

HYSTERIA
Box 2481, Station B
Kitchener, Ontario
Canada N2H 6M3

\$1.00

fall issue 1985
Vol 4:1



breaking the SILENCE

a feminist quarterly

Critical Questions for Feminists

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typesetting: 'Flybynight Type' (with thanks to *The Charlatan*, Carleton University)

design and layout: Gabrielle Nawratil
centre pages—Catherine Labelle

printing: Carleton University Graphic Services

graphic and photo credits: Broadside, Canadian Woman Studies, Everywoman's Almanac '84 and '85, Pride Book '85, Our Right to Love, Kaleidoscope brochure

original graphics by: Catherine Labelle, Gabrielle Nawratil

about *Breaking the Silence*

For too long women's voices—our struggles, and joy—have been silenced. Living in a patriarchal world, we have been separated from one another and from the mainstream of society.

The *Breaking the Silence* collective is committed to giving women a voice. In particular, we provide a forum for discussion of the social welfare needs of women—needs such as support services for survivors of violence, affordable housing, sufficient and good daycare, adequate pensions and employment.

We are committed to moving toward a world absent of oppression: be it sexism, racism, classism, homophobia or ageism. We are committed to helping to build a peaceful and humane world: a world where women's ideas, experiences and activities are heard and made visible.

from the collective

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Critical Questions for Feminists

Feminists today are facing some critical questions about ourselves and about our movement. It is time to come to grips with the fact that we may consciously and unconsciously invalidate the experiences of many women and completely ignore those of others.

Why do many women who identify as feminists feel peripheral to the women's movement? Have we created a closed community which offers a supportive environment to some and excludes others who do not conform to a certain definition of "political correctness"? We constantly struggle to find a balance between supporting all the choices that women make (recognizing that they are limited to begin with) and condoning choices that reinforce inequality between women.

This special issue, *Critical Questions for Feminists*, is an attempt to explore some of the problems of putting feminism into practice. What does it look like; what does it feel like? How much room do we make for diversity among women? Have we created a movement that is elitist and exclusive? Have we failed women who are already committed to working for a better world for women?

One clear signal of the necessity of this task is the absence of certain groups of women from the women's movement. In our eagerness to bridge the differences, we may have minimized the significance of factors other than gender in many women's lives. Factors such as class, race, nationality, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, etc. interact with sexism to shape women's lives and choices. If we ignore this reality, we trivialize women's real struggles and further alienate them from working ►

and identifying with other women. If we truly want a diverse movement of women, then we must question our level of support and acceptance of differences. The articles in this issue of *Breaking the Silence* reveal the concern of our writers, and many other feminists, for the current condition and future direction of the women's movement.

In this issue Karen Dubinsky examines the questions which the existence of R.E.A.L. Women pose for the women's movement and asks whether our need for community has supplanted our need for a movement.

In a conversation with Deborah Gordon about racism and classist bias, Esmeralda Thornhill points out that the Women's Movement has traditionally been dominated by White Women. She explains how the ignorance and racism of White Women has marginalized Black Women and denied them entry into the movement. This article details the serious implications of our racist and classist bias.

Debra Pilon's article on the Kaleidoscope conference raises some questions for Ottawa women about how to reconcile differences and splits between feminists in the same community. Carolyn Strange's report on the lesbian and gay history conference illustrates the tremendous diversity that exists within those communities and the growing concern about the dangers of exclusion and division.

Kim Bailey explores some of the questions for feminists that are raised by the controversy over lesbian feminist sadomasochism. Is lesbian feminist S/M practice violence against women in another form? Bailey contends that feminists have a tendency to judge the actions of other women according to standards of "political correctness" and challenges us to think about the questions this area poses for our understanding of female sexuality.

Joan Holmes' article on motherhood reveals the lack of support for mothers within the feminist community but also for heterosexual women raising their children with men.

It is not easy to be self-critical in a world where women's very being is defined as as less than human, as inevitably imperfect, and when too many women have internalized this social reality. It is easy to feel that we don't need any more criticism from ourselves or from other women. And it is also understandable that as women living in a deeply misogynistic world, we seek a safe community and a sense of unity. We feel that showing our weaknesses may make us more vulnerable to attack. It is this very vulnerability that has made us distrustful of other women. It has made us search out an elusive haven where all women adhere to predictable and prescribed behaviour. It has made us fearful of challenges to our own brand of feminist analysis and lifestyle. It has made us reject women who may represent other perspectives and realities. We must find ways to admit, appreciate and constructively deal with our differences—and create a unity that encompasses our wonderful diversity as women.

More Changes ...

We continue to amaze ourselves! We are beginning our fourth year of publication, and the next step in our evolution is a typeset magazine—all on the same shoestring budget and inordinate amounts of unpaid, inspiring work by the collective. We'd like to thank Carol, Chris and David of The Charlatan, Carleton University for an accommodating phototypesetter rental arrangement which has made these further format changes possible.

If any women in the Ottawa area have skills to offer in the production (layout, pasteup) aspect of publishing a magazine, we welcome your technical and creative talents, and encourage you to contact us. Women interested in the other equally exciting areas of producing a quarterly are invited to contact us as well.

The next major task to be undertaken for us is computerizing our mailing list. We have received many letters from subscribers not getting their issue in the mail. We apologize for the inconvenience, and hope that the latest twentieth century technology will insure that we avoid such problems in the future.

If you appreciate our continued changes, and can't refrain from sending us a donation, we'll understand ...

Thanks to our generous subscribers who sustain our excitement and development.

Two Upcoming Theme Issues

**Women Missing from the
Women's Movement**
please submit articles by
January 10, 1986

Young Women

article deadline April 11, 1986.

We encourage women who would like to write for *BTS* to contact us at with article ideas, either by calling or writing:

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Racism

and the

White Women's Movement:

*an interview with
Esmeralda Thornhill*

by Deborah Gordon

We women share a common concern, a common commitment and a common goal...[l]et us picture for ourselves this present portrait of women. Let us run our eyes over this composite collage of the female experience and we must quickly conclude that Black Women are not in the picture. We Black Women have been either left out, or, where there is a hint of presence, it remains that of an undeveloped negative—but which is being passed off in its distorted state for a truthful fully developed picture. (1)

Esmeralda Thornhill is a Black Woman. She is a jurist, linguist and pedagogue. She was responsible for developing and teaching the first ever accredited university course on Black Women's Studies in Canada. She is also one of the founding members of The Congress of Black Women of Canada and of the International Resource Network for Women of African Descent (IRNWAD). Currently, she is an anti-racist educator with the Quebec Human Rights Commission.

In November 1984, Thornhill presented a paper entitled, "Focus on Black Women" at the Second National Conference of the Canadian

Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIA-W) at the University of Quebec in Montreal. The conference was called *Women: Images, Role-Models*.

The text Thornhill presented brings to light the all too often obfuscated image of Black Women and their experience as a triply-oppressed group on the counts of race, sex and class. In "Focus on Black Women", Thornhill analyzes the negative stereotypes and pervasive myths derived directly from the distorted and dehumanizing trauma of Black enslavement in order to reveal the indomitable spirit, strength and stamina for survival of Black Women.

"Focus on Black Women" holds up

to light a very disturbing truth with which White feminists must come to terms if we are ever going to have a unified, integrated Women's Movement: namely, that Black Women have been denied entry into the mainstream of the Women's Movement because of racism—White Women's and White feminists' racism.

How is this possible, I asked myself when I read "Focus on Black Women". I believe, like many White radical feminists that all women are sisters; that all women are spiritually, emotionally and psychically connected. I believe that we are transcending the man-made divisions of class, race and nationality to come together as women. Am I and other White feminists really denying Black Women and women of colour the human respect and dignity they deserve?

I spoke with Esmeralda Thornhill about "Focus on Black Women", and slowly I began to open my mind to the possibility that White Women and White feminists somehow are misunderstanding and perhaps even fearing Black Women and what they represent. Consequently, we are refusing to acknowledge their personhood, their rights as women, equal to our own.

Deborah Gordon: In "Focus on Black Women", you state that "[a]s Women ... we live in a sexist world order. However, we Black Women and other women of colour in addition live in a racist world order which so far has denied us entry into the mainstream of the Women's Movement." What do you perceive to be the mainstream of the Women's Movement?

Esmeralda Thornhill: What is today and has traditionally been considered the mainstream of the Women's Movement is in reality a White Women's Movement. Anything non-White is considered marginal. The present official feminist discourse is devoid of colour. It is based on the implicit norm of White Women's experience being the gauge for *all women's* experience. Even though the White Women's Movement professes to be a progressive movement which has drawn richly from the Black Liberation

Movement, it still reflects racist patterns.

DG: *How and why are Black Women denied entry into the mainstream of the Women's Movement?*

ET: By both omission and commission. Through ignorance and insecurity and ingrained, unconscious, racist practices carried out individually and collectively. Every kind of issue around which women rally must, of necessity, take race into account or we leave out women of colour. Let me give you an example: A White Woman once accusingly asked a Black friend, "How come you Black Women are not more involved in the Peace Movement?" The Black Woman spontaneously retorted, "Because we don't have two hundred thousand-dollar homes to protect."

"I posit to you that real Sisterhood means a willingness, a political and personal will—collectively and individually—to assume responsibility for the elimination of racism."

Obviously there is a difference of priorities here. The issue of peace is of great significance, true. But how can one expect a Black Woman to sit down and intellectualize and theorize about peace when she does not have peace of mind, because, for example, her child comes home traumatized, in tears after having been subjected to racist teaching material in the classroom? Peace is not only nuclear peace. Peace is also peace of mind.

When Black Women attempt to raise the issue of racism in an objec-

tive, non-controversial way to White Women, White Women immediately get on the defensive, personalizing the whole issue as if the Black Woman is launching a personal accusation and attacking her. Clearly, it is the White Woman's conscience which is doing the accusing, rather than the Black Woman herself, who has tried to frame her frustration in an objective fashion.

DG: *In the text, you explicitly state that "North American society is one in which racial imperialism supersedes sexual imperialism." What exactly do you mean by this statement?*

ET: In the North American context, the experience of Black enslavement shows us manifestly that divisions were drawn along racist lines rather than along sexist lines. Many times White mistresses stood by and watched while Black Women were flogged, branded and tortured. There was no rallying point for Sisterhood between White and Black Women. As a result, White Women were also oppressors of Black Women.

DG: *This perspective seriously questions a radical feminist perspective which is based on the opposite premise—that sexual imperialism supersedes racial imperialism. How do you reconcile these two perspectives so that women of both beliefs can work together to overcome all women's oppression?*

ET: I must reformulate your question to read: "This perspective seriously questions a White Woman's radical feminist perspective ..." because a Black Woman's feminist perspective is *a priori* based on the premise that racial imperialism takes precedence over sexual imperialism.

The only way in which White and Black Women can work together is by first acknowledging that we live in a colour-conscious society, and when we talk about discrimination, we must realize that within the various enumerations of illicit motives of discriminations, there exists an implicit hierarchy. When we examine, for example, the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, "race" and "colour" head the list. Clearly, "race" and "colour" have a greater degree of gravity and are more



White feminists cannot continue to ignore Black Women's reality when talking about women's experience

serious forms of discrimination than, for example, social conditioning.

Secondly, women of colour also have to deal with sexism, but not necessarily within the framework White Women have already traced out for themselves from their own limited experiences.

DG: How can White Women help themselves to come to terms with the fact that not all women are equally oppressed, and therefore, that we must guard against the danger, that with our class, race, educational and political privilege, we may become the oppressor?

ET: White Women must wake up to the fact that, as a society, we have in-

herited a legacy of institutionalized racism which is rampant psycho-social reality in today's collective consciousness while women must confront their individual and collective practices and ask themselves to what extent are they contributing to the problem or to the solution.

Only through this process of introspection can White Women come to recognize and acknowledge the pervasive presence of racism and ward off the danger of emerging from the ranks of the oppressed to become the "nouveau" oppressors.

DG: Your text takes brief glimpses at the past lives of Black Women from Ancient Africa to the Americas to the

Canadian Government's Domestic Scheme of the 1950's. The purpose of your historical journey of discovery into the past lives of Black Women is to reclaim the priceless and unique image of these women. How has this image been distorted by the dominant culture?

ET: Once again, I must reformulate your question to add to the word "discovery", "re-discovery". The image of Black Women throughout history has been so distorted that we embark on a journey of re-discovery in order to unearth the true picture of Black Women.

