

WE ARE WOMEN



Written by Angela Rose
Toronto 1973

Women themselves



Dennis
Braithwaite

What will kill women's lib in the end is not male chauvinism, media sniping or public apathy, but women themselves.

Already, woman-like, they are fighting like cats, both in the movement and on the outside. In last month's *Esquire*, Germaine Greer put down the Libbers who went to the Democratic convention intent on getting concessions from McGovern. Because that vanguard acted like women, Ms. Greer reported bitterly, they were hosed, as usual.

In this month's issue, regular contributor Nora Ephron has some very nasty things to say about Betty Friedan, while putting Gloria Steinem on the kind of pedestal men are usually found erecting for women.

Poor Betty Friedan; six years ago,

her book, *The Feminine Mystique*, more or less set off the current feminist rage, but now there are none so poor to do her reverence. Midge Decter, the anti-feminist author of *The New Chastity and Other Arguments Against Women's Liberation*, calls old Betty a "would-be intellectual" and while she's at it characterizes Kate Millet's book, *Sexual Politics*, as "vulgarity almost not to be credited."

What makes women fight the way they do? Men, of course; that is, they fight over men, or to get men, or impress men. Even the chilliest feminists are really only trying to attract some man's attention. In the first instance they may be getting revenge on a shucked husband or lover, but their long-term intention is to connect with another male, on better terms than the first time, if possible, on any terms, if necessary.

It would be a terrible world were this not so. If men and women weren't obsessed with each other, there would be no art in our lives, no striving, no bridges built, no wars, no revolutions, no fun. Women's lib itself is the best proof of this. What have they accom-

will kill women's lib

plished? What enjoyment are they getting out of life?

It isn't that men are all that wonderful, far from it; by any rational standard of excellence, women are better than men. But they can no more exist without the other sex than men can. To deny this is to place man totally out of harmony with nature—and, God knows, he is kinky enough as it is.

The man-woman thing—love, sex, marriage, coupling, the unique and enduring friendships that arise between them—what else is there in the life of human beings that is of any real relevance? Homosexual love, I suppose, must be counted in this arrangement too; but it is a minority aberration, second best, even by the testimony of some homosexuals.

None of this argues against the equality of men and women, if equality can be defined and if, after it's been codified, it is still what both really want. Midge Decter believes that women can't cope with the freedoms that are being thrust upon them now and that women's lib is a reflection of their insecurity and anxiety.

Whether that's so or not, I think it's true the new feminists are motivated by hatred or resentment of men, a very subjective, unnatural and ultimately insufficient foundation for a movement that asks to be taken seriously both as a revolutionary philosophy and a rational guide to behavior.

Women, thank heaven, will be the last to follow women's lib, in practice, however interesting they may sometimes find it to be in theory.

Reprinted from the *Toronto Star*,
October 16, 1972.

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(Comment on Dennis Braithwaite's Article, "Women Themselves Will Kill Women's Lib")

INTRODUCTION

Dennis Braithwaite's stereotyped, dismissive approach to the women's movement is a reflection of men's attitudes to women in general. He, along with a lot of other men, believes that:

1. women's concerns are petty and not to be taken seriously:
"I think it's true that the new feminists are motivated by hatred or resentment of men, a very subjective, unnatural and ultimately insufficient foundation for a movement that asks to be taken seriously. . ."
2. women never *act* autonomously but merely *react* to men:
"What makes women fight the way they do? Men, of course; that is, they fight over men, or to get men or impress men."
3. the whole meaning of women's lives must come not from themselves but from the men around them. "Even the chilliest feminists are really only trying to attract some man's attention."
4. any attention by women to their own needs must be selfish and unjustified.

This arrogant assumption by men that *they* are the reason for women's existence and that women's affairs are petty has been called *sexism*.

When men discuss the woman's movement, their sexist orientation becomes more hysterical because there is an added ingredient of fear: "Already, woman-like, they are fighting like cats, both inside and outside the movement."

This is clearly not a balanced, well-informed statement. It is a defensive reaction similar to reactions of other men (and some women) who feel insecure when their most fundamental ideas are challenged.

When men disagree among themselves Mr. Braithwaite thinks they are statesmen or politicians or honorable defenders of important principles. When women disagree, he says we are "fighting like cats."* Like any other serious political movement the women's movement includes a variety of analyses and strategies. These are political questions of major importance that women are debating:

Our movement is an important social force today. It has grown out of the experience of oppression that all women share, and reflects a common determination to end that oppression. This essay attempts, in part I, to describe the shared female experience the movement is based on and, in part II, to outline different ways that experience has been analysed by different groups of women.

