contributed by the mother or the father and that the paternal genes are needed to ensure normal development for, among other things, in mammals, the proper development of the placenta. This seems to me to be an excellent parasite ploy for making hetero-sexual reproduction the mode of necessity and therefore a way sperm have tried to ensure their indispensability.

It is known that in each cell one of the two X chromosomes in 'normal' female humans is deactivated. Why is this? And might a woman with two functioning Xs be more able to accomplish full-term virgin birth?

Recently there appeared a pamphlet, *La Ovagenesis* (1986-87), about a lesbian who has been spontaneously pregnant a number of times, but has not carried a child to term. As she's shared her story in her travels, she's found there are more than a few other wimmin who have had this experience.

## Starting Over

More and more questions arise. What is the evolutionary purpose of 'sex' as we know it, as opposed to sex for the purpose of hetero-sexual reproduction? (I've recently learned that members of at least one of the parthenogenic species of lizards do oral-genital love-making with each other, seemingly related to procreation.)<sup>18</sup> What are orgasms for? And, as male anatomy is derived from the *female*, what are clitorises for? There may be fascinating possibilities I'm overlooking regarding the clit (could it be an embryonic nerve center, held over into our adult forms due to neotony?<sup>19</sup>) but it seems most likely that the purpose of the clit is to facilitate orgasms. What, then, are orgasms for? I think it's quite possible that orgasms play a role in electromagnetically stimulating a body to parthenogenicize. (Remember those lab successes with a tiny electrical charge?) Also, one cannot expect muscles that have never been exercised to be ready to carry and then birth a baby; it seems very reasonable to me (especially if wimmin would not be parthenogenicizing until

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<sup>18</sup>See Chris's description on p. 13 of this issue of *LE*. Many thanks to Chris for this and other new information.

<sup>19</sup> *Neotony* as it applies to human means the retention in adults of characteristics generally found in embryonic or juvenile stages of other primates.

they are a bit older) that orgasmic contractions help to strengthen and tone the reproductive muscles and organs.

Maybe eroticism, like reproduction, is originally an activity that only takes *one* to accomplish, and all the intensity and delight we have discovered we can create with each other are just extra bonuses made possible by our ability to masturbate to orgasm. It wouldn't really surprise me very much, however, if, especially being the intensely social creatures that we are, the presence of another member (or members) of our species, experienced in a tactile way, might best trigger the process of parthenogenesis.

Though some information is obtainable on the (hetero-)sex lives of other species it seems that not much is available about their masturbatory and/or lesbian activities. It is difficult to develop a theory on the function of non-het sex in the absence of this information. Sometimes traits and behaviors occur simply as by-products of other changes and in themselves do not necessarily confer any evolutionary advantages. Could eroticism be just serendipity? It seems to me that it must have predated hetero-sexualism because males have never come up with anything completely original; they have only altered and exploited already existing structures and practices.

What other female animals have clits? Apes, monkeys, cats, and therefore probably all mammals, do. (If they are anatomically placed as ours are, how could they benefit non-frontal copulation?) How exactly does copulation trigger ovulation in those animals in which it does?<sup>20</sup> Why does estrus occur? If it really meant receptivity on the part of the female, how come the females of so many species do not allow copulation to occur without being chased, harassed, held down, attacked, bitten, brutalized, injured, doused with pheromones from the male, or at the very least distracted, as well as subjected to a host of similar activities, all euphemistically termed "courtship"?

A detailed human female anatomical diagram seems difficult to come by. Where do the clitoral nerves go, after the shaft has forked (these two branches being called *crura*)?<sup>21</sup> The embryo contains two duct systems, the Wolffian, which develops into the internal male genitalia, excluding

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<sup>20</sup>In some animals (among them rabbits, squirrels, ferrets, and domestic cats) the female reportedly doesn't ovulate until stimulated to do so by copulation.

<sup>21</sup>*Our Bodies/Our Selves* is the only place I found a diagram that even showed the *crura* or mentioned their existence.

the testes, and atrophies in the female (becoming the longitudinal duct of Gartner), and the Mullerian, which develops into the internal female sex organs and degenerates in the male. What might be the *original purpose* of this dual capacity system in fetal development?

How does all this relate to sexual reproduction in flowering plants? What about ferns and mosses, which both alternate generations of hetero-sexual reproduction with asexual spore production?

What about the possibility that diploid organisms would 'naturally' be triploid? There is at least one species of organism, the isopod crustacean *Trichoniscus*, in which the triploid variety is parthenogenic, while the diploid variety of the same organism reproduces hetero-sexually.

What might the connection be between the cause of maleness and that of cancer, besides the already identified causal relationship between sperm and cervical cancer? Considering the rapid, uncontrolled proliferation of our species resulting from hetero-sexual reproduction, could hetero-sexualism be called 'species cancer'?

Though the boys, as always, will try to use their science to convince us of how much we need them, I, for one, am looking forward to what we can learn and utilize from all the frantic new research presently surging in genetics. Every new 'discovery' helps us to find the way from our remarkable past. I'm also curious: What are the oldest *verifiably* male specimens found of our species, or of others?

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# The Choreographing of Reproductive DNA

*Ryn Edwards*

A number of my lesbian friends as well as myself have been interested in the question of parthenogenesis in mammals or, more exciting, the possibility of fusing the eggs from two wimmin and subsequently placing the "gynembryo" in the uterus of one of the wimmin to develop to term. My pursuit of the issue has been fleeting at best, but because Jeanette Silveira re-opened the box for me and because I am teaching a new course next academic year on the biology of female sexuality, I have begun to look into the scientific basis for the probability. It does not look hopeful, but current research has led to an unexpected interpretation which is thought provoking.

## Choreographies

In the 1980s experimental evidence from a variety of projects<sup>1</sup> began to lead scientists around the world towards a new understanding of how the expression of DNA<sup>2</sup> in mammals is regulated. This research not only impacts cloning efforts to maximize food production (Cross, 1989), for

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<sup>1</sup>These projects include experimental investigations of cloning and parthenogenesis, of expression of genes injected into egg (or sperm) nuclei and incorporated into the host DNA, and investigation of hereditary diseases which are not carried on the sex chromosomes but appear oddly related to the sex of the parents. Mice have been the focus of most of this research though some of the genetic diseases and ageing studies have been with humans. For a critical review see Solter, 1988.

<sup>2</sup>DNA, deoxyribonucleic acid, composes the backbone of chromosomes. A sequence of DNA comprises a gene.

example to obtain dairy herds with maximum milk output, but will also affect research in fetal and child development (Paldi et al., 1989), ageing (Mays-Hoopers, 1989), and genetic and DNA-based diseases (Michalovsky and Jones, 1989), including cancers and viruses such as HIV.

There is strong motivation for scientists to develop the technology to produce nearly identical individuals, and for mammals parthenogenesis holds the most likely current possibility for accomplishing this. Scientists and capitalistic ventures have considerable interest in developing the capability to produce parthenogenetic embryos to term, because of the high yields that could theoretically be produced if domestic mammals raised commercially were genetically composed of that genome<sup>3</sup> which produced quality and quantity milk, meat, eggs, wool, etc. The scientific laboratory which accomplishes the technology for this will undoubtedly win the Nobel prize.

The unexpected results suggest that, in mammals,<sup>4</sup> the DNA of the female gamete (the egg) is chemically marked differently than the DNA in the male gamete (the sperm). Although both the egg and the X-bearing sperm contain one copy of all the genes needed to produce a healthy fetus alone, the genes of both are chemically marked in ways which prevent this. Apparently, following fertilization, a few genes needed to establish the development of the placenta are activated only in the DNA contributed by the sperm, while many genes whose functions are solely committed to the initial development of the embryo are activated only in the DNA contributed by the egg. Genes from the sperm which theoretically could also function in the initial development of the embryo do not and genes from the egg which theoretically could function in the establishment of the placenta do not.

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<sup>3</sup>The genome is all the DNA (chromosomes) in the nucleus of a cell. It usually represents all the genes needed to produce a normal individual.

<sup>4</sup>The mouse has been the experimental animal of choice because it is easily cared for, has a short pregnancy, and has a physiology which in many ways resembles that of human beings. Rats, rabbits, hamsters, ferrets, and sheep have also been used (Graham, 1974). Anyone is well justified to take caution in assuming that what may be true for the mouse will be true for human beings or all mammals until a trend towards universality is shown. Since similar results are obtained with all other mammals tested such a universality is now being assumed amongst scientists (Markert, 1982; Solter, 1988).

To use a dance metaphor, the egg and the sperm are given *different choreographies*. Scientists use the term *imprinting* rather than *choreography*. Both terms suggest a pattern, but *imprint* implies a fixed state, while *choreography* implies a more dynamic, nonstatic condition, a pattern reflective of and changing with time. For me, *choreography* holds a more feminist meaning, that of essence resulting from the interplay or interactions with others, other choreographies.<sup>5</sup> I am not insisting through use of this term that these others only be coupled as male/female, yin/yang; rather I am interested in eliminating the dominance/subordinance value implicated in many scientific terms, which do not reflect the biological reality.

The complete organism can only develop fully if the dance is complete, and the dance requires both dancers, both choreographies. This is new research; however, its implications are that over time, through the interplay of genes activated in each of the contributed genomes, and influenced by timing factors, the choreographies of each dancer (egg and sperm genome in this case) take on an array of different patterns as cells divide and grow and become destined to become the different tissues and organs that make the mammal. Different genes are turned on and off in the paternal and maternal genomes, both sharing in the "work" that is required to make the adult organism.

When gametes are made in the new organism, their DNA is choreographed according to the sex of the organism and irrespective of whether the DNA originated from the maternal or paternal side. Thus, the DNA which a female mammal got from her father is re-choreographed in her eggs<sup>6</sup> with the maternal/egg choreography and not that of the paternal/sperm. Although the DNA she carries in her other body cells remains choreographed as female and male, all the DNA she contributes to her children will be marked female. And vice versa for a male organism.

How the choreographies are stored for repeated use when gametes are formed and how each is selectively imparted to the DNA of eggs and

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<sup>5</sup>I see this as being similar to what Sarah Hoagland explains in her book, *Lesbian Ethics*, as the valued ethical understanding of ourselves, not as selfish individuals, but as individuals who function and have meaning because of our diversity and through our interactions with one another.

<sup>6</sup>Eggs develop in the fetus and are held in some sort of suspended animation until hormones, cycled on onset of puberty cause some to develop periodically and be released from the ovary.

sperm is not known, but strong evidence suggests that selective methylation of (addition of  $-CH_3$  groups to) DNA is part of the method for determining the choreography (Sapienza et al., 1989). Sequences of DNA which have methyl groups attached are genes not capable of acting.

The implication of these new research results is that neither parthenogenesis (reproduction from one egg alone) nor cloning using female-only DNA (a gynembryo or other forms of cloning) will be possible anytime in the near future.<sup>7</sup> Unless we find some simple molecular switch that we can manipulate either to turn off the female choreography, so that all female genes can function, or to impart paternal choreography to eggs, parthenogenesis or development of female/female embryos will not be likely soon. From the scientific perspective, we are beginning to understand that life is more complicated, inter-relational, and situational than most of us can even now imagine.

## Genetic Diversity

Why might such a complex pattern, of what I am calling choreography, have evolved? Why select a method of "heterosexual" reproduction over parthenogenesis (from egg alone) or "gynogenesis" (from two eggs)? I believe that the answer lies in the evolutionary selection millions of years ago for modes that held greater probability for increased diversity in gene pools. "Heterosexual" reproduction presently does this better than parthenogenesis.<sup>8</sup> Clearly, DNA has had no selective pressure to "label" itself permanently, ego-centrally so to speak, as male or female, paternal or maternal, for it is interchangeable and cares nothing for the created characteristics of gender our minds have fashioned. However, the evolution of choreographing the DNA from the two contributors to

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<sup>7</sup> Parthenogenetic embryos of rabbit were reported in the late 30s and early 40s to have been initiated outside of the womb and implanted into the uteri of surrogate mothers who produced 4-5 live births out of thousands of such embryos introduced into surrogate mothers' wombs (e.g., Pincus, 1939). However, these experiments have been impossible to repeat, and further research in the late 40s and early 50s demonstrated that parthenogenetic embryos from rabbit never formed a placental attachment in the uterus nor developed extensively (Graham, 1974; Markert, 1982).

<sup>8</sup> Even the addition of the Y chromosome to the gene pool, although small, does enhance the diversity of gene expression via the many characteristics peculiar to males.

an embryo would serve to assure greater mixing of gene pools than could be achieved parthenogenetically or gynogenetically in mammals.

But why the need for diversity in the gene pool? As an oppressed people, we value diversity highly, but where lies the genetic value? Less diversity would better support the survival of those organisms living in a relatively stable environment. Thus the genes of those organisms who are most successful would contribute most to the reproductive pool. Genetic variation would presumably increase the probability that less successful organisms would be born, thus decreasing the successfulness of the species overall. On the other hand, a changing environment would favor those species which had a large gene pool, because there would be a higher probability that some organisms would have the genetic makeup to survive and survive well.

In terms of the history of the earth, the environment in which humans have evolved has been relatively stable. However, physicists now believe that the earth is subjected to periodic catastrophic environmental changes which have resulted in extinctions of many organisms, such as the dinosaurs, at various intervals in earth's history. As a species, human beings evolved since the last catastrophe. A catastrophic change in the environment would result in extinction of those organisms with small gene pools adapted to the former environment solely, while those which had diverse gene pools would mathematically have a better chance of having produced genetic combinations in the former environment which could survive the new one. Men have caused more rapid and drastic changes in our environment than any other organism on earth, as is witnessed now by water and air pollution, for example. Our continued survival may rest in a diverse gene pool.

Maintenance of diversity, however, could evolve in a number of ways, heterosexual maintenance being only one. Certainly parthenogenesis has survived in many organisms and through numerous catastrophes so we should expect that diversity can be maintained for this method of reproduction as well. For the most part, in bacteria, protists, fungi, plants and animals where parthenogenetic (asexual) reproduction is preferred, it is common that genetic mutation is high. That is, the DNA of these organisms is more susceptible to change via the environment and penetrating ultra-violet light than in those where heterosexual reproduction is preferred. Thus, gene diversity can be enhanced through parthenogenetic reproduction, not through the reproductive process itself, but rather through mutation. The reliance on mutation as the only means to

maintain diversity could be considered less effective and efficient since mutation is a random process not always creating viable or beneficial changes.

## Implications

So the human species and mammals in general have apparently evolved from a source which had established a preference for maintenance of gene diversity through heterosexual reproduction. Persons wishing to establish animal clones will have a more difficult time making that a production line process and certainly are not likely to be able to produce more than eight of any clone.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, parthenogenesis and gynogenesis in humans is not likely to become a scientific capability, at least not soon. Parthenogenetic- and gynogenetic-produced embryos in mice can develop to the eight cell stage but then die, in large part because the embedment in the uterine wall and initiation of the placenta do not occur. An experimental method to investigate whether the genome of the egg alone can produce a viable mouse if an artificial placenta could be established is not yet possible.

And if parthenogenesis or gynogenesis were possible, neither is likely to produce the amazon wimmin I think we would want to produce. Viable mice can be produced if a one to eight celled fertilized embryo is fused with a similar stage embryo produced parthenogenetically or gynogenetically (McGrath and Solter, 1984). Such embryos develop with cells derived from egg only genomic contributions and from those having both egg and sperm genomic contributions. These embryos, termed *chimeras*, implant in the uterus and develop placenta because some sperm genome exists in nuclei along with the egg genome.<sup>10</sup> Mice from these embryos are born with similar or greater weight than those

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<sup>9</sup>Following fertilization in mammals, the cells from the two, four, and eight celled embryo can be separated and each can develop into an entire individual, all being identical (Cross, 1989). This cannot be done following the eight cell stage.

