

ON PRIMARY RELATIONSHIPS

When we started talking about dependence in the gay women's group, couple quickly became a bit of a dirty word. A closed circuit, a mutual admiration society. We were all aware - and talking together how could we not be? - that our most important relating wasn't just with one person. And yet it seemed absurd to think we could fuck with all of each other, as things were, or to think that there wasn't some kind of difference with the woman or women we were fucking with. So the term primary relationship replaced the term couple.

A primary relationship doesn't imply property rights. Therefore it doesn't imply that you have to do everything together - like in the 'ideal' long-lasting heterosexual couple the wife is always advised to get in on her husband's activities. It means that each woman has her own autonomy. But we still assumed that primary relationships were inevitably fucking relationships, forgetting that we relate to every one at all times. We redefined sexuality as the energy in all our actions, so that communicating - touching, working together, listening to music together, understanding each other - was the most important thing, and yet we still took it for granted that genital sexuality was somehow the culmination/touchstone/final test of all these things.

At least this is what the woman I'm fucking with and I found. We've known each other for three months, been fucking for two. The idea of a primary relationship seemed to fit what we felt about each other. We accepted intellectually that we could fuck with other people, but that a primary relationship does take work and so time. The most important thing is the development of trust, and this is also very hard, given that we have to shake off patterns of dependence, dominance, withdrawal, unquestioning commitment. Therefore, at least in the initial stages of the relationship, when there is more intensive working out taking place, we felt it was unlikely that we would be able to develop other relationships.

However we started to feel very hassled. We couldn't think of why: we considered spending more time together, spending less time together, talking about it, letting things go their own way, we wondered whether we were being too dependent or playing it too cool. Nothing we said worked - we just felt a big communication gap.

Then we spent a day in the country and discovered: We were putting expectations on ourselves. We were assuming that the relationship already was what it could be. We realised that for both of us there were people we'd known from long before we ourselves met

who were just as important to us as we were to each other, and that a lot of our hassles had come from trying to balance what we saw as opposing claims on us. So weren't these primary relationships too? That started to make nonsense of the whole term "primary relationship". At what point does a secondary relationship become a primary relationship? It started to seem just another way of categorising. We'd been taking it for granted that we should not have ideas based on past patterns or expectations of the future: that we should be living in the present - "This moment is different from any before it." But at the same time we were seeing our relationship as something greater than the sum of our moments of relating. We were assuming that something was created that carried over into the moments when we weren't communicating, either because we weren't in the same place, or because we were hassled. That is, we were hassling ourselves.

So why had we assumed that a fucking relationship had to come first? It was dismally clear that in couple type relationships a woman is expected to leave all others and cleave to her man. Only in this way - by having so many extras built into the sexual relationship - can men keep their unpaid housekeepers, egoboosters, doorsteps, child nurses, table decorations, without any questions being asked. "Being in love", as opposed to loving, is in fact a nice form of slavery. So we'd got rid of the need for role playing, power games etc, but we were still imitating this irrelevant way of acting.

We didn't change what we were doing at all, but our heads definitely changed. We have to break down the sanctity of relationships which involve genital sexuality. We are responding sexually to everyone, whether this involves fucking or not (and indeed between two women it's hard to say exactly what is fucking.) We still have hangups about fucking deeply conditioned into us, but we believe that the primacy of genital sexuality, the idea that it is a consummation, is a male trick. And believing this, jealousy begins to be truly meaningless, precedence in relationships begins to be truly meaningless, fucking begins to become a real part of our lives. There's a lot about these ideas that's a bit terrifying to us. There's a lot more understanding involved.

Jenny & Sue

Sorrento Radicalesbian Conference

July 6-8th 1973

Bisexual women, who have been caught on both sides and in the middle of the heterosexual/homosexual argument, have a unique contribution to make to open discussion on sexuality in the movement. Their experience is nearly as hidden and difficult to weigh as a factor as that of the possibly prevalent asexuality in the movement. Clearly, most women will not become lesbians, but more may experiment with bisexuality under the influence of Women's Liberation (indeed, that is often what they are doing when they have a "lesbian experience"), the most important group yet to speak up in the women's movement on the whole. The topic of sexuality may well prove to be the bisexual women. Given the tendency noted by some observers for some adolescents today to be bisexual or to try bisexuality, and with the opinion forming among some scientists that free of societal restrictions everybody might be bisexual, it is amazing that there is no bisexual caucus in the women's movement. One reason for the omission may be that bisexual women bring out fears of homosexuality in straight women and also fears of heterosexuality in women who live as lesbians.