*He can make this distinction only because he has no respect at all for women; our concerns are so ridiculous as not to allow for any debate, discussion or disagreement. He uses an age-old sexist image, women as cats, to make this point. Any similar racial stereotype would be immediately recognized and labeled as such. But we women are so used to mother-in-law jokes, woman driver jokes, dumb blonde jokes, bitch/cat jokes that we have internalized them. Even now any objection to the insults implied seems extreme to most women.

I. WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE

All women in the movement agree that women in every sphere of life today are subordinate to men. This can easily be seen if we list just three "natural" pairs:

- secretary/boss — The boss clearly commands.
- doctor/nurse — The doctor has a much higher status, income and power.
- husband/wife — The husband dominates the household, owns the property, determines the family's status by his achievements, while the wife organizes her life around his needs and sees her main role as supporting him.

Women in high schools are no exception to this general rule.* School, family and the media work together to ensure this. They are important institutions in controlling us now, and they have a special role in laying the basis for our continued subordination in the future. This process is called "socialization" and it is the process by which women internalize their 'feminine' identity and begin to play 'feminine' roles, including all that goes with them in our society — passivity, gentleness, self-sacrifice, the need to be desired, the ambition to be a mother, etc. etc.

SCHOOLS

Schools, by their very structure as well as by the content of what they teach, are central institutions in training everyone (boys and girls) to be passive. We get overt maintenance of the dominant

*I'll mainly be dealing with women *students* although the proportion of male and female principals, relative to the proportion of male and female teachers is enough in itself to show that women teachers are oppressed as well.

ideology today when we are taught that our system of government is the best possible; when no real issues are raised, and when teachers with dissenting views are intimidated.

But more important than this, we are trained and molded, by the way things are done at school, to fit into our society. We are prepared to accept a situation where we have no control over our own lives or working conditions and we are always following someone's orders. In this respect the extreme authority relations in schools are preparation for later-on. Attendance is obligatory, and students are continually subjected to indignities from the staff — from comments on their dress or hair to demands to know exactly what they're doing all the time (e.g. who hasn't been stopped in the hall and asked what they're doing?). Even lockers are not considered private. In fact, students are denied recognition as responsible individuals. This prevents us from getting any sense of ourselves as deserving of respect so we have fewer expectations for later on when we begin working. It also means that repressive situations on the job seem less repressive because we've been freed from the petty irritations of school. The main limitations, however, remain throughout our lives. Adults have no more choice about working than children do about going to school.

Another way schools prepare us for this is by making the learning process a passive one. We aren't encouraged to discover things for ourselves, to add to a body of knowledge. Instead we are told that a sum-total of knowledge exists, that the teacher and certain textbooks contain it, and that we have to learn it. This has been called education as consumption: we are passive consumers of an existing pile of facts. We never learn that knowledge is important for what it helps us *do*. We have no active

orientation in our education. No one discusses why we should learn one thing as opposed to another and, for sure, no one asks us what *we* think is important to know and why.

This consumption attitude to education is reinforced by exams and marks. Exams test what you know of a set amount of material the teacher told you to learn. No one has to ask why it's worth learning this particular stuff — it's obvious that it's worth knowing because that's the way you get good marks. And credits, after all, are what we're here for. We are measured and graded by teachers in accord with criteria which we have no part in determining and have no reason to believe are particularly valid. The external demands of the labor market are used to justify grades and marking. They provide the sanctions which make marks an important means in our control, as well as an important factor in developing our passivity.

In these ways schools socialize *all* students to accept authority unquestioningly and to accept a situation where someone else controls things. But schools go even further in the socialization of women into specifically 'feminine' roles. Women are not expected to excel academically or in sports. They are generally directed toward 'feminine' subjects in their choices of options. The advice they receive from guidance counsellors about careers favors "feminine fields" such as office work, nursing, etc.

FAMILY

The family reinforces our experiences in high school, making us think of ourselves as passive objects (successful because of what we look like and not what we do — successful, in fact, because we do nothing.)

Where school, by external sanctions (marks, detention) enforces our obedience to authority, the family does so by internal sanctions (our own sense of guilt and duty to our parents*). At home, just as at school, we are expected to obey without question. And the family helps the school keep us in line:

- Notes are sent to our parents when we are absent
- Our parents keep us in if our homework isn't done.

The family is tied into being a part of the apparatus of control. Parents know that things are organized so that if we don't get decent grades our chances for a job are much reduced — because they care about us, they become a part of our oppression.

