FEMINISMO PRIMERO
un ensayo sobre separatismo lesbiano

FEMINISM FIRST
an essay on lesbian separatism

Katharine Hess
Jean Langford
Kathy Ross

traducido por/ translated by
Helen Weber & Fabiola Rodriguez

tapa por/cover by Reneé Perry
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Authors</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part One</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian Separatist Basics</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radical Feminism</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialist Feminism</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part Two</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative Separatism</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origins of Separatism</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Identification</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalism</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle Politics</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Separatism</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matriarchism</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separatist Separatism</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separatists Are Not Fascists</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part Three</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Oppressions</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Oppression</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Semitism</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat Oppression</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ageism</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ideas and opinions expressed in this paper belong to the authors alone.

Las ideas y opiniones que se expresan en este ensayo pertenecen solamente a las autores.
INTRODUCTION

Lesbian separatism is most importantly a tactic rather than a goal. It is a way of building a strong feminist movement to work for feminist revolution. It is not an absolute but a response to real events right now. It comes from the history of women's oppression and not from some mystique of women's superiority.

This paper grew out of a discussion/study group that began almost four years ago. There were six lesbians participating in the original group. In the beginning of 1978 the group refocused its direction and those of us who were separatists formed a subgroup to write a paper about separatism. The paper has changed radically (as have some of our politics) since the first draft was completed in 1979. At that time we gave copies to about 15 lesbians who in turn gave us written and verbal criticism of the paper. The rest of 1979 was spent rewriting and restructuring the paper.

We decided to write this paper because of the widespread misunderstanding of separatism in our local feminist community and in the feminist media. Among feminists separatism is a term that provokes anger, contempt, fear, and rapid disavowal. Separatism has been called dogmatic, rigid, anti-woman, racist, classist, and, as a final twist, fascist. Separatists have responded to all this understandably but badly by keeping their political thought and activity more and more private. Anti-separatism increases with this lack of communication. So while the dispute over separatism remains an uneasy undertone at most meetings of politically diverse feminists, it is rarely confronted head on.

We are hoping to clear up myths, answer criticisms, and encourage further definitions and dialogue. We will also be criticizing some aspects of separatism that we've observed and/or participated in. We want to clarify our differences with other lesbian-feminists (including other separatists) in order to make working relationships based on our unities more possible. We aren't trying to conciliate or recruit. We are not presenting here a self-contained analysis of lesbian separatism, complete with charts and guides. This is not a program.

The purpose of this paper is to explain the meaning of separatism, partly by putting it into historical context. To this end Part I is a comparison of lesbian separatism to the two other strongest political tendencies in feminist ideology: radical feminism and socialist feminism. Part II begins by interpreting separatism abstractly as a concept that has arisen in different movements for some similar reasons. This part then draws on the history of racial separatism in the U.S. in order to critically assess some of the directions that separatism can take. Part II finishes by
zeroing in on three dangerous trends within lesbian separatism and explaining why fascism is a false accusation. Part III confronts the issue of how feminism can and must fight all oppressions affecting women.

THE AUTHORS

We are three lesbian separatists, ages 31, 30, and 27. One of us has a strong leftist background; the other two were slightly involved or identified with left politics. We are all from middle-class backgrounds. We have all had some college education. One of us is Jewish, the other two are from Christian backgrounds; we are all white. None of us is fat-oppressed. One of us grew up in rural Canada, the other two in the U.S., one in a large city, the other in a town. We've had a variety of jobs. During most of the time we were working on this paper we were employed as a printer, house-cleaners, a dance instructor, and a doll-maker. None of the three of us is a biological mother; we are all now or were at one time involved in childcare and two of us were at one time peripherally involved in boycare. We've all been in and around the feminist movement for seven to ten years. During that time we've worked in a variety of political groups and projects. These include: a lesbian-feminist press, a lesbian-feminist bookstore, childcare groups, feminist coalitions to coordinate activities or carry on specific campaigns, a lesbian-feminist media group that puts out a weekly radio show, the Lesbian Mothers National Defense Fund, feminist newspapers and magazines, several discussion and study groups.

July 1980
PART ONE

LESBIAN SEPARATIST BASICS

The term lesbian separatism has been used to express many different politics. To us it means, most importantly, not a way of promoting exclusively lesbian concerns, or a way of protecting lesbians from heterosexism in political groups, but a possibility of prioritising feminism. We want to distinguish clearly between women's interests and men's interests so that we can act in women's interests. The institution of heterosexuality blocks this process by encouraging women to see our interests as identified with men's instead of opposed to them. Women are not going to be able to persuade men as a group that it is in their best interests to set women free because it isn't. Men get material benefits from women's oppression: better pay, better working conditions, free labor in the household, more status, greater control over sexual relations, etcetera.

We have observed and experienced that men who think they are being less sexist are using women to try to get approval. This distracts women from connecting with other women in the fight against sexism and other oppression. These "exceptions" spend more time trying to get points for "non-sexism" than working against male supremacy. Men's activities in "support" of feminism have turned into men's liberation and a rebellion against their own roles. But there is no necessary contradiction between patriarchy and an expansion of the male role into femininity or homosexuality: witness ancient Greece. When men permit each other to have more effeminate manners or to be gay it does not follow that women get to define themselves. As one radical feminist wrote:

I fully recognize that some radical males have on occasion baked a tray of brownies to celebrate May Day. This does not alter the fundamental structure of American life. Economically and emotionally men's interests are best protected by the oppression of women. It is pure idealism to imagine men as a group rising above their interests in order to be charitable to women. Men will make room for women's interests only if and when women are strong enough to force the point. As separatists we choose to oppose men rather than try to reform them, not out of a belief that men can't change but out of a belief that they won't change until they understand that they have to.

We may fight alongside (we do not say with) men in certain situations like the anti-Nazi and anti-Initiative 13 marches in Seattle in the summer of 1978 but in these situations we insist on our po-
itical independence.* We will not put it aside in order to emphasize unity. Men are not allies in feminism which is the framework of our political position on any issue.

The greatest temptation for straight feminists is to attempt to reform men whether on a personal or organizational level. We are in potential solidarity with those straight feminists who like us want to oppose men rather than try to reform them. However, heterosexuality makes the pressure to reform men very great. Often the short or long-term goal becomes to improve sexual relationships with men. As Radicalesbians wrote:

As long as women's liberation tries to free women without facing the basic heterosexual structure that binds us in a one-to-one relationship with our own oppressors, tremendous energies will continue to flow into trying to straighten up each particular relationship with a man, how to get better sex, how to turn his head around—into trying to make the 'new man' of him, in the delusion that this will allow us to be the 'new woman.' Lesbian separatism is not about asserting lesbianism as a superior lifestyle but about making use of its potential for political independence from men.

The aim of lesbian separatism is feminist revolution. We share this goal with most radical feminists and many socialist feminists but we define it differently. Though no one has made anything like a clear map of feminist revolution, a comparison of the different positions held by radical feminists, socialist feminists and lesbian separatists will perhaps give us a better sense of direction.

**RADICAL FEMINISM**

Radical feminists see the patriarchal family as the primary institution of oppression. We agree. They see the antagonism between men and women as the primary political conflict. We agree again. It is important to understand that men as a group oppress women as a group. A political analysis that does not define its enemy can become vague and unfocused and begin to blame such things as "society" ("Oh we live in such a violent society") or socialization ("Men can't help it that they're rotten to women they were taught to be that way.") This way of thinking bypasses the materialist reasons for women's oppression. It is men who made this society, men who maintain it and men who profit from it to various degrees.

Radical feminism originated with women who split

* Initiative 13 was a city-wide initiative designed to severely limit the civil rights of lesbians and gay men. It didn't pass.
with the left in the late sixties (though some of those who joined had not previously been involved in any radical politics.) They decided to quit trying to qualify as a revolutionary force within the left and find out instead what it might mean to be a revolutionary force in their own right. In some ways they still make use of their leftist education. Some of them, for instance, validated women as a revolutionary group by asserting that women were a class, or, following the nationalist model, a colonized group. Radical feminists did not mean class in a strictly Marxist sense, however. They said that women's role in the process of reproduction was analogous to workers' role in the process of production. Workers produced, but did not control the means of production, the factories, etcetera. Women reproduced, but did not control the means of reproduction, their own bodies and existences. Women's class status, therefore, was based on their role of bearing children. In the early 1970's Ti-Grace Atkinson wrote that the meaning of feminist revolution was that women must seize the means of reproduction, their bodies. (Must we not also seize the means of production? Or is that men's work?)

Following from this most radical feminists say that racism, classism and other oppressions are not women's issues but human issues, and therefore not appropriate targets for the women's movement. Sexism was related to racism by analogy in many early radical feminist tracts (just as it was related to economic-class oppression by analogy as shown above) but there was very little analysis of how sexism and racism and classism intertwined for the majority of women in the world. The concept of women as a class or colonized group was too often used to absorb class and race and other differences among women.

One radical feminist wrote, "Sometimes non-feminist issues like racism and class snobbery crop up as eternal problems in women's liberation. These are often legitimate internal issues."3 (our emphasis) If racism and classism aren't women's issues what is? The obvious answer: sexism. But what is sexism once we've abstracted it away from racism, classism, anti-semitism, age-oppression, and other oppressions? Sexism as it affects young, white, middle-class, non-Jewish women? How can we understand sexism without understanding how it affects differently-oppressed women differently (as well as the same)? Asked another way, if racism and classism aren't women's issues, whose are they? Men's? So then are we to fight racism, classism, and other oppressions as they affect men? Unfor-
unately that is exactly the effect that excluding these issues from the feminist movement has had. Women go outside of the feminist movement to work on racism, classism, and so on in organizations that put men's interests first. Of course, radical feminists were not solely responsible for separating feminism from other issues. Leftist feminists had already rejected feminism as an arena for fighting racism and classism.

Another radical feminist wrote, "When we organize on working-class issues we will be organizing as workers not as women." But if women's oppression is acknowledged to be economic as well as psychological and sexual then why should we fight economic oppression as workers rather than as women? The implication is that the minute we emerge from the home we become full fellow-members of the Marxist working-class instead of being shut into a new category of working women. Actually our so-called oppression-as-workers is oppression-as-women. Women's work in the labor force is most often an extension of our work in the home: services, laundry, sewing, general drudgery, assistance to male work. As economies develop, jobs that were once done in the home move outside the home; the sexual division of labor shifts but continues to exist.

As lesbian separatists we struggle toward feminism that analyzes any and all oppression from a feminist perspective. This is a crucial theoretical difference with radical feminists. It results in a difference in strategy in that lesbian separatists are trying to create a feminist movement that expresses our total politics. We agree with radical feminists that women should not be diverted away from a feminist movement into other movements. But we do not see feminist revolution as separate from total economic revolution or revolution to end racism or any other oppression. We consider oppressions other than sexism to be not just internal issues but issues also central to our outward-directed theory and strategy. We have to consciously and actively fight all oppressions in feminist terms. This means that we have a very high stake in creating a multi-racial cross-cultural and anti-classist feminist movement that will be able to fight all oppressions.

We can't simply attack sexism and expect other oppressions to automatically fall. Moreover, we can't assume that other movements will fight other oppressions effectively. By implication radical feminists leave the solution of class oppression to the left, the solution of race oppression to anti-imperialists or the Third World, the solution of the destruction of Earth to liberal ecologists, etcetera. But all of these groups' politics have serious flaws.

Radical feminists asserted that economic analysis alone was not enough. The way that they expanded on it was with psychoanalytic theory. For
example, radical feminists tend to emphasize men's psycho-sexual interests in oppressing women as more primary than their economic interests. In an early essay of Ti-Grace's she analyzes men as the enemy but then goes on to interpret their oppressor role in psychopathological terms as a disease which women can help cure.5 Batya Weinbaum, in her analysis of socialism as a working-class male reaction to the beginnings of a basis for women's independence under capitalism, explains this reaction in terms of sexual jealousy of the male bourgeoisie (who in early capitalism appropriates the labor of working-class wives) on the part of the male proletariat.6 To be fair, she also clearly indicates the economic interests. Shulamith Firestone says that women's oppression comes inevitably from their role in what she terms the "biological family" which she then defines in Freudian terms.

These emphases logically tend to result in a description of feminist revolution which is primarily cultural or technological. Ti-Grace at the end of her essay recommends a transformation of sex roles. Firestone advocates a radical androgeny brought about through changes in the technology of reproduction. Weinbaum's conclusions—a pooling of resources within sex and age groupings instead of within the family—are rare for a radical feminist in that they are specifically economic. But radical feminist descriptions of revolution tend to skip over the step of wresting economic and political power from men and go on to somehow revolutionizing sex roles.