Sidney Abbott & Barbara Love, Scarpe Man & Right-On Woman, p.156.
published by Stein & Day, N.Y.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- (1) What is bisexuality?
- (2) 'Bisexuality' is frequently considered to be a cop-out; 'the happy medium' label for gays who can't totally admit it, or who try in vain to fit into this middle way category. Bisexuals are cast off as confused people and often not accepted or taken seriously. Is this a fair attitude? Are all bisexuals confused about their sexual identity?
- (3) Considering that the 'cop-out' attitude is fairly wide-spread it shows that the confirmed bisexual is oppressed by both gays (She's gay but does not want to lose male approval) and straights (She's not really 'unnatural', she's just going through a stage! 'Oh she's bisexual. She's all right, she's half normal'). This is borne out by the fact that bisexuals are not a very vocal group in either Gay Liberation or Women's Liberation. Must bisexuals form their own exclusive movement in order to gain acceptance and liberation?
- (4) The idea that bisexuals are simply sex maniacs who don't care who or which sex they sleep with as long as they are turning on, is a prevalent one. Does this myth stem from heterosexual/homosexual people's insecurities regarding emotional involvement with a person who has the capacity to relate fully to both sexes?
- (5) Do bisexuals present a threat for lesbians and women generally?
- (6) What does the bisexual consciousness (experimentally as well as a feminist political ideal) have to offer Gay Liberation & Women's Liberation?
- (7) Both G.L. and W.L. have as their ultimate aim the eradication of sexism i.e. sex role conditioning & all the oppression & discrimination that goes with it. Does the radical bisexual challenge this ideal or are her sexual politics the same?
- (8) Are radical bisexuals attracted only to men who have a feminist consciousness? Do lesbians feel attraction to this kind of man?
- (9) Do bisexuals discriminate against gays and/or straights?
- (10) Many gay people consider that bisexuals should, in view of the struggle against homosexual discrimination, generally call themselves 'gay' rather than use the 'bi-term'. Is this oppressive for bisexuals or will it in the long run change social attitudes towards them?
- (11) Is bisexuality an alternative to our society's dualistic way of thinking which creates the heterosexual/homosexual, male/female, black/white, right/wrong dichotomy?
- (12) In a non-sexist society in which there was no oppression or discrimination on sexual grounds whatever would people then naturally relate to others as people regardless of their sex?
- (13) Is bisexuality an unworkable ideal for the radical/feminist lesbian?

THE RADICALESBIAN CONFERENCE - SORENTO 1975

'What is a lesbian? A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion'. (The Woman Identified Woman)

The radicalesbian is a woman who seizes upon that rage, that point of explosion, and throws it back in the face of society. The radicalesbian is, of course, much more than this. The radicalesbian is also a woman who -

no longer accepts society's stigma
 no longer internalizes feelings of guilt
 no longer believes that all she has done is bad, perverted or unnatural
 no longer represses her lesbian experiences
 no longer 'conceals' herself
 no longer wastes time with psychotherapists (cultural policemen)
 no longer accepts the myth that she is a lesbian 'only in bed'
 no longer plays a role in order to appease heterosexual fantasies

The radicalesbian realizes that her life has simply been different and, for her, beautiful. The radicalesbian sheds her old feelings of guilt, secrecy, anxieties, fears. She realizes that all of that shit belongs to the past and that now her mind is in a different place. Where is her mind?

FACT AND FANTASY

The radicalesbian refuses to accept the false assumptions that:

- (a) because she is not playing her socially assigned sex role that she is not a 'real woman' - whatever that means.
- (b) she is some kind of freak; 'a man trapped in a woman's body' - the most common and oppressive put-down of the lesbian.
- (c) she should be freaked out by the word lesbian. She recognizes that the word has been used and abused by men in an attempt to put down any woman who refuses to suck up to the male ego.
- (d) she is not a person in her own right but simply a sexual being. She understands fully the male myth that the function of all women is that of receptacle; a vessel for babies and penises. She also understands the lie that says that all a lesbian really needs to be made into a 'real woman' is to be fucked by a 'real man'. The radicalesbian refuses to be dehumanized and treated as a sex object by men and sometimes by other women who, because of their own internalized guilt and oppression, play male roles.

The radicalesbian knows that to classify other women into roles (butch - femme) is simply to continue the male classification system of defining people as sex objects and prevents any real love and bonding between women. She understands that role terms are used by men to frighten women who are coming to a realization of their feelings of love and eroticism towards other women. She also understands that women who think of themselves as butch or femme have internalized the male system of classification and are still oppressed by male culture. The butch lesbian may think, for example, that a woman can only love her opposite - a man - therefore she will play at being one. The radicalesbian knows that she must help all women to understand the mechanisms of this male con. She feels that she must be supportive of other women and **GIVE TO THEM HER LOVE, ENERGIES AND COMMITMENT, for the revolution**

The radicalesbian is a woman who loves other women because they are women not because they are imitating the male or female stereotype. The love of the radicalesbian for other women surmounts all artificial boundaries because she knows, or is learning to understand, what all the shit is about. Loving another woman because she is a woman (and of course for other reasons) may sound sexist but until a society exists in which men do not oppress women and love and sexual expression is allowed to follow feelings, until a society exists in which labels such as homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual & asexual disappear the radicalesbian will continue to love women because they are women. The radicalesbian has rejected all forms of male defined political and psychological thinking and who has freed her own psyche from the oppressive demands of patriarchy.

THE RADICALESBIAN AND HER BODY

The radicalesbian demands freedom over her own body. She refuses to be alienated from her own body and emotions. As with many feminists she is trying to 'get her body together' and not think of herself in terms of parts - a result of sexist advertising which dislocates a woman's mind into thinking that she might have a nice smile, for example, but wrinkly skin.