Even more than at school the family is where we women learn to be 'feminine'. This is where, right from the beginning and most intimately, we see sex roles performed and learn to emulate them. At home we babysit and help with dinner while our brothers mow the lawn and walk the dog — just as at school we do Home Economics while boys do Shop.

SOCIALIZATION

In these two main areas of our lives, home and school, our 'feminine' development is determined by two factors:

- (1) the limited options which are available to women
- (2) our own internalized control through our image of "femininity."

*This isn't to say, of course, that parents don't punish: they withhold the use of the car, send us to our rooms, and some are even downright brutal.

The first factor results from the ways our lives are structured: limited in concrete, material ways. For instance:

- In school less is spent on women's sports facilities than on men's.
- There really are far fewer good jobs available to women. Guidance counsellors are only being realistic when they mention this to girls.
- In our society a woman is expected to subordinate her career to that of her husband -- so, again, it is realistic to advise less challenging and less well paid jobs that can be easily interrupted and can be found in any part of the country (wherever her husband's job takes her.)
- At home you may be forced to be in earlier than your brother; you may not be allowed to learn to drive; or you may not be invited to go fishing or to baseball games with your father.

The second factor is ideological (a result of the way we think): that social expectations and an already socialized 'feminine' identity put on women. We have accepted society's definition of what it is to be feminine, for we have been learning it ever since we were born. Thus we have our own internal checks against succeeding and developing abilities that aren't considered suitable for girls or women.

Social pressure against a really smart girl who stands at the top of the class or an outstanding athlete who is fitter and stronger than most of the boys works because we believe it. We feel that women who are a success are not 'feminine'. Our identity as women is tied up with the limitation of our abilities and the denial of our own fulfillment. Paradoxically and tragically for us, to succeed is to be a failure as a woman. We are left with no way out. If we resist and do challenge male supremacy we

pay a terrible price, for we are de-sexed. We are no longer feminine (but we aren't male either). If we succumb, as the vast majority of us do, play the game and are "feminine," we pay the even more terrible price of accepting an inferior position and giving up any claim to satisfaction and fulfillment through our own powers.

How have we allowed ourselves to be limited in this way? How have we come to participate in our own oppression? It has been possible because there is more to women's socialization than the negative parts (what we must *not* do.) The other side — what makes our subordination bearable — is the tremendously powerful myth of motherhood. It is not just that we are prevented by social pressure and social institutions from doing exciting things; we are also told that we *don't want* to do these things. We are to find our fulfillment elsewhere, in being a wife and mother. We are told, and begin to believe, that all the other things that we used to think were exciting and worth doing are not for us. We are made for higher, more noble spheres for which our 'feminine' qualities especially fit us.* For us, all the economic, social and cultural achievement in the real world of men must be secondary, even for women who work. *Our* real world is the home — the isolated, separate dwelling which we must consecrate all our time to maintaining while we let life slide by. To achieve what we are told is our supreme satisfaction, we work hard at being second best in order to avoid offending men, so that we will be *allowed* to become a wife.

*The veneration of women — putting us on a pedestal, telling us that we are the power behind the throne and the backbone of civilization and that our sphere (the family) is the only really satisfying sphere — is an important tool in our oppression for it further mystifies our real condition and lack of self-realization.

In school we know we must never embarrass boys by being better than they are or they won't like us. Later on a woman's role is to support her husband's ego. One way to do that is to let him know she depends on *his* skills, intelligence and success. This is only one of the ways that marriage and motherhood prevent a woman from living her own life. For a mother is expected to fulfill herself through her children and husband — by serving them. In a situation where she is extremely limited as a developing, independent person she is expected to be satisfied performing the routine tasks of housework and enjoying her husband's and children's successes in *their* lives. "Success" for her daughter (us) is, of course, usually seen as marriage and family. That is, repeating her own limited pattern.*

Men do not have their male identity confined by a subordinate role as helpmate. They are defined by what they *do* — doctor, baker, truck-driver, baseball player. If a man doesn't marry, we assume he chose not to. He is called a bachelor and seen as dashing and independent rather than pitiful. Women, on the other hand, all share a general social category of wife (and mother). If they are identified at all specifically it is by what their husbands do. If a woman doesn't marry she's considered an old maid or spinster — not exciting and independent

*It is little wonder that women in this situation often become irritable or depressed. We have to see this as the result of their concrete situations and not a personal failure on their part of an element of the female character. The woman's movement wants to move women beyond any feeling of guilt they may have at their dissatisfaction. For this guilt at failing to be a contented wife and mother is one of the most effective weapons used against women. Instead of struggling to repress their feelings, women must struggle to change the conditions which make them feel that way.

but a pitiful failure. Because we are taught that the only place we can be satisfied is in the home, we find it hard to believe a woman would choose not to marry. We assume she wanted to marry but no one wanted her — her independence and freedom are seen as her failure.