<sup>10</sup>Interestingly, the presence of the male genomic material not combined within the same nucleus with female genomic material does not result in implantation and placental formation. Thus, it is not the male genome alone that results in placental formation but the male genome in close conjunction with the female in the same nucleus (Paldi et al, 1989).

from embryos with only cells derived from egg/sperm genomic contributions, but as adults chimeric mice are always smaller.

Furthermore, the parthenogenetic and gynogenetic cells of the chimera mouse do not account for 50% of the cell mass. The number of these cells is reduced dramatically in all tissue types. That is, these cells appear to have less viability and either do not divide as rapidly as egg/sperm genomic cells or die and are absorbed. However, such cells can produce healthy eggs. Interestingly, such cells, although preferentially excluded from muscle, liver, bladder, pancreas, lung and kidneys, compose approximately 10% of brain, heart, blood, small intestine, and spleen (Fundele et al., 1989). These strong amazon tissues tolerate female-only cells! These findings nonetheless suggest that female-only genomic adults would not be the amazons we would need.

What other hopes to increase the female population and decrease the male population do lesbians have? A hot topic of conversation amongst macho male pilots is that the most macho pilots have female children. Word-of-mouth amongst some women researchers at NASA<sup>11</sup> is that male astronauts also follow this trend, once having been in space they have produced only daughters. Little et al. (1987) studied these trends<sup>12</sup> and reported that the effect appeared to be related to high gravitational forces which some test pilots and astronauts endure when being propelled rapidly . . . . SPACE may be their frontier but our hope!

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<sup>11</sup>National Aeronautics and Space Administration

<sup>12</sup>However, no such sex of offspring effect was found for female mice subjected to two to four times normal gravitational pull by being housed in cages on a large centrifuge (Moore and Duke, 1988). At the highest gravitational force they did not produce any young when mated, but at lower gravitational forces they produced offspring in normal female to male ratios. It would be interesting if these two women researchers would examine the effect high gravitational forces have on male mice by breeding them to female mice exposed only to earth's gravity.

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# Lesbian Violence, Lesbian Victims: How to Identify Battering in Relationships\*

*Lee Evans and Shelley Bannister*

*Lee:* In 1982 I got beat up by my friend's ex-lover. She wasn't angry at me, I just happened to get in her way. As word got out about this incident, dykes began to tell me stories about abuse in their relationships. I didn't want to hear it. I wanted to continue to believe that lesbian violence was an aberration, that it didn't happen to strong dykes unless they had provoked it. I wanted to feel immune from this kind of pain and violence. I wanted to believe that lesbians were different from men.

What I came to eventually believe is that lesbian battering and lesbian rape are more common than we acknowledge. I also found out it's not enough to just believe that we are different from men. In fact, we become different from men by making different choices when confronted with the same situations. To do this, we need information about how power and control are used in battering relationships. I hope this first of a two-part article will help lesbians make informed choices when violence strikes our friends, ourselves, and our communities.

*Shelly:* I have centered my academic research on violence against women generally, reading and writing about the many ways in which the heteropatriarchy oppresses women. One of my close dyke friends was being battered in a lesbian relationship at the same time as I attended a panel, led by Lee, on lesbian battering. The interest and research that led to this article resulted from both of these experiences. Since then I unfortunately have talked to many lesbians who have been and are being battered in lesbian relationships.

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In 1986, with the publication of *Naming the Violence: Speaking Out About Lesbian Battering*,<sup>1</sup> the silence that shrouded lesbian battering was broken. Lesbians encounter extreme repression in our daily lives, however, and the voices of battered lesbians are still muffled. Even though we have legitimate fears about lesbian-hating in society and a reluctance to raise issues about lesbian battering even within our communities, we must continue to identify the very real physical and mental/emotional violence that lesbians inflict on their lovers and friends and to demand an end to this violence within our communities.

The organized battered women's movement began in 1978 with the creation of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Lesbians comprised a small sub-group of that organization. Fearing homophobic attacks by heterosexual women in the battered women's movement, lesbians did not discuss lesbian battering openly within the NCADV until its first conference in 1980. Since then the NCADV has included lesbian battering as one of its priority areas, including lesbians who are survivors of sadomasochism.<sup>2</sup>

In this article we discuss the various ways that lesbian battering manifests itself within a relationship and the effects of the violence on the lesbian who is battered. Battering takes many forms and results not only in physical harm but also in the loss of positive feelings of self-worth and personal power. We write this article to help lesbians determine whether they are being battered and to encourage recognition of how encompassing this violence can be in our lives.

### The Cycle of Abuse

In 1979, Lenore Walker described a cycle of violence that exists in most heterosexual battering relationships. We see this cycle as applicable to lesbians in several respects and discuss it here in the context of lesbian relationships. The cycle has three stages: the calm, loving, honeymoon period; the tension-building stage; the explosion, battering stage; followed by a return to the honeymoon stage.<sup>3</sup> The honeymoon stage is a time when the batterer actually is setting the victim up for the future abuse. The batterer shows interest in her lover, is sensitive, passionate, loving and romantic. The relationship builds very quickly, resulting in 'instant intimacy.' This stage moves into the tension-building stage in which the batterer shows her displeasure at her lover by finding fault with her, picking arguments, putting her down. These small assaults increase in intensity as time passes. The third stage is the physically battering stage in

which the batterer attacks her lover in some way. This can include physical assaults, including sexual assaults, and almost always includes emotional abuse as well. Often this stage is immediately preceded (in the 24 hours prior to the attack) by a sharp increase in name-calling and fault-finding by the batterer. Following the physical attacks, there is almost always a return to the honeymoon stage characterized by apologies, with the batterer seeking nurturing from her victim and promising "never again." As the cycle continues, these honeymoon phases become shorter and shorter, until they sometimes cease to exist. The time between the physical attacks is lessened and the physical attacks increase in severity.

The batterer controls the timing of the attacks; the victim's control is limited to appeasing and pleasing the batterer to delay the eventual attack, or to aggravating the situation and bringing on the attack to get it over with and hopefully return to the honeymoon stage. This does not mean that the victim has any ability to stop the battering or that she has caused the battering. We mean only that any woman existing in such a state of anxiety, waiting for the next, unavoidable attack, will take whatever steps possible to alleviate that anxiety.

This cycle model does not take into account the daily coercive control and psychological manipulation exercised by the batterer on her victim. It also does not allow for the often unpredictable violence by the batterer. Walker's model suggests that the batterer's tension buildup and violent release results from some internal psychological mechanism in the batterer. Many victims have stated, however, that the batterer in fact sets up a scenario of tension-building culminating in violence to disguise how premeditated an act the violence is. Additionally, it appears that the cycle of violence is more like a spiral than a cycle, with each act of the violence being somewhat different than the previous act, making it harder to recognize as a pattern.

### Coercion Behaviors

While Walker's model outlines the cycle of battering and describes how and when the violence may occur, it does not satisfactorily describe the process through which a person gains control and power over another person. This process is described in Amnesty International's *Report on Torture*, which includes A.D. Biderman's Chart of Coercion.<sup>4</sup> This chart outlines a number of behaviors that a person uses to gain this kind of control over another. To see if Biderman's model of control would apply to lesbians, we compared the behaviors listed in the chart with the

personal accounts of lesbian battering in *Naming the Violence* and to the stories told to us by battered lesbians. We sadly observed that every behavior outlined in Biderman's chart was used many times over by lesbian batterers, as described in the book as well as in the personal accounts we received from battered lesbians. Those behaviors include: isolation from friends and family; monopolization of the victim's perceptions by the batterer; inducement of debility and exhaustion in the victim; threats on the lesbians' safety and/or that of friends, pets, or family; demonstration of the batterer's omnipotence over the victim; degradation and humiliation of the victim; enforcement of trivial demands; 'crazymaking' behavior; and occasional indulgences in good, loving behavior by the batterer toward her victim.

The fact that a particular relationship can be characterized by some of these phases does not necessarily mean that it is a battering situation. We discuss these behaviors in detail below to illustrate how they *intertwine* with one another to create a reality that keeps the victim focussed on the relationship and not on herself. We wish to show also how insidious the psychological control that permits battering can be and how subtle and removed from casual inspection it can be.

### 1. Isolation from friends and/or family.

Certainly some amount of isolation of lovers from the rest of the world is not unusual, especially in the beginning of a lesbian relationship. New lovers tend to spend a lot of time together getting to know one another and making love. We even expect this kind of behavior within our communities. Kate Clinton jokes about two new lovers who manage to get out of bed long enough to go to a concert, not realizing that they have bedspread marks on their faces. This joke appeals to us because most of us have been there. The line in *Desert Hearts*, "We've got to get out of this room, if only to take a walk," brings laughs from dykes in movie audiences.

This isolation continues even after the newness of a relationship fades. We all know, or have been, lesbians who find a new lover and drop out of sight until the relationship hits the skids. Then they both re-emerge into the community, re-establish old friendships, meet new lesbians, and share their lives with others until a new lover is found and the disappearing act begins again. Unfortunately, our communities support this cycle of isolation. The concept of romantic love assumes that we are each just a half of a person, looking for the perfect lesbian to join with to become a complete dyke. While we might not like to admit that we play this

game, a look at our communities reveals support and social respectability for couples. When was the last time that we invited a dyke and her best friend to dinner, rather than the dyke and her lover? We assume that lovers sometimes need special time together. Do we make the same assumption for friends? Our isolation within relationships from the rest of the community is often accommodated by the community. This isolation, however, is damaging.

Isolation is not only felt in the context of the relationship. Lesbians routinely face isolation in many parts of our lives: from each other, from our families, in our jobs, from nature (for us city dykes). We often avoid deep intimacy with friends because of the secrets from our pasts that we are protecting. We are isolated by our differences and often alienated from ourselves.

We must learn to identify the effects of isolating relationships, because batterers almost always try to isolate their victims from their previous lives. Here are some examples of battering relationships in which isolation plays an important role:

- Your lover is so jealous that you limit your contacts with other dykes so that you won't have to put up with her jealous remarks or rage.
- Your lover intercepts your mail, monitors your phone calls, or establishes a rule under which there is no privacy within the home; what is yours is hers.
- Your lover interferes with your friendships and either chases your friends away or turns them against you with lies and half-truths.
- Your lover constantly criticizes your friends for being too political and radical, or insufficiently political and radical.
- Your lover decides that she wants you to go back into the closet for her career's sake, or for her emotional well-being.
- Your lover decides that she wants you to move somewhere with her where there will be no lesbian support for you or where all of your friends will be her friends first.
- Your lover takes your car keys, or your car.
- Your lover does not want you to go anywhere without her and insists that you should do all of your socializing as a couple.

- Your lover goes to your night-shift job with you; your lover never lets you alone.
- Your lover is always in the midst of a crisis, so that you never can leave her alone.
- Your lover creates embarrassing scenes in front of your friends or family so that none of them feel comfortable visiting you anymore.
- Your lover's friends are the only friends who ever visit.

While some of these examples may not be abusive behavior on their own, we see them as helpful in determining whether we are in unhealthy relationships which may seriously deteriorate to our physical and emotional disadvantage. We suggest that the reader ask herself these questions:

- Do I have the feeling that it is somehow 'bad' if I want to be emotionally intimate with someone other than my lover?
- Do I withhold information from my lover about my social interactions for fear of what she may say or do?
- Does this relationship foster a sense of community for me with other lesbians; does my lover encourage me to spend time with other lesbians?
- When I am around my lover and friends or family, am I nervous about what she might say or do to embarrass or humiliate me?

In virtually every lesbian relationship where there is battering, the battered lesbian has been isolated from others on either a social level or on the intimacy with friends level. Isolating the battered lesbian prevents her from gathering support from other lesbians to leave the relationship. It makes the battered lesbian totally dependent upon her batterer for social contact, for love, for day-to-day interactions. It gives her a skewed sense of herself. This isolation serves the batterer well: she does not want her actions to be scrutinized by others and she needs her victim to be dependent on her.

Isolated battered lesbians develop a sense of helplessness and powerlessness. This further develops into a total inability to make choices and to see life objectively. The sense of hopelessness can manifest itself as laziness or disinterest in life, which reinforces the negative self-image which is developing.<sup>5</sup> This mindset allows the batterer to continue the battering relationship as long as she wants.

## 2. Monopolization of perceptions.

The battering partner creates situations in which she is always 'right' about everything and in which she is always the more important member of the relationship. She controls the battered lesbian's sense of reality. Some examples:

- Your partner always 'wins' the fights.
- You feel that it is easier to go along with your partner than to fight for your own decisions.
- Your partner's explanations always make more sense than yours do, her politics are always more correct, her opinions more important. You learn to agree with her in all of these things.
- Your decisions must meet with her approval.
- Her opinions are the deciding factor in what you wear, in where you go, in what you do and whom you see.
- Your life revolves around her moods, her problems, her emotional state of mind. Your wishes and emotional states are secondary to hers.
- You watch what you say so that it meets her approval.
- Her very presence overwhelms everything else that is happening.
- You have the sense that you are walking on eggshells.

The effect of this monopolization of perception is obvious and obviously harmful: the battered lesbian loses her sense of self, her confidence and her belief in herself. Her life begins to revolve around the batterer.

## 3. Inducement of debility and exhaustion.

Behaviors of the batterer leave the victim feeling sick (literally), tired and confused. Examples of these:

- Your lover wakes you up to fight in the middle of the night or keeps you from sleeping until she is ready to quit fighting.
- Your lover criticizes you around a disability you have, belittling it and/or denying its existence or harmful effect. Your lover tries to convince you that if you just changed your attitude (or something else about your lifestyle like the food you eat or how much you sleep), you could cure yourself.

- Your lover expects you to take care of her and do chores when you are sick.
- Your lover expects you to function normally when you are ill or when you are hospitalized.
- Your lover expects you to be nurturing towards her when she knows that you are hurting.

The battered lover's abilities to think clearly and take care of herself are grossly impaired when her lover refuses to acknowledge her basic physical needs such as the need to sleep, to eat, and to rest when ill. When a lesbian needs emotional support and attention and yet is expected to nurture her partner instead of being nurtured herself, her emotional strength is sapped. Her ability to refuse and defend against the abuse is hindered.

#### 4. Threats.

Threats are used by the battering partner to intimidate and exert control over her lover. A lesbian who is constantly being threatened learns to be constantly on guard against the threat being carried out and must worry for the targets of the threats. Some examples:

- Your lover threatens to hurt you, your pets, and/or your family when you do not comply with her wishes or when she is angry. She threatens to hurt your friends or other lovers.
- Your lover threatens suicide as a way of manipulating you into doing what she wants you to do.
- Your lover threatens to come out for you to your family or your job.
- Your lover threatens to slander you in your community.
- Your lover threatens to break or destroy things that you love.
- Your lover silences you with a look or an expression when you are in public.

Being threatened by someone you love or by someone you believe has power over you can create anxiety and despair. It adds to the feelings of hopelessness and loss of sense of self that the other behaviors have helped induce.