A radicalesbian is a sexually creative being. In his book, Homosexuality: The Psychology of the Creative Process, Rosenfels argues that 'each homosexual is a creator - to the extent that only he/she can determine the type of person he/she will eventually become'. The Body Politic, in a review of Rosenfels' book, wrote that 'the homosexual knows that the strongest weapon which society possesses to undermine the creative identity of each individual is to assign gender roles. The creative psychological growth that is based upon an inner identity, is, especially in modern society, most clearly visible in homosexuality. The homosexual psychic life is not adaptive to socially sanctioned roles but by necessity is, within a homosexually repressive society, creative and, as such, revolutionary'.

The radicalesbian challenges the idea basic to a patriarchal society that women exist for men and that their sexuality can only be defined in terms of response to a male's sexuality. (In this sense she is more of a threat to patriarchy than the male homosexual). She rejects completely the assumption that sexuality is the gift of the male and violates willingly the male-female social contract (nuclear family, consumerism etc.). She understands her own sexuality and sensuality: her clitoris her body. She is able to enjoy sexual relating with other women and should be able to discuss problems of sexuality with her lover - usually a silent topic between men and women. She also understands how to relate to herself - 'masturbation is better than oppressive mating'.

The radicalesbian understands perfectly the miracle of Monique Wittig's hymn to women, The Guerilleres. The following is a brief extract:

The women say that in the feminary the glans of the clitoris and the body of the clitoris are described as hooded. It is stated that the prepuce at the base of the glans can travel the length of the organ exciting a keen sensation of pleasure. They say that the clitoris is an erectile organ. It is stated that it bifurcates to right and left, that it is angled, extending as two erectile bodies applied to the pubic bones. These two bodies are not visible. The whole constitutes an intensely erogenous zone that excites the entire genital, making it an organ impatient for pleasure. They compare it to mercury also called quicksilver because of its readiness to expand, to spread, to change shape.

The radicallesbian understands fully the importance of coming out. Firstly she knows that coming out may/will isolate her. To say 'I am a lesbian' is to stand outside tradition, law, religion, history and society. But only by making herself an outsider has she the chance of becoming a whole human being. ('I am a lesbian 24 hours a day, not just in bed'.) But before a lesbian can become an activist she has first to change herself. Abbott and Love, in Sappho Was A Right-On Woman, write:

Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation meet in the gay Feminist. This woman has declared a break with her past and her life has a new beginning. She has found her divided state unsatisfactory at a gut level and, after much conflict, has come to rely increasingly on her personal values and convictions. She challenges the habit of hiding within herself for the strength to be honest and to take action. Her identity solution gives her courage to step out of line and be counted as an individual.

To transcend her circumstances, she may defy the reality of the present and purposively live openly as though the present were the future. By envisioning and demonstrating a new reality for and with Lesbians, she also creates it.

....
She creates her own future simply by living it'. (p.218-9)

There are many active ways in which a radicallesbian may find a new and positive self image (Gay Liberation, C-R groups, being more socially expressive, wearing lesbian badges, demonstrations, attending Radicallesbian Conferences at Sorrento). The important thing is that the radicallesbian is truly creating her own future by living it.

It is also important for the radicallesbian to realize that commitment to a radical stand comes to each in her own way and in her own time. A radicallesbian must understand that her 'consciousness must never become so "high" that she accuses other lesbians of having no consciousness at all. For each Lesbian knows her own suffering, and that is the seed from which consciousness grows' (ibid, p.235)

The importance of coming out cannot be overestimated. Firstly because the lonely, isolated lesbian, knowing that there are many other lesbians who are proud of their lesbianism, knows she is no longer alone - and may also become radicalized. Secondly, the lesbian who adopts a radical stand is more likely to help expose all of the myths that have been heaped upon lesbians since the greatest myth of all - Adam & Eve. As Abbott & Love point out society expects the lesbian to be bizarre:

'What is bizarre behaviour for anyone else is what society considers normal for the lesbian; what is ordinary behaviour for anyone else is actually what society considers bizarre for the Lesbian' (p.86-7)

It is time that the Lesbian took all of the shit that has been poured on her by straight, male dominated, male controlled society and sent the shit back. IT IS TIME TO TURN THE FAN AROUND. It's time to say, 'Look out straights, I'm a lesbian and I'm beautiful'.

Even before the movement towards radicalization began Sylvia Plath, from her own private anguish, wrote:

Out of the ash
I rise with my red hair
And I eat men like air.

Feminist consciousness and sexuality.

What do we mean by sexuality? In a society which puts sex aside in a separate, private context, which defines sexuality in terms of genital contact, we have to ask this question.

1. We can't say that sexuality is divided up into homosexuality, bisexuality, heterosexuality. This is to suppose that our sexuality can be defined in terms of the gender of the people we relate to! And it is to emphasise, along with sexist culture, the primacy of gender. Sexuality is not a matter of our habits of relating. We all have sexuality - of the same order. We all have energy; we direct it, we define it, we use it - for contact with people, with things, with ideas. Our energy has the potential for expression towards anyone of either sex. But the expression does not define the nature of it. Sexuality flows from inside us and is integral to every one of us.

