

Against Separatism

"Joe and the other members of the [BAD] Brigade are to be congratulated for sticking their necks out here, knowing full well they'll be hacked at. This pamphlet 'attacks the notion that freedom-oriented feminists or gays should organize separatist groups or communities.' [I]f this pamphlet generates debate, they'll be well served by it."

-Factsheet Five

"confronts a controversial issue head on," is designed to make people aware of what is happening, challenge them to think and act." I give it a Highly Recommended to anyone concerned about the plague of separatism, which is hopefully all of us."

-Ron Tobin, The Thought

**Anarchism &
Identity Politics**

ANARCHY



Tobin, Ronald C. "Anarcho-feminism: Necessary or Divisionistic?"
The Thought, July 1989. Individualist anarchist critique of
anarchist feminism, arguing that feminism and separatism are
sexist.

Weaver, Read. "What Business Is It of Bay Windows ?" *Bay
Windows*, January 5-11, 1989. Letter to the editor defending
Tobe Taylor's abortion of a male fetus because of its sex, and
questioning the decision of the male editor of Bay Windows to
even discuss the issue.

Zabarsky, Marsha. "Separatism is Still an Indispensable Tool."
GayCommunity News, January 25-31, 1987.

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Introduction

Over the last several years there has been a resurgence of separatism in the feminist and lesbian/gay movements. Although many who identify as feminists or gay/lesbian liberationists claim to be interested in bettering conditions for all people, not just themselves and other women or homosexual people, they often organize themselves in exclusive groups. Within broader groups, such as the North American continental anarchist gatherings, there are often workshops, subgroups, or 'spaces' that exclude people on the basis of sex, color, or sexual tastes. And these discriminatory practices are often supported by the some of the people who are being excluded. While we defend the freedom of people to associate with or avoid whoever they wish, as long as no coercion is involved, this exclusivist behavior should be seen for what it is; sexism, racism and homophobia. Members of the Drinking Brigade have attended three of the anarchist gatherings, and each year this separatist current in the movement is becoming stronger. In San Francisco, there were a number of exclusivist workshops and a women-only "space", workshop after workshop degenerated in hostile yelling matches between some of the women and men, and speakouts by some women and homosexual people were used to attempt to bully people with whom the speakers disagreed. As anarchists and individualists who see anarchy as entailing the liberation of all people as individuals, not as members of narrowly defined groups, we oppose this trend toward separatism and exclusion.

We are publishing this collection of writings in an attempt to stimulate discussion of this issue. The first article, "Anarchists and the Left", was written in 1984 for publication in an anarchist magazine, but was not published as planned. It is included here because it puts the critique of separatism within the context of a broader critique of the wider anti-individualist or, as it is called in the article, leftist outlook of many in the anarchist movement. Support for separatism,

Kroll, Judy. "Aid Deadlier Than AIDS." *The Spark*, Nov/Dec 1983. Argues that the formation of a homosexual "community" is a positive development.

McElroy, Wendy, ed. *Freedom, Feminism and the State: An Overview of Individualist Feminism*. Washington: Cato Institute, 1982. Collection of writings of U.S. antisexist individualist and anarchist writers, women and men, from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Peacott, Joe. Letter to *The Spark*, Mar/Apr 1984. Individualist critique of the articles by Croft and Kroll cited above.

Quiet Rumors: An Anarcha-feminist Anthology. London: Dark Star. Collection of basic anarchist feminist writings.

Raimondo, Justin. *In Praise of Outlaws: Rebuilding Gay Liberation*. San Francisco: Students for a Libertarian Society, 1979. Libertarian pamphlet endorsing idea of homosexual "Stonewall Nation."

Saunders, Carol. "The Reply." *Freedom*, Oct. 10, 1981. Anarchist feminist response to Iris Mills' critique of feminism.

Sears, Hal D. *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America*. Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1977. Discussion of the non-feminist, antisexist men and women who made up the sex radical movement of the nineteenth century.

Segaloff, Jean. "The Myth of the 'Feminist Male.'" *Gay Community News*, August 1, 1981. Argues, from a sexist standpoint, that men cannot be feminist.

Society For Cutting Up Men (SCUM). "A Scum-filled Hex on Bay Windows." *Bay Windows*, January 5-11, 1989. Letter to the editor endorsing aborting male fetuses, arguing men are biologically inferior to women.

Taylor, Joan Kennedy. "Acting National Coordinator's Notes." *Association of Libertarian Feminist News*, #31, Summer, 1989. Argues for dropping libertarian from the group's name, but retaining feminist.

Taylor, Tobe. "What If It's a Boy?" *Sojourner*, Dec. 1988. Argues in favor of aborting male fetuses because of their sex, contending men are, by nature, not "all right."

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- Eagan, Margery. "NOW Misses Chance to Make a Change." *Boston Herald*, July 25, 1989. Critique of NOW's proposal to form a women's political party, arguing in favor of joint action between women and men.
- Ernsberger, Donald C. with Jarret Wollstein. *Sexism and Individualism*. Warminster, PA: Society for Individual Liberty. Non-feminist, individualist discussion of sexism and suggestions for fighting it.
- Fifth Estate Staff. "Anti-rape March Sparks Debate on Feminism." *Fifth Estate*, June 1, 1980. Critique of activities and ideology of feminists and separatists involved in exclusivist Take Back The Night march in Detroit.
- "Gay and Straight Grief: the Differences." *Kick It Over*, Nov. 1988. Reprint, in an anarchist newspaper, of article contending that homosexual people and heterosexual people grieve differently.

like support for nationalism and reluctance to criticize socialist states despite their abuse of people, comes out of a group-oriented world view which many anarchists share with the statist left, but with which we disagree.

"Feminism: Disarmed? Indulgent? Introverted?" first appeared in *Freedom*, a British anarchist magazine in 1981. Iris Mills is an anarchist who spent over a year and a half in jail as one of those accused of conspiring to cause explosions in the "Persons Unknown" case in England. She was subsequently found not guilty of the charges. This article is a transcript of Mills' presentation at a debate at London's Autonomy Centre on September 25, 1981. In it she argues against feminism and separatism, for, as she stated in the debate, "Surely our concern is to bring people together, not to erect still more barriers...To me anarchism stands for the individual liberation of each human being."

"The Politics of Identity and Difference: Gynocentric vs. Polyandrogynist Visions" is an updated version of an essay "On the Current Schism: Gynocentrism vs. Androgyny," which was published in the feminist student newspaper *Rising Tide* in 1986 in Binghamton, NY. Peter Cariani holds that the basic assumptions of much of the feminist movement are nationalist in their ideological structure, and that an individualist-androgynist feminist approach is a more direct route to sex-equality. It is argued that nationalistic, gynocentric approaches perpetuate and deepen divisions between men and women by creating strong sex-dependent identities and exclusivistic political organizations. These divisions result in the restriction of life choices for both women and men. Rather than organizing along lines of biological sex, an alternative movement would seek to deconstruct the distinction between man and woman rather than reconstructing it, freeing both men and women from stereotypes and socially-enforced norms. The strategy would involve dismantling all power relations based on biological sex rather than gaining power for particular groups of people by using the sex distinction.

The letter to the Association of Libertarian Feminists (ALF) published here as "Individualists against Sexism", was written in August 1989 in response to an article by Joan Kennedy Taylor, ALF's acting National Coordinator, in *Association of Libertarian Feminists News #31* in the Summer of 1989. In this article Taylor discussed the possibility of changing ALF's name because of widespread misunderstanding of the word libertarian and confusion about ALF's relationship to the Libertarian Party (LP). (ALF is a group of libertarians and anarchists which is independent of the LP, although some members of ALF are members or supporters of the LP). In this letter I argue that the word feminism is more problematic, that feminism has historically been associated with statism, sexism, and conventional moral values, and that, just as anti-sexist anarchists and individualists historically avoided the label feminist, ALF should drop the word from its name.

"Lesbian/Gay Liberation or Individual freedom? was published in the Summer 1984 issue of *Instead of A Magazine*. It argues that separatism and anti-heterosexual bias on the part of gay/lesbian liberationists leads to new forms of bigotry and a new hierarchy made up of homosexual people, instead of in the direction of sexual freedom for all people and tolerance for the sexual tastes of others.

We found biologist Ruth Hubbard's article, "There is No Natural Human Sexuality" in the May 1987 issue of *The Bi Monthly*, the newsletter of the Boston Bisexual Men's Network. We included it here because her argument that sexual tastes are not inborn or unchanging over time is a powerful argument against homosexual separatism.

We hope these articles encourage discussion about the issue of separatism in the anarchist and other social change movements. We welcome feedback and criticism from readers.

Joe Peacott

to look at hormone levels or any other biological phenomenon as the cause for "type" preference within a sex. In fact, scientists rarely bother to ask what in our psychosocial experience shapes such tastes and preferences. We assume it must have something to do with parents or other early experiences, but don't probe deeply unless our preferences involve the "wrong" sex. Then, suddenly, we try to pinpoint specific causes from out of the maze of biological, psychological, and social experiences that make us the people we are at a given time in our lives. Because of our recent history and political experiences, feminists have an easier time accepting this line of reasoning than many other people do. Many women who have thought of themselves as "heterosexual," and who may have married and had children, when we have had the opportunity to rethink, refeel, and restructure our lives have fallen in love with women, sometimes much to our own surprise.

