

THOUGHTS
ON
FEMINISM

Radical
Feminists
(miscellaneous)

london 1972

Introduction

These articles are written by London women who consider ourselves Radical Feminists and have been holding discussions for almost a year. We prepared this collection for the National Women's Conference held in London in November 1972. It was intended to answer questions and to clear up some misconceptions about us. We are often described as man-haters, but we hope these papers will show that we are not anti-men but pro-women. Our articles do not represent all the tendencies in Radical Feminism. Some of us are already reconsidering what we have written. There is no consistent line in our thinking, there is only the shared goal of a continuing feminist revolution.

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Off each others backs!

Frequently, especially in the last few months, I've been molested by men. Perhaps these occurrences seem more frequent owing to my rapidly growing consciousness of how blatant men are in their sexism and aggression towards women; but they come as a result of my dressing to please myself and no-one else and in accordance with my way of life, they come because I'm somewhat solitary in life and habits and feel I have a right to walk alone along any street when I choose, no matter what time of day or night; they come because I don't drop my eyes when a man approaches or turn my head in another direction to that which I'd been looking in, or look timid and nervous.

Events which occur when a male murmurs a remark, hisses, whistles or just grabs or paws me are often dramatic as I react with action suited to the situation that has taken place. The after reaction is one of murderous anger as I recognise that once again a male has expressed the sex object/property attitude, the loathing, the violence that ALL men feel in greater or lesser degrees for ALL women and that it has, quite often, been more aggressive in my case because I'm not conforming to the stereotype in dress or manner, because he realizes I'm a threat to his male domination. If the time and place and circumstances were right he'd deal with me the way he thinks women who don't react as they ought should be dealt with. One day, the time, place and circumstances are going to be right - there are plenty of horrific murders of women to prove it - and I will be "liquidated" just as any non-conforming being, any threat to the system, is disposed of by the ruling class. That's a fact all revolutionaries must face. Every man is a policeman for male supremacy.

But what of it ...? Well, at meetings with other women, sitting cosily by the fire in someone's home or in a women's gathering, when I mention these experiences I'm appalled at the general reaction of the women. After expressing sympathy over the incident and generally expressing abhorrence over the molestation, they go on, frequently, to say "Perhaps it's your dress, men don't like it." "They're only looking for a reaction - if you ignored them they'd go away." (OH YEAH? - My most frightening encounter evolved from doing just that!). "They don't know any better." "Don't walk around by yourself at night (WHAT? AND STAY HOME?). "They probably recognised your WL badge (don't always wear it!) "You must have done SOMETHING to be molested like that." "They're oppressed by the system and its a symptom of their oppression." etc. etc. ...

These remarks are not only male identified and an escape from confronting the reality that it COULD happen to them, but show a veiled justification of, and an unconscious, by tacit agreement with, the act committed by the man/men. I'm sick to death of listening to women who attempt to justify male violence, who talk of how the system so oppresses men that they need to go out and molest, mutilate, rape, stab (you know all the other things as well as I do) women to escape it. Next time someone says a socialist/communist (you know all those ones too) revolution will change it all, I'm going to scream. I'm going to take her for a walk for several nights and see if her political ideas by the fire can stand up beside her experiences out in the cold reality.

A change in government or system doesn't change the way men behave in pubs, in the home, in the bedroom, in the office or on a darkened street at night. In these encounters it's not a black and white confronting each other (except twice) or a working class versus middle/upper class, or any other combination. It's a man and a woman and he is out to prove his domination and ownership. Politically, therefore, he is my enemy.

Women have, throughout the ages, become watchdogs and stewards on behalf of men, policing the responses and actions of other women, ensuring that nothing upsets the master, that all girls are conditioned in accordance with male wishes. Whenever this falls down, the male himself will step in and take over the discipline. He is aware that women will not unite with the deviate - he has installed in all that everyone else is the enemy: higher classes, lower classes, coloured races, other men, never himself.

Whatever women do for themselves is always secondary to that which they do for men. When a woman asks for something she urgently requires, she will often justify it by explaining how others such as her man and children will benefit. If the demand is made by many women they will talk about man and children in a universal sense.

While women were pressing so earnestly for the vote, they were also vehemently proclaiming it would be for the good of all mankind if one half of the population were enfranchised. With militancy and by shattering the myth of women's limited role, they obtained their vote. They trickled into professions and proved the opposition wrong. But before long the male reaction was in motion, in the guise of Freudian psychology, and took back with a theory what had been gained with years of work, pain, often violence, imprisonment and in some cases, death.

By convincing women that their desire for freedom stemmed from envy, and by playing on the fears and guilt of the newly emancipated, even the most staunch feminist could be shaken, if not by the Freudians themselves then by the newly reconverted women with whom she was identifying and who now rejected her as a "fanatic" or "man-hating frustrate" or "would-be man". Today we hear scorn for the Pankhursts and the W.S.P.U. because they were militant on the issue of women's suffrage. Their politics were "not broad enough to see the women's issue in terms of economic and class oppression". They united as women, for women and that alone dismisses them from any serious recognition. Yet Sylvia Parkhurst is more "in" than Annie Kenney it seems, despite the class difference! No-one heeds the prophetic statement made in 1914 by Emmeline Pankhurst ("My Own Story") that women will not progress in their struggle as long as they work in male organisations, for male activities and believe that by doing so they will gain their freedom.

All revolutions until the present have been fought for men. Women have fought but it's never their struggle. If present leaders of, and writers about, socialist, communist and Third World revolutions are an indication of what is in store for the world then women have no expectations of a better deal at any future date. When Fanon in "Wretched of the Earth" can take the rape of an Algerian woman who would not betray her husband and then go on for a chapter to discuss how the husband reacted, how he rejected his wife, how he was reduced to physical and emotional impotency by news of the rape while absent, how the Algerian man was deprived of his manhood by the French etc, etc, I question his analysis of just who the revolution was for. (Incidentally, I know from experience who it was for.)