The psychological emphasis is echoed in one of radical feminism's main practices: consciousness-raising or the use of personal experience to describe oppression. C-r was ideally used to translate personal experience into an understanding of the oppression of all women. But it had many other uses also: it was an all-woman space in which to validate feelings of oppression; it broke down the isolation many had felt earlier. There were many drawbacks to c-r. Many women became absorbed in the psychoanalytic side of it and failed to use their analysis in confrontative situations. For too many women c-r was all that ever happened, a dead end. For some women it was therapy (learn to love yourself). It was a way for many women to better their own lives, cope with their own problems instead of collectively fighting for a whole different world. This was an abuse of the original intention of c-r but it was a fairly common one.

Moreover, c-r tended to confine the analysis of women's oppression to the experience of the women in the c-r group. Since these women were most often white and middle-class the analysis was apt to have a white middle-class bent. As one radical feminist wrote, "We made the assumption, an assumption basic to c-r that most women were like our-
selves--not different--so that our self-interest in discussing the problems facing women which most concerned us would also interest other women." This obviously fed into the tendency to isolate sexism out from other oppressions. Such a "pure" sexism would apply best to those women not oppressed in other ways.

While radical feminists, like us, are tactical separatists, believing in separate political organization of women, here too is a basic difference. One radical feminist explained that radical feminists want to separate in order to push for integration. She pointed out how the right to abortions, for example, could be interpreted as the right to sexual relations with men on an equal basis. But this shifts the emphasis away from more power and over toward improved relationships with men. As radical feminists were the first to point out, the right to abortion is, most importantly, the right to control our own bodies. Which would also imply the right to be lesbians or to be celibate. Radical feminism sometimes balks at challenging heterosexuality. Is the goal integration, or power over our lives? How well we can integrate with men may be contingent on how they react to feminist revolution. As tactical lesbian separatists, our goal is not separation and not integration, but freedom.

**SOCIALIST FEMINISM**

The socialist-feminism we mean here is the politics that attempts to fit feminism into existing socialist theory. We recognize that there are also women who call themselves socialist-feminists who are working for a synthesis of socialist theory and feminist theory. Like radical feminists some socialist feminists call women a class. But they generally mean class in the Marxist sense. That is, women are a class because they have a unique role in the process of production, producing not commodities, but services for family members. In this way they are similar to serfs, also outside commodity production, who make up a distinct class in Marxist terms. More often socialist-feminists do not consider women as a class. Either way they consider feminist revolution as part of a larger class revolution. But if women are a class then they can play a more integral role in the class revolution than if they are not.

To consider the women's movement as one part of a larger socialist movement means to take a reformist attitude to feminism itself. That is, the focus of feminism within socialism is to reform the sexism out of socialist movements and later out of socialist governments. The left has been slow to deal with feminist issues, especially lesbian issues, calling lesbianism a product of decadent capitalist society or shrugging it off as a bedroom.
issue. So a lot of energy has had to be spent in liberalizing the left around lesbianism and basic feminism. Yet it is doubtful if women within the left could have won the reforms they did were it not for the pressure created by the existence of an independent women's movement. And as this movement becomes less and less visible, the pressure is off and some socialist organizations are beginning to lapse back into their old ways.

A leftist-identified lesbian speaker at the Strong Women's Conference in Seattle in 1977 said that the women's movement would continue to exist "after the revolution." What revolution is she talking about, one wonders uneasily. She might have meant a permanent feminist revolution in which, after the initial overthrow of male authority, women continued to struggle to hold the ground we'd gained and to end oppression on every level. But without further explanation the most likely meaning, since it is the usual one, is that "the revolution" will not be primarily feminist, but women will fight in it in order to create a society where we can keep on fighting for feminist reforms maybe with better luck. So, like Iranian women we may be marching in the streets against the loss of rights or, like a woman in China, we may be battling the state for a conviction against a rapist. Reformism won't work for women (or anyone else for that matter) because our oppression is not a result of attitudes and socialization (these are themselves results) but of the interests of men in their various positions of power over women.

Moreover, the idea that either feminist reforms or feminist revolution stand a better chance in a socialist country just isn't borne up by the facts. As Batya Weinbaum pointed out, socialists explain away the sexism in socialist nations as a result of lingering sexist ideology (whose root cause has been cut away) or problems of economic underdevelopment. But these explanations ignore the fact that socialism in itself doesn't destroy the economic basis of women's oppression: the family and the sexual division of labor that extends from it out into the workforce. And while socialist governments (such as Cuba, China, U.S.S.R.) apologize for the sexual division of labor and insist they are taking steps against it, they actually praise the "socialist family." As if sexual division of labor in the workforce could be eradicated if the family was left intact.

Another reason frequently heard for why socialist nations have not freed women is that they are not truly socialist. But it is not just an imperfect socialist practice we are up against. It is a socialist theory that from the start has treated women's oppression as peripheral rather than pivotal. As Weinbaum clearly shows, the socialist idea that women's liberation will follow from their full involvement in production is inadequate. She writes, "Though revolutionary in its totality,
Marxist theory presented a concept which was fundamentally evolutionary when it came to women. She gives the example of the Italian Communist Party Program:

Step I is that women will go into production; Step II is that they will play a greater and greater role; Step III is that they will eventually arrive at equality. All of this, of course, ignores the dialectic. Which is: what if men react to women taking their first step I? Which they do and have all over the globe. In fact, Weinbaum suggests, with ample documentation, that socialist and labor organizing received a major impetus from a male need to restabilize relationships between working-class men and women that had been disrupted by capitalism. Of course, as the family breaks down somewhat, capitalism invents new ways to oppress women. Still the beginnings of a basis for women's economic independence from husbands seems at times to be a main motivator of male revolt.

Some socialist-feminists seem to believe that socialist revolution has to precede feminist revolution in the way that (according to Marxism) bourgeois revolution had to precede socialist revolution. That the socialist-capitalist battle is the main battle today and it's a matter of either fighting irrelevantly and ineffectively for a feminist revolution or moving forward with historical events. And that therefore women should throw themselves into the class struggle. But women have fought for socialist revolutions. Every last one of us doesn't have to in order to learn from the experience.

Socialism as it exists today does not seem like a better atmosphere for the continued development of feminism than advanced capitalism. For one thing the family is solidified. The single woman is in some places an anomaly. If anything is a precondition for feminist revolution, some amount of release from personal dependencies on men may be. For only this allows for an autonomous women's movement; only this allows for lesbian-feminism; only this allows for a feminist movement which relates to men as the opposition. The analyses by socialist-feminists of capitalist patriarchy usually show how female oppression is integral to capitalism. By contrast, socialist-feminist analyses of socialism (it is not generally called socialist patriarchy) make a case for female oppression being incidental to socialism. Our analyses of socialist patriarchy need to be just as deep and searching as our analyses of capitalist patriarchy.

We know that within patriarchy real freedom cannot be achieved. And that patriarchy is not just an ideological system but an economic one. Women are always being moved around on patriarchy's game-board according to patriarchy's needs. At differ-
ent times in different places we are needed more as productive workers, or as consumers, or as sex objects, or as mothers, or as fighters. Women's lives have been improved some over the years by democratic capitalism and socialism. They have been improved more dramatically by socialism but not in relation to men. (For example, as Weinbaum pointed out, women were bought and sold in pre-revolutionary China but so were men. Today women have a much better life than before but not vis-a-vis men.) The family may be modified by reforms such as better divorce and marriage laws but it continues to exist and to exploit women in every country in the world. Abortions and birth control may be more accessible to some of us but they continue to be legislated by men. Lesbians may be granted civil rights here and there but we continue to be suppressed and persecuted in most places because our choice represents a potential threat to male ownership of women. Any improvement in our lives that is based not on our own control over our lives but on patriarchy's expedience of the moment can be reversed at patriarchy's whim. Any patriarchal system in crisis can be expected to take back most or all of what it has given us. Liberals and conservatives argue over whether to try to placate us or put us once and for all in our place but they agree on one thing: at any cost power over women must remain in men's hands. Just now in this country the conservatives are trying to reverse affirmative action, civil rights for lesbians and gay men, the breakdown of the nuclear family and the legality of abortion. They are trying to force lesbians back in the closets and other women back in the home. And similar reactions in times of similar economic stress can be traced in socialist countries. Our right to determine our own lives will only be won when we end the rule of men.

To be revolutionary about feminism means working for a feminist revolution. Through this revolution men's power over women will be taken from them or surrendered by them. Women will become self-determining. Other (not primarily feminist) revolutions are not irrelevant to women. But an orientation toward a feminist revolution gives us a set of principles with which to operate in other revolutionary situations. For example, in any alliances we form we will fight for differentiating women's concerns from men's and making women's a priority, for opposing men as a bloc rather than trying to educate them individual by individual, for keeping separate women's/lesbians' organizations and fighting units and for making our tactics reflect the interests of all women.
PART TWO

COMPARATIVE SEPARATISM

Lesbian separatism is often considered a fanatical ideal with no context in recent history. Among separatists are those who claim Amazonism as their only political precedent. Among critics of separatism are those who see it as the fascist fringe of the feminist movement. Both are ignoring the history of separatism as a concept in recent times. Lesbian and women's separatism parallels the separatism of other groups in many ways.*

The separatism of women is different from other separatisms in that it has no regional base. Therefore, the separatism of women has little in common with Quebecois, Basque, or Puerto Rican separatisms, for example, which all aim at the nationalization of an already defined area. It is also different from racial separatism in the U.S. which is regionally defined to some degree. Native Americans have a clear claim on treaty lands. Chicano/a separatists feel ties with southwestern U.S. though Aztlan is often given more cultural than geographic significance. Black separatists have perhaps the most debated relationship to any one region (five southern states? Africa? existing urban communities?) Even so, Black separatism is in part a way of using, or trying to use, the ghetto as a power base. Women's separatism, on the other hand, is up against a status quo in which women are mostly integrated (the main exception being in the labor force). Racial exploitation historically required that people of color be separate from whites. The exploitation of women as women historically required that women live with men. Logically a regional base would give separatism a more nationalist bent. And practically that seems to be the case. Yet lesbian separatism also has its nationalist faction.

Despite differences, there are some similarities between lesbian/women's separatism and racial separatism, partly because the second wave of the feminist movement modeled itself in part after the movements of people of color, especially the Black movement, as the most media-highlighted racial movement of the sixties. Like many feminists, lesbian separatists would do well to stop imitating the methods and ideas of other movements and start analyzing them. We can recognize much of the rationale, and many of the dangers of lesbian separatism through a comparison with racial separatism.

* Some of the observations about lesbian separatism in this section are also true of lesbian feminism in general which is sometimes very separatist in practice.
This comparison does not imply political support. We do support separate groups along lines of color or other oppressions within the feminist movement—for example, groups of older women or lesbians, ethnic women or lesbians, etcetera that are feminist. But as feminists we do not advocate any separatism that conflicts with the ultimate unity of women across lines of color, country, or other divisions. Nonetheless separatism is a means of organizing that has certain observable origins and patterns of development in any movement where it appears. Through a comparison of lesbian/women's separatism with racial separatism we can hopefully avoid errors that we haven't yet made. We can come to a better understanding of separatism's place in the feminist movement, its problems, its possible outcomes.

**ORIGINS of SEPARATISM**

Separatism is in part a response to the inadequacies of civil rights tactics. It tends to arise as an alternative to campaigning for equal treatment within the existing system. In the sixties, for example, Black liberationists got disillusioned with temporary stop-gaps against poverty, with the right to vote for racist candidates, and so on. Native American leaders got tired of getting no results through the "proper channels" of protest with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and other white agencies. As for the women's movement almost from the beginning there was radical and separatist opposition to the reformist and male-female integrationist National Organization for Women (though there should also have been opposition to the racial segregation in N.O.W. that made it an almost all-white group.) Radical feminists learned from the example of racial separatists, being immediately unimpressed with sporadic openings in male job fields, token women executives, as well as impatient with the minor attentions paid to them within mixed radical groups. An old lesson was relearned: that oppressions like racism and sexism were not incidental social problems, but deliberate social policies of the group in power (white men). So, what was required was a revolution to overthrow that group. And the militant understanding that racism/sexism were supported by the real interests of a certain element of society went hand in hand with the separatist tactic of not working politically with that element. For racial separatists that element was whites. For feminist separatists it was men. (For while men of color do not benefit from white male rule in the countries where that is the rule, they do benefit from oppressing women of color.)

Militant separatism was not the only alternative to reformism, of course. Individual men of color and women of any color could and did join the inte-
grated leftist revolutionary efforts. But the left has not taken much initiative in fighting racism or sexism. Much of the socialist left tends to treat race and/or sex as reform issues. This tendency ranges from dismissing women's liberation as a reform that can be accomplished within capitalism, to believing that socialism will automatically end racism and/or sexism, to writing racism and/or sexism onto the post-revolutionary reform agenda, to considering racism and/or sexism attitudes to be ended through consciousness-raising. Whatever form it takes this tendency rules out the idea that racism and/or sexism are primary oppressions to be uprooted only by a revolution (economic and political as well as social) that specifically attacks them. So leftists oppressed by race and/or sex often have to spend a lot of time and energy trying to reform revolutionary organizations and ideologies that have racism and/or sexism at their base. Racial or feminist separatists have chosen instead to work out whole other ideologies and organizations directed at racism and/or sexism.

