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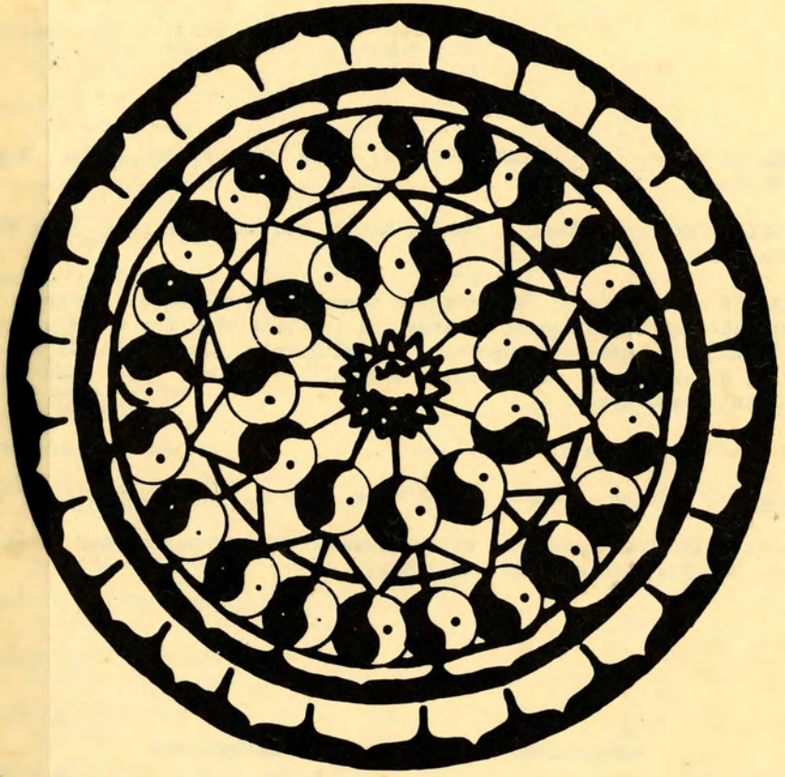
Special Issue: Lesbian Community



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Feminary, Volume IX, Number 1 (Spring 1978)

MEMBERS OF THE *Feminary* COLLECTIVE are: Lynn, Sherry, Mab, Helen, Susan, and Janet.

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THE COLLECTIVE ENCOURAGES and welcomes feedback. Please, write us at P.O. Box 954, Chapel Hill, NC 27514.

THIS BOOK DOES NOT CIRCULATE

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Collective Statement

This Feminary focuses on local lesbian community. This is our first thematic issue, so we would like to explain how and why we arrived at this particular topic.

Plans for this issue rose out of a year-end evaluation of Feminary's purpose and direction. At that time we realized a need for more focus. We saw that part of our lack of focus came from a confusion over our audience. As we asked ourselves in a statement issued during that time, "For whom are we writing--radical lesbians, all feminists, working women, professional women, students?" In addressing such basic questions, we found a direct relationship between audience and community. As a local feminist journal, our audience should be the community of local women. But we were then confronted with equally basic questions about that community: "What (as opposed to 'who') is our community? Can we even talk about a community of local women? and should we? What holds communities together?" and on and on. At this point, we decided to address the theme of local community in our next issue. As planning progressed, we made another important decision: as a lesbian collective we could only talk knowledgably about lesbian community. Thus this issue.

Our decision to focus on lesbian community, of course, does not imply a denial of women who are not lesbian. We are trying to deal with our own realities, with what we know best. We think that this beginning attempt to deal with our specific community will be valuable to other communities as well. Julia Stanley's article in this issue indicates that community is a topic much on the mind of lesbians all over the country; we hope our discussion will prove helpful to some of them. We also feel that the issue is important for women who do not identify as lesbians. As more and more women look for alternatives to male-dominated structures and relationships, lesbian community becomes increasingly important and viable; as lesbian feminists we are working to keep our "borders" open to any women who want to join us for mutual nurtuance, in mutual strength. Also, lesbian community serves as a kind of laboratory for relationships between and among all kinds of women, since it is not only lesbians who have lived and worked in isolation from one another. Finally, lesbian community can also serve in some ways as a model for other potentially communal groups whose unity has been shattered by the malignant forces in this society (just as their efforts toward community can benefit us).

Working on this issue of Feminary has taught us a lot about the subject. We have at various points run up against great silences. The topic calls for a level of personal as well as theorectical discussion that is hard to elicit, and understandably so. And we have not been completely successful. We realize the collection of essays here does not tell the whole story. Some of the more difficult issues and emotions have perhaps been sidestepped. The blank pages in the middle reflect this incompleteness. Perhaps they will also encourage each reader to explore her own silences on the subject.

In dealing with silences we have also come to realize the need for a written history. Most of what is known about this community is transmitted through oral tradition and rapidly transforms itself into personality and mythology. As women who have been denied our tradition, our past, we must not now deny it to ourselves and to other women.

This issue, though not a final statement, covers a wide range of material. Julia Stanley's article provides a theoretical basis for discussion; a poem by Monica Raymond (from New York City via Cambridge) is the other non-North Carolina piece. Articles from women in Fayetteville (about two hours' drive from Durham) and Charlotte (three hours away) provide a wider geographical perspective and some historical insight as well. Fayetteville is a much "younger" women's community in a much rougher city. The essay from Charlotte (reprinted from Sinister Wisdom) seems to represent a common pattern in older, more politicized communities. It is also a thoughtful and sensitive statement on separatism, an important issue for lesbians working to define community. Chapel Hill and Durham are the main focus of the essays. We include the beginnings of a local history and excerpts from past Feminaries, personal essays, and poetry from a variety of local women.

We hope this issue of Feminary will stimulate discussion, change. We invite response from local women or from other lesbian communities (or non-communities) who would like to share their experiences. A sizable response could induce us to return to the topic in a later issue.

Shah

for the Feminary collective

LG242

Lesbian Relationships and the Vision of Community

by Julia Stanley

Julia Stanley, feminist teacher and writer at the University of Nebraska, generously agreed to let Feminary excerpt her paper "Lesbian Relationships and the Vision of Community" for this issue. We are grateful to have access to her analysis. Julia writes largely from personal experience and with an admitted bias toward couple relationships. But in placing lesbian community in a continuum of self-relationship-community-society, she generates questions essential for those of us working in and toward lesbian community. Whether her answers have validity, each of us must for herself decide. We offer the following abstract of her arguments as context for the more extensive quotations that follow:

Before we can talk coherently about community, we must realize the difference between a community and a subculture. A larger, hostile society defines a subculture by the oppression of its members. Its membership is thus negative and involuntary. A community defines itself voluntarily, in positive terms of shared values and needs. At present Julia feels we have a lesbian subculture, but not a community. Her analysis explores the avenues from subculture to community.

First we must ask ourselves the basic questions: "Do a significant number of us want community?" Will it "significantly improve the quality of our lives?" Then we must examine "the ways we relate to each other in the present"--an examination involving issues of intimacy, celibacy, the couple relationship, sexual freedom, and autonomy. We must also develop an ethos, which would make explicit the ways women's lives touch, thus minimizing pain and misunderstanding by structuring expectations, helping members to respond to changes in their realities.

Julia elaborates that the main change in her reality has been from a male-dominated understanding in her past toward an as yet undefined future (in which lesbian community, we hope, would coalesce). A large part of this patriarchally dominated past for Julia involved the "old dyke ethos" of the 1950's, which gave validation and support for lesbian couples, in part by invalidating other lifestyles. Consequently, there came a rejection of lesbian couples because they were supposedly based on a patriarchal-heterosexual model. Julia feels that the demise of the old ethos has left us in an "ethical void." She asserts that patriarchal oppression is not inherent in the couple relationship because a hostile society does not validate lesbian couples. Such an analysis, she hopes, will clear the way for allowing couples to serve as a "powerful stabilizing support unit" within a community, a place to build trust, a place to fall back in times of personal crisis.