When Lenin tells Clara Zetkin (Zetkin's "Recollections of Lenin") that discussion of women's two most enslaving burdens - sex and marriage - must come second and that women must relate their struggle to the youth movement in the Party and take on a greatly expanded mother role within communism, I cannot see how such a revolution guided by such a man has any relevance to me, to my mother, to my grandmother, to my sisters, my aunts or my cousins - despite its working-class basis. We women are told again that we are second or third on the agenda, to get on the end of the queue and we will be considered if we give help when needed. It's time we put ourselves first and fought our revolution. We've been in the queue the longest and taken more than any other class or race.

It's time we stopped accepting male oppression and excusing it. It's time we stopped feeling guilty about putting women first for a change and about openly expressing liking for our own sex. It's time that the pressures to tone down their politics were taken off radical feminists, lesbians and militant feminists. It's time that we recognised that the threat women feel from these women and their politics is the old fear that the male will reject us (and therefore all will reject us) or punish us for daring to identify with the rebels.

We should realise that the alienation is not so much our fear of that woman herself but a fear of the consequences when the master/husband/male in general finds out that a rebellion is brewing.

What we need to do is to realise that the only way to fight sexism is to assert ourselves and, in league with our sisters, do all that is necessary to bring about a revolution, a Feminist Revolution, the only revolution in history which cuts across class, race and nationality to unite the world's most oppressed people. We will never be liberated from our oppressors without a struggle. Women's Liberation must become Women's Revolution.

The man question

Let us follow precedent and consult a man: "Nowadays, many people are calling for a transformation to a national, scientific and mass style. That is very good. But 'transformation' means thorough change, from top to bottom and inside out. Yet some people who have not made even a slight change are calling for a transformation. I would therefore advise these comrades to begin by making a little change before they go on to 'transform' or else they will remain entangled in dogmatism and stereotyped party writing" (Mao Tsetung). So in England we have a series of books and documents relating women's liberation to "the greater struggle" but practically no analysis of what actually goes on in the kitchen, the school and the bedroom.

I would forego a million mentions of the heroic Vietnamese/Irish/Panther women in the male left organs (sic); and a dozen new clauses in their manifest for one sign of their recognising why women abandoned the left organizations to form their own. That is, for one measure of actual democratization between even the men in those organizations. Or for one individual male 'revolutionary's refusal to compete, decision to examine his personal feelings (in mixed or male company, not alone with one of us, his "hot-water bottle with tits"), real commitment

to childcare ... Actually I have seen just 2 men attempt responsibility for their children, and each of these men had come out as homosexual. Why will gay men also come out for our struggle? Because "so long as a man anywhere is ridiculed by straight men for being effeminate, whatever that is taken to mean, women will not have won their battle for full selfhood, since all the qualities that feminists affirm must come to be seen as beautiful and valuable and thus impossible to mock in anyone, regardless of gender" (Kenneth Pitchford).

I don't believe our oppression will cease until we consider TOTAL changes in the men we know, no longer seeing them as "simultaneously strong and weak - too strong for poor weak women to successfully fight them and too weak in their dear little egos for us to criticise them in any way" (Martha Shelley). We like to say that the Chinese women did consciousness-raising. They also went back and "spoke bitterness".

Lucy Stone saw the problem. "We must be rid of mere ladylikeness, we must succeed in making the oppressed class of women the most urgent in the demand for what we all must have. When we have brought this about, we shall be irresistibly strong. But while we lack enthusiasm and the consecration that can be derived only from the knowledge of great wrongs, we shall continue to show weakness." Our movement doesn't yet have "the knowledge of great wrongs" - we feel the wrongs of "humanity" (the other 49%) by far more keenly. **Some of us see housewives as backward; or as serfs who cannot revolt.** I'd certainly be afraid to stand in a public place and say (the truth) that more people die in a year from illegal abortions in South America than are killed in South East Asia (how could I explain that I go to the demonstrations? that I'm not a racist, a cultural nationalist, a pig?). Or to say that Sylvia Plath didn't use rape as a metaphor (how could my mind survive the ensuing critical gangbang?) But then, "a girl is just lost without her sense of humour," as Danny La Rue would tell us: after long and truthful discussions of our sexuality, my consciousness-raising group broke into involuntary laughter at the notion (from a marriage manual) that satisfactory lovemaking should always ensure the woman an orgasm. And now back into the Movement comes (oops) the vaginal orgasm, that last accomplishment of "ladylikeness" - or "mass-hysterical survival response" as T. Grace Atkinson put it.

We've seen revolutionary violence up till now as an element of other people's struggle. So our movement has supported the self-defensive violence of picketers, the Angry Brigade's assault on the State, the violence of individual women against the police at demonstrations ... and ignored the fact that we don't

know how to fight. All women are under threat of physical violence. Our Movement should demand that all women learn from childhood to resist that threat; and admit that it derives not from capitalism (Barbara Hutton) or imperialism (Golda Meir) or 'the system' (The Queen??) but from what Rivolta Femminile calls "the members of the penis culture".

The heart of the matter

"Sex is deep at the heart of our troubles and unless we eliminate the most pernicious of our systems of oppression, unless we go to the very centre of the sexual politic and its sick delirium of power and violence, all our efforts at liberation will only land us again in the same primordial stews" (Kate Millet on Jean Genet)

The reproductive function of woman, the predictability of her life style, has made it possible for man to control and dominate the female sex. From this biological difference, all human power systems can be traced.

After controlling and establishing himself as more powerful than woman, the next step for man was to want to extend his empire to include more people. Accordingly, he continued to establish power relationships with men to the point where all men were competing for status. We see, therefore, that from sexism sprang racism and class oppression.

Status is measured by the extent and quality of control man exerts over people and therefore, the more powerful the man (i.e. the more males he is able to control), the less urgent is his need to exploit women, his prime power base, and the more subtle are his methods of exploitation likely to be. But the exprsssing of himself through women is a basic ego satisfaction available to all men.

As the psychological power increases, that is, as male and female roles become less distinct (primarily among liberals), women are looking for equality within their relationships with men through reforms concerning contraception, abortion, childcare and equal pay. Man is sufficiently secure to no longer need to resort to the blatant degradation of women as, for example, do black and working class men in addressing women habitually as darling, baby, and referring to them in sexually derogative terms - cunt, skirt.