#### 5. Demonstrating power.

Batterers attempt to convince their victims that they can do things that others cannot do. This can include both positive and negative behaviors. Some examples:

- Your partner tells you that she has 'special gifts,' that she is psychic, that she's extremely bright, that she knows much more than you do.
- Your partner convinces you that only *she* can satisfy you sexually.
- Your partner always seems to know where you are, where you have been, and who you have seen.
- Your lover always claims to be politically correct and know the right ways to do things.
- Your lover always claims to know what you are thinking and what you are planning.
- Your partner always seems to know more about you than you know about yourself.

Many times batterers actually are more powerful, but they do not possess the extraordinary power that they claim for themselves. Instead, they hold the power of someone who watches carefully and has learned how to effectively manipulate their lovers. The batterer may in actuality know where you have been and who you have been with; but ask yourself how she has obtained all this information. Are friends unknowingly assisting her in her constant surveillance of you? Is she in fact following you, or does she have other people doing that for her? Is she convincing others that they must help her watch over you because of some problem you are having?

The batterers seeming omnipotence is designed to teach the battered partner that it is useless to resist.

#### 6. Degradation.

Almost all battered lesbians report being constantly barraged with humiliating and degrading remarks from their abuser in private as well as in public. This is often done in clever ways that hurt the victim but appear petty or even humorous to friends or acquaintances. The batterer knows how to most effectively undermine the self-confidence of her victim. Some examples:

- Your partner puts you down in a way that makes you think there is something essentially wrong with you.
- Your lover talks you into doing sexual things which are embarrassing to you or that feel bad.
- Your partner "jokingly" makes fun of you in front of others.

- Your partner calls you offensive names such as 'slut,' 'whore,' or 'cunt'; or racist, Jew-hating, or classist names.
- Your lover blames you for the physical or sexual abuse done to you by a family member or by a previous lover; she makes you feel like you deserved it.
- Your lover makes you beg not to be hit, or beg to be let out of a locked room, or beg to be allowed to use the bathroom or stop fighting or to be allowed to go to sleep.
- Your partner interrogates you about past lovers or lovers she thinks you have currently, or that you do have currently.
- Your partner makes you ask permission to do everything, even trivial things. She says, "Didn't you consider *my* feelings when you decided that?"

It is often easier to go along with someone who is intent upon degrading and humiliating you. If your lover starts criticizing you in public, it is often easier to laugh it off or appease her in some way, or even to leave a gathering with her, than it is to resist her. This is especially true if you know that she is likely to escalate her behavior and cause a scene. Degrading a person is another way of threatening that person: "If you think that this is bad, just wait and see what else I will do if you don't go along with me." This treatment is designed to reduce someone to basic survival concerns.

#### 7. Enforcing trivial demands.

The battering partner will require her victim to comply with all of her demands, even the most trivial, as a means of establishing complete control. This prevents the battered lesbian from trying to think for herself or from being able to make decisions for herself. These, in turn, make it more difficult for the battered lesbian to break free of the batterer, as she has forgotten how to take care of herself and make her own choices in life. Some examples:

- Your lover insists on the right to approve all of your clothing.
- Your lover demands detailed reports from you when you get back from shopping.
- Your partner has rigidly defined ways of doing things that you must adhere to, from the way to dust and clean the house, to making the beds, washing the dishes, driving the car, shopping for groceries,

doing the laundry, etc. For example, she insists on telling you what roads you should take to get somewhere when you are driving.

- Your partner demands that you wear your hair the way that she likes it.
- Your partner is super-critical of your ways of doing things.

Molding the battered partner into complete compliance makes the batterer's job much easier. To control someone, you must be able to affect all of their decisions, even the trivial aspects of life.

#### 8. "Crazymaking" behavior.

This type of behavior is designed to make the battered lesbian feel that she is losing her sanity. It is designed to make her feel confused and unsure about what is happening in her life and how it is happening. Some examples:

- Your lover tries to convince you that you are wrong even when it is apparent that you are not wrong.
- Your lover tries to convince you that it is you and her against the world and that no one else can or will understand your relationship.
- Your lover blames you for her behavior: she calls you a slut when she is caught having an undisclosed relationship; she says that you are the abusive one after she has hit you or abused you mentally.
- Your lover lies to you and then denies lying to you; she contradicts herself within the same conversation and then denies making the contradictory statement.
- Your lover steals money from you and buys herself something extravagant with it after complaining about how broke she has been. She denies taking the money from you even though you know that she was the only one who had access to it. She accuses you of being careless with your money and jealous of her for her new purchases.
- Your partner changes the rules of the relationship without warning or explanation, leaving you constantly confused about what just happened. For example, you had both agreed that you would never argue in the middle of the night. One early morning she wakes you to complain about your lack of attention to her. When

you remind her of your agreement, she says that if you really loved her, you'd talk to her.

- Your lover expects to be nurtured after she has hurt or abused you and acts as if she is the victim. She acts as though she knows she is horrible to be putting you through this, but that it is your responsibility to convince her that she is not bad or a brute for hurting you.

"Crazymaking" behavior is remarkably effective; often it involves the use of reversals (twisting or reversing the truth) that are impossible to argue your way out of. This behavior aggravates the state of isolation and teaches the battered lesbian not to trust her own truths and sense of what is real.

### 9. Occasional indulgences.

This behavior is akin to Walker's honeymoon stage in the cycle of violence she describes. If the batterer were a monster all of the time, the relationship would have never gotten off the ground. Unfortunately, batterers tend to be very charming and loving when they choose to be.

There are some good times within these relationships. Some examples:

- Your lover surprises you with presents, especially when you least expect them; you expect her to be mad when you come home from visiting your sister, and, instead, she surprises you with a gift.
- You learn to believe that your lover is the only person that can make you really feel better about yourself, and when she's being nice to you, you feel really good about yourself and your abilities.
- Your partner indulges you with special gifts or special care after she has humiliated you or hurt you.
- Your lovemaking is sometimes sweet, tender and wonderful.
- Your lover expects you to heap love and praise on her for these gifts and nice treatment. She says to you, "See, I'm not such a bad person after all." "See, we can have some good times together if you'd just be nice to me."

In the context of all of the above, this gentle, loving behavior is as dangerous as the abusive conduct. This special treatment and the gifts can make the battered lesbian even more anxious to please her batterer, and even more confused.

## Conclusion

We write this article to help battered lesbians realize what is going on in their lives. Often when a lesbian is in a relationship in which she is being battered, she is too close to her batterer and too dependent upon her to realize that it should not be like that. When a person takes control over another, the victim loses her sense of self and her sense of personal strength. Her perceptions of safety and her definition of her own sexuality are changed to fit those of the battering partner. The battered lesbian adopts her batterer's view of the world to the exclusion of all other information that she receives. If a friend tries to criticize how the batterer is treating her victim, the lesbian victim defends the batterer, explaining how she is misunderstood. Information contradicting the messages the batterer gives her is discarded because it does not fit.

Lesbians who are being battered often end up justifying to others their batterers' conduct towards them. The terrible messages that the batterer tells the victim (such as that she is ugly or is nothing without her lover) become internalized to such an extent that the battered lesbian totally believes them about herself. Taking on the batterer's view of herself, the victim loses her ability to see her life objectively and believes that staying with her lover is her only option.

We write this article also for lesbians who have friends who are being battered by their lovers. We cannot tell a lesbian how to run her life or what choices she should make. But we have a responsibility to each other to help ourselves perceive our lives clearly. We anticipate writing a second article that will include suggestions for ways in which lesbians and lesbian communities can deal with lesbian battering. In the meantime, if a friend is being battered, continue to maintain contact with her and encourage her to focus on her own feelings rather than those of the batterer. Battered women's shelters may offer helpful information as well as refuge, although they are often homophobic. The book *Getting Free*, by Ginny NiCarthy<sup>6</sup> is a good resource. It is important for us to support each other especially as we try to recover from the physical and emotional attacks from which we suffer or have suffered.

The lesbian community takes so much abuse from the heterosexual world that it is horrifying to think of the abuse that occurs within the community at the hands and minds of lesbians. Of course, we all are victims of the heteropatriarchy. But we cannot allow the batterers of lesbians to use that to excuse their abusive, hateful conduct. We must stop the abuse. We tend to be generous with each other and look for the

good in ourselves and our friends. We see so much violence and hatred outside our communities that we prefer not to see it within. We deny that a dyke we have met or who a friend is starting a relationship with might be abusive, might be too controlling. It is dangerous to make assumptions that all lesbians are non-violent and can be trusted with our hearts and bodies. In our relationships with individual lesbians as well as in our communities, be they large or small, we must be strong enough to speak out against this violence and to encourage all lesbians to respect each other. After all, being a lesbian is about loving ourselves and loving lesbians. Whatever values are created within different lesbian communities, it is important that we acknowledge that lesbian battering has no place in any of our value systems.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Naming the Violence: Speaking Out About Lesbian Battering*, edited by Kerry Lobel for the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence Lesbian Task Force (Seattle: Seal Press, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Hart, "Preface," *Naming the Violence*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>3</sup> Lenore Walker, *The Battered Woman* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1979), p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> A.D. Biderman, "Chart of Coercion," In, Amnesty International, *Report on Torture* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1975), p. 53.

<sup>5</sup> Walker, *Op. Cit.*, p. 174.

<sup>6</sup> Ginny NiCarthy, *Getting Free* (Seattle: Seal Press, 1982).



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# Separatism Is Not a Luxury: Some Thoughts on Separatism and Class

*C. Maria*

Julia Penelope, in "The Mystery of Lesbians," asks, "HOW, in spite of derision, incarceration, violence, and poverty, do we find the courage TO CREATE OURSELVES??"<sup>1</sup> This question rekindled my anger at having been unemployed for two years following college graduation in 1986, as well as at the poverty many women are forced to endure. But as an Afro-Latina Radical Dyke living and working in racist heteropatriarchy,<sup>2</sup> I was next brought to consider the current phallocratic system and wondered how possible it would be for Lesbian Separatists to move beyond a focus on class.

My point in this paper is that socialist feminists are wrong in insisting Lesbians focus on class. They dismiss the connection between economic deprivation and the sexual caste system, where men make women's lives almost unlivable. We live in a world that is ready to prepare our funeral pyres daily.<sup>3</sup> Many Lesbians, in focussing on class, have missed the importance of separatism, which is to make our Lesbian lives livable in the present. This is not living "one day at a time." Rather, Lesbians must be active, creative, and rigorous participants in our present reality. To that end I conclude with A Proposal.

## Socialism Is Not the Answer

Most women could care less about separatism. This purposeful ignorance not only comes from non-feminists and anti-feminists, but also from feminists who should know better, yet choose to ignore separatism even as a possibility. Some of this ignorance is caused by the fear of male reprisals. But fear alone has not stopped many Lesbians and Radical

Feminists from envisioning a world free from male oppression and violence. So what else is behind this ignorance?

The only way to account for this dismissal is the belief among liberal and socialist/left-wing heterosexual and lesbian feminists that some men, particularly poor men and ethnically different men, are more oppressed than women in general. They say these men do not benefit from the sexual oppression of women. bell hooks even goes as far as to justify male sexual crimes committed against women and to argue that men are the real victims.

Alienated, frustrated, pissed off, he may attack, abuse, and oppress any individual woman or women, but he is not reaping the benefits from his support of sexist ideology. When he beats or rapes women, he is not exercising *privilege* or reaping any positive rewards; he may feel satisfied in exercising the *only* form of domination allowed him [emphases mine].<sup>4</sup>

In fact, physical and sexual abuse that come from male heterosexual privilege are so pervasive and oppressive, that less privileged and LEAST privileged women often DO become Lesbian Separatists.

Those who see Lesbian Separatism as classist and racist deny the lives of Lesbian Separatists, most of whom are not privileged. For example, hooks sees separatism as purely a class issue.

Most women do not have the economic freedom to separate from men because of economic interdependence. The separatist notion that women could resist sexism by withdrawing contact with men reflects a bourgeois class perspective.<sup>5</sup>

hooks assumes all Separatists are white and privileged. But if Separatism derived from a "bourgeois class perspective," most of the more privileged lesbians would be Separatists, or at least give separatism some serious consideration. And there would be few racially and ethnically different Separatists or less privileged Separatists.

Yet Separatism IS an economic issue. Lesbian Separatists are painfully aware it is racist heteropatriarchy that keeps women poor. No woman, however wealthy, has unrevocable power. All men however poor, have some unrevocable power.<sup>6</sup> In patriarchal heteroeconomy,<sup>7</sup> ALL women are economically bound to men. Jeffner Allen explains this dilemma:

Although we choose to live as lesbians, we are obliged . . . to stand in relation to the patriarchal economy . . . . We are obliged to stand in relation to men, especially to secure food, water, shelter, clothing, and frequently, for the goods and money that must be exchanged for such commodities.<sup>8</sup>

Any woman who separates, however partially, from a man or men, will suffer economically. Living as a Separatist entails taking the risk that racist heteropatriarchy can, at any time, withdraw the *only* means of support available to us for obtaining basic necessities and maintaining any quality of life. Becoming a Separatist means that a Lesbian has placed integrity above any other consideration that would unnecessarily bind her to men.

Socialist feminists, however, would say less privileged women must remain allied with men IN OUR GROUP, because it would be in "our" best interests. But less privileged men still equate *their* interests with the interests of "our group." If women follow the socialist feminist prescription, they will remain the economic and sexual slaves of the men they are forced to serve. "Freedom," for socialist feminists, means keeping solidarity with less economically privileged men no matter how sexually, physically, or psychically abusive they are to the women who have the misfortune to be around or involved with these men. ***Women are not allowed to separate from men for any reason.***

According to Alison Jaggar:

What the politics of total separatism ignores, however, is that some groups of women have interests in common with some groups of men. Working-class women have interests in common with working-class men; Jewish women have interests in common with Jewish men; differently able women have interests in common with differently able men; and women of color have interests in common with men of color.<sup>9</sup>

What Jaggar doesn't explain is how women of color, Jewish women, working-class women, and differently able women, despite a strong commitment to ending all oppression, still have the fortitude to be Separatists. Yet socialist feminists call working-class, Semitic,<sup>10</sup> differently able, Afra-Amerikan, Latina, Native Amerikan, and Asian Amerikan Lesbian Separatists racist, classist, antisemitic, ableist, and ageist.

Jaggar continues:

. . . a politics of total separatism is *necessarily* classist and racist no matter how far classism and racism are eradicated inside womanculture. In part, it is classist and racist because access to the womanculture is more difficult for poor women and women of color, just as it is more difficult for such women to be exclusively lesbian. On the most fundamental level . . . total separatism is classist and racist because it denies the importance of class and race divisions . . . . Consequently, it can never be effective in bringing about far-reaching social transformation [emphasis mine].<sup>11</sup>

Jaggar contradicts herself immediately in this statement. If classism and racism are done away with in "womanculture," why does she still see it as classist and racist? The contradiction doesn't bother her, or else she would have given this comment more thought. *Everything* desirable is more difficult for less privileged women to obtain. But she chose to focus on the idea that less privileged women are supposedly unable to be Lesbians. Her mentality is the same as that of many socialist countries, such as Cuba, which proclaim Lesbians are the result of regressive, perverse, bourgeois influence. They uphold compulsory heterosexuality by making criminals out of Lesbians.

Socialist feminism suffers from a lack of moral and ethical intelligence. When socialist feminists tell us we are classist and racist for being Lesbian Separatists, they are hiding their own moral failure to consider the same for themselves. Socialist feminists assume economically, racially, and ethnically oppressed women are not intelligent enough to make our lives as livable as possible, or to choose our beliefs and how best to act on them. They assume we must be "rescued" and placed back in the "graces" of racist heteropatriarchy.