In addition to the prejudice against couples, other problems inhibiting lesbian community rise out of patriarchal thought processes: a failure to distinguish between bonding and binding; to define intimacy and consider its implications for our use of energy; to reject the patriarchal equation of sexual liberation with personal automomy and independence. We accept male definitions of these activities at our own risk, she asserts, and at the risk of lesbian community. After considering celibacy and multiple relationships as valid alternatives to the couple relationship, she ends by restating her own predisposition to a "one-to-one relationship," a choice rising because "my energies go in too many other directions for me to spend my time working through all the pain and intricacies of trying to accomodate myself to more than one woman at a time."

Subculture vs. Community

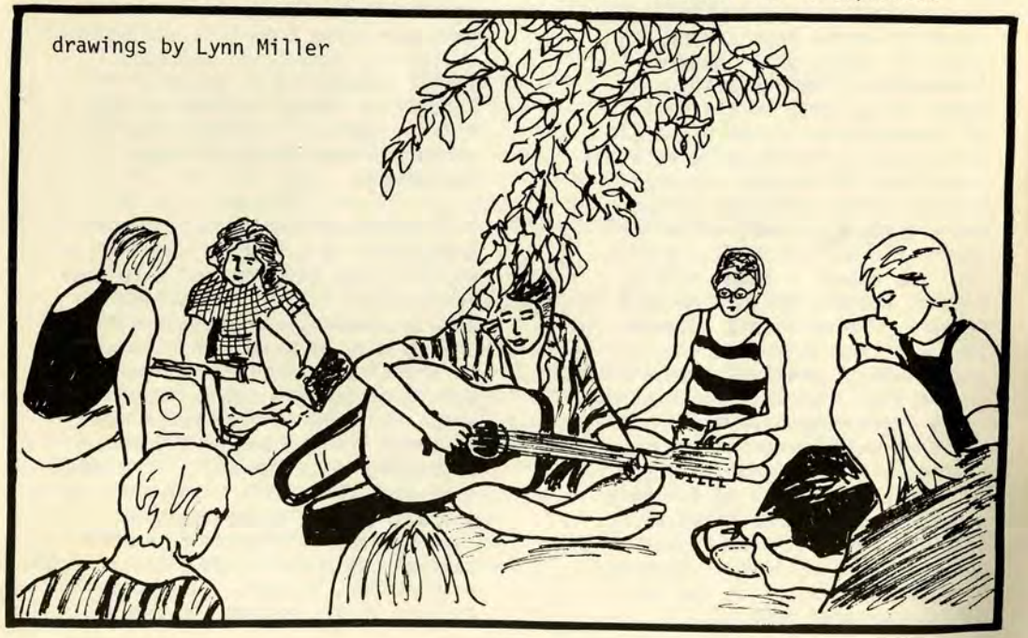
In recent years, partly as a consequence of the various liberation movements and partly as a response to these movements, usage of the word community in specific political contexts has suddenly increased, especially in those discussions focused on political goals and ideologies. Once some sense of shared goals, needs, or desires has developed within a group, it might seem natural to begin to regard that group as a "community." But this impulse moves too quickly on the basis of inadequately tested assumptions and faulty definitions, I suspect; there is a difference between being a member of a sub-culture and a community, and, while one membership may eventually evolve into the other, I think it's a trap to believe that there is a necessary relationship between the two. The differences between sub-cultures and communities derive from the motivations underlying their establishment and the kinds of bonds required for the existence of each type of group. Perhaps a great deal of the pain we experience in our lives as Lesbians can be traced to our too-hasty and optimistic assumption of "community" on the basis of sub-cultural identity.

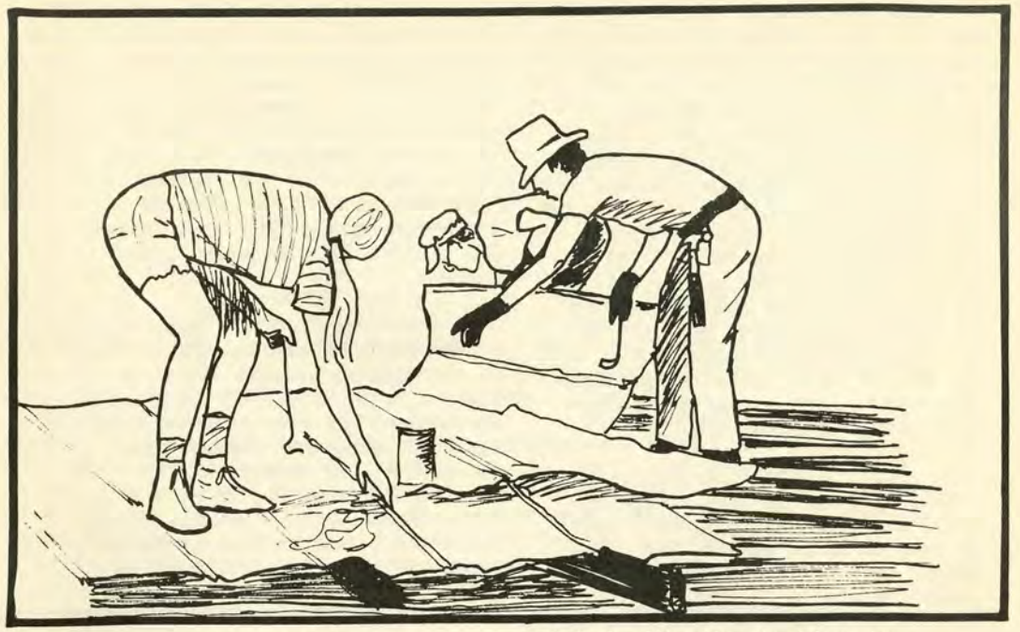
Once a woman has identified herself as a Lesbian, she automatically becomes a member of the Lesbian sub-culture, a group defined as outcast and undesirable by the larger society of heterosexuals. As Lesbians, whether we like it or not, we join a subculture, a group wholly defined in negative terms by an external, hostile culture that sees us as deviates from their "norms".... Any bonding or sense of commonality that may arise from this situation is largely accidental and superficial because it is based on a a negative identification of our being....we are fighting in a group defined for us by those oppressors....

In direct contrast with our membership in a "sub-culture" would be the existence of a Lesbian community. I don't think that we have a community yet, but I will sketch some of what I think would be the distinctive features of such a community, and the ways in which it would differ from a subculture. First, and most important, membership in a community is a voluntary act. One joins a community because she finds companionship, support, and commitment to common ideals within that community. Second, a community, as such, is internally defined by its members on the basis

of shared experiences and common interpretations of events in the real world. One important difference between a sub-culture and a community that makes it difficult to transfer membership in one to membership in the other is the negative base of the sub-cultural identity, an identity that considerably antedates our contemporary impulse toward community. In the Lesbian sub-culture, we have spent much time defining our differences in an effort to effectively work together against our oppressors. A community, on the other hand, is composed of individuals who have many ideas and experiences of our lives that we share. I think we have assumed that we do share certain aspects of our lives, but those assumptions have made it easy for us to neglect explicit definition of exactly what we do share beyond our oppression. The struggle against oppression may create alliances, but it will not automatically establish bonds that will prevail beyond the immediate oppression. A community is a small society in that its members have entered into a "social contract" based on common needs and shared ideals....

Although there are those of us who are disillusioned within the Lesbian movement, I think we find ourselves feeling this way because we assumed that sub-cultural identity would somehow mysteriously evolve into community identity as a result of on-going process. To make oneself vulnerable in a sub-culture is to open oneself up to attack from within that sub-culture, because the tendency among the oppressed seems to be to turn inward in destructive and suicidal rage and maim the nearest available victim: someone who is oppressed





for the same reasons, and therefore defenseless. At this point, I think we are our own "worst enemies," and our movement is being destroyed from within....