The left has come out with support of some separatist movements. Notably a whole new politics sprang up in the left, precisely for the purpose of supporting separate racial movements, in the name of anti-imperialism. There are some racist implications to anti-imperialism that we will talk about later on. But also in the late sixties certain Trotskyist groups issued resolutions supporting separate ("autonomous") movements for women and racial minorities. There is no inconsistency in this. For instance, Trotsky himself wrote in the thirties that for oppressed national minorities (specifically the Basques in Spain and the Blacks in the U.S.) self-determination was a revolutionary demand. Most working-class Basques and Blacks in the twenties and thirties identified more with separatism than with socialism. Implicit in Trotsky's principle was the belief that Black and Basque separatists, if supported by socialists, would not only come to interpret their own struggle as socialist but would join forces with other socialists.

It's clear, then, that a leftist perspective on separate movements contrasts with a separatist perspective. For leftists involved in separate movements the important question often becomes how can we best shape these movements to fit into the left. For example, the theme of the Strong Women's Conference mentioned earlier was "What role does the autonomous women's movement play in the total revolutionary process?" What feminist separatists are asking is how can we become an autonomous movement. Separatists in general want separate movements not in order to gain leverage with the left or to train as vanguards for the left but in order to be truly independent of the left (and other politics.) This does not preclude coali-
tions at a later time. Some women seem to think that the time for coalitions is here, and that feminist separatism is less necessary now that the left has made some concessions to women's liberation. But nothing the left grants us can ever take the place of a separate power base.

So separatism has been a response not only to the "equality gradually" of reformist integrationism but to the "freedom for you will follow" of leftist integrationism. Those who chose feminist separatism got sick of trying to convince men that women's liberation was in itself a revolutionary aim (in their spare time from pouring coffee, cranking the mimeo, and being fair sex game for any comrad.) Those who chose racial separatism lost faith in the anti-racist militancy of groups who were busy using them as figureheads.

With the beginning of lesbian-feminism, female separatism rapidly led to lesbian separatism. Originally lesbian-feminism implied a form of feminism that specifically challenged heterosexuality as an institution. Nowadays lesbian-feminism is used simply to identify lesbians who are also feminists (and many times also socialists, or anti-imperialists, or anarchists, or political inactivists.) Lesbian-feminism has lost most of the specifically political meaning it briefly had. It does vaguely imply a common lifestyle, value system, media and sense of community or social network. Women's separatism while it still exists (women-only groups) is largely lesbian in practice though it does signify a political difference with avowed lesbian separatism. Straight women are limited in how politically separate they can be by male jealousy, male demands on their time and loyalty, the need to accommodate male points of view, and plain old male presence.

. CULTURAL IDENTIFICATION

Another reason people quit the left is that it didn't offer the same opportunities to assert racial or sexual identity. If racial separatism, for example, had only been a matter of resisting white control, it would likely have been manifested in multi-ethnic organizations excluding white people. Instead it was manifested in separate organizations for each racial group. Separatism, for Chicanos/as and Native Americans was partly a reaction to the threat of cultural extinction. For Black men it was partly a way of regaining their Black manhood. However, among racial separatists the emphasis on cultural identity has all too often only widened divisions between different oppressed races. It has also contributed to a reactionary stance toward women since the family and women's role in it are considered essential to transmitting culture. For lesbians, separatism was partly a way of releasing ourselves from an
identification with men so strong that we sacrificed our interests to theirs. However, among lesbian separatists, the cultural emphasis has widened the divisions between lesbians and straight women much more than a simple principled political separation would have done. It has also served to widen the divisions between women of color and white women sometimes, since the search for women's culture has in many ways been an extension of the white hippie search for counter-culture. The search for women's culture has been carried on mostly by white women in ignorance of the cultures of most women in the world but in eagerness to lift a few things from the lifestyle and spirit of cultures of color.

When "identification" is central to radicalism there is the possibility for it to encourage a disregard for others differently identified but similarly oppressed. So there are such abuses of the concept of racial identity as certain Black separatists buying into the white picture of the world as polarized into Black and white to the extent that other peoples of color are considered one or the other. Racial separatism in this way actually tended to reenforce racism between one racially oppressed group and another. Or there are such abuses of the concept of women-identification as C.L.I.T. saying that straight women are not "real" women. Coalitions have taken place between different races and between lesbians and straights—but often in an atmosphere where there is no continuous interaction and a lot of distrust. Many lesbian separatists idealize lesbian identity and ignore our commonalities with straight women.

Lesbian separatism is making some gestures toward understanding how all women (not merely young, white, thin, middle-class Christian women) are oppressed. But the impact of these gestures so far is small. Especially since lesbian separatists as well as feminists in general continue to deny feminism's ability to unite women. Some say, for example, that working-class women can't afford to separate from men; or that the family is essential to the freedom of women of color. Young white middle-class feminists who dominate separatism as well as other segments of the women's movement are too careful not to trespass on what they seem to consider oppressed-male territory: analyses of class, race, and age as they apply to women. Any feminist politics that persists in the myth that it is inherently relevant only to white young middle-class women will never succeed in making itself relevant to all women.

**NATIONALISM**

Most importantly, separatism, as we've said, refers to separate political organization and ideology. But for some it has also meant a separate na-
tion. The nationalist facets of separatist movements analyze the oppression of their people as colonial or neo-colonial. Following from that their primary demand is for land, resources and an independent government and economy. So there was the Chicano suggestion that the southwestern states revert to Chicano control, or a hint that community control might eventually evolve into Chicano "city-states." There was the Native American proposal that tribal lands be made "independent" enclaves, protectorates of the U.S. government. And there have been various Black blueprints for taking over sections of the U.S. or moving back to Africa and the adoption in spirit at the 1967 Black power conference of a resolution to initiate a national dialogue on partitioning the U.S. And recently there was the First International Lesbian Swim on Washington to demand a separate nation for women. (Actually the latter seems to have as much in common with the theatrical pie-throwing politics of the Yippies as it does with racial separatism.) Aside from the utopianism of these proposals (why, for example, should Native American tribes expect more than a neo-colonial status as nations enclosed by the U.S.?) there are many problems with the nationalist emphasis.

Nationalism is a means of survival and development as a people. But it is not a means of ending oppression or the abuse of power. Nationalist revolutions usually choose economic structures designed to liberate the people from outside imperialism, not necessarily from class or any other oppression. Nationalists are fond of saying that a nationalist struggle is automatically a class struggle since national minorities and imperialized nations are mostly poor. But this sounds like rhetoric in view of the facts. A revolution which has an independent nation as its goal is much more likely to end there. In order to compete in the international economy nations predictably form their own strong centralized states and single out their own minorities to oppress. Only out of a real commitment to and identification with international revolution would come less oppressive policies internally and externally. Socialist revolutions have often succeeded largely because of their nationalist platforms (e.g. China). It's no coincidence therefore that these revolutions based in part on nationalism (especially as a way of combatting imperialism and the problems of underdevelopment) have not dealt well with oppressions within their borders. The nation-state is, after all, a large-scale model of the patriarchal family (the fatherland "caring" for, policing, its loyal children and "protecting" them from the world.)

In the Native American movement a purely tactical separatism barely seems to exist, since separatism is almost always connected to the call for national sovereignty. In the Black movement nation-
alism and separatism came to be used interchangeably by some, or combined into one term (national-separatism) by others. We need to distinguish between separatism as a tactic (political separation) and separatism as a goal (separate nation.) Lesbian separatists must confront the difference. We should be working not for a female state but for the end of sexism. We must fight for the freedom of all women everywhere.

**LIFESTYLE POLITICS**

Racial separatism and lesbian separatism have run into some of the same internal difficulties in developing a program. There have been similar splits between those who emphasize economic self-sufficiency and those who think it impossible. There has also been a similar split between those who want to concentrate on reviving or inventing a subculture and those who want to join the rights struggle and reorient it along revolutionary lines.

Some racial and lesbian separatists have believed in building economic power within capitalism. One means is through businesses, banks, and so forth, with slogans like "Buy Black" and "Support feminist businesses." But capitalist enterprises are inevitably geared toward the female or race-oppressed bourgeoisie or petty bourgeoisie and not the working-class. And despite some talk of cooperative non-profit-oriented economic networks, no one has figured out how to make them work within capitalism. The new businesses, marginal to the economy, yet dependent on it, necessarily fall by the wayside in an economic crisis.

Separatists in any movement stress the necessity of self-definition. To this end they try to control their own communities, culture and media as much as possible. For some it becomes their whole focus. Cultural revolution is essential, but it is not enough. Militancy requires a psychological shift from shame to self-confidence, from self-blame to anger. And revolutionary movements are definitely strengthened by a culture which directs people's lifestyles toward revolutionary ends. However, if and when the maintenance of a separate culture becomes its sole aim separatism becomes non-revolutionary. It tries to evolve toward freedom with cultural and psychological changes (changes internal to, confined to, the community or the individual.)

This sub-cultural emphasis is in part a response to frustration at creating strategies to actually change the existing system. Leroi Jones, Black cultural nationalist, argued: "We cannot fight a war, an actual physical war with the forces of evil just because we are angry. We can begin to build. We must build Black institutions in all the different aspects of culture."14 Certain militant stances of the sixties couldn't be maintained, for example attempted seizures of land (the sei-
zure of Alcatraz by Indians of All Tribes and the brief seizure of Santa Catalina Island by the Brown Berets) and the "urban guerilla" tactics. Some of those involved in those activities have turned from confrontations more to community work. This work consists of a lot of badly needed services offered by Chicanos/as, Blacks, Native Americans, Asian-Americans, Puerto Ricans to their communities: cultural centers, breakfast programs, free schools, health clinics, patrols to prevent police harassment. Feminists have followed this pattern also with clinics, rape patrols, child care cooperatives, etcetera. But too often the construction of a new lifestyle and institutions becomes an end in itself. So the strong community base which is a valuable part of separatism (and feminism in general) comes to be a substitute for a movement, instead of a support for it. And the services eventually usually become severed from any ideology. Instead of pushing forward more we stop at defensive positions of survival, self-improvement and shelter from the outside world.

Under these circumstances our little enclaves can exist only with the tolerance of the larger society. Separatism, racial or lesbian, is somewhat acceptable to liberals as long as it is not armed and militant. That is, as long as it remains a lifestyle alternative which provides badly needed services, thereby relieving the society-at-large of that responsibility. And separatism is not inherently militant. Without military strength or political organizations or clear ideology our little enclaves are totally defenseless. At any time the government can cut off funds and either release or simply lose control of citizen backlash. The government can allow the right-to-lifers and Nazis and Ku Klux Klan to become more and more powerful while it still plays liberal, withholding official sanction from the right-wing. At the same time it can casually cut down on welfare programs, civil rights, as soon as the cries of revolution die out. This is what the late seventies and conceivably even more the eighties are all about.

As Harold Cruse, Black scholar and cultural nationalist, criticized one aspect of Black separatism:

Many Afro-American nationalists cultivate an existence that reduces any contact with whites to the barest minimum. Many others live in an intellectual world of the teachings of Islam or the history of the glories of Africa past and present... It is an inbred, exclusive, and often a make-believe world that exists only for itself without specified goals. It is a world that awaits the arrival of an armageddon, a day of racial reckoning, but that rationalizes away every positive action on the political, economic and cultural fronts.
An Indian cultural nationalist, Mad Bear, says that one part of an Iroquois prophecy predicts that the white man will soon blow himself off the face of the earth. Among lesbian separatists, matriarchists advocate the recreation of ancient matriarchal culture as they imagine it. And many have been tempted at least for periods of time into a kind of dreamy matriarchism, an idea of biding our time until daddy patriarchy dies and women come into their inheritance, the earth. We do not want to deny the possibility of a calculated use of psychic skills toward revolutionary ends. But among both racial and lesbian separatists are those whose beliefs resemble mythology more than politics.

A key to cultural feminism/separatism is in some contemporary feminist fiction. A common theme is the utopia or semi-utopia set in a post-nuclear-holocaust world in which women live comparatively freely, sometimes separate from men. Feminists often envision an apocalypse, a dramatic destruction of the patriarchal order brought about by its own excesses. "If we withdraw our energies, it will destroy itself," is a typical comment. But feminists need to take an active role in the destruction of patriarchy, need to try to direct that destruction, just as within a Marxist framework workers must take an active role in the inevitable destruction of capitalism. We need to plan, not only prepare. Preparation alone implies the abdication of strategy, a disbelief in the possibility of taking initiative. To only prepare makes sense as a last resort when there is no chance for offensive action. An apocalyptic view may simplify our tasks. But first it assumes our failure.