The society in which we live channels, guides, and limits our imagination in sexual as well as other matters. Why some of us give ourselves permission to love people of our sex whereas others don't is an interesting question, but I don't think it will be answered by checking our hormone levels or trying to unearth our earliest affectional ties. As more women begin to speak more freely about our sexual experiences, we are learning more about how women come to re-examine, re-evaluate, change. Lately, increasing numbers of women have begun to allow ourselves to acknowledge "bisexuality"-loving women and men, in succession or simultaneously. I believe that most of us will end up acknowledging that we love certain people or, perhaps, certain kinds of people, and that gender need not be a significant category, though for some of us it may be.

necessity to differentiate themselves in kind from the primary caretaker engenders a fragility into the male ego that women need not deal with. Surprisingly, neither Chodorow nor Dinnerstein addresses the question of why, in that case, women later form affective ties with men rather than transferring their primary bond from the mother (or other female caretaker) to other women. Their model readily lends itself to the idea that to women and men, love for women comes easily, while love for men is problematic. But they do not explore these implications.

In my own theorizing I don't either, because I am no more comfortable with models that posit a psychological determinism than I am with biodeterminist ones. I find Chodorow's and Dinnerstein's analyses more interesting than Freud's, but no more convincing. Much more realistic to me are the diversity, change, and flexibility in sexuality reported by Kinsey, who emphasized that most people can love people of either sex and that the choices change over time and social circumstances. I do not give much credence to retrospective accounts by some lesbians and gay men who believe that they were born "different," homosexual. In my teaching, I have sometimes asked students to reflect--out loud, if they wish,--about the development of their own early loves and attachments. And, usually, women who think of themselves as heterosexual in that their sexual relationships, as adults, are with men recall strong erotic ties to one or more women or girls during their childhood and adolescence. My point is that if these women were involved in loving relationships with women, they might look to these early loves as "proof" that they had always been lesbians, while if they relate sexually to men, they may be tempted to devalue them and call them childhood crushes.

I believe that people fall in love with individuals, not with a sex. Even within one sex, most of us prefer certain "types"; usually not any man or woman will do. It is an interesting question what shapes those preferences. But no one has suggested that something innate makes us light up in the presence of certain men or women. We would think it absurd

Anarchists and the Left

Joe Peacott

Modern political and social views are generally broken down into the broad categories of right and left, and most people who interest themselves in social or political ideas identify themselves with one of these categories or their various sub-categories. The right consists of people who view themselves as conservatives, republicans, fascists, moral majoritarians, puritans, racists, KKKers, etc. The left comprises communists, social democrats, liberals, socialists, populists, progressives, feminists, pacifists, gay/lesbian liberationists, etc. Because these definitions are so widely accepted and so often used in political discussion, many anarchists have a tendency to adopt one of these labels and identify with one of these general groups.

Although there are some anarchists or libertarians who identify with the right, most seem to feel they have much more in common with the traditional left. I think a lot of this has to do with the fact that many of us who are now anarchists first became involved in social or political action and ideas through left-identified movements, i.e., anti-war, anti-draft, anti-racist, feminist, gay/lesbian. And despite the fact that we ex-leftists now reject the state and political action, many still hold some of the leftist positions and views which led to their initial radicalization. But in order to build a new society based on individual freedom and equal freedom for all, the anarchist movement and anarchist individuals need to break with the left and leave behind this leftist baggage.

The primary problem with most leftist positions is that they promote group interests over individual interests and further isolate people from each other. An example of this is feminism, with which a number of anarchists are currently infatuated. Feminism historically has embraced temperance, voting, and conservative sexual practices, as well as equality for women within the bounds of statist society. Many modern-day feminists support voting, women government

officials, censorship of sexual literature, and social actions from which men are excluded, i.e. Greenham Common, Seneca, Take Back the Night marches, as well as equality for women, again within the bounds of statist society. Yet some anarchists still describe themselves as feminists.

The problem with feminist philosophy, as with the philosophies of lesbian/gay liberation, black nationalism, and support for nationalist movements in other parts of the world, is that they define the issues in the context of groups and group interests. For instance, rape and murder of women is defined as a special class of violence, violence against women, not simply violence against an innocent person. Although this may not seem to be more than a minor semantics difference, this method of describing the problem leads to specific social and political actions. It leads to the formation of groups such as Women Against Violence Against Women, women-only Take Back the Night Marches (men are specifically not invited), and the current pro-censorship anti-pornography movement. And all of these efforts lead to a further division between men and women. This may be a desirable and consistent goal for feminists, but it has nothing in common with anarchy.

We live in a violent society. Women and men are both subject to random, unprovoked violence by others and it's also true that more women than men are subject to this violence, and far more women than men are raped. But what is gained by organizing against violence against women instead of violence against all innocent people? Nothing but more polarization between the sexes. Most men oppose violence against both women and men, as do most women. The anti-violence, anti-rape movement, if framed in terms of the inviolability of all individuals and their right to defend themselves against any coercion and violence by any means necessary, could promote individual freedom much more effectively than women-only anti-violence marches ever will. After all there are a lot of men who are afraid to walk the streets alone at night, as well. Reaching out to these people in this way would broaden the anti-violence movement, and

reformers, such as Havelock Ellis, who biologized the supposed difference. "The homosexual" became a person who is different by nature and therefore should not be held responsible for her or his so-called deviance. This served the purposes of the reformers (though the laws were slow to change), but it turned same-sex love into a medical problem to be treated by doctors, rather than punished by judges--an improvement, perhaps, but not acceptance or liberation.

This brings us to Freud, who was unusual for his time (and still, to some extent, for ours) in insisting that sexual development is problematic for everyone and that it is scientifically as valid to ask how a child comes to love people of the other sex as of her or his own. However, he plotted a course of development that involved his newly invented Oedipus complex and castration anxiety to explain how men come to form affective attachments to women and women to men. Loving people of one's own sex continued to be seen as pathological.

Feminist revisioning of Freud by Nancy Chodorow and Dorothy Dinnerstein interprets the course of affective development by putting at the center the child's relationship to the mother rather than to the father. However, since girls' first intense, affective experience is with a person of the same sex, whereas for boys it is with a member of the other sex, their description continues to posit a crucial difference between the ways in which girls and boys develop their identities and erotic relationships to members of the other sex. Whereas Freud delineated a course that he believed more clear and direct for boys, but more fuzzy and problematic for girls, Chodorow's formulation suggests that male development is the more problematic. Girls grow up identifying with their primary care-giver, a woman, and they assume that they will become like her. Boys, on the other hand, become men by insisting on being unlike the person who cares for them, whom they know best, who is their first love. And since boys (like girls) usually are not nearly so familiar with a man as they are with the mother (or other primary caretaker, who also usually is a woman), this

Hite came out with her first *Report*, which said that sexuality, as we have constructed it, doesn't serve women, many women came forward to acclaim her and agree. When she later wrote, in her *Report on Male Sexuality*, that it didn't do so well by men, either, she was dismissed as a charlatan. The analysis I have just described comes to the same conclusions: our construction of sexuality doesn't do well by women or men. But it's harder on women.

Granted that sexuality is socially constructed, each of us writes her or his own script out of the sum total of our individual experiences. None of this is inborn or biologically given. It is constructed out of our diverse life situations, limited by what we are taught and/or imagine as permissible, correct behavior. There is no "female sexual experience, no "male sexual experience," no unique heterosexual, lesbian or gay experience. There are instead the different experiences of different people, which we lump according to socially significant categories. Whenever I hear a generalization about the sexual experience of some particular group, exceptions immediately come to mind -- except that I refuse to call them exceptions; they are part of the total reality. Of course, some similarities are generated out of the similar social circumstances in which members of groups find themselves, but we tend to exaggerate what exists when we go looking for in-group similarities, or for differences between groups.

This line of thinking is illustrated by the heterosexual / homosexual dichotomy, which originated in typologies that were in vogue in late nineteenth century biology, especially in human biology. Behaviors were no longer merely attributes of particular persons; they defined people. A person who had sexual relations with a person of the same sex became a certain kind of person, a "homosexual"; a person who had sexual relations with people of the other sex, a different kind, a "heterosexual." This way of classifying people erased the hitherto accepted fact that many people don't do exclusively one or the other. It created the stereotype which was then popularized by the sex

hopefully also build support for other efforts to increase individual freedom and autonomy.

Besides leading to separatism and further isolating people from each other, leftist positions supported by some anarchists promote continuing oppression for many people. This is clearest in leftist/anarchist support for national liberation movements. Many anarchists are hesitant to criticize the murderous actions of the PLO, IRA, INLA, Red Brigades, etc., while they are more than willing to denounce the terror committed by the zionists, British imperialists, or German authoritarians. But nationalist movements, once in power, have been anything but libertarian. The Vietnamese statists drive out the ethnic Chinese, the Sandinistas censor La Prensa and institute a military draft, and the Khmer Rouge are butchers. As the saying goes, the enemy of my enemy is not necessarily my friend. Anarchists should have learned this lesson from the experience of the Russian revolution, when anarchists from around the world went to Russia to support the revolution and were killed or deported for their trouble.

Certainly, foreign imperialism is often more brutal and murderous than local statists that replace it, but it is certainly not anarchistic to support one group over the other. I don't think that the Irish nationalists will be any more tolerant of individual rights, anarchists, abortion rights, or lesbian/gay sex after they seize power than the bigots who currently rule Ulster. And the nationalists' current practice of bombing pubs where soldiers hang out, even though this results in the murder of innocents, should not endear them to anarchists.

Nationalism, like feminism, is based on the primacy of groups over individuals. Nationalists believe that "nations" oppress other "nations". Anarchists, on the other hand, contend that some people oppress other people. That is why we should be supporting the liberation of people, not the liberation of nations, as national liberation always means the liberation of local tyrants from the interference of foreign tyrants, not the liberation of individuals from authority of any

sort.