It is impossible for Lesbian Separatists, especially racially and ethnically different Lesbian Separatists to ignore race and economics because these are our daily reality. We understand very well what divides us. And however real many of these dichotomies are, we NAME the agents responsible for the imposed FALSE differences.

While Lesbian Separatism cannot afford to ignore race and economics, it is the strength of our diversities AND similarities that will bring about a REAL social transformation, one far beyond the reach of socialist feminism.

## The Bottom Line

Many feminists, particularly liberal and socialist feminists, will defend working in the male economy on the basis that doing so will increase our socio-economic standing. But, as Jeffner Allen states, "... men, not women, achieve a monetary advantage..."<sup>12</sup>

Class status is something possessed by men working in patriarchal heteroeconomy. Women do not have class status. The male class structure defines and prescribes women's economic, emotional, and sexual servitude to men, while the patriarchal heteroeconomy constructs the concrete basis for women's economic oppression. Patriarchal heteroeconomy, by paying women the lowest wages, coerces us into remaining under racist heteropatriarchal domination. Sexual terrorism in the workplace extends women's continued servitude beyond the realm of the phallogratic household. In turn this terrorism forces women into the "private" sphere, where the terrorism can continue in secrecy. Like rape and pornography, sexual terrorism in the workplace tells women what men think of our presence, our existence, and our place in racist heteropatriarchy.

Women do not acquire class status on our own merit, but rather as socio-economic, political, and sexual attachments to males. Any woman who refuses to be a male attachment loses the "benefits" of the male economy. The Lesbian Separatist is not part of the patriarchal heteroeconomy. Nor is any woman who is not attached to a man.

Poverty is something not fully belonging to patriarchal heteroeconomy. The levels of the class structure imply that members have "upward" mobility.<sup>13</sup> This mobility is a phallic mobility. Women, not phallic beings, are automatically excluded. In order to survive, unattached women, including Lesbian Separatists, work in the male economic system performing tasks that define our lack of class status. We are forced to live like stationary migrant workers, who must earn our keep and never protest our condition, lest we sink further into degradation.

Women's lack of our own class status can be seen most clearly in the "service" industries, such as restaurants and diners, corporate offices, and retail stores. Women are the majority of low-level workers in these industries. We often work 8 or more hours a day, frequently at minimum wage. Some jobs, particularly in restaurants, pay below the minimum, forcing women to live on tips received for smiling, being courteous, and being compliant.<sup>14</sup> These jobs require little educational training and

offer few opportunities for promotion or increased wages. It is not surprising that these jobs have the highest turnover rates, because the women who do them are easily expendable.

By having women perform degrading and repetitive tasks, men in control of the patriarchal heteroeconomy can continue to do whatever they choose without thinking about the consequences. Men continue, with total confidence, to waste and destroy, knowing they have conditioned women well to clean up for them. Women

. . . take on the dirty work, to take charge of the material and psychic rubble . . . [to] yield simply another variation . . . of female self-sacrifice and female housework: sweeping up the ruins of patriarchy.<sup>15</sup>

The Lesbian Separatist has chosen to defy men, to hate men,<sup>16</sup> in order to be for women and for our freedom to be our Selves. The price to maintain our integrity is often poverty, violence, degradation, and the denial of basic necessities. Despite the poverty suffered and the obstacles placed in front of us, we know we are right.<sup>17</sup> And because of the joy and freedom we radiate, our enemies know we are right.

*Consider the case of the Masai warriors, a group of pastoralists that live in Kenya and parts of Tanzania. Although the women take care of the cattle, the source of the group's wealth, their husbands are the owners, and the cattle are passed down to their sons. If a woman gives birth only to daughters or is unable to give birth, she is ostracized and is forced to live on her own. She is not valued as a woman in her own right. She is valued only if she takes care of the cattle and gives her husband sons. Her daughters will not be able to take care of her when she is old. They must leave when they are married off to men in neighboring villages, forced to repeat the same pattern their mother suffered when she was younger.<sup>18</sup>*

Since power given to women by men is revocable, no woman can be said to be economically wealthy, because she does not live in an economy or a society based on female values.

## A Proposal

Many feminists do not want to acknowledge how comfortable they have become with their heterosexual privilege within the oppressive system that many other women want to leave behind. They continue to ask for a few privileges for themselves, while conditions for most women remain unchanged. Few feminists any longer propose the abolition of racist heteropatriarchy, because to do so they would have to confront their own complicity and the painful subordination men have forced upon women through terrorism, indoctrination, deprivation, and lies.<sup>19</sup>

We can start, even in modest ways, to disrupt the male economy. Lesbian Separatists and Radical feminists have already begun, by refusing to be with men, or to cater to their needs, desires, and whims in our personal/political lives. Although heterosexual women can also contribute to this disruption, through sabotage, it is unlikely they will place themselves and other women above male priorities.

Lesbian Separatists can do much more:

We can disrupt patriarchal heteroeconomy through the barter system, where goods and services are exchanged directly for each other rather than for money. For example, if I need to have my broken window replaced, I would have a friend who is an expert glazier replace my window in exchange for my fixing her car when needed, in the present or the future. We both obtain what we need without the exchange of money. We can also create our own monetary system through the use of a voucher system only Dykes networking together would recognize. These vouchers could be used to obtain basic necessities and services from Dykes with specialized skills.

A similar form of disruption is to refuse to pay taxes. Most of the tax money paid goes directly to the phallo-military waste machine to invent more weapons to annihilate sentient life. The rest is used to keep so-called elected and appointed "officials" and corporate "officers" in the death-dealing, white, heterosexual male system wealthy. The two most recent, blatant examples are the theft of millions of dollars of federal housing money and the theft of billions of dollars by savings and loan executives. The system of taxes is another form of male parasitism, draining women's energy through degrading work to feed their insatiable greed and hatred for life.

**There are "illegal" methods that can be pursued, such as counterfeiting money, tapping into the money supply, which is regulated by computers, disrupting business on Wall Street and other financial centers where the business of patriarchal heteroeconomics is conducted each day.**

**We can organize ourselves into cadres of thieves and shoplifters to steal basic necessities and money for our daily living. With increased skill, we can also teach other Dykes how to steal.**

**We can squat in abandoned buildings and renovate them for living and/or political action purposes. Lesbians are often denied space, even by feminists. Renovating buildings would be a good way to re/claim our much needed space to think and act toward our well-being.**

**For those who have female children, we can refuse to send them to public and so-called private schools. We can instead create our own Radical Lesbian schools. Some fundamentalist christians have resisted sending their children to public schools, because, in their opinion, racist heteropatriarchal values are not promoted *enough*. They actually want to take control of the public school system by taking away the few "reforms" education has been allowed to make. Christians notwithstanding, most schools continue to teach racist heteropatriarchal values and to promote "great" white men, while women are ignored or shown only in stereotypically "supporting" roles. The agents of the monetary tax system are running a protection racket on the educational system, so that it will accept money on the agents' terms. A Radical Lesbian education would be based on values that maintain our moral intelligence and integrity. We can learn about our foresisters' lives, struggle, and achievements and about what is being done in the present.**

**Some feminists have proposed destroying the system by working within the male economy, especially at a bank or large corporation, but giving the money to our causes. There is nothing inherently wrong with taking the money we earn from our jobs in patriarchal heteroeconomy and using it for Lesbian causes. It is a good strategy to give back energy to our Selves and each other. We need to find every possible way to get money from the male economy for our well-being. But we must understand that any such strategy is short-term and must contribute to long-range goals. It also must be understood that it is very difficult, although**

not impossible, to work in a corporation, a large business, or government, and simultaneously maintain Radical Dyke perspective and anger.

The corporation, the state, and the heteropatriarchal family all have the same hierarchy and "relational" lines of superiority and subordination. Dissenting women, especially Lesbian Separatists, are removed for not deferring to and being for men. Dissenting women are also held up by the male corporate structure to all other women as examples of what their fate will be if they challenge the system. Women's reason, intelligence, and anger are fragmented, dissipated, and purposely misaimed<sup>20</sup> in order to maintain corporate power. The male economy needs female complicity, at any expense, up to and including the destruction of women's knowledge and passion. The corporation is part of the phallic upward mobility scheme. And as we have seen, women cannot achieve upward mobility in patriarchal heteroeconomy.

We must realize that as long as we work in the male economy, females will not benefit from the work men have told us to perform. A crucial step to ending patriarchal heteroeconomy, and ultimately racist heteropatriarchy has been proposed by Susan Cavin and must at the very least be *considered* by ALL Lesbian Separatists. That is to stop working for men in any capacity.

. . . it is when the oppressed stop working for the oppressors . . . that liberation solutions are actualized. As long as women work in patriarchal economies, they will remain oppressed.<sup>21</sup>

We can be very creative in our methods of disruption. But we have to end the phallic heteroeconomy that perpetuates the male class structure and the male value system. Thus we can continue to create the gynocentric society we have already begun. We must act now, because we have recognized the racist heteropatriarchy for what it is; we must ". . . render it harmless and . . . see how one goes about living without it."<sup>22</sup>

Lesbians and our liberation are, and must be, the most important considerations in our lives. To assign our Selves and each other lesser value is to the peril of us all.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Julia Penelope, "The Mystery of Lesbians: II." *Lesbian Ethics* 1:2 (1985), p. 53.

<sup>2</sup>It is impossible to conceive of patriarchy as NOT racist as well as lesbophobic. Therefore I have chosen to expand on the Original insight Julia Penelope had when she coined the term *heteropatriarchy*, which I first encountered in her article, "WHOSE Past Are We Reclaiming?" *Common Lives, Lesbian Lives* 13 (Autumn 1984), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup>The Inquisition in Europe has been referred to by Starhawk as The Burning Times. The truth is that since the beginning of racist heteropatriarchy, women's bodies, minds, and spirits have been immolated in the phallocratic death pyres. The evidence of woman-burning is global because phallocracy is global.

<sup>4</sup>bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), p. 73.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>6</sup>Although this insight/incite has been around the Feminist movement for some time, it is always Original. Among those who have discovered this is Anna Lee in her article, "One Black Separatist," *Innerviews* 5:3 (1981), p. 31.

<sup>7</sup>A term I have coined to show how the exploitation of all women by men is connected to the economy that maintains heterosexuality as the "standard" and forces women to remain in relation to men.

<sup>8</sup>Jeffner Allen, "Lesbian Economics." *Trivia* 8 (Winter 1986), p. 40.

<sup>9</sup>Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Totowa: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), p. 296.

<sup>10</sup>I have purposely not written "Jewish." This is not done out of disrespect to Jewish Dyke Separatists, but to include our Arab sisters who are Lesbian Separatists.

<sup>11</sup>Jaggar, *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup>Allen, p. 49.

<sup>13</sup>I am not proposing any form of "downward" mobility. When women are earning 65¢ to every dollar men earn, when women who are college graduates earn LESS than men with an eight grade education, when women cannot afford day care for young children, when it is estimated that by the year 2000 virually all of the poor will be WOMEN AND CHILDREN, we are not "downwardly" mobile. We are IMMOBILE!

<sup>14</sup>A personal/political point: After working in several varieties of restaurants in the past years, I have made this observation: Although many men also work in restaurants, they generally are not working in the local greasy-spoon diner or fast-food restaurant. As restaurants become more "up-scale," catering to the

clientele they want to attract, men are seen in these establishments as employees, where pay, benefits and opportunities for advancement are much better. Women are never seen as employees in these restaurants. Do YOU support this instance of oppression by eating in these restaurants anyway?

<sup>15</sup>Christina Thürmer-Rohr. "From Deception to Un-Deception: On the Complicity of Women." *Trivia* 12 (Spring 1988), p. 69.

<sup>16</sup>See Jeffner Allen's discussion on man-hating in her essay, "Remembering: A Time I Will Be My Own Beginning." In her *Lesbian Philosophy: Explorations* (Palo Alto: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1986), pp. 19-24.

<sup>17</sup>Marilyn Frye, "Some Reflections on Separatism and Power." In her *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Trumansburg: The Crossing Press, 1983), p. 98.

<sup>18</sup>I first heard about the lives of the Masai women from a movie I saw in a sociology of gender class in April 1985. Their plight is the plight of many women throughout the world including Amerika, where older women, after making many self-sacrifices to raise children and maintain the house, often find themselves with nothing to show for their hard work, especially if the husbands die or divorce them.

There is also an interesting story told about the male ownership of the cattle. In pre-patriarchal history women were the owners of the cattle and were responsible for making all decisions. But a drought came during the summer season and killed all the cattle. Although the drought could not have been prevented, the men blamed the women for the death of the cattle. When they were able to replenish the livestock, the men took everything away from the women, from positions of responsibility to ownership of the cattle. Here we have more evidence that we have not always lived in a patriarchal society.

Yet the fact that this story, assigning women blame for a natural disaster, was told by a woman shows female complicity in justifying and maintaining male lies and male control.

<sup>19</sup>Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), p. 217.

<sup>20</sup>See Mary Daly, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p. 206-7, for her discussion on women's passions and knowledge and how they are fragmented and dissipated by racist heteropatriarchy.

<sup>21</sup>Susan Cavin, *Lesbian Origins* (San Francisco: Ism Press, 1985), p. 153.

<sup>22</sup>Thürmer-Rohr, p. 74.

## Interstices of Race and Class: Creating Intimacy\*

Anna Lee

*This is the first installment of what will be a regular LE feature, a column on race edited by Anna Lee. Your contributions for the next and subsequent issues are invited and encouraged. This paper should get your thoughts flowing and your fingers typing. In her reflection on what she has brought from the black women of her community of origin to the radical lesbian community, Anna Lee asks us all "to examine our communities of origin for the female centeredness that existed there."—JS*

The lesbian community reflects diverse groupings. That diversity is intentional because radical lesbians have made a conscious decision to include all lesbians who love lesbians. This distinction between lesbians and those who love lesbians is significant, because it is radical lesbians who are questioning what values we enact and what structures we create which support diversity. The point is not that lesbians love women but what that love means within the context of lesbian community. If loving a woman is a private act and that loving is oblivious of political implications, then the diversity which is a political goal will be irrelevant. Diversity may or may not happen, but as an objective, diversity will not occur intentionally among those lesbians who define love as a private interaction.

While diversity refers to more than race and class, it is these two differences and differentiations we will discuss. In limiting ourselves to these two, we do not mean to minimize the importance of all of the others or to suggest that the way out of these two man-made traps is the way out of all of the other ones. A word of caution is necessary. These

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\*This paper was first given as a W.I.T.C.H. lecture, February 89, in Boston.

two differences are traps, but we are also going to suggest that discussion of class and race is a path which enriches lesbians by making our culture stronger and more powerful.

It is the richness of our various communities of origin which contributes to the breadth of our lesbian ground. Of course, the values of our communities of origin are important only if they support our female primacy. Male values from our communities of origin will not enhance lesbian meaning. When we discuss communities of origin we are referring to not only class background or current class and racial identification, but also ethnic groups, various degrees of physical and mental abilities, different body types, male religions of our childhoods, our age continuum and so forth. As we sift through those values from our communities of origin, we are starting to identify the ones which will move us forward as lesbians. This examination of our values is the stuff of political vision and is difficult work. This is the work that radical lesbians are performing. It is work all lesbians could be doing. Perhaps it is this thoughtful sifting of values which is finally the distinction between lesbians who love lesbians and lesbians who take lesbians for granted.