I think it would be inaccurate to claim that all Lesbians wish to become members of a larger Lesbian community....The most basic question, of course, is: Do a significant number of us want a community?....Are there reasons for wanting to establish the more or less permanent bonds involved in community? Will the existence of a Lesbian community significantly improve the quality of our lives? Before we respond to these questions with immediate and optimistic yeses, I think we should begin our consideration by examining the ways in which we relate to each other in the present, for a community consists of women relating to each other. How we communicate and deal with other Lesbians becomes an important issue....

From "Old Dyke Ethos" to Ethical Void

The process of developing an ethos is both a result of the urge to community and a necessary means of establishing community. An ethos makes explicit the ways in which women's lives may touch, combine, and rub against each other with the least possible friction....An ethos will not eliminate pain, but it can provide us with a common means of defining and structuring our expectations (of ourselves and others) so that they are consonant with the realities of our lives as we understand them. A useful ethos would give us a way of interpreting and responding to changes in our realities.

As I conceive of my present reality as a Lesbian, my life is in the process of transition from one understanding of the world to another. Behind me is the male-dominated culture from which I am gradually disentangling my conceptual processes; somewhere before me is another culture, as yet undefined and non-existent, with different ways of structuring reality and interpreting events, an evolving way of defining myself and the meaning of my life. At least one part of my process of self-understanding in the future is an analysis and evaluation of my past existence in American patriarchal culture....

....in the past several years, I have observed (and participated in) attacks on Lesbians who relate to each other as couples and monogamous, self-contained units. I now regret having participated in those attacks, because I believe that they were based on a simplistic view of relationships among women, and I offer the following analysis as the result of my own experiences and analysis of those experiences....

Back in the 1950s, the earliest part of my life as a Lesbian, the ideal was to find another woman, fall in love with her, settle down, and live happily ever after.... We borrowed this model from heterosexual society because it was the only model we had....Along with the ideal of "coupledom," we also took the desire for faithfulness to one another (monogamy) and some sort of "marriage," patterned after the structure sanctioned within heterosexual society.

Along with this imitation of heterosexual "bliss" went what I have called "the old dyke ethics," a structured way of relating to other lesbians, both in and out of couples, <u>also</u> borrowed from the larger culture....Lesbian couples have had to struggle against pressures that would destroy the relationship, pressures originating within the Lesbian sub-culture.... and those institutional forces in the heterosexual world that denied the validity of a Lesbian lifestyle....

Briefly stated, the dyke ethos of the 1950s sanctioned the survival of the Lesbian couple, validated their efforts to define themselves in terms of their relationship, encouraged monogamous behavior on the part of the members of the couple, and condemned those Lesbians who trespassed against these sanctions....but we knew where we stood, at least, with respect to defined terms and expectations of ourselves and others....

We have always been in competition with each other in this sub-culture, and we have always been suspicious of each other, but we now have to deal with the reality of an ethical void. That is, we no longer know how to define ourselves in terms of our relationships with each other, and what is a realistic expectation on one day is unrealistic the next....Granted, none of us are given guarantees that are good "for life," but I fear that we will destroy our current movement from within if "bedroom politics" continue to divide us....

Re-examining Couple Relationships

The single, most-cited reason for condemning couple relationships as "unhealthy," "oppressive," and "unliberated" has been the effect on the status and self-concept of the woman involved in a heterosexual couple; that is, most analyses that condemn couples as inherently anti-feminist base their value judgment on what the heterosexual couple has done to the power of women. But this condemnation is based on specious reasoning, which assumes that Lesbian couples are <u>inherently</u> the same as heterosexual couples, and I think this assumption is demonstrably false. It is true that the female/male couple, as defined within the contemporary patriarchy, has enslaved the woman so involved. It is also true that the "femme" partner in Lesbian couples has been, and is, enslaved in exactly the same way, and on the basis of rationalizations that parallel and imitate the dichotomies on which the patriarchal nuclear family is founded....I would like to suggest that patriarchal oppression is <u>not</u> inherent in the couple....

If we can ignore, for a moment, the fact that support input (psychic energy) was unidirectional and required the subordination of women to that function, we can look at the potential of the couple (or any other type of relationship) as a powerful, stabilizing support unit within our own movement. In a small (therefore manageable?) relationship unit, it becomes possible to create lines of support and mutual benefit, so that the members of that unit have a more or less constant source of emotional support that they can fall back on in times of crisis in their lives....

I would maintain that the correspondence cannot go much beyond imitation....Two women who are not performing their "function," nurturing males, will not be validated as productive, "useful" individuals within the system....

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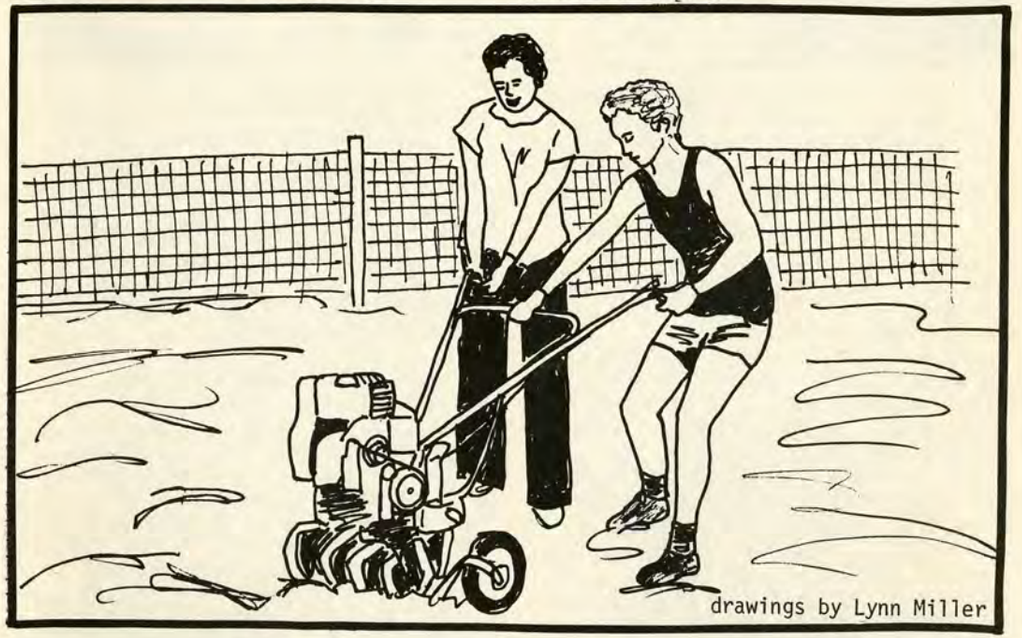


drawings by Lynn Miller

The Second Michigan Wimmin's Music Festival:

amazon culture or just another amerikan consumer event???