Considering man's relationship to woman as being basic to power structures, we must next look at that relationship to ask what makes women acquiesce to this psychological inferior-

ity, that is, what makes us into inferior beings. Because it is only by looking at ourselves that we can see why women continue to support men with their whole lives; it is only by asking what makes women penetrable psychologically by men that we can understand the nature, the root cause of women's oppression.

Women are classified as emotional creatures. Being deprived of other modes of expression, the height of most women's ambitions is closeness to another person (naturally, a man), expressed through physical intimacy. As long as women's sights are fixed on closeness to man, the ideology of male supremacy is safe. As long as she deems it natural that she should be psychologically open to man, that her vagina is the normal place in which man should masturbate, the status quo remains unchanged.

As long as we accept vaginal sex as the norm, we have little right to complain about male power. Because as long as THE SEX ACT remains the norm for sexual relationships, we remain the unconscious, habitual givers; pawns in the male power game. And we will continue to be dominated by men. It's too easy to blame the oppressor - it takes two to play a power game. The only person who is able/will want to change the relationship is the oppressed, and she can only do that by becoming consciously less penetrable, less open to men, that is, by withdrawing more into herself and questioning the extent of unconditional giving in her nature. By doing this we will become more aware of ourselves in all relationships with people; our personality alters in the process as we become less penetrable(vaginal) and increasingly self-contained (clitoral).

As people accept that male and female genitals aren't so different, that women experience orgasm in the corresponding part of the body to the male (i.e. clitoris as opposed to penis), the whole myth of perfect sexual union, of simultaneous orgasm is shattered. We see that there is little reason why normal sex should be between a man and a woman. Perhaps it will not be until woman no longer considers the male orgasm in her vagina as in her best interest and withdraws her services that reproduction outside of the human body will receive great attention.

As long as we have our closest emotional/sexual relationships with men, Women's Liberation can be no more than a hobby, an 'extra' activity. Our first loyalty is going to the man who penetrates us ideologically. The more penetrable we are, that is, the closer we come to achieving vaginal orgasm, the more fully we have surrendered our self to be supportive of another person. As long as we consider the slightly erogenous vagina to be his home territory for orgasm, we remain oppressed.

The 'radical' man who sympathises with women (or rather with 'aware' women) is both dangerous and obstructive to WL. He enables many women in the Movement to be hostile to men and yet still see their man as the exception.

The fact that many women come to WL thro the male Left, that is, having been politicised first on issues of concern to men (i.e. class, homosexuality) and because they continue to identify with the Left, has made the Women's Movement, to a large extent, a branch of the male Left. While the men get on with the real revolution (concerning economics), the domestic side of struggle (abortion, childcare) is left, traditionally to the women. Progressive men have co-opted revolutionary potential.

The Left, of course, understand that their male presence is not feasible in WL. Absent physically, they remain directors with their female representatives in the Movement reminding 'non-political' sisters of the bigger struggle outside, preventing women from concentrating too much on themselves.

Men close to WL approve of their women getting on with the social work involved. Campaigning for abortion keeps them in their place - as long as they're going to need aborting they're still accepting the passive role, and anyway, they are helping cope with the population problem. They can't do any real harm agitating for more pay either - he knows where the real power lies and in any case, he is unlikely to be at the bottom end of the male hierarchy to feel threatened! Even campaigning for equal opportunity need not disturb him unduly. After all, he still has the basic psychological power.

As long as women have such reforms as their goals, the power structure is safe. Men will continue to oppress women until women disallow it, until they become aware of themselves and start to question as to who benefits most from THE SEX ACT. From that point, the ability to assert oneself, to have respect for oneself as a fully autonomous person must follow. Women may continue to be 'giving' creatures, but let us give consciously rather than by habit; able to retain control of ourselves in the process. This becomes increasingly possible as we realise the clitoral nature of our sexuality and from this point understand the true nature of vaginal sex, that is, the total sacrifice of self which goes with the penetrable (vaginal) personality.

We must stop considering men and the concern they are feeling over the tearing away of the masculine role as a threat of annihilation of themselves. Otherwise, we have not yet accepted

the oppressor as being man. Any person who is receiving the sexual, economic and status benefits of the male role is actively preventing us from being whole people. We must move away from excusing our individual men as being non-oppressive to directing always more of our energies to ourselves, to women. We must be violent. In order to achieve anything, we must recognise ourselves as battered by male supremacy and work together to combat patriarchy. This cannot be achieved through liaison with patriarchs (men). We are not working together while some of us are still supporting men in our heads.

As long as women continue to understand normal sex, that is, sex for pleasure rather than reproduction, as consisting of vaginal penetration by the penis, they remain colonised and will always be unable to assert themselves fully. The vaginal (penetrable) woman will always have man's ideals in mind and put her own in a secondary position. As long as she is in this state, woman can work only to reform her conditions and cannot alter the power base.

Continuance of the male system depends on women allowing regular access to the vagina. Liberation for women is not possible so long as vaginal sex is accepted as the norm rather than as a possible variation. Only when woman understands the unequal nature of heterosexuality and from that recognises her life as an extension of male accommodation is she able to distance herself ultimately from her oppressor.

Strike against reproduction

"There is no more distressing spectacle than that of slaves who take pleasure in their servile state ... you are far from possessing the pride of those wild birds who refuse to hatch their eggs when they have been imprisoned ... take an example from the wild birds who, even if they mate with males to relieve their boredom, refuse to reproduce so long as they are not at liberty." (Monique Wittig)

As we become increasingly aware of our service function in relation to men and are demanding that men do more work in the home, take responsibility for childcare, that they pay us more at work, so we also become conscious of the service function of reproduction.

We can understand that the prime serving role of woman is that of providing the oppressor with people with whom he may continue his oppressive system.

Despite the extent of male power over us, we hold the ultimate power - to withdraw the services of reproduction. When woman exerts this power, unless man resorts to physical power (and when women stop thinking of themselves as 'feminine' and train their bodies to be active, even this may be of little avail), the patriarchal system will crumble. When he is refused the right to our bodies, his power ceases.

The belief in 'natural motherhood' means that women go on seeing their ultimate, their only real means of fulfilment in producing children. And having children makes it more difficult to lessen dependence on men.