2. We can no longer go along with the assumption that genital contact is a totally different thing from other contact, whether touching, talking, playing music together, working together, feeling for each other. When I first began relating to a woman I was suffering from a lot of guilt - religious ideas, moral ideas, social ideas. And I was guilty about genital sex in general, not just the fact it was a woman. One thing I remember very clearly was our problem about drawing a line. We decided occasionally, you see, that it was wrong and we wouldn't fuck. We would be warm with each other, close, touch each other - and sometime one or both of us would get turned on. As much as we tried we were totally unable to draw any line between affection and sex - they merged into each other. We could not break through then, but we knew really, that it was all the same thing, all part of a totality which was our response to each other as people. We struggled to refrain from 'sex' (to avoid 'sin') and we found that we had to refrain from contact! to achieve this. All our contact, all our warmth was and is sexual, integrated. No boundaries exist - except in our minds. Sexuality is, simply, energy; and fucking is one medium for the expression of it.

3. Still, a lot of things prevent us from seeing this. We sleep in separate bedrooms, we fuck in bed. The flow of ourselves towards another or others is always interrupted by the conditions we use for fucking. We set it aside in separate, private rooms and we go to them at night. These circumstances are constantly preventing us from integrating our genital expression with the rest of our lives; those circumstances reflect and reinforce the attitudes towards fucking in our minds! And being in bed even sets a pressure to fuck on the situation. We interrupt and categorise our flow towards other people. A place for everything and everything in its place. This is to deny ourselves the chance to respond and be, freely.

So we're saying that sexuality has nothing to do with who you express it with. The question arises: Why are we talking about being lesbian, then. The point about relating is that we can only relate really when we are honest, open and warm - in this society we will, therefore, relate to each other. If honesty and equality are criteria for relating, then it's taken for granted that we will relate to women.

But we have to get rid of the assumption that all you have to do to be a right-on feminist is to fuck with a woman. Nothing is real unless we feel it. To say that an external action is the point is to fall into that old pitfall, to think that what we do is what matters and to suppose that the hidden things, which we may or may not reveal (i.e. our thoughts and feelings) are not important. That's the great con which keeps people guarding the appearances of their actions, the look of the thing. The appearance of something can be in harmony with its motives, the reasons for doing it - but it can be fake. We cannot judge anything by its appearance. Not forgetting that our culture has taught us that it's the external things that matter, from what we own right down to appearing to do the right thing...

Consciousness can be reflected in our actions - but it is not a matter of actions. It's a matter of knowing clearly what we think and feel, of seeing everything for what it is, including the things that go on in our own heads. No false motives, no rationalisations, no dishonesty with ourselves. And from this follows honesty with other people and honest action. Liberation is a process, and no action can be a criterion for progress. Fucking with women is a consequence of that process, but it's not even a guarantee that the process is going on. I know that I fucked with women for about seven years before I began to come to grips with my own dishonesty. I know that it's only in relating to women that I can come to grips with it, but relating

... 2

[Conference Paper]

is the operative word, not fucking.

Robin Morgan says:
Yet I have lain in beds
with some women, yes,
for a variety of reasons
not the least of which,
surprisingly/obviously
was male respect.

But if there is a next time, by god,
it will not be for that
nor will we lie on a plank
in someone's correct political platform,
nor will it be done for abstract female approval
or respect.

Consciousness is the main thing, not fucking with women. Women whose consciousness is changing, we must recognise, may be as far along as any of us who have broken down the barrier to fucking with each other - because that is only one barrier of many. To be a feminist is to be woman-identified, to work with, work for, live with, fuck with women - we cannot isolate fucking all over again, as this culture has done, and suppose that our fucking habits are the main, central, most important part of our changes. One aspect of a total picture. No more genital oncupmanship.

The other assumption which has to be challenged is this: that a woman who does not fuck with women is not a feminist. This kind of criterion runs directly against the whole spirit of feminism. What we are talking about is consciousness and action flowing from consciousness. I related to women sexually for years, and during these same years I put my woman-friends down for being 'hung up on cleanliness', 'prudish', 'narrow-minded'... I still felt more valid when I was with a man; I still sought male approval; I competed with men to be 'just as strong and capable as a man' in male arenas. I defined myself and other women in terms of male concepts - attractiveness, i.e. physical appearance or wit and intelligence. For me the process of becoming woman-identified had a lot to do with how I related to men and most of all to do with how I related to women quite apart from the fucking.