The world is an oppressive and brutal place for most people. Some people, however, because of some physical characteristic or behavior, are oppressed in different or more vicious ways than others. Black people in the U.S. are denied access to jobs, entertainment facilities, housing, etc., because of their skin color much more often than white people; women are more often subject to violence and rape than men; gay men and lesbians are more likely to be fired from their jobs because of their sexual practices than are straight people. Despite this general trend, however, all of the specific victims of these oppressive practices are individuals. And we should fight bigotry and rape because it injures individual people, not because it hurts black people, or female people, or homosexual people, or any other specific group. To borrow a phrase from the left, an injury to one is an injury to all. I am a man, I'm gay, and my skin is white. But none of these characteristics defines me or my social views. Only by emphasizing the fact that the differences between any two individuals are more profound (and interesting) than the differences between groups, and by remembering that the similarities between individuals are more important than any of the differences, will we be able to build a world of equal freedom for all.

Building movements around shared superficial characteristics such as skin color, sex organs, or sexual tastes will only lead to more divisions between us, with a subsequent reduction of freedom for us all. Straight white women and gay black men can both oppose rape, fight U.S. intervention around the world, support abortion rights, and fight censorship. We need to assert our individuality and emphasize what makes us unique, while at the same time associating with other autonomous individuals to further our common desires and goals. Movements centered around our shared opposition to the state and authority, and any intervention in our lives, will bring about more libertarian results than any exclusive special-interest campaign will ever result in.

most traditional societies, we raise boys and girls together, while we insist that they must not explore their own sexuality, and especially not each others.

What if we acknowledged the actual separation of sexuality from reproduction and encouraged our children to express themselves sexually, if they were so inclined? This would mean that they could explore their own bodies as well as those of friends of the same or the other sex, when they felt like it. It would also mean that they would have some sense of their own and other people's sexual needs, and would know how to talk out these needs with friends and sexual partners before reproduction became an issue for them. Presumably, without the embarrassment of unexplored and unacknowledged sexual needs, contraceptive needs would be much easier to acknowledge and deal with as they arise. So, of course, would same-sex love relationships.

As Steve Jackson has pointed out in *Childhood and Sexuality* this would be especially advantageous for girls, though it would help children and adolescents of both sexes. Boys, in the ordinary course of sexual exploration, discover their penis as an organ of pleasure, and it is also the organ they are taught about when they learn about reproduction. Reproduction and pleasure therefore are linked. Girls exploring themselves find their clitoris, but when they learn about reproduction, the clitoris often goes unacknowledged, and they are taught that their vagina is the organ important for sex and reproduction. According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, the vagina is "the passage leading from the external genital orifice [what's an orifice, Mummy?] to the uterus in mammals [what's a mammal, Mummy?]; from Latin vagina, sheath [you mean I am a sheath for a penis or a baby, Mummy?]." Therefore, for boys, there is an obvious link between reproduction and their own pleasurable, erotic explorations; for most girls, there isn't.

It should not surprise us that a male-dominated society has constructed sexuality in ways that serve men's sexual needs more than women's. The interesting thing is that when Shere

There Is No 'Natural' Human Sexuality

Ruth Hubbard

The circumstances that arouse our sexual feelings and the ways in which we express them are structured by the society in which we live, and have changed over time. There is no "natural" human sexuality. Historically in the West, sexuality has been linked with reproduction. This arises out of the Christian equation of sexuality with sin that must be redeemed through reproduction. It results in the invalidation of all forms of sexual expression and enjoyment other than heterosexuality. To fulfill the Christian mandate, sexuality always should be intended for reproduction. Actually, in our day, just plain heterosexuality will do, irrespective of reproductive consequences.

This sets up a major contradiction in the way we initiate children to sexuality and reproduction. We teach them that sex and sexuality are about having babies and warn them that they must not explore sex until they are old enough to be mummies and daddies. Then, when they reach adolescence and the entire culture pressures them into sexual activity (whether they want it or not), the more "enlightened" among us teach them how to be sexually (meaning heterosexually) active without becoming mummies and daddies. Surprise: it doesn't work very well. Teenagers do not act "responsibly"—teenage pregnancy and abortion are on the rise. Somewhere, we forget that we have been teaching lies: sexuality and reproduction are not linked in "advanced," "developed" societies. Youngsters are expected to be heterosexually active from their teens on, but to put off having children until they are economically independent and married, and even then to have only two or, at most, three children.

Other contradictions: this society accepts, on the whole, Freud's assumption that children are sexual from birth and that in childhood society channels that polymorphously perverse sexuality into socially acceptable forms. Yet we expect our children to be asexual. Furthermore, more than

Feminism: Disarmed? Indulgent? Introverted?

Iris Mills

It has become normal for people in these debates to begin by criticizing the title of the debate - and I won't be the first to break this tradition.

What I take exception to in the title is the word 'disarmed' because I don't believe feminism was ever armed in the first place. It always was, is now, and will remain, 'unarmed.' The demands of the women's movement have never had revolutionary implications; they have never posed threats to either the state or capitalist society and therefore it is a mistake to think of it as a once revolutionary force now diluted by reformism.

It is precisely because of the women's movement rationale itself that it could never be revolutionary. Its professed aim has been to put women on an equal footing with men, to explain oppression in terms of sex instead of class. This analysis was wrong on both counts. By presupposing that men, as a sex, call all the shots and are more privileged in all respects, feminists risk losing sight of the fact that men in this society are themselves subject to discrimination and oppression based on class. The desire to be equal to men seems ridiculous to me, for who would want to be equal to slaves?

Of course many feminists recognize this and try to get round it by claiming that women's demands, if implemented, would revolutionize society. They say that once a deep and thorough-going realignment of the sexes takes place, once the psychological barriers which divide men from women are removed, society in its present form would be radically altered. Patriarchy, so the argument runs, is the source of oppression, preceding the development of classes and capitalism; and the consequence of its demise would be a free and equal society.

The second mistake is to treat 'freedom' as quantitative. Human freedom is not divisible, degrees of oppression are

not real criteria with which to analyze society. It is immaterial whether patriarchy preceded class development. Oppression is based on class and I believe that the men and women of one class must unite and fight the men and women of the ruling class. To say, as Astrid Proll did, that she knew she could get justice because the judge hearing her case was a woman, is dangerous. It is dangerous because it promotes a myth - the myth of sisterhood. As if all women, despite their class, have something fundamentally in common, because they share the same kind of sex organs.

The myth of sisterhood works against revolutionaries in two ways. It separates men from women. You all know of 'women only' meetings. Surely our concern is to bring people together not to erect still more barriers. The 'woman is superior' syndrome is not something I am exaggerating for tonight - it is plainly visible in Spare Rib among the contributors who state that they hate their male children - at six months old! It's horrendous. The worst aspect of the 'myth of sisterhood' is that it leads directly to women's issues alone and undermines the solidarity so important to a revolutionary movement and neglects a class analysis. Thus women's demands have been channeled into projects like the First Women's National Bank of New York, which allows men to have accounts but not to become shareholders. The logic behind this seems to be that self-managed oppression and exploitation is better. It also indicates the identification of women's rights with women careerists and professionals. There is no demand for revolution just a demand that within the framework of this economic and social system women get a fair deal. Big deal!

Of course it is true that within the women's movement there are those women who call themselves revolutionaries, whose rationale appears to be that they recognize that women will never achieve anything other than superficial equality unless society undergoes a revolutionary change. They say however that they prefer to work with women only, because they feel dominated among men. I can understand that to a point but no problem was ever solved by ignoring it.

The real mistake here, Polly, is imagining that there is a stark division in the human species between gay and not gay. It's nonsense; there is the world of sexual behaviors, and individuals decide, moment-to-moment, what they are going to do and with whom.... "Gay" is a psychological and "sociological abstraction, a useful notion for certain kinds of discussions, but a fiction when you come right down to the level of people and what they choose to do. The idea has caused immense harm; how many people have wasted time agonizing over "what" they are... am I gay if I feel this way sometimes?... am I really bi, since I was just attracted to a woman?... if I'm gay does that mean that I have to act a certain way now? These questions are an absurd and tragic waste of time.... "

Excerpted from "Polly Sexual," in *Possessed*, Autumn 1988.

don't invade the equal freedom of others.

If some men are domineering toward women they should be confronted by the fact it's no use going away and hoping that in your absence the man or men in question will come to their senses. Anyway some women feel dominated by other women - what do they do then? Form a sub-group of submissive women only?

Some women use the 'degrees' of oppression argument as an explanation for their work in the women's movement. The point of the argument being that you should work with the most oppressed. For example Kate Millet says that in the United States white women are more oppressed than black males. I'm not sure how points are allocated but I suppose that a black working class unmarried mother who's a lesbian must get the highest score.

Demands for free abortion, better day care facilities and so on are important only in so far as they make life today that much easier in much the same way as demands for prison reform in the way of more association, longer visits and the like, makes prison life a little easier. But these reforms should be left to the liberals; they don't come to grips with the basic problem in society. For women who feel themselves to be revolutionaries it is more important that they see past these reforms and concern themselves with more fundamental issues. When someone says 'I'm an anarchist-feminist' to me that's like saying 'I'm a vegetarian who doesn't eat meat.' To me anarchism stands for the individual liberation of each human being.