Interstices may very well be the source of creating intimacy among lesbians. Interstices are the spaces between beings. It is those spaces or differences which in the past have been stumbling blocks to creating intimacy. For a long time we have known that racism and classism are manmade and some women benefitted from their existence. We could take those concepts one step further. What happens if we shift our perception from difficulty to joy? What if, in fact, those debilitating structures were utilized as the basis for intimacy? In astrology, the square configuration (two planets 90 degrees apart) is both a difficulty and a source of great strength. If we focus on the strength aspect of the square configuration, then the possibility of joy and intimacy is created.

### Values in Black Women's Networks

For a long time racism was defined as an oppressive structure, which it is. Racism has also meant that black people and black women specifically learned to move through a world in which our very beings were under attack. That learned ability fosters our perceptions of ourselves as being able to survive and thrive under conditions in which we were not meant to survive. As Lorde has discussed,\* silence does not protect us.

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\*Audre Lorde, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action." In, *Sister Outsider* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), pp. 40-44.

While racism made our lives difficult it also nourished a strong egoism and belief in ourselves. Those of us who did not incorporate this egoism often did not survive. We have paid a high penalty for our strength. Nevertheless, the strength of black women often does not get discussed. It is this strength that I want to examine.

Black lesbians come from this tradition of making choices within circumstances we do not control. Because we make choices within circumstances we do not control, we have learned that conflict may be unavoidable. When conflict occurs, we are much more likely to address it than to run from it. Understanding that conflict may be unavoidable and may occur when we do not necessarily choose it, forces us to stand our ground. For truly, there may not be any place to which to run. In a hostile world we do not create, this kind of egoism serves us well. Belief in ourselves versus belief in others is not necessarily an either/or choice. Belief in ourselves sustains our ability to wrench our focus from values that undermine us. It is the belief in ourselves which creates, encourages, expands those values which foster growth. In that process our belief in ourselves connects with others who travel our path and share our journey. A belief in ourselves increases the possibility that we can reject our oppressors' definition of us and develop our definitions of who we are and can be in the world.

It is that connection to others grounded in our belief in ourselves which is the underlying basis for the networks created by black women. These networks were created under oppression, but also valued the connections between black women. It was not until I was an adult that I realized that some people visited places not people. It was within the existence of the black network, that I learned that our connections with each other are the basis for survival and well being for each member of that network. Briefly, people were more important than places, buildings or things.

Unlike the specific-issue networking so valued within many feminist communities today, the networks created by black women encompassed an entire community. Black women's networks sustain a community which has integrity or wholeness. Because these networks were based on integrity, it was not necessary for the survival of the network to demand that each participant act in good faith at all times. The networks are based in reality, and as such, the absence of betrayal is not the underlying basis for the continuation of the network. Acts of betrayal do occur and may continue to occur, but black women foster the notion that as

betrayal becomes meaningless and irrelevant, it is resorted to less often. The network encourages each participant to recognize the necessity for sustaining the connections but to understand that if an individual failed to do her part the relationships could continue. The creation of black women's networks was based in reality. In contrast, the networking in the feminist community is based on specific issues and therefore depends on each member acting in good faith. Because there is no overall commitment to each other, an individual member not doing her part detracts from and can destroy the specific-issue networking. Reality-based networks and belief in ourselves are partners. Both contributed to our strength to withstand oppression and our ability to create new value and meaning in our lives.

This network is not only grounded in reality, but also in pleasure. The activities in which we participated were not only economical but enhanced our skills and talents. The activities did not occur unless we created them. It did not matter whether the talent shows or baseball playing was 'professional'—which translated in our minds as white and expensive and something to be watched. What did matter was that each of us contributed and developed our own skills and talents. The fact that our individual talents and skills were supported meant that we perceived ourselves as actors and more importantly as valued contributors to the community we created. To this day the idea of watching any sport is boring to me. If I can't play, I don't want to watch someone else play. It is true I would watch my friends participate in a sport, but only to support my friends, not to watch a game. As belief in ourselves and networks based in reality contributed to our ability to evaluate the world and to value each other, so did interacting with each other contribute to our belief in ourselves as important and as actors in the world of our creation.

Each of these values—belief in ourselves, reality-based networks, and selves as participants in the world—has meaning for the creation of lesbian connections and intimacy. Each of these three values, among others, is the contribution black women can make to changing what lesbian values are enacted in the community. What other female-centered traditions or beliefs can we define or identify from our own communities of origin that will foster, support and spark lesbian meaning? What conversations in which we participated illustrate that the females in our communities of origin were important and that women were the reference points to help us define ourselves? What traditions from our

communities of origin supported female centrality? What did we learn in our communities of origin about femaleness that can contribute to us valuing other lesbians and attending to each other?

### **Lesbian Intimacy**

All of us need to examine our communities of origin for the female centeredness that existed there. It is that female centeredness we need to create lesbian community, which is diverse. I return to my community of origin in order to discuss the creation of intimacy among lesbians.

The three values I have mentioned so far can contribute to the creation of intimacy. For these values consciously enacted promote the concept of lesbian agency, vitality and centrality within our world view. Conscious enactment is a key element. If our values reflect neither consciousness nor consideration, it is very probable that the values enacted will not reflect strength or value lesbian primacy. Without a conscious focus on each other, we will be much more likely to ignore and probably dismiss each other and what talents or skills each has and contributes to lesbian meaning. It is this consciousness which furthers our political objective to create diversity among lesbians. In fact, the three values significant to black women must be incorporated in lesbian interactions for intimacy to occur. An intimacy between lesbians from varying communities of origin must be based on the values promoting female centrality.

The dictionary defines intimacy as involving one's deepest nature, as essential, innermost and marked by close association or familiarity. The dictionary also defines intimacy as sexual relations. However, I want to retain the broader definition. What we are discussing is a lesbian community. The earlier definition of lesbian community was that an army of lovers cannot be defeated—this has been updated to, an army of ex-lovers cannot be defeated. The metaphor of army and war is hostile to the concept of lesbian intimacy. The notions of army/war and the privatization of lovers preclude the lesbian interactions and connections that I want to occur. In other words, lesbian intimacy cannot occur within the parameters of armies engaged in war. Nor can intimacy among diverse lesbians occur between only two lesbians. Two lovers are limited to the degree of diversity each can bring to the relationship.

The intimacy I am describing is the intimacy of friends who also may be lovers, but the lover relationship does not take precedence over other relationships with friends. In order to embrace intimacy with lesbians

from many different communities of origin and to enjoy the benefits from that intimacy, we must expand our traditional ways of valuing connections and relationships. A word of caution. The creation of intimacy among lesbians cannot be instant or superficial. Both qualities will defeat our purpose of creating an inclusive lesbian community and the benefits of intimacy will be diminished. It will defeat our purpose because recognition and certainly understanding of the strengths that each lesbian possesses will not occur at a glance. Recognition and understanding require sustained focus on each other, in order that we can sift through to identify a strength which contributes to lesbian meaning. The benefits will be diminished because the point of intimacy is not to create a collection of acquaintances but to create a diverse lesbian community which values individual strength not weakness, which values individual talents and skills, not incompetence, which values individual participation not onlookers. It is egoism or strength, talents and skills, and participation we want to foster and support in each lesbian in order to create lesbian community.

### **Lesbian Community**

It is in embracing egoism or strength that we acknowledge our own importance and value. In recognizing our own importance, we can incorporate the belief in our right to survive and, indeed, in our ability to survive. Additionally, we approach other lesbians knowing we bring something to the table. We know who we are and what we can contribute to lesbian meaning. It is this egoism or strength that provides our ability to focus on what constitutes lesbian meaning. It is egoism or strength which is the basis for our focus on other lesbians in order to help us define ourselves.

Once we are focused on ourselves and each other, we can encourage interactions which reflect the value of female centrality. In studying black women's networks, we discover that the willingness to make an overall commitment is imperative. Our willingness to make an overall commitment to the creation of lesbian intimacy is also imperative. As *Alix Dobkin* sings, we have to take ourselves seriously. In addition, our commitment must be such that our interactions are realistically constructed. Our commitment must have room for individuals moving in and out of various interactions, while each individual takes the commitment to lesbian intimacy seriously. In creating lesbian intimacy, we not only recognize its value but also we acknowledge we may individually

fail. To recognize the value of lesbian intimacy and to acknowledge the possibility we may individually fail establishes our interactions on a reality basis. It is necessary to base our interactions in reality since doing so allows us to sustain the existence of our connections without being totally dependent on good faith or specific issues. If we base our interactions on specific issues, we are more likely to believe that we are identical and be devastated when we discover we are not.

One of the ways to establish our interactions on a realistic basis is to foster individual participation. As we foster individual participation, it is important that we not assume each individual will act the same as the others. What we do want is to value individual talents and skills so that each individual plays a part in the creation of lesbian meaning. In addition, we can stress the significance of individuals participating in creating lesbian values to the continuation of lesbian intimacy. Because each lesbian will bring different talents and skills to the creation of intimacy, our interactions will reflect our diversity. As actors, lesbians will learn from each other. What is even more important lesbians will value what we have created.

We want a lesbian community that is distinguishable from mainstream. It is through examining female centrality learned from communities of origin that we can begin to attend to each other. It is in the creation of intimacy that we can learn what it is we need to know in order to identify lesbian meaning. It is through the development of egoism, establishment of lesbian interactions and the participation in lesbian interactions that we create intimacy among diverse lesbians. In consciously embracing our diversity we may, in fact, discover a way out of the non existence of lesbian community.

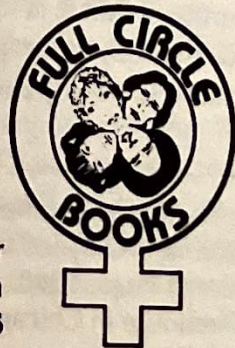
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# The Possibility of Lesbian Community\*

Marilyn Frye

I live in Lansing, Michigan. I have lived there for almost 15 years. There's a lesbian community there which I, along with many others, have worked to create, grow and maintain. This community has been shaped in many ways by lesbians who are separatist—though being separatist does not mean the same thing to all of us. I'm proud of the lesbian community in the town I live in. I move in that community with a strong and satisfying sense of shared accomplishments. I want to talk a bit about that community tonight.

Two things have happened recently in my community that have generated a lot of feeling and a lot of talk. The two things weren't causally connected with each other; they just happened to happen close to each other. About a week ago, a lesbian in my town committed suicide. She did it decisively and deliberately. The other thing is that Sarah Hoagland's recent presentation in Lansing triggered open conflict about the value of 12-step programs to individual dykes and as an influence in the community. Both of these things, the suicide and the conflict, focussed my attention on lesbian community—what it is, how it works, what kind of glue holds it together.

Probably the most obvious thing about what makes this community a community is that it is *not* that we agree on everything. There is, in fact, much disagreement on practically everything. Here's a list of some things there is *not* agreement on in my community:

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\*This talk was one of nine presentations by lesbians whose work is published in *For Lesbians Only* (edited by Sarah Hoagland and Julia Penelope, London: Onlywomen Press, 1988), which we did for a gathering at the Mountainmoving Coffeehouse in Chicago, April 29, 1989, in celebration of the publication of the book.

- we do not agree on the importance of recycling jars and paper, or on whether it's okay to have christmas trees;

- we do not agree about what the priority is on working against u.s. imperialism in central america or on working against nuclear power and nuclear weapons, or on working for legal and available abortions;

- we do not agree on whether the practice of friendship requires remaining supportive, or even civil, to lesbians who go straight, or requires active support of lesbians who have male babies;

- we all say that we are against racism, but we do not agree at all about what it is or what to do about it;

- we don't agree about whether it's ok to wear skirts and dresses, to shave our legs, to get permanents, to wear make-up;

- we don't agree about whether 12-step programs are wholesome for dykes, or whether it's okay to practice or to purchase therapy;

- we do not agree about how much of the Lesbian Alliance's funds should be donated to the Sharon Kowalski fund, or about whether the Lesbian Alliance and the Ambitious Amazons should try to work together more;

- we don't agree about what kinds of behaviors between lovers are ok and what kinds are terrible;

- we do not agree about whether there is still any such thing as women's music or about whether the Olivia caribbean cruise is absurd;

- we don't agree about how important it is to have events, activities and homes accessible to wheelchair users, nor about whether it's ok to drink alcohol, to go to weddings, to like your father or brother, to dedyke your house when your parents visit, to get a hot-tub or a nice car if you can afford it, to watch tv or to go to a male dentist;

- we do not agree about hamburgers.

And this is only a few of the things we don't all agree about in my community. I'm sure I don't even know what some of the things are that we don't agree about.

You might suppose that there is agreement among us on some other level, and I supposed it too. But the issues about 12-step programs have made me doubt it. I thought that in spite of all our differences about specific actions and practices, what held us together was something some of us have called "ethical compatibility"—some deep likeness of

ethical and political intuition. I have thought something like that underlay our *lesbianism*, our *desire* for each other.

So what *is* there? What holds us in community? The answer seems to be either (1) nothing holds us in community, or (2) I've asked the wrong question. I opt for (2).

What I'm getting at here is that it's the natural normal thing for women to be connected and sustained in community with each other, and it has nothing in particular to do with agreeing about anything, or even liking each other. It certainly doesn't have anything in particular to do with approving of each other. Instead of looking for something like common values to account for what holds us together, we should consider what ever kept us apart or works to keep us apart . . . . And this brings me to the topic of separatism.

Heterosexual/patriarchal forms of social organization keep women apart from women, separate women from women. And that, I would say, is unnatural. I spoke at the beginning of creating and maintaining lesbian community. But when I think about the actual activities and behaviors we do, what they mostly add up to is not *building* something, but just clearing space for something. Almost all the organizing adds up to nothing more than making space and getting a whole bunch of lesbians in that space all at once. That is, we separate lesbians from separation from each other and then community happens. It is anarchic, often strife-ridden and stressful, not always fun, not always affirming of whatever we think about things or about ourselves, but it's also just the normal thing for women—to be in lesbian connection with each other. It doesn't have to be explained.

Now, what about the suicide? It is terribly sad and awful, and I grieve for the life that might have been. It makes everyone wonder what we could or should have done to make living tolerable, not to mention joyful, for that woman. But one of my friends (with whom I disagree about some very important things) noted that in the almost fifteen years we've known this community of many hundreds of lesbians, this is only the second suicide she know of (only the first that I had known of). Before the current era of lesbian feminist consciousness, suicide was epidemic among lesbians, so my older friends have told me. But among us, suicide is not epidemic. In the time I have known this community, we have fought and quarrelled, and trashed, and bashed, and made love and made hate, had parties and played and flowed through shifting patterns of affiliation and ostracism, and had powerful feelings of solidarity and

powerful feelings of alienation from each other, and put out innumerable newsletters and fliers and organized fund-raisers and gossiped, and felt great and felt terrible. And lesbians in my community have survived in large numbers.

What I'm saying is that lesbian community is possible—a community that is "separate" in the sense that there is a lesbian center of gravity (or of hilarity, perhaps), a force field, in which natural lesbian connection happens, which sustains and protects lesbians in many ways and varying degrees from the ravages of misogyny and heterosexualism, even, for some and in some ways from the violences of racism and poverty.

In my community, lesbians don't agree about anything and *lesbians survive in droves.*

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## Interdependence: A New Concept in Relationships

Dianne Post

*I saw a woman sleeping. In her sleep, she dreamt life stood before her and held in each hand a gift—in the one hand love, in the other freedom—and she said to the woman, "Choose."*

*And the woman waited long: and she said, "Freedom."*

*And life said, "Thou hast well chosen, if thou hadst said 'love' I would have given thee that thou didst ask for; and I would have gone from thee, and returned to thee no more. Now, the day will come when I shall return. On that day I shall bear both gifts in one hand."*

*I heard the woman laugh in her sleep.*

Olive Schreiner, 1901

The dark kitchen smelled of hamburger and grease and stale beer. Spots of light gleamed off the shiny aluminum like wild animal eyes piercing through the dark. The man held me around my waist and was violently smashing my small body on his rigid penis. I screamed.