The image Black Women and indeed of Black people, for example, projected by the dominant culture has been a distorted and passive

negative: that the inhumane bondage of Black people was in their best interests since White Slave Masters "fed, clothed and sheltered" them. But there is another side to this coin. Blacks have never been passive creatures as depicted or portrayed by White historians and the White Establishment. The establishment of the complex Underground Railroad, the daily work to rule of plantation slave life, the coded messages couched in Negro spirituals and the self-inflicted abortions and suicides Black Women carried out are eloquent examples of how there was active resistance by Black people to enslavement.

DG: *How has this image been distorted by the White Women's Movement?*

ET: Let me give you one contemporary illustration. The White Women's Movement has continued to perpetuate the distortion of this image, for example, in the recent amendments to Canada's Criminal Code. These amendments were preceded by extensive and unflagging lobbying on the part of women's groups to evoke the historical underpinnings of sexual and physical violence and oppression toward women. Yet, in all of these presentations, not once to my knowledge, did anyone or any group advert to the historical, legal, physical, and sexual violence wrought systematically upon Black Women. What must we incontrovertibly conclude? *That Black Women are not women?*

DG: *When I read the historical part of "Focus on Black Women" I was struck by the strength and perseverance of Black Women who have suffered in slavery, who have suffered as domestic servants in Canada, and who are still enduring over 300 years of mistreatment. What has this oppression taught Black Women?*

ET: It has taught us as Black Women that although we are proud of our strength and stamina which we inherited from our African foremothers and slave forebears, we cannot content ourselves with this legacy of necessity. There is no need to romanticize this exceptional strength and stamina because I opine that any human being, no matter what their

colour, placed in the same situation of adversity, would have had to develop similar survival skills. *This strength represents an adjustment to an abnormal situation which must be acknowledged as such and which we cannot endure ad infinitum or ad nauseam.*

This extraordinary strength we have to draw on might be justifiable if it were to guarantee an eradication of racism and ensure that our children and our children's children would not be called upon to manifest the same extraordinary strength merely to survive. Such is not the case.

DG: *What must this oppression teach White Women?*

ET: The oppression of Black Women should teach White Women that even though as women we are all oppressed, we are not all equally oppressed. In other words, Black Women are the victims of a triple oppression on the counts of race, sex and class. In light of this, when White Women single out women for recognition, they must realize that Black Women are several paces beyond White Women because of our very unique experience.

DG: *You state in your text that "... Black Women perceive as highly dubious the quality of today's Sisterhood as professed by certain White feminists." What commitment to Sisterhood do you expect from your White Sisters?*

ET: "Hearing White Women solely expressing to us a desire for Sisterhood or merely voicing a desire to have Black Women join their White Women's groups does not automatically leave us thrilled and overjoyed. White Women equivocably perceive themselves as acting in a generous, open, non-racist manner and become shocked when we Black Women respond to such magnanimous empty overtures with anger or outrage.

"We Black Women expect OUR White Sisters' commitment to Sisterhood to go beyond hollow lip service."

"I posit to you that real Sisterhood means a willingness, a political and personal will—collectively and individually—to assume responsibility for the elimination of racism. This

need not be engendered by feelings of guilt, moral responsibility, or rage. It might be. But it need not be. For it can spring from a heartfelt desire for Sisterhood and the personal and intellectual realization that racism among women undermines and weakens our collective power. It can spring from our knowledge that racism is an obstacle that divides us and that women—all women—are accountable for racism dividing us.

"This true Sisterhood begins with the revelation, acknowledgement, and confrontation of the myths, stereotypes, and false assumptions that cloud the real image and deny the existence of Black Women. This true Sisterhood means that we have to be supportive of justice for all women, which in turn means that we must stop playing ostrich and start acknowledging openly and consistently the shared commonness of our human experience, our common oppression as females, and our common differences." (2)

The powerfulness of "Focus on Black Women" did not pass unnoticed without leaving its mark. It has been requested and subsequently authorized as part of the mandatory assigned reading for the *Women and the Law: Feminist Legal Theory* course at the University of Windsor, Faculty of Law. The text is available through the Quebec Human Rights Commission, Education Department at 260, rue Saint-Jacques, Montreal, Quebec, H2Y 1P5. Another treatise, which focuses on Black Women, "Black Women: Double Dilemma" is also available through the Quebec Human Rights Commission.

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(1) Esmeralda Thornhill, "Focus on Black Women", paper presented at the Second National Conference on Women: Images, Role-Models held by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAOW), Montreal, November 1984

(2) Esmeralda Thornhill, "Black Women's Studies" in *Teaching Related to Women in Black Women: Double Dilemma*, Quebec Human Rights Commission, Education Department, 1985.

Editor's Reference: For educational purposes, it was agreed by the interviewer and Ms. Thornhill that any reformulation of the interviewer's questions would be clearly shown by keeping the original formulation in the text of the interview.

REAL WOMEN and Real Feminism

by Karen Dubinsky

This article is a revised excerpt from a longer paper prepared for a feminist theory seminar at Carleton University and published by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIA).

They oppose abortion, no fault divorce, affirmative action, equal pay for work of equal value and universal free daycare. They refer to NAC (National Action Committee on the Status of Women) as "a handful of radical feminists promoting their own personal extremist views purportedly on behalf of women of Canada". They argue that the wage gap between women and men is not evidence of sex discrimination, but simply a reflection

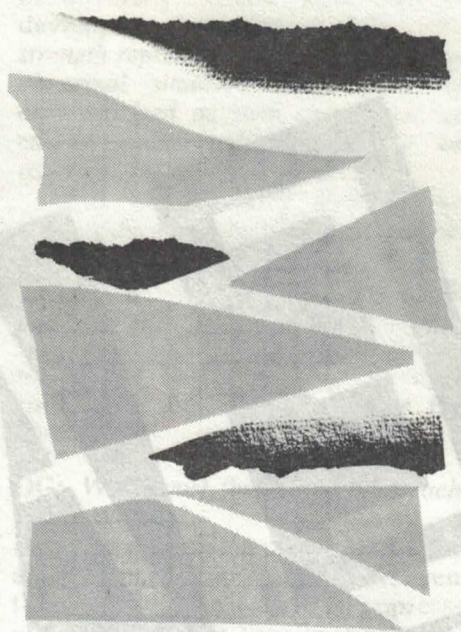
of the different career paths chosen by the sexes. They believe that much of the legislative reform sought by the women's movement in the past decade has eroded the "cornerstone of society"—the nuclear family.

"They" are not the federal P.C. caucus, the Fraser Institute, Bob Guccione or the Catholic Church. This time, "they" are women; Realistic, Equal, Active for Life women, to be specific, a group which arrived on the

political landscape early in 1984. After a year of organizing, media blitzing and preparing briefs to government on issues like pornography, prostitution, sex education and divorce, they held their first national conference in Toronto in February 1985. Most recently, they have been attempting to get state (ie. federal Secretary of State) funding, and complain publicly that their lack of success so far in this venture is due to the "takeover" of certain federal government departments by "radical feminist extremists".

While R.E.A.L. Women claims a membership of over 20,000 nationwide, they refuse to divulge their membership list or their financial supporters. Indeed, they announced that they had 10,000 members at their introductory press conference last year; not bad for an organization which had yet to circulate its first newsletter. However, numbers aside, the phenomenon which R.E.A.L. Women represents, namely right wing anti-feminism, initiated and led by women, demands careful scrutiny and response by feminists.

Until recently, it has been popular among feminists to dismiss anti-feminist women as insignificant in their own right. The common response was to see these women as either 'duped' or terrorized by "the patriarchy". We always point out, for example, that the anti-abortion movement is financed and heavily controlled by the (male-dominated) Catholic Church. We sniff that Margaret Thatcher and her ilk have become "honorary males", or "men in skirts". At our most extreme, we celebrate the fact that so-called "pro-life" women are (as are all women, supposedly), 'life affirming' beings who have been led astray. It is our job as feminists, therefore, to somehow 'win' them back to the fold. Andrea Dworkin, one of the few feminists who has analysed anti-feminism at length, argues in *Right Wing Women* that "the New Right in the U.S. is a social and political movement controlled almost totally by men, but built largely on the fear and ignorance of women".



This sort of argument is far too simplistic, and it quite dangerously misreads the motivations and origins of anti-feminism. The evolution of groups like R.E.A.L. women surely punctures the "women-as-dupes" theory. Here is a group of generally well-educated, politically astute women, who collectively exist to oppose feminism. We cannot blame the gender hierarchy for their existence; R.E.A.L. Women is organized and led by women. It is similarly incorrect to view the anti-abortion movement as simply a 'male conspiracy'. That kind of thinking is an insult to the intelligence and motivation of anti-feminist women, and it denies them any responsibility for their actions or their ideas.

To understand why R.E.A.L. Women exists, we have to move beyond the concept that "women-are-good", therefore "women-are-victims." This approach simply asserts the innate goodness or correctness of the biological female, and therefore blames inconsistencies (ie. anti-feminism) on external factors, usually men. Without denying the tremendous coercive power of male violence, or the fact that men do play a significant role in anti-feminist and anti-abortion campaigns, the development of R.E.A.L. Women has shown us that it's time to look at anti-feminist women as political actors *in their own right*.

To do this, we need to broaden our analysis beyond gender exclusively. As many American feminists have pointed out, one particularly sinister aspect of the American New Right is the fusion, at the level of ideology and organization, of traditional right wing economic thinking (eg. attacks on the welfare state, on workers and trade unions) and sexual conservatism (ie. attacks on feminism, on gay and lesbian rights, defence of the nuclear family). It's difficult to judge whether this sort of alliance has been fully developed in this country; right wing economic groups in Canada have yet to make any public pronouncements about the sexual agenda of anti-abortion or anti-feminist groups. Yet R.E.A.L. Women might be a willing partner. What, after all, is 'realistic' except accepting economic priorities and arrangements as they exist and 'making do'?

To understand R.E.A.L. Women, feminists must allow ourselves some room for self criticism. What is it about the way feminists have presented themselves that some women feel so threatened by? Here we can both congratulate and criticize ourselves. Feminism has indeed succeeded in shaking up the common sense of society, the Happy Days family with mom at home, dad at work (preferably in the private sector and *not* in a union), and unlimited numbers of children, is not the dominant Canadian reality. The most basic feminist concerns; equality, autonomy and choice, have entered the mainstream of Canadian life. Yet, as many feminists have pointed out, if feminist ideas have begun to 'free' women from traditional domestic roles, such freedom has proved, for large numbers of women, rather illusory. Limited improvement in women's economic situation make ideas like 'independence' and 'autonomy' ring rather hollow. As Andrea Dworkin has pointed out, our 'victories' on the sexual liberation front are also rather ambiguous. Sexual freedom (access to birth control, abortion, etc.) as it unfolds in a still patriarchal and capitalist society, can have the effect of

'freeing' women from one of the few sources of security we have had: a stable and responsible male breadwinner.

We also have the dominance (exploited, but not created by the media) of liberal 'feminism-as-career-strategy'. One reason feminism is so disdained by R.E.A.L. Women is that they see it as an elitist movement, designed to advance the interests of 'selfish' urban professionals. Sabina McLuhan, a R.E.A.L. Women and anti-abortion activist, characterizes the philosophy of feminism as "women first, and let men and children manage with leftovers". An American socialist feminist, Barbara Ehrenreich, has termed this image 'lifestyle feminism', and argues that

outside the middle class, lifestyle feminism can be actively repellant. If feminism is for women who are slender, 'intelligent' and upwardly mobile, and you are over forty, perhaps overweight and locked into a dead end job or marriage, then you are more likely to see feminism as a put down, rather than a sisterly call to arms.

One cannot blame liberal feminism in any direct way for creating anti-feminism, but we should recognize that this approach to feminism has an extremely limited constituency.

All of this is not an argument to stop the campaign for better access to birth control and abortion, or better job conditions for women. This is, however, an argument for a more complete and more grounded feminist politics. We don't have much to gain by entering into a dialogue with R.E.A.L. Women; at least at the level

of their leadership. They have a particular set of concerns which are manifestly opposed to feminism. But, *unless we challenge the perceptions of feminism which R.E.A.L. Women is attempting to exploit, we run the risk of losing the little ground we have gained.*

Challenging distorted perceptions of feminism means many things. Primarily, it means looking at ourselves—the women's movement—with a critical eye. It is of limited value to reply indignantly to R.E.A.L. Women's charges that of course the women's movement addresses issues of concern to women with children, women with less than professional jobs, and women in the home. I know that, you know that: the point is, why don't the women attracted to R.E.A.L. Women know that?