But women have never done anything independent of men except produce children (not equating a casual fuck with producing children). Non-productive women, i.e. spinsters, old maids, the childless wife are 'failed' women. Outside of the family women can only be successful by becoming male identified or else be an anonymous cog in the male system. So we don't have the experience of female people fulfilling themselves on their own terms.

Not bearing children does not mean that we have no contact with children. As women are withdrawing from their men, increasingly there is a need for women to live with each other, to share the living with and the caring of children. Only when women know that they have the support of other women can they learn not to need to be possessive, to regard children, whether they have given birth to them or not, as part of their living group.

As more women realise that human fulfilment need not entail childbirth, that they can put their energies into other ways of living, of working with women, with children, so will the male power system proceed to lose its hold.

Oppose the nuclear family. Open the adoption 'homes'.

From time to time the media denounce women's selfishness in choosing abortion rather than bearing their child full-term and handing it on to other parents (married, well-off and practising Christians). At the same time, we know from the experiences of those "illegitimate" mothers that adoption homes and the agencies of state will make every effort to compel a woman to keep her child, marry its father, and feel guilt if she "abandons" it. Heads of adoption societies assert without apology that their job is to correlate the "new family" with the infant's biological parents - so working-class children

won't in fact lower the tone of middle-class adoptive households; and a baby whose mother has a low IQ is simply withheld from adoption. Can we imagine the way that children remaining in these institutions are regarded? And on what social assumptions they are raised?

We talk about children's liberation. Before getting pregnant (at a time when women have no control over the reproductive process) we should perhaps assert our kinship with these children, and, together with our brothers in G.L.F., demand a place for them in the new community we fight for.

Why not Miss World?

1966.

I enter a photograph for the "Evening Standard" Girl of the Year competition, thinking that if I win I can put off deciding on a job for another year after getting my degree. I lose.

1970. Conversation:

JOHN COCKS: My friend saw the Miss World demonstration, and he said the girls who were demonstrating were absolutely super ...

SELF: (cringes)

1972. Conversation:

AMERICAN FEMINIST: We haven't demonstrated against beauty contests or bridal fairs for the last 3 years.

SELF: Why?

A.F.: Because those demonstrations were anti-woman (she sounds surprised at my question).

Our action at the Miss World contest rests on 2 assumptions about the women competing: First (stated), that our sisters don't know what they're doing, have no control over their situation, and can therefore be ignored by us while we fight it out with Bob Hope and Eric Morley. The vanguard is dead. Long live the vanguard. Second (unstated), that "these women" are a kind of fake while we - still smiling at insults, making up for interviews, articulating male theory, zigzagging down streets where men walk straight through us - we are "the real women". It's Germaine Greer's phrase and if the movement doesn't agree, well John Cocks does.

What we must realise is that women (we) act in our own self-interest within the meagre choices offered us. No blame attaches to self-interest, or why did we want a movement of our own? Miss World actually offers the competitors a chance

of limited self-expression - very limited admittedly; last year Miss Portugal was allowed to walk at her own pace for one circuit, but on refusing a second time to break into a trot, lost her hope of the prize money. The contest is obviously shit but haven't we all eaten shit to get a job sometime? And we shouldn't accept a male estimate of those talents women now channel into self-presentation. Women don't paint their faces, choose or make clothes, decorate a house solely to please a man. In Sweden, London and California, women are beginning to make art out of what were once called crafts - sewing, tapestry, basketwork, cut paper. This art is not 'feminine'; a lot of it is huge and very scaring. When our revolution comes people might see "The other side of the underneath" of those smiling well-groomed contestants.

The Miss World demonstration was a first sign that English women were coming together to reject that definition of them which everyone now knows: Sexual Object. Times have changed. What we have now is a ...revolutionary party? The demo's success as a tactical operation is assessed in 'Time Out' between the waterbeds of 'Forum's ads for figure modelling; women tend to go to the Albert Hall with their boyfriends and are entertained by mor@ men making fun of something we've never felt was funny - our servility, the masks we have to wear and the clothes which truss us ("Women Are Not Chicks" says a Chicago poster).

I've here criticised the event which reminds the world we still exist. This is because I hope that after the discussions of this weekend, the world will be getting other reminders.

Action now

Presumably we're in the Women's Movement because of some common causes - that seems obvious - yet we seem to spend so much time, in big meetings and national conferences, arguing about specific theoretical differences and not acting positively with other women. The most obvious agreements we have are that we're oppressed in a male society (oppression which is today culturally determined. We have come far from nature - now the culture guarantees the continuance of biologically determined sexism); that we've got together to work this out, sort it out, change it. We women working with women changing things for the better for all women.

We have been talking in England now for about three years - we have talked - we differ greatly. Some of us think the 'enemy' is capitalism, some think it's sexism, but most see it as both but place them in different order or importance. That's stating

very, very briefly what has happened - BUT, in fact, in the eyes of everyone and in the unchanged eyes of the people who dictate to us who we are - through the media men - fuck all has happened - we're even conned into laughing publicly about Women's Liberation ourselves.

Nothing has changed because Women's Liberation is a very part-time issue for most of the Women. (That is, outwardly, nothing has changed - the very fact that hundreds of women have become aware of their oppression and stepped out of the usual con of existing entirely through men, is a big thing.) It's a one-**evening-a-week meeting**; we have become like any left-wing political group - meeting weekly, writing pamphlets, being enthusiastic about 'the revolution' and feeling high once a week (or low, depending on how the power-struggled meeting went that night). We've fallen into that trap of not living the life we're talking about - getting stuck on the issues we can reform and getting us no further.

We're afraid to really threaten men, because that would really threaten our own lives (as we look at them from the limited present) - we are stuck solid into heterosexuality - using most of our energy trying to work out our individual relationships with MEN - so very little energy is being put into working within WL with WOMEN. We're clinging onto heterosexual privileges given us by male society created to make sure we stick by men (eg status, economic advantages, protection etc). Of course these heterosexual relationships are "on the road to being free of role-playing" - that's why we put so much energy into them - but by trying to develop freer types of relationships with men, it's US who use up much more energy talking, screaming, crying, kicking THE OPPRESSOR -man.