He growled, low like the beast he was, "Shut up or I'll kill you."

I knew then it was not my father. He never said those things when he raped me. I shut up.

When he finished, he stood me on the floor and then, gripping me tightly by the shoulders, forced me to my knees. He rammed his penis into my mouth until I gagged. Finally satiated, he zipped his pants and walked out.

I made my way slowly into the women's bathroom. Smelling the cheap perfume and strong disinfectant, I threw up. Then I washed my face, hands and between my legs. Complete confusion stunned me into silent shock. I didn't know how life was to be, but I knew it was not to be like this.

I was only 8 years old.

In my confusion, I looked up at the ceiling trying to find some reality. The entire ceiling shattered into a crazy kaleidoscope distorted through thick glass. Each time I moved my head, another fractured image shifted.

Lowering my head, I started to walk out of the bathroom. I didn't want to go back into the bar, back to the counter where my father sat drinking an Old Milwaukee beer. He had taken money from that man to let him take me into the empty kitchen and rape me. I didn't want to go back there but what else could I do? I was only 8 and I was somewhere in southeastern Wisconsin in a bar at the intersection of two country roads. It was dark and I didn't know where home was or how far.

Each step I took down the short hall to the bar was torture. I hated myself and felt complete loathing for myself for going back. Maybe I was a bad girl. Why else was this happening to me? Why else was I going back to the man who did this? But what choice did I have but to go back or walk out into the unknown blackness alone?

As I stepped out of the hall into the bar, every man turned and stared at me—leering, smirking. **I turned and walked swiftly back through the darkened kitchen and out the back door into the dark, unknown night, alone.**



I learned of this event when I was 42 years old. Suddenly, a lot of things made sense. I have always been driven by the power of independence to find freedom. For as long as I can remember, and others have verified what I cannot recall, nothing was more important to me than freedom and no trait so salient as independence.

As I have participated in and observed the lesbian community, especially in our intimate relationships, one constant problem for me, and one I have seen others struggle with or succumb to, has been maintaining independence in a relationship. Two concepts pervade any relationship discussion today: interdependence and codependence. I would posit a third concept which is more compatible with lesbian separatist theory and practice: Interindependence.

### **Interdependence**

The concept of interdependence has become a familiar one in our society. Womyn's spirituality has long recognized the fact of interdependence, today politicians and even physicists admit its validity. Politicians talk about global economy, environment, politics and trade. An excess of carbon monoxide in New York is (imperialistically) addressed by planting trees in Guatemala. New branches of physics embodied by Chaos theorists discuss the interrelatedness of all things.

For centuries womyn have intuited that the universe is a web and all things are intricately woven together. Finally, physicists now argue that enfoldment is the structure of the universe rather than a big bang. Thus, womyn's view of the interconnectedness between all things is correct. At the same time, counterforces maintain a tension to keep things separate, else the universe would collapse into itself. This is where womyn falter. We lack our own voice and do not place ourselves in this web of relationships, i.e., the picture is out of balance. To continue our growth process, we need to acknowledge not only the web that ties us together, but the space between that keeps us apart—our interdependence.

### Codependence

Codependency is now the topic of the hour among psychology buffs and alcoholics anonymous offshoots. Usually one need look no further than her own family to see examples of mutual dependence and why the concept of interdependence is so necessary. Some time ago, I applied to teach at an American school in Nicaragua. I happened to mention this to my mother when I was visiting and she launched into a diatribe about why I could not go. I might get hurt or be in an earthquake, she might die when I was gone. (Neither of us foresaw the revolution.) I explained to her that if I didn't go for that reason, I would be angry, blame it on her, and then learn to hate her. I would have become dependent on her continued good opinion of me and she would have become dependent on my physical presence. Thus, if she wished to maintain a good relationship between us, she would understand that, if I got the job, I had to go. Only years later did she tell me that she understood. (I didn't get the job.) Many times, we do what our parents or friends or lovers want and then resent them for it. That weak link, that dependent person or relationship, causes the strong one to fall.

No matter how feminist we are, if one lesbian is dependent on the other, the relationship becomes skewed and the strong one is as tightly skewered to the weak as vice versa. We don't want to hurt her feelings, we don't know how she'll cope without us, we'll wait to break up until she has a better job or a better car or a better therapist. We are no longer independent but as controlled as she. We have betrayed our central commitment to strength and independence for every woman.

I am not denying that there is a dependence inherent in our lives. I am dependent on my paycheck to pay my mortgage. I am depending for my life on the other driver to stop at the red light. But if I cannot function when I lose my job or I can't drive because of my fear of the other driver, then the relationship has sunk into pathology. Likewise when I cannot live without a lover or "relationship," then love has sunk into pathology.

## **Interdependence**

The concept of interdependence is simple. If I wish to stay independent, others with whom I closely relate must also be independent. Since we are interlinked in the world it becomes our interdependence—one woman's independence maintained by the independence of another—that allows each to maintain our individuality and uniqueness.

The concept is implicitly recognized in modern physics by the principle that we are not observers of the physical world but participants therein. Even the action of observing influences the outcome of the world as observed. This independence that I speak of is not to be confused, though it often is, with selfishness, aggression or the inability to deal with others. It is none of these. The independence I speak of is a personal awareness of one's own power; one's own ability to navigate the rivers of life. It is the ability of an 8 year old to walk out into the dark night, alone, and have the strength to know that she will survive. It is the ability to avoid the quicksand of helplessness. We must have the ability to say, this is who I am without reference to anyone else and without reflection in someone else's eyes. While we are a composite of our experiences, we are more than that. We are the essence of ourselves and of how we use those experiences, prior relationships, family, to become ourselves. Yes, I exist in relation to other people, but I must know myself alone.

In our common understanding of the meaning of independence, we think of not becoming dependent on someone else. But we must also think of not letting someone else become dependent on us. An example is the facilitation of our daughters' growth. They are dependent on us as babies and the entire process of their growing up is to become independent. As good mothers we feel a constant tension between pushing them toward less dependence, yet holding them back out of fear.

Likewise mothers grow if their adult daughters do not allow them to become dependent either economically or emotionally. We are all familiar with the elder parents who now fear to venture from their houses without the helping/restricting hand of their grown daughter. Even flowers sheltered from the wind and rain do not grow. At the first storm they die.

The essence of all laws of nature is self-consistency, i.e., each thing obeys its own internal pattern (independence as I define it) and interdependence, i.e., each property determines all the rest. Thus, if each lesbian's behaviors define mine, each lesbian must remain independent for me to do so—interdependence is born.

### Illustrations

Two examples come to mind from my own life. I first used the term *interdependence* when discussing the type of relationship I would have with my first lover 10 years ago. She and I are both fiercely independent women and pride ourselves on being so, perhaps to a fault. I was 11 years older and very enthusiastic about this, my first love. At 32, my career was well on its way. At 21, she was still fumbling around. Unwittingly, in my zeal to promote her career, I began to encroach upon her own personal decision making. I never realized it because my behaviors were coated in the guise of helpfulness.

She initiated the breakup by saying she had to because I might die. I assured her that I would in fact die some day, but I didn't see why that meant she had to break up with me now (pretty funny in retrospect). A more articulate explanation of the reason came some time later. She had allowed herself to slip into dependence on me. A standard joke between us was that I made all the decisions and she got all the credit. I felt resentful about that "joke" and the truth of it. We both had lost our independence. The healing took 5 years (for me) because of the helplessness, blaming and guilt that surfaces when a dependence is broken.

Three years later in my second relationship, I vowed not to repeat my mistakes. I very carefully and studiously did not make decisions for her nor let my strong personality and penchant for rapid decision making create an imbalance of power. I wouldn't even say what movie I wanted to go to until after she spoke her preference. I followed this approach flawlessly to the point where she accused me of refusing to be kind, read helpful. When we broke up and went to counseling, she admitted that had I "helped" her, she would have been resentful and blaming. The healing was much shorter this time because neither of us had lost our independence.

Somewhere there must be a middle ground. As lesbian feminists we struggle to create a vision of equality amidst the patriarchy. We struggle through our inner systems of oppression. We need not be perfect, only growing.

### Conclusion

As feminists, maintaining our independence is important. As lesbians, maintaining our interdependence is vital. We can remain strong only by empowering our sisters to remain strong too. Failing that, the chains of dependence run both ways. They hamper both the strong and the weak until it is impossible to tell the difference. Travel together because you want to, each standing freely on her own, not because you have to hold each other up.

# Nexus

*Nexus is an information exchange, a place to ask questions, to make suggestions, to report on things that have worked or haven't. And a place to have fun.*

## Betrayals

### By Others:

- Lesbians who are unfriendly because I'm a political dyke.
- Lesbians who separate their personal/political life from their work life WHEN THEY DON'T HAVE TO. Why not be out at work if you can be? I've never been the only one, once I've come out.
- Lesbians who put me down for working as a secretary. Sometimes they don't even mean to put me down. Except once they've heard what I do for a living it seems much more interesting to go on to talk about their jobs as teachers, lawyers, etc.
- Lesbians who are unfriendly/hostile/coupled off/joined at the hip at women's events. As Ann Landers keeps saying, whatever happened to manners?
- My friend who gets a new lover and suddenly it takes a long, long time to return my calls. I don't exist for my friend, for months. I curse answering machines.
- Sharing house costs equally, except neglecting to tell me that she has inherited money. So actually my wonderful roommate lied to me about her income.
- Cheating her lesbian employees and still expecting me to shop at her bookstore. Did she think we wouldn't hear about it? That we wouldn't care? We have bosses, too, except ours don't usually pretend to be our friends.
- My women lovers who lied about why they broke up with me. Why not just say, "Look, I like Susie better than you"? Instead it's the old, "I'm not ready to be with anyone right now" line and two weeks later I see her with Susie.

### My own:

- Faking orgasms with women (I never bothered with men).
- Not telling my lover my true fears, feelings and history.

- Flirting and avoiding confrontation with other women.
- Refusing to question my deepest assumptions.
- Holding back love and friendship from lesbians because I'm tired and disappointed and I have taken to squashing generous impulses.
- Hesitating in my friendships with young lesbians because they are young (under 21).
- Not finding the time to visit a woman friend in the hospital with PID but, a few years later, finding the time to visit male friends sick with AIDS.
- I knew a lesbian couple and was friendly with both. After they broke up, one told me her lover had battered her. I stopped all contact with both of them because I didn't know what to do.
- A woman, an old friend, tells me she was raped a long time ago, back when we were teenagers. I get furious with her for not telling me at the time it happened.
- The lesbians I befriended because I had the hots for a friend of theirs.
- Pretending to like Japanese food, basketball, bridge.
- Not allowing differences.
- Lying about my past with men. (I enjoyed the sexual part of being a heterosexual—it was the head trips that got to be too much for me.)
- Lying about how I felt about lovers. Pretending to care when I didn't any more and pretending I didn't care that they were breaking up with me when I still did. Taking over their lives. Denying them privacy. Denying them access to my feelings.

*Carol Evans*

—the pen name of a New York dyke who writes for *Womanews*.

## Ordinary Magic

we pass information to each other. tales pass and re-pass. i have heard and read many times about how the ancient circles of huge stones in england may have been moved there and raised by wimin's singing.

if i went outside tomorrow morning and found an enormous stone in front of my house, i would want an explanation. how could i have failed to hear the big truck, the crane, the workers' voices? it's one thing to smile in contented sureness at the thought of stones rising on a musical

tone, rising on wimin's will; it's another thing to believe it could happen here, now. i am *afraid* to witness such "miracles." afraid it would stretch my mind beyond its limits. is that what "madness" is?

and i'm convinced that these events don't happen in my life because of that fear. or because of that non-belief.

the phrase "you create your own reality" is offensive, certainly, with its implication that if you have problems it's all your fault. but i believe i can influence my reality. not necessarily that i *do* influence it automatically, but that i can learn to. it's not our fault if we can't raise monoliths today, through collective dyke energy. it may be that we could relearn those skills. we may be able to learn how to influence our reality in many other ways as well. i think in fact some of us are doing this.

i have a particular skill that i've rarely told anyone about. i wonder how many others have such skills or perceptions and keep silent for the same reasons i have—because these abilities are "weird" and have no usefulness under patriarchy.

what i can do is "see" letters and numbers in color. as a child i was told that i had probably learned my numbers from a clock with different colored numerals. that was an easy way to dismiss my perception. it doesn't explain why i have a mental picture of every letter of the alphabet in different colors—not the bright primary colors of a child's clock, but colors so subtle it's hard to find words for them. i've tried to put them on paper using a set of 64 crayons, and had trouble getting the exact qualities of hue, intensity, *luminosity*, *vibrancy*. these are colors i can *feel*. i'm 42 and these images have not changed for me since, as a small child, i wrote my initials on a rock: *MS*. red and green. i didn't like my initials (and later changed my name) because even though *M* is a sort of maroon and *S* is green that can lean towards a deep foresty tone, they're still too bright together as complementary colors.

the only use i've found for all this is that at times it helps me remember things. if i remember that someone's name "sounded yellow," then it probably began with an *L*. *B* can be yellow, too, but a deeper shade, ranging all the way to brown depending on its context. a word is colored more by its first letter than by the others, though i might get a feel of the entire "color shape" of a word that would help me remember it.

i wonder what uses this skill would have in a different society? in a society where the intuitive and the practical are not separated? i wonder what other skills i (and you) have that are going unnoticed, minimized, not talked about, unused, undeveloped?

i've been having conversations with a friend who believes that we could perfect our intuitive sense to eliminate the need for clocks and

appointments. "we'd just *know* if someone wanted to see us, or if they weren't going to come," she says. in one of the *foxfire* books (a series published some years ago, composed of information from interviews with practitioners about traditional ways of doing things in the rural u.s.), an old country woman who seldom had visitors stayed home on the day the interviewing team came—because she sensed someone was going to visit.

i'm trying to become more sensitive to these things. to really notice how many times something happens just as i felt it would. (it's hard sometimes to know what's prescience and what's worry.) to visualize help for wim who need it and then *fully believe* it was more than coincidence when the outcome is as i imaged it.

what if "magic" was ordinary—a daily part of our lives? if we truly believed we could move huge stones—could we?

zana

thanks to grete for spinning visions with me. helping birth these thoughts . . .

## Am I a Cheese Addict or Just a Mouse in Human Skin?

Ask yourself these questions:

1. Do you ever eat cheese alone or in a dusty corner of the house?
2. Have you ever substituted provolone for New York Sharp, thinking that one particular cheese was the problem?
3. Have you ever manipulated or lied to get cheeseballs away from children?
4. Do you regularly use cheese as an inducement to get yourself up or as a treat just before bed?
5. Do you avoid friends or restaurants that do not serve cheese?
6. Have you lost friends due to your clothes smelling of Limburger?
7. Have you ever tried to stop eating cheese and failed?
8. Does the thought of running out of cheese terrify you?
9. Do you have little stashes of cheese hidden around the house in secret places "just in case"?
10. Would you rather die than live in a world without cheese?

11. Do you find yourself nibbling rather than chewing cheese?
12. Have you ever used cheese to overcome emotional pain?
13. Have you ever overdosed on cheese to the point of constipation?
14. Has your sexual relationship been affected by cheese breath?
15. Do you need cheese before you go out to a social event?
16. Do you ever lace your morning cereal with grated parmesan?
17. Have you ever eaten so much cheese that you forgot where you were?