Separatists in every movement have not only been excluded but have too often excluded themselves from large-scale and outward-directed activism. Lesbian separatists, for example, are rarely if ever among the speakers at rallies or conferences. No one has gotten far in creating a distinctively feminist ideology and strategy. For many feminists it is not a priority; for lesbian separatists it is a basic goal. But to try to do it outside of participation in the feminist movement is a dead end. Theories that aren't practiced and tested stay static and didactic. Racial separatists lost a lot of support to integrationists (both left and liberal) who had programs and took concrete actions on issues like housing, education and so on. Several Black separatists have observed that Black separatism's main weakness is its lack of a program on which to base actions. (A program would include a long-term goal and a plan to get there and immediate actions that fit into the plan.) Cruse stated that Black separatists need to go beyond a separatist "mood" to specific separatist objectives. Lesbian separatists should learn from this before lesbian separatism dissolves into a mood-state. Separatism isaced
with the challenge of becoming more than a matter of who you are and who you're allied with. Our theories have to build on woman-identification and the basic political antagonism between men and women with considerations of economic and political structure.

Lesbian separatists need to think about what social-political-economic system would make freedom for women possible. We know capitalist democracy does not. Existing socialism hasn't yet and doesn't automatically. "Pure" socialism is an unknown which existing socialist theory may not be adequate to create. It also doesn't make sense for separatists to keep aloof from the debate between socialism and anarchism. Much of the feminist movement is organized roughly along anarchist lines, whether or not it is conscious of it, using consensus, non-static leadership structures, and small groups. Many feminists, including separatists, go round and round in the anarchist-socialist argument without even recognizing it let alone making use of its history. Far from being just a leftist problem, anarchism versus socialism is intensely relevant to women. Do we have to design a future society or just a revolution? Can our culture be a useful tool? How useful? How much do our tactics have to reflect our goals in order for us to succeed? Can a "dictatorship of women" (like the "dictatorship of the proletariat") evolve into a free society? Is hierarchy and/or the mystique of "good leadership" our only hope? Or will it destroy the women's movement? If so, what are alternative types of leadership? Do we need a party? Or can we accomplish unity of purpose and action through a federation of small groups? We need dialogue on all these questions that takes the experience of other political movements into account.

There are three developments within lesbian separatism that are specific examples of some of the dangers we've been discussing in this section. They are: economic separatism, matriarchism, and separatist separatism.

**ECONOMIC SEPARATISM**

Though the trend seems to be moving away from economic separatism, it has happened in the past within the feminist community and there is a potential for it happening again. Economic separatism is based on the idea that women can and should withdraw their economic support from patriarchy and try to become self-sufficient.

One attempt to achieve this has been the formation of feminist businesses. One of the basic principles of a feminist business is economic separation—setting up a system where the flow of goods and services is between women, where women are trained or jobs are provided for them within the business, and where time and energy is being
shared mostly with women.

Feminist businesses are different from other woman-owned businesses. Both could be using feminist principles within the business, but only feminist businesses are marketing their politics, selling feminism.

One argument made in favor of totally integrating your job with your politics is that it is a better use of your time and energy. Instead of selling some of your most productive time to patriarchy, you can keep it for women. Instead of burning yourself out working forty hours at a straight job and another twenty at your politics, you can do both at once. On the surface it sounds like a good alternative, more efficient, less exhausting, and therefore more effective in fighting patriarchy. But we don't think it is.

One of the purposes of feminist businesses is to provide jobs for women so that they can make money, acquire skills, and have access to equipment in an unoppressive atmosphere. This was one of the goals of Olivia Records, to provide jobs for women in the recording industry. Other examples could be feminist businesses that provide workshops for women, or feminist businesses running coffeehouses or restaurants. But the number of jobs feminist businesses can provide is way too small to make any impression on the economic oppression of women. So to view these businesses as a strategy for freeing women is useless.

We like the idea of having lesbian presses, workshops, coffeehouses and radio shows. Feminist services are important to any feminist community. We support feminist services that are non-hierarchical and worker-controlled. Feminist services should be responsible to the feminist community, and responsible for the politics they produce.

The problem is that women are limited in what they can do politically within a feminist business because of the pressure to make it financially, which invariably comes first. Because feminist businesses often combine their products with their politics, and because they need to produce products that will sell, their politics get coopted. The result is watered down political statements. This happened when Olivia Records diluted their politics in order to appeal to a wider audience. Because these politics are so ambiguous, the Seattle Weekly, for example, could interpret Be Be K"Roche as a transexual beat and say outright that Olivia's appeal is greatest when they soften their feminism (as they often do.) The straight world says: make it less political, and we'll buy it. Feminist businesses are left to comply or die.

For all these reasons we are opposed to the idea of feminist businesses being a way to fight patriarchy.

Another way feminist businesses sell out feminism is by getting funded by corporations, foundations, the government or rich white male liberals.
wo all have an interest in buying up as much of the feminist movement as they can in order to control it. So we have women's studies, feminist credit unions and feminist counseling all participating wholeheartedly in patriarchy's economic institutions. Or we have the Feminist Economic Network which attempted to form a string of connected organizations composed of a few women who controlled it and had all the power. Fortunately, their attempt was unsuccessful. Or we have Judy Chicago's project The Dinner Party being funded by Chevron. When you can get money without strings, that's fine—but usually temporary.

Feminist businesses are not and cannot be a strategy for revolution. No one is going to pay you to have a revolution. Doing a business is not a good way of expressing your feminism. It is fine to incorporate feminist principles into any business, or into your job. However, we cannot replace or escape patriarchal capitalism with feminist capitalism. Moreover, history has shown that feminist businesses became irresponsible when they tried to pay salaries and expand and that their politics got coopted along the way. For all these reasons we are critical of making a business your politics.

MATRIARCHISM

This section is about matriarchists and about some spiritual feminists. There is a growing trend within the feminist movement toward spirituality being the way to fight patriarchy and end oppression. But a spiritual belief system can't substitute for a political ideology since it doesn't explain power relations in the world. Being spiritual doesn't mean you can't be political.* We are not critical of spirituality itself but of how it has been abused both generally and within the feminist movement by some women.

It is matriarchists who have been primarily responsible for abusing spiritual ideas. Many of them venerate "the female principle" and believe that men are mutants. But politics of liberation cannot be based on biological inferiority. Spiritualists sometimes believe that you can meditate your way to a better world. They often form coven or covens to perpetuate the concept of goddess worship. Some spiritualists' focus on religion that they consider to be female-oriented is something more than Christian religion with a female emphasis (god with an "ess" on it), which may be oppressive to Jewish women and others who did not grow up with Christian values and in Christian cul-

* We are not discussing positive uses of spiritual ideas or practices partly because we are in disagreement about it and partly because it doesn't relate to the purpose of this paper.
ture. It also alienates and excludes atheist women of course. An example of this is the drawing on the cover of the March/April 1978 Tribad magazine. The drawing is of a woman (goddess-type), her arms outstretched with the words: COME TO ME WOMEN AND BE SAVED printed across the page. Being saved is an oppressive concept that is part of Christianity. It promotes the concept of hierarchy: the One (on top), in this case a woman. No one is going to save us except ourselves. Matriarchists have also bought into the hippies' romanticization of non-Christian cultures and religions: namely, Native American cultures, and eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. Glorifying rituals and/or religions in this way is oppressive.

Matriarchists base a lot of their ideas on the old matriarchies. They say they are working for a matriarchy and then define it in terms of the past. When matriarchists refer to this past, we are left with the impression that matriarchies were perfect all-woman societies. This utopian way of thinking pervades a lot of lesbian politics. Although it is argued that there were all-woman societies, or matriarchies that consisted of women and men, or matriarchies where men were on the periphery, or matriarchies that were oppressive or hierarchical societies, nobody knows for sure what matriarchies were like. Believing in and attempting to create an all-woman world tends to become divorced from the realities of patriarchy. So we find many matriarchists cloistered in small groups with as little contact as possible with patriarchy. Some matriarchal communities are even attempting to exist physically apart from the rest of the feminist movement. We know we cannot overthrow patriarchy if we remain isolated from other feminists. It is simplistic to think that these alternative groups will become a reality for the whole world or will be effective politically. And it is downright dangerous too, because patriarchy won't just fade away.

**SEPARATIST SEPARATISM**

Separatist only-ness has been a trend among some lesbian separatists. It ranges from separatists who will work politically only with other separatists; to separatists who do the majority of their political work with other separatists; to apolitical separatists who associate only with other separatists.

Many separatist separatists mistakenly believe that they are an oppressed minority within the lesbian community. It is true that separatist only-ness gained in popularity because of the misunderstanding and trashing of separatists within the lesbian-feminist community. But separatists also chose not to communicate their politics in many cases.

Separatist separatists seem less concerned with
fighting patriarchy than with avoiding contamination by men. Some separatist separatists believe that if you're not a separatist they you aren't fighting patriarchy. While protecting separatists, separatist separatism also isolates them from the larger feminist movement. The atmosphere of secrecy and seclusion which surrounds these small separatist groups is alienating to everyone outside the group and leaves many lesbians with the impression that separatists do not consider themselves part of the feminist movement. Unfortunately many of these separatists don't.

Are there any good reasons for separatist onlyness? Separatists do need to define separatism with each other. The group writing this paper is an example of that. We are not opposed to separatists working together. We are opposed to separatists becoming an isolated group splintered off from the rest of the feminist movement.

**SEPARATISTS are not FASCISTS**

It is some of these same developments which have influenced some feminists to call separatism fascist. However, the charge of fascism is based on a few serious misinterpretations: 1) that separatism, in some way, is anti-democratic and dictatorial—that it tries to tell everyone what to do; 2) that separatism rests on a belief in the biological superiority of women and inferiority of men; 3) that separatism ignores race and class conflict by emphasizing gender conflict.

Any comparison between revolutionism and fascism plays into the hands of the rulers who'd like to keep us playing ideological musical chairs trying to get to the left of each other while they call the tune. It can lead women to shy away from being too militant. It can make us scared to exclude men from our movement. The name fascism has a lot of dramatic power. A loose and confused usage of the word only gives the actual fascists more of a chance to smash the feminist movement.

What is fascism? Its economic environment is capitalist patriarchy. When capitalism is doing okay, expanding into new markets, increasing profits, etcetera, then "democracy" (not pure democracy, but the U.S. brand for example) suits its interests pretty well. Democracy allows for more cultural diversity (including our own lesbian subculture) and so creates new demands for specialized products (for example, women's cigarettes, the "dyke" look, women's liberation books and magazines.) Political rights in a democracy keep people thinking that they can improve their lives without destroying the present economic system. In short, democracy is good business for awhile. But in times of economic crisis the buying power and contentment of the people become less useful to capitalism than their quiet acceptance of each new financial squeeze. The capitalists try to pre-
vent lower profits by slashing wages, laying off employees, raising prices, getting government subsidies and starting wars—all of which means more taxes, less money for welfare programs, and so on.

Politically, fascism is a middle-class reaction to radicalism. It blames the problems of the middle-class (primarily white males) not on capitalism or patriarchy but on oppressed groups. For example, it would blame unemployment on people of color and women overrunning white male job fields instead of on capitalists' concern with profit. It would blame rising prices on other countries. The middle-class with its terror of sliding into blue-collar status and its hope of hanging onto its privileges, is often quicker to distinguish itself from lower classes than to identify with them. Fascism promotes mystical ideas of racial purity and revives old mythologies to justify them. Fascism diverts all anti-government and anti-corporation sentiment against liberalism.

The initial fascist structures are anti-labor or anti-ethnic gangs and rightist grass-roots citizen organizations. But historically these groups soon obtain the backing of the most conservative of the industrialists (such as the iron, steel, and mining interests.) These capitalists are less dependent on retail sales and so less worried about alienating large parts of the consumer population (people of color, gays, women.) The retail capitalists on the other hand try to put off absolute repression of radicalism in favor of liberal compromises. They would rather cope with the crisis by buying off the revolution (creating agencies to "assist" minorities and women, funding groups who are working for gradual within-the-system change, giving us media coverage that plays down our radicalism and plays up our reformist gains, e.g. the Betty Friedan myth that women's liberation has already been won.) But as the society polarizes further and further, the liberals have to make a choice. And when violence breaks out between the revolutionaries and the fascists, liberalism is no longer an option. The fascists then may successfully take over the government with the support of the most powerful capitalists.

Fascism creates a stronger more repressive state to keep the people from rebelling. This requires a reorientation of values away from civil rights and toward patriotic duty and self-sacrifice. Fascist ideology makes the state all-powerful over the individual and the individual responsible only to the state. Fascist regimes do away with freedom of the press, the vote, the right to strike and to unionize. Fascism is a kind of ultra-nationalism. It blames the nation's problems on other countries. It promotes militarism.

The fascist state relies on the family to uphold its strict values of obedience. The family under fascism is highly authoritarian. As the workers
are denied rights in the national structure, women (the family workers) are denied rights within the family structure. In fascist Germany women were totally excluded from political organization. The idea of sexual equality was denounced. Under fascism those women who are not openly persecuted are forced back into the home as wives, mothers, socializers of children and sexual servants. To women in general fascism means—on top of the general repression—no options for independence from men. To many women (for example, Jews, lesbians, women of color, and/or disabled women) fascism can mean concentration camps.