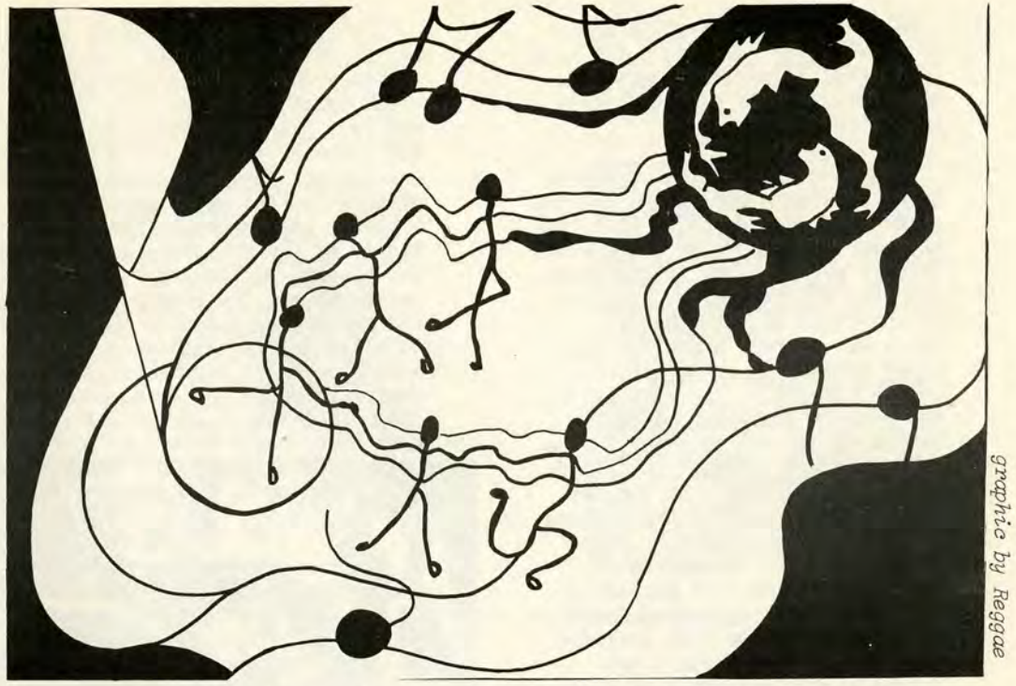
by Valerie

full Luna in Pisces in the Moon of Hazel, an emblem of consecrated wisdom. two friends and i had hitchhiked up from North Carolina for the michigan wimmin's music festival. "who is gonna be there?" people asked us. "Alix Dobkin, Kay Gardner, Margie Adam, Teresa Trull....and thousands of beautiful amazons!" whaddaya mean who's gonna be there? unlike many wimmin, i didn't come for the music. the music was great! but the main reason i came to Hysteria (instead of to illinois) was to spend 4 days with <u>us</u> within the boundaries of a separate wimmin's space. (read: matriarchal nation). so there i was thursday afternoon, gawking at the constant flow of smiling sisters, while visions of the feminist woodstock danced in my head, visions of tribal unity.

well one thing quickly became clear. after digesting the first two hours of tumbled images, it seemed obvious that ours was no easy blanket unity. there was such a mixture of wimmin, so many divergent types! there were smart clothed party dykes, laughing gentle hippie lesbians, tough serious crewcut political activists, shy student couples, wild eyed feathered naked gypsies dressed in scarves and bells and paint and cymbals... advocates of monogamy, non-monogamy, capitalism, socialism, anarchism, spirituality, politics, reformism, revolution, gay liberation, lesbian feminism, separatism...what do <u>all these wimmin</u> have in common? the smile in our eyes, our love for each other, maybe not much more. maybe that's enough. we were together in anarchistic consensual unity, definitely not as <u>one</u> tribe but a gathering of the tribes.

three full moons have grown and waned since then. that communal explosion of energy has dispersed into the glowing fragments we all carried away with us. my friends who shared the experience came home euphoric and elated and i pushed aside my feelings of restless dissatisfaction, intending always tomorrow to write this article. but now the 'We Want the Music Collective' (who produced the festival) has communicated both their financial situation and several problems that arose during the festival to us, and things they say reinforce some of my impressions. so i want to share some of my feelings with the wimmin's community.

one of the biggest problems i had was with the spectator/star split. all the articles i've read about the festival have focused on reviews of the big-name performers, with little or no mention of the many community-inspired workshops and spontaneous events. i feel that these wimmin got too much interest for too little input. most of the "stars" stayed in motels in town, and while i can understand some of



graphic by Reggae

the reasons for this (dreary damp weather could give singers colds, difficulties of doing concert circuits prepared to go camping) it definitely reinforced a sense of their separation from the community. i mean, this wasn't just any old cold and wet and grime! the concentration of women energy transformed the discomfort into a metaphor for what we can survive and come thru smiling, at least for me and wimmin i was with. it didn't seem like the performers shared this experience and consciousness with us. it hurt to once again have the image of the peasants gathering in the muddy hills graced by the brief appearances of our stars...

this is a distortion. i saw Kay Gardner, Alix Dobkin, and Casse Culver around a lot and heard great reports of workshops they held! and there may be similar instances i don't know about. but a generalization, the image i'm presenting is one that i saw and felt clearly but haven't seen communicated yet.

the other side of the spectator/star split was a clear sense of wimmin defining themselves as an audience, as passive spectators waiting to be entertained. people huddled around a lot "waiting for the music to start" or else stayed in pre-existing friendship groups passing the time till performances, the scheduled performances were what everyone was interested in. open mike attracted a fair crowd of dancers and wimmin drifted on and off stage, playing and singing and generally making it impossible to establish a boundary between per-

formers and spectators--we were all just there, great! but i want to generalize again, communicate these broad vague but definitely real impressions...

beyond the physical presence of naked wimmin everywhere and the absence of men, we could have been any amerikan campgound...there was lots of eye contact, friendliness, and free expressiveness, but all on the level of individuals. there was no real organized communal attempt to establish cohesive community. the pervasive party-party atmosphere actually seemed to detract from this. the WWTMC concert information stated, "the political basis of the festival is the creation and affirmation of wimmin's space." that vision was left incomplete on the negative level of excluding men. much more attention could have been given to that positive, creative, and absolutely necessary next step: once we have all wimmin in a space, what do we do with it? what kind of livingspace do we as wimmin create?

on the physcial level this could have meant organizing dwellings in circles around a central space, so wimmin could feel connected with small tight energy circles in the midst of the chaos of the crowds. food could have been shared in these, and late-night campfire singing, whatever. resources could have been more easily pooled: i saw couples in large empty tents and wimmin sleeping on the ground in blankets in the rain. if a definite attempt at community was being made, people might feel more responsible towards each other's needs.

on a social level these groups or tribal circles could have provided intimate contact with strangers, concrete emotional support for wimmin who felt alone or unable to deal with the crowd as a mass, and a place to air and discuss feelings about what was going on at the whole event. specific problems that arose in the larger community of the festival--such as wimmin not signing up for security work during performances, and wimmin who signed up not showing up for work in many areas thus leaving the available wimmin to work long extra hours--could have been discussed daily in these subcommunities. a sense of accountability to each other could have been developed and supported along with a sense of participation in a loving caring tribal family.

if we are ever to get beyond naive idealism, we must recognize the depth of our conditioning as amerikans in a society which is not only partiarchal/capitalist but also individualistic and consumer-oriented. we must recognize that eliminating men (however permanently) won't automatically give us amazon nation. we must break the mindsets of passivity and isolation as "consumers" and "individuals" and actively experiment with creating new social forms. sitting back expecting the "good vibes" to be enough isn't enough. amerikans have always been great at that kind of good leisurely fun. do we want to be more than that? it not, we should shut up about amazon nation. if we do, we should start thinking about it and developing concrete alternatives!

i suggest that at future festivals as much preliminary attention and care should be given to developing possible community structures as to getting big name performers.

i think we can do this without reverting to the structuredness of girl scout camp. communicate plans with wimmin who'll attend, and have a few experienced community organizers around to get things rolling!

earlier i mentioned visions of a feminist woodstock. this vision could also become a nightmare, this year's festival was larger than last year's - as the movement becomes more widespread, will the crowds proportionally increase? it was nice to see so many sisters but many of us felt burnt out on the crowds. camping was pretty packed, and men had to come in to clean the

graphic by Reggae

OR JUST ANOTHER AMERIKAN CONSUMER EVENT?

toilets. (please sisters! when you use the woods, make like a cat! it's probably still dangerous to walk out there!) personally i might go back to a National Festival again. the psychology of a "mass event" tends to intimidate people and thwart a sense of cohesive community. i wonder: why can't there be similar regional festivals?

the advantages to this seem obvious. it would spread the workload around. at smaller festivals communal intimacy could grow more easily. connections made could be followed up on by wimmin who live and work in the same area. less known local artists could get exposure (money). travel distances and expenses could be cut. the hardcore wimmin who want to meet everybody could go to more than one a year. and it would lessen the risk of developing the whole psychology of centralized mass spectator/star events within one of the most potentially creative and freeing experiences of our culture.

another issue is that of money - WWTMC communicated that most wimmin got in for free or reduced rates. so did i. i wasn't earning money at that time, but now i question myself and other wimmin: are we really that bad off? do we take out our hostility at having to support landlords, supermarkets, and the U.S. Government by refusing to support our own? i wonder if at smaller regional festivals wimmin would feel more of a connection with the wimmin doing the work and would be willing and wanting to put more of ourselves into it, socially, creatively, and materially.

i've criticized the festival so much because the dream we whisper and shout to create is one that's so dear to me and i hate to see us falling short by making predictable mistakes! but the festival was also a very euphoric healing place to be. specific images remain clear in my mind: laughing naked wimmin who trans-

continued on p. 59

photo by Carol Spears

enclave

we need a safe place.
flesh fervid and loose
has the most to lose.
under bright light these shudders
could be any confession.