Socialized as we are, the thought of not marrying and not being desired by men is more horrible to us than the thought of not ever living our own lives. This is why Dennis Braithwaite is partly right in his article when he makes men so central to woman's every concern. Women who are still unaware of their own worth do measure themselves by what men think of them. He is wrong, though, to think this is true of women in the movement. The whole thrust of the movement takes women beyond this slavery to men towards autonomous action in their own interests. What frightens men who are opposed to the movement is the end of their personal dominance over significant numbers of women. And this may be why Braithwaite insisted so violently that the women in the movement really were still dependent on men. He needed to believe it and to reassure other men who are worried.

The new found independence women gain by acting together in the movement also frightens some women. It is a tremendous responsibility to begin defining ourselves and acting, instead of being content with achieving our identity through oppressive and limiting categories such a wife and mother. And this is a step that is often hard to take. It is easier for younger women, who still have their lives ahead of them, to seize the chance, than for older women, who often feel their whole life work is threatened by the questions the woman's movement raises. That is why high school women have a tremendous role to play.

Even so, it's not easy for high school women. Given the choice between (1) making the men around us insecure by our success (in school or sports or job) and risking rejection as a woman, *or* (2) accepting our subordination, most of us choose the latter. Even without realizing it, without ever sitting down and consciously making the decision, we all began doing it very early in our lives in lots of small ways.

Do you remember when you first learned that the differences between men and women were not just anatomical, and in their clothes but were in some mysterious way much, much deeper? Maybe you can't, because we learn that very, very young. But if you do, you'll know that it didn't seem logical at the time. It just got to seem more and more natural as you and your brother were socialized to play different roles:

- You got dolls for Christmas; and he got a baseball bat.
- You saw that your mother always did the cooking and cleaning.
- Your early school books had boys planning to be doctors and firemen, while girls wanted to be mothers or nurses.

Everything is structured to make sure we learn that central lesson. Girls who hold out longer than most and enjoy sports until they're into their teens are called "Tomboys" and are brow-beaten into acceptable molds by social pressure

- the nagging of parents who are frightened she won't attract men if she isn't more 'feminine',
- the jeering of other girls who feel superior in their conditioned conformity,
- eventually, the rejection by her male friends which closes off the alternative to her, even if she were strong enough to resist the other social pressure.

MEDIA

How many of us have the strength in ourselves to resist social pressure and do what we really want to do or even to know what we really want to do? In high school, girls shave their legs, pluck their eyebrows, spend money on make up and stockings, try to attract boys by acting silly, and so on. And the vast majority of us feel very unhappy during this period of our lives. There are good times, but there is always that underlying anxiety — “do I fit in, do the boys like me, are my breasts too small or large, my legs too fat or skinny, is my face too pimply?”

We all want to belong and have friends and be loved. This is a basic human need. The trouble is that the game is set up for women so that in order for us to do that, we have to conform to images — we don't have to *do* or *be* anything, instead we have to *look* like something. We measure ourselves against an unattainable image pushed by the media — a slim young woman with gleaming hair, shiny teeth and soft skin. This plays on our insecurities so we buy things in order to belong and be loved (hair conditioner, clearasil, sun tan oil, etc.). The message comes relentlessly out to us that the way to be happy is to look like this unreal woman. This is the model we must follow if we are to be “feminine.”

This is a very important period in our lives. It is while we are at high school that we learn to measure ourselves by what we look like instead of what we do; we internalize our identity as sex objects. This is a tense period because the ‘goal’ is unattainable — none of us is ever beautiful enough. It is also tense because this goal conflicts with many others we are forced to give up. For instance, if we have fat legs we may have to give up swimming in order to hide them. This final choice of passivity and

the limitations it involves for us is not made easily. The social pressures brought to bear on us at this time to make sure we choose the 'feminine' way are especially acute. No wonder we're anxious.