For the first time I became aware of having always treated men in a special way, laughed at jokes whether they amused me or not, listened, listened, listened, no matter how bored, waited for the guy to say when he'd had enough of talking to me, never initiated either talk or the breaking off of it, which is to say I discovered I had always automatically taken great care to please men and to protect their egos from any injury by me. In this way I hoped to get approval, and the validity that goes with it. At the same time I would be willing to join men while they put women down (without identifying with the woman). I agreed with Jan while he said my mother and his wife's mother were the cause of the trouble in our respective families - because they were frigid bitches (dig that). I played the game of being allowed to be a 'great chick' while other women weren't. And, although I did always find it easier to talk to, got close to women I met, I still insisted that women living together were impossible, bitchy, pernickety, claustrophobic, limited - I, of course, preferred to live somewhere with a few men around. When I talked about my women-friends, especially to men, I stressed their limitations, often put them down. One strangely tangible change which suddenly happened about last September was that I stopped speaking and thinking negatively of one woman who'd shared a flat with me, recognised her as the beautiful, warm, person she is, and began to understand her. When I visited Jenny in London one night, a woman living alone in Earls Court came over. I found her, immediately, boring, superficial, conservative and unliberated. Robina found her lonely, isolated, struggling to make contact, and oppressed. The night made a great impression on me; by the time the sister from Earls Court left I became dimly aware of what Robina was doing - communicating with this woman as a human being, an equal, and recognising, understanding her. I was judging. I was beginning to understand what feminism is about. Real people in real contact. No categories. No judgments.

All this happened in the context of me relating sexually to women; and that had nothing to do with my approach to feminism. What happened was that I began to identify with women, to identify myself, at last, as a woman. I

became increasingly indifferent to male-approval on any level, I began to understand women, why we are like we are, I began to see how we have all been steered away from seeing what we have in common, I began to understand my mother; I saw clearly that I had been identified with men, had never supposed women worthy of identifying with (forgetting that I was one). For the first time I was glad to be a woman. I had remained totally dissatisfied with being female right through my years of fucking with women. The important thing that occurred, the thing which changed my life, my relating, my perception of myself and others, my playacting, my dishonesty - the thing that changed was my consciousness. I began to see people with clarity. I recognised male bullshit instantly; I slowly started seeing my own bullshit.

So all this goes to point out the absurdity of seeing fucking with a woman as any kind of criterion for feminism. I know women all around me who are in this process. Some of them are married and fighting their husbands/lovers for recognition, for equality of honesty; some have realised that it's a losing battle; some have left; some are living alone for the first time and fucking no-one; some are fucking with women; all are relating to women. We are all in the process, though, and all recognising and breaking down different barriers and obstacles. Do we really consider that the barrier to actually fucking with a woman is the crucial or the only barrier? To do this is to define relating in terms of the sexual, the sexual in terms of the genital and to fail to recognise and understand our sisters as women.

At the meeting at the Centre on Lesbianism and Feminism we were in a group where a woman said that she lived with a woman, felt close and loving towards her, but did not want to fuck her. Is this woman to have no credibility? If we insist on honesty, we must in this as in every area give our sisters space to be honest about their feelings. We may believe this kind of feeling (like many others) is a hang-up, but we must know, by now, that the only way to get free of hang-ups is to recognise them, to see that they are there. Besides there is no honesty in any sister lying on a plank in our correct political platform, and we would be anything but feminist to expect this.

Who are we to create pressure anyway? more pressure for women? This society insists that women fuck men, which we agree is sexist, we cannot insist that women fuck with women. We know, too, that consciousness grows, is a process of freeing ourselves from pressure, finding what we want in ourselves and learning not to act in any way which we cannot be in harmony with. Consciousness is not a program - we may not tell our sisters what they really want. Radical change means wanting to do what you do; not adopting anything, but becoming. No pressure.

And this pressure is not just pressure, but sexist, for it assumes the primacy of genital sex, rating, for example, warm and real sisterhood below fucking with a sister!!! If we recognise that our sexuality be de-emphasised and de-isolated, brought back into harmony with our thoughts and feelings, we cannot take it separately from consciousness in our theory. To me it seems that feminist consciousness leads to an inability to engage in unequal, role-playing relationships, which leads to more relating to women on every level, which leads to fucking with a woman sometime, when the affinity is there.

It will be because our minds
challenge and delight each other,
and for qualities I cannot know yet
because they will be hers,
concrete, specific, individual,
like her name.

And this is the point. Fucking with a woman isn't a political decision but a real relationship.

This is not to deny that women should be able to relate sexually to each other, that there is a barrier which can be broken down. It is only to say that this is not the only barrier and that there can be, should be, no hierarchies in feminism based on who we fuck with.

We want to re-integrate our sexuality, make our fucking as everything else, free of pressure, free of dishonesty, free of fear, of games, of alienation. We need a clear pure consciousness of ourselves and each other. We need to say and do what we mean. We need to learn how to act as we feel; and we need to help our sisters to do the same. Nothing is real unless we feel it.

kerryn

(This was written for the Radicalesbian conference held at Sorrento on July 6th-8th 1973.)

(73)

46

"It is the primacy of women relating to women, of women creating a new consciousness of and with each other which is at the heart of Women's Liberation and the basis for the cultural revolution".

FEMINIST CULTURE

Radical feminism stands so completely in opposition to all the male culture demands that it necessitates a whole new life style. It means changing the way we live and relate all day, every day.

Male culture has always demanded that we identify with men and exclude women. (Feminism means identifying with women and excluding maleness). Love between women is a real political force - untested of massive implication.