R.E.A.L. Women and groups like it are issuing a political challenge to feminism. To respond, let's keep in mind the origins and ultimate purpose of feminism: it is a political movement aimed at ending the oppression of women. In recent years, it seems we have become more concerned with ourselves as a 'community' and less as a 'movement'. A community is by nature restricted and inward-looking: a place for rejuvenation and support. Obviously that's a necessary component of political struggle, but it is not political struggle itself; it doesn't touch large numbers of people. A community welcomes the sight of the same familiar faces at political events—it makes for a more intimate and pleasurable affair. A movement, however, recognizes that social change is a vast undertaking and requires constant growth.

Perhaps some 'would be' feminists are restricted in their involvement in the women's movement by aspects of our structure and practice. There is a component of feminist culture—relevant perhaps to young, urban, educated women, that has been universalized as feminist process, which does not reflect the experiences of all women. Many women find long, constant and intensely personal meetings both alienating and impractical. A movement cannot isolate itself to the point where it does not acknowledge the decisions women make with respect to having children, caring for themselves, loving women or men, or working politically with men.

There is absolutely no need for feminists to 'give up' territory to groups like R.E.A.L. Women: our very inclusiveness is feminism's greatest strength. But we might think about abandoning these exclusive aspects of our ideas and our practice. No one has the monopoly on feminist "process", nor do all women think alike, work alike or care about the same issues. How do we remain open, inclusive and relevant to all women, without smothering, for example, socialist feminism's trenchant critique of class domination, or lesbian feminism's insights about the institution of heterosexuality? How do we value the experiences and contributions of women in the home, but recognize their contradictions? How do we recognize objective, material differences between women while encouraging unity? These are just some of the questions anti-feminism forces us to think about.

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For further reading on anti-feminism, the following sources are particularly interesting:

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Deciding what is Feminist:

**Lesbian Feminist
S/M and
some of its
implications
for feminists**

Just when feminism was feeling relatively comfortable with its analysis of oppressive sexual relations and some of its solutions, along comes an organized lesbian feminist sadomasochist movement.

S/M, according to Pat Califia (a prolific S/M lesbian feminist) is, a consensual activity that involves polarized roles and intense sensations. A S/M scene is always preceded by a negotiation in which the top (the sadist) and bottom (the masochist) decide whether or not they will play, (have a sexual en-

counter) what activities are likely to occur, and about how long the scene will last. The bottom is usually given a 'safe word' or 'code action' she can use to stop the scene. This safe word allows the bottom to enjoy a fantasy that the scene is not consensual, and to protest verbally or resist physically without halting stimulation. (1)

(for more detail on lesbian feminist S/M refer to *Coming to Power: Writings & Graphics on Lesbian S/M* edited by SAMOIS)

Politically, S/M lesbian feminists have begun to organize on the basis that they are discriminated against because they are a sexual minority. S/M lesbian feminists liken their struggle for sexual freedom with the repression of gay people during the Cold War in the 1950's. During the '50s, "the Communist party was as apt to purge homosexuals as the state department" (2). S/M lesbian feminists equate the lack of acceptance of a S/M lifestyle within the feminist movement, with the lack of acceptance of homosexuals in progressive movements in the 1950's.

In researching this article, I talked to an Ottawa woman who is a S/M lesbian feminist. When asked how she would like the feminist community to respond to her lifestyle, she said she wanted the feminist community to see that S/M is not violence against women. She argued that because women *consent* to and *enjoy* S/M, it is not violence. It is felt by S/M lesbian feminists that there is no point in suppressing their sexual desires, just because these desires do not fit into a feminist value system. Thus, S/M lesbian feminists have decided to act on their sadomasochistic fantasies. These women abhor the thought of being raped against their will. Neither do they enjoy being beaten up by police or gay bashers. They argue that because of the unequal power relations between men and women, heterosexual S/M is not the same as S/M between women.

Instead of attempting to negate or share power, S/M lesbian feminists want to explore, practice and exchange power. This exercise of power takes place between S/M lesbian feminists in their sexual encounters and does not necessarily permeate other aspects of the relationship. It is argued that women generally do not control what is done to their bodies. Thus, in an S/M encounter, the masochist is empowered simply because it is *her* limits to the severity of punishment that limits and controls the situation. Deep trust between women is developed in this situation because the sadist must adhere to the masochist's wishes, and the masochist must trust the sadist to do so.

S/M lesbian feminists adhere to the tenet of feminism that advocates the exploration of self and freedom for self discovery. As Johann Reimholt explains in her article, "From S/M, Feminism and Issues of Consent,"

the subjective approach is a way to find out how people really feel instead of how they are supposed to feel. It is also a weapon against conformity: hearing others cop to their individual feelings and experiences is the best way to appreciate how differently we all live our lives. (3)

S/M lesbian feminists see S/M fitting into feminism in this way and resent being told by other feminists they are "too warped and brainwashed by society ... to know what they're doing" (4)

S/M Lesbian Feminism vs Feminism

Needless to say, there is considerable conflict between S/M lesbian feminists and anti-S/M feminists. Anti-S/M feminists see this group of women as merely copying patriarchal roles that are both hierarchical and violent. They see these women as doing nothing to challenge the status quo. For this reason, S/M lesbian feminism is seen as totally inconsistent and contradictory to feminist values.

By imitating power imbalances between various groups like blacks and whites, Nazis and Jews, S/M lesbian feminists have been accused by other feminists of being racist and classist. Members of minority groups find it insulting and potentially dangerous that

their sufferings are being trivialized by S/M's sexual parody. It is argued that the meaning of certain symbols like whips and swastikas cannot be changed arbitrarily for sexual excitement. If the meaning of these objects as symbols of power and domination are in fact changed, what good would they be in a relationship that claims it is playing with and exchanging power? Anti-S/M feminists also argue that playing games with violence trivializes the experience of countless women who are victims of rape, incest and pornography. (For more detail on the anti-S/M position, refer to *Against Sadomasochism* edited by R. Lindin and D. Pagano).

Anti-S/M feminists also question how personal sexual experience and desire can be divorced from political

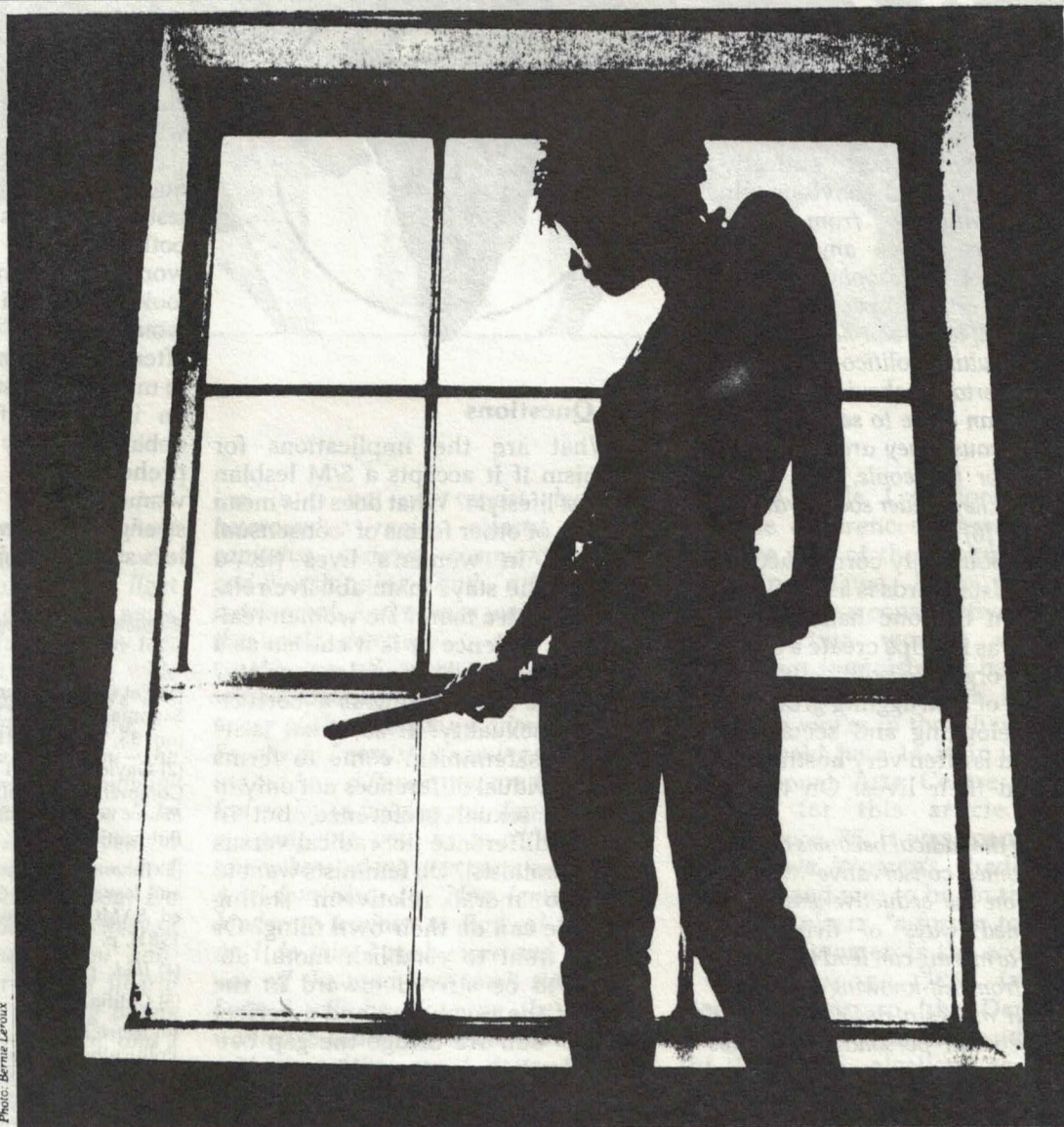


Photo: Bernie Leroux

realities. The bedroom door does not close out basic inequalities. This is especially true in light of the fact that most S/M lesbians play the masochistic role. (5)

S/M lesbian feminists accuse "traditional" feminists of being anti-sex and puritanical and are therefore conservative and imitating the status quo. Conversely, the anti-S/M feminists see the S/M lesbian feminist community as mere replicas of patriarchal relationships and are therefore basically conservative and status quo. Feminists on both sides of the issue are accusing each other of essentially the same thing. It is for this reason that feminists must begin to not only critically examine the structures that oppress women, but to look critically at our own movement as well.

What is "Politically Correct"?

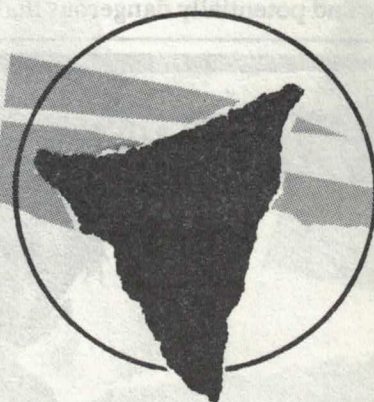
The notion of politically correct behaviour has developed in reaction to oppression. Muriel Dimen in her article "Politically Correct? Politically Incorrect?" says, it is behaviour which, *grows naturally from moral judgements (which any political ideology or philosophy contains) that deem certain aspects of the present way of living bad ... In the light of the resulting politico-moral principles, certain behaviours and attitudes can come to seem not only 'bad' because they are harmful to society or to people, but 'wrong' because they hinder social transformation.* (6)

Being politically correct according to feminist standards is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it is empowering as it helps create a space for people to organize politically. It gives members of a struggling group a feeling of belonging and security in a world that is often very hostile to their ideas and their lives. On the other hand,

(w)hen the radical becomes correct, it becomes conservative ... For it plays on the seductiveness of accustomed ways of living ... It's social armoring can lead the person away from self-knowing authenticity ... It makes a misleading clean cut between personal experience and old but still powerful social practices, and draws a neat circle around experience and a new set of supposedly acceptable practices. (7)

This neat circle around experience creates problems for the women's movement. The idea of "politically correct", has a tendency to exclude women whose behaviour is considered "wrong". This happens at the organizational level as well as at the interpersonal level. A contradiction in the movement begins to emerge. The contradiction is between individualism that proclaims self determination for women, and collectivism which proclaims collective struggles against oppression. As a result, there is a constant pull between these two factors within the women's movement.