Male structured institutions (which is every one) need to be broken down, individual men changed radically - but it's not up to us to change individual men - when we're not around cooking their dinners, being on show and fucking for them, they'll soon know they'll have to change and THEY CAN WORK IT OUT FOR THEMSELVES.

Women's Liberation is getting clogged down with small male reformist issues (eg contraception and abortion). We are leaving no scar on anybody - the reason is because of this enormous waste of energy being abused on men and just asking men and his institutions to change instead of grabbing what we want with women. If we really, sincerely want to change society and be rid of sexism, capitalism in all their subtle and not so subtle forms, we have got to change our living - which doesn't just mean spending hours talking about possess-

ions of people/property, free love/sex etc - it means withdrawing from our male-orientated lives, living, trusting, working playing, sexing, loving, hating WITH WOMEN - giving up all heterosexuality - really putting into practice what we've talked about for ages - SISTERHOOD.

Only when we are together, and not returning at midnight once a week to tell boyfriend/husband "what's been said at the women's meeting", can we really start to have impact of any sort - can we really begin to change for the much better. We're not a mass movement and won't be for a long while yet - there's so much to be done and explained before then. Only when we're controlling media will we be able to start explaining in our language what we women think, do, who we are - instead of having labels thrown over us. But it's going to be a long while before we control media or are even allowed to talk about women ourselves - until then our actions have got to be loud and clear, positive to women (and damaging to men).

So when we in the Women's Movement have left our emotional relationships with men and are then more women identified - the first thing to do is learn to be independent of men in other spheres too and learn to be inter-supportive with other women (learn useful household skills, car skills etc).

We should also become independent of power-crazy women who use Women's Liberation groups for their male-type ideas of being individually powerful rather than becoming collectively strong with other women - these women have to change this oppressive aspect of themselves, for we surely aren't striving to be powerful in the male sense of the word (oppressively).

The difference between helping/forcing women to become aware of their own oppressiveness over other women (eg power crazy-classist-, ageist-, racist-, sexist- women) and helping men become less oppressive, is the important fact we so often overlook, man is the oppressor of ALL WOMEN, so all women must fight THIS oppression; and so that this can happen, we women must sort out, by using positive women-directed energy, how we can work more easily with each other - for a start, the ones amongst us who do feel oppressed by other women must talk it out and show them how they are putting some women down - this sort of helping someone out of their oppressive role is necessary in order for women to be united, whereas helping men is contrary to being a full person.

We have to work out together what sort of "socialism" we need and not work within male socialist/Marxist/Communist organisations hoping that "when the revolution has happened the men are

sure to miraculously stop oppressing us". For so many of us, Women's Liberation is the secondary struggle in our lives - it's separate from our living; our male politics of the past and present are not being questioned enough.

To state exactly what is wrong now and how to right it both now and ideallistically in the future is not for just one person to do. What I think could be done now is that those of us who do feel similar frustrations to express what we feel to each other and COLLECTIVELY DECIDE what areas we need to learn more about - what specifically needs attacking, what methods need to be used, etc. I can't write down a paper revolution - it's been done so many times before and is usually quite useless, being idealistic and unrelated to one's own experience. If when some action is going on we could report it amongst each other thus spreading knowledge and support, we'll soon learn what we feel personally capable of doing. It just needs a small group of women friends to start the ball of action rolling.

One just hopes that more and more women will stop seeing themselves through men and start seeing themselves as whole individual women who have so much to gain from other women.

Towards a women's culture

It seems to me that there are many definitions that must be attempted before one can get near defining Radical Feminism. The most basic definition needed in that of WOMAN.

As someone said, woman has been defined for so long in terms of cunt it is difficult to go beyond that. To say that woman is womb and mammaries is not quite sufficient either. For while those kinds of definitions may suffice now, if we are real really after gender liberation - an end to sex role tyranny, then we must define our most basic terms in ways that encompass the revolution we want to bring about.

Perhaps it would be easier to begin by defining sexism - the domination/oppression of one sex by another, usually seen in terms of what we know as 'male' oppressing what we know as 'female'. What is the nature of this oppression? That the oppressor sees the oppressed as 'he' wants to and not as 'She' really is. That 'she' must make her primary desire that of pleasing 'him', regardless of whatever second-level aggression and hostility may exist. That 'he' is then able to see situations in simplistic terms, especially emotionally as 'he' only attributes emotional responses to 'her' that 'he' is prepared to deal with or overlook. 'She' on the

other hand, tries to UNDERSTAND, and in any case not to upset 'him'. THAT IS TO SAY, 'SHE' IS IN FACT MUCH MORE EMOTIONALLY FLEXIBLE - has a wider range of emotions, and all that goes with that.

The best example of this to me is in hearing/listening. Because of the collective unconscious of women which has made them feel the responsibility for hearing a child when she cries out in the night, women are aware of far more of the subtleties of life. Some may argue that many men get up in the night when the child cries, but a woman knows that the ultimate responsibility to be sure that someone gets up to see to the child rests with her - and women accept this responsibility.

Which seems to bring me to the question of violence.

The stereotypic woman is one who is passive, while men are aggressive. This is translated directly into the use of violence (some discussion of the distinction between force and violence would probably be useful here.) Men, as we all well know, fight wars and are quite ready to resort to violence to settle disagreements, to assert their control etc. etc. etc. (I don't really want to discuss men more than necessary). Women allow themselves to be subjected to this violence. In order to prevent rape WOMEN are ordered off the streets!!! We certainly know who makes those laws. But how did this situation come about?

Did it exist before the industrial revolution, or was it the economic competition for jobs and the desire of employers to keep wages as low as possible that put women into this seemingly permanent inferior position? That is, how much of the present situation is due to urban conglomerates, overcrowding, etc. etc. Or alternatively, has this tyranny over women existed as long as classes have existed? That is, any man made to feel he is in a 'lower' class immediately wants to get at the man above him through that man's woman. THAT IS, BASIC TO THE CLASS SYSTEM IS THE CONCEPT OF WOMEN AS PROPERTY.