And around that love we must build a way of life; a way of living out our primacy with women in our every day lives.

Ideology

The feminist movement is a political force. It has a comprehensive, coherent ideology - a body of ideas that analyses our oppression in all its ramifications - economic, political, social. But it is not an exclusive ideology. It grows as our feminist consciousness deepens.

Feminist culture is the working out of that ideology. Through it we can construct a way to end our oppression.

Love between women is "the cornerstone for this structure. It is the touchstone of our independence, self-image, creativity. It is the distillation of women's oppression and the crystallization of women's power. Without this as our base we are doomed to reformism and disunity".

As a radical lesbian I draw my strength, support, direction from and with women. Lesbianism, for me, is an attempt at a freer life-force moving towards a women's revolution.

Male culture

Male culture's definition of women is that we exist for men. That definition confines us and excludes us from defining and shaping the terms of our own lives. Men have always controlled, organised, ordered and ruled our lives.

Now we must control and regulate our own lives. "For self regulation is the basis of freedom, and dependence the origin of inequality".

Male power is encased in male culture - in all the institutions of the patriarchy. For centuries men's unknowledge of the female experience, and the conscious exclusion of women from any but the most purile spheres of activity, have made us invisible in male culture.

Because male culture and supremacy are so pervasive we can never hope to invade. To combat it we must create a female model. Just as it is important to create an image - a reality - of capable, strong independent feminist culture.

Human culture will exclude women until we refuse to be invisible. The necessary precondition is the creation of the female experience - the neglected half of human experience. Feminist culture must be researched, explored, recognised and publicised. By women.

Our History

Female culture is largely unrecorded. What is recorded is fragmentary. "I have to dig my identity out of a chaos of images. I am an archeologist".

Brilliant women, artists and musicians, did exist. But information about them is buried beneath the shit of male history, male dominance.

"Historically man's unknowledge of the female experience has made us invisible. Mystic, not actual. We are invisible, unless we wear man made masks. We live invisible within male culture. We conform to male images of ourselves if we wish to survive and be seen at all."

Just one example is the 'witches' of the Middle Ages.

Witches

The oppression of peasant women in the area of the witch craze took at different forms at different times and places, but never lost its essential character: that of a ruling class campaign of terror directed against the female peasant population.

The real issue was one of control: male upper class healing under the auspices of the Church was acceptable; female healing as part of the peasant subculture was not.

The witch was a threat to the Church/State. She was a woman, and not ashamed of it and she appeared to be part of an organised underground of peasant women.

In locale and timing the most virulent witch hunts were associated with periods of great social upheaval, shirking feudalism at its roots - mass peasant uprisings and conspiracies, the beginnings of capitalism and the rise of protestantism.

There is fragmentary evidence, which feminists ought to follow up, suggesting that in some areas witchcraft represented a female-led peasant rebellion.

There is evidence that women accused of being witches did meet locally in small groups, and that these groups came together in crowds of hundreds and thousands on festival days. The meetings were probably occasions for trading herbal lore and passing on the news. There is little evidence of the significance of the witches organisations, but it is hard to imagine that they weren't connected to the peasant rebellions of the time.

Perhaps they were the first feminists - slaughtered in their millions by the male ruling-class.

Our Present

To paraphrase Valerie Solanas - life in this society is, at best, an utter bore; with no aspect of society being at all relevant to women.

A radical feminist can't take part in any aspect of the existing culture without having to compromise somehow. In a job, in education, in almost every interaction she is treated not as a person but as a woman.

So it is important to create a 'liberated territory' within which we can grow in the recognition of our personhood, in which our consciousness can be forged into constancy by the love and support of our sisters in struggle.

The Vision

More than words, more than action, the creation of a feminist culture can generate an atmosphere where women can feel free enough to struggle to be free.

And the effort to create this culture itself is part, of the vision. "The vision must be so powerful, so urgent, so compelling, so immediate, so utterly convincing that women can no longer stand living the way that they do." Which is only the way they have been expected to, and afraid not to.

"We must use the magic of poetry and music to create the vision of a society which embodies community, dignity, joy, knowledge, understanding, meaning and love."

A society in which enjoyment will spring directly from living itself, the process of experience, rather than from the quality of achievement.

This requires a new culture to replace male culture: where co-operation, love and life are the guiding forces of organisation rather than competition, power and bloodshed.

This concept will change the way we live. We must begin to build collectives where women are committed to other women on all levels - emotional, physical, economic, political.

"Women must grasp a sense of their power to change their own lives", and that can best be achieved by becoming actively involved in film groups, theatre groups, newspaper collectives, etc.

Never doing anything leads to a lack of confidence in your ability to do anything. Taking control of a media and working in it creates a sense of the creativity, energy, pride and power women are capable of.

The Direction

There are many areas of activity in which we can act out our feminist ideals.

In a woman's community we must attempt to meet the survival needs of women without economic privilege. This means co-operative child care, health clinics, abortion clinics, resources centres, information centres, switchboard referral centres, etc.

These require a large, effective, organised and dedicated women's movement.

Media

It is essential that we build our own media: newspapers, tapes, films, etc. Without our own media we are without a voice. We cannot rely on the communications of the oppressor. Past mass media distortions of Women's Liberation are ample evidence of that.