For the reasons I've given I don't believe feminism was ever 'armed' in the sense that it ever provided a revolutionary challenge to the state. But is it also 'introverted' and 'indulgent'? Briefly then:

A glance at some of the feminist fiction around is, I think, a fair indication of the concerns of the women's movement. Pick, say, Marge Piercy's books, *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *Vida*. It seems odd that feminists who are allegedly concerned with destroying the current sexual stereotypes are setting up new ones, and have books full of 'beautiful'

people. Piercy's heroines are all very physically attractive to men. Moreover the men themselves conform to the same old model: handsome, strong and athletic. Indeed in *Vida* it is the slightly feminine man who betrays the heroine.

Also, for some ridiculous reason, cats play an important role - they supposedly represent the female image. Is that supposed to be soft and fluffy? While dogs are despised, the reason for which I haven't yet grasped, but apparently dogs are more masculine. I think that this type of fiction which reflects feminist issues shows them to be introverted and indulgent in the same way as conferences on orgasm are. By all means talk about these things with your friends, male and female - or with strangers if you will. But don't try to give them a political expression or use them as examples of political oppression of women by men.

Finally, I want to acknowledge some benefit from the feminist movement - simply that it has done something to change the nature of relationships between men and women; with developments in technology that give us effective contraception, for example, relationships were bound to evolve. But anarchists have to go further it is not possible to have 'free' relationships in an unfree society. We can work towards it, true, but we can never obtain it until we have a free society in which to develop properly. I maintain that human beings and human relationships cannot be free until the oppression of the state and capital is destroyed and a classless society is created. Nothing less will do.

research. Thousands of lesbians and gay men are clamoring for money from the federal government to help find a cure for AIDS. This is a turn away from the independent gay-oriented clinics which have been started during the last ten years, and toward alliance with the same medical-industrial-government complex that conducted the Tuskegee syphilis "experiments" on unknowing black men, and encourages the sterilization of poor women. Although a cure for AIDS will require lots of money and hard research, seeking help from the state will lead to more government control of health care and less individual initiative and control. The most positive aspect of the AIDS crisis, the formation of self-help and support groups for AIDS patients by the patients themselves, other gay men and lesbians, and especially by gay and lesbian health care workers, is being de-emphasized more and more by gay/lesbian leaders in favor of the fight for governmental funding.

It's a sad comment on the lesbian/gay liberation movement that the only example of old-fashioned resistance in recent years has been the "White Night" riot in San Francisco. Although it was inspiring to see burning police cars and smashed city hall windows, it was disappointing to realize that the issue that brought people out was the fact that a murderer did not get a life sentence or the death penalty. Killing or locking up Dan White forever will not protect or liberate gay men and lesbians. Only self-defense, by any means necessary, will protect us from those who hate us. Prison and the death penalty are horrors, whatever crimes their victims have committed or been convicted of committing. Supporting them for anyone betrays the movement's supposed interest in personal freedom.

Gay men and lesbians interested in freedom need to avoid the trap of gay/lesbian liberation. While rejecting the lesbian/gay "community," we need to be open and assertive about our sexuality and defend our freedom to live as we please. We can do this in the context of a broader struggle for the freedom of all individuals to live as they like, free of the constraints of any authority or "community," as long as they

an attempt to change the bigoted world in which we live. I am not interested in gay/lesbian liberation. I am interested in individual liberation. Respect for and acceptance of individual differences, including sexual tastes, lays the basis for a society of equal freedom for all of us.

The gay/lesbian "community" can be just as discriminatory as any other community or group. Lesbians who engage in S/M sex have been denied meeting space at the Cambridge Women's Center because of their non-traditional sex tastes. Black men are frequently "carded" and denied admission to gay men's bars. And Harry Britt, the gay San Francisco supervisor, is supporting the recent ban on sex at the gay men's bath houses in San Francisco. This is a "community" of which I want no part.

I am not interested in having gay men and lesbians trying to run my life instead of straight people. Neither community has any interest in individual freedom. This is a problem common to all movements which are based on the interests of specific groups, such as lesbian/gay liberation, feminism, or national movements. The interests of the group inevitably supersede the interests of the individual, resulting only in new forms of oppression.

Such a movement logically throws in its lot with the electoral system. Since they really are not interested in fundamental change, but only in opening up the system to more gay men and lesbians, civil rights legislation is a consistent route for them to follow. But reliance on the state will serve only the interests of the leaders of this movement. Passing laws merely increases the power of the state, including lesbian and gay politicians, to interfere with the rest of us. Civil rights laws don't make it easier to come out to friends and co-workers. They only make it easier for aspiring gay and lesbian politicians to find work. Lesbian/gay marches, for all their problems have certainly helped change other people's view of us more than any legislation will.

The most recent and well publicized case of this reliance on government is the struggle for state funding of AIDS

Feminist Politics and Abuse

Lisa Orlando

Laura Hathaway's excellent letter on child abuse and lesbian battering exemplifies the direction I think this discussion needs to take. Unlike Hathaway, I was physically abused by my mother. And although, like Hathaway, I had many childhood encounters with the 'helpers', I also went through the juvenile court system, which considered me "incorrigible" because I stood up against my mother's abuse, refused ever to believe that I deserved it, and ran away every chance I got. My very early awareness that I was unjustly treated merely because of my status as a child has been the root of my politics and my very personal hatred of oppression in any form. In fact, my mother is herself partially responsible for my precocious political analysis of the situation: she always said "you're my slave until you turn 18."

I have also been attacked and almost killed by a woman lover. Whenever I hear descriptions of women as "essentially nurturant, nonviolent, etc.," I feel nauseous and infuriated. Early in my involvement with radical feminism I realized that women's violence was not taken seriously my anger at my mother was as delegitimated as it had been by the "child shrinkers." Women I was told, were only violent because they were oppressed, so you couldn't blame them. Men were violent either by nature or privilege, so they had no convenient excuses. I'm sick of all this double-talk. Both men and women, as adults, are oppressors of children. Any feminism which wants to base its politics on a romanticization of the mother/daughter bond furthers the oppression of children and silences those of us - male and female - who were and are abused by our mothers. "

From *Gay Community News*, Mar 24, 1984

The Politics of Identity and Difference: Gynocentrist vs. Polyandrogynist Visions

Peter Cariani

Within feminism(1), there has always been a covert tension between those who advocated more power for women as a class (gynocentrism) and those who advocated the abolition of social roles based upon biological sex (polyandrogyny). These two strategies for social transformation form two poles of a contemporary feminist spectrum. Each defines sex-based oppression (patriarchy, sexism) in its own way; each articulates a distinct feminist vision and pathway for liberation.

The gynocentrist approach is essentially a nationalist strategy. Women and men form distinct and competing bio-social classes (or "nations"); here, the nature of the oppression is the domination of one bio-social class (men) over another (women), and the nature of liberation necessarily involves a struggle for power between gender classes.

The polyandrogynist approach(2) rejects the notion of ideal, homogeneous classes, instead focusing on the actions of heterogeneous, concrete individuals in specific situations. Where gynocentrists see the struggle between male power and female power, polyandrogynists see the struggle between those men and women who support sex-based social norms and those men and women who seek to dissolve them completely. Instead of acquiring normative powers for a particular bio-social class, polyandrogynists seek to eliminate such powers in order to allow individuals of either sex to determine for themselves what kind of life they want to lead, freed of bio-social role expectations.

Profound differences between the gynocentrist and the polyandrogynist worldviews underlie many of the debates over sexuality and sexual freedom, over the proper relation between individual choices and social norms, over the role of political movements in shaping individual identities(3). What

Lesbian/Gay Liberation or Individual Freedom?

Joe Peacott

In June, 1969, for the first time, customers at the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York, fought back against the police when they tried to raid the bar. The modern gay/lesbian liberation movement generally considers this event the birth of their movement. But, unfortunately, this movement really has little in common with the spirit of the Stonewall revolt. Instead of self-defense against the attacks of the state and reliance on their own strength, the strategy of the lesbian/gay movement now consists of reliance on the state's laws and money, and support for the electoral and legislative process.

Gay/lesbian civil rights legislation and funding for AIDS research are the current focus of the lesbian/gay movement. They lobby for passage of laws to prohibit discrimination in housing, jobs, etc., based on sexual tastes, and go begging to the feds for money to help find a cure for AIDS. Lesbian/gay political alliances and caucuses endorse various politicians running for office and have succeeded in pressuring a number of big city mayors to appoint gay/lesbian liaisons. They talk about the gay/lesbian "community" as if we were a neatly definable political and social group, to be used to reward or punish politicians and government officials with our vote.

There are several other problems with this approach, the most important and fundamental of which is the myth of a lesbian/gay "community". The gay/lesbian liberation movement promotes the idea that gay men and lesbians have common interests and goals different from those of straight people, and therefore should work together as a group. But I have no more in common with most lesbians and gay men than I do with most straight men and women. Although most gay men and lesbians feel some effects of anti-homosexual bias, the best way to fight this is not by isolating ourselves as a "community," but by reaching out to other victims of conventional society and allying with them in

viewpoint or style frequently reduced simply to manifestations of sexism in the eyes of the feminists. Certainly, there is a problem with sexism in the anarchist and libertarian movements, as elsewhere in life, but separatism and feminism do nothing to break down the barriers. Excluding and attacking people simply on the basis of their sex is sexist, whoever is doing the excluding.

Individualism as a philosophical system is necessarily anti-sexist, since it views persons as individuals, not as members of various groups based on sex, color, class, etc. Individualists fight against legal restrictions on abortion because we feel all people should be free to control their bodies, just as we fight against the draft for the same reason. Abortion is no more a feminist issue, than is (all-male) draft registration. Both are individualist issues: the state trying to run the lives of people who should be left alone. And just as many women have been involved in anti-draft work, many men are fighting to preserve the freedom to abort.