Women as independent, emotionally flexible beings immediately undermine a male-dominated system. As capitalism is male-dominated and the nuclear family is currently its most powerful agent, women's liberation would mean the end of culture as we know it.

Defining woman

The ideological rape of women is incessant. Its logical outcome is the premise 'no woman can be raped if she doesn't want to be'. The immediate theory is that any woman can constrict her vaginal muscles so tightly as to prevent penetration. If she would rather be penetrated than beaten to death then she really wanted to be raped after all. Every raped woman feels guilty at having been raped and society conspires to make the rapist blameless, or at least at the mercy of uncontrollable but understandable and 'natural' biological urges. The natural urge for survival which leads women to submit to rape, night after night in their conjugal beds, is never recognised for what it is and can thereby be separated off from what we classically think of as rape:

'To violate forcibly and without her consent' - to trivialise, degrade and ultimately refuse to accept any woman's definition of herself - thereby denying her very existence. To establish standards of femininity and to say that in proportion to how short of those standards one falls, one is that much less than a 'real woman'. The myth carries itself away and it becomes like keeping up with the Joneses. Someone always has more, one never quite knows how much more but imagines more than exists, and so it spirals until we are all chasing after an impossible ideal (at the same time consuming more capitalist goods and services).

A 'real woman' is, in the end, one who wants to please men. Whether she succeeds or fails or how close to either she comes merely establishes her place in the hierarchy (the top being pleasing the top man - socialists will tell us about male hierarchies). A woman who does not want to please men is probably a lesbian (never a woman) or possibly an old maid (a failed woman) or if young enough, a tomboy (not yet a woman). A 'real woman' who finds the 'job' of pleasing men unsatisfying is a hysteric. So much for us from where they sit.

But how do women define women?

We live in a world where all images in all media are male defined coming from a culture based on male values. 'Woman' is 'wife of man'. So what do we even call ourselves? And what do we have in common, as identity beyond genitals or perhaps hormone balance? In a gender liberated society these will be unnecessary questions, but in order to bring about that liberation it is necessary to focus on the actual area of struggle. To do this by defining women in terms of ourselves rather than in terms of men is to act

in a decolonising fashion. In defining ourselves in this way we are taking a step in the direction of our liberation, gender liberation and the feminist revolution.

Race

To Radical Feminists sex-class is the basic division in the world. All women are our natural allies (whether they know it or not), all men are our enemy. So we have no difficulty in deciding where our loyalty lies in international conflicts and in questions which we are told involve racial prejudice.

We white Feminists are, however, guilty of racism. We habitually do not support black and coloured sisters in a way which is in their best interest. Instead, we support their MEN. Is female liberation not for these women?

We do not support black women when, talking of oppressed peoples we say "blacks and women ...". Black sisters must feel unable to identify honestly to this kind of statement. Where is there mention of black womanhood acknowledged as a separate identity from that of the black nation?

When we say 'black liberation' we assume, wrongly, that black women are included in this concept and will find their liberation through the liberation their men are fighting for. BUT THIS IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR US. THAT IS WHY WE ARE IN THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT. We white women in the female liberation movement obviously believe that our liberation is not the same as, or included in men's ideas of revolution. We insult our black sisters by applying to them a notion which we ourselves have rejected as next to useless.

Black women will never feel that our movement is relevant to the struggles of their lives while we persist in presenting them as appendages of their men. We must speak out about the sexism of the black man in his relation to us, and to coloured women. We must try to eradicate the white liberal guilt we have been made to feel about the 'emasculated black man' and identify strongly with women, with whom, after all, we have everything in common.

Pro women

All women are oppressed as women whatever their economic status. If there is a division in society defined by physical appearance into dominating and dominated classes, then no member of the underclass can move into the top class unless they cross the physical boundary, i.e. no woman can become unoppressed as a woman unless she crosses the physical and

psychological boundary and becomes a male. The history of women is one of oppression and powerlessness. They fulfil the same role of child-bearing and home making. All women are conditioned to conform to the 'normal' idea of a female i.e. feminine, and to enter the male institution of marriage. The culture of their society, art, values, customs, politics, etc reflect the absence or deformity of their sex. Women as a group have no power in the existing system; they can only fit in and accept the rules. The female that becomes an M.P., managing director or oppresses other women directly by delegating their work to them cannot change the concept of women's work or the idea of femininity in her own class without challenging the whole system. The woman in the top economic class can't change the concept of femininity for her own class because it would change for all economic classes. She is not allowed to challenge the oppression of women because that involves attacking males - she merely delegates the responsibility of her children and her housework by oppressing other women e.g. nanny, cleaner, maid. It is only herself as an individual that is removed from the function, it is still her role, she has not changed the idea of woman's work. Women who support and work for the values of the system gain some economic advantages and prestige but in supporting the system basic to which is the oppression of women, they are supporting the oppression of women and of themselves as women, therefore they support the system at a price.

The domination of women by men and the manipulation of society in men's interest is sexism. Women's role and identity are merely what men require them to be. New humans are required so women's first function is to reproduce and to look after the offspring. This function brings with it all the restrictions that are necessary to keep male pride and confidence secure - faithfulness etc. A female must give a male the psychological support needed for him to go on oppressing her. In order for this dominance not to be challenged by women, her territory is limited, her roles are functional and supportive.

To prevent women spending time and energy with other women, when men need it, the view of herself and of other women is derogatory, continued by male control of art, literature, history and the media.

When related to the female, the male is a dominant creature. Another male challenges this dominance. The relationship between two males can only be a competitive one. A male can have no male as his equal; he can either be more or less dominant. The inferiority of women is needed psychologically by men and in order to keep his identity of dominance he must compete with other men. This general principle can be seen in the way that

men organise their society, play competitive games, make war - and it can be seen in their methods of government and in their political groups.

Therefore, in order for the society, organisations, concepts, culture to flourish, this basic principle must be maintained. It is not just the female's role of reproduction, home-making, emotional encouragement or even her work that keeps the system going but the general feeling that she is inferior. Single men benefit from this, as do monks and all male institutions, even when no women need physically be present. That is why a male is more violent with women because his identity and male pride is at stake.