It is true that some women who advocate a reign of terror against men call themselves separatists. It is also true that some fascists in Italy and Germany had formerly been socialists. However, after this definition of fascism it should be clear that fascism and separatism (by our definition) are completely opposed. So what are the misunderstandings that have led many people to associate lesbian separatism (and other separatisms) with fascism?

Although separatists are not the only feminists with a belief-system we seem to get the brunt of the criticisms for being too dogmatic. At different times the argument rages in the local and national lesbian press between "personal freedom" and "political correctness." Some women defend their freedom to wear dresses or be friends with men against what they consider regimentation. (The point here is that radical feminists a few years back had to fight for the right to wear pants and separate from men. Therefore, to make the right to wear dresses the issue seems diversionary at the very least.) The term "political correctness" is an easy way to dismiss any set of feminist standards as being rigid and moralistic. Feminism does not just mean support for women in working out personal solutions. Feminism is not and hopefully will not become a branch of the hip psychology movement. Feminism is a whole new system of values which suggests new ways of acting in the world. And it is a system of values that is based on the aim of freeing women. Advocating a value-system is not at all the same thing as dictating one. Developing an ethics oriented toward political change is not the same thing as setting up a static moral code. Trying to collectively build a sense of responsibility for fighting oppression is not the same thing as giving orders. Propaganda (that is, an attempt to convince other women of what you believe is in all of our interests) is not the same thing as psychological manipulation.

Feminists need to quit concentrating on criticizing and defending individual lifestyles and start studying how to attack patriarchy. When women actually make strategies, it becomes a lot
clearer which ways of life fit with those strategies. But these days (late seventies, early eighties) we are trying to treat a loose community of individuals who are busy self-improving or just surviving as if it was a movement acting toward agreed-upon goals. Arguments about lifestyles seem to fill the political vacuum. In fact, feminists don't have much sense of how any of our lifestyle innovations are part of concrete tactics for ending the oppression of women.

The belief of fascists in biological inferiority is an opposite thing from anger at an oppressor group, an anger that is appropriately expressed in violent slogans and actions. Women have good reasons to hate men. As women assaulted and battered by their male "protectors", as rape victims, as the most exploited workers, we have a right to direct our violence individually and collectively at those who keep us down. Revolutionary violence is different from the violence of the owners of property and the owners of women. We are enraged by the idea of mass or individual murder of men for being men. We are strongly opposed to the rejection of any group based on the idea that the group is inferior. Though there are certainly biological differences between men and women, some of which may affect general personality traits, biological differences do not imply biological inferiority or superiority. There are biological differences between different races, ages, species of animals, and this doesn't make one age or race or species inferior to another. (We are including humans among animals here.) The point is that historically men have been shits. Shits to women and shits to each other and shits to the earth and sky and water. Our anger against men is based on history not on biology. Men are not compelled to oppress us by their hormones. They oppress us in order to protect their position in the world.

The rest of this paper is our answer to the third accusation, that separatists ignore other oppressions by prioritising sexism.

PART THREE

ALL OPPRESSIONS

This last section of the paper is about the relationship of sexism to other oppressions. We discuss why women need to prioritize feminism rather than fighting for recognition in other movements. We talk about how women can be stronger in a feminist movement that is working to end all oppression. We discuss how the feminist movement has failed to incorporate struggles against racism, classism, anti-semitism, ageism, and fat oppression. How men oppressed in any way don't belong
in the feminist movement. We base our separatism on the belief that we can and must fight all oppressions affecting women with feminist principles and feminist organizations.

The following sections are to be looked at as examples of the interplay between feminism and the fight against oppressions other than sexism. We haven't discussed all the ways that women are oppressed. The oppressions we've chosen to discuss are ones (not the only ones) which are affecting large numbers of women in the world. They are ones having an impact on the feminist movement right now; the neglect of these oppressions has already been dangerous to the feminist movement. Also, separatists have been criticized for their politics on most of these issues.

It is true that the feminist movement in the U.S. in the last decade has been dominated by middle-class W.A.S.P. 20-35 year olds. For a host of reasons: among them: women without age race or class privilege are treated oppressively in a great number of ways by privileged feminists; it hasn't been made clear by feminists (including the feminist media) that feminism means fighting for the liberation of all women and that all women need to be working for feminism; male-dominated movements who claim the loyalty of some women discourage these women from participation in the feminist movement; the patriarchal media picks up on W.A.S.P., looks-, age-, and class-privileged women and so feminism is advertised as concerning only these women.

Lesbian separatism reflects all this. Separatists have continued to make the same mistakes. It is not because the idea of female or lesbian separatism is innately oppressive that it's been dominated by women with more privilege, though this is often given as the reason. Separatists are accused of caring only about sexism and ignoring differences between women. Prioritizing feminism means that you can't ignore differences between women, not if you want any women to be able to be part of a unified feminist movement. It means that you have to build a movement capable of fighting not only sexism but all other oppressions suffered by women. The vast majority of women in the world are not oppressed simply as women but also as young or old women and/or Jewish women and/or women of color and/or working-class or poor women and/or fat women and/or disabled women. Moreover, for example, working-class women experience not only more classism than class-privileged women, but also more sexism because of the classism. For example, for a class-oppressed woman the difficulty in getting an abortion is compounded by the difficulty in affording one. And this compounding of oppression holds true for all women oppressed in more than one way.

Too often all the categories of oppression are considered mutually exclusive like statistics in
sociology books instead of realities. You are a lesbian, or you are working-class or you are colored, for example, and you damn well better figure out which so you know which caucus to go to. This way of thinking manifests itself in comments like: "Country-western music is working-class music" when what is meant is white working-class music. Or: "When we women need the Third World then we'll work on our racism and when they need us they'll work on their sexism" as if feminists are all white and the Third World is all men. Asked if we think race and class or class and sex or race and sex are mutually exclusive we say, of course not. But our actions tell a different story.

You can't fight ageism effectively, for example, without fighting sexism since the age experience of girls is all wrapped up with their oppression as females. Conversely working for an end to sexism without working for an end to ageism isn't working for the liberation of age-oppressed women. The same holds true for any women who experience two or more oppressions. A woman oppressed by class and race as well as sex, for example, can't split herself among three separate movements each of which will recognize only one part of her oppression. To date there is no movement that seriously and militantly fights all oppression. We want the feminist movement to become such a movement. But this is not the case right now. Different oppressions are treated as separate fights. This reinforces the idea that oppressions are single entities with no relationship to each other. We've got to change this if we want to include the fight against all oppressions in the feminist movement. A feminism that categorically excludes some women can never succeed. The most common reason given by feminists for why some women can't be feminists is that feminism is a luxury not a survival issue. As if all women's survival isn't dependent on how we're treated as women. (For the woman who has everything: liberation.)

If the fight against sexism were the only thing going on in the feminist movement then it would become a movement opposing the power of men over only W.A.S.P. class-privileged age-privileged, et cetera women. We are working to build a multi-racial, multi-national, multi-age movement that is non-oppressive and directs confrontative energy outward toward fighting the oppressions that women suffer. One of the mistakes of separatism, lesbian-feminism, and feminism in general is that in fighting oppressions other than sexism it has been too inward-directed. Certainly we want a movement in which women aren't going to oppress each other. But we're not going to be able to completely quit oppressing each other within the movement as long as we're still living in an oppressive world. It's necessary to actively confront oppression on a societal not just a community
CLASS—OPPRESSION

In this section we talk about classism in the feminist movement, including stereotypes, myths and attitudes related to class. We discuss the ways that women are oppressed differently by class than men. We discuss why a feminist movement aimed at ending classism as well as other oppressions is what we have to work for.

Many feminists came from the New Left (the anti-war, anti-imperialist, and student movements, etcetera). With them they brought a few classist attitudes: 1) that revolutionaries are enlightened intellectuals who represent the interests of the working and poor classes, and 2) that revolutionaries, having excluded working class and poor people by self-definition, should then condescendingly "extend" themselves to them--recruit them, educate them and so on, or 3) on the other hand, that working class and poor people should be hailed as the vanguard and expected to be oracles of political truth. These attitudes have been acted out by middle class women in radical and lesbian feminist groups.* They sound like "And now let's hear what one of our working class sisters has to say" or "We have to do something to make our middle-class movement relevant to the needs of the working class women out there." The fact is that despite classism, lots of working-class women (mostly white) have been involved in the feminist movement from the start.

Middle-class background women have often assumed that the other women around them in the women's movement are middle-class too or at the very least middle class identified. It's a myth put out by anti-feminists but accepted by many feminists that "real" working-class women can't afford to be and aren't feminists. This myth is supported by stereotypes of what a working-class or poor life is. It is not classist to expect feminism from working-class or poor women. Rather it is classist not to. It is classist to consider these women (who are most women) only as objects of special outreach programs instead of as actual or potential participating members of feminist groups.

Radical and lesbian feminists have sometimes been over-confident of our democratic and non-hierarchical group structures. Even within collectivist structures a lot of class hierarchy can exist—for example, in the way that factions are formed, the way propaganda is put out, the way a group is

*This section primarily discusses the classism practiced by middle-class women because they are the most significant group of class-privileged women in the feminist movement. (Upper-class women comprise only a small percentage of feminists.)
made accessible and/or accountable to women outside it.

Additional classism came with the development of lesbian-feminist culture because it borrowed so greatly from the counter-culture at large. The hippie and post-hippie sub-cultures had related to white and colored working-class and poor cultures by romanticizing them, taking a few customs from them, and remaining ignorant about them. The lesbian-feminist subculture did this too with white women trying to recreate "matriarchal" lifestyles of Native Americans or Africans and middle-class women getting working-class jobs for periods of time or living in working-class neighborhoods with the idea of enriching their own identities. Downward mobility has become one way that many middle-class background feminists try to avoid responsibility for their class-oppressive behavior. But downward mobility doesn't necessarily change your basic attitudes and habits, though it will probably teach you something about working-class reality. Downward mobility often brought with it a classist value-system. For example, the idea of getting "good" jobs—that is, high-paying skilled (like carpentry) rather than "degrading" jobs (like house-cleaning or clerical work). The contempt for any traditional women's work and the glorification of the male trades. It is sexist as well as classist to put down traditional women's work. Besides, downward mobility is a very real situation for many women. Getting disabled, having kids (particularly single motherhood), getting fat, getting older, all contribute to downward mobility where there is no choice involved. Survival also means trying for the most bearable decent paying job you can without selling out your politics. It is classist and sexist to insist that women stay in women-only job fields and not try for better-paying jobs.

The following are some examples of classism directed at working-class lesbians by middle and upper-class lesbians. A working-class lesbian was talking about how impossible it is for some women to change their work situations. A middle-class woman responded by saying that if she really wanted to change her life she could walk 50 miles and get another job. An upper-class lesbian claimed that she had little in common with a working-class lesbian who "is mostly interested in working-class kinds of things like watching T.V. and going to bars and drinking." An upper-class lesbian tried to prove she wasn't classist by claiming, "I may not be working-class but my best friend is working-class and she wouldn't be friends with anyone oppressive."

In analyzing classism among feminists there has been a lot of glib stereotyping along the lines of "working-class women are more direct" or "middle-class women are better verbalizers" or "politeness is a middle-class value" or "middle-class women
have more self-confidence." These assertions lead in turn to a set of easy "solutions" to classism such as "middle-class women should shut up" or "it's right-on to interrupt someone mid-sentence" or "any idea that sounds educated is middle-class bullshit" or "violence is a more honest way of expressing anger than trying to reason." It's necessary to understand how given attitudes and habits are class-related--particularly necessary when they are oppressive or based on privilege, but generalizations can be more obscuring than revealing. What is class-related in middle-class women is not necessarily oppressive and what is class-related in working-class or poor women is not necessarily desirable.

Class values in this country and some others tend to be diffused. There are people who fall into each class in an economic sense who identify with another class in a cultural sense. The media bombards everyone with a given set of middle-class values. Most class-related attitudes are not consistent across the class. For example, attitudes about money are usually class-connected. But that doesn't mean that if you know someone's class background then you can predict her attitudes about money. A middle-class woman might have been taught that she can get somewhere by saving money. Or she might be careless of her money because she never quits feeling financially secure regardless of her savings. A working-class woman might feel like she may as well spend her money whenever she gets any since getting it or not getting it seems out of her control. Or she might have learned frugality as a means of survival or upward mobility. None of this cancels out the need to figure out when a specific behavior is class-oppressive or based on class privilege. But it complicates the process.

Poor and working-class women are oppressed differently by class than men are. For example, men have more access to upward mobility than women do. Women usually have less status in their jobs, receive less pay, and are less likely to get interesting jobs than men are. In every country in the world there is a division of labor by sex where women have a whole different kind of jobs. If a woman is married she derives much of her class status from her husband and only as long as she remains married to him. All of these factors contribute to a very different and more class-oppressive experience for women.