Nowhere is the contradiction more evident than between "traditional" feminism and S/M lesbian feminism.



The Questions

What are the implications for feminism if it accepts a S/M lesbian feminist lifestyle? What does this mean in terms of other forms of "consensual violence" in women's lives (ie. a woman who stays in an abusive relationship with a man)? Do women really choose violence or is it chosen as a result of a warped and violent society?

Is there such a thing as a "correct" feminist sexuality? If so, what is it? How does feminism come to terms with individual differences not only in terms of sexual preference, but in political difference (ie. radical versus liberal feminists)? Do feminists want to fall into moral relativism stating everyone can do their own thing? Or do we want to establish moral absolutes to be strived toward in the name of the revolution and a perfect society? Can we bridge the gap between these two extremes?

Are feminists afraid of S/M lesbian feminists because they demonstrate a deviance from feminist theory? Are

feminists afraid of how patriarchy will exploit this issue and use it against all women as proof of women's masochism and justification for the current violence by men against women? Why are we so afraid to talk, or even think about this issue?

Can women who do not fit into the traditional feminist ideology fit into the women's movement (ie. including right-wing women)? When does critical analysis end and judgement on another woman's life begin? Are there any of us who are pure of "patriarchal activities" and thoughts? What about those of us whose sexual fantasies resemble pornography? Can feminism reject the S/M lesbian feminist lifestyle? What does this mean in terms of deciding who is or who is not a feminist? Can feminists really call it a women's movement if it rejects some women and not others? In what ways does examining S/M lesbian feminism challenge feminist ideas of what is and what is not "politically correct"?

Feminists need to address these questions in order to understand S/M lesbian feminism's implications for both feminism in general and the women's movement. Feminists cannot look away from S/M lesbian feminist women. Their existence, although often terrifying and incomprehensible to many feminists, has sparked debate on important feminist issues. This debate can only lead to a better comprehension of women's sexuality, women's lives and will hopefully strengthen the women's movement. So let's start talking.

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(1) Pat Califia, "Feminism and Sado-masochism," *Co-Evolution Quarterly* (no. 33, spring 1981), p. 31.

(2) Gayle Rubin, "The Leather Menace: Comments on Politics and S/M," *Coming to Power*, ed. SAMOIS (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1981), p. 194.

(3) Johanna Reimholdt, "From S/M, Feminism and Issues of Consent", *Coming to Power*, ed. SAMOIS (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1981), p. 81.

(4) *Ibid.*, p. 83.

(5) Califia, p. 31.

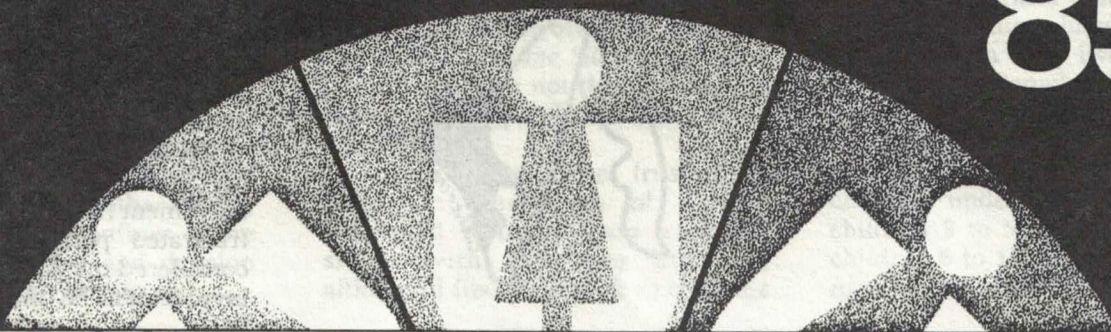
(6) Muriel Dimen, "Politically Correct? Politically Incorrect? *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 139.

(7) *Ibid.*, p. 141.

Empowerment for Whom?

The Women's Credit Union and

KALEIDOSCOPE 85



by Debra Pilon

I want to rise from the depths into raw sunshine. I begin in a place where the water is dark and I swim upwards with my eyes open, into the white light and the life-sustaining dry air. I move from the shore of this blue lake, my feet touching Mother Earth, along a wide trail filled with other women. We are walking together. This is important.

I wonder what to say about you—the women walking beside me. Is it only intellectually that I see you as 'sisters'? In my heart, am I distanced from you, in my heart do I divide you from me, do I name you, brand you, objectify you? Do I label you and thus make a mockery of sisterhood? I call some of you anti-feminist, others I point out as liberal feminists. Many others walking beside me I describe as simply 'women' and I feel comfortable with you because you are not necessarily feminist: you do not threaten me the way feminists do.

I am a radical feminist. The world I

live in is not only sexist, but also heterosexual, racist, classist, ageist, capitalist, socialist, communist, male-god-worshipping and all-inclusive patriarchal. And women want to change this world, don't we?

We are all women, we share the same knowledge of our oppression deep in our souls, whether we admit it or not. So why do I persist in naming you, pointing out how different you are from me? I feel no joy in judging you, I am not happy assigning you to a stifling niche somewhere along the continuum from Anti-feminist to Non-feminist to Moderate feminist to Radical feminist. As I do this, I push more and more of you off the road onto dark side paths. Soon I will be alone on the road. I wanted to share this day in the sunshine with you. Why am I destroying our sisterhood? This is a nightmare. I want to wake up.

Give me the real world, please.

In this article, I will look squarely at some differences among women who are part of the 'women's movement' in Ottawa. I am presenting what I hope is a constructive dialogue between two women who call themselves feminists yet have differing views of the ways in which feminism works in their lives. A conference held June 14-16 in Ottawa at the National Arts Centre was the catalyst for this article. Called *Kaleidoscope '85*, it was sponsored by the Ottawa Women's Credit Union (OWCU) and was to be, in the words of its organizers, "a forum to explore the role of women in the economy."

Kaleidoscope '85 featured Geraldine Ferraro (the Democratic Party's vice-presidential candidate in the 1984 U.S. election) as a guest speaker and the cost to attend the two-day event was \$125. (subsidies

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became separatist, giving their time and energy to women only.

Most of us became educated, privileged women. Our goal of achieving emancipation for women in the public world also involved fighting for liberation in our private lives. We gave a great deal of ourselves to analysing and 'working on' our relationships in a never ending struggle to achieve non-sexist romantic and domestic liaisons. Few of us had children.

Although children were not a priority in our personal lives, issues around the rights and needs of mothers were often the focus of our political efforts. We fought for reproductive choice, the recognition of midwifery, universal daycare, rights to child support payments and maternity benefits, and the right of a woman to give her children her family name. But still few of us had children.

Fifteen years later I look back on my involvement in the women's movement from a new and somewhat frustrated perspective. I had long considered myself a feminist and my involvement in the women's move-



by Joan Holmes

Mothers need to Danc

When I first became involved in feminism and the women's movement, many women my age were concerned with redefining the place of women in our society. We questioned many of the things we had been taught to expect as females, primarily our prescribed role as wife and mother in the nuclear family. We were afraid that we could not broaden our horizons and explore our full human potential if we were saddled with babies. We were so sure of the dangers inherent in raising children that many of us totally rejected motherhood as an option in our lives.

We chose another path: a path

that would take us beyond the restrictions of traditional North American female experience. We travelled and we studied incessantly (concentrating on Women's Studies in progressive social science departments). We had discussion groups and raised our consciousnesses; we tried to raise other women's consciousnesses as well. We worked for various women's projects and feminist groups, for measly salaries or for free. We got involved in all manner of monogamous, polygamous, hetero-homo-and-bisexual relationships, or remained celibate. Some of us continued to seek personal happiness in relationships with men (or a man); others

ment has been an important part of my life; however, now I am a mother and I am finding it increasingly difficult to maintain my involvement.

I'm only ten months into this new job of mothering but I can plainly see that our fears as young women were wholly justified. I understand now how motherhood can eat up a woman. It saps her energy, dominates her thoughts, and monopolizes her capacity to be caring and give affection. This may sound terribly negative but it is reality. I am not denying the great rewards and emotional satisfaction of mothering; I am still in awe of the tremendous creative power of female biology.

This awareness, however, does not alleviate the day to day demands of child rearing.

Being the mother of a young baby means that I am constantly catering to the basic needs of another individual. My mind is continually cluttered with concerns for the baby's welfare—does he have clean clothes and diapers, what should I feed him for lunch, has he been in the sun too long, is that diaper rash or chicken pox? At the end of a long day, I know that I will not get my well-deserved rest. Baby will wake in the night and need more care, nursing, changing and comforting if he is sick or cutting teeth.

I have very little energy left over to devote to the women's movement. I can work as a feminist independently on the home front instead, discussing and negotiating with my partner, trying to achieve non-sexist upbringing for my son, forwarding the concerns of girls and women in my own circle of friends and with little children that I know. In other words, I can retreat into the confines of the family and try to live and develop my feminism within that sphere.

to the greatest degree when we are working together in groups; I do not think that a woman is very effective working in isolation. Besides feeling that collective efforts are the most effective, I, personally, need the revitalization and empowerment that I receive working with other women. It is at this time, when I am bound with the responsibilities of a young child and in danger of stagnating in isolation, that I most need the support of other women.

I am frustrated, on a personal level, because I don't feel that I am growing and developing as a feminist. I never find the time and energy to read the work of feminist thinkers, discuss issues with other women or be really active in the movement. Over the last year I have had to limit my involvement to working on *Breaking the Silence* and have found that I can not devote as much time and energy as I would like to the magazine.

I experience these frustrations from the perspective of a very privileged woman. I am a professional with my own business, although I find it difficult to combine

a baby and a career, it is possible. My work schedule is flexible to a degree, and I can afford part-time childcare. Baby's father is an enlightened supportive partner and a committed and active parent. I am in a very enviable position compared to many women struggling to raise children. And yet with all of these advantages, I still find it very difficult to allocate any of my time to activities outside of my home and business.

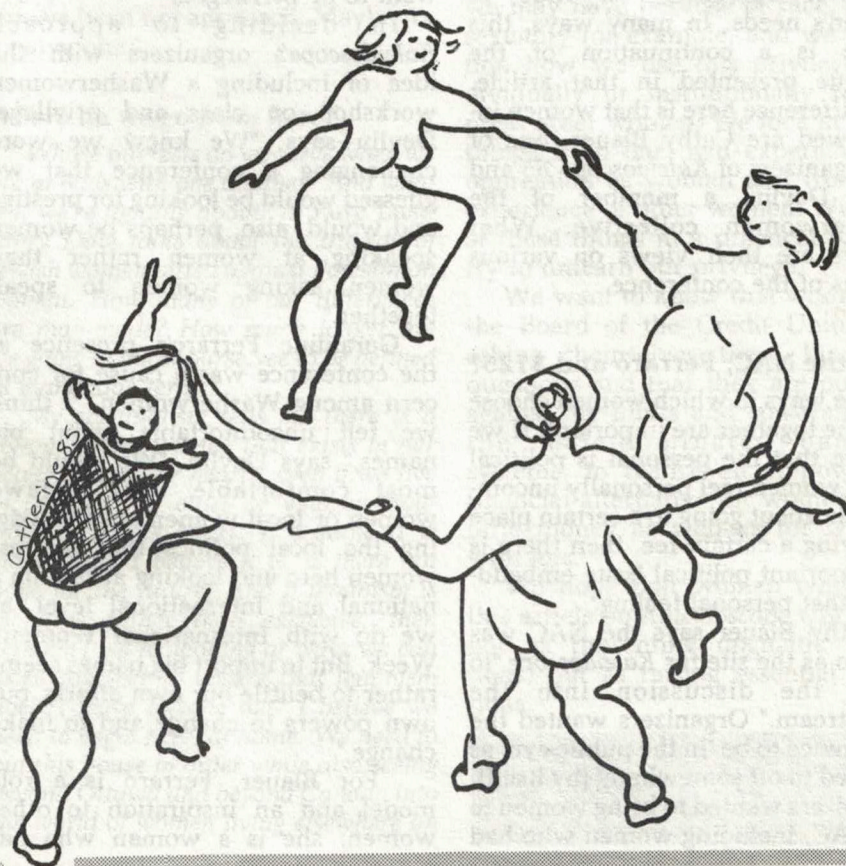
I am extremely concerned, on a political level, that as a mother I find it so difficult to participate actively as a feminist in the women's movement. How can we progress as a movement, representing the real needs of women, when it is so difficult for women with children to take part? We must recognize that the vast majority of women have children at some point in their lives. According to Statistics Canada, 83% of ever-married women have had children. Of Canadian women participating in the labour force in 1984, 51% had children under 3 years, 57% had children 3 to 5 years, and 64% had children 6 to 15 years. That's a lot of mothers!

