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Radical Feminism

edited by Anne Koedt • Ellen Levine • Anita Rapone



An anthology of radical feminist writings from the current women's movement. Forty-five articles ranging from the personal to the theoretical and drawn largely from the feminist annual NOTES.

Man-Hating

by Pamela Kearon

Pamela Kearon was a founding member of Redstockings. She is now active in The Feminists.

The question of man-hating among radical women seems like the most difficult one to get up a serious discussion on. And you really feel crummy dragging it all out again only to encounter the raised eyebrows, the surprised expressions, voices vibrating with moral indignation; or worse yet, some cute joke and a round of hearty chuckles—completely destroying your point. But hold on! Before you get indignant, before you make your little joke, allow me to try to convince you that man-hating is a valid and vital issue.

Hatred is certainly an observable human fact. And since women are human—not a link between man and the ape—not some innocuous, shadowy, fairy-tale version of the Man—since this is so, hatred, hostility and resentment probably exist somehow in us. And, further, since many of us have already come to the conclusions of feminism—that equal status and opportunity with the male is necessary to our full human existence—the realization of our past and continued subjugation has most likely aroused in us some sentiment resembling hatred. Now, each of us, in denying our hatred and explaining our astonishing magnanimity, relies upon some common argument. Among the most common:

Argumentum ad Sexus:

“Men and women are made for each other sexually. I am perfectly ‘normal.’ Therefore, I must certainly love men.”

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Answer:

Many men engage in sexual intercourse, often extensively, even marry, while yet hating women. These men are called misogynists. Now, there is no shame in being a misogynist. It is a perfectly respectable attitude. Our whole society (including too many of the women in it) hates women. Perhaps we need a Latin or Greek derivative in place of "man-hating" to make the perfect symmetry of the two attitudes more obvious.¹

Argumentum ad Superioritus:

"Hate man? No! Definitely not! We must understand them; they depend upon us to show them how to love."

Answer:

This argument is based upon the "Natural Superiority of Women."² We are congenitally incapable of hatred. It is our mysterious XX chromosomal structure. Failing to "understand" the man is a perversion of our second nature. Brushing aside forever the utterly unprovable fiction of our second nature, and speaking purely from personal experience, it would seem, on the whole, that people do not react to oppression with Love. I mean the poison seeps out somehow. Sometimes aggressively on those in an even meaner position; sometimes taking the form of an all-pervading and impotent resentment—a petty and spiteful attitude. When women take their hatred out on others, those others are likely to be other women, particularly their own daughters. In doing so they reconcile their own impulse for an object of hate with the demands of an authoritarian system which requires all hate and spite to be directed downward, while respect and "understanding" are reserved for higher-ups, thus keeping nearly everyone supplied with pre-ordained and relatively powerless victims.

Anyway, all arguments which tend to suppress the recognition of man-hating in our midst are reducible to this: *fear*. Man-hating is a subversive and therefore dangerous sentiment. Men, who control definition, have made of it a disgusting perversion. We have been unable to get out from under their definition. I've been at meetings where women actually left because they thought that "man-haters"

were on the loose. One woman talked to me in awe and disgust about a woman who she felt had made an anti-male statement at a meeting. It has been the cause of a deep rift within Women's Liberation. It is a vital issue because it involves ultimately the way we feel about ourselves, and how far we are willing to go in our own behalf.

Hatred and Man-Hating

There is no dearth of hatred in the world, I agree. But the thing is, people keep on hating the wrong people. For instance, a lot of people apparently believe that we must fight to preserve our freedom against little Vietnam. Whites, just now stepping out of poverty themselves, arm against the "menace" of the Poor and the Blacks. Upper-middle-class radical snobs despise the class of Whites just beneath them. And men hate women. Our hatred is such a shoddy and confused emotion. We indulge in the most circuitous and illogical prejudices. We have never given the idea of hating someone who has actually done something hateful to us a chance. Oh, I know we ought to hate the sin and love the sinner. But too often we end up loving the sinner and hating his victim (as when one woman seeing another put down, or hearing about her unhappy affair, calls it masochism and that's the end of it).

If hatred exists (and we know it does), let it be of a robust variety. If it is a choice between woman-hating and man-hating, let it be the latter. Let us resolve to respond immediately and directly to injury instead of taking it all out on a more likely victim. It is a difficult stance because it requires a fidelity to what is real in us and neither innocuous nor attractive to oppressors, to that part of you which turned you on to feminism in the first place. That part which is really human and cannot submit.

Footnotes

¹ It is interesting that while the Greeks had a word for both man-hating and woman-hating, only the latter has been anglicized and incorporated into English—A likely word would be 'misandry.'

² From the book of that title by Ashley Montague.