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RADICAL FEMINISM: CRITIQUE AND CONSTRUCT

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter is both a construction of Radical Feminism, and an implied critique. In writing it, we became acutely aware that because of its very nature, Radical Feminism has concentrated on creating its theory in the writing of women's lives and the political analysis of women's oppression. Little time has been devoted to defining and redefining our 'theory'. Where socialist, liberal, and semiotic feminism have convenient existing theoretical structures to manipulate and re-manipulate, stretching them like a skin across the drum of women's experiences, Radical Feminism creates a new political and social theory of women's oppression, and strategies for the end of that oppression, which comes from women's lived experiences.

So Janice Raymond writes her theory of women's friendships, their passion and the obstacles involved in befriending women. In doing so she critiques hetero-reality: the value system of women as being 'for' men, upon which patriarchy rests. Kathleen Barry, Catharine MacKinnon, Susan Griffin, and Andrea Dworkin explore the international sexual slavery trade, pornography, and woman-hating, thus creating their theories of the social control of women, women's bodies, our sexuality, and our lives.

Radical Feminists frequently combine creative writing and theory, such as in the poetry and prose of Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Robin Morgan, Susan Griffin, and Judy Grahn. Here the passion of Radical Feminism can be fully expressed, because it is a theory of the emotional as well as the rational intellect.

Theory and practice are interdependently intertwined. Anne Koedt, Judith Levine, and Anita Rapone touched on this in their introduction to *Radical Feminism* in 1973 when they wrote: 'the purpose in selecting and organising this anthology was to present primary source material not so much *about* as *from* the Radical Feminist Movement' (our italics, p. viii). Radical means 'pertaining to the root'; Radical Feminism looks at the roots of women's oppression. As Robin Morgan says (1978, p. 9):

> I call myself a Radical Feminist, and that means specific things to me. The etymology of the word 'radical' refers to 'one who goes to the root'. I believe that sexism is the root oppression, the one which, until and unless we *uproot* it will continue to put forth the branches of racism, class hatred, ageism, competition, ecological disaster, and economic exploitation. This means, to me, that the so-called revolutions to date have been coups-d'états between men, in a half-hearted attempt to prune the branches but leave the root embedded – for the sake of preserving their own male privileges.

Radical Feminism's revolutionary intent is expressed first and foremost in its woman-centredness: women's experiences and interests are at the centre of our theory and practice. It is the only theory *by* and *for* women. Radical Feminism names *all* women as part of an oppressed group, stressing that no woman can walk down the street or even live in her home safely without fear of violation by men. But French feminist Christine Delphy points out that like all oppressed people, many women do not like to accept that they are part of an oppressed group, developing various forms of denial in order to avoid identification.

Feminism itself has marginalized Radical Feminism, moving into a comfortable and easy libertarianism, stressing individualism rather than collective responsibility; or into socialism with its ready made structures to attack, withdrawing the heat from the main actors of patriarchy: men themselves.

More than ten years after the publication of *Feminist Practice: Notes From the Tenth Year* (1979) – a self-published pamphlet by a group of English Radical Feminists – many of the comments about the place of Radical Feminism still ring true (p. 1)

> We are all agreed that we would call ourselves Radical Feminists and that we want to do something about the fact that we feel our politics have been lost, have become invisible, in the present state of the WLM [Women's Liberation Movement]. We feel that this was partly Radical Feminism's own fault, for in England we have not written much for ourselves – concentrating on action – and so being defined (maligned?) by others by default.
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> We feel that Radical Feminism has been *a*, if not *the*, major force in the WLM since the start, but as factions started to emerge it has rarely been women who called themselves radical feminists who have defined radical feminism. For a long time it was used as a term of abuse to corral those aspects of WL which frightened those concerned with male acceptability, those aspects which most threatened their image of respectability. Radical Feminists became a corporate object of derision which these women and men could then dissociate themselves from.

We do not intend here a history of Radical Feminism as space does not permit it. But our generation was not the first to see where the enemy of women worked and slept and how they upheld their dominance over women. For example, Hedwig Dohm in Germany, Susan B. Anthony, Matilda Joslyn Gage, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman in the US, Christabel Pankhurst (before her socialism) and Virginia Woolf in England, and Vida Goldstein in Australia are but a few of our predecessors.[1] And in November 1911, a Radical Feminist review, *The Free Woman*, began publishing weekly as a forum for revolutionary ideas about women, marriage, politics, prostitution, sexual relations, and issues concerning women's oppression and strategies for ending it. It was banned by booksellers, and many suffragists objected to it because of its critical position on their obsession – 'feminism is the whole issue, political enfranchisement a branch issue' they wrote (in Tuttle 1986, p. 117).

Radical Feminism embraces a variety of positions, and is constantly developing, changing and expanding, thus defying attempts to label and neatly categorize it. We cannot make the definitive statement, but we will outline its essence, influenced no doubt by our own values and political positions as Radical Feminists.[2]

DEFINITIONAL STATEMENTS FROM RADICAL FEMINISM

As space is limited, we choose to concentrate on the general principles shared by the various streams within Radical Feminism rather than on the differences between them. The first and fundamental theme is that women as a social group are oppressed by men as a social group and that this oppression is the *primary* oppression for women. Patriarchy is the oppressing *structure* of male domination. Radical Feminism makes visible male control as it is exercised in every sphere of women's lives, both public and private. So reproduction, marriage, compulsory heterosexuality, and motherhood are primary sites of attack and envisaged positive change.

Robin Morgan catches the excitement of Radical Feminism in her definition in *Going Too Far* (1978, p. 13).

> it wasn't . . . a wing or arm or toe of the Left – or Right – or any other male-defined, male-controlled group. It was something quite Else, something in itself, a whole new politics, an entirely different and astoundingly radical way of perceiving society, sentient matter, life itself, the universe. It was a philosophy. It was immense. It was also most decidedly a real, autonomous Movement, this feminism, with all the strengths that that implied. And with all the evils too – the familiar internecine squabbles.

A second central element characteristic of Radical Feminism is that it is created by women for women. Christine Delphy points out that people from the Left for example, are fighting on behalf of someone else, but that (1984, p. 146)

> the contradictions which result from this situation are foreign to feminism. We are not fighting for others, but for ourselves. We and no other people are the victims of the oppression which we denounce and fight against. And when we speak, it is not in the name or in the place of others, but in our own name and in our own place.

Radical Feminism stresses that 'emancipation' or 'equality' on male terms is not enough. A total revolution of the social structures and the elimination of the processes of patriarchy are essential. In her paper published originally in 1979 titled 'I Call Myself a Radical Feminist' British writer Gail Chester outlined her position, clearly defining herself as 'active in and believing in the need for, a strong, autonomous, revolutionary movement for the liberalisation of women' (p. 12). To her Radical Feminism is both socialist in its intent and revolutionary.

Mary Daly defines Radical Feminism in terms of the selfhood of women. Reclaiming and remaking language she exhorts women to take their true Selves back, and become self-acting, self-respecting. In *Gyn/Ecology* (1978), she calls Radical Feminism a 'journey of women becoming' (p. 1). Mary Daly has a unique style in which she reworks language for Radical Feminist purposes. Her work is impassioned, poetic and deals with spiritual dimensions. She sees the Radical Feminist task as changing consciousness, rediscovering the past and creating the future through women's radical 'otherness'. In her own words (p. 39): 'Radical Feminism is not reconciliation with the father. Rather it is affirming our original birth, our original source, movement, surge of living. This finding of our original integrity is re-membering our Selves.'