As well as the actual work she performs, the female's lower existence is needed psychologically by the male for competition, eg for one class to control another, for gangs to be better than other gangs, for one political group to lead another. In order for a male to fit into the society, the club, the party, he must asseet the dominant male identity.

Considering the weight of male dominance - organised armies, police and the accustomed use of force - the female is given remarkably little freedom. Females are not encouraged to defend themselves against the violence of men and great energy is used to keep them divided. Females who take up positions in society which are not supportive of men or do not act in a male-approved way, e.g. women who don't marry and women who rebel, are given very little respect in society and are therefore a threat. This illustrates that men cannot respect women as a group by using them and oppressing them merely through physical force, they have to believe that they are inferior. The relationship between the dominant and lower males is not only continued by psychological means. A lower male keeps his separate male identity, but he is kept in his place by conditioning and force. With females however, it is not possible for men to dominate them mainly by physical force because they need them psychologically.

Male competition, being based on nothing more than uncontrollable feelings of self-importance, can get out of hand e.g. war. In times of war, men need women to help in their battles, either keeping their society going while they are absent or directly helping them in the confrontation. Therefore the female duties develop and they perform tasks previously done by men. The task of putting the females back in their place is not always completely successful and often previous jobs continue to have bearing on women's relative freedom, bringing a contradiction to their female conditioning.

The motive of competition with other males hides the basic oppression of women that it is based on, and only when this competition produces contradictions in the women's position does their basic oppression come to the surface in the shape of a female rebellion. When females rebel on their own terms, then the reason for the male's war-games is undermined. Women who refuse to support men and want their freedom are attacking the male mind. The 'real man' would rather destroy the society he lived in than not be a 'real man' in it, hence the strength of feeling from derision to anger and violence that a female rebellion receives.

Men welcome women into their societies, institutions, parties only if they are well-versed enough in male values, priorities, ie if they have been well enough conditioned into male thinking. They are thus rendered incapable of identifying with women who are not approved of by their males. Thus men form camps with female supporters. Obviously there is no recognisable female camp as this cannot be accommodated by the system. "If you are not in my male camp, you must be in one of the others, if you don't support my struggle you are supporting my oppressor". If some women can't be put into a camp then there is the class of women who haven't made it with men and aren't feminine or respectable anyway e.g. spinsters

Male socialists would say that the interests of the women in the upper economic classes were directly opposed to those of women in the lower economic classes. Capitalist men would agree as the women's first identification must be with their economic class, with the laws and ideas of their men. To say otherwise would be a threat to all men. In this way all men control women. The top group of men comfortably control the women in their own group and the lower men control their women as far as the top group will allow. The lower male's pride can be left to itself if it serves the interest of the dominant male, eg the damage done to the lower male's ego when a woman asks for equal pay or enters a previously all male occupation. Therefore, sexism of the lower groups of men can be curbed to suit the top male's interest. The lower males however fight back eg on the question of equal pay. In 'Woman's Estate' by Juliet Mitchell, the attitude of the unions to women workers is illustrated by the T.U.C. who "stress that it is in the interests of all workers to urge its implementation because among other reasons, in times of economic recession and forced labour redundancy, women form a pool of cheap labour" and "Women as ununionized cheap labour pose a threat very comparable to that of immigrants."

Thus it is a battle between groups of men, one group of men in control of all. The top men convince their women that their

interests lie with them and therefore they accept their economic privilege at the price of their own identity and do not identify with the lower group of women. Similarly, the lower group of women are blind to the oppression of the women in the higher economic class because the economic battles of males take precedence.

Women believe that the enemies of their males are also their own enemies and without support their males may be beaten by outsiders. They are encouraged not to have a real struggle of their own and not to identify with each other as an oppressed group. This division of women is very strong and well maintained. It is easier for the standard confrontation of men to take place than a direct battle between the sexes. It is easier for females to support the male battle and join in the struggle on one side than to fight males themselves. If females have believed and identified with the aims of their men, it is easier for them to support their males than to realise why they are fighting in the first place.

The organisation of society, its beliefs, values, rituals, culture etc stems from the relationship between the two distinct beings - female and male. **Male domination and competition is the general principle.** Analysing and taking part in male war games of any sort is merely practising sexism and supporting the principle of society rather than challenging sexism itself. Analysing how **men** practise their dominance and competition and taking part in their struggle with each other will never destroy their dominance or change the society for women.

To say the struggle is only an economic one is to ignore the foundation of society, to ignore one half of humanity, seeing women only when they fit into the economic scene, always as they are related to men. Men have built capitalism and now we must help them to destroy it, using the same attitudes, methods and values that created it. All the evils of women's oppression are attributed to capitalism but women's oppression did not begin with capitalism and will not end when it has ended.

The division of the sexes in the working class that the upper class males are exploiting and using for their own economic **ends is one that society and their dominance of their own** class is based on. Asking women and men to relate as workers in the same struggle is asking them to ignore the basic division of society, refusing to analyse it to see how it is maintained.

The economic system benefits from the unity of the couple and the family, but it is the subservience of the female in **this basic** unit of society that maintains the patriarchy. Women tied to any family system by lack of power and conditioning are **of benefit**

psychologically to all men and therefore the use of the basic unit can't be isolated to the top class of males.

If you are fighting capitalism, you are saying that economics establishes and maintains the sexual division. The methods of sexism change, but the main principle is the use and oppression of females by males. With subjection of the female and his dominance as a principle, the male competes with others for his own power and prestige. Money is a power symbol. Dominant males change and reform their sexist society to coincide with their interests. When women's freedom is relatively extended on male terms for male use, it is not a conscious effort to free women but a by-product of his search for power. It will never be in his interest to free women because that undermines his position. He is using women in his home, factories, institutions to improve his own economic position and power position. If you challenge the economic system, you are challenging the dominant male. If you are fighting sexism you are challenging the basis by which he keeps his power over men, using women, i.e. the reason for his power.

To only support the lower male's struggle against the top male is a false consciousness. Males will determine the course and action of the struggle. What power will women have after the 'revolution' if none before and none during? If women submerge their struggle to that of men, their position in the new structure will be determined by men. Women's consciousness of their oppression will not remain high if they have not fought for women's interests, with women only, removed from the inter-relationship with men.