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I am afraid, however, that this is the most dangerous form of 'working from within'. From experiencing my own life, and knowing the lives of other feminist mothers, I have come to believe that it is far riskier for a woman's feminism to be isolated within her family than to work within the malestream bureaucratic, political or corporate worlds. Working within the family means constantly answering challenges to long-accepted feminist analysis and struggling for ever egalitarian concession. It's debilitating. In the long run, it makes a woman compromise her beliefs and become much less radical.

I firmly believe that we advance



were available to reduce the cost for certain events). The fact that the conference seemed geared to middle-class white women in professional jobs or high-powered careers made me wary of it. After attending the conference and reflecting on it, I wondered about the wisdom of staging an event that welcomes and includes, almost exclusively, women with money and power, or the ability to achieve both.

As a result of *Kaleidoscope*, there are two areas of concern and discussion that I am easily able to identify:

1. What problems are created by having a conference at the NAC, bringing in Geraldine Ferraro and charging \$125 to attend?
2. What differing theories and/or realities are at work between *Kaleidoscope's* organizers and Washerwomen, an Ottawa collective which holds workshops for women's groups on issues of class, privilege and oppression?

In the Spring '85 issue of *Breaking the Silence*, Alma Estable wrote a feature article which examined the reasons why the Ottawa Women's Credit Union was founded and the ways it currently responds to women's needs. In many ways, this article is a continuation of the dialogue presented in that article. The difference here is that women interviewed are Cathy Blauer, one of the organizers of *Kaleidoscope* '85 and Clare Devlin, a member of the Washerwomen collective. What follows are their views on various aspects of the conference.

Why the NAC, Ferraro and \$125?

The ways in which women choose to come together are important. If we believe that the personal is political and if women feel personally uncomfortable about going to a certain place or paying a certain fee, then there is an important political issue embedded in that personal feeling.

Cathy Blauer says the NAC was chosen as the site for *Kaleidoscope* "to bring the discussion into the mainstream." Organizers wanted the conference to be "in the public eye, as opposed to off somewhere" (by itself). Organizers wanted to bring women to the NAC, including women who had

"never been there before and had had no reason to go; they would now have a reason to be there." As far as the NAC being an intimidating place for some women, Blauer pointed out that many places where women's conferences are held, such as universities, may be intimidating too. Her desire was to make the NAC a place where women would feel comfortable.



On the other hand, Clare Devlin of Washerwomen ways holding *Kaleidoscope* at the NAC smacked of "paying for prestige, which is something that divides, that belongs to those who are privileged or who want to be privileged."

In deciding to approach *Kaleidoscope's* organizers with the idea of including a Washerwomen workshop on class and privilege, Devlin says: "We knew we were challenging a conference that we guessed would be looking for prestige and would, also, perhaps be women speaking at women rather than women asking women to speak together."

Geraldine Ferraro's presence at the conference was a cause for concern among Washerwomen. "I think we felt uncomfortable about big names," says Devlin. "We would be most comfortable with Ottawa women or local women acknowledging the local politics that oppress women here and looking at that on a national and international level, as we do with International Women's Week. But to import big names seems rather to belittle our own efforts, our own powers to change and to make change."

For Blauer, Ferraro is a role model and an inspiration to other women; she is a woman who has

managed to leap the barriers which keep women out of powerful positions in society. "And there's some resentment over that from certain sectors," said Blauer. "I don't understand why. I don't think she compromises herself. Certainly, her statement on abortion was one of the most powerful I've ever heard and with women in those high places making those kinds of statements, the women's movement is better off. We're better off for that, especially because she does it with such clarity and honesty."

"I think if I had been to hear her (Ferraro)," said Devlin "I would have been excited and charmed and inspired but that's not what I really believe makes for long-term change. I think it's large numbers of women recognizing their own powerlessness but recognizing the power we share that will make long-term change."

"And one woman who has achieved something very close to international power is, in fact, a model of the gulfs that exist and that are getting bigger in our country," Devlin continued. "There are more women with each change of government who for perhaps a short while are in positions of greater power... But it's very much not enough."

Differing theories and/or realities

What are the philosophies at work to create the gulf that exists between Washerwomen's view of the *Kaleidoscope* conference and the organizers' view?

After the conference, Cathy Blauer told me she has a strong sense that "there's unity where there wasn't unity before; the feedback from the women involved in the conference is very positive." Blauer does not feel that either she or the OWCU has been "attacked" by Washerwomen's desire to look at the questions of class or privilege in the context of the women's movement. "It was essential for me to have them (Washerwomen) involved," she says.

"We've all chosen whether we fight from within or without the system," Blauer said. "And I don't think one is more effective than the other. I think both are needed. I think you need very radical women in the women's movement to keep it mov-

ing ahead and you need the more moderate women to fight the fight inside."

Devlin agrees that women who believe they are clearing a path for other women by "making it" in the system have a right to pursue that goal without being denigrated by other women. "They are able to do that and they do it through a large number of professional clubs and organizations ... and they're getting very good at networking and are realizing the importance of doing that and they have the money and the leisure to do it. Women coming together in this way is important for all women across Canada."

"Yes they should do that and, yes, I'm glad they succeed," she said. "But they cannot do that on the backs of poor women."



"Here's where I'm letting my own guilt stand in the way in that I, as a Credit Union member, have let the OWCU get away, if it has, from adequately providing help and financial information to women on low income and to women on welfare and, instead, is choosing as a symbol of its place in the community a conference which spoke mainly to the elite. There's no doubt that it did do that and that the articles in its newsletters speak to women who have money. And this is not enough for an institution that was founded in the way that the OWCU was founded (with a commitment to provide support and financial aid to poor women)."

The direction the OCWU is taking is an important issue for the 2,300 women who belong to it. Devlin says Washerwomen is planning to meet with the Board of Directors of the Credit Union to discuss these questions and get more information.

If the OWCU is moving into the arena of 'success', then Devlin says she has strong concerns about that move, especially if 'success' is measured in what she describes as "very consumer terms and very male acceptable terms".

Blauer defends women who choose to work within the system, the women for whom a conference like *Kaleidoscope* was designed. She does not agree that they are necessarily coopted by becoming part of the business world or government, etc. "In fact, they're the ones who are fighting on the front lines. They're the ones walking into the situation and taking it in the neck. And there is this intolerance of women inside the system by women outside the system ... I don't know how you can bring together very polarized groups."

On the other hand, Blauer believes "there is some commonality within the different groups within the women's movement. That's my hope and that's my own personal philosophy. And that commonality sort of transcends what we wear or where we work or where we live or what kind of income we have or whether we're married or partnered or gay or mothers or whatever. That's always been my approach. Maybe it's a naive one."

Where do we go from here?

Whose interests do we serve when we are at odds with one another? And what is it we're fighting about? In Pure Lust, Mary Daly talks about the tragedy of Jewish women pitted against Palestinian women. How many of our differences are man-made? How much longer are we going to allow ourselves to be defined in man-made terms?

My spiritualism tells me there is a community of women that exists in our heads and in our hearts, even if we live in countries or cities or villages thousands of miles apart. If sisterhood is global, and I believe it is, is there not hope for the future? And if feminism is inclusive rather than exclusive, then shouldn't we be looking at ways we can work together to ensure that feminism doesn't leave anyone out? I believe we need to begin here, at home. We need to put this house in order while also seeing beyond Ottawa and beyond Canada into the world of women living elsewhere on

this planet.

We must gather together, as the poet Ellen Bass urges us, we must gather what we know and our joy in each other, if we are ever to reap our stunning harvest.

This gathering is so important, this process of assimilation is so necessary that without it, we will be easy prey for those who delight in the maintenance of our oppression.

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The Washerwomen respond:

This article on the *Kaleidoscope* conference is causing us as women in the Washerwomen collective some pain and confusion.

We feel we are shown as confronting and judging the Ottawa Women's Credit Union. While we have questioned the way the conference was organized and will again raise our concerns with the Credit Union, we do not want this to be seen as confronting.

In our workshops we, and the other women participants, look as clearly as possible at the privileges we may have because of race, class, sexuality for example, and we question how we use this privilege, individually or institutionally to oppress other women. We look at these things from our own experience of oppression as women and from the experience of other women. We look at these things in a practical way to try to unlearn our privilege.

We want to know that women on the Board of the Credit Union are asking themselves these kinds of questions and that they are pushing against the limits and constraints of the male-dominated banking systems, to realize an empowering financial alternative for women with little money as well as for women with lots.

We hope that women who read this article on *Kaleidoscope* will see it not as presenting dogmatic assertions, but as raising essential questions.

Writing Women In: *Looking towards Europe*

by Cynthia D'Errico

Many of us depend on feminist thinking to accurately analyse and translate the contradictory messages about women that are produced by our culture. In North America, however, the feminist emphasis on social reform has left little room for conceptual thinking about woman's nature and identity.

If conceptual thinking has been given short shrift here, it's been compensated for across the Atlantic. The differences between North American feminism and European feminism are exciting to consider. While North American feminism seems to promote an identity for women based on the very culture that oppresses women and carries confused notions about that identity, European feminists have attacked the very foundations of that oppressive culture.

Our European sisters recognize that the problems posed by conceptual equations are much more subtle than those posed by social equations. For example, "equal pay for work of equal value" is an accepted feminist goal. But in the realm of ideas, equality carries the threat of assimilation. In her pioneer work on women's literature, *A Literature of Their Own* Elaine Showalter pointed out,

[Women must decide whether] to move beyond the female tradition into a seamless participation in the literary mainstream that might be regarded either as equality or assimilation.

This either/or proposition echoes a common feminist fear that equality is assimilation. The denial of "difference" is dangerous if only because one gender (guess which one) will be

absorbed, annihilated by assimilation. In Europe, feminists are working against concepts about women that deny "difference", deny heterogeneity, that formulate female identity in terms that reek of male construction and perceptions.

European feminists expose the assumptions that underlie culture: they attack nothing less than all thought and language. Thought, as evinced



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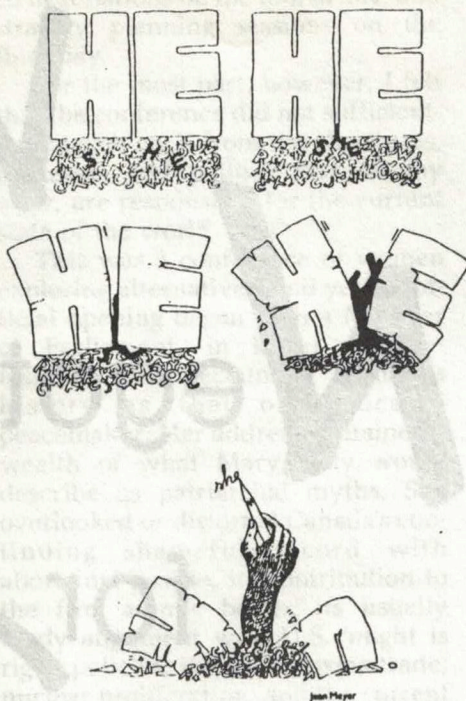
through culture, and language, which is the protective veil through which we are persuaded to accept our condition as natural, are both picked apart. Because these women write and work in the areas of psychoanalysis, linguistics and literary criticism, their unveiling procedures are especially effective. They are able to attack male thinking on its own turf, crush its righteous presuppositions, and then refashion notions about women; how we think, speak and act. Their work subverts age-old (ph)allacies, by razoring through male thought and culture, and leaving it to topple.