Feminists need to study the class structures of all economic systems instead of concentrating almost totally on capitalism. Identifying capitalism as the enemy does not relate to all the women in the world who remain oppressed living in non-capitalist systems. It is true that capitalism dominates the world economy and has altered class structures all over the world. But we cannot simply attack the capitalist class system, since
class predates and goes deeper than capitalist relations. No existing structure has ended classism in general or class oppression specifically directed at women. There are class structures in socialism (as it exists today), feudalism, tribalism. Our ignorance of these is not only oppressive to women who live in other economic systems but limiting to our own perspective on oppression in general. What do we say to a woman who experiences classism not to mention sexism within a socialist country? "Well we'll worry about your problem when it becomes our problem, that is after our socialist revolution"? What could be more divisive? We would do better to concern ourselves with her problem now in order to avoid repeating it over and over and over.

RACISM

There is a great difference between separatists and the left (especially anti-imperialists) on how to fight racism. Separatists are often accused of a racist refusal to support liberation movements of people of color. As feminists we think it's tokenistic to support movements of color by uncritically backing up what they are doing or saying. Tokenism means in part trying for a good record on the issues. ("We co-sponsored five politically correct events last year," etcetera.) It is necessary to know what movements of color are doing about racism. But it is more necessary to all women women to come up with original actions against and analysis of racism than to back up or participate in what male-led movements of color are doing. The best "support" is initiative. Actions can be: articles, forums, leaflets, demonstrations, sabotage, confronting racist situations on all levels. Women need to be developing analysis of racism that is integral to feminist analysis. Most importantly, we need to be working toward building a race-integrated feminist movement that would be able to fight racism.

Male-led movements of color have been aimed mostly at ending racism against men. For instance, a movement that opposes forced sterilization as a violation of colored men's "right" to a patrilineal continuation of "their" race but not as a violation of colored women's right to control their bodies is obviously oriented from its core toward men more than women. So is any movement that holds onto the tradition of women as the property of men. These politics are sexist. In many cases the sexism is too much of an integral part of the politics for us to support any part of their politics while criticizing the sexism. For example, basic to the politics of much of the Black Power movement in the U.S. in the sixties was the idea that Black men must get back their "manhood" that is their "rightful" power over and superiority to
Black women. The National Indian Brotherhood of Canada only belatedly supported the July 1979 100-mile Native Women's Walk to Ottawa protesting the status of Native women. The men would support it only after the women were told they could meet with the new minister of Indian Affairs, that is, only after it had gained the attention of media and government. Any politics that wants to keep women in the role of raising revolutionary fighters is a patriarchal politics. Any politics that continues to deny women's right to live and act separately from men is a patriarchal politics.

The same criteria go for the revolutionary governments of the Third World. We support the ousting of U.S. puppet-supported governments, for example, in Chile (1970-1973) and Nicaragua, but we don't support the replacement of these regimes with patriarchal governments. Third World nationalist patriarchy is still patriarchy and sometimes oppresses women horribly. We aren't talking about an across-the-board condemnation of anything men take part in, but a determination to resist the kind of control shown in the following examples: Che, working for Batista's downfall in Cuba didn't want women in the guerilla army because he didn't want the men to be fucking when they should be fighting. In Angola after the women's army worked for Angolan independence, 300 of them were jailed by the new regime. In Iran (spring, 1979) women demonstrators were attacked with knives and accused of being SAVAK agents for protesting Khomeini's withdrawal of rights for women. Women's support of Khomeini's revolution didn't mean the revolution's support for the rights of women. We need to support women for making feminist demands within non-feminist movements even though we believe the way for women to free ourselves is through creating an international feminist movement.

Anti-imperialists think racism is a more urgent problem right now than sexism. And often they interpret the right of women of color to defend themselves as the right of women of color to defend "their people" from white imperialism. A woman from the African People's Socialist Party said that the Dessie Woods case is not a women's issue. And at the Seattle Strong Women's Conference workshop on rape, a woman from the Prairie Fire Organizing Committee stated that when a white woman is raped it's an assault on herself but when a woman of color is raped it's an assault on a whole people. This denies the possibility of all women identifying as a group. This view of the rape of women of color by "white imperialism" also puts this (definitely female) experience into terms that don't include the oppression of women of color as women. It implies that women of color are mostly oppressed by white men and the white system—and implies that any men of color who oppress women of color are doing so only as agents of white imperialism. In reality who mostly is
sexist to women of color is men of color, just as who mostly is sexist to white women is white men. (Especially in the cases of rape and marriage.) Anti-imperialists seem to dismiss the sexism of men of color as an imitation of white culture which will disappear with the restoration of Third World cultures, or else to tolerate this sexism as necessary to the new dignity of men of color. The first point overlooks the fact that patriarchy preceded white imperialism. It forgets the fact that the Native American and African cultures had a form of patriarchy before the first white missionary/mercenary ever arrived. As for the dignity of men of color, men will have to find a definition for themselves that does not involve the degradation of women. Anti-imperialists seem to have decided that women of color's people are men of color. But someone who is oppressed by race and sex has at least a few possibilities for who to identify with first: people of color, women of color, or all women.

In many ways, women of color have more in common socially and economically with white women than they do with men of color. Women of color's exploitation in the family and at work outside the home is worse than white women's but it is totally different in kind from the exploitation of men of color. Like the vast majority of white women, women of color still do unpaid and more or less compulsory labor in the home, as mothers, housekeepers, sexual servants. The sexual division of labor is cross-racial and cross-cultural; for most women working outside the home, what's available is service-type jobs. Women of color's pay and working conditions in these jobs is worse than white women's (as a group) but much worse than men of color's. Affirmative action quotas in general call for hiring 1/3 white men, 1/3 minorities, 1/3 women. Women, but especially women of color are greatly underrepresented by these guidelines, first because women of color are hired to fill quotas for the woman category rather than for the minority category, and also because women of color will usually lose the jobs to white women on account of employers' racism.

Most women of color in the world live in extreme poverty and under extremely sexist conditions, and often in imperialized countries. Thirty million girls throughout northern and eastern Africa undergo some form of genital mutilation. An Egyptian woman estimates that even though it is technically illegal in Egypt, 90% of rural Egyptian women have clitoridectomies. It is considered outrageous for a woman to be alone on the streets in many places—in Tehran (in Iran) women going to work in the early morning are continually attacked if they can't find a male escort. In many countries if a man kills his wife, sister, or daughter because she slept with another man he will usually not be prosecuted. A woman killing a man for similar reasons
gets the death penalty. In Iran in 1972 the illiteracy rate for men was 53%, for women 75%—in rural areas 8% of women are literate, 32% of men are. In most countries that are just starting to industrialize, 25% of women are in the work-force, that is work other than cottage industries, housework, and farmwork (as opposed to much higher for men.) Only 5% of Middle-Eastern women are in the work-force. In Saudi Arabia this statistic is 1%, Iran 11%, Egypt 3%, Algeria 2%. Of course, when women do enter the work-force they pay for increased independence with an extra shift of low paid work under awful conditions. For most women of color in the world, life is much harder than for most white women. Women in any country or culture are always worse off than, and oppressed by, the men of that country or culture. Conditions for women of color are conditions suffered as women. And this is the basis for all women uniting in a movement to work for women's freedom.

But so far, white women have not made better allies for women of color than have men of color. White feminist attempts at fighting racism have often been inward-oriented, working on changing their own guilt feelings, competing with each other over who can be non-racist, or coming up with endless justifications for and/or guilty analyses of their own racism—or picking an individual woman of color to be friends or lovers with and to quote as an authority on racism. These processes ease or sometimes increase anxieties about being white but they do nothing to end the oppression of women of color. White feminists need to stop excluding women of color from feminism so that we can develop a feminist analysis of racism.

Too often when white women try to orient the feminist movement toward women of color, they orient it toward straight women. Which usually means: inviting men to events and talking less about lesbianism. A reason often given (for example, at the Strong Women's Conference and in a Seattle interview with two white women from Olivia Records) for why the feminist movement should be oriented toward straight women is that only then would it be able to draw women of color. This is a special slap-in-the-face to lesbians of color, and a statement of non-support to any feminists of color. It is offhandedly assumed that women of color are not only straight but strongly and necessarily linked to men. A white member of Prairie Fire Organizing Committee in Seattle remarked in a workshop at the Strong Women's Conference that the family is very important to women of color.

The left (among others) has focused on protecting the family in cultures of color. It is definitely oppressive for the state to force Native American children to go to school and foster homes off the reservations. Or for women under apartheid in South Africa to be prevented from leaving the homelands to work in cities or to join their husbands.
in the cities (the government doesn't want to encourage a stable Black population in the cities.) But it is also necessary to fight the family as an institution for the oppression of women. We have to fight for the right for women to control who we live with and are connected with. We can't support the state or individual men having that right. So, coming out of the mouths of radicals, or coming out of the mouths of right wingers who want women in the home under the male thumb--support for the preservation of the family is support for the preservation of sexism and heterosexism. When basic principles of feminism are put aside in order to give support to movements led by men of color, then all women but particularly women of color are betrayed. It is also inconsistent for lesbians who find lesbianism important to their own feminism to deny its importance to the feminism of other women.

The argument over racism between separatists and anti-imperialists (and other leftists) is going on because feminists have managed to take our cues from patriarchy and separate the fight against racism from the fight against sexism. This forces women of color and white women into isolation from each other, and fatally weakens our movement. The separation of the two fights is clear in almost every event (which isn't many) in the feminist community that has anything to do with fighting racism at all.

One example which points up all the harm of this separation was at the Berkeley Women's Music Collective concerts in 1977. The band played two nights, once for women and once for a mixed audience. The sponsors arranged it so that the money from the women-only concert went to the musicians, while the money from the mixed concert went to Yvonne Wanrow's defense fund. This way women were made to choose between supporting Yvonne and listening to lesbian music without men present. Having to choose between supporting women's right to fight back against racism and sexism and women's right to women-controlled and identified gatherings meant for many of us pitting one part of our politics against another when they belong together.

This was a minor event in itself but it's part of a trend to treat the separate women's movement only as a space where women can support each other and create alternative culture, while the actual political confrontation of oppression, especially racism, is supposed to take place in movements with men. The subtle message is that women-oneliness is okay for cultural events but not for seriously fighting racism and sexism. Women-oneliness is more than a prop for women's culture--it is not a shelter from reality, nor is it only a comfort. It is a political right and an organizational tool. It helps us develop a politics that is clearly our own and based on our own needs and hopes. It's important to make the women's movement itself a force for fighting racism, sexism and other oppressions.
in the world (as opposed to only within the community.)

The concerts were set up so that women as a group couldn't show support for a woman of color. Once again women are told: either support/join up with a sexist Third World movement or a racist women's movement. We can only lose by continuing to treat sexism and racism as separate issues to be separately fought. Even in a case like the Bakke decision that so clearly affects all women as much as men of color, the struggles are not united. The slogan went "Fight Bakke, Fight Racism." What about sexism? The affirmative action lawsuits directed at all women colored and white were just waiting in the wings for Bakke to win. Every time feminism is ignored in a fight against racism or anti-racist principles are sidestepped in a fight against sexism, women of color lose out.

A lot of left-leaning lesbians, especially anti-imperialists, have separated the struggle against racism from the struggle against sexism (while including both under a "progressive movements" umbrella) and have sacrificed the second to the first. They seem to think, as so many still do, that as the victims of sexism, they/we have the right to put up with sexism if we choose. We have no such individualistic right, since sexism is turned against all women. So anti-imperialists, while prioritising racism, have treated sexism as an internal contradiction only and have fought sexism far less militantly than racism. A lot of feminists (including a lot of separatists) on the other hand have made a similar mistake in treating racism as an internal issue to be dealt with only within the feminist movement, if at all, and in trying to reform the racism only out of ourselves and the community. This is an error in emphasis. As feminists we do need to work on our racism and to confront others' racism. But we have a tendency to point up the racist details in our own and each others' daily lives, instead of figuring out ways to take action as feminists on racism in the rest of the world.

ANTI-SEMITISM

Jews have been scapegoated and oppressed for thousands of years. Widespread anti-semitism exists around the world. Half the world population of Jews (12 million before 1939) was wiped out during World War II. Yet many people believe that Jews never had it so good. Others argue whether anti-semitism should even be recognized as a valid oppression. These same attitudes have existed in the feminist movement. It is only within the past couple of years that feminists (mostly Jewish) have been organising and participating in actions to combat anti-semitism.

With the exception of Israel Jews have been treated as outsiders of the cultures they have
lived in since the Diaspora. The Diaspora (from the Greek, meaning to scatter or disperse) began when the Jews were exiled out of the Middle East during Babylonian times. This marked the beginning of a period which was to go on for thousands of years as Jews were persecuted and kicked out of place after place. Many Jews originally went to Europe, Africa, and other areas of the Middle East but over time Jews have settled all over the world. Because of this Jewish people are made up of many different races and cultures--Black Jews, Chinese Jews, or Arab Jews to name some. Most of the Jews in the U.S. are Ashkenazic (of Eastern European descent) and have white skin. The U.S. has the largest population of Ashkenazic Jews of anywhere in the world. But it was Sephardic Jews (Jews of Spanish and Portuguese descent) who were the first Jews to immigrate to the U.S.*

Although Jews have been traditionally scapegoated and oppressed by many of the same people (for example the KKK) who oppress people of color, the experiences of anti-semitism and racism are not interchangeable. Jews of color continue to experience more oppression than Ashkenazic Jews because they are oppressed by racism as well as by anti-semitism. We also do not view anti-semitism as the same thing as the oppression of white ethnic minorities in this country.