In the introduction to the first issue of the French feminist journal *Questions Feministes* (1977) – a journal of Radical Feminist theory – the editors identify their political perspective as Radical Feminist, recognizing that the political struggle they are involved in is that against 'the oppression of women by the patriarchal social system' (p. 5). They outline some of the underlying principles of Radical Feminism: the refusal to accept the projection of 'woman' as existing outside of society; the notion that the social existence of men and women was created rather than being part of their 'nature'; women claim the right not to be 'different' but to be 'autonomous'; a definition of a materialist approach to analysing women's oppression based on the fact that 'all women belong to the same social class' (p. 7).

That women form a social class is an inherent part of Radical Feminism. Ti-Grace Atkinson wrote in 1974 that: 'The analysis begins with the feminist *raison d'être* that women are a class, that this class is political in nature, and that this political class is oppressed. From this point on, Radical Feminism separates from traditional feminism' (p. 41). She saw the 'male/female system' as 'the first and most fundamental instance of

human oppression', adding that 'all other class systems are built on top of it'. She writes (p. 73):

> Women will not be free until all oppressed classes are free. I am not suggesting that women work to free other classes. However in the case of women oppressing other women, the exercise of class privilege by identification in effect locks the sex class into place. In identifying one's interests with those of any power class, one thereby maintains the position of that class. As long as any class system is left standing, it stands on the backs of women.

In the Introduction to *Feminist Practice: Notes from the Tenth Year* (1979), the principles of women's liberation were clearly delineated. From this manifesto we can pull together some common threads: Radical Feminism insists that women as a social class or a social group are oppressed by men as a social group as well as individually by men who continue to benefit from that oppression and do nothing to change it; the system through which men do this has been termed patriarchy; Radical Feminism is women-centred and stresses both the personal as political and the need for collective action and responsibility; it is 'power' rather than 'difference' which determines the relationship between women and men. And finally, that 'whatever we do we mean to enjoy ourselves while we do it'.

THEORY AND PRACTICE

Because the theory is based in the experience of women's lives, it is part of the value system of Radical Feminism that 'the personal is political'. In Gail Chester's words (1979, p. 13): 'Radical Feminist theory is that theory follows from practice and is impossible to develop in the absence of practice, because our theory is that practising our practice is our theory'.

Misunderstandings have occurred because critics claim that Radical Feminism has rejected theory. But it has always maintained that we *do* need theory for understanding women's experiences, for evaluating the causes of women's oppression, and for devising strategies for action. But we *have* rejected theory which is too esoteric, too divorced from the reality of women's experiences, too inaccessible to the majority of women whom feminism is supposed to serve.

Chester argues that Radical Feminist theory has not been recognized as 'a theory' because it hasn't always been written down (p. 14): 'If your theory is embodied in your practice, then the way you act politically has as much right to be taken as a serious statement of your theoretical position as writing it down in a book which hardly anybody will read anyhow'.

Charlotte Bunch has written that theory is not 'simply intellectually interesting', but that it is 'crucial to the survival of feminism'. It is not an

academic exercise but 'a process based on understanding and advancing the activist movement' (1983, p. 248). To this end, Radical Feminist theory is not an objective exercise, disengaged from women themselves. A theory which begins with women, places women and women's experiences at the centre, and names the oppression of women, involves a holistic view of the world, an analysis which probes every facet of existence for women. It is not, as Bunch indicates, a 'laundry list of "women's issues" ', but 'provides a basis for understanding every area of our lives . . . politically, culturally, economically, and spiritually' (1983, p. 250).

Bunch cautions Radical Feminists against becoming tired and feeling that feminist theory is too slow in bringing about change. At these times 'feminists are tempted to submerge our insights into one of the century's two dominant progressive theories of reality and change: democratic liberalism or Marxist socialism' (p. 250). Bunch argues that while feminism can learn from both of these streams of theory, it must not become embedded within them or too tied to them because our view of the world is an alternative view which is autonomous and women-centred.

For her, theory 'both grows out of and guides activism in a continuing, spiralling process' (p. 251). It can be divided into four interrelated parts: a description of what exists and the naming of reality; an analysis of why the reality exists and the origin of that oppression; determining what should exist in a vision for the future; and strategies on how to change that reality (pp. 251–3).

An example of the coalescence between theory and practice is the development of collective action. Through collectives Radical Feminists strive to eliminate the concepts of hierarchy which place power in the hands of a few over the many. They are attempts to work in a collaborative fashion towards a common goal, giving value to each woman, allowing her a voice, yet making all members collectively responsible for action.

A theory which grounds itself in the understanding of the basic violence of men towards women also energizes activism at the point where women need most help, for example within the Rape Crisis Centre Movement and the Women's Refuge Movement. Grassroots organizing at the level of women's daily existence and survival stresses the ongoing struggle against patriarchal violence. It also stresses the belief that in every day of our lives women can make an inroad into the destruction of negative self-image and negative life experience which male-dominated society hands to us. So the revolution takes place every day not in an unimagined future. In Gail Chester's words (1979, pp. 14–15):

> Because Radical Feminists do not recognise a split between our theory and practice, we are able to say that the revolution can begin now, by us taking positive actions to change our lives . . . it is a much more optimistic and humane vision of change than the male-defined

notion of the building towards a revolution at some point in the distant future, once all the preparations have been made.

PATRIARCHY

Radical Feminists have been wrongly accused of developing a 'conspiracy theory' with its intimations of paranoia. This political strategy is intended to reduce and oversimplify the Radical Feminist analysis of male power. Ironically however, patriarchy as a concept is now used by all forms of feminism, and socialist feminists in particular struggle to make it 'marry' with socialism. (See, for example, Sargent 1981.)

Patriarchy is the domination of men over women. Kate Millett's early work (1971) is a good example of the approach that 'sex is a status category with political implications'. Male power, that is patriarchy, dominates over class, religion, race, and culture, though it appears in varied forms at different historical periods. Millett explored this enforcement of male power through ideology, biology, myth, the family, economic and educational opportunities, and through the use of force by men. Shulamith Firestone's analysis (1970), on the other hand, placed more power on biology and the entrapment of women through their reproductive ability. If that trap was removed, she argued, women would have greater opportunities for equality.

Patriarchy is a universal value system, though it exhibits itself in different forms culturally and historically.[3] Ruth Bleier defines it thus (1984, p. 162):

> By patriarchy I mean the historic system of male dominance, a system committed to the maintenance and reinforcement of male hegemony in all aspects of life – personal and private privilege and power as well as public privilege and power. Its institutions direct and protect the distribution of power and privilege to those who are male, apportioned, however, according to social and economic class and race. Patriarchy takes different forms and develops specific supporting institutions and ideologies during different historical periods and political economies.

Patriarchy is a system of structures and institutions created by men in order to sustain and recreate male power and female subordination. Such structures include: institutional structures such as the law, religion, and the family; ideologies which perpetuate the 'naturally' inferior position of women; socialization processes to ensure that women and men develop behaviour and belief systems appropriate to the powerful or powerless group to which they belong.

The *structures* of patriarchy which have been established in order to maintain male power have been clearly analysed by Radical Feminists. *Economic* structures have been dealt with in books by, for example, Lisa

Leghorn and Katherine Parker (1981). Hilda Scott (1984) clearly demonstrates the increasing feminization of poverty. *Political*, *legal*, and *religious* structures are dominated by men who ensure that they maintain those positions. Women's right to vote is only a recent event historically. Within the legal profession, few women sit on the higher benches in the court system. Within the private domain of the *family*, marriage, and reproduction, men have structured a system whereby woman's reproductive capacity leaves her vulnerable and powerless, domestically exploited, and entrapped in economic dependence.