The idea the media pushes of what a real woman should be is not restricted just to her image and looks. Other 'feminine' characteristics are exemplified. Women at home are easy prey to advice to consume. They are isolated and have little chance to do anything fulfilling so they seek satisfaction from material goods — a new dress, new curtains and so on. Advertising is aimed at them to make them buy and to enforce their feminine identity. This is especially evident in the commercials where women are happy in the home — getting deep satisfaction out of knowing that their dishes sparkle. They live for others and are thrilled at the slightest recognition of their effort from a husband who, for instance, is rushing out to play golf and notices his shirt is nice and bright. They work hard to maintain their soft hands and shiny hair for their husbands. Even the woman who takes Geritol doesn't do it for herself — she does it so she can look after the kids better and please her husband. That's because she's self-sacrificing. Her husband can say, in appreciation, "I think I'll keep her," because she is absolutely dependent on him — another essential feminine characteristic.

Have you ever noticed that any official information in commercials is given by men? They run the tests for the new laundry soap; they tell us all about the new washing machines or dog food. Women are there

- to compete in choosing the whiter wash or mopping the floor,
- to be the bank clerk who smiles as the bureaucratic man tells us all about the special new loan-plan.

- to provide a model of beauty to oppress other women and for us to emulate,
- to be sexual objects to increase men's interest in the advertisement, associating the product (cars, beer) in his mind with sex so he's more liable to buy it.

All this is tremendously important in reinforcing our socialized sense of what it is to be "feminine."

II. *THE MOVEMENT*

The women's liberation movement grew from the common concern of women to end the subordination that I have described above. We all agree that:

- Women, today, are in an inferior position.
- This is a social condition and not the individual problem of individual women.
- Our subordination results from women's unequal opportunities and our socialization and not from any genetic inferiority.
- We can and must change things by acting together.

But we women in the movement belong to many different groups with differing ideas of how society works and how and why women are oppressed (analyses). The different analyses lead to different ideas about the best ways to change things (strategies).

REFORM FEMINISM is one of the main tendencies in the movement. The objective of this group is full equality within existing democratic capitalist society. They do not believe there has to be any basic change in the structure of our society in

order for women to be liberated. So they work for equality through existing political, social and economic institutions such as the schools, courts and parliament. They seek legislation to legalise abortion and enforce equal pay for equal work. The American National Organisation for Women (NOW) is the best known of the reformist women's groups.

RADICAL FEMINISM is the other main tendency in the woman's movement. Radical feminists see their oppression as the direct result of the organization of our society and link their struggle for their own liberation with a struggle to change society in radical ways. Sexism and female oppression permeate the institutions of our society — schools, courts, families and so on. For them, to oppose sexism is to oppose those institutions and to seek for alternative ways of living.

There are two main types of radical feminist: *Cultural Feminists* who tend to stress alternative life styles and *Socialist Feminists* who stress political activity. **CULTURAL FEMINISTS** see men as the root cause of oppression: It is because society is organized by and for men that it is unfree. Male values of aggression and competition are dominant. So we have wars, and people (especially women) are subordinated to anti-human ends.* Cultural feminists accept the common idea that men and women are essentially different. But they don't say that therefore women are happy at home serving their husbands and children and are not interested in or capable of doing anything else. Instead, they argue that women (who are gentle and

*There is a paradoxical parallel between the cultural feminists' view and Braithwaite's, for he sees all events as products of the division between men and women: "If men and women weren't obsessed with each other there would be no art in our lives, no striving, no bridges built, no wars, no revolutions, no fun."

co-operative) would make a much better job of running things than men have. They see their task to re-create society in the image of woman's values and to go beyond capitalism which is the concrete manifestation of male nature. An example of this approach is this quotation from the Manifesto of The Society for Cutting up Men (SCUM):

"The male, because of his obsession to compensate for not being female combined with his inability to relate and to feel compassion, has made of the world a shit pile."

(quote taken from *Sisterhood is Powerful* ed., Robin Morgan.)

Cultural Feminist analysis traces women's oppression historically from the first assertion of male control — female subordination is maintained by woman's economic weakness but the establishment of man's economic and social dominance is explained ultimately by the natural aggression of men, (a psychological explanation).

Some cultural feminist groups would go so far as to say that society is a reflection of man's nature so it is only women who are oppressed by its structures. Women are distorted and limited by their socialization to be subordinate, but men are not distorted because they are naturally dominant. They do not suffer because of social pressure to be a success, to like sports or to repress fears. This means the struggle for liberation is not seen as a part of a wider struggle for human liberation from an economic system which is exploiting, stunting and oppressing us all. Men in an absolute sense are on the other side. The fact that women are subordinate to men, means, for some cultural feminists, that men in general are the enemy.