Fighting sexism is important, and I support ALF, even though I am not a feminist, because I feel it makes a contribution to this fight. But I think ALF should reject the word feminist and leave it to the statist who so frequently use it to describe themselves. Something like Individualists Against Sexism would be a more fitting name for a group of individualist anarchists and libertarians committed to the fight against sexism.

should be the relation of individuals to collectivities? Is the purpose of feminism to liberate women as a bio-social class or is it to free all individuals from the fetters of imposed sex roles? Should feminism construct alternative "feminine" and "masculine" identities or should it subvert all such essentialist constructions? And what should be the role of men in feminist movements? Should they be excluded, sent off to form their own groups, should they be allowed in as equals, or should the whole question be put aside in favor of more pressing issues? Analogous questions can be asked with respect to other forms of oppression (e.g. racism, nationalism, repression of unsanctioned sexualities) and their associated strategies for liberation. These kinds of questions take us to the core of what politics is about.

Deconstruct and reconstruct: political categories & personal experience

Ultimately the answers depend upon the basic categories of our political thought, because as moral, political beings we experience and judge the world through these categories. The political categories we construct determine what we notice as we move through the world, which distinctions we make, to what aspects of the world we attribute good and evil. Each of us constructs our own categories to make meaning out of an otherwise meaningless confusion; the categories we construct are partially determined by our own histories, our current experiences and desires, as well as the categories of those around us as communicated through language. Individually and as political communities we must choose our categories very carefully: they form who we are as moral-political beings. If we strongly believe that men are inherently domineering and women are inherently nurturing, we will go about the world making these sex-based assumptions about the people we encounter, to the extent that we may not take note of the existence of domineering women or non-domineering men. When a man commits a heinous crime, there is an a strong tendency to attribute it to

his maleness, to put it under the rubric "male violence," but when members of other groups (women, racial & sexual minorities) commit similarly violent acts, we, as progressives, are properly careful not to attribute the crime to the criminal's group membership; other, more specific explanations must be sought for why that individual did what s/he did. When we fail to note the exceptions and the resulting incongruities between our experiences and expectations, we stay stuck in our own closed world of self-justifying beliefs. We cease to learn from our experiences, we stop growing. In radical political cultures, especially in more militant ones, these basic political categories can become highly charged with moral contents and strongly reinforced, making it very difficult to break out of thinking in terms of politically correct stereotypes. And even when one has succeeded in mentally deconstructing the received categories, our political cultures, with their endless moral posturing and instant condemnation, make it difficult to publicly challenge accepted moral truths. To be sure, some political communities are worse than others in this respect, but often these social and mental constraints persist in more subtle forms in less militant circles. Wherever we are, we need to constantly question our operating assumptions, and to discard those assumptions which no longer agree with our lived experiences.

Ideal classes and concrete individuals

As radicals, most of us have inherited either directly or indirectly most of our ways of thinking and acting from the marxist tradition. The marxist tradition has in effect handed us ideal, platonic classes by way of the hegelian dialectic, with all of their terrible totalitarian, hierarchical, life-negating ramifications. In effect, the ideal political categories of marxism prevent us from seeing the concrete individuals in our lives; instead we see the classes of which each individual is but a representative. As a consequence, we often treat the people we first encounter in everyday life, not

Individualists Against Sexism

Joe Peacott

I think that changing ALF's name, as discussed by Joan Kennedy Taylor in *ALF News* #31 is a very good idea. However, the word I find most problematic in the current name is feminist, not libertarian. Both the current and historical politics and activity of most people who label themselves feminists are at odds with the goal of a free, non-statist, and non-sexist society that I, and I assume most in ALF, pursue.

Feminism has a history of allying itself with anti-sex and pro-censorship forces, anti-alcohol campaigns, and statist solutions to the problems created by sexism. On the other hand, there is a long tradition of people fighting sexism, especially in the U.S., who have not adopted the name or ideology of feminism, and, in fact have stood in opposition to the conservatism of feminism. People such as the sex radicals, both men and women, of the latter half of the last century, Emma Goldman, and Voltairine DeCleyre all waged fights against sexism, censorship, and authority in general, and none considered themselves feminists (although modern feminist historians falsely claim them as part of feminist history, equating anti-sexism with feminism). Anti-sexism is one thing; feminism (but certainly not all self-described feminists) is something quite different.

Feminism, as an ideology can not be anything but sexist. Even the word itself, meaning, basically, womanism, is exclusive of men, which certainly is not anti-sexist. At the recent anarchist con/fest in San Francisco, anarchist-feminists and their supporters organized exclusivist workshops, and even two days of women-only and men-only meetings and activities. Such separatism did nothing but further the distance between many of the women and men in the anarchist movement and inhibited man-woman dialogue, which is crucial to fighting sexism. Within the mixed workshops there was continuous tension between many women and men, with all sorts of disagreements in either

Bonne Bell Shouldn't Be Exclusive Race "

Jennifer Jordan

As a woman and a runner, I must raise objection to the exclusionary rules governing the Bonne Bell road race.

As I ran my daily river run the day preceding the race, an obviously trained male runner passed me with a cheerful and open, "Good luck tomorrow!" I felt anger for those that would exclude him from a fun holiday run by reason only of his sex. The reverse discrimination shocks me. "

Can you imagine a race for "whites only" "Christians only" "Americans only?" Ridiculous that women, bound by some convenient tradition, find themselves in the position of social arbiters and separatists. "

"Sorry, but that's just the way it is." Seems that I've heard those words before, in Mobile and South Boston and Johannesburg.

Funny when the power is in the other hands, sexism is the rule rather than the exception to be fought and eradicated. If equality is ever to be realized in this country, hadn't we better define our principles with a bit more clarity? "

From *The Boston Globe*, Oct. 21, 1983.

as themselves as morally autonomous individuals with their own particular histories but as abstract class tokens with one collective history. Politically-correct leftist political culture typically pigeonholes people into economic classes, gender classes, racial classes, and sexuality classes. Within militant gynocentric-feminist circles it matters a great deal whether the speaker is male or female, and to a lesser extent whether s/he is gay, straight, or bisexual. The person speaking in a political meeting is no longer speaking for him/herself, but for all the political categories s/he represents. Here there is often a hierarchy of speakers paralleling a hierarchy of oppressions--those who can claim to be most oppressed by virtue of their class membership have the most moral clout, while those without such stature can be readily dismissed on the basis of their class origins: as objective oppressors, tacit sympathizers, or naive onlookers. Every argument is thereby subtly reduced to an ad hominem one, dependent upon the class position of the speaker. In many movements for social change, ideologically-based assumptions of ideal classes greatly reinforce and amplify these destructive interpersonal dynamics. In order to create liberatory alternatives to what have become traditional assumptions of radical politics, we must take a good look at the basic structure of our political thinking. We need to begin to make such a re-evaluation in feminism.

Gynocentric feminism: the construction of difference

Perhaps the majority of the feminist movement today sees itself as championing the interests of women in a world where gender issues are decided in the competition between the interests of men and those of women. For these feminists, it makes sense to organize the movement for sex-equality as a movement of women as a group struggling for their own rights(4). This woman-centered, or gynocentric feminism embodies a nationalist, corporatist approach to the problem of sexism in society. In its most orthodox, extreme versions, men and women constitute different

competing classes engaged in a Manichean war of domination(5). In its less extreme versions, gynocentrism simply construes feminism as concern with "women's issues" and "women's rights," leaving the boundaries of the political struggle more open-ended and less rigidly defined.

Essentialism: biological, spiritual, and psychological.

Even in its milder forms the gynocentric worldview depends upon essential, relatively immutable differences between the sexes. Typically, women are believed to be more nurturing and emotionally supportive, while men are thought to be more analytical, domineering, and violent. Some gynocentrists believe this is a consequence of women's biological reproductive role and/or the construction of their bodies(6) (biological essentialism). Others believe that women are spiritually more connected to the earth(7) (spiritual essentialism) or that women's "ways of knowing" are different from men's(8) (epistemological essentialism). More developmentally oriented gynocentrists believe that sex- differentiated socialization is so complete and pervasive throughout society that men and women are inevitably psychologically constituted differently as "masculine" and "feminine" beings(9) (psychological essentialism).

Essentialism forms the metaphysical underpinnings of both gynocentrist feminism and the traditional sex role hierarchy. If women and men are not individually different in important ways, and if neither men nor women can change their basic psychological make-up, then they do form separate classes with separate interests and these interests may come into conflict. If these differences between individual men and women were no longer regarded as important or if more important differences exist within each sex-class than between them (e.g political, cultural, religious, sexual orientation), then the entire rationale of the gynocentrist movement is undermined.

Whatever their origins, inherently different (and

(25) I know of a situation in which an anarchy-feminist publication would not send a copy of their magazine to a person who maintains an archive of current anarchist newspapers, magazines, and leaflets, simply because he is male. The collective initially told him that they would not sell the magazine to any man, because some woman might borrow a copy from him, and that this might set up a power imbalance between them. As an end result the archives has no copies of this journal, and this particular point of view is not represented among the other anarchy-feminist materials.