Witness the force of these statements by two European feminists:

... a woman cannot 'be'; it is something which does not even belong in the order of being. It follows that a feminist practice can only be negative ... In woman I see something which cannot be represented, something that is not said, something above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies ... in social, sexual, and symbolic experiences, being a woman has always provided a means to another end, to becoming something else; a subject-in-the-making, a subject on trial ... there can be no socio-political transformation without a transformation of subjects; in other words, in our relationship to social constraints, to [female] pleasure and more deeply, to language.

Julia Kristeva,
"La femme, ce n'est jamais ça",
Tel Quel, automne, 1974.

When I say 'woman', I'm speaking of woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man; and of a universal woman subject who must bring women to their meaning in history ... the repression that has kept them in the dark—that 'dark' which people have been trying to make them accept as their attribute—there is, at this time, no general woman, no



one typical woman ... you can't talk about a female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes.

I mean when I speak of male writing ... there is such a thing as marked writing; that, until now, far more extensively and repressively that is ever suspected or admitted, writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural—hence political, typically masculine—economy ... that this locus has grossly exaggerated all the signs of sexual opposition (and not sexual difference) where woman has never her turn to speak ...

Nearly the entire history of writing is [confused] with the history of reason of which it is at once the effect, the support and one of the privileged alibis.

Helene Cixous,
"The Laugh of the Medusa"
L'Arc, (1975)

European feminists alert us to a psycho-linguistic condition that permeates the way we think about ourselves, the way we construct our place in the world. Traditional psychoanalysis, for example, is based on theories of subject-formation—how "I" perceive myself in relation to

"not-I" or "other"—and these theories largely leave out the female subject, because psychoanalysis has designated the female as always "other". Women, then, are, psychoanalytically speaking, never subjects, only "objects". This is the Oedipal dream to which we are all subjected and which filters through our culture in various ways.

Are we, in North America, delving deeply enough into these questions? Significant change in these areas cannot be effected on the doorstep of social reform. Nor can we relegate these challenges to the attic of university discourse because no far-reaching echoes will issue from that privileged chamber. Conceptual issues must have a forum wherever women have a voice. *BTS* has opened the door of discussion by allowing this article to be published. While much has been left out, it is hoped that this article will spark enough interest and controversy to oil the machinery of conceptual change. We must get moving on this sophisticated but important material as have our sisters in Europe.

bts

Further Recommended Reading

- Abel, Elizabeth. *Writing and Sexual Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
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- deCourtivron, Isabelle and Elaine Marks, eds. *New French Feminisms*. N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1981.
- Fleenor, Juliann E., ed., *The Female Gothic*. Montreal: The Eden Press, 1983.
- Gallop, Jane. *The Daughter's Seduction. Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982.
- Garner, Shirley Nelson, et al., *The (M)Other Tongue. Essays in Feminist Psychoanalytic Interpretation*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum de l'autre femme*. Editions de Minuit, 1974.
- Irigaray, Luce. *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*. Editions de Minuit, 1977.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language. A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Roudiez, Leon S., ed., N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1980.

by Helen Durie

A woman's peace conference at Mount St. Vincent University in Halifax in early June brought together 350 women from 33 countries. Sponsored by a coalition of Canadian women's groups, the conference provided a rare opportunity for women from a broad spectrum of political bases across the country to come together on the issue of peace, and to learn first hand of the lives of sisters from many other parts of the earth. The stories of their struggles against apartheid, brutal dictatorships, economic slavery, male violence, nuclear testing, missile deployment, etc., and here in Canada, the desperate situation of aboriginal people, moved us enormously, sometimes to tears. They brought us a deeper active understanding of the many faces of militarism. They demonstrated to us how Canadian policies and our way of life are implicated in global racism and in the repression and the impoverishment of many of the earth's people, and of how all struggles against violence in all its forms are part of the search for peace.

Despite acute awareness of the oppression and exploitation that affect women's lives everywhere, and the threat to all life, there was reason to celebrate, in being together with sisters of diverse colours and cultures—from countries such as South Africa, Belize, French Melanesia, Iceland, Israel, Kenya, Norway, the Soviet Union, Chile, The Phillipines, Nicaragua and Ethiopia. It was also an opportunity for newer peace workers to come together with women in Canada who have long been associated with peace work—Rosalie Bertell, Ursula Franklin, Muriel Duckworth, Edith Adamson, Kay Macpherson, Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg, to name just a few—and for older and younger women, and reformists and transformists (to put it simplistically), to share perspectives. Preparation for Halifax included locally organized regional peace meetings. These not only contributed to the important

Women Negotiating for Peace



Women's Action for Peace demonstrating at Litton

work of strengthening women's local peace work, but ensured countrywide input to the conference. For many reasons, it was a unique event,

and it was good to know that some of our tax dollars were largely responsible for making it financially possible, since so many are used to perpetuate the many faces of militarism.

The theme of the conference was *The Urgency for True Security: Women's Alternatives for Negotiating Peace*. It was based on the view that women have unique perspectives and negotiating skills which have been excluded from the public arena, while long years of 'negotiations' by men have only brought us more conflict and weapons. From the first day, however, there was uncertainty about how to translate the theme into practice, even among organizers.

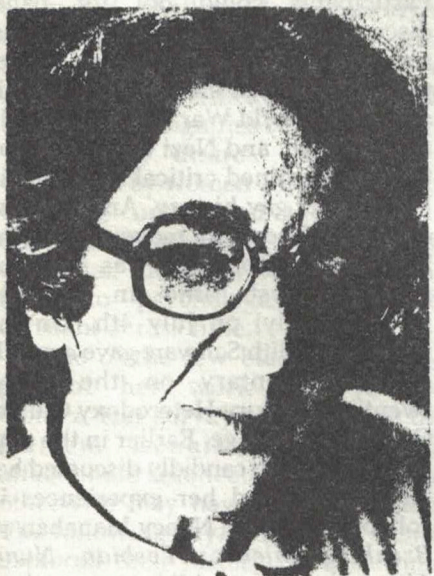
The conference was 18 months in the planning, and from a passing familiarity with the planning process, there was clearly hopes that it would be different, dramatic and effective—in both process and content. To the extent that this was achieved, much credit is due to the planning group. This is especially so, since



Kay MacPherson

they (and expected participants) reflected great diversity in political perspectives and strategy.

Morning plenary sessions during the first three days, with presentations primarily from women from other countries, were followed by small group discussions. The opportunity to spend time each afternoon with the same women was a wonderful way of getting to know at least a few women on a more than superficial level, and to explore and develop our views. These first three



Ursula Franklin

days were to lead up to a day of staged negotiations on the fourth day, and strategy planning sessions on the final day.

For the most part, however, I felt that the conference did not sufficiently distance itself from the structures, processes and politics that, in my view, are responsible for the current state of the world.

This was a conference of women exploring alternatives, and yet the official opening began with a Member of Parliament, in khaki military-fashion suit, recounting Canada's history as that of dedicated peacemaker. Her address contained a wealth of what Mary Daly would describe as patriarchal myths. She overlooked or distorted Canada's continuing shameful record with aboriginal people, its contribution to the first atomic bomb, its usually ready alignment with U.S. 'might is right' policies, its role in arms trade, nuclear proliferation, and the current escalation of the arms race, and so on. There were frequent loud interjections by many in the audience, who did not want to give even tacit support to her message, and these interruptions were in turn met with discomfort and disapproval from others.

The government representative was followed first by a French Melanesian woman, who riveted the audience with her impassioned account of the continuing liberation struggle in her country despite brutal repression, and then by Ursula Franklin. It was heartwarming to hear Franklin speak unequivocally about the hypocrisy and unpeacefulness of government policy. Undoubtedly this arrangement of speakers was intentional, although the vocalized divided response to the government representative was probably not expected. It served to highlight some of the differences among participants, in terms of politics and expectations. We did not find the way to address these differences openly and constructively, and they hung in the air during the conference.

The possibilities for a full and free-ranging discussion of what we as women would want to negotiate, and how, in order to develop non-violent

ways of living together, were also limited for me by the academic and catholic setting, and the political environment. I felt spiritually and intellectually confined by the cold physical structures, by nightly stays in a convent, by several hours each day in a lecture-style auditorium, and by the absence of an accessible, comfortable space for spontaneously gathering with other women to reflect, talk and plan at the end of the day. Some activities were included to make our time together spiritually as well as intellectually engaging, such as early morning sessions in different spiritual traditions, and evenings of politically-rich entertainment by local and visiting artists. Even so, I sometimes found myself longing for the physical freedom, spiritual nourishment and anarchistic political environment of Seneca, or Greenham. At these and other 'women and militarism' gatherings I have shared a painfully intense awareness of the enormity and urgency of the present, but I have also been excited and inspired by glimpses of joyful and cooperative ways of living together.

The international presence and testimony deeply enriched our political analysis. However, there still seemed to be many 'sacred cows'. Too many speakers narrowly attributed the basis for women's concern and contribution to our role as childbearer and mother (and therefore, it is presumed, natural peacemaker). The invisibility of lesbians conveyed the message that there were issues and experiences which could not be addressed with comfort. Another limitation was a meeting style which too much of the time favoured those of us who were accustomed to articulating our views in large groups and formal settings. The organizers were successful in ensuring at least some presence by women from different classes and cultures across Canada, but participation did not sufficiently reflect this diversity.

Overall, the climate did not provide encouragement for seriously incorporating a discussion of what, to me, are some of the most solid foundations of our militaristic and patriarchal world, such as institutionalized

religion, the traditional family unit, socially-enforced heterosexuality, the education system, or the unequal power and privilege of education and class (even among those of us there). Without such discussion, I could not fully give my heart and mind over to considering alternatives, and in fact I frequently wondered just how 'alternative' we were expected to be.

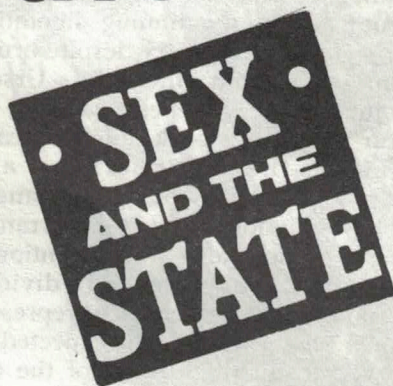
The final two days evolved into tedious debate over the wording of a final statement (which a group selected prior to the conference were to take to the Nairobi NGO forum), and over countless resolutions demanding actions by various governments. While the statement and resolutions were impressive in their scope, they are a collection of words unlikely to be heeded by any government, leaving at least some of us to question how different this conference had been from any other.

By the end of the conference, many women had simply drifted away, and it concluded not with a joyous celebration and a united sense of direction for the future, but with a halfhearted circle and song.

For me, there was a sense of lost opportunity, a sense that we failed to step outside the usual structures and boundaries of discussion and open ourselves up to truly alternative paths. One woman from Greenham, in particular, attempted to draw us in this direction, but we did not seriously heed her. At the same time, the conference and my reflections on it, have since opened up new paths of thought for me, and every woman there would undoubtedly say the same.

Whatever the differences in our perspectives, what we all shared is the vision that women together hold the possibility for reclaiming this earth from male violence. My own vision is inspired by my experience of the powerful spiritual energy that can develop among women—powerful and creative enough to disarm and transform a hostile, abusive crowd. For me, our hope is in letting go of our identification with and support of the boundaries and institutions that militarism uses to divide us, so that we can release together this transforming energy, this lust for life. bts

What you missed if you didn't attend the



conference

by Carolyn Strange

Most conferences leave one wondering how to fill those interminable hours between interesting sessions. Not this one. The *Sex and the State: Their Laws, Ours Lives* conference rarely allowed time for lunch, let alone boredom. This international gathering on lesbian and gay history, held from the third to the sixth of July at the University of Toronto, outdid its successful predecessor, *Oscar Wilde Conference* of 1982 in the variety of sessions and presenters on hand. According to the conference brochure, coordinators set out to challenge "the white, male-dominated, heterosexist 'grand tradition' of history [by creating] a history which is politically relevant and breaks down distinctions between scholarship and activism". Not only did the "grand tradition" of history break down, but the "grand iciness" of academic conferences also melted in the warm atmosphere of this gathering.