Film

In this medium women are beginning to create our own image of ourselves - instead of being defined by someone else's image or information. And film is so popular and subtle that it can often communicate in a way that written material cannot.

Women's Radio

In the U.S. there are dozens of women's liberation radio stations and programmes. They both give the woman who work on them a valuable experience and are an effective medium for communicating with women.

They report developments in such movement fronts as childcare, abortion and equal employment. They broadcast news of events in the women's movement, feminist poetry and interviews with women and air personal accounts of discrimination - as well as playing mainly music by women.

Television

A potent medium for communicating feminist ideals is television. Especially as so much of our oppression these days originates from TV.

In the U.S. cable television will soon open up vast possibilities - a woman's station will be possible.

For us here, now: the ABC is soon to run a series of half hour programs-made and controlled by different minority groups. Feminists must seize opportunities like this. Besides being a medium for our message it will create confidence and new skills for the women involved in making such a program. Eventually we will take over their media.

Sport and Self-defence

"The woman who has the continued opportunity to move skillfully learns that she, as an individual, is an effective action-producing agent within her life-world."

All sports invented so far emphasize the aspects of physiology in which males excel.

Women have been conned into believing they are weak. But women are strong. Most women have internalised the male image of us as weak and helpless. We must destroy that in ourselves, in our heads, before we can become strong. It is essential that through sport, exercise and self-defence courses develop our latent strength and self-confidence.

Men see feminism as a joke; because they believe we are too weak to be of any real danger. They are not prepared to face strong, angry, defiant women who are not intimidated by their power.

Women's Studies

At the moment there are various women's studies programs at different universities. I believe it is very important to have courses like these in which we can study women's history and women's oppression.

But we must be careful of being fobbed off with separate women's studies courses, run on comparatively small budgets, that allows the universities to avoid confronting the sexism and ignorance of feminism in their own departments and courses.

Sisterhood

Meetings, discussions, Consciousness Raising Groups, conferences etc. are probably the best way to spread the feelings of feminist community. Personal interaction between women can counteract the traditional alienation of women from each other.

Printed leaflets, articles, newspapers, journals are also important. All drawing women together into a shared experience of feminism, of togetherness, of sisterhood, of cultural revolution.

The Tactic

"The point of Women's Liberation is not to stand at the door of the male world, beating our fists, and crying "let me in, damn you, let me in!!" The point is to walk away from that world and concentrate on creating a new woman, a woman who will make that world fall merely by refusing to populate it, a woman who will remake herself."

The destruction of the patriarchy lies at the core of a community of women who, by the indestructible nature of their creative feminism, are in the process of destroying Maleness.

But they will not quietly sit by and let us create a new woman or a new culture. They will attempt to destroy us. They will use the most effective weapon they have always used on women - male disapproval. It has always been effective before because women have been dependant on them. But we have severed our dependence. Now we must become strong in our independence.

And women are stronger people. We have born hardship, taken the beatings and rapes men vent their frustration in, and yet continued to feel love and compassion. We have always coped with the worst.

And who is stronger than the woman who knows and feels the vast pain of woman's oppression and yet copes with it, struggles against it every day.

Men, trapped in their egocentricity, arrogance, power and cold greed cannot empathise with our pain. They cannot feel in their gut the torture of our oppression.

So it is up to we women, we feminist women, to build a revolution. A vast feminist, cultural revolution.

(This paper was developed out of many conversations with feminist sisters and from reading and lifting ideas from several feminist articles, books and journals).

THE RADICALESBIAN MANIFESTO

Lesbian. We do not accept the word in the sense that it is traditionally used to describe, explain and limit us. Through our experience we have come to see its political significance. "Lesbian is the label which holds every woman in line." It's a fear word that says a woman has stepped outside her sex role - when that's what we want to do, the label loses its bite.

Conditioning as a woman begins early. Women are deluded into thinking that they are getting as good a deal as a man, just different. Lesbians are not conned into accepting their situation but are taught that lesbianism is a product of penis envy, arrested development, personality inadequacies, hormones. Society expects concealment of us. To the oppression of being a woman is added the oppression of concealment. This is why coming out is important. While we continue to hide from society we are accepting our own oppression. To become visible is the indication that we no longer accept their terms. We widen the range of our honesty with each other and all we meet. We break down our isolation. We recognise our oppression and refuse to internalise it. To say that Gay is Good is divisive but is necessary in our reaction to conditioning. We will not let society rest. Anyone who wishes to disapprove will be obliged to do this to our faces.

We want to overcome the division between women - to touch, relate, to give strength and validity to each other. We want women to be able to relate to women on all levels. We want to relate as individuals, not as elements in a correct ideology. Fucking with another woman just removes one more barrier in our minds, enables us to learn to love our woman-selves in another woman. It is another eradication of oppression. But every woman who likes and works with other women is "gay" by society's standards. For us, gay consciousness is feminist consciousness.