(26) Of course, there are a good number of "guilty male feminists" around who in one form or another gladly accept the separatist essentialist characterizations of them. See the articles by Stephen Heath, for example, in the troubled *Men in Feminism* anthology, Alice Jardine & Paul Smith, eds. (Methuen, New York, 1987). Many but not all of the essays in *For Men Against Sexism*, Jon Snodgrass, ed (Times Change Press, Albion, CA 95410) are dripping with guilt over their authors' sex, race, class, and sexual preference. A refreshing constructive alternative to these self-flagellations are three essays included under the title of *Off Their Backs ...and on our own two feet* (New Society Publishers, 4722 Baltimore Ave. Phila. 19143, 1983)

(27) Many of those who have been on the margins of feminism, particularly those who have black and/or S/M identities (e.g. bell hooks, Carol LeMasters, cited above), recognize the problem of the construction of unified feminist norms, and are properly critical of the ways in which such norms function to exclude them. Rarely, however, is this recognition extended to the ways in which their own frameworks exclude other groups.

(28) Last year I attended a candle-light memorial vigil for two women who were murdered while vacationing in the Carribean. A separatist who identified herself as a black lesbian noted that the murderer was probably a black man and rightly cautioned the crowd about not making racial generalizations about black men, but then began making invidious generalizations about men in general. Another separatist contemptuously railed at middle class white men, implying that all men were violent, that all "male violence" was directed against women and children, and indirectly that men have no place in her community. Depressingly, most people there seemed completely blind to these incongruities: racism is okay as long as it's directed at whites, classism is okay as long as its not directed at the working class; sexism is okay as long as it's directed at men.

tend to help poor people most; since women and racial minorities comprise a disproportionate share of poor people, individual women and members of minorities will tend to benefit most.

(20) Often the basis of exclusion has no good rationale. For example most feminist self-help health groups which taught menstrual extractions would probably allow lesbian, celibate and post-menopausal women to learn the technique but completely exclude the male partners of those women who might actually need it.

(21) This is also why abortion is not a choice faced by women as a class, but a choice faced by individual women over the control of their own bodies. The locus of decisionmaking here should be the individual person, not the group. The absolute right of an individual to control his/her own body has been relatively absent from pro-choice rhetoric: it is often implied that women as a whole should collectively decide how, when, where, and by whom reproductive decisions are made, but this is potentially every bit as destructive to a particular woman's choice as having the decision made by legislatures, Supreme Court Justices, or the FDA.

(22) The American individualist anarchist tradition was based upon self-directing self-constructing individuals entering into mutual, voluntary cooperative associations. The tradition was staunchly anti-capitalist and feminist, respectful of individual rights but cooperative in its outlook. Josiah Warren, Benjamin Tucker, Angela and Ezra Haywood, Voltairine de Cleyre were some of its exponents. See the *Freedom, Feminism and the State* anthology, cited above in note (4).

(23) On one hand feminist women want men to take responsibility for and become active in struggles for reproductive freedom, egalitarian child-rearing and social provision of child care, and more equitable pay. On the other hand, many would rather not have men in their organizations, even as equals, or have them evolve their own independent perspectives on these matters. As a result many men come to see these issues in gynocentric terms, as "women's issues" for which they have no standing to think about or comment on. No independent person, man or woman, will stay for long in such a situation. Feminist organizations can be real political minefields even for men having the best of intentions, and it is only those with the hardest political skins who survive for any length of time. I've thought about packing it in too many times to count.

(24) Often more strident separatists can threaten to leave a group if it becomes mixed, knowing that the group will decide to exclude men entirely rather than risk losing a single woman member. Thus even if a majority of the group would otherwise prefer a policy of non-exclusion, the guilt of "abandoning one's own kind" and/or "caving in to men's desires" ultimately prevails.

incompatible) desires and orientations of men and women lead to the necessity for a separate movement to advance the interests of women (since the interests of men as a group are already presumably represented in the current political and economic structures).

Separatism. Essentialism leads to separatism by providing the basic distinction on which separatism rests, by defining what counts as "one's own kind." In addition to essentialism, separatism also involves a strong preference for "one's own kind." Those who see large relatively immutable differences between the sexes, and who prefer their own sex are drawn to separatism in various degrees. At its most extreme this can mean living in a sex-exclusive environment where one need never come in contact with the other sex. It can mean simply choosing to associate only with one's own sex in one's personal life (as in social or political groups). It can mean participating in groups which exclude on the basis of sex or silently tolerating sexist practices by one's political associates. Similarly, there are many different motivations for separatism: intense hatred of the other sex because of past negative experiences or intense love of one's own sex because of past positive experiences.

Separatists of various stripes comprise a significant subculture within the feminist movement, with a considerable array of women-only consciousness-raising and study groups, cafes, bookstores, schools for self-defense and self-help, art galleries, music festivals and health collectives. In comparison there exist few if any contemporary progressive circles which exclude women(10).

Nationalism. Essentialism and separatism form the basis for nationalism. Nationalism in its broadest sense is the belief that those groups of people who have similar innate characteristics (such as nationality, race, sex, native language, economic class, parent religion) should band together to form power blocs to advance their group interests. Essentialism gives nationalism its metaphysics; separatism gives nationalism its emotional basis for

"preferring one's own kind" over others who are different.

The nationalist approach is "groupist": one is born either inside or outside the group, one is given an identity as a member of the group, group oppressions are called forth to claim moral recognition, the interests of one's own kind always supersede those of other peoples. Here there are no individuals, only members of groups. Each person is necessarily allied with and identified as belonging to one group or another: men are assumed to male-identified and therefore allied with patriarchy, women are assumed to be female-identified and allied through "sisterhood."

Many types of nationalism are possible; they can be based on any distinction that can be represented as innate and morally compelling: country of origin (patriotisms of all sorts); tribal, linguistic, or ethnic group (e.g. zionism, palestinian nationalism, pan-germanic nationalism); race (white supremacism, pan-africanism); religion (religious crusades of all sorts); biological sex (male chauvinism/patriarchy, gynocentric feminism) or economic class (aristocratic chauvinism, proletarian nationalism)(11).

Nationalisms create other oppressions by setting up categories for defining people and treating them according to their national category, rather than what they've said or done or experienced. If the discrimination is pervasive and has deep social effects, then these categories come to be internalized by their victims. People develop primary identities which depend upon the categories of the oppressing system. The oppressive system of social roles and expectations never lets its victims forget who they are and how they must act, as women and men; as blacks and whites; as christians, jews and muslims; as upper, middle, and working class people.

Organizing along nationalist lines utilizes these previously internalized identities and strengthens them. The nationalist strategy thereby capitalizes on oppressive distinctions and norms that are already in place, creating ready-made categories for resistance and instant solidarity. Very rapidly

a few women dominate the discussion. The definition of the problem in terms of women vs. men has masked the problem of outspoken vs. reticent people. In mixed groups there are always some men and women who speak quite a bit and other men and women who remain silent. The solution is not to make the division along sex-lines, but along those of who has spoken and who has not. Those who have not spoken (whether men or women) should get absolute priority.

(14) Some writers (perhaps over-optimistically) feel we are already proceeding well along the path. to androgyny and that the old gender-based identities are fast fading away. See Elisabeth Badinter's *The Unopposite Sex: The End of the Gender Battle* (Harper & Row, 1989).

(15) Because of the successes of the feminist movement thus far, some previously sex-differentiated roles have been integrated. There are now more female doctors, lawyers, architects, bus drivers, carpenters, auto mechanics, and more male nurses, househusbands, secretaries, elementary school teachers and daycare workers. Obviously, we have a long way to go before the proportions are even close to equal.

(16) Strong sex-based identities, however, make it exceedingly difficult to even imagine this kind of political movement. For such a movement to get off the ground, there must be at least some initial recognition of similar desires, some degree of mutual trust, and viable strategies for personal change for both men and women.

(17) "The feminist movement went a long way in restoring to women a sense of boundaries and in affirming our right not to be violated or be mere reflections of male desire. For some women, however, those boundaries in turn became a prison. Though seemingly freed of the domination of male desire, we are still no closer to our own. " Carol LeMasters "S/M and the Violence of Desire" *Trivium* #15 Fall 1989, (P.O. Box 606, Amherst, MA 01059). Her essay is brave, iconoclastic, personally revealing and heartfelt, delving into questions of identity, power, and the feminist community.

(18) Ruth Hubbard and other feminist biologists have written extensively on these issues. See *Women, Feminism and Biology: The Feminist Challenge*, Lynda Burke, Methuen, New York, 1986. *On the Necessity of Bestializing the Human Female* by Margot Sims (South End Press, 1982) satirizes biologically-essentialist feminism. Biological essentialism was less prevalent in the feminist movement before the dominance of separatist feminism in the 1970's and spiritualist feminism in the 1980's. *Eve's Secrets: A New Theory of Female Sexuality* by Josephine Lowndes Sevely (Random House, 1987) provides a biological argument based on anatomical homologies for the similarity of sexual response in males and females.

(19) All systems which redistribute economic power to individuals will

be a distinctly "feminist science," or whether women philosophers, mathematicians, and scientists somehow think differently from their male counterparts.

(9) Carol Gilligan's *In A Different Voice*, (Harvard University Press, 1982) for example, provocatively argues that boys and girls are socialized in radically different ways, resulting in fundamentally different ways of experiencing and acting in the world. She does not, however, look at the overlaps between the two groups, nor does she attempt to explain how some girls come to have more traditionally masculine qualities or how some boys come to have traditionally feminine ones. " Looking more closely at Gilligan's research it is hard not to see there a methodology designed to exaggerate difference and to disregard similarity between women and men." Lynne Segal, *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism* (Peter Bedrick Books, New York, 1987, p.147).