Are you a cheese addict or just a mouse in human skin? This is a question only you can answer.

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## An Edifying Tale

A nurse in a hospital in Phoenix, Arizona, reported that a man had been brought to the emergency room after a terrible day. He said he had been messing with the BBQ in the backyard and got some flammable liquid on himself. His arm started on fire. As he was trying to beat out the fire, his leg started on fire. He decided to jump into the swimming pool.

As he ran across the deck, he tripped on a glass, broke it, and cut his foot to shreds. This caused him to fall and he hit his nose, breaking it. He slid on the concrete into the pool, scratching his side severely.

When he got out of the pool, his friend agreed to take him to the hospital. On the way they were hit broadside by another car, on the injured man's side of the car. The impact broke his leg, hurt his neck, and cut the side of his face.

At the hospital the nurses shared this sad tale of woe and all felt sorry for the poor man and his bad day.

About a week later, 2 cops came to the hospital nurses' station. They were there to arrest the man—for arson. He had been trying to burn down his ex-wife's house.

*Dianne Post*

## And In This Corner

. . . . . JMax

"She's got a lot of class," what do you think the chances are that who that is said about is middle or upper class? No, it is generally said about someone "aspiring." Or "she's got no class"—what class of people do you think that is denigrating?

The patriarchy has done everything and I do mean everything to keep women from bonding. The Lower class has more experience at bonding; because we needed bonding for survival the lower class has been perfecting and practising this art anyway. It's an art that brings a joy and warmth to everyday life that many middle-classed dykes envy and often can only look in on. Sure they can learn it just like I can learn to use classical music as a source of anticipated pleasure & relaxation.

The sociological model for talking about class is Upper, Middle, and Lower Class. Each of these divisions is further divided into threes, also called upper, middle and lower, so you can get more specific within a class. For instance as your basic white trash/welfare I fall in the middle of the Lower class division with the working class being in the upper part of my division and the poor being in the lower, so technically I'm middle-lowerclass. Someone asked me to define these sections in each class division; I can't. For one I don't really know anything about the Upper class nor the upper section of the Middle class. I do know that each race and culture has its own set of realities and they do not equate; for instance a black dyke and a white dyke do not have the same privileges, attitudes and behaviors just because they are both, say, lower middleclass.

Jeanette just came in with two muffins and one glass of milk to share, and after talking and eating for a while I realized she drank all the milk. She immediately got up and returned with more milk for me dramatically whispering, "This is not a cool thing to do while she is working on this column." This is a start on the humor I promised along with the tip of the month. If you middle-classed dykes want to impress your lower-classed girlfriends, the next time you buy a newspaper from a box automatically take out two and leave one on top of the box as if you are

always thinking about the next person. And don't say anything about it as if you just do this generally.

Here's some ideas for the next issue, which won't have a column on class; rather the whole issue will be dedicated to Class, so that much longer as well as more shorter pieces can be accommodated. I wish someone would tackle an in-depth article on "ingrainedness." Recently I was talking with a black dyke who is staying in the home of a radical upperclass dyke from South Africa. This radical dyke has done lots of work and really committed herself in actions and money against apartheid. And would never think of herself as racist. And yet as serious and well meaning and revolutionary as this woman is, my friend found several instances of blatant racism from her. In trying to explain this she told me her fear that the racism is so "ingrained" in the South African dyke that no amount of work can get it out. Do you think this has to be true?

I thought the oppressor was supposed to have more responsibility to stop the oppression because, tho they lose too by classism, they are less damaged from it. The question is, can they, and how does this work in the lesbian political community where we want to act out a model of equality and assertiveness for every dyke, even the upper class ones.

Maybe the middle class talks about feelings so much partly because I'm only willing to give them accusations. Are they as busy with proving that they are real people with real feelings as I am with trying to prove I'm a person whose life deserves to be known about *by them* and respected. I dismiss the higher classes because they hurt me; I have to protect myself but they only see it as dismissal. I accuse them and then won't listen to them—wish I could say this is only when they are stupidly trying to squirm out of their privileges or trying to defend attitudes that only prove their prejudices. Yes, I stereotype the higher classes too but my stereotyping of them hasn't fucked with their survival and opportunities. It's not like I haven't given them the benefit of the doubt on many occasions, but it is also true that each one of them dearly pays for the last one's fuckups. Is it any wonder they feel superficially judged and think "what is the use." However, we won't let dykes get away with saying nobody black will talk to me, so how can I cure my racism.

I would like to treat political lesbians differently than I do the general populace because we are the ones who try hardest on *all* these isms; but my habits were born of necessity and the higher classes habits were born of asshole (perhaps they would prefer I say ignorance), even if it was

their parents' (society's). I wonder tho where these higher-than-me classed dykes are supposed to get the desire and the strength to be less defensive and scared around me, knowing how I look at them. And how do we keep these thoughts from seeming like lesbian dogma—that a middle class dyke is automatically “bad” and lower class is (because of her oppression you know) “good.”

Love won't solve class problems but it offers a groundfloor for the motivation and opportunity necessary to be less defensive and more open and to really feel with another (unlike political meetings which do not and I think cannot offer this). Love is how dykes of different classes get so close to each other in the first place, especially in the early stages of romances and friendships. Then later the cold realities of class misunderstandings tear them apart, especially if they just loved their way over the differences instead of learning where they came from, understanding or appreciating them, and deciding together just what is fair and what is possible to expect from each other.

The Readers' Forum topic for the Class issue is Class: How It Affects Our Lesbian Interactions. How about focussing on mixed marriages (pardon the patriarchal metaphor), lovers of different class backgrounds? Do your fights that deteriorate to stereotypes and distancing have anything to do with class? Have you recognized reoccurring emotional issues you can't solve because you can't get inside of each other's perspective—give examples please, personal stuff is better than abstractions. How do you go about learning to really know someone unlike your self? Has being close to a dyke of another class enlarged your visions, increased your understandings of life, broken habits of thought that were limiting or unreal? Have you gotten an appreciation of the wonder and diversity of emotions that you didn't know about growing up. Has life with another class helped you grow or left you lonely? Are you stimulated or ruttled under? Compare your reactions to lovers in different classes more than comparing the actual lovers in different classes. I don't mean all this just for lover couples but for close friends too.

This column is supposed to be for readers to write in and make comments about class and ask questions of other readers and myself. So feel free to comment on these reader responses. Sometimes I'll comment too, but we would really rather hear from you.

## The Local PO

I'm a spike in my parents' class aspirations: a quick rise and fall. My mom came from Southern dirt-farming people: she and her sisters all married Yankee boys and got out as fast as they could. My dad was orphaned at 16. What my folks agreed on in the marriage was that hard work would get them where they wanted to go; and in their case, it did. The next thing they agreed on was that their children would get college educations like they didn't; and we did. Consequently I got a hell of a good education and hardly any idea of what to do with it.

In 1982 I walked into my first station for my first assignment and 50 men looked me over. One yelled out, "God! They sent us another woman!" The next thing I heard was, "At least she's white!"

Welcome to the USPO. By the way, there was a big campaign in '87 to end all sexual innuendo and ethnic slurs on the work floor. You don't hear the colorful male dialogue much anymore. That's because of us wims taking over. Back when I joined up, we were one in ten. Now we're pushing the half-way mark. Wims just don't go for that stuff. Why not?

Why not is because men *bond* with ethnic and sexual put-downs. You'd think the aggressive talk would spur aggressive feelings, but it works the opposite. As long as they're talking, it's safe. It's when they're *not* putting each other down that real aggression could erupt. For example, the white men tell the Hispanic men to stay away from "their" wims. The Hispanic men say the whiteys better *hope* they stay away because whiteys got no "huevos" (balls). They both grin and are pals because what they've really done is bonded together by talking about wims (in this case white wims) as a commodity they've divvied up according to certain rules (according to race lines) and they've re-affirmed, for today, that the agreement stands. I found it truly amazing how frequently, dozens of times per day, the men went through these routines to assure their "brotherhood." I'm convinced that blue collar men hate faggots so much because gay men don't do their fair share of keeping wims down.

We wims in the PO don't have anything we've taken possession of and are keeping for ourselves, so that kind of talk, which reflects political power agreements, doesn't fit for us. What we do share with the men is an inherited distrust of and hatred for Management, the "ties." Every supervisor is a "tie," and any carrier who moves into management is more or less despised. This is an immutable position: supervisors, on

principle, are irredeemable shitheads and we blue collars will antagonize, frustrate, and take advantage of them whenever we can. On this count men and wims bond to keep possession of a certain amount of self-determination on the job; not a small task in a para-military organization.

If push comes to shove, the men will throw the wims to the wolves without a moment's hesitation. We know this. But het wims have a powerless feeling that comes from being mothers first and everything else second. The het wims without children are as a group more militant, and the Lesbians—well, in my town a high number of Lesbians are union stewards. A lot of us have problems with authority.

Among Lezzies I move comfortably among the middle classes because of my education and articulation; but I feel alienated from their conservative outlook. Working class Lezzies are more fun and generally more from-the-gut radical; and what I really like is how they don't have too many illusions about men.

Among working-class Lezzies my major frustration is that social networks (the bar scene, the sports scene, the kin, the girls who hang out together) are so emotionally satisfying, life becomes a closed circle. Working-class childhoods seem to be happier than mid-to-uppers, so as adults working-class wims find much more satisfaction in their lovers, their families (if they have them) and their substitute families. It's a great strength but can be limiting. I heard a Jewish wim explain once that she loved her strong family background, but what drove her crazy was that the family was all there was. I feel that way about the w-c: the emphasis on social networks is a way of being conservative.

*Virginia Rose*

### Think First

It's hard to put into words just how I feel when the subject of class comes up. I am always curious and eager to hear when Lesbians talk about the ways they learned to interact and be that were born of cultural and class settings that were different from my middle class one. I guess I worry sometimes that my curiosity is prurient or objectifying, and I hate the part of me that wants attention or immediate acceptance because of whatever awareness I happen to have.

The first class-related thing I learned from my upper lowerclass girlfriend was not to use the phrase "I'm broke" when what I really mean is "I need to go to the ATM." And we notice the differences in style that Caryatis describes so well (Caryatis Cardea, "The Lesbian Revolution and the 50 Minute Hour: A Working-Class Look at Therapy and the

Movement," *LE* 1:3, 1985)—I can talk on for hours about my feelings, am comfortable revealing a lot, but all in a relatively linear, unemotional way . . . my lover will much more often speak with feeling, rather than about feelings . . .

My worst recent faux pas: A dyke friend has an ex-husband who is a total vampire, whining energy suck. He was dubbed The Black Hole. So of course I was telling a Black friend about him and charged right in and said, "He's such a total jerk; we call him The Black Hole." I heard my words and stood in shock. Her reaction was nervousness, denial, brushing it off. Then I made it even worse by nervously trying to explain that we were referring to the astronomical phenomenon, as if she wouldn't know what that was. Wow, I can be patronizing, too!

But the worst part of this story, the part I really want to hide is the background: I had roomed with this woman for two years and she wouldn't ever discuss racism with me. Whenever I would even mention racism—mine or someone else's, she would politely change the subject. This may have been more indicative of her own privacy than reflection on me, but in any case it was very hard for me to honor; I still feel like a failure and an asshole. That is such a selfish reaction I can barely admit to it, but there it is. She's certainly entitled to choose her confidants or not talk about racism to whites at all. As a white middle class woman I am learning not only to listen and learn but to **back off**.

My pet peeve is women who have privileges but deny it and especially those who claim that since they don't take advantage of their privileges that's the same as not having them. Grrrr.

*Eileen Anderson*

### **Oh Yeah**

Out of the thin blue air a middle-class friend of mine said to me, "Someday I want to have a talk about class with you." My first thought was, ah goody, the lower-class dyke gets to play font of wisdom on class issues. What I said was, "Listen, the only time I ever think about class is when I get pissed off." Then on second thought I had to add, "Of course, since the world gives lower-class people more occasions to GET pissed off, I suppose I do think about it a lot."

*Liz O'Lexa*

### **Some Thoughts on a Book Pertinent to Class Understandings**

Imagine the effect it might have on a young girl's mind if a social worker comes to call after her baby sister is born, the social worker tells

the girl's mother, who has done all she can to make the house neat and clean, that this place isn't fit for a baby. That is a true incident, described in Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* (London: Virago, 1986; New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1987). That experience touched Steedman at a very deep level:

And I? I will do everything and anything until the end of my days to stop anyone ever talking to me like that woman talked to my mother. It is in this place, this bare, curtainless bedroom that lies my secret and shameful defiance (p. 2).

Steedman carries this idea of a shameful secret further when she says, "The sense of my childhood that I carried through the year's was that people knew something about me, something that was wrong with me, that I didn't know myself (p. 40)." This provides us with crucial information about the trauma of growing up working-class in a classist society and it indicates certain similarities between the psychological damage done to victims of child sexual abuse and classism. "At all levels, class-consciousness must be learned in some way, and we need a model of such a process to explain the social and psychological development of working-class children."

Steedman emphasizes it was not penis envy that marked her life or her mother's life. It was envy for things.

From a Lancashire mill town and a working-class twenties' childhood she came away wanting: fine clothes, glamour, money; to be what she wasn't. However that longing was produced in her distant childhood, what she actually wanted were real things, real entities, things she materially lacked, things that a culture and a social system withheld from her (p. 6).

There was no place for a working-class woman to take these longings where they could be articulated, identified and understood. Not in the romanticized versions of the working-class that speak glowingly of the simple life and freedom from rampant materialism, not in the women's movement. What feminist wants to hear of a father who didn't matter and had no power? What Marxist wants to hear of working-class women wracked with envy for concrete objects, and suffering when they don't get them?

While Steedman herself does not offer a complete model, she does articulate many of the psychological learnings of a working-class childhood. One had to do with survival.

She cried, because tears are cheap; and then she stopped, and got by, because no one gives you anything in this world. What was given to her, passed on to all of us, was a powerful and terrible endurance, the self-destructive defiance of those doing the best they can with what life hands out to them (p. 31).

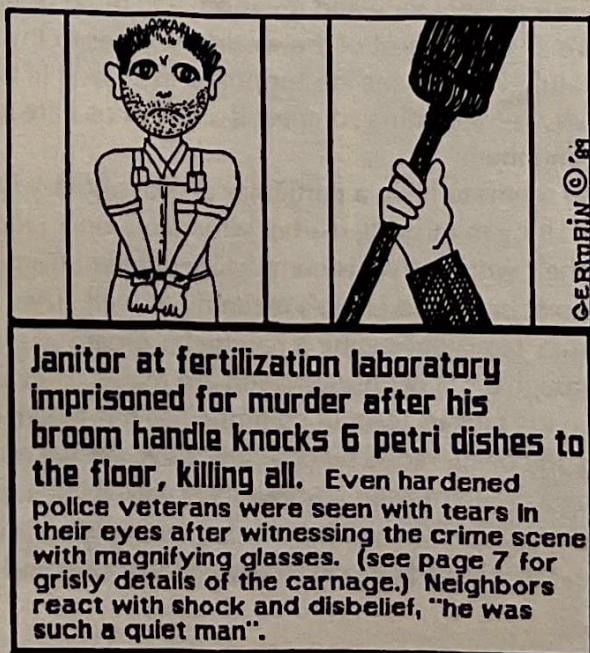
In Steedman's discussion of the consequences of growing up working class, she uses words and phrases similar to those someone who has survived child sexual abuse might:

You grow small, and quiet, and take up very little room. You take on the burden of being good, which is the burden of the capacity to know exactly how someone else is feeling.