The history conference ran in conjunction with the seventh annual meeting of the International Gay Association. A modest fee (\$20/\$30) allowed one to attend both conferences, a privilege that only complicated matters when it came time to deciding on a session. Participants could opt for panel discussions, films, group workshops, roundtables or conventional paper presentations. In the evenings, public shows on World War Two, Harlem in the Jazz Age, and Nazi Concentration Camps examined critical moments in lesbian and gay history. An overview of the gay liberation movement in the U.S., *Before Stonewall*, was screened for the first time in Toronto (appropriately) on July 4th. On the final day, Judith Schwarz gave a public slide-documentary on the early-twentieth-century Heterodoxy Club of Greenwich Village. Earlier in the day, Rosemary Curb candidly discussed her background and her experiences in collaborating with Nancy Manahan on *Breaking Silence: Lesbian Nuns*. Although these public presentations

were completely dominated by American content, they nonetheless included some of the best popular material available on lesbian and gay history.

One of the conference coordinators' most commendable achievements was the balance between sessions on lesbian and gay male history. Highlights of the first day included a provocative interview by Joan Nestle of the historical connections between lesbians and prostitutes. Later, Liz Kennedy and Madeline Davis of the Buffalo Women's Oral History Project gave one of their entertaining presentations, this one on lesbian relationships in the bar culture of the '40s and '50s. The following day was a marathon that began with a three-hour session on finding, doing, and preserving lesbian history. Members of the New York's Lesbian Herstory Archives sketched the background of their vital institution, while Frances Rooney explored the difficulties and pleasures of piecing together Canadian lesbian history. The plea in both sessions was the same: lesbian invisibility will persist unless lesbians ferret-out the history of their predecessors and preserve their own history as it unfolds.

The most talked-about session, however, was the "butch/femme" roundtable in which eight women offered a brief summary of her views on the controversial subject. For many, the presentations and discussion afterward challenged preconceived notions of "role-playing" and heterosexual mimicry; instead, as Amber Hollibaugh offered, butch/femme signifies complementary "systems of desire". The session, dominated by women who came out in the '50s, underlined the need to examine the specific historical context of lesbian identities before reducing them to psychological constructs constant across time.

One of the few black lesbians to present her work was Jewelle Gomez. Her survey of lesbians in the Harlem Renaissance was an affectionate recollection of a past that otherwise may have been forgotten. The following day, lesbians of colour explored their history in Asia, India and Latin America. Unfortunately



Marching to a different drummer:
Canadian WACs during World War II.

CBC-TV "Women at War"

scheduling conflicts meant that only a minority of participants could attend. For those who did, these women challenged the assumption that a single historical paradigm exists for the history of lesbians.

For the more theoretically-inclined, Friday afternoon offered a taxing session on the historical construction of lesbian and gay identities since the early-modern period. Lisa Duggan addressed the "crisis in lesbian history", a pursuit she believes is beset by practical impediments and theoretical impasses. For historians and theorists of sexuality, this session was a chance to hear such luminaries as Jeffrey Weeks "talk sex", though it left most lay participants scratching their heads.

On the final day, Esther Newton presented an interesting comparison of studies on lesbian and gay culture. She exposed the influence of lesbian-feminists' biases in producing a skewed picture of "the lesbian community" as a white, middle-class educated group. Such studies, Newton argued, reflect rifts between existing lesbian communities along class, racial and ethnic lines. In contrast, the greater anonymity of gay male sexual contact seems to foster a more heterogeneous community among men. Her work

touched on one of the underlying themes of the conference: the hostility of lesbians who emerged from working class, black, and/or bar culture toward judgemental lesbian-feminists. For anyone who thought all lesbians are (or should be) feminists, Newton's paper and related discussions in other sessions raised new and challenging issues to consider.

The greatest disappointment of the conference was the final panel which unfortunately degenerated into a gripe-session instead of a productive plenary. Discomfitted participants used the opportunity to grind a number of axes rather than addressing the final session theme—the uses of history and future directions.

The issue is not one we should leave to historians or academics. Lesbians and gay men "are everywhere"; they have also existed throughout history. But a gay liberation movement as we have come to know it is only a product of a particular historical moment. If we want to ensure its survival and thereby secure a freer future, we must look to and learn from the past. Thus equipped, with the help of conferences such as this one, we may move more confidently toward the future.

bts

Feminist Periodicals Conference: *Developing Process*

by Joan Riggs and Marie O'Shea

A national conference for Canadian feminist periodicals was held in St. Marc-sur-Richelieu, Quebec from June 14-16, bringing together fifty women from thirty-five English and French language feminist periodicals. For many of the women in the *Breaking the Silence* collective this conference was eagerly anticipated. A meeting with other women who dedicate the same energy and time to the same feminist vehicle for change seemed to be a perfect catalyst for generating new ideas and developing an understanding of where feminist periodicals fit in the broader political picture. We were not disappointed in meeting those fine women.

The conference focused primarily on skill-building and information-exchange about the more practical aspects of producing a feminist periodical. Noticeably missing was a feminist process and a forum for political discussions.

It is a tiresome but essential commitment to adhere to a process that has been created by women to ensure that our personal and political needs are met. A number of key ingredients in a feminist process were absent, including: no around-the-room introductions at the opening plenary or the workshops we attended; information was not easily attainable on the 'real discussions'; no process developed that

empowered all women thus allowing them to fully participate and; personal or informal power was ignored. Some women at the conference held power both within their community and nationally. That power, if not acknowledged, silences women who are either intimidated by power or feel they should be quiet and learn from the 'leaders'.

Most of the political discussion at the conference evolved around specific events and felt like crisis management in the women's movement. Two periodicals, *Herizons* and *Kinesis* were (are) being threatened by right wing forces. *Herizons*, at the time, was also in danger of losing its federal funding. Instead of specific time being taken within the conference to address these issues, the discussion floated around the nebulous threat to all feminist press. In fact, the reality of all political tools for change, including the press, is that we threaten the status quo. Therefore we are always vulnerable to being attacked. It would have been more useful to acknowledge our political position and develop future collective strategies to meet the needs of all of the groups who were present.

The lack of a discussion which places feminists in a political context prevented many ideas from being fully discussed. The question was never asked as to 'how we saw our role in the

women's movement?' Feminist periodicals play a vital role. Each periodical has developed individually, ascribing to certain values, and identifying with certain groups of women more than others. It would have been more than useful to have discussed who we see ourselves representing, reflecting, reaching out to, and who do we, by default or conscious choice, omit. There are many women missing from the women's movement as was mirrored in the conference delegation where there was only one woman of colour present. It would have been useful for the conference delegation to have discussed the question of what power we have in disseminating information and insuring that women's voices are heard? And what is our responsibility to be conscious of that role?

The conference could have benefited from hearing from all the periodicals represented at the conference. The members of *Breaking the Silence* came from a particular perspective that unfortunately was not conveyed to the delegation. Our publication is relatively self-sufficient, not dependent on government funding, three years old and growing, based in Ottawa which makes it somewhat schizophrenic, simultaneously national and community-based and produced by a twelve-woman collective. This was the first time *BTS* had had representatives at a feminist periodicals conference. Our knowledge and experience, and that of many others, was underused.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the women, in particular Susan da Rosa and Eleanor Wachtel, who coordinated the conference. The conference was useful in learning more of the 'hard facts' related to producing a feminist periodical. Concrete outcomes of the conference include: a commitment that we hold annual meetings, a commitment to supporting one another should we individually come under attack, the development of joint promotion and marketing campaigns and commencing research on the feasibility of a staff person for a national association.

We look forward to the next conference to be held in Toronto next year.

bts

BOOK REVIEWS

Fables of Brunswick Avenue
by Katherine Govier
Penguin Books, 1985

reviewed by
Martha Muzychka

Never judge a book by its cover, nor perhaps by its glowing reviews in the daily press. Despite the attractive cover, and Katherine Govier's intriguing introduction to her collection of short stories, the rest of the book fails to live up to its promise to provide an inside look at the hopes of Toronto's young and jaded artistic quarter.

Many reviews have praised Govier's attention to detail and uniqueness of imagery, all of which is true. Govier describes the minutiae of daily living—fighting a losing battle with cockroaches or interpreting the nuances of cocktail party chatter—with precision, as if she hopes to illuminate some great truths about

life. Yet we the readers receive this information without knowing how to apply it to our lives, our experience.

While Govier's characters are rich in personality—the reader can recognize bits of herself in the weary mother, the confused dancer, or the deserted wife—the people in her stories are mostly passive, accepting both the disasters and the successes with equanimity. When action is taken, the result is violence, isolation or death.

More is expected from *Fables*, yet nothing more is revealed. The tones of sadness and resignation which permeate the lives of these people leave the reader restless. Underneath the carefully crafted scenes, the finely drawn personalities, there is guilt, and it is the kind of guilt calculated to make one uneasy about certain choices, made day to day in the business of living.

Still it isn't a waste of time to read Govier's book. "Brunswick Avenue" chronicles one woman's changes in life, using as a backdrop the changes in her physical environment. There is hope in this telling of self-discovery and independence, and yet an understanding of the imperfection of reality. The cleverly written "Tongues" describes the inanity of social conversation with the bemused perspective of an outsider in a foreign country examining unusual tribal customs.

It is in stories like these that Govier's talent for writing shine through. She leaves behind the brittle sophistication of the finely tuned phrase for the abrasive quality found in writing from experience. The flaw in *Fables* comes from trying too hard to be a clever writer instead of a simple one, and that makes all the difference.

bts

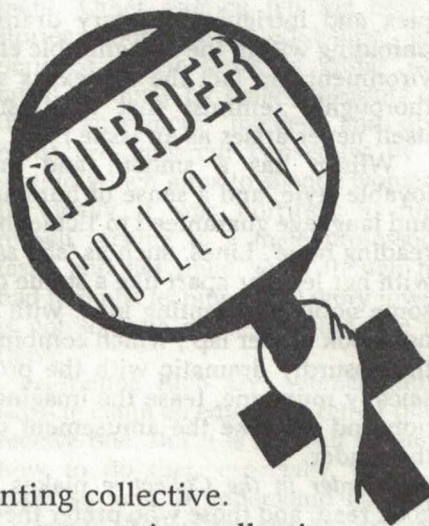
A New Recipe for Murder?

Murder in the Collective
Barbara Wilson
The Seal Press
Washington, 1984

reviewed by Catherine Labelle

Take one politically-conscious printing collective.
Mix unrelentingly with one lesbian typesetting collective.
Combine these main ingredients with a blended formula of Agatha Christie and Nancy Drew,
and you've got a *Murder in the Collective*, first in a forthcoming series of mysteries featuring Pam and (what remains of) her collective.

Given my understanding and experience of collectives, and the tensions and antagonisms that can and do develop within them, I had half ex-



pected to discover that "murder" was a metaphor for the venting of angry frustrations in some wild climactic moment. However, there really is a murder—and a murderer; or is it murderess?

Unfortunately, "more duress" is what Wilson subjects us to, given her compulsion to embroider her plot with every known political and feminist concern—from liberalism, racism, classism, heterosexuality, homophobia and ageism, through father-daughter relationships, marriage-divorce, alcoholism and child-custody rights for lesbian mothers, to militarism, violence, pornography and sadomasochism. Without denying the importance of all these issues (and more) for women, it is nonetheless regrettable that so many political threads are stitched so tightly (and so correctly) into the fabric of the story that little room is left for careful and considered treatment of their complexities. For example, Wilson's sympathetic interest in the distressing predicament of Filipino exiles, whose desire to return to their homeland is

frustrated by the danger that awaits them there, is belied by her one-dimensional portrayal of their characters and the significance of this underlying theme is lost and trivialized among the multitude of others.

This multiplicity (or token representation) results in a focus on the types and degrees of oppression at the expense of character development. It is a common and useful practice for women to analyse and relate their personal experiences of oppression to the larger political realm, thus making important theoretical connections between the personal and the political. But sometimes this approach results in a belief that the validity of a woman's entry into the movement is measured by the extent of her personal suffering (and not by her level of understanding). In Wilson's book, this attitude is represented by poor Pam, who, feeling excluded by her white, middle-class, heterosexual, 'true-blue' American background, is relieved to discover that she too can experience oppression. As June (poor, black single mother) expresses it: "Honey, you are so liberal you don't know how liberal you are ... Though now you're a lesbian there may be some hope for you." Yet it remains unclear how being a lesbian will cure Pam of her liberal values.