Typically in academic-feminist writing the psychosocial categories of "gender" ("masculine"/"feminine") are distinguished from the biological categories of sex ("male"/"female"), but in practice feminist activists collapse the gender categories into the biological ones. As far as I know there are no political organizations explicitly for "feminine" people (men and women) or "masculine" people (men and women), nor any which exclude on the basis of "gender" alone.

(10) There are a few discussion groups for men in these circles, but even these are usually open to interested women. There seem to be virtually no men-only public political events.

(11) It is hard to think of a conflict in the world which was not aided and abetted, if not created, by these distinctions, although obviously female nationalism cannot by any stretch of the imagination be shackled with responsibility for the death and destruction caused by its ideological cousins.

(12) E.g., Israeli eviction of the Palestinians is excused because of the horrendous experience of the Holocaust; Palestinian terrorist reprisals are excused because of the extreme brutality of Israeli occupation/repression. Contrary to popular belief, oppression does not necessarily sensitize one to the pain of others; victims of previous oppression can be just as brutal and insensitive to others as anyone else.

(13) Often in large mixed-sex groups, there is a call for separate women's discussion groups, usually rationalized by arguing that men will inevitably dominate the discussion if allowed to participate. By excluding men, women will feel safe and more able to speak in a group, and the problem of differential participation is thereby solved. What reportedly happens, however, is that in many of these women-only groups typically

nationalist movements can tap into deep wells of alienation, resentment, and anger. Where people felt powerless and alone, they suddenly feel empowered and part of movement. Where one's identity and self-worth were in question, now there is a movement to forge a common identity and history.

There is no question that nationalist-type movements can be extremely uplifting and personally empowering. However, there are deep problems which surface in the long run, after initial victories are won, and once the movement gains some power.

Double standards. By so sharply separating those of one's own group from everyone else, nationalism creates double standards of behavior. These double standards arise from parochial habits of mind which give the benefit of the doubt to members of one's own group and devalue the intentions of those outside the group. Those who are officially recognized as oppressed are allowed to do things that would otherwise be seen as oppressive(12). We readily see the sexist implications of conscious policies of sex-based exclusion when traditional men's clubs prohibit women members, but rarely is the reverse situation criticized. Yet both policies rest upon sexist assumptions, that the worth of a potential member is to be measured according to his/her sex. While oppressive behavior by those who have been victims of past oppressions may be understandable, it should not be condoned. Previous oppression cannot serve as a justification or rationalization for oppressive acts.

Perpetuation of oppression. Perhaps the worst danger of nationalist strategies is that they do not eradicate the oppressive distinction on which the oppression is built. In the process of organizing along nationalist lines, it is necessary to create a strong group identity ("class consciousness"), and a strong sense of the Other. Gynocentrists encourage identification as women, lesbian separatists encourage identification as lesbians, black nationalists encourage identification as blacks, and the list goes on. Rather than dissolving the oppressive habit of sex-based stereotyping,

the gynocentric program deepens sex-based identities and magnifies sex-based distinctions.

Paradoxically, nationalism sets up an incentive for perpetuating the oppression on which it derives its support, since its political base lies in oppression-generated national identities. Once the oppression is sufficiently ameliorated or eliminated entirely, then the movement becomes passe. Leaders of nationalist movements acquire a built-in interest in generating confrontations in order to renew group solidarity. Such inter-group struggle often masks intra-group power differentials(13). After power has been attained by the movement many believers are surprised to find that little actually changes in the basic power relations, except that now their leaders are members of their group rather than of a different one (e.g. female bosses instead of male ones).

Androgynist feminism: the amplification of autonomy

Androgynist feminism is an alternative to the nationalist, gynocentrist mode of political struggle. Androgynist feminists want to bring about a situation in which biological sex becomes increasingly less relevant as a social distinction(14). Women will gain equality only when the social categories of man and woman are finally stripped of their meaning, when it becomes largely irrelevant for the selection of life choices, when "masculine" and "feminine" traits become disconnected from biological sex. Both sexes will thereby gain choices that were not available to them before. Women will be freed to assume social roles traditionally restricted to men (e.g. having careers, developing their artistic and intellectual talents, assuming positions of public responsibility, organizing economic enterprises) as well as their traditional choices. Men will be freed to assume social roles traditionally restricted to women (e.g. raising children, coordinating life in the home, working with the poor and disadvantaged, teaching, nursing, pursuing their own emotional development)(15). Rather than the gynocentric trajectory of separation and perpetual

identity politics we must offer strategies of politicization that enlarge our conception of who we are, that intensify our sense of intersubjectivity, our relation to a collective reality. We do this by reemphasizing how history, political science, psychoanalysis, and diverse ways of knowing can be used to inform our ideas of self and identity. Politicization of the self can have as its starting point in an exploration of the personal wherein what first is revolutionized is the way we think about the self....Such a perspective, while it would insist on the self as a site for politicization, would equally insist that simply describing one's experience of exploitation or oppression is not to become politicized. It is not sufficient to know the personal but to know to speak it in a different way" (p. 107).

(4) Sadly, most contemporary anarchy-feminists seem to subscribe to this view, despite contrary arguments by outspoken anarchist advocates of sex-equality: Emma Goldman, Voltairine de Cleyre, Angela and Ezra Heywood, Stephen Pearl Andrews, and Victoria Woodhull. See *Freedom, Feminism, and the State*, Wendy McElroy, ed., (Cato Institute, 1982). Unfortunately, neither individualist feminism nor anarchy-feminism are rarely ever mentioned on the typical feminist political map, which includes liberal feminism, socialist feminism, marxist feminism, radical feminism, cultural feminism, post-modern feminism, post-structural feminism, Freudian feminism, French feminism, existentialist feminism and spiritual feminism.

(5) The gynocentric worldview owes its internal logical structure to hegelian nationalism by way of orthodox marxism. Instead of a totalizing framework subordinating all issues to struggles between economic classes, here all other issues are dominated by struggles between gender classes. Men as a class dominate women as a class, much as capitalists dominate proletarians in orthodox marxism. Patriarchy is the conspiracy of male power which makes such oppression possible.

(6) Many French feminists have used the "politics of the body" to implement covertly essentialist feminist programs. For example, Luce Irigaray poetically argues in her essay "When our lips speak together" in *This Sex Which is Not One* (Cornell University Press, 1985) that women are metaphysically distinct from men because of anatomical differences between penises and vaginas. Much of the French feminist discourse, which mixes psychoanalysis and literary criticism, seems to be deliberately written to obfuscate and mystify. On this side of the Atlantic, feminists such as Andrea Dworkin have long based their metaphysics of difference on anatomical asymmetries of heterosexual intercourse.

(7) as in currently popular practices of goddess worship.

(8) See Margareta Halberg's sensible discussion, "Feminist Epistemology: An Impossible Project?" in *Radical Philosophy* #53, Autumn, 1989. "Phallogocentrism" also comes up in whether there can

violence" is used in a feminist context, there is too often only silent acquiescence(28).

Out of these and other experiences, I have resolved not to participate in any movement which does not at least on its face treat me as an equal. I urge others, male or female, black or white, gay, bi, or straight, differently abled, whatever your situation, to do likewise; to leave movements which judge on the basis of innate characteristics and to form organizations which treat all people with mutual respect, as equal individuals. Only when we ourselves refuse to make judgments about people based on innate characteristics, will we be able to move toward the kind of society where we can be ourselves, unchained from the prejudiced, stereotypical expectations that others have of us.

(1) I take feminism to mean any movement which attempts to alter sex roles in the direction of sex-equality (however these concepts are defined by the movement).

(2) "Androgynist" has two common meanings: unisex , where everyone is a uniform mixture of "masculine" and "feminine" traits (monoandrogyny), and freedom from socially enforced sex roles where individuals, male and female freely determine for themselves how they want to be, without being coerced to be "masculine" if they are male, or "feminine" if they are female (polyandrogyny). Note that these two senses of the word are diametrically opposed to each other; one enforces a unisex conformity, while the other subverts it. In this article, the second sense of "androgyny," as gender freedom will be used. For more discussion, see the anthology "*Femininity, Masculinity, and Androgyny*," Mary Vetterling-Braggin, ed. (Littlefield, Adams & Co, 1982).

(3) Ann Snitow's excellent "Pages from a Gender Diary", in the Spring 1989 issue of *Dissent*, covers many of the same divides: between "minimizers" and "maximizers" of sex-difference, between "essentialists" and "social constructionists," between "cultural feminists" and "post-structuralists." She deals with the complex, problematic nature of the category of "woman" for feminist theory. Despite all of its subtle insights and self-awareness, she in effect tacitly assumes a gynocentric framework by assuming her audience to be entirely female. Men are still Other, outside the community of feminist discourse. For many years bell hooks has very thoughtfully grappled with the difficult questions of racial and sexual identity (see especially her recent *Talking Back: thinking feminist, thinking black* (South End Press, Boston, 1989): "To challenge

division, social roles will be more highly integrated, and less sex-segregated once the social, economic, and psychological barriers come down.

This vision is no less radical than its nationalist counterpart; it involves no less struggle around issues of power and economic gain (freedom has both a political and material basis), but the terrain on which it is fought is fundamentally different from that of gynocentrism. Rather than a struggle between innately different biosocial groups, the struggle is between those who desire the freedom to determine their own life choices and those who would impose choice-denying social norms in the name of the collective. Rather than a parochial struggle between various pressure groups each representing their "own people", the androgynist approach advocates universal freedoms to be extended to all people as potentially autonomous individuals.