The tracing of male dominance to man's nature can be seen in the following analysis: —

In early societies women, because they bore the children, didn't hunt — they developed community life. The experience of the hunter, on the other hand, "had led him to value dominance; he had become unsuited for living as an equal in the community, because he knew only how to overpower and conquer the prey. Other masculine values, formed in the transient existence as hunters, included competition (with the prey) and violence (killing the prey). . . Gradually in some cases, but often through violent upheaval, former hunters took over female communities, suppressing the female through dominance and even enslavement."

(From Roxanne Dunbar "Female Liberation as the Basis for Social Development" in *Sisterhood is Powerful*)

The de-emphasis of the importance of economic structures in women's oppression is more strikingly seen in a quotation from the New York Radical Feminists:

"We believe that the purpose of male chauvinism is primarily to obtain psychological ego-satisfaction, and that only secondarily does this manifest itself in economic relationships. For this reason we do not believe that capitalism, or any other economic system is the cause of female oppression.

(Cited in Elizabeth Diggs "What is the Woman's Movement?" in *Women: A Journal of Liberation*, Vol. 2, Number 4.)

SOCIALIST FEMINISTS, on the other hand, base their analysis

firmly in a study of the economic relations of society. I feel that this approach is the most productive and goes furthest in providing an analytic framework within which we can understand our experience as women. So I will devote more time to describing it than I did to either reform or cultural feminism.

For Socialist Feminists the primary causes of divisions are economic and not instinctual. Men and women are socialized to perform different roles, and men *are* often domineering and aggressive. But our society's values are capitalist values and wars and poverty are the result of a system run for the benefit of a few. They are not a mere reflection of male nature.

The specific situation of women in early societies originated in a sexual division of labour, a crucial element of a larger social division of labour. As long as it took all the efforts of all the people just to produce enough to live (subsistence), a kind of primitive communism reigned, and the division of labour remained mutually beneficial to all members. But once agricultural societies began producing 'social surpluses' over and above mere subsistence needs, social classes arose. Instead of all sharing equally, certain groups began to appropriate the surplus agricultural products for their own benefit. A ruling class developed and the state grew up to help it rule.

It is the class relations that define the fundamental nature of a society. In the feudal village economy, for example, the situation of women was circumscribed by the form of production: peasant families had to give a set percentage of their produce to the lord or work his land for so many days a week. The family itself was a directly productive unit; and the woman, while subordinated, participated directly in productive and social life.

With the advent of the capitalist mode of production, however, women were pushed more to the periphery of social life. Ruling class appropriation of society's surplus product no longer took the form of "rent" or "tribute in kind". Instead, it took the form of wage labour. The wage the capitalist pays is never equal to the full value the worker creates with his labour. The boss keeps the difference as profit. For the single wage paid to the worker, the capitalist also gets the labour necessary for the family's subsistence, which is done by the worker's wife — cooking, cleaning, sewing and child-raising in the home. While the woman is still as central as ever to social production, and perhaps more overworked, the wage form and the development of the nuclear family disguised this centrality by isolating individual women from the mainstream of social life.

This organization of things also ensures that women provide a vast reserve of labour. When they are not needed to work directly for the capitalists they stay at home as housewives with no wages for their work and no unemployment insurance. But they are always there if they are ever needed to do other jobs as well (generally the most menial and worst paid jobs in the work force). So women's presence in industry has fluctuated with capital's demand for her labour. Many more women worked, for instance, during the World Wars.

Twentieth century capitalism, 'plagued' with overproduction and automation, had to tightly regulate its labour force. Instead of relying on the mechanisms of the market to ensure that the right number of workers are available in the right place at the right time, it depended more and more on cultural and political control and regulation. For instance, child-labour laws and

protective laws for women passed early this century were not primarily designed to help women. Their purpose was to prevent massive unemployment (and unrest) by keeping women in the home and kids in school (this latter also helped develop a skilled labour force.).

Probably the most crucial aspect of advanced capitalism is its fantastic productive capacity. Spurred by the competition of rival capitalists and the need to consistently cut production costs, capitalists constantly strive to increase productivity (output per worker). They do this through technological innovation and 'scientific management' techniques. The assembly line and industrial engineering are the best know examples of this process.

The race for profit through productivity had advanced so far by early in the twentieth century that a drastic reorganization of the system became necessary to prevent its disintegration. Material wealth had increased so much that the supply of useful goods began to outrun the demand for them.* If the law of 'supply and demand' were allowed to operate freely, prices would plummet downward and the rich capitalists would lose their profits and power. In addition, since machinery could do most of the subsistence work, people would be free to use their time more creatively.