Reluctant to venture beyond the womb of the 'politically correct', Wilson contrives a degree of variety by means of repeated role reversals. Ray, for example, the handsome ex-lover of Pam, current lover of Zee, and future lover of ..., is instantly recognizable as the masculine version of the promiscuous, attractive, but otherwise featureless woman, the staple of the dime-store detective series. And Hadley, the gum-chewing Texan cowgirl who swaggers through the pages with the easy grace of the lesbian-feminist superwoman (psychologically, physically, and otherwise ready to take on any problem) is reminiscent of—dare I say it?—John Wayne, or even the Lone Ranger. When, in the end, her horse/truck heads off into the sunset (actually around the corner) after a tearless, blunt goodbye, we are left wondering: who was that turquoise-eyed woman who left behind no more than the memory of her coloured contact lenses? (This cowgirl's blues were not

so blue after all!)

Although the roles are reversed, the stereotypes remain. The steady regression of Jeremy's character, from absent-minded, seemingly harmless ex-hippie, whose "thoughts were swathed in such soft blankets of disclaimers and fillers that they usually died of suffocation before they were lifted out of the mental crib", to ex-army spy, pornography reader, extortionist, and all-around bad guy, suggests that Wilson is not yet ready to challenge some of the basic tenets of detective-mystery writing and the implications these might have for women; the bad "guys" remain thoroughly bad, and the good "guys", thoroughly good (or, at least, under their tough exteriors, essentially good). Although she does examine the political and personal determinants of criminal action, and questions the standard portrayal of sexual roles (albeit through only a superficial reversal), Wilson does not provide a critical feminist rewriting of the detective-mystery genre, but rather superimposes a feminist context on a standard format.

Yet having been a long-time fan of Agatha Christie, and (I must confess) having read endless numbers of Nancy Drew stories in my girlhood, it was a pleasure to get the same complex and intriguing mystery drama unfolding within the recognizable environment. (In fact the context is so thoroughly feminist that feminism itself never arises as an issue.)

Wilson has a smooth and enjoyable style, and a sense of humour and language guaranteed to 'tickle the reading bone'. Lines, such as "she sat with her legs far apart like a statue of some nobly unrelenting idea, with a notebook on her lap", which combine the absurdly dramatic with the prosaically mundane, tease the imagination and provoke the amusement of the reader.

Murder in the Collective makes a good read, and those who prefer their murder mysteries and detective stories in a feminist guise will no doubt be eagerly anticipating the future adventures of Pam and the Seattle printing collective. But those who expect or desire a critical feminist examination or rewriting of the detective-mystery genre may be left feeling somewhat disappointed. *bts*

continued from page 17

A mother's participation is limited by the overwhelming burden of her family obligations. This is more the fault of our social system than of the inaccessibility of the women's movement. Social values and role expectations conspire to make a mother focus her energies on the needs of her children. The nuclear family, even one with two adults committed to sharing responsibilities, offers little support in comparison to the magnitude of the job of raising young children. Necessarily institutional support, free universal daycare, for example, does not exist. Consequently a mother, especially one who works outside the home, has limited opportunities for leisure time; and we all know that it takes time to make a revolution.

The women's movement has been fairly diligent in giving practical support to mothers. Feminists have been at the forefront of redefining the family, encouraging fathers to become active parents, and promoting alternative 'family' structures and parenting arrangements. Almost every daytime 'women's event' has free childcare. But good luck trying to find a feminist friend to babysit while you go to a women's dance. Don't you know mothers have to dance too?

The women's movement must be committed to being accessible to mothers. That can involve providing childcare services or taking babysitting collections at meetings and events, or scheduling the time and location of activities to accommodate the needs of mothers. There is a limit, however, to how much we can do inside the movement to alleviate the burden of mothers. The real responsibility for recognizing the needs of mothers and acting upon them lies with the various levels of government that control funding, and create and implement social policy.

My most serious criticism of the women's movement is that it alienates women with children. I am not alone in my perception that my choice of lifestyle is maligned/devalued/denigrated by other feminists. I find myself defensive about living and breeding inside of marriage. When I was writing this article I hesitated to say that I am married and living with the baby's father, yet my

husband is my main practical and emotional support; I would not have made the decision to have a baby without him.

Because I have chosen to be a mother I have knowingly limited the amount of time and energy that I have to devote to the women's movement and my own development as a feminist. I work hard at informing my child-free sisters about the realities of motherhood, and at times I ask that they accommodate my parenting needs. I do not commit

myself totally to the women's movement, a good deal of my energies go elsewhere, but my feminism is always with me. I resent the view that my choice to be a mother and all its ramifications makes me less of a feminist.

I fully support the choice of women to entirely centre their lives in the women's community and reserve all of their energies for women. Indeed, I find the women-only parts of my life absolutely essential to my mental health. Still, I can-

not live with a women's movement which advocates female separatism as the ultimate feminist ideal and the most politically correct lifestyle, and which views any other choice as indicating a woman's lesser commitment. This attitude of valuing some life choices over others is creating an ideological hierarchy within the women's movement. Hierarchy is a most fundamental contradiction to the basic principles of feminism that I will not accept. bts

L . E . T . T . E . R . S

Breaking the Silence would like to encourage women to write—to make this a forum for your ideas, engage in dialogue on the issues that affect you, or respond to the articles published in BTS. We welcome your input!

More on Women and Education

Building upon Sherry Galey's article on women in education (*BTS*, Winter 1985), I would like to share some of my own experience, and those of my friends, in a university setting.

Workload is a major concern because everyone sacrifices something academically in order to make it through the term. At least one course or another seems to suffer no matter how diligent or organized you are. Connected to workload is the question of fees because the system makes it economically more sensible to take five courses instead of four per year. It is time somebody realized that university isn't a consumer commodity and that economy of scale doesn't make much sense.

I believe that the workload and finance issues both relate specifically to women, and even more so to women with families. All women work even if they live alone. If they have a family or a lover, they must make sacrifices either in their education or in their family time. My own case is very unusual as I live with a man who shares daily cooking and housework and who mothers me when I am busy with term papers and exams.

As the *BTS* article says, the educa-

tion system, set up by men and run by men, does not leave much room for women's experience. A woman I know in the MSW program at Carleton University tells me of the difficulties of re-imagining a completely new kind of system, even in a feminist environment. Other women tell me horror stories about their education experience. Their work is either not taken seriously by male professors or their experiences, intellect and opinions are undercut constantly by a system which aims to silence women. Personally, I was horrified to find myself writing to a male professor's taste, and not mine, even though he had feminist leanings. The ivory tower is not so pure as they would like to think.

Adrienne Rich says women must learn to claim an education rather than receive one. But it is difficult to learn how to do that, especially when it takes so long to understand how the system itself discriminates against you.

In the *BTS* article, Galey quotes Jane Thompson: "We have to transform ourselves and our relationships with men from a position of autonomy rather than dependency. Autonomy given the knowledge of our own worth and value and beauty and energy and right to inherit an altogether fine future."

While I agree, I would point out that it is very difficult to maintain a sense of worth and value in academic pursuits because of the marking system, and what it represents.

As a student, you are expected to make mistakes. But to take criticism well, your self-esteem within the system as a whole depends very much on what professors tell you about your worth. If you tell it as you see it, you are accused of thinking emotionally and misunderstanding the issues. When you are given B's or C's for doing what you think is your best, it is hard to maintain your confidence. It is even harder to continue expressing your views within a system which invalidates them. Furthermore, the functioning of the system depends on winning that precious approval: 'A' students get funding, 'C' students do not. 'A' students are groomed for graduate school; they get good references, they get accepted into graduate schools for having expressed the right opinions.

In many ways the system maintains the system, and transformations are achieved at great cost. To maintain a sense of value in the face of hostility, we must band together, remembering the personal is political. We must share our experiences and use our anger to help each other. To gain the autonomy necessary to achieve that transformation Jane Thompson mentions, we must have some inner sense of worth that is unshakeable.

We need to keep analysing and working at this so we may find ways of using this power in the academic world as we have learned to do in other areas.

Tünde Nemeth

RESOURCES

Fundraising for Women's Organizations

*Algonquin College,
Colonel By Campus
Saturday, Oct. 19, 1985
9:30 - 3:30 pm.*

The first half of the workshop will look at different sources of funding available to women's organizations: private (foundations and corporations), all levels of government, and the "do-it-yourself" method (benefits), and some ideas on how to access money. The afternoon will be spent practicing writing and presenting applications. Cost: \$25.00.

Immigrant Women in Ottawa-Carleton

Immigrant women share many of the problems of their Canadian-born sisters, and are subject to additional stress because

of their immigrant status. Language barriers, racial prejudice, social isolation, lack of suitable employment, and impaired access to social services are among the difficulties encountered by immigrant women.

Mental Health Service Needs of Immigrant Women in Ottawa-Carleton is a report on the findings of nine months of research with immigrant women, front line workers who work closely with immigrant women, and local agencies and organizations. The report includes statistical data on Ottawa-Carleton such as labour force participation, income levels and prevalence of single parent families. Available for reference at:

*Ottawa-Carleton Immigrant
Services Organization
425 Gloucester Street
Ottawa, 238-4256*

Mothers are Women

Mothers at home are an invisible population, who face enormous stresses and responsibilities in relative isolation and with limited resources or supports.

In the spring of 1984, women involved with the Parent-Preschool Resource Centre recognized a need amongst its members who had chosen to stay at home with their children. By the fall, with funding assistance from the Secretary of State Women's Program, a non-profit organization called *Mothers are Women* was born.

The goals of this organization are to provide grass-roots support for women at home, to forge links with other women's organizations, to bring this group into the mainstream of the women's movement, and to lobby for greater support on the political level (e.g. pensions for homemakers, family allowances, etc.).

The group provides workshops on a variety of subjects, and resources and support for women interested in starting discussion groups. *Mothers are Women* will begin publishing a newsletter in October.

For further information, please contact Jane Ellens at (613) 728-7698.

CONFERENCES

Making Affirmative Action Work is the theme of the Canadian Labour Congress' Fifth Biennial National Women's Conference. It will be held at the Skyline Hotel in Ottawa from September 25th to 29th. For more information:

*CLC Women's Bureau
2841 Riverside Drive
Ottawa, Ontario
(613) 521-3400*

R/Evolution in Health Care for Women is a conference to be hosted by the Gander Status of Women Council October 18th to 20th in Gander, Newfoundland. It will feature workshops on sexuality, drug abuse and Ottawa's Helen Levine speaking on feminist therapy and depression. A conference for young women will run concurrently. For more information:

*Gander Status of Women Council
PO Box 246
Gander, Newfoundland
A1V 1W6
(709) 256-3775
(709) 651-3914*

Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues is planning a **conference on youth** for October 18th to 20th in Toronto. Contact:

*The Advisory Council
on Women's Issues
880 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1L2*

Nation-Wide Issues, Neighbourhood Action: People Making the Difference is the theme of a conference sponsored by the Association for Community Education to be held in Victoria, B.C. from October 24th to 26th. The goal is learning to share the skills and resources of every community member in order that action can be taken on national and international issues. Contact:

*Angie Preston
James Bay Community School
140 Oswego Street
Victoria, B.C.
(604) 384-7184*

The Third Annual Meeting and Conference of the Atlantic Assn. of Transition Houses will take place from November 13th to 15th in St. John's, Newfoundland. More information can be obtained from:

*Phyllis Seymour
2048 Gottingen
Halifax, Nova Scotia
(709) 754-2072*

Looking Back - Moving Forward is the End of Decade Conference sponsored by the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women on November 15th and 16th in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Write or call:

*Nova Scotia Advisory Council
on the Status of Women
PO Box 745
Halifax, N.S.
B3J 2T3
(902) 424-8662*

The Mid-Year Meeting of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women will be held in Winnipeg between November 22nd and 24th. Contact:

*NAC
344 Bloor St. W.
Suite 505
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 1W1
(416) 922-3246*



"Looking Forward, Reaching Back" Women's Archives In Canada Project

The Canadian Women's Movement Archives has been collecting material on the women's movement in Canada since 1977. The bulk of archival material, though is being saved by individuals and women's groups across the country.

During the next year, the CWMA will be researching and compiling a directory of Women's Archival Collections in Canada. A collective member will be travelling across the country to meet with individuals and women's groups.

If you or your organization have any material on the women's movement in Canada, please contact the CWMA. Help ensure that our history is saved.

Canadian Women's Movement Archives
P.O. Box 928, Stn P, Toronto, Ont. M4T 2P1 (416) 597-8865

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