Too often the interests of women are submerged in the struggle for the greater goal, i.e. the replacing of one set of males and their values with another set. Women's problems are fine and can be indulged in when there is a lull in the main struggle, but when the 'real' struggle comes along, a potentially threatening strike or just blatant male aggression, then there is no time for such niceties. As if the women's movement existed to stop the oppression of women in the male revolutionary groups and had nothing to do with the course of the struggle. This is, of course correct from the male point of view, i.e. to make pretensions to female equality in the male camps between skirmishes.

Any 'revolution' by males would lead to a society which would reflect the sexism within which the struggle occurred and this would obviously not change as long as men were in control. There would still be a need for a woman's revolution based on the height of consciousness and potential power of women in the new society. The feasibility of female revolution would seem to be remote when

we consider history, or rather, recorded history. Male control over the generally accepted methods of struggle have guaranteed women's energy is devoted to one or other of their causes. The argument of **women's lack of potential for rebellion even** exists in the movement, e.g. working women are considered never to have political consciousness because their identification with the family results in their lack of identification as workers. Also, women are considered not to have revolutionary potential because of their absence in strong positions in production etc. **Our lack of solidarity is due to the lack of history of women's struggle for women's interests alone; this is the result** of being the psychological underclass. All males are responsible for this; women are used by capitalist males for their own ends and also by working males, being needed to strike when asked for support and laid off in time of unemployment. This effects single as well as married women. Women's potential is measured by male standards, by the number of women present in production, the male battleground.

Our struggle is both against the top class of men and the men they control. If action against either is considered as support for their opponents, it is because we are not recognised as having a struggle ourselves. Our interests only overlap when we are involved in the male competition which effects women. Women used at work by top males have some overlapping interests with any males they work with. The struggle is not the same but the action at the time is. Males and females can do the same thing but the aims can be different. Asking for equal pay is more important than for more pay, because a female is comparing her status as a woman to the status of the other half of her economic class. She is considering the basic division in society. She can then be conscious of the dominance of the top males and how it relates to her oppression by her own males. Obtaining unequal pay reflects the inferior status put on all women. She is challenging male dominance rather than ignoring the sexism of her own men and merely challenging the economic dominance of the top men.

We have our own goal, and actions should be looked at in terms of our interest. We do not consider the top group of men as the only enemy, the outsider that binds our interest to the rebelling males. We are not fighting capitalism, we are fighting sexism, the cause of capitalism. We do not fit into their theory, we do not have to fit into their struggle. We will not help to hand over power to another group of men.

Since women are the psychological underclass, working women should identify themselves as members of the underclass in an oppressed economic position rather than primarily as members of the working

class and secondarily as females. Women's first consciousness of their lower sexual class position will free them from complete identification with the family, unions and male political organisations. It is only then that they can see their position in relation to all groups of males. Women's consciousness cannot depend on the levels of rebellion and theory of men nor can woman's struggle be organised around the power structures of men (production).

So called revolutionary male socialists are merely reforming a male structure. Only women can be revolutionary. Free women can no more fit into a male revolution than they can fit into a male world. Women's Liberation does not just mean that women who were not primarily participating in socialist groups should now organise together only to analyse their oppression in relation to these groups and then join in with the real revolution when it comes along. Our liberation does not rest on a refinement of a male socialist society. The system is male; it can never be changed, can never be a different system until the male sex is not dominant. Merely removing economic classes only reforms a male system since males can find other power symbols. Only women can be revolutionary since they alone can abolish patriarchy.

Thoughts on the Movement

The Womens Movement has come to a critical juncture in its **development** and the clearest sign of this is the current debate over the structure of the movement.

There is great emotional loyalty to the small group structure. Women - so long isolated and privatized within nuclear families - need the intimacy of the small group to 'come out' of feminine role-prisons to be people. Learning to talk and re-awakening one's ability to think is a long, often painful process. Schooling and cultural conditioning in general have taken a big toll on our abilities for self-expression. And they have also made each woman fear loosing that bit of individuality she feels she expresses in her privatized existence. It is only through consciousness-raising in small groups that women will come to see the commonality of their experiences and be willing to make generalizations about themselves. And it is only when we can begin to generalize that we can begin to involve the majority of women in struggles for liberation.

The small group serves another useful function, and that is to enable us to work out revolutionary (radically new) styles of political relationships. 'Leaders' is not inherently a bad thing; it becomes bad and therefore counter-

ative. Because all available models for leadership contain these unsisterly elements, we are treading unexplored ground in trying to work out political structures. This search is complicated by the fact that most women do not identify with women. Most of us feel more intelligent and more capable than what they have been told women are like. An essential element in consciousness-raising is to realize that all women are capable of intelligent thought and capable action. When we each believe this in our gut, the need for hierarchical structures will have died that true sisterhood will have been born in its place.

It is not enough, however, to just sit around in our small groups and talk. After an initial period - probably six months or a year - the grievances that made us come out to join a small group in the first place will have been pretty thoroughly aired. And even the most fruitful of insights as to the nature of our oppression cannot keep a group going when this point is reached. Usually one of two things happens - either the group falls apart or a process of purging group members - eating our own flesh - begins. And so we arrive at the present debate.

There seems to me very little doubt about the need for small groups as a way in to the women's movement for the reasons described above. And there also seems to me little doubt about the need for something more after a time. There seems to be general agreement that this need for something more ought to take the form of action. We are then faced with the question of what action. This carries with it several highly charged issues. The main issue is the one of differences among women.

It often seems that while passionately defending the uniqueness of every individual, women at the same time strongly resent and possibly are threatened by another woman or women doing something different. This general attitude has made it difficult to begin actions as no one has wanted to appear to be elitist or to be acting in a 'vanguard' fashion. It is important to realize that, while certain generalizations can be made about all women, groups of women have different concerns and interests and therefore different priorities. This fact has been in large measure obscured by the creation of local groups on the basis of geographic proximity. And it is perhaps one of the things which has prevented local groups from engaging action. The important thing to bear in mind is that differences among women are not divisions between women. Our unity in diversity is the source of our strength.