We want a genderless society, that is a society that doesn't differentiate on the basis of sex, where people relate to each other irrespective of gender. But we recognise that at this time and in this place women are just more likely to be able to form relationships with other women than with men, if our criterion is warmth and honesty. We know our relationships are natural. "The only sexual perversion is a relationship based on exploitation and dishonesty."

We understand that our oppression stems from a sexist society. We recognise our oppression as women. We understand the specific threat

that our living without men poses to the institutions of monogamy and the nuclear family, institutions which are the basis and the training schools of the patriarchy. This is why we organise as gay women apart from our gay brothers. Gay men, though still oppressed, do still receive the automatic benefits of being male in a patriarchal society. Lesbians can only receive the automatic oppression of being female in a patriarchal society. There are professions traditionally allotted to gay men, but there's not even a paternalistic hand to women. Gay men have their heroes - Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde - while ours are suppressed - who knows that Florence Nightingale and Joan of Arc related to women? Homosexual men have always had the option of compromising, of receiving approval by being worthwhile citizens. Women aren't supposed to act for themselves, they are the power behind the man. So a lesbian, logically, has no place at all in a patriarchal society. At the same time this makes us freer to act against it.

We see all oppression - capitalist/worker, white/black, imperialist/third world as sexist, that is, as based on male power. We identify with the struggles of all oppressed groups, not as different isolated causes, but as symptoms of a sexist world view.

We are going to fight our oppression on all levels. We refuse to regard ourselves as free while women are oppressed. We recognize the institutions which oppress us, and will not set up copies of marriage, of role playing, of power dominance. We are fighting our oppression with honesty, in ourselves and others. We will destroy the nuclear family in ourselves. We do not want equality, but liberation. We do not believe in individual solutions.

Our immediate aims and tactics are not fixed. Preconceptions affect tactics; we think that the whole society must change, and work at what comes, fixing at no one level. It is part of our oppression that we do not know how much we do not know. We cannot say what freedom will be like. We do not have a programme. A new society of aware people is very much a vision still. But we can say certain things. We do not condone any manifestation of the ideals of monogamy or the nuclear family within our own relationships. We believe that leadership is destructive, power is sexist, and as we aim for a leaderless society so we work in a leaderless group. And we attack the power basis of sexism in existing institutions. We work through consciousness raising to free our own heads. We work through zap actions and demonstrations to raise the consciousness of others, always bearing in mind that confrontations may open people's eyes, it may also alienate them. We do ^{not} groove on militancy but adapt tactics to situations. But we do not shirk confrontations, knowing that our silence oppresses our silent sisters. Our existence is an argument in itself. Not only poofster bashers but a whole society oppresses us, so directness is the best tactic.

We want more than equality. We want Revolution. Male power, embodied in the male institutions of our present culture, is aggression. To ask for equality is only to get into that - into ruthlessness and non-caring. So forget about that concept of power and talk about collective feminist consciousness; about development as people in strength and love. "Lying in the arms of the individual solution," we won't get anywhere. So we want to establish our own alternative feminist culture. We want a distinct feminist community where we can learn to be/act ourselves as people. We are not going to be seen through the eye of male culture. And there's no point in conquering male culture when we can create our own.

N.B Everything is a paradox.

RULES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Since Radicalesbians first got going round Australia, a number of unwritten rules have been built up about how a lesbian feminist relationship should work. I wanted to write something about them, but all I got was either my life story or statements about love and work and economic bases that got too far away from the daily details I keep thinking about. So instead I've written down the rules about relationships that I collected by talking to women in Adelaide.

1. Feminist lesbians who are fucking together don't:

- pash on in public places
- go everywhere together
- live together/sleep together every night
- say they want to be monogamous.

The reasons for this set of rules are something like:

- setting up a situation for yourself where you can't drift into making a fucking relationship your main security or interest
- making sure that other people can still get through to you.

2. Within the relationship there are other rules. Feminist lesbians don't

- fall in love
- feel jealous
- want to be monogamous

and do

- talk about what they are doing, not only with each other.

The reasons for this set of rules are something like:

- getting suspicious about the idea of love because it mainly seems to have worked to keep women out of action.
- getting suspicious about monogamy because it mainly seems to be there to make stable worker-producing families.

3. Then if you do get involved in multiple fucking relationships there are some other rules. These aren't quite as clear cut yet, but my random sample agreed that:

- you can't work on spontaneity e.g. if you all go to a party you need to know beforehand who goes home with whom
- some kind of balance of time has to be worked out
- you don't want to know either everything or nothing about your lover's other lovers.

The reasons for this set of rules are something like:

- since we have been trained to expect that we will get our main emotional security from one other person, we have to untrain ourselves. To demand of ourselves and the women we love that we act as if we were there already is silly.

These are the rules as far as I can collect them. I've written them down as dictatorial statements, but actually they aren't used as a great new way of conforming. Everyone who believes in them breaks them, but it means that we have to think about what we do, and not just drift along doing what we were always told to do.

Still there is a lot that the rules don't even take into consideration. Are we working out rules to change society or to make life easier? Is there anything in the rules that applies specifically to lesbian relationships? Is this etiquette or politics? And a lot of other questions.

Jenny.

A discussion on rules and relationships will take place at