As with all other oppressions it is Jewish women who are more oppressed than Jewish men, as well as oppressed by them. Jewish women are stereotyped as loud, doting, overprotective Jewish mothers, as pampered Jewish Princesses, as faithful wives and providers. Jewish women were oppressed by Jewish men, for example, in the late nineteenth century in this country. Jewish women worked in the sweat shops and besides enduring horrible, unsafe working conditions, these women suffered sexual harassment on the job, were paid less than the men, and after working ten hours a day six days a week, went home and were expected to take care of men. A more contemporary example of a Jewish man using sexism and anti-semitism against Jewish women is a male drag queen recently in Seattle who calls himself the Jewish Mama.

There are several reasons why some Jewish lesbian-feminists have been closeted for so long about being Jewish. One reason is simply because of the anti-semitism prevalent in the lesbian-feminist movement as well as in the world. Jewish feminists are treated much the same way Jews are treated everywhere. They aren't liked and trusted; they are stereotyped as being loud, obnoxious, pushy, aggressive, intense, over-friendly or on the other hand, passive and non-verbal. They are

* In 1960 there were 11 million Ashkenazim, a million and a half oriental Jews (Middle Eastern), one-half million Sephardim (Spanish and Portuguese) and 15 thousand Falashas (Ethiopian Black Jews).
chided for trying to take over meetings, for being too smart or too stupid. Then they are accused of trying to "Jew someone down." They are assumed to be rich and have control of the economy. They are assumed to be educated and working in professional jobs. They are believed to be liars, cheaters, and stealers. They are seen as perpetual complainers. All of these are anti-Jewish stereotypes that continue to make it difficult for Jewish feminists to be Jewish-identified. The real differences are simply ignored and Jewish feminists are encouraged to blend in.

Another reason Jewish lesbian-feminists have been closeted for so long is because of all the internalized hatred they have of themselves. Many of them learn to assimilate. Particularly in places where there aren't a lot of Jews. By assimilating they give up their identification of the things they respect in themselves that are Jewish. And lesbian-feminists have assumed that identifying as Jewish meant that you were identifying with a patriarchal religion. It is wrong to reduce Judaism to a religion. Interestingly enough, it was considered fine for feminists trying to create matriarchal religion to borrow Christian rituals such as in the connection between Christmas and winter solstice. (We don't know any women who exchange presents on summer solstice.) One Jewish lesbian sums it up:

I take pride in my Jewish heritage, and I am tired of hearing women dismiss Jewish identity as "oppressive" and "patriarchal" without knowing anything about it. I am tired of feminist books that sum up all Jewish thought in that one stupid prayer, "Blessed art thou...who did not make me a woman," that has probably been invoked more times in this decade by Christian women to condemn Judaism than by Jewish men to thank God.16

Another reason some did not readily identify as Jews was because of their involvement with the left. Anti-semitism in the left is not a phenomenon created by the American left. It is rooted in history. The left's history of anti-semitism can trace some of its roots back to the ideas of Lenin, Marx, and Stalin. Although many leftists may not personally agree with Lenin, Marx, and Stalin's views on Jews, their impact in shaping many anti-semitic ideas currently endorsed by the left is undeniable.

Lenin opposed the Bund* on the basis of its na-
tionalism and separatism insisting that it was an obstacle in the development of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party which was intended to unite the proletariat into one mass movement to oppose Czarist autocracy and the capitalist ruling class. Inherent in Lenin's ideas was the concept of "amalgamation" which meant the assimilation of national minorities and the eventual fusion of nations. He said: "The best Jews, those who are celebrated in world history and have given the world foremost leaders of democracy and socialism, have never clamored against assimilation." Marx's views about the Jews were based on two erroneous ideas. First, that all Jews were members of one class—the bourgeoisie. And second, that the Jews were responsible for the rise of capitalism. He said: "What is the worldly cult of the Jew? Bargaining. What is his worldly god? Money." Stalin's belief that Jews weren't entitled to a state is rooted in his analysis where he attempts to prove that they are not a people and not a nation. He bases this in part on the fact that Eastern-European Jews in the early twentieth century occupied no common territory.

It is easy to understand how an atmosphere got created in the left where one was supposed to shut up about being Jewish and where Jewish presence in Israel was in question. It was never just a matter of the left's criticism of Jewish nationalism (note the support by the left of nationalism of other oppressed groups including Palestinians). We (the writers) are in disagreement about whether or not any state should be ethnically defined but we do agree that both Jews and Palestinians should be able to live unoppressed in the Middle East and elsewhere.

What follows are some examples of anti-semitic things that have happened to Jewish lesbians in Seattle. A Jewish lesbian was talking to her friend about the movie The Battle of Chile. Her friend described all the horrors going on in Chile and then said that what was going on in Chile made the Jews look like they got a good deal. Two Jewish lesbians were eating in a Jewish delicatessen in Seattle. A large group of men and women were sitting at the next table. Some friends came up to the large group, talked for awhile, and as they were leaving raised their hands and said Heil Hitler. Other Jewish lesbians have friends who when they find out they are Jewish say, Oh where did which they saw as the culture of the masses of Jews. As Bundists saw it, Jewish identity would happen even in a classless society by the institutional right of the Jews to run their own social and cultural affairs. The Bund first joined, then left, then rejoined the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party. In 1921 it dissolved with part of its membership joining the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks).
you grow up, New York? Do you like bagels and lox? Is it true that some Jews don't have big noses? Jewish lesbians have also been told, don't complain you've got it good here, after all, there's no holocaust happening in the United States. Another lesbian was told: "You're Jewish? You don't look Jewish." Jewish lesbians have also had to listen to anti-semitic comments about or to Jewish men being passed off as criticisms of their sexism. Like when a non-Jewish woman said to a Jewish man, we're going to put all the men in camps. Here you are identifying with this woman for her feminism and she turns around and uses her supposed feminism to voice her anti-semitism.

FAT OPPRESSION

Separatists haven't to date been called fat-oppressive for refusing to work with or relate to fat men. In Seattle this is probably partly because it has been primarily separatists who have been most vocal about fat oppression. In fact most of the work that's been done on fat oppression has been done by women. There is no existing sex-integrated anti-fattist movement; there is no insistence by patriarchy that fat women and fat men belong together; there are no ghettos in which fat women and fat men belong. In these ways, the fight against fat oppression differs from the fight against racism and other oppressions. Partly for these reasons, no one has bothered to accuse separatists of fat oppression. Separatists don't think fat women (or thin women) need to work with fat men to fight fat oppression, and, in this case, no one challenges this opinion.

Part of it is also that the existence of fat oppression has rarely been recognized.* But just take a look at media portrayal of fat. When was the last time you saw a movie or ad in which a fat woman wasn't shown as obscene, evil, or funny? Look at the upsurge of weight loss clinics, health spas. Look at the quantity of advertising for diet foods, diet beer, diet pop. Doctors invariably diagnose fat as a disease. Doctors often are insistently on weight loss before operating on a person. Look at the ridicule fat people get for even attempting to do any sports; look who mostly jogs around the reservoir. Fat is billed as unhealthy. But inspite of the quantities of crap you hear about fat causing heart diseases, high blood pressure, hypertension, etcetera, etcetera, inspite of insurance companies' assumption that fat people are a higher risk (which employers use as an excuse

* The examples of fat oppression in this paper are from current U.S. culture. In some cultures fat has been valued as a sign of wealth or health. In the U.S. it is currently fashionable to be very thin.
to not hire fat people), the truth is that no disease has ever been proved to be caused by fat. It is instead dieting that is unhealthy. How many people died from that liquid protein drink last year? How many suffer colitis from the low-carbohydrate diet? How many are weak and sick and self-hating from starving themselves? How many are poisoned from diet pop and artificial sugar? How many have been killed or made permanently sick from the intestinal bypass operation (in which they remove most of the small intestine, decreasing absorption of nutrients into the blood)? Not to mention that all these diets and cures are about 99% ineffective. A chapter title in one of the hundreds of diet books reads: time on your hands is food in your mouth. It recommends you keep yourself so busy you have no time to eat. (As if food is an addiction--preposterous! Of course eating is an addiction--sort of like breathing.)

The question we finally ask is: what is it to them? Why do they care if you're thin? What do the doctors care? What do the sports people care? What do the employers, clothes manufacturers, advertisers, book publishers care? The first answer you get from any of them is concern for your physical and psychological well-being (which you know has got to be bullshit.) The second clearer answer you get is that they're making a mint off it! Take a look at the money they're making off women who torture themselves with diets and girdles so as to survive in personal or job relationships with men. Then take a look at the money they save by not dealing with the space needs of anyone of any size other than the statistically average size for an adult male. If you're too little and/or a child, or if you are too big, you find that restaurants, movie and bus seats, cars, office furniture, bathtubs, turnstiles, clothes in most stores--don't fit you. But then again they'll find ways to make a mint off anything--even fat if it was the fashion. So take a closer look and see their true interests. Fat oppression keeps women worried about having something wrong with them--keeps women weak from dieting, encourages being geared towards pleasing men in order to get jobs or money or status, or to get or keep relationships with men. It is supposedly women's fault if they can't fit the standard woman image that men use as a measure in deciding how they will treat women.

Women and men are affected differently by fat oppression. Women in the first place are supposed to be smaller than men. Standards of attractiveness are much narrower for women than for men. Feminists recognize that size and beauty standards for women are set up by men and don't allow women to feel at ease with their bodies or looks. On the basis of how well women measure up to male standards (or can afford or fit into the expensive fashionable clothes that are part of the image but
only come in small sizes) men can hire or
to advertise: waitress wanted, fits size 8 to 14 uniform.
Stewardesses have strict controls put on their
size too. For instance, United Airlines insists
you be 5'2" to 6' in height with weight "in propor-
tion" meaning that if you're 5'3" you can't weigh
more than 126 and still be a stewardess. No wonder
the little work that has been done to fight fat
oppression has been done by feminists.
But feminists and the lesbian sub-culture can't
claim to be free of fat-oppression. Some lesbians
with background in the counter-culture natural
foods movement carry with them anti-fat attitudes
about what a healthy body is supposed to look like.
The Amazon warrior image is a little less confining
than this, but still excludes fat women (also
short women and disabled women.) Some women call
dieting "reclaiming our rights to our own bodies." Our rights to control of our bodies is a theory
set up to keep women from being oppressed by male
ideas of what we should do with our bodies--support-
ing dieting is a wild mis-application of this
theory.
Some lesbians label all men ugly--using looks-
oppression as a way of expressing anger with men.
Our fight with men doesn't have to do with how they look but with how they treat women.
Lesbians are as capable as anyone else of sup-
porting weight loss as a cure for fat oppression,
of assuming that fat women eat candy bars by the
dozens, of finding fat women "unattractive", or in-
timidating, of stereotyping fat women as slow,
lazy, clumsy. We're sick of hearing "just lost 25
pounds and I feel great"--then, as a P.S., "my body just happens to feel better thinner." The
reason you feel better thinner is because you ex-
perience less fat oppression. Of course, you feel better when you're not getting wise cracks and
guilt trips etcetera. We're also skeptical when
lesbians claim they like fat on somebody else when they dislike it in themselves. The way to overcome
fat oppression isn't by getting thin just like the way to overcome lesbian oppression isn't by being straight.

Fat is a Feminist Issue is a book designed to
catch the eye of feminists and quasi-feminists who
are looking for a feminist answer to the fat ques-
tion. Don't be fooled by the title. Fat is of
course a feminist issue, but this is not a feminist
book. Out of one side of her mouth, the author
seems to be implying we shouldn't be made to feel
bad about the sizes we are--but out of the other
side of her mouth she's giving you this rap about
how to stop being fat. She has this very tricky
pop-psychology line about how women who are fat
are compulsive overeaters who are trying to make
themselves sexually unavailable. Who needs to
hear more crap about how fat women are neurotic?
This book is more of the same old bullshit--worse
maybe because it masks the same old bullshit behind the word feminist. This is a (subtle) fad diet book.

About as far as most feminists have gotten (if they've gotten past the Fat is a Feminist Issue rap) is: arguing with other women over stereotypes and self-image around fat. Most of the articles on fat oppression are about the same arguments. More active things have been: Fat Underground's picketing of T.V. stations airing fat-oppressive ads (in L.A. in 1975); Fat Forum, an educational about fat oppression (Seattle, 1977); the stink-bombing of a gallery where a fat Tuesday poster of a scantily clothed woman was displayed (Seattle, 1978).