*Under capitalism, of course, this is not the same as everyone having enough to live on comfortably. The existence of 'over-production' while 20% of Canada's population lives below the poverty line, reflects one of the major contradictions of modern capitalism.

Within the irrational capitalist system, however, free time and material wealth meant 'unemployment' and 'overproduction'. The solution of the capitalists consisted of:

- Regulation of the labour force: the growth of a new breed of unproductive, whitecollar, technical, and service workers; a vast educational apparatus to train this bureaucratic bunch (and to keep people out of the work force as long as possible), and a restriction of women to the home.
- Restriction of production and administered prices: The large corporations in each industry began to reach tacit agreement on price levels which guaranteed a certain rate of profit; to maintain these prices, 'supply' had to be kept down: so we have acreage restriction and plowing under of crops in agriculture, and 25% of industrial machinery lying idle.
- Regulation of demand: to assure a market for its ever-increasing products, capital had to manufacture artificial needs in people. This is done through advertising, by playing on people's insecurities (bad breath, low 'status' etc.). This is the kind of context in which socialist women understand the advertising pressure on you in high school. It is part of a whole trend in capitalism today. Wasteful and irrational commodities were developed, and consumer credit came onto the scene to allow people to buy more than their wages would immediately permit. In addition, the capitalist state, running on public money, became an ardent source of demand itself, singlehandedly financing the existence of a massive 'defense' (arms) industry. The state also picked

up the responsibility to maintain the giant welfare apparatus designed to maintain consumer spending while easing social tensions.

- Socializing the people: given the irrationalities of the modern capitalist system, a sophisticated infrastructure is needed to propagate the values useful in maintaining the system. The schools emphasize work values, the media concentrates on consumption values, while the family, schools, and media lead scores of other institutions — trade unions, churches, girl guides — in conditioning us to accept existing sex, racial, class, age and authority norms. It's these stereotypes that underpin capitalist political dominance. At the core of these institutions of capitalist socialization and legitimation is the family, the basic unit for the whole system.

Today, the traditional family and the woman's role within it is changing. The new stress on consumption means that women have many more household appliances and cars to do the shopping with, etc. At the same time the increased importance of education in training the work force and socializing the population takes children out of the way after the age of five. Teenagers are becoming independent earlier and, in the more affluent society, young people can leave home to live alone or with friends as soon as they get work. So the job of being a mother is less time-consuming and extends over a shorter period of a woman's life.

Thus material conditions are making it possible for women to be less tied to the home. The demands of the system, however, require more than ever that she stay there:

1. the labour force cannot absorb a vast influx of women.

2. her isolated situation in the home ensures that a housewife is a champion consumer; something very important to modern capitalism today. She seeks relief from boredom and frustration by buying.* And she builds her identity through her looks and not her actions, so if she can afford it, she pays a lot to maintain her appearance.

3. now that consumption is so important to the system, women's role as sex object has become crucial. We learn we should be 'beautiful' and we buy things to try to be so. We are used in advertising to stimulate men's consumption, too.

To be a sex object a woman must be passive. The ideological machine of the capitalists is in full-rev all the time to reinforce this passivity and keep women at home despite the possibilities for independence that the new material conditions offer. The tasks of a good wife and mother are extended to keep women busy. Now they include being beautiful. So housework includes spending time at the hair-dresser and other things never before seen as a normal part of woman's duty. The churches, child psychologists, and all sorts of people are busy stressing the importance of having his mother around all the time (for a child's healthy development.).

*Here (as in Braithwaite's assertion that women live only for men) we see the grain of truth underlying sexist stereotypes and attitudes. Blondie in her manipulation of Dagwood to allow her to keep the clothes she buys is a caricature which reflects the tragic condition of women who are forced to substitute buying for living and must ask for their husband's permission to do this.

There has been, and still is, very stiff resistance to allowing women to decide for themselves whether they want children as is shown in the refusal to provide free contraceptives or abortion on demand.

The family is, then, a key institution to modern capitalism:

- It socializes people to accept authority and to be 'feminine' or 'masculine'.
- It keeps people isolated from each other in separate units.
- It encourages consumption.
- It provides, free for the capitalist, the tasks necessary to keep the worker at work (cooking, sewing, cleaning and rearing children).

Because these tasks are done in private homes, their importance to the capitalist is hidden. Women see themselves as serving their family and not the capitalist, and they do not demand to be paid for their contribution to production. They are content to share their husband's wages and to accept the subordinate position in the home that this dependence on hand-outs entails. Women's labour does not produce commodities which can be sold. In our society value is defined according to what is bought and sold, so women's work is undervalued and treated as marginal. Her social worth is under-rated.