Patriarchal *ideology* maintains these structures. The family is maintained through the concept of romantic love between men and women, when in fact marriage contracts have traditionally had an economic base. Women's labour within the family, which has been unpaid and unacknowledged, and which includes the emotional servicing of members of the family as well as their physical servicing, continues to be defined as a 'labour of love'. Men have managed to create an ideology which defines men as the 'natural' owners of intellect, rationality, and the power to rule. Women 'by nature' are submissive, passive, and willing to be led. Processes such as the socialization of children encourage this situation to continue. So, for example, in playground games, boys soon learn that they are to act and girls to create an 'audience' for male performance.

The construction of the *family* and of the economic dependence of women on men also interrelates with the ideology of hetero-reality and the structures of heterosexuality. Adrienne Rich (1980) has analysed the compulsory nature of heterosexuality and its function as a political institution. She argues that men fear that women could be indifferent to them and that 'men could be allowed emotional – therefore economic – access to women *only* on women's terms' (p. 643). The compulsory nature of heterosexuality defines men's access to women as natural and their right.

In a broader analysis Janice Raymond (1986) has created the term hetero-*reality*, that is the belief that in our world woman is created *for* man. Hetero-reality determines that the single woman is defined as 'loose' in the promiscuous sense. So the state of being free and unattached with respect to men is translated into the negative state of being available to any man.

The patriarchal system operates to maintain the unequal power balance between women and men by using language and knowledge to construct definitions of masculine and feminine behaviour which support the established power imbalance. Dale Spender has addressed these issues through her analysis of language, showing how men have constructed and controlled language in order to reinforce women's subordinate position. She is also reclaiming 'women of ideas' historically and the knowledge that they have created. Spender shows the continuity of women's resistance to patriarchy and the constancy of the men's elimination of them from the

record of knowledge. In *Women of Ideas and What Men Have Done to Them* she writes (1982, p. 5):

> I have come to accept that a patriarchal society depends in large measure on the experience and values of males being perceived as the *only* valid frame of reference for society, and that it is therefore in patriarchal interests to prevent women from sharing, establishing and asserting their equally real, valid and *different* frame of reference, which is the outcome of different experience.

Spender stresess that men have controlled knowledge and therefore made women invisible in the world of ideas. Structures within patriarchy are established in order to maintain the view that there is no problem with the fact that men are more powerful than women. As she says (1982, p. 7): 'Patriarchy requires that any conceptualisation of the world in which men and their power are a central problem should become invisible and unreal. How could patriarchy afford to accept that men were a serious problem?'

Patriarchy also has a material base in two senses. First, the economic systems are structured so that women have difficulty getting paid labour in a society which values only paid labour and in which money is the currency of power. Women without economic independence cannot sustain themselves without a breadwinner. They cannot leave a brutal husband, they cannot withdraw sexual, emotional, and physical servicing from men, they cannot have an equal say in decisions affecting their own lives, such as where they might live. Radical Feminism has therefore stressed the necessity for women to exercise economic power in their own lives.

Women's oppression through unpaid domestic service in the home is primary in the patriarchal system of support. Christine Delphy, whose Radical Feminism stems from a Marxist base, argues that 'patriarchy is the system of subordination of women to men in contemporary industrial societies, that this system has an economic base, and that this base is the domestic mode of production' (1984, p. 18). This domestic mode of production is also a mode of consumption and circulation of goods. It differs from the capitalist mode of production because 'those exploited by the domestic mode of production are not *paid* but rather *maintained*. In this mode, therefore, consumption is not separate from production, and the unequal sharing of goods is not mediated by money' (1984, p. 18). Delphy argues that the analysis of women's oppression which places women in a traditional class analysis, is not adequate because it cannot account for the particular exploitation of unwaged women. Men are the class which oppresses and exploits women, which benefits from their exploitation.

The second material base which Radical Feminism names as crucial to the liberated existence of women is that of woman's body herself. Internationally, it is a woman's body which is the currency of patriarchy.

Kathleen Barry has shown in *Female Sexual Slavery* (1979) that the international traffic in women operates extensively in the social control of women. Women in marriage are seen to be 'owned' by their husbands and cannot bring a civil case of rape in most countries. Women's bodies are used in advertising and pornography alike, objectified and defined as 'other' and available for male use.

Men control the laws of reproduction, for example male parliaments and male-run pharmaceutical companies determine the forms of contraception available and the extent of their use.[4] Male-controlled governments determine women's access to safe abortion. Male law determines the civil powerlessness of women in bringing rape or incest charges against men. As Delphy notes (1984, p. 217) 'feminism, by imprinting the word oppression on the domain of sexuality, has annexed it to materialism'.

Men as a group enjoy the privileges of power. It is in their best interests to maintain the existing patriarchal system, and they have structured the world in order to maintain this unequal power imbalance, for example, in their structuring of pay inequality, and the sex-segregated work world. They need to maintain the unpaid labour of women; the emotional and physical servicing of women; the sense of being in control which they feel individually and collectively. A man exerts power over *all* women, and over *some* men. Men continue to do it because they need to live their emotional lives vicariously through women. And they control reproduction because they need to control procreation to ensure their genetic continuity – hence their recent attempts to develop new reproductive technologies and genetic engineering. They experience both a fear and an envy of women (O'Brien 1981; Rowland 1987).

Thus male power is maintained and defined through a variety of methods: through institutions within society, through ideology, through coercion or force, through the control of resources and rewards, through the politics of intimacy, and through personal power. The simplistic labelling of an analysis of patriarchy as 'conspiracy theory' conveniently allows critics of Radical Feminism to dismiss this analysis of women's oppression.

UNIVERSALITY: CLASS AND RACE ISSUES

Radical Feminism has been accused of a 'false universalism'; an unjustified assumption of female commonality (Eisenstein 1984). Indeed, Radical Feminism does see the oppression of women as universal, crossing race and culture boundaries, as well as those of class and other delineating structures such as age and physical ability. Radical Feminists make no apologies for that. Sexual slavery within marriage was an accusation of Christabel Pankhurst's in the nineteenth century in Anglo-Saxon England, and sexual slavery as a trade has been documented and traced by Kathleen

Barry (1979) in many countries in the twentieth century. We have been accused of ignoring difference – of being indifferent to difference. But Radical Feminism welcomes and *acknowledges* the diversity of women, while stressing our similarities and the differences between women and men.

The concept of sisterhood has been important within Radical Feminism, underlining a belief that to undermine male power women need to form a cohesive revolutionary group. Sisterhood is a moving and potentially radicalizing concept of united women. Sonia Johnson ran a historical campaign for the US Presidency in 1984 on a Radical Feminist platform. She writes (1986, p. 14): 'One of the basic tenets of Radical Feminism is that any woman in the world has more in common with any other woman – regardless of class, race, age, ethnic group, nationality – than any woman has with any man'.

In *Sisterhood is Global* (1984) Robin Morgan draws together contributions from feminists in seventy countries, the majority of which are Third World countries. She begins with a quote about the global position of women in the Report to the UN Commission on the Status of Women (p. 1): 'While women represent half the global population and one-third of the labour force, they receive one-tenth of the world income and own less than one per cent of world property. They also are responsible for two-thirds of all working hours'. Morgan then proceeds to draw together the commonality of women through the various feminist representations in the book. These include among many the following aspects which we will briefly summarize.

Two out of three of the world's illiterates are women, and while the general literacy rate is increasing, female illiteracy is rising. Only a third of the world's women have access to contraceptive information or devices. In the developing world women are responsible for more than 50 per cent of all food production. In industrialized countries women still are paid only one-half to three-quarters of men's wages. Most of the world's starving are women and children. Twenty million people die annually of hunger-related causes and one billion endure chronic undernourishment and poverty. The majority of these are women and children. Women and children constitute more than 90 per cent of all refugee populations. Women in all countries bear the double burden of unpaid housework in association with any paid work they do.