AGEISM

The oppression that girls experience on account of age is very different from that of boys. Ageism directed against girls has everything to do with their being female. Boys are valued above girls, as men are valued above women. Most families want to have boys more than girls. It's traditional in patriarchal cultures to be happier over the birth of a son than a daughter.

Girls of any age have much less independence than boys. It's not as safe for girls to be walking on the streets; 99% of child molesters are men--93% of their victims are girls. The streets are male territory. A girl or adult woman unattached to a male is considered the property of all males--girls, like other women, are urged by harrassment and rape to be dependent on males who will in theory protect them from "the bad men." In reality girls, like other women, are more often raped by the males (including boys) who have been billed as their protectors than by the stranger lurking in the bushes.

Boys' use of sex as a weapon of power is called "experimenting with sex." In 1978 a judge ruled that a teenage rapist be set free, because "boys will be boys."

Girls, like adult women, are supposed to serve as sex objects: movie theaters run not only stuff like Deep Throat and your average revolting adult porn but also stuff like Pretty Baby (a film portraying an adult male as victim of a girl seductress, a child porn film trying to pass for a "beautiful", "imaginative" art film, a film that tries to pass off rape as art.) An ad for a girl porn movie in Seattle read: "The girls you love to hurt: how young is too young? 14? 12? 10?" Girls are encouraged to appear weak and passive, essentially to remain in an oppressed child's role, while boys are expected to be strong and "grownup."

* Certainly boys as will as girls suffer from ageism. Adult lesbians can be age-oppressive to boys

102
The main difference in the experience of boys and girls is that at any age, boys as males have power over girls—and not only over girls the same age or younger. They say and do really sexist things to adult women as well—we have all seen boys making fun of and sexually objectifying women's bodies (including girls') just as other men do, or bossing them around as if they expect females to be their servants.

Some lesbians think they can teach boys to be nonsexist. While parents do have influence over a child, it is part of the oppressed role of women as mothers that they have always been expected to be able to turn their children into whatever is required—are held personally responsible for the child's actions and have to feel guilty for being a bad mother if the child does anything out of line. (Witness how some of our mothers felt about our coming out.) The attitudes, behaviors, personality of a child are not only far less easily molded than is generally supposed but are influenced by her/his whole experience, of which the mother's input is only a part. It is especially difficult to instill values in a child that go against what the rest of society is urging. Even if one or two lesbians are urging a boy to be non-sexist, the chances that he will escape being sexist are very slight, since the whole of patriarchy—through media, school, street interactions, etcetera, is urging him to be as sexist as he can possibly be. We can't afford to put our trust in the ability of men of any age to be non-sexist, as long as being male means having power over women.

Patriarchy has set it up so that women practically have to live with brothers, fathers, husbands, sons.** In fact, it's been set up so thoroughly as well as to girls. A lot of adult women find boys less intimidating because they can pull an age or size power trip on them. It is sometimes not easy to see when a comment is legitimately critical of a boy's sexist behavior and when it's ageist. Some anti-boy remarks you hear can be anti-child, e.g. "He's so male--so noisy and demanding." In this case, his energy level might have to do with his age rather than his maleness. Though as already discussed, there are certainly differences in the ways boys and girls act.

**The only times patriarchy makes it easy for a woman not to live with her son is when it declares her an unfit mother. At least 3/4 of lesbian mothers who go to court on child custody cases lose the case—many of them on the grounds of being a lesbian. The state has no right to decide whether a woman gets to live with her children. Though sometimes it can be a better alternative for a child to be living in a foster home if his/her parent(s) are abusive.
that there are virtually no good alternatives for a woman who doesn't want to live with her male child.

In most cases the nearest solution for a lesbian mother who doesn't want to live with a boy is relatives—the boy's father, or grandparents. (Though this often means that a woman, grandmother or stepmother, ends up with the responsibility again, since in heterosexual couples this duty is traditionally the woman's.)

Men raising boys can't be considered a good general alternative. We know how often men are insensitive to others' needs. And so few men are even remotely interested in being nonsexist themselves that the chances of a man raising a nonsexist boy are very slight—especially with the sexist backing of the rest of society. There have been a few groups of men who wanted to support feminism and have tried to do a little childcare—all too often they've ended up offering, for example, two hours of childcare on alternating new moon Fridays.

Separatists have made a mistake in treating the male child issue as if there are any easy alternatives for lesbians with sons. We are outraged with those who seem to advocate categorical violence to boys. "Kill Boys" as a supposed expression of feminist anger is as horribly ageist as "Kill working-class men" would be horribly classist. Why single out men oppressed by age?

There is the possibility of a situation where boys can be disruptive to feminism—for example, where sons of lesbians would start forming anti-lesbian gangs, though this seems far more likely to come from without the lesbian community than from within. But, the major threat to lesbians or to feminism does not come from the few boys who live with lesbians. Because of sexism no woman should be in a position of having to relate in a close way to men of any age. However, the realities of life for women under patriarchal rule mean that mothers of boys usually have no alternatives to living with their sons. Lesbians who want to connect with other lesbians who might have sons aren't going to be able to avoid having at least some contact with these sons.

Boys, like any males, don't belong in the few women-only spaces available. But it has to be possible for women with boys to participate in feminist political work and women-only events. This doesn't mean boys have to be invited. It does mean that we have to provide not only girlcare but also boycare for meetings, events, and actions.* And if

* Some of us think this means that we need to be responsible for finding someone who's willing to do boycare; some of us think this means that we have to be willing to do boycare ourselves when necessary.
we're providing a female-only space for adult women, it's unfair to not also provide it for girls who don't want to or can't attend the event. So we need not just mixed girl/boy care but also a separate space for girlcare.

In the feminist movement when ageism is discussed it is usually around the issue of childcare, or concerns ageism directed at girls and boys usually under age 10. What this has to do with is that the feminist wave of the late 60's and 70's had drawn in mostly 20-30 year olds, some of whom had children but mostly young children. Whole areas of ageism are rarely discussed. If this movement is going to be a movement working for and potentially involving all women, it's going to have to do something about ageism and sexism directed at women of all ages. Significantly ignored are teenage women, middle-aged women (aged around 45-65) and old women (aged around 65 or older).

In the late 60's and early 70's the women's liberation movement attracted a lot of women. Many were women from the youth movement (where you weren't supposed to trust anybody over 30), women from the New Left, women from colleges--most of whom were in their early 20's. Age-privileged women continue to dominate the movement. Partly because issues of ageism and sexism directed at women older or younger than this have rarely been discussed. Partly because teenage or older women were treated in a number of oppressive ways when they did join feminist organizations. Teenage women have been patronized as naive and irresponsible; older women have been treated as conservative, dependent, or tokenized as wise and experienced--both groups perceived by the age-privileged group as "other", not "us".

But there is a definite basis for women of all ages to be working together rather than in mixed male/female anti-ageism movements. Ageism affects women differently from men. The position of age-oppressed women is harder than the position of age-oppressed men. Because of the overlapping of sexism and ageism, conditions for age-oppressed women are more like those of women in general than like conditions for age-oppressed men. In the U.S. 60% of those over 65 and 2/3 of those over 75 are women. Though those over 65 are 10% of the U.S. population, they are 16% of the poor population. (For most people getting older means getting poorer.) Like women in general, old women are poorer than old men. They receive lower Social Security pensions because it is mostly men who have had higher paying jobs and more consistent job records. Only 2% of women in the U.S. get any pension at all. Old women, being perceived as a more vulnerable group are victimized by crime more than old men. Though only 5% of old people live in nursing homes, 3/4 of those who do are women. Statistically you don't get out of a nursing home alive. Average length of stay is two years usually ending in death.
Much of the oppression affecting older women is coming directly from the men they relate to: when men divorce their wives to find younger women, this is not only sexism; this is older men using ageism against older women. Twice as many widowers as widows over 65 remarry: who they're marrying is younger women. Old women are no different from other women in that who oppresses them on a day to day basis (besides bosses) is mostly husbands and boyfriends.

Although not considered technically old, women by age 45 are treated as if this is the beginning of the end of their lives. These are the peak suicide years for women. They have more difficulty than men entering the job market or changing jobs. And yet they are too young to qualify for SSI or pensions and often can't get unemployment benefits. They are not taken seriously; they are referred to as menopausal (for example, see how Edith of "All in the Family" is shown.) They are past the age when women are "desirable." Childbearing is part of patriarchy's definition for the role of women. Women past childbearing age are considered useless when men of this age are often "in their prime." Women are encouraged from menopause on to take estrogen to stay younger. Estrogen replacement therapy has been given as an anti-wrinkle medication to women despite the link between estrogen and cancer.

Teenage women have more mobility and status and privilege than old women and less than women aged 20-40. But the oppression suffered by teenage women has much in common with the oppression suffered by women in general.

Women are tracked into service jobs from an early age. It isn't completely unheard of for a high school woman to take the car mechanics class instead of the sewing or typing class, but it is uncommon, and not encouraged. This means that teenage men get out of school much more prepared for trades jobs than women are, and young women are already being tracked into service or secretarial work.

"Incorrigibility" is a special legal term that is used far oftener for young women than for young men. And reflects patriarchy's differing standards. You can be declared incorrigible if you run away from home, or if your parents don't like what you're doing, or if you get pregnant. Young men are not declared incorrigible for getting women pregnant. Youth homes and juvenile halls are full of young women whose only crime was getting mistreated at home. Young men are allowed much more independence.

These are a few examples of how women are oppressed differently than men by a combination of ageism and sexism--and in ways that women are more likely to be able to relate to than are men of any age. Which means nothing if women aren't willing to put out the energy to understand. If the femi-
nist movement wants to be a movement caring about all women, it needs to care about, analyze and fight the sexism and ageism that happen to age-oppressed women.

CONCLUSION

This paper has been an experiment in collective writing process. Some sections show the results of inevitable political compromises. Other sections are jagged because of our different instincts for form and style. In many places the variety of input has strengthened the paper. We are all dissatisfied with certain parts but believe that the whole is valuable.

We've tried to put lesbian separatism into perspective. To destroy the traces of cultism that cling to its name. To uncover its solid historical roots. To explain its most important tenets. To separate its potential from its mistakes to date. In the beginning of the 1980's feminism seems to be in trouble. We hope this paper will help to clear some of the confused air of the last decade and make it more possible to go forward.
NOTES

1 Olah, Suzie, "Economic Function of the Oppression of Women" Notes from the Third Year
2 Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman" Notes from the Third Year
3 Brooke, Off Our Backs, February 1980
4 Leon, Barbara, "Separate to Integrate" Feminist Revolution, ed. Redstockings, 1975
5 Atkinson, Ti-Grace, "Radical Feminism" Notes from the Third Year
6 Weinbaum, Batya, The Curious Courtship between Women's Liberation and Socialism, 1978, p. 109
7 Firestone, Shulamith, The Dialectics of Sex, 1970
9 Leon, Barbara, "Separate to Integrate" Feminist Revolution, ed. Redstockings, 1975
10 Weinbaum, op. cit., p. 14
11 Ibid., p. 52
12 Ibid., p. 83
13 Ibid., p. 137
14 Jones, Leroi Kawaida Studies
15 Cruse, Harold, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual
16 Bloch, Alice "Scenes from the Life of a Jewish Woman" Dyke, Fall, 1977
17 Lenin on the Jewish Question, 1974, p. 1-19
18 Ibid., p. 110
19 Schenkman, Allon Gal, Socialist Zionism, 1973
20 "On the Jewish Question" Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, 1967, p. 243
21 Urofsky, Melvin, American Zionism from Herzl to the Holocaust
22 Stalin, Joseph, Marxism and the National and Colonial Question. p. 35-45
Feminism First is the second in a series of feminist pamphlets being published by Tsunami Press. We have a few major political goals in publishing this series. We believe in an international and multi-racial feminist movement and want to distribute writings representative of women of different countries, cultures and races. We would like articles that address the economic exploitation of women and explain economic class relationships in differently-developed societies. As part of building a feminist movement, we hope to publish theory, analysis, strategy and speculation specifically about or at least important to feminism and the conditions of women.

We have a direct commitment and priority to publish articles by and about working-class, colored, and non-U.S. women. Through distribution of these pamphlets we hope to make feminist politics available to more than just the predominantly white, English-speaking countries (and sections of this country). We, therefore, intend to publish all of the pamphlets in both Spanish and English.

The feminist movement seems to be at a theoretical and strategic impasse. Projects, single-issue campaigns and newsletters that haven't died are too often disconnected from any clear ideology. This series is a chance for feminist activists to communicate their ideas and possibly strengthen feminist thought.

Still available is Tsunami's first pamphlet, Coming Out Colored, by Maya Chumu, a Chicana-Yacqui lesbian-feminist, who writes about the struggles of lesbians/women of color against: capitalism/imperialism, the devastation of the planet, racism in the feminist movement, sexism in racial liberation movements, and the destructive effects of interracism between peoples of color.