Any increased independence of women would threaten this organization of things which is so profitable to the ruling class. If they began to move beyond the home or to demand pay for housework,* collective ways of doing their tasks would be

*The major strategic debate among socialist women now is whether women should base their struggle for liberation on a demand to be paid for housework or a demand to be equal in the work force. Unfortunately there is not room to go into that issue here.

necessary — day-care centres, communal eating arrangements and so on. This would undermine their socialized sense of the subordinate role of women; it would threaten sales — for example, far fewer appliances, such as stoves and dishwashers would be necessary. And it would mean that women would no longer work free for the capitalist. People's isolation and competitiveness would begin to be broken down.

It is clear that the particular form of our oppression as women reflects the needs of our specific economic system. It is contradictions within that system and the demands it makes on us that have led to the rise of the woman's movement today. The opportunities that are offered to us with one hand and denied with the other have made many women question their situation. Socialist feminists believe that we have to understand how things work to keep us down and why our oppression is necessary in this economic and social system in order to be able to challenge it and work for change.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE WOMAN'S MOVEMENT

The movement has matured in the last few years and is still developing fast. In its earliest period women felt the need to spend most of their energy proving they were oppressed and documenting the ways in which this oppression occurred. Then, still not liberated from our dependence on men, we worked to prove to men that we were an important force in the struggle to change society. We argued the case for the need for radical women's groups separate from men's organizations on the left.

Now we don't have to spend time proving ourselves to men or convincing ourselves that we can act. We are beyond that and

are free to get down to the business of devising strategies to change things. In this period, debate within the movement is incredibly important. It is through sharing our differing analyses and ideas for action, and testing them in practice, that we will build an effective movement.

Some of the questions we are asking now are:

1. Do reformist demands weaken our movement or strengthen our cause?
2. Should we work to get more women in the work force with equal pay for equal work or should we try to build alternatives by demanding wages for housework and developing collective institutions such as day-care centres.
3. Should the main emphasis lie in cultural action — developing alternative values and life styles — or should we be more oriented toward political action and building our power?
4. Are 'power' and 'organization' male? If so should women avoid both in their struggle for liberation? Or do we need to organize and to get power in order to achieve liberation?
5. Is it possible for women to liberate themselves while they relate closely to men or do they have to break all contacts with men, at least for a time, in order to gain strength and a sense of themselves?
6. Are the struggles of all women the same? Or do different issues speak to different sectors of women?

For instance, is it only the privileged who suffer from being sex objects?

Only someone who feels his privileged male position threatened by women acting together, could dismiss the serious debate as "fighting like cats". Our movement is a broad social force — it cannot be dismissed by Mr. Braithwaite or anyone else with sexist arguments from the past.

If you are interested in reading further and forming your own ideas about this movement and its aims you might find some of the following references useful:—

COLLECTIONS

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| <i>Sisterhood is Powerful</i>
(articles and documents of all types) | Robin Morgan (ed.) |
| <i>Unite!</i>
(Canadian movement literature) | Canadian Women's Educational Press (ed.) |
| <i>From Feminism to Liberation</i>
(mainly theoretical articles) | Edith Hochino Altbach (ed.) |

BOOKS

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| <i>The Dialectics of Sex</i>
(cultural feminist) | Shulamith Firestone |
| <i>The Female Eunuch</i>
(cultural feminist) | Germaine Greer |
| <i>Sexual Politics</i>
(cultural feminist) | Kate Millet |
| <i>Feminine Mystique</i>
(reform feminist) | Betty Friedan |

Woman's Estate
(socialist feminist)

Juliette Mitchell

*Women, Resistance and the
Revolution*
(socialist feminist)

Sheila Rowbotham

ARTICLES

*Woman and Subversion of the
Community*
(marxist feminist)

Mariarosa Dalla Costa

In "Radical America" Vol. 6, No. 1, Jan. - Feb. 1972.

There are many, many more books and journals and articles and poems coming out of the woman's movement today. They cover such topics as women and psychology, women's sexuality, the history and development of women's oppression, women in literature, woman's role in production, women and the law. The works listed above are only a tiny sample. I chose them because they all deal with women's oppression, the movement, or strategy in a *broad* way.

I hope I have included enough to show you that you don't have to depend on TV commentators or journalists like Braithwaite to learn about the movement or women's condition. You can examine your own experience and you can go to women in the movement, read what they're writing and speak to them. It's only a short step from there to doing things with other women and helping to make the movement yourself.

From:
The Women's Kit
(Toronto: OISE, 1974)

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