Many countries have stories of the invisibility of women's history. Everywhere women fight to control their own bodies. Organized patriarchal religion operates world-wide in order to maintain women in subservient positions. The right to safe abortion is under constant attack in most countries. Laws concerning marriage continue to militate against women's independence and freedom. The basic right to divorce has still to be won in many countries. Female sexual slavery is a constant issue, and

this is particularly true in Asia and the Pacific. Violence against women through rape, pornography, and battery is a continuing global issue.

And the connections continue. Robin Morgan comments that the contributions in *Sisterhood is Global* cross cultures, age, occupations, race, sexual preference, and ideological barriers, and so does the Women's Liberation Movement itself. She speaks of the resistance shown in all countries to patriarchy, and the sense of solidarity and unity that the women express (1984, p. 19):

> Contributor after Contributor in this book contests a class analysis as at best incomplete and at worst deliberately divisive of women. Article after article attempts valiantly to not minimise the differences but to identify the similarities between and among women . . .
>
> Rape, after all, is an omnipresent terror to all women of any class, race, or caste. Battery is a nightmare of emotional and physical pain no matter who the victim. Labour and childbirth feel the same to any woman. A human life in constraint – such suffering is not to be computed, judged or brought into shameful competition.

Radical Feminism thus holds that women are oppressed primarily and in the first instance as *women*. But because of differences in our lives created by, for example culture and class, women experience that oppression differentially, and it expresses itself differentially. Radical Feminism has from the beginning striven to deal with such differences. As Susan Griffin remembers (1982, p. 11):

> And of course, we carried the conflicts and differences of society into our world. Within us there were working-class women, middle-class women, white women, women of colour, Jewish women, Catholic women, heterosexual and lesbian women, women with and without children. We had to learn to speak among ourselves not only about our shared oppression but about the different conditions of our lives, and like any movement, we have at times faltered over these differences, and quarrelled over the definition of who we are.

As early as 1969 there was a 'Congress to Unite Women' in which many of these issues were raised. In workshops women addressed the question 'how women are divided: class, racial, sexual, and religious differences'. Conclusions included the following (Koedt *et al.* 1973, p. 309):

> We will work with all women recognising that the uniqueness of our revolution transcends economic, racial, generational, and political differences, and that these differences must be transcended in action, the common interest of our liberation, self-determination and development of our political movement.
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> All women are oppressed as women and can unite on that basis; however, we acknowledge that there are differences among women,

> male-created – of economic and social privilege, race, education, etc. – and that these differences are real, not in our heads. Such divisions must be eliminated. They can only be eliminated by hard work and concrete action, not by rhetoric.

In the late spring of 1971 there was a Radical Feminist conference in Detroit, USA. The many issues discussed there are outlined by Robin Morgan (1978). Among them were the difficulties of relationships with men, the difficulties about decisions concerning children and lesbianism. 'What about our ageism and older women? How can white feminists concretely support the growing feminism among minority women?' (p. 156).

In 1978, the problems of racial differences were discussed by Adrienne Rich in her prose piece 'Disloyal to civilization: feminism, racism, gynephobia' in which she writes about the separation of black and white women from each other and points out the difficulty and the pain and anger involved in these delineations. Rich acknowledges 'the passive or active instrumentality of white women in the practice of inhumanity against black people' (1979a p. 284). But she argues against what she calls the ludicrous and fruitless game of 'hierarchies of oppression' including the liberal guilt reflex on the part of women whenever racism is mentioned. There is danger, she argues, that guilt feelings provoked in white women can become a form of social control, paralysing rather than leading women to relate honestly to the nature of racism itself. She warns white women against the possibilities of colluding with white male power to the disadvantage of black women.

But as Bell Hooks (1984) points out, there are also cultural differences. She stresses the importance of learning cultural codes. She quotes an Asian American student of Japanese heritage who was reluctant to participate in feminist organizations because she felt feminists spoke rapidly without pause. She had been raised to pause and think before speaking and therefore felt inadequate in feminist groups.

This example raises the varieties of categorization which delineate different groups of women. Robin Morgan (1984) points out in her global analysis of the Women's Liberation Movement the many forms of division that can operate, including clanism, tribalism, the caste system, religious bigotry, and rural versus urban living. Looking at the various possible categories reminds us that racism itself is an ideology. As Rosario Morales, of Puerto Rican background, comments (1981, p. 91):

> everyone is capable of being racist whatever their colour and condition. Only some of us are liable to racist attack . . . *guilt* is a fact for us all, white and coloured: and identification with the oppressor and oppressive ideology. Let us, instead, identify, understand, and feel with the oppressed as a way out of the morass of racism and guilt.

The criticism that Radical Feminism has not dealt with class is mean to imply that we do not consider economics to be of importance, and that we do not understand the battle against capitalism. This is patently not true in the work for example, of Lisa Leghorn and Katherine Parker, and of French theorist Christine Delphy. But, as Delphy comments (1984, p. 147):

> but we materialist feminists, who affirm the existence of several – at least two – class systems, and hence the possibility of an individual having several class memberships (which can in addition be contradictory); we do think that male workers are not, as victims of capitalism, thereby absolved of the sin of being the beneficiaries of patriarchy.

The delineation of women as a class itself implies that men benefit in concrete and material ways from their oppression and exploitation of women. Whatever the political regime, it is women who do the unpaid domestic labour and men who gain from it. It is women who service sexually and emotionally.

Radical Feminism acknowledges that women experience their oppression differentially depending upon class. In the early 1970s, two members of the US collective The Furies published an anthology on *Class and Feminism* (Bunch and Myron 1974) in which Radical Feminist authors grappled with the problems engendered by class differences among feminists. Consistently since that time Charlotte Bunch has stressed a class analysis within Radical Feminism. In her words (1981a, p. 194):

> Women's oppression is rooted both in the structures of our society, which are patriarchal, and in the sons of patriarchy: capitalism and white supremacy. patriarchy includes not only male rule but also heterosexual imperialism and sexism; patriarchy led to the development of white supremacy and capitalism. For me, the term patriarchy refers to all these forms of oppression and domination, all of which must be ended before all women will be free.

In her discussion of sexuality she points out that there can be a breaking of class barriers among lesbians where 'cross-class intimacy' occurs. This is particularly true for middle-class women because

> lesbianism means discovering that we have to support ourselves for the rest of our lives, something that lower- and working-class women have always known. This discovery makes us begin to understand what lower- and working-class women have been trying to tell us all along: 'what do you know about survival?'
>
> (p. 71)

Again, the personal is *political.* Radical Feminists will not devote women's energy to the traditional socialist revolution, though we share some values in common, such as the oppressive nature of capitalism. We do not have faith that such man-made revolutions will ensure women's autonomy. Bonnie Mann analyses socialism in action in Nicaragua, pointing out the positive values inherent in the work of the Sandinista government and in the fact of such a revolution, but noting also that there are no known lesbians in Nicaragua and no safe abortion. She writes (1986, p. 54):

> But there is a lesson here that history teaches her radical feminist students who have long since rejected the ideological reduction of patriarchy to capitalism by the left, for those of us who know a socialist or communist revolution is not the answer to the global slave-status of women. The lesson is this: anything that strikes a blow to such a large root of suffering, of evil in this world, sends reverberations through the very foundations of patriarchal power. And these reverberations ring with the possibility of radical, lasting change.

WOMEN'S BODIES

Radical Feminism has stressed women's control of our bodies as essential to liberation. The issue has been dealt with in three primary ways; through the Women's Health Movement; through an analysis of the body as a primary site of women's oppression; and through a discussion of sexuality.

The women's health movement

As part of its analysis of the structures of patriarchy, Radical Feminism has argued that medicine is male-controlled, operating to control women socially to the detriment of our health. In the late 1960s the Women's Health Movement gathered momentum, developing since then in international scope with diverse approaches to women's health. It has revised the way women's health has been viewed, stressing self-help and prevention rather than a reliance on hi-tech, expensive, and dangerous technologies and drugs.

Radical Feminists argued for safe and freely available abortion and contraception. 'The right to choose' in the issue of abortion was a slogan which encapsulated the right of a woman to decide whether or not she wished to maintain a pregnancy and rear a child. Women of colour made us aware of the limitations of the concept of choice within this slogan by stressing that while white women were being controlled by their lack of access to abortion, black women were being controlled by constant

sterilization without consent. The British anthology *No Turning Back* documents this (Feminist Anthology Collective 1981, p.145).

> Obviously, the fact that the black women are sterilised against their will while white women are finding it harder and harder to get abortions, is related to the attempts to limit the black population on the one hand, and to force white women out of paid employment on the other. A campaign around 'a woman's right to choose' must relate to the different needs and demands of all women and in so doing recognise that the problems of black women do not mirror those of white women.

The recognition that 'choice' has to be redefined has also led to the analysis of the way women in the Third World have dangerous contraceptive drugs dumped upon them, such as the increasing use of Depo-Provera, and the analysis of the way international aid is tied to such things as sterilization programmes for women (see Akhter 1987).

One of the landmarks of the Women's Health Movement was the initial revolutionary action of self-help gynaecology. In April 1971 in Los Angeles, Carol Downer showed women for the first time how to use a speculum to examine their own vagina and cervix and the bodies of other women. In these actions, women came to see for the first time inside themselves. They were no longer solely for the male medical gaze. These actions demystified women's bodies and made the gynaecological ritual more obvious in its humiliation of women. Ellen Frankfort remembers (1973, p. ix):

> I hate to use the word 'revolutionary', but no other word seems accurate to describe the effects of the first part of the evening. It was a little like having a blind person see for the first time – for what woman is not blind to her own insides? The simplicity with which Carol examined herself brought forth in a flash the whole gynaecological ritual; the receptionist, the magazines, the waiting room, and then the examination itself – being told to undress, lying on your back with your feet in stirrups . . . no-one thinking that 'meeting' doctor for the first time in this position is slightly odd.

The development of women's health centres was an essential part of this form of activism. The intention was to develop alternative health measures for dealing with some of the most common ailments that women suffer from, such as monilia and cystitis, with a focus on developing preventative procedures. And these were to be women-centred: services run *for* women, *by* women.

In 1969, when little information was available on women's health, the Boston Women's Health Collective put out the first edition of *Our Bodies,*

Ourselves which became a basic reference text for women all over the world. The second and third editions published in 1984 and 1985 have continued this tradition with an expanded view of women's health and the medical system which attempts to control it. Stressing preventative measures, and the need for women to understand how our bodies work, this book is an act of resistance against misogynist health care throughout the world.

Women's bodies as a primary site of women's oppression

More than any other theory of women's oppression, Radical Feminism has been unafraid to look at the violence done to women by men. It has shown that this violence to women's bodies and women's selves has been so intrinsic to patriarchal culture as to appear 'normal' and therefore justifiable. So rape, pornography, and sexual slavery affects one particular group of 'bad' women (see Barry 1979) and not other 'good' women. The message is that if women 'behave' they will be spared. This procedure not only ensures the intimidation of women in their daily behaviour, but splits women from each other, classifying one group of women as justifiably abused.

A large amount of empirical work has been done by Radical Feminists on sexual violence, documenting the evidence on rape (for example Susan Brownmiller 1975); incest (for example Elizabeth Ward 1984); pornography (for example Andrea Dworkin 1981; Susan Griffin 1981) and sexual slavery (Kathleen Barry 1979). There is no space here to deal with such an extensive body of work, but Kathleen Barry's work on female sexual slavery is an example of the development of Radical Feminist theory and practice.

Barry has documented sexual slavery on an international level (1979). She begins by tracing the original work carried out by Josephine Butler in the first wave of women's protest against sexual slavery in the nineteenth century. She then goes on to detail current practices of sexual slavery. For example, since 1979, agencies promoting sex tourism and mail-order brides have been operating in the US and many European countries. This amounts to the buying of women from Latin America and Asian countries: 'This practice, built upon the most racist and misogynist stereotypes of Asian and Latin American women, is a growing part of the traffic in women which is a violation of the United Nations conventions and covenance' (p. xiii).

Female sexual slavery is used to refer to the international traffic in women and forced street prostitution, which, as Barry amply shows, is carried out with the same methods of sadism, torture, beating, and so on which are used to enslave women internationally into prostitution. She looks behind the façade that intimates to us that the white slave trade

ended in the nineteenth century. She points out that although there is a white slave trade in eastern countries, there is an Asian slave trade in western societies.

Barry resists the argument that prostitution is purely an economic exploitation of women. When economic power becomes the cause of women's oppression 'the sex dimensions of power usually remain unidentified and unchallenged' (p. 9). Touching again on the resistance even of feminists to deal with the sexual oppression of women in its raw form she writes (p. 10):

> Feminist analysis of sexual power is often modified to make it fit into an economic analysis which defines economic exploitation as the primary instrument of female oppression. Under that system of thought, institutionalised sexual slavery, such as is found in prostitution, is understood in terms of economic exploitation which results in the lack of economic opportunities for women, the result of an unjust economic order. Undoubtedly economic exploitation is an important factor in the oppression of women, but here we must be concerned with whether or not economic analysis reveals the more fundamental sexual domination of women.

She goes on to point out that people are justifiably horrified at the enslavement of children, but this has become separated from the enslavement of women. This process distorts the reality of the situation, implying that it is tolerable to enslave women but not tolerable to enslave children. She writes (p. 9): 'As I studied the attitudes that accept female enslavement, I realised that a powerful ideology stems from it and permeates the social order. I have named that ideology cultural sadism'.

Barry explores the economic reasons for the cover-up of the international trade of women and the basis of male power which is involved in it. She instances, for example, the INTERPOL analysis of sexual slavery which is conveniently hidden from public scrutiny. INTERPOL has prepared two comprehensive reports based on their own international surveys 'which they have suppressed' (p. 58). So in their 1974 report, contained in Barry's appendix, one of the conclusions is that 'the disguised traffic in women still exists all over the world' (p. 296).

Initially Barry herself had flinched from the task of unveiling the traffic in women. She talks about the difficulties of coming face to face with this raw brutality towards women, which includes the seduction of women into slavery by promises of love and affection, or the brutal kidnapping and forcible entry of women into prostitution and sexual slavery. But much as Radical Feminism has dealt with the horror of pornography, rape, and incest, Barry believes that for women it is important to know the truth about the sexual violence to women. Women have been bullied into denying that it exists. We have been forced into colluding in the secrecy of

sexual violence to women. We are unable to bear the feeling of vulnerability which that gives to all women (p. 13):

> Hiding has helped keep female sexual slavery from being exposed. But worse than that, it has kept us from understanding the full extent of women's victimisation, thereby denying us the opportunity to find our way out of it through political confrontation as well as through vision and hope . . . knowing the worst frees us to hope and strive for the best.

As theory and practice are intertwined in Radical Feminism, Barry has been involved since 1980 with the establishment of the International Feminist Network Against Female Sexual Slavery which launched its first meeting in Rotterdam in 1983. From twenty-four countries women came to expose the traffic in women, forced prostitution, sex tourism, military brothels, torture of female prisoners, and the sexual mutilation of women. In each country the network operates collectively to deal with their specific culturally based problem areas. For example, the most effective work against sex tourism and the mail-order bride industry (which operates quite effectively between Australia and Thailand among other countries) has been done by Asian feminists, particularly the Asian Women's Association in Japan and the Third World Movement Against the Exploitation of Women in The Philippines. Again, this demonstrates the global perspective of Radical Feminism.

From the empirical work of women in the area of sexual violence has come the development of theories of what Barry calls 'sexual terrorism'. This terrorism she explains 'is a way of life for women even if we are not its direct victims. It has resulted in many women living with it while trying not to see or acknowledge it. This denial of reality creates a form of hiding' (p. 12). Radical Feminism will not collaborate in this blindness, but names and addresses the basic and primary violence done to women as a social group and to individual women at the level of their daily lives.[5]

Similar work is occurring within the area of the new reproductive technologies. Here, Radical Feminists are analysing the way patriarchal medicine again is sadistically brutalizing women's bodies in the name of 'curing' infertility. No preventative measures are offered. Little attempt is made to understand the causes of infertility. No analysis takes place of the structures which create the desperate desire to have children.

Radical Feminism names the alliance between commercial interests and reproductive technologists or 'techno-patriarchs' within the structures which currently wrench power from women in the procreative area. We refuse the naive political analysis which posits that it is possible for women to gain some control over these technologies, and that then it will be acceptable to use them. Our analysis shows that the technology is not value-free and is in itself sadistic in its abuse of women and their bodies. (See for example

Arditti *et al.* 1984; Corea 1985; Corea *et al.* 1985; Spallone and Steinberg 1987.)

Again, from this theoretical and empirical work has come the development of an international network, the Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering (FINRRAGE). Based on national regional groups working in a collective fashion, Radical Feminists are educating women at the grassroots level as well as working on political strategies in order to stop the control and abuse of women's bodies.

Sexuality

Because of the Radical Feminist analysis of the oppression of women through male sexuality and power, and because of the demand to take back our bodies, Radical Feminism has defined sexuality as political. The interrelationship between heterosexuality and power was named.

In 1982 Catharine MacKinnon argued that heterosexuality is the 'primary social sphere of male power' (p. 529) and that this power is the basis of gender inequality. It is to feminism what work is to Marxism – 'that which is most one's own yet most taken away' (p. 515). Heterosexuality is the structure which imposes this appropriation of woman's self, 'gender and family its congealed forms, sex roles its qualities generalised to social persona, reproduction a consequence, and control its issue' (p. 516).

It was within Radical Feminism that lesbian women began to demand their right to choose a lesbian existence. In a summary article first published in the *Revolutionary and Radical Feminist Newsletter*, no. 10, 1982, the London Lesbian Offensive Group expressed their anger at anti-lesbian attitudes within the movement and at heterosexual feminists because they:

> do not take responsibility for being members of an oppressive power group, do not appear to recognise or challenge the privileges which go with that, nor do they bother to examine how all this undermines not only our lesbian politics, but our very existence.
>
> (1984, p. 255).

When heterosexual feminists do not acknowledge their privileged position, lesbian women feel silenced and made invisible. The article outlines clearly the privileges which heterosexual feminists experience over lesbian feminists in spite of the real fact of the oppression of heterosexual women. For example, many have access to male money, they have the privilege of the assumptions of being considered 'normal' instead of 'deviant'. In short, they have automatic benefits by virtue of the fact that they are attached to a man.

Lesbian feminists suffer under the law in a variety of ways. Often they

are not free to claim their lesbian lifestyle for fear of retaliation in the workplace, in terms of housing rights, in terms of being ostracized. In issues over custody of children, the battles for lesbian women are bloodier and more likely to fail (see, for example, Chesler 1986).

In retaliation for the oppression of lesbian women by heterofeminists, in 1979 the Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group published a stinging attack. They accused women in heterosexual couples of shoring up male supremacy (p. 65): 'Men are the enemy. Heterosexual women are collaborators with the enemy . . . every woman who lives with or fucks a man helps to maintain the oppression of her sisters and hinders our struggle.' Part of the basic argument against heterofeminism is the argument that heterosexual women service male power and privilege. By directing their energy towards a specific man within the social group men, women's energy is once more taken from women and given to men.

Although there are substantial difficulties and dangers in being lesbian in a heterosexual world, the pleasures of living a lesbian existence were also clearly outlined in the Leeds article (p. 66):

> The pleasures of knowing that you are not directly servicing men, living without the strain of the glaring contradiction in your personal life, uniting the personal and the political, loving and putting your energies into those you are fighting alongside rather than those you are fighting against.

In an afterword which was added before republication in 1981, the Leeds group commented that this paper had been written for a workshop at a Radical Feminist conference in 1979. Some of their comments they later found to be offensive and inconsistent. For example, 'we now think that "collaborators" is the wrong word to describe women who sleep with men, since this implies a conscious act of betrayal' (p. 69).

For some women within the Women's Liberation Movement the issues of lesbianism and heterosexuality caused an irreparable split. For others, the debate increased their awareness, as did discussions around class and culture, about their own positions of privilege or oppression within the social group woman, and within feminism itself. Some lesbian feminists moved to develop an analysis of the position of lesbian feminism within the Women's Movement. An analysis of the choice of Radical Feminist heterosexuality is yet to be written.

Charlotte Bunch named lesbian feminism as the political perspective on 'the ideological and institutional domination of heterosexuality' (1976, p. 553). As she put it, lesbian feminism means putting women first in an act of resistance in a world in which life is structured around the male. Discussing the first paper issued by radical lesbians, 'The Woman-Identified Woman', she takes up the expanded definition of lesbianism as the idea of woman-identification and a love for all women. Behind this is the belief in the

development of self-respect and a self-identity in relation to women, rather than in relation to men.

In 1975 Bunch had already said that 'heterosexuality means men first. That's what it's all about. It assumes that every woman is heterosexual; that every woman is identified by and is the property of men' (1981a, p. 69). Bunch thus stated what Adrienne rich later theorized in her influential paper on compulsory heterosexuality (1980) and Janice Raymond developed in her work on female friendship (1986). Bunch argued that heterosexism supports male supremacy in the workplace and is supported through the oppressive structure of the nuclear family. It is being fed by the actual or more often supposed benefits to women who continue life within the accepted norm of heterosexuality: the privileges of legitimacy, economic security, social acceptance, legal and physical protection – most of which do not hold true anyway for the majority of women in heterosexual relationships.

Adrienne Rich (1980) analysed the way in which heterosexuality had been forced upon women as an *institution*, and the way women had been seduced into it (in the same way as she had previously analysed motherhood as an institution; see Rich 1976). Lesbian existence represents a direct assault on the male's right of access to women.

Most importantly, though, was the term she coined: the 'lesbian continuum'. It was to have a major effect in reuniting lesbian and heterosexual feminists in their attempts to both validate the differences between their lives *and* strive towards developing a common political platform. Her lesbian continuum includes

> a range – through each woman's life and throughout history – of woman-identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman. If we expand it to embrace many more forms of primary identity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support; . . . we begin to grasp bits of female history and psychology which have lain out of reach as a consequence of limited, mostly clinical, definitions of 'lesbianism'. (p. 649)

Extending this analysis of heterosexuality and the way it has controlled women's energy, women's sexuality and women's culture, Janice Raymond created the term 'hetero-reality'. She writes (1986, p. 11):

> While I agree that we are living in a heterosexist society, I think the wider problem is that we live in a hetero-relational society, where most of women's personal, social, political, professional, and economic relations are defined by the ideology that woman is for man.

Smashing the myth that women do not bond together and that hetero-reality has always been the norm, Raymond traces the history of women's friendship, of women as friends, lovers, economic and emotional supporters, and of companions. She attacks the dismembering of female friendships arguing that this represents a 'dismembering of the woman-identified Self' (p. 4). She emphasizes the intimacy in women's relationships, stressing that passionate friendships need not be of a genital-sexual nature.

Raymond coins the term *Gyn/affection* in order to be inclusive of all women who put each other first, whether lesbian or not. At the basis of her discussions of sexuality is the Radical Feminist belief in the political necessity of woman-identified feminism. It means that a woman's *primary* relationships are with other women. It is to women that we give our economic, emotional, political, and social support. In the words of Rita Mae Brown (1975, p. 66):

> A woman-identified woman is one who defines herself in relationship to other women and most importantly as a self apart and distinct from other selves, not with function as the centre of self, but being . . . a woman can best find out who she is with other women, not with just one other woman but with other women, who are also struggling to free themselves from an alien and destructive culture. It is this new concept, that of woman-identified woman, that sounds the death knell for the male culture and calls for a new culture where cooperation, life and love are the guiding forces of organization rather than competition, power and bloodshed. This concept will change the way we live and who we live with.

Implicit in many of these statements is an assumption of separatism, which has been seen as a political strategy, a space in which to create women-identification and the regeneration of women's energy and women's Selves. Charlotte Bunch writes of her time living in a totally separatist community of women as one in which personal growth and political analysis could be more readily developed. Despite the fact that she ultimately rejected total separatism because of the isolation it involved, as a political strategy it still has its uses. In Bunch's words (1976, p. 556): 'Separatism is a dynamic strategy to be moved in and out of whenever a minority feels that its interests are being overlooked by the majority, or that its insights need more space to be developed.'

In her paper 'In Defence of Separatism' (1976), Australian Susan Hawthorne has outlined the degrees of separatism which operate within Radical Feminism. She points out that it is impossible to be a feminist and not believe in separatism in one of its degrees. She includes among acts of separatism: valuing dialogue with other women and engaging in women-only groups; engaging in political and social action with other women;

attending women-only events – including events where women can have a good time!; working in an environment which is run by and for women; giving emotional support to women; engaging in sexual relationships with women; participating in groups which are concerned with women's creativity and the creation of women's culture; living in an all-women environment without contact with men.

It is this last degree of separatism which is predominantly understood as its definition. This is perceived as the most threatening form of separatism because it suggests that women can successfully live in the world independent of men. Indeed, this conception of separatism within the Radical Feminist framework is an empowering one. As Marilyn Frye writes (1983, p. 105):

> When our feminist acts or practices have an aspect of separatism, we are assuming power by controlling access and simultaneously by undertaking definition. The slave who excludes the master from her hut thereby declares herself *not a slave*. And *definition* is another face of power.

MOTHERHOOD AND THE FAMILY

The institution of the family is a primary institution of patriarchy. Chained to the theory and practice of hetero-reality and compulsory heterosexuality, the father-dominated family, with its dependent motherhood for women, has enslaved women into sexual and emotional service. For most women this includes unpaid domestic labour. In the bastion of the family, the private oppression of women is experienced on a daily level. It may be expressed through its physical manifestation in assault, its economic manifestation in male control of resources and decision-making, its ideological control through the socialization of women and children, and/or its control of women's energy in emotional and physical servicing of men and children. In addition, as Andrea Dworkin says (1974, p. 190): 'The nuclear family is the school of values in a sexist, sexually repressed society. One learns what one must know: the rules, rituals, and behaviours appropriate to male–female polarity and the internalised mechanisms of sexual oppression.'

Marriage itself has been seen as prostitution, where a woman trades sexual servicing for shelter and food. Sex is compulsory in marriage for women, ensuring heterosexuality within the economic bargain. As Sheila Cronan wrote (1973, p. 214):

> It became increasingly clear to us that the institution of marriage 'protects' women in the same way that the institution of slavery was said to 'protect' blacks – that is, that the word 'protection' in this case is simply a euphemism for oppression.

The patriarchal ideology of motherhood has also been scrutinized. During the early years of this most recent wave of the Women's Liberation Movement, many women rejected motherhood as an enslaving role within patriarchal culture. Since that time, feminists have tried to rewrite the definitions of motherhood, leading us to a more positive vision of what the experience might be like if women could determine the conditions. Adrienne Rich has written (1979b, p. 196):

> This institution – which affects each woman's personal experience – is visible in the male dispensation of birth control and abortion; the guardianship of men over children in the courts and the educational system; the subservience, through most of history, of women and children to the patriarchal father; the economic dominance of the father over the family; the usurpation of the birth process by male medical establishments.

Although motherhood is supposedly revered, its daily reality in patriarchy is tantamount to a degraded position. Motherhood is also only admirable when the mother is attached to a legal father. The pressure on women to undertake the mothering role is intense, as men are fearful that women will choose to discontinue mothering or have children without a man.

In *Of Woman Born* (1976) Rich delineated two meanings of motherhood: the *potential* relationship of a woman to her powers of reproduction and to children, and the patriarchal *institution* of motherhood which is concerned with male control of women and children. One of the most bewildering contradictions in the institutionalization of motherhood is that 'it has alienated women from our bodies by incarcerating us in them' (p. 13).

Just as heterosexuality is compulsory, so too is motherhood. Women who choose not to mother are outside the 'caring and rearing' bond and attract strong social disapproval. Women who are infertile, on the other hand, are subjects of pity and even derision. The institutionalization of motherhood by patriarchy has ensured that women are divided into breeders and non-breeders. Motherhood is therefore used to define woman and her usefulness.

WOMEN'S CULTURE

Emerging out of the concept of separatism as an empowering base and a belief in establishing and transmitting traditions, histories, and ideologies which are woman-centred, Radical Feminism strives to generate a women's culture through which women can artistically recreate both their selves and their way of being in the world outside of patriarchal definition. So, for example, Judy Chicago creates 'The Dinner Party' with two hundred places set for women of history who have made important contributions to

women's culture as well as society at large. So Radical Feminist artists, painters, and writers resist the male-stream definitions of art and culture, redefining both stylistically and in their content what culture and art are and might be for women.

Many Radical Feminists are involved in writing (prose and poetry), film-making, sculpture, theatre, dance, and so on in their daily practice of Radical Feminism. For Radical Feminist poets and novelists, language becomes an essential code in redefining and restructuring the world with women as its centre. As Bonnie Zimmerman put it, 'language is action' (1984, p. 672).

Within the creation of a woman's culture, the arts are not the sole areas of work. Feminist scientists for example are trying to generate visions of a new science and technology which would not be exploitative of people and the environment. Having critiqued masculine science, Radical Feminists are developing new ways of conceptualizing science (Bleier 1986).

Mary Daly attempts to reconceptualize the world as it might look from a perspective in which women's different needs and interests form the core of cultural practices and their theoretical underpinnings (1978, 1984). In her unique analysis of the oppression of women (1978, 1984), including her stress upon the daily physical and mental violence done to women, she recreates language, a sense of the spiritual, and a sense of physical being. She emphasizes the importance of naming, in that to name is to create the world. She also stresses the need to recreate and refind our original selves, before we were mutilated by patriarchy and subjugated to patriarchal definitions of the feminine self. She refuses to accept the woman-hatred within existing language, redefining for example 'spinster' and 'hag' in a positive way.

As Radical Feminism struggles to refind our cultural history and recreate culture around women, it is constantly misunderstood, labelled 'cultural feminism', and defined as 'non-political'. This is a false representation as the redefining of culture is interrelated with the development of a liberating ideology in tune with the autonomous being of people. It attacks male control of the concept of culture and patriarchal use of culture for the purposes of indoctrination of both women and men into patriarchal ideology. It is essentially *political*.

BIOLOGICAL ESSENTIALISM

A frequent criticism of Radical Feminism is that it supports a biologically based 'essential' division of the world into male and female. In particular this accusation is charged against Radical Feminists working in the area of violence against women who name men as members of the social group 'man', as well as individual men where relevant, as oppressors of women.

The facts are that men brutally oppress women as Radical Feminists

have empirically shown. But why do men do this? Can it be changed? Kathleen Barry has addressed these issues in her analysis of sexual slavery which we discussed earlier. She states the truism that men do these things to women because 'there is nothing to stop them' (1979, p. 254). Her analysis of the *values of patriarchy* and theories which supposedly account for male violence is too detailed to discuss here. The important point to stress is that Radical Feminism cannot be reduced to a simplistic biological determinist argument. That its critics often *do* thus reduce it is a political ploy which takes place in order to limit the effectiveness of its analysis. We know that women have good reasons for being frightened to name men as the enemy, particularly when they live in hetero-relationships. Women are not fools. We know the kind of punishment which may be meted out for exposing patriarchy and its mechanisms (see Cline and Spender 1987).

Christine Delphy argues that the concept of gender – that is the respective social positions of women and men – is a construction of patriarchal ideology and that 'sex has become a pertinent fact, hence a perceived category, because of the existence of gender' (1984, p. 144). Therefore, she argues, the oppression creates gender, and in the end, gender creates anatomical sex (p. 144): 'in a sense that the hierarchical division of humanity into two transforms an anatomical difference (which is in itself devoid of social implications) into a relevant distinction for social practice'.

Radical Feminists are well aware of the dangers of rooting analysis in biology. If men and women are represented as having 'aggressive' and 'nurturing' charcteristics because of their biology, the situation will remain immutable and the continuation of male violence against women can be justified. But this is not to say that there are not differences between the sexes. This is patently so. These differences, however, do not need to be rooted in biology nor do they need to be equated with determinism. As the editors of *Questions Feministes* put it (1980, p. 14): 'we acknowledge a biological difference between men and women, but it does not in itself imply a relationship of oppression between the sexes. The struggle between the sexes is not the result of biology'.

Men are the powerful group. But men need women, for sexual and emotional servicing, for unpaid labour, for admiration, for love, and for a justification of the existing power imbalance (see Cline and Spender 1987). In order to maintain the more powerful position and so feed on their need of women without being consumed by it, men as a powerful group institutionalize their position of power. This involves the need to structure institutions to maintain that power, the development of an ideology to justify it, and the use of force and violence to impose it when resistance emerges (see also Rowland 1988).

It is possible that differences between women and men arise out of a biological base but in a different way to that proposed by a reductivist

determinism. The fact that women belong to the social group which has the capacity for procreation and mothering, and the fact that men belong to the social group which has the capacity to carry out, and does, acts of rape and violence against women, must intrude into the consciousness of being female and male. This analysis still allows for change in the sense that men themselves could change that consciousness and therefore their actions. It also allows women to recognize that we can and must develop our own theories and practices and need not accept male domination as unchangeable.

Existing differences between women and men may have been generated out of the different worlds we inhabit as social groups, including our experience of power and powerlessness. But this is not to say that these differences are immutable. The history of women's resistance is evidence of resistance to deterministic thinking, as is the history of the betrayal by some men who support feminism, of patriarchy.

WOMEN'S RESISTANCE, WOMEN'S POWER

In our relation to men as the more powerful group, women do have some crucial bargaining areas: withdrawing reproductive services, emotional and physical labour, domestic labour, sexual labour, and refusing consent to being defined as the powerless, thereby verifying man's right to power. The withdrawal of services from men is an act of resistance; in Dale Spender's words (1983, p. 373): 'making men feel good is *work*, which women are required to undertake in a patriarchal society; refusing to engage in such work is a form of resistance.'

In *Powers of the Weak* (1980) Elizabeth Janeway lists the power of *disbelief* as a form of resistance. The powerful need those ruled to believe in them and believe in the justice of their position. But, as Janeway points out, if women refuse to endorse men's domination it signifies a lack of sanction of the authority of the ruler by the ruled, and destabilizes their sense of security.

Importantly, women can also exercise the power of disbelief with respect to the self of woman as defined by man. Janeway explores it thus (1980, p. 167):

> Ordered use of the power to disbelieve, the first power of the weak, begins here, with the refusal to accept the definition of one's self that is put forward by the powerful. It is true that one may not have a coherent self-definition to set against the status assigned by the established social mythology, but that is not necessary for dissent. By disbelieving, one would be led toward doubting prescribed codes of behaviour, and as one begins to act in ways that deviate from the norm in any degree, it becomes clear that in fact there is just not one way to handle or understand events.

A further 'power of the weak' lies in the collective understanding of a shared situation. Through collective political action and through consciousness-raising techniques, women have developed a sense of female identity and solidarity. The collective action and networking of the International Network of Female Sexual Slavery, and the International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering are examples of women educating for activism against violence against women. Women's health centres and the development of refuges and rape crisis centre are other examples of collective actions of resistance.

Radical Feminists are also developing women-centred approaches to changing the law. Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin attempted to introduce a law in the United States to ensure that the victims of pornography had a right to take civil action against their abusers (MacKinnon 1987).

The creation of Radical Feminist knowledge itself, such as that contained within the works described above, represents an act of women's resistance. Radical Feminism has often been described as a state of rage. People – men and women – who have comfortable, safe lives fear that rage. It implicates them in the oppression of women, either as members of the oppressing group or of the oppressed group. Radical Feminism reminds women of their own moments of exploitation or abuse, and these memories are not welcome. Such down-to-earth knowledge intimates the possibility of a lack of control. As Susan Griffin remembers (1982, pp. 6–7):

> As I became more conscious of my oppression as a woman, I found myself entering a state of rage. Everywhere I turned I found more evidence of male domination, of a social hatred of, and derogation of women, of increasingly insufferable limitations imposed upon my life. Social blindness is lived out in each separate life. Like many women, I had been used to lying to myself. To tell myself that I wanted what I did not want, or felt what I did not feel, was a habit so deeply ingrained in me, I was never aware of having lied. I had shaped my life to fit the traditional idea of a woman, and thus, through countless decisions large and small, had sacrificed myself. Each sacrifice had made me angry. But I could not allow myself this anger. For my anger would have told me that I was lying. Now, when I ceased to lie, the anger I had accumulated for years was revealed to me.

Radical Feminists are angry because patriarchy oppresses women, but we are also filled with a sense of empowering well-being through bonding with other women and a joy in the liberation from accepting patriarchy and hetero-reality as immutable ingredients of human existence. Radical Feminist writings are sometimes rejected because of their openly voiced anger and passionate call to end women's oppression.[6] But Radical

Feminism *is* passionate. We are passionately committed to women's liberation and through our work we hope to empassion others. Nothing less will do if we are to break the brutal tyranny of man and develop theories and practices for a future in which women can live self-determined as well as socially responsible lives.

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NOTES

1 See Dale Spender (1983), for a collection of historical writings on feminist theorists.
2 There is a great need for books on Radical Feminist theory. To date the gap still exists for works about Radical Feminism by radical feminists.
3 For examples of its universality see Morgan (1984) and Seager and Olson (1986).
4 Radical Feminists also stress the importance of applying a women-centred analysis to the various forms of population control as they oppress women in so-called Third World countries. See for example Vimal Balasubrahmanyan (1984) and Viola Roggenkamp (1984) on India, and Farida Akhter (1987) and Sultana Kamal (1987) on Bangladesh.
5 Pornography is another crucial site for Radical Feminist theory and practice. A discussion of the recent developments (1986) in the USA and strategies developed by Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon would deserve a chapter of its own. Due to limitations of space, however, we have to refer the reader to the following references: Dworkin (1981); Griffin (1981); Lederer (1980); Linden *et al*. (1982); Marciano (1980); Rhodes and McNeill (1985).
6 See Frye (1983), 'A Note on Anger', for an excellent discussion of the meaning of this anger.

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