To androgynist feminists it makes more sense to organize according to a shared vision of the future (patriarchy vs. sex-equality) rather than according to the categories of past oppressions (men vs. women)(16). Reconstructing the categories of the previous oppression and creating a woman-centered identity moves profoundly in the wrong direction--destroying choices available to women by advancing new ideologically determined norms, rather than expanding real life-choices(17).

In many ways the debate parallels that between the marxists and the anarchists a century ago over the role of hierarchy and centralized power within the revolutionary movement. The marxists said yes we need centralized authority structures, but they'll disappear after the revolution; the gynocentrists say we need separation and woman-identified power for a while until women are equal, then we will dismantle the structure. The matriarchical order that some gynocentrists fantasize about is the sex-role equivalent to the dictatorship of the proletariat; were they to attain power, the results would be similar: more oppressions, more hierarchies of power legitimated by past oppressions.

Biology should not be destiny. In contrast to gynocentric feminism, the basic assumption of androgynist feminism is that the social role differences between the sexes have little or no basis in biological differences;(18) they are social constructions which can be changed by concerted effort. Women and men are now on the whole socialized differently, but there do exist dominant women and submissive men. The problem needs to be recast in terms of how do we go about dismantling all power-based relationships, regardless of the sex of the dominant partner. For the most part, this strategy will benefit women, because most women in contemporary society tend to have less power in relationships. It will also benefit those men who are in similar situations. Dismantling of power structures empowers relatively powerless women and men, while taking power away from relatively powerful men and women. On a larger social scale, this strategy involves dismantling hierarchies of power in the workplace, in the political arena, in all the larger institutions of social life. Since women currently tend to be towards the bottom of hierarchies of power, a general democratization of power will for the most part benefit them(19).

Means and ends. As women and men in feminist organizations, we should seek to construct the social relations which mirror the kind of integrated, sex-equal society which we want to bring about. This will take honest, concerted efforts by both men and women to communicate and to change the ways in which we interact. We will necessarily have to find creative ways to empower and encourage those who have been put down in the past, and it will be a long, hard struggle.

If we take Emma Goldman's insistence on the consistency between means and ends, there should be no double standards in our organizations: if we do not want ourselves excluded from organizations on the basis of biology, we should not discriminate on that basis. This is not to say that groups which happen to be all-female or all-male are inherently bad, or that mixed groups are always necessarily

exclusions based upon biological sex are as deeply reprehensible as those based on race, or on any other accident of birth.

In political meetings, especially those with a high proportion of separatists, I have often heard very negative generalizations being made about all men, and almost never are these generalizations challenged. The solution here is not to suppress these grievances, because in many cases there are genuine, specific problems which need to be addressed. The task here is to get those who have complaints about the behavior of some individual or group to be as specific as possible about the behavior which needs changing, and to educate those whose behavior is offensive. Too often these issues are discussed in separate sex-segregated groups, making it impossible for men, who are usually the objects of criticism, to hear, respond and learn from their critics. How else are behaviors to be changed, if not by honest communication? I have heard women feminists say that they don't want to teach men how to behave ("women have been taking care of men all their lives"), and then in the next breath complain about unintended behaviors which they found offensive. Rather than focusing on the gender of the person, it is much more important to concentrate on the behavior: what aspects make it offensive, what assumptions lie underneath it? Standards of mutual respect and proper conduct within a community are thereby made explicit and applied to all members, whoever they are, male or female.

We also need to be more careful with our language. Much of the language used by contemporary feminist activists betrays some very crude and sexist generalizations (as in the construction "male violence"). And this comes from within a movement which championed the critical analysis of language. Imagine for a moment the reactions to constructions such as "black violence" or "homosexual violence." Immediately we see the racist and anti-gay implications of these connotations, and many will be quick to challenge the speaker, whoever s/he is, but when "male

to us(25). Often, we are told to start our own men-only groups, but to many of us this is as much an anathema as women-only ones. In addition, some of us do not identify as men, as inconceivable as that might be to those with strong gender-identifications. The insistence by some women separatists that men should form their own groups or caucuses is an external imposition of an unwanted identity(26).

During the debate around the Dworkin-McKinnon pornography ordinance I did some work with Cambridge Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce (FACT), which was at the time exclusively women. To my extreme dismay, several months after the referendum, FACT held a panel discussion of the lessons learned in the battle, and excluded men, even those who had worked on the campaign, from attending. Ironically, much of FACT's core membership was composed of S/M lesbians, who have also been marginalized and excluded from much of feminism(27). Recently I did phone tree work (in opposition to the Operation Rescue blockades of abortion clinics) for a pro-choice group, only later to discover that their meetings are closed to men. In these situations, one cannot help but feel used. This is exactly the sort of sexist marginalization that many feminists correctly criticized some New Left organizations for practicing. Now, tragically, feminist groups engage in the same patterns, and rationalize it in the same ways: we have other more pressing issues to deal with.

All the double standards and standard rationalizations notwithstanding, it is difficult to see these exclusions as motivated by anything but a deeply sexist way of seeing the world. Simply put, a man, whatever his persona, his political beliefs, his intentions, is excluded because of innate characteristics he cannot change. No person is perfect, but each person has some capacity to learn from mistakes and to change the way s/he behaves. Yes, all people should have the absolute and inviolable right to associate with whomever they please, but the rest of us do not have to morally approve of the basis of the association. In my mind,

better (It is the nationalists who always judge groups by the composition of their membership). It just says as matters of policy we should include/exclude people by their actions or chosen beliefs, not by accidents of birth. There may be some circumstances in which single sex groups may be necessary, but we should not quickly jump to exclusionary policies for all sex role issues before examining possible non- or less exclusionary alternatives(20). Difficulties for some group members in dealing with those of different sex, race, class, or sexuality should be seen as attitudes to be overcome by everyone involved, not as situations to be rationalized away or avoided by the group through blanket exclusions. If we cannot construct sex-equality in our own mixed sex organizations, how can we hope to do it on a society-wide scale? Clearly this is the challenge we must face if we seek to change society at large.

Freedom to define oneself: the construction of identity

If we are to believe seriously in the possibility of fundamental change, then we must build into our movements for social change those social relations which we seek to implement in the future society. The purpose of remembering the past should be to anticipate the future rather than to wallow in past oppressions. Gynocentrist feminism is determinist, its basic categories locked into the injustices of the past; androgynist feminism is constructivist, mindful of history but always oriented towards future liberation.

The politics of making biology irrelevant to destiny is a politics of choice, a struggle for freedom. If we act always to expand choice for more people; we will foster self-development, self-direction, and personal autonomy. Far from being a reformist program, expanding significant life-choices for most of the society will necessarily entail radical political, economic, and psychological changes. Freedom has a material basis (if you don't have money, you don't have economic alternatives), a political basis (if you don't have political power, all of your alternatives are subject to

decisions by others), and a psychological basis (if you don't have a sense of who you are and what you want, you can't effectively exercise decision-making autonomy). Women will only develop the means to exercise their autonomy fully if they are given real life-choices they themselves make as individuals, not if they are presented with a prefabricated model of womanhood(21).

Gynocentric feminism denies this choice on a very fundamental level, that of personal identity. Gynocentric feminism asserts that one's identity is fixed by one's biological sex, and that one has no role in constructing the core of one's identity. In contrast, androgynous, role-choice feminism asserts that both women and men have some (albeit limited) choice, that they are in some part responsible for the situation they find themselves in and that they have some (albeit limited) means of changing it. Power relationships are relationships between (at least) two complementary roles: those of domination and those of submission, and the relationship breaks down once either party ceases to play the appropriate role. Each of us participates in many different types of relationships involving power, and consequently most people have mixed roles: dominant in some relations, neutral in others, submissive in still others. Both have the option to leave or restructure submissive roles or to reject domination in favor of equality.

Androgynist, role-choice feminism undermines mystical, innatist identity formations by asserting that we construct our selves. Here the important sources of solidarity are the values which we have chosen for ourselves which we share in common with other people, not those values imposed upon us by traditional social roles or by "movement identities." We find others like ourselves, rather than molding ourselves in others' images. This process of self-construction determines who we are and how we experience the world around us.

Should political movements consciously construct personal identities of their members? Should "movement identities" be

reinforced and encouraged? Ultimately the answer to this question lies in the relative values placed on group formation and cohesion vs. the autonomy of the freely associating, self-constructing individual. Nationalist political strategies depend completely upon the construction of a common, national identity, a collective consciousness. Individualists can only see such a political construction of individual identity as a loss of self-determination and a diminution of individual consciousness. We well know the terrible effectiveness with which totalitarian, identity-manipulating political strategies mobilize to take power. We have yet to see an radical, cooperative, individualist alternative which could self-organize on a similar scale to diffuse power and to amplify freedom, but such alternatives are surely possible and remain to be fully developed and articulated(22).

Postscript: men and feminism

This article has been difficult to write for many reasons. It's very hard to express criticisms knowing the kind of vilification which will be provoked. I feel as many others who have been marginalized by feminist orthodoxy, but without even the saving grace of being female or lesbian or a member of some other widely recognized oppressed group. No doubt many gynocentrists will immediately dismiss the perspective simply because I am male and therefore in their eyes have no standing to comment on feminist issues, let alone to criticize their assumptions.

Even those of us who have been sympathetic to feminist ideals all of our lives and have been active for many years find it difficult to feel at home in the movement, to be accepted. Most feminist women have a deeply ambivalent attitudes towards participation by men(23). A small but significant number of feminist activists hate men in general; some refuse to talk with men at all, even those who are feminists(24). Most of the activist groups which deal with gender issues are women-only, so many of the discussions around these issues are carried out in political circles closed