Steedman closes her book by saying her final gesture of defiance is to refuse to let herself be absorbed by the central story and to make space for her story in the restricted landscape of our culture.

As a working-class lesbian, I found Steedman's book compelling and authentic.

Joanna Kadi



## Letters to the Editor

### To *Lesbian Ethics*:

We strongly object to "Warping Our Way On-Ward" by "Andante Bel Canto" (Jane Meyerding) which was printed in *LE* Vol. 3, No.3. Meyerding combines Lesbian-hatred, anti-Separatism, ethnicism, and ridicule to attack Bev Jo's and Linda Strega's article entitled "'Lesbians' Choosing Pregnancy?!", which was printed in *Amazones d'Hier, Lesbiennes d'Aujourd'hui* (Montréal, Canada), No. 20, June 1988. We question the ethics of printing an attack on an article which you refused to print, and which most of your readers wouldn't have seen since it's never been printed in the United States. We also question the ethics of printing any article about a very serious issue that affects all Lesbians' lives, in a forum on "Dyke Humor." There's nothing funny about "Lesbian" pregnancy, and no Dyke politics should be made the butt of jokes—that's how men and heterosexual women treat Lesbians.

Why did Meyerding single out Linda and Bev's article for criticism and ridicule, when that entire issue of *AHLA*, which was titled "La Maternité Revue et Rejetée" ("Motherhood Reviewed and Rejected"), contained articles by other Dykes from at least three countries besides the U.S. that similarly analysed Lesbian motherhood and spoke out against women who identify as Lesbians getting pregnant?

Rather than discussing what Bev and Linda actually wrote and saying why she disagrees with them, Meyerding distorts their ideas and insults them. She sows her Lesbian-hatred and Separatist-hatred by ridiculing all Lesbians who say they don't want to be around semen or penises ("... whether in its original container or re-pack-aged in a more aesthetically appealing turkey-baster"). Not fucking men or being intimate with them is as central to Lesbians as loving females is. Penises represent rape and invasion, and male weapons are made in their image. We all know most of the world professes to love semen and penises, and certainly all Lesbians are supposed to as well (if we know what's "good" for us). Why is Meyerding so upset if a few of us dare to say we'd rather not be around them?

Meyerding also seems to have a particular dislike of Mary Daly's writing since she ridicules it by mimicking it—but why name only Linda and Bev in her attack when their writing style is completely different from Mary Daly's?

Meyerding distorts Bev's and Linda's meaning as well. They said that the "Lesbian" pregnancy fad is producing a patriarch's dream world because 85% of babies born through artificial insemination are males. They also said that boys so outnumbering girls in Lesbian communities has meant that Lesbians' daughters are already being raped by Lesbians' sons. Do we really want to participate in creating a world or even communities with 85% men? Obviously, Meyerding would rather Lesbians didn't think too deeply about the implications of all this, and that if we begin to we should feel silly and "warped." Yet

it's essential that Lesbians question all sacred male institutions, including one as revered as motherhood and reproduction. It's also important to question whether someone who chooses to get pregnant by any means while calling herself a Lesbian is a Lesbian, since these women are demanding Lesbian money and support. (Most donated Lesbian money goes to Lesbian mothers.) But Meyerding interprets this to mean that Linda and Bev are saying that no-one who's a mother could be a Lesbian, which of course is not what they said.

Bev and Linda also refuted the argument that some Lesbians must become pregnant or there soon won't be any more Lesbians in the world. Of course, Lesbians will continue to come out in spite of being born into heterosexual families. Bev and Linda pointed out that most Lesbians' daughters are choosing to become heterosexual (as most heterosexuals' daughters do). Meyerding distorts this by pretending that the "logical" conclusion of Linda and Bev's politics would be for Lesbians to protect heterosexual nuclear families. Her making this into a "joke" doesn't make the distortion any less harmful. Does she really think that there's ever going to be a problem with too few people on earth? Hasn't she noticed that obsessive breeding is doubling the planet's population every few decades, and that this is destroying the earth? It's always easier to attack radical politics with ridicule than it is to face difficult issues honestly and with integrity.

Meyerding also seems to be saying that Italians are ridiculous by saying she uses "Andante Bel Canto" as her name when she "doesn't want to be taken too seriously." It's likely that this is directed at Linda Strega, who clearly identifies herself as Italian-descent.

Why did you print this article? You identify as Separatist. Why does your journal policy permit the printing of such obvious anti-Separatism and Lesbian-hatred? And since *LE* is open to men and heterosexual women, who will therefore read this attack, how can printing it in any way further Lesbian "ethics"?

In International Dyke Separatist Strength,

*Ruston*

Signed in support and agreement:

*Hilary O.* (Aotearoa/New Zealand)

*Janet B. Bridget* (England)

*Sandra Lucille* (England)

*Rhona Lishinsky*

*Carla Duke*

*Katinka Strom* (Sweden)

*Frances* (Denver, CO)

*Roxanna* (Denver, CO)

*Cindy Cooper*

*Jane Meyerding responds:* Meyerding is not "so upset," actually, but what she really "would rather" is that lesbians "think . . . deeply about the implications of" excluding humor from any aspect of our lives. ("Andante Bel Canto" is a musical term, not a reference to any nationality or culture.)

## 108 Announcements

*Jeanette responds:* I don't want to constrict the content of *LE* to the extent you suggest. I'm not willing to say that satire is an illegitimate form of criticism for *LE*, nor to equate satire of one part of one separatist article with anti-separatism or lesbian-hatred. I don't agree with everything I print, in fact I disagree with something in just about everything I do print. I do feel a responsibility to print a range of radical lesbian viewpoints.

### Notes on Contributors

**Chris Sitka.** I have been a lesbian activist for the last 17 years. I spend my time studying, researching and writing on any and every subject relevant to the resurgence of our ancient lesbian traditions and the creation of a sustainable lesbian culture. I am from a white, working-class, migrant background. I live in Australia.

**Jesse Cougar.** Skipped town without giving us her bio note. We think she's a Scorpio.

**Ryn Edwards.** I am a white lesbian plant physiologist teaching biology and women's studies at the elitist institution, Kenyon College, in Ohio, and with NASA monies am investigating how plant and fungal cells detect gravity.

**Lee Evans.** I live happily unemployed in Cleveland, Ohio. I have worked in the battered women's movement until I got (driven) out when the social workers took over. Like most dykes and separatists I am fast, furious and funny.

**Shelly Bannister.** I am a lesbian separatist living in Chicago. I am a teacher, a lawyer, and a student.

**C. Maria.** I am 29, a bibliophile, especially of works by Lesbians, and a terminal pack rat. Of all things, I would like to go to graduate school next fall, but would also like to become a vegetarian and buy a new bicycle. Presently writing articles on Separatist literary criticism and sexual/political clarity.

**Anna Lee** is a black lesbian living in the midwest.

**Marilyn Frye** is 48 years old, born and raised in white protestant middle america in a functional family (one that functioned perfectly by heterosexual/patriarchal standards). She is a devout lesbian, which proves that functional families can produce dysfunctional women. She gratefully acknowledges the influence in all her work of her lover Carolyn Shafer, who is the ideal dyke.

**Dianne Post** is a lawyer and a writer, and has been involved in the battered women's movement for ten years.

**JMax.** I am a 45 year old separatist dyke who is looking for a substance that adversely affects males while doing no damage to women. Call collect if you know of any.

## Announcements & Ads

**Lesbian Ethics** ad rates are as follows:

Classified: 20 cents a word, \$3 minimum.

Display 3 x 2-1/2 \$15, half page \$25, full page \$50.

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**Third Annual Lesbian Separatist Conference and Gathering** will be held in southeastern Wisconsin, August 30 through September 2, 1990. Play, talk, argue, spark new friendships, renew old connections, and have fun for a change! Sliding scale registration fee: \$85-150. For more information, contact: Burning Bush, P.O. Box 3065, Madison, WI 53704-0065, USA.

**GOLDEN THREADS**, a contact publication for lesbians over 50 and women who love older women. Canada and U.S., confidential, warm, reliable. For free information send self-addressed envelope (U.S. residents, please stamp it). Sample copy mailed discreetly, \$5 (U.S. \$). **GOLDEN THREADS**, P.O. Box 3177, Burlington, VT 05401.

**Women's Review of Books**, monthly review of feminist writing. In-depth reviews of the most current and controversial in writing by and/or about women. Subscriptions \$15, two years \$26. Institutions \$25/47. Canada add US\$3, elsewhere add US\$5 surface, US\$18 air. Dept. EX, Women's Review, Wellesley Women's Research Center, Wellesley, MA 02181.

**Women of Power**, a forum for the studies of feminism, spirituality and politics. \$26 four issues, outside u.s. \$32 u.s. surface. Sample \$7. P.O. Box 827, Cambridge, MA 02238.

**Hag Rag**, New Rage Thinking from the midwest. \$1.50/issue. P.O. Box 93243, Milwaukee, WI 53203.

## Conferences

**National Lesbian Conference**. Next planning meeting, April 28-29, Kansas City, MO, for info :Jane Spotted Eagle (816)252-9343. The conference itself is April 24-28, 91. Contact: NLC P.O. Box 3057, Albany, NY 12203.

**WOMONWRITES**, 12th Annual Southeastern Lesbian Writers' Conference. Five day workshop in central Georgia, May 31-June 3, 1990. \$60. Sandra Lambert, 811 NW 19th Ave., Gainesville, FL 32601.

**4th International Feminist Book Fair**, Barcelona, June 19-23, 90. Emphasis on authors from Eastern Europe, Mediterranean, and Latin America. Contact Fair at: Casa Elizalde, Valencia 302, 08009 Barcelona, Spain. (93) 487-2897.

## 110 Announcements

**National Association of Women's Centers (NAWC).** 3rd conference July 12-15, 1990 at Calif. State Univ., Sacramento. Pam King, P.O. Box 246833, Sacramento, CA 95824.

**NWSA (National Women's Studies Assoc.) Annual Conference, "Feminist Education,"** June 20-24, Univ. of Akron. For info: Univ. Maryland, College Park, MD 20742-1325, (301) 454-3757.

**4th International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women,** June 3-7, 1990. Box 733 HN, Hunter College, 695 Park Ave., New York, NY 10021.

**2ND ANNUAL WOMYN SHARING SPIRIT/SHARING SKILLS CONFERENCE,** April 20-22. For womyn "new to it all." \$140. **5TH ANNUAL WOMYN & WITCHCRAFT CONFERENCE,** Aug. 30- Sep. 2, \$165. Both in central Wisconsin. Re-Formed Congregation of the Goddess, Inc. Box 6021, Madison, WI 53716, (608) 838-8629.

### Calls for Papers

**Literary anthology for, by and about Black Lesbians seeking POETRY** (any form or length) and **SHORT FICTION** (maximum 25 pages). Send unpublished submissions and queries with self-addressed, *stamped* envelope to: Terri Jewell, 211 W. Saginaw, #2, Lansing, Michigan 48933. *Deadline April 1990.*

**WHAT IS A LESBIAN?** Seeking radical, creative, diverse approaches to this question for upcoming anthology. Eccentricity welcome. Send with s.a.s.e. to Lise Weil, P.O. Box 70, Montague, MA 01351 by April 1, 1990.

**What it is like to change lifestyles:** a call for first person accounts (essays, prose, articles, interviews), poetry and graphics by women who were in long-term marriages and left their marriage for a lesbian lifestyle. We are looking for a diverse representation. Send material plus SASE to Lynn Martin, Box 359, West Chesterfield, NH 03466. *Deadline May 1990.*

**Gallerie** is producing one book-length Annual and three magazines each year, featuring women artists from across Canada and the U.S. Deadlines December 31 and June 1. They also have an Image Registry. For more info: Gallerie Publications, Attn: Caffyn Kelley, Editor, Box 2901 Panorama Dr., North Vancouver, BC, Canada V7G 2A4.

### Guidelines for Authors

**Lesbian Ethics** is a forum by and for lesbians, any other use must be cleared with the individual authors, who can be contacted through *LE*. *LE* is a journal of radical lesbian ethics and politics, with an emphasis on how lesbians behave with each other. We welcome essays, reviews, letters to the editor (of no more than 1000 words) and responses to material which has appeared in *LE*.

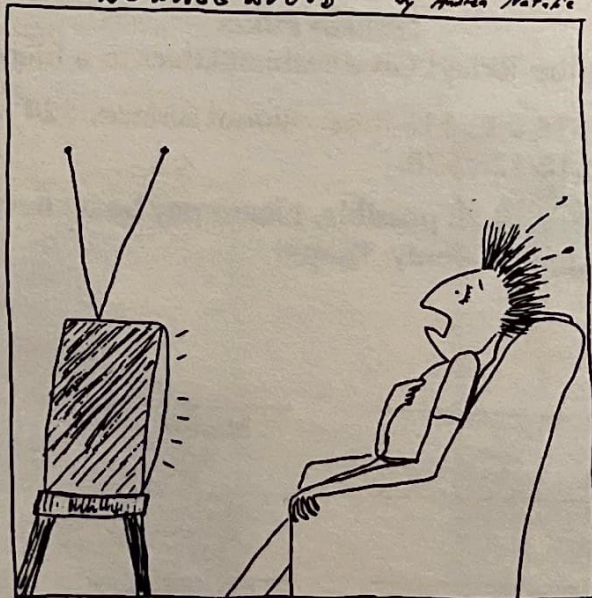
*LE* does not publish poetry or fiction. *LE* does not publish material being published elsewhere, but we don't mind simultaneous submissions as long as you advise us of the fact when you send in your article. Depending on where we are in the publishing cycle, we may take up to 9 months to respond to your article.

Contributions should be based on lesbian experience, should cite lesbians—with an adequate reference to the source of the material cited, should cite male authors only in extreme circumstances, and should use the variations of the words *dyke*, *lesbian*, *woman* in preference to *human*.

The Readers' Forum topic and focus for *LE* 4:2 is Class: How It Affects Our Lesbian Interactions. This issue is being guest edited and deadline has been extended to August 15, 90. See JMax's column in this issue for suggested topics for the class issue. The Readers' Forum for *LE* 4:3 is Our Mothers, the quality of our relationships with our mothers and the influence of these relationships on our lesbian lives. Deadline is December 31, 90. Forum contributions will be edited to save space and avoid repetition.

Write to inquire about deadlines for articles. Type all manuscripts double-spaced. We will love you if you can send it on a disk (Apple or IBM, MS Word, WordStar, WordPerfect). Include your phone number for editing purposes. Send an SASE if you want your manuscript returned.

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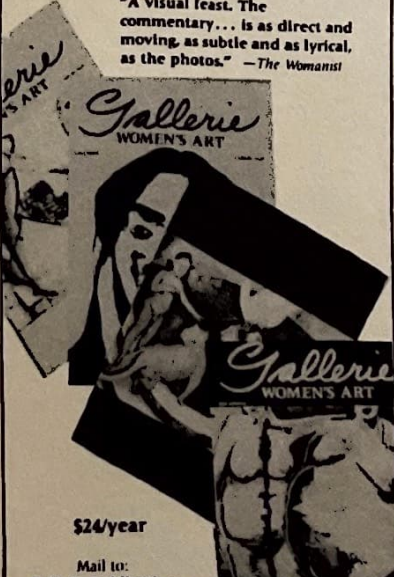
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