I've scarcely been
in a sheltered region.
peace is a gloss for wars.
I live jarred by alarms
jumping out of my skin.

it's only a month since I
knocked my first nail in
or pulled a tent straight on poles.
skittish to dream
of stillness - let alone build.

but that I want
to turn and live in space
to furbish and enfold
staggers me
from my darkest hold.

--Monica Raymond

Fear in Fayetteville

By Minnie Bruce Pratt

I just got through mopping my floor because I was afraid; rather than sit on my green couch and shake, I used my adrenlin and anger to clean up.

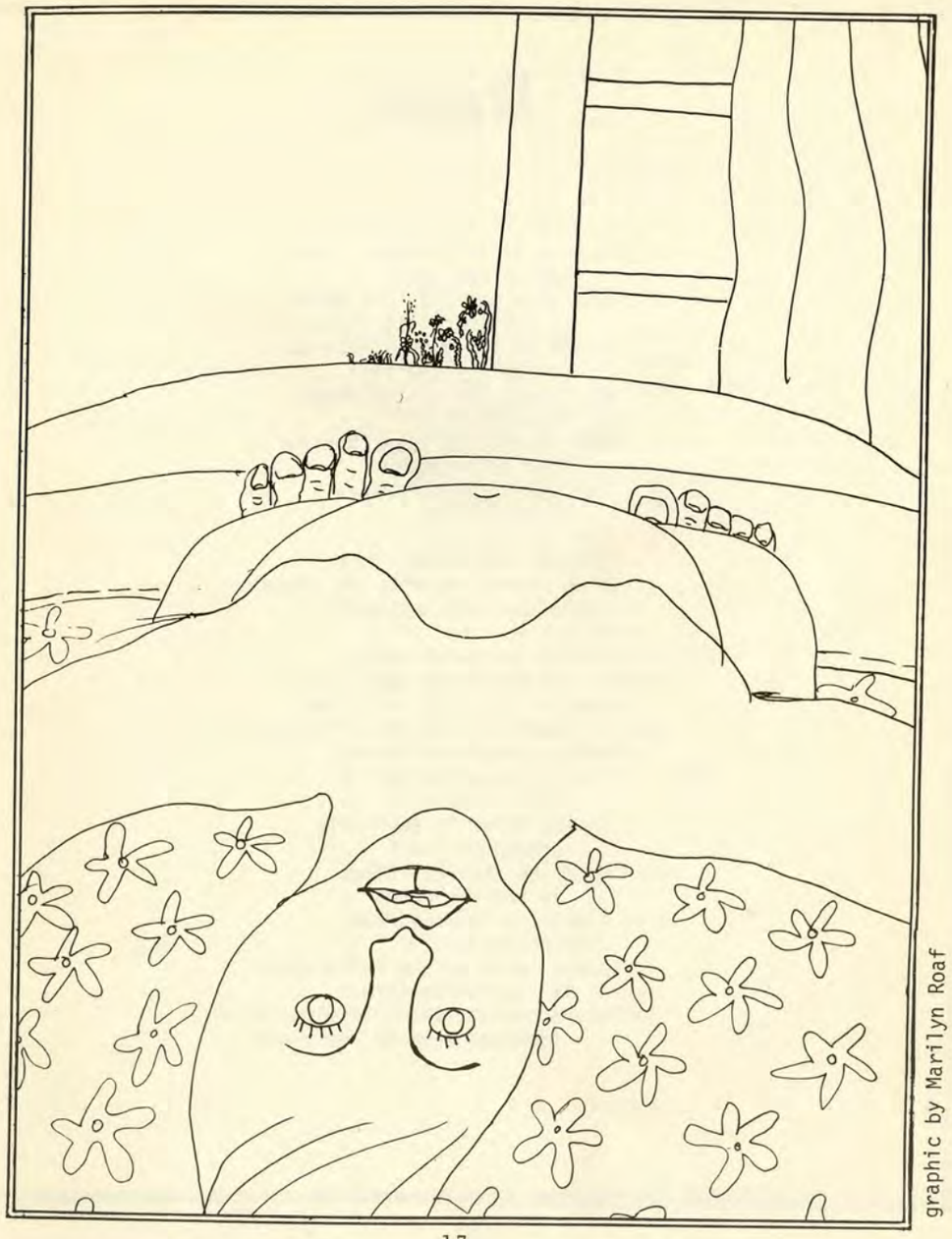
I was afraid because a woman friend's life had been threatened. She is involved with another friend, a woman. The husband had found out and begun the inevitable melodrama of threat and intimidation; his variant was a combination of carbombing and names being turned in to employers.

Over the last three years in Fayetteville I have gotten quite used to a stomach convulsed with fear. When I lived in Hillsborough I was calmly rural, and I was calmly academic in Chapel Hill. I was a feminist; I knew vaguely what women suffered, as we all do, since we have all experienced the sidewalk name-calling, the poor pay, the condescending male employer or teacher or husband. When I moved to Fayetteville, I understood that women were second-class citizens. Living here, I now understand that in our life women aren't merely unequal to men; we are hated, we are hunted by men. We are the enemy; the smokescreen of male liberal views shouldn't blind us to the war going on.

Living in this town, we are all afraid in some way. Often when I express this fear to other women, they say I am paranoid. I feel that they are denying the fearful reality of every woman's existence and denying our bravery in continuing to live.

Here some of us are afraid of harassment and prison. A Lesbian friend who is in the military points out impatiently that she doesn't fear a dishonorable discharge just because of the loss of education and job benefits. She fears the surveillance of the CID, who take pictures at the local bar; she fears the recurring purges, like the one that got fifty women at Bragg last year; she fears the solitary confinement used by the Military Police to procure confessions.

Some of us are afraid for our lives here. A married friend who works on our Battered Women Taskforce wants us to hurry up and get our refuge established. Her husband has written of his early return in April from Korea and "I may need a place to go," she says. One of my students comes to me after class for legal advice; her enraged boyfriend has burned all of her clothes in her front yard. I open the Observer and read that a woman driving her car down Pamalee Drive was pursued by her husband in his truck. He forces her off the road; she runs into the woods; he follows and shoots her repeatedly and kills her. He drives off and is never arrested.



graphic by Marilyn Roaf

Rape

At four in the morning I hear
her scream again.
This time he holds the knife
to her throat in the park
behind my house where leaves
darken for the fall.
She offers thirty-two cents.
He wants all.
When the police come they don't
find no screaming
lady search the creepers
at next light
find no body left
but the corpse
of my fear clutching the phone
on the desk and wait

for her to scream again
at ten in the morning
down by the creek it's Sue
taken fishing by her grand-
father, raped and hooked
by him with pain

in the fall, in the early
afternoon
watching the bees bloom
in the sasanquas
I hear my lover scream
in Kansas City
where he holds the knife close
to her white throat
where she fights while blood drips
from her ears to the floor

behind a barracks door
slammed in Germany
Sue hesitates to scream,
to create a stir,
a racist scene over the black
GI beating
off his load of rage
in her

final report of the day
I hear Beth
typing the women who've sat
in her office, their lives
bleeding from the mouth, their sides
swollen with incest,
they slide into the metal
file drawers
while Beth feels them murmur and cry
in the cabinet of her heart

Mesia measures the red
for Holofernes'
head and paints revenge
for her rape and death,
paints Judith alive with the knife
in the shadows of midnight.

I wake to my lover's scream
this time in my arms
he holds the knife to her throat.
Her scars bleed.
I think of Holofernes'
bleeding head.
I hold a knife to his throat.
I hold her.
We watch the dark night pass.
The door is locked.
We hear the step. He holds
the knife to her throat.
I hold her scarred. I hold
her in my arms.

by Minnie Bruce

We are all afraid of rape. A friend in NOW is told in a casual conversation by a military woman, "I was raped my first week at Bragg by my commanding officer." Another friend returns home from evening rehearsal; when she goes upstairs to change clothes, she is raped and beaten by a teenage boy who had climbed in a dormer window. As I begin to know women in town, one by one they tell me their story of rape by grandfather, father, date, husband.

I am afraid to live alone among these men. I am afraid to go many places. When I drive on Bragg Boulevard at night I never stop directly beside a car at a traffic light; another friend was shot twice one evening near Lib's Place. I'm afraid sometimes to talk openly on the phone, since the line clicks with suspicious regularity. Often I am afraid to speak frankly at school since I do need the job.

And I need other women in this town. We need each other, though what we give to each other is often limited by our fear of scorn, threats, economic and physical reprisals from men, when we want to work with and be with other women.

In Fayetteville, with the Mafia, the John Bircher Republicans, the Army, the good old Democrats, few men bother to camouflage their woman-hating and so we see them keep us in line with that most quick and effective method, physical force. We understand the prison of our own inner doubts, yet all my effort to develop a confidence in my womanly strength can be checked rather abruptly if a man holds a knife to my throat.

I need other women in this town: to talk to so I won't think I am the only one and therefore crazy, to work with on projects so those of us still in our various prisons have somewhere to go, to love so that my fury doesn't explode me like a grenade.

There seem to be so few of us even out on work-release from men that I'm not so careful about passwords, about who is feminist, or lesbian, or socialist, or Democrat. I do look for the women who want to work. I do notice many differences in what we want to work on together and I do see our differences dividing us into black women, working class women, professional women, on and on.

It is important for each group of us to have solidarity and clarity about our unique needs, particularly lesbians, since we often seem most hated and most sought for the hunt, perhaps most dangerous in that our freedom offers escape to other women and most vulnerable to fear in our hiding. However, in any of our groups I see only a momentary and doubtful trust; even in our need, we are divided from each other by powerful forces. In Fayetteville, there is no united women's community, or lesbian community, because we are all afraid, of losing male tolerance, of incurring male violence. It is dangerous to love women since once men see us break for that freedom, they re-double their efforts to humiliate and divide us. We are beginning to trust each other as women for some help when there is danger and pain---not only the sneer

on the street corner, but the blow that breaks your jaw, the agony of children lost, the desperation of no money and no food. What aid we give each other still seems small when we see every day the many deaths we go to.

photo by Lynn Miller

Ode To A Long Lost Love

(or: They Asked Me to Write About Community-
But All I Can Do Is Cry.)

Community?
What Community?
I see no community, I feel no community,
except that of duke
(and what is duke
but a stopping point in my life?)

What is a community anyhow?
--a group of people?
Well, I've seen these groups,
but take no comfort in them;
they haven't seen me.

Who brings me comfort
When I know not a soul
With whom to share and communicate?
Where is the community for me, anyhow?
In all of the regular places
I'm called an outsider.
I've met many people
but know none.
I'm an incidental in the lives
of those around me;
I haven't shared long years with them.

Is it thus with all new ones:

The friends within my mind are fading;
I no longer take much comfort in myself.
And Boston is so far away.

Carol Mortimer 2/3/78

Note: "Vision," by Joy Justice, was first printed in Sinister Wisdom, Fall 1977. The author writes, "Vision is by definition 'away,' up ahead somewhere. At the same time it is within the visionary." In the following excerpt from "Vision," Joy Justice explores the tension between herself as an individual and herself as a member of a community.

From "Vision"

by Joy Justice Charlotte, N.C.

To me lesbian separatism has always meant radical feminism without the "buts." I see two basic perspectives on the roots of sexism. There is the perspective that men oppress women. And there is the perspective that people are people, and we are all hurt by rigid sex roles.

The most uncompromisingly thorough development of the first perspective is separatism. Separatism elaborates the idea that men oppress women and adds that:

--The institutions of society are created and defined by men so that relating to them is the same as relating to men.

--Heterosexual women identify with men, and therefore act as their representatives when relating to other women.

--Lesbian-identified-lesbians are more free of male society than anyone else.

--The values of society (aptly named in CLIT Statement Two, "pricks in the head"), such as competitiveness, "objectivity," self-sacrifice and hierarchy, have affected us all, and we need to understand and try to change these values in ourselves.

--Male-created divisions along class and race lines are present in relationships between lesbians and we need to work on ending the oppressive relationships among ourselves as well as in society.

The second perspective is harder to be specific about because its main characteristic is mushiness. I think it could be called humanism. Its proponents rely heavily on the word "love" and a sort of amorphous-warm-glow attitude towards life in general. They do not want anyone to be angry about anything. They say things like, "men are people too." This perspective is the generator of the "buts." "Men oppress women, but I know this one good man."

After Harriet and I failed to find any security in what we gave each other besides the sharing of the vision, we became lovers with Catherine and Claire respectively. The four of us along with three other lesbians, Penny, Anne, and Mandy, started meeting to talk about CLIT Statement Two, which we had all read and liked. In the process of talking we became separatists. Our name grew to be Drastic Dykes.

We did not become separatists because we wanted to separate ourselves from the world. In fact, for the first five or six months that Drastic Dykes met, we met at the Women's Center, and were individually still very much involved with the straight women at the Center. We became separatists because we felt the need to express what we thought and how we felt strongly. We needed to free ourselves of toning down everything we said so as not to threaten anybody. We needed to clear the mush from our minds, to get the "buts" out of our lives, and to stop shrouding our words in cotton. We gave each other permission to do this, and support to take the consequences. The consequences were immense.

Two words seem to come up most often when non-separatists are talking about separatism: "anger" and "isolation." "You can't be so angry. You will only isolate yourselves." Well, it is not true that you can't be so angry. You most definitely can. But it is true that if you are so angry you will be isolated.

(The fear that oppressed people have of their own anger is phenomenal; it puts me in mind of early Christians under the rule of Rome. You won't catch the president of the Board of Directors of General Motors sitting around worrying about being angry. He doesn't have to be angry. He has power. Now I admit that getting stuck in anger can be demoralizing. But it is possible to get *through* it to the other side, and the world looks much clearer, and makes much more sense from there. Besides, if you are angry, then you are angry, and you're much better off facing it.)

As I said, we did not become separatists with the goal of separating. But isolation was the ultimate result. The process went something like this: at the Women's Center we began to express what we thought and felt. Part of what we expressed was anger. When straight women and other lesbians were frightened and angry with us because of what we thought and how we expressed what we thought, we became *more* angry, until finally there were no straight women coming to the Center. We were left with the choice of continuing to run a women's center for women who would not come to meetings because we were there, or leaving. We left. At the time Drastic Dykes left the Women's Center I still did not expect to become isolated. I hoped in my heart of hearts that the other women would come running after us, yelling, "Wait! Come back! You were right!" That did not happen. There were other losses too. Catherine quit her university teaching job. Anne and Penny dropped out of school. Claire and Mandy changed relations with friends and lovers. We made our choices and paid our prices. It was o.k. because the choices we made were truly what we needed to do.

For me, being a separatist felt like leaping *beyond* "the boundary," and living outside of patriarchal society. I know that technically it is not possible to do that. I mean, yes, I did still work for male bosses and stuff like that. But emotionally it is possible to live outside of patriarchal society now. Possible, but very hard. The physical sensation I associate with that period of isolation is that of being in a

void and a pressure cooker at the same time.

Once I felt that I was living beyond the boundary, the vision began to fade. It began to fade because as much as I could envision I was living in my daily life; the vision was no longer "away." And it began to fade because I had no movement anymore. The women I knew who had composed it were telling me very emphatically that they did not want any part of my movement. They told me to my face at the Women's Center and at conferences, and they told me in print in women's and lesbian papers. Following the vision as best I could led to the end of the vision.

I think it is very important that non-separatists writing about separatism make an effort to do so with much more thoughtfulness and respect than they have in the past couple of years. For the most part non-separatist comments on separatism have amounted to nothing more than name-calling. Because separatism has been so important to me, I need to hear more than, "separatists are so angry, mean, and isolated." I need to know what lesbians think about the theory and analysis of separatism, which still seem to me accurate as a way to understand the world.

I suspect that behind most of the anger towards separatists are specific situations in which the angry writer did not want to do something that specific separatists wanted her to do. If that is the case, I want to hear about the specific situation as well as the conclusions the writer has made from the situation.

To get the ball rolling, I will tell you this, I stopped being a separatist over a nightmarish period of months last fall and winter because to continue meant I would have to do things that I did not want to do. (Remember, I am still operating on the unsaintly premise of doing what I want to do.)

I would have had to stop being friends with a man who had been my friend for over seven years.

I would have had to feel guilty about being close to my sister, who was straight at the time.

I would have had to relate to everyone in the world on the basis of which box they belonged in - straight; straight lesbian; says some good things so she may be a potential separatist; etc.

I would have had to be vulnerable to a lesbian who hated me because I am middle-class and she is working class.

I would have had to be willing to sit around and seriously discuss whether or not I would kill my father if it were necessary for the overthrow of the patriarchy.

I was not willing to do any of these things, and other separatists wanted me to. (You may wonder how I managed to be a separatist for two years with such un-separatist elements in my life. But I thought I was, so as far as I'm concerned, I was.) By telling what happened I want to leave each reader free to draw her own conclusions.

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photo by Lynn Miller

Notes Toward a History

In the collective statement at the beginning of this issue, Mab commented on our feeling that we need a history (really many histories) of our community. By this we don't mean traditional history, which would simply set down in one linear sequence the "significant" events of our past. But we do mean that we need to "preserve our process," to remember our individual and collective pasts, to reflect not only on events which have occurred but on what we have thought and felt at different times.

Our local lesbian feminist community is nearly ten years old. However, what most of us know of our community's early years is incomplete and impressionistic. It has come to us through an oral tradition which gradually grows weaker - putting us in danger of losing a part of our history.

What follow here are some notes toward a history. They are certainly incomplete and impressionistic, because those of us who compiled them were not in this community ten years ago, or even five years ago. Furthermore, they resemble a simple chronology of events. But they are meant to start us thinking about our histories in terms beyond chronology. We hope they will make us remember and write about what we've forgotten - and that women who know more about our past will fill in the gaps and correct the inaccuracies. We also hope these notes will make us ask questions. For instance, what has been the nature of the interplay between our personal lives and events in the women's movement and the gay movement - locally and nationally? What were we thinking and feeling at the times we came out? And what was going on around us? This is only one of many lines of questioning.

Our local lesbian feminist community seems to have its roots in (1) the women's movement of the late '60's and (2) the gay movement of the early '70's. Originally these were very separate roots. We might argue about the relative importance of each; but the women's movement was at the time stronger locally and probably more important. Both, however, resulted in groups and organizations - some short-lived, some still in existence.

The Women's Movement. In both Chapel Hill and Durham the early women's movement produced consciousness raising groups, out of which significant, long-term, political and task-oriented groups developed. For example, Womancraft (a collectively run outlet for woman-made crafts) and Lollipop Power (a small press publishing non-sexist children's books), both located in Chapel Hill-Carrboro, grew out of CR groups. Other local groups to which the early women's movement gave rise were the Women's Health and Pregnancy Counseling Service of Chapel Hill, the Chapel Hill Rape Crisis Center (the oldest rape crisis center in North Carolina), the Durham Women's Health Coop, the Women's Center of Durham, and the Durham Women's Radio Collective. Most of these groups remain in existence - though they suffer for lack of support.

The early women's movement, however, has been important not only in that it fostered these groups, whose concrete accomplishments we can see, but also in that it helped individual women gain the understanding and the courage to be themselves - and to be political. It is certainly significant that a number of local women who later defined themselves as lesbians participated in early CR groups.

Feminary, too, grew out of the women's movement in Chapel Hill. From 1969 until 1973 the *Feminist Newsletter*, as it was called then, was largely an irregular publication. At the beginning of 1973 the collective began putting out the biweekly newsletter which ran until the end of 1976, when we decided to change to our present format. (The name remained *Feminist Newsletter* until the fall of 1974, when it became *A Feminary* after the reference to "feminaries" in Monique Wittig's *Les Guerrières*. *A Feminary* was inevitably shortened to *Feminary*.)

The issues which concerned the original collective members paralleled to some extent those that concerned the national women's movement - birth control, abortion rights, child care, job discrimination. And local women wrote in *Feminist Newsletter* about their experiences as wives, mothers, girl friends, and employees; they also wrote about personal feelings and conflicts and about their evolving feminist visions. But it was only gradually and with trepidation that the *Newsletter* approached the issue of lesbianism. Early in 1973, some time after most of the collective members had come to define themselves as lesbian feminists, the *Newsletter* for the first time announced a "gay women's" event. Then in March 1974 three collective members edited a thematic issue on lesbianism, explaining in their editorial statement that they were lesbian faminists. It was a big step for the *Feminist Newsletter*, one which needs more reflection and analysis than we've yet given it.

Chapel Hill and Durham. From their beginnings until about 1973, the women's groups in Chapel Hill and Durham grew independently and did not know much about one another. Then in the summer of 1973 a group composed of women from both Chapel Hill and Durham worked together on the compilation of *Whole Women Catalogue*, a resource book for women in North Carolina. From that time forward there has been more interaction among groups and individual women in Chapel Hill and Durham. Gradually, however, in spite of the fact that groups were generally no more or less political in one than in the other, Durham

feminists came to be viewed as more political, or more radical - or something. This perception has continued and has been the source of some misunderstanding and bad feeling. Now may be a good time to ask ourselves whether this perception was a true one originally, what it was based on (did it have anything to do with images of lesbian and non-lesbian? with particular friendship groups?), and how it has been perpetuated. Now may also be a good time to ask what was happening in Raleigh during the early years of the women's movement. Communication between groups in Raleigh and in Durham/Chapel Hill has never been very good. Has geography been the only reason for this?

The Gay Movement. In the early '70's the only local gay organization (there were bars, of course) was the Duke Gay Alliance, which predated the Carolina Gay Association by several years. It was from the DGA that a small group of women withdrew, calling themselves the Lesbian Rap Group. Their withdrawal was in part a negative reaction to the way the gay men related to one another (largely just sexual) and in part a positive need for a separate space in which lesbians could discuss the issues affecting our lives (which the men did not seem to understand).

TALF. In 1974 the Lesbian Rap Group changed their name to Triangle Area Lesbian Feminists (TALF) and began a months-long process of working out their politics and discussing the purpose and priorities of the group - whether TALF was to be a radical political group, a support group, a social group, or all of these. This discussion continued on and off for about a year and then was suspended in frustration and irresolution. Yet TALF itself has survived and has returned from time to time, though without much success, to the questions of purpose and priorities.

1975 on. 1975 was an eventful year and one which had a radicalizing effect on a number of women in our community. Early that spring a group of local women went to Atlanta to attend the Great Southeastern Lesbian Conference. While they were there, five of them were arrested in a restaurant by an off duty policeman, who intervened in an argument they were having with the cashier (male) about their bill. The policeman said they were creating a disturbance; but it was obvious to them that he arrested them because he had concluded, from their dress and conversation, that they were lesbians. Their sense of oppression had never been quite so immediate as it was then.

Two other events which occurred that spring and summer brought home to these women and to others the knowledge of the oppression which Black women, poor women, and prisoners experience. One was the violent reprisal suffered by the prisoners who demonstrated against conditions at Women's Prison in Raleigh; the other was the trial of Joan Little. Meanwhile, a feminist "theory group," made up largely of Durham women, had been meeting; and that same summer several of these women

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A year ago the political disucssion group of TALF compiled these questions to facilitate a workshop on lesbian community at last year's Southeastern Gay Conference. We reprint them here, because they are part of our process of thinking about community.

What lesbian groups exist within our communities?

How and why do groups within a community come into existence?
- How do friendship groups start?
- Is there a relationship between friendship and shared politics?
- How are groups sustained?

What personal needs are met by groups? In what ways is a community like a family or small town?

How do we perceive that groups within a community are different?
- Are groups as separate as we think they are?
- Do we sterotype each other (jocks, bar dykes, politicos, career lesbians, country dykes, spiritualists, separatists, etc.)?

How does someone become a member of a community?
- What opportunities for relating do we provide (bars, lovers, parties, friendship groups, political groups, events, projects, etc.)?
- What qualities and behavior do we respect in each other and reinforce in the community?
- Who's popular?
- What characteristics do we find attractive (types of work, clothing, sexuality, eating habits, living conditions, etc.)?

Do we relate differently to friends and community after coming out?
- Did the definition and qualities of community change?
- What have been the influences of the women's and gay movements?

How do communities differ because of physical locality (town, city, country, college town, etc.)?

The following two essays were taken from past issues of Feminary. Although both were written several years ago, we feel they are relevant to this issue and also that they put us in touch with our own (Feminary's) sense of history and community.

I am setting the table for tonight's dinner, a casserole and salad which I have prepared for the 3 of us who make this our home. One of my friends will be back soon, tired from her long day at work; the other is reading in her bedroom, happy to have spent the New Year's holiday out walking all day. I want this meal to be a pleasant one, as we begin a new year together, and so I put on the table the special peppermint kerosene lamp and the purple cloth napkins. We recognize these as elegant and valuable touches, which bear repeating, from our separate but common pasts.

This setting leads me to a series of questions which I am beginning to keep in my consciousness at all times--they are guides to what I expect of myself. What do we need? What do we value? What are our priorities? Which perceptions, patterns and interactions fit our needs and desires? Which former decisions and identities continue to fulfill us?

I am out on the streets today, getting some errands done along Franklin St. and watching the crowds. I notice many women my age with men, couples who already have that lookalike appearance common in older partners. I think about the gratification of finding someone with whom you can identify, the security of finding yourself in another. I see that some men are able to make the outward change toward apparently androgynous twosomes with their women--these men whom women refer to as "special"--and that this minor adaptation allows women not to come together with each other, not to find ourselves in each other. I am warily conscious of the ease with which women become attached to these men in whom they find themselves, the ease with which so many women separate themselves from the politics of women together. It is an insidious way our culture insists that women who, in a feminist context, choose each other as primary friends are thereby perversely and pervertedly choosing to step outside what is societally approved.

Whether we consciously recognize this conditioning or not, it operates very strongly in the decisions we make daily regarding with whom we spend time, exchange energy--to whom we commit ourselves. Our politics need to recognize how this pervasive custom works against our organizing with and for ourselves as women; we need to know how to make real and possible, for all women who will listen, the steadiness and potential of our lives together. *continued on p. 61*

I had an idea for an article. It emerged from the basic conflict in my life, a conflict between me - a woman with a past, with individual values and goals, with deeply embedded hopes still unattained, and me - an evolving feminist, still struggling to shed the cocoon of the past, still having only buds for wings, still incapable of flight. I had an idea to write an article about how it feels to break through that cocoon. I wanted to tell of the freedom in that first flight. I wanted to tell why we must shed the past to save any hope that there may be a future. I wanted to write the simple answer that makes a woman strong enough to not have to look back.

But there is no simple answer. To shed the past - to give up the old ways, the old dreams, the old loves - is nothing like shedding a cocoon. I am not wrapped in my past like a mummy is wrapped in cloth. Years cannot be unwound and thrown away. I cannot burn my past and rise phoenix-like from the ashes. My past is why my present is. My past is why my present is. The past is the fuel upon which my evolving consciousness burns. I look back in shame, in fear, in bitterness and anger; but sometimes still in longing. I wanted to write an article that would erase that longing. But now I see I cannot live without it. If I refuse to recognize the past's reality, I lose the fuel to keep evolving.

If we deny the past, cut it away without mercy, then we amputate a part of what we are, and may cripple fatally the revolution. If the past is nothing, it can be replaced with anything. A revolution based on "anything" is doomed to failure. Rejection of the past is not enough, and not to be indulged in thoughtlessly despite the urge to dump it like a burden from our backs. The past is a foundation not to leap from with untried wings, but to step from with great care. And there must be a present to grasp, to hold onto, as we make that step. That present is us, that present is each other. This is why support is so important and why we must be responsible for the well-being of each other. Because we each slipped through the patriarchal grasp in different ways at different times, because we each must struggle individually with the memory of what came before, because we each are different in ways that often lead to conflict; it is difficult to remember that our responsibility to each other in the present is just as important as our responsibility to our vision of the future. Unless we offer a present to each other, we will never share a future.

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THESE BLANK PAGES REPRESENT SILENCES, THE PAINFUL THINGS THAT PEOPLE COULD NOT WRITE DOWN. WE PUT THEM HERE TO REMIND OURSELVES AND OUR READERS THAT THIS ACCOUNT OF COMMUNITY IS INCOMPLETE.

A Mental Health Perspective on the Lesbian Community

by Mindy and Maureen

From our perspective as mental health workers in a Triangle Area facility where some of the clients seeking services are gay or bisexual women, we are offering our observations of what are to those clients important issues on the topic of lesbian community.

Gay and bisexual women who seek counseling take this measure for a variety of reasons that seem at the same time to be both personal and political. For some, environmental pressures are often more crucial than internal conflict, and for almost all, the nature of their relationship with the lesbian community is an important concern.

Some gay and bisexual women come to counseling with none but extremely positive feelings about themselves and favorable experiences as lesbians in their environment. Others, however, especially lesbians over 25, are suffering in varying degrees from the effects of psychologically damaging experiences as a result of living in a homophobic society. Some of these women did not have a chance to express their sexual attraction to other women; instead, they entered into psychologically forced heterosexual unions. Often, for these women, the presence of ex-husbands and children still remains a cause of conflict and ambivalence. Some women who are in academic life fear loss of parental funding, or loss of academic scholarships or teaching assistantships or departmental status. Some women fear vindictive ex-husbands or hostile children, who threaten to expose them publicly to employers or landlords/ladies. Some have undergone the loss of former "friends" who couldn't deal honestly or rationally with their feelings about lesbianism. And many fear vengeful parents who continually attempt coercive and manipulative techniques and guilt-trip devices (freaking out, getting sick, bringing up religion, tearing up letters, intercepting phone calls, forcibly separating daughters from female lovers, sending daughters "away" to school, calling up employers and professors to expose their daughter's lesbianism,) in a futile effort to mold their children in their own image.

These experiences totaled can create feelings of alienation and cumulative stress which, if ordinary avenues of expression of passionate love, intense hurt, and justified rage have been blocked, can make it that much harder for a lesbian to connect with a community of gay women.

What happens when a woman tentatively approaches this nebulous "lesbian community" for the first time is that she is often unsure of both herself and the community members. Often, her choices are not yet clearly developed, and her ambivalence may make both herself and others feel uncomfortable. It is not unusual to find women whose period of isolation and non-support has been so pervasive that neither the Women's movement nor the Gay movement has made any appreciable impact upon her life. Having received no input from these sources, she may feel much more conflict than other lesbians who have had opportunities and reinforcements to come to terms with themselves and who, therefore, may find it frustrating to relate to her. She may want desperately to communicate her inner struggles freely and openly in the lesbian community. But she may be inhibited because she fears that to share feelings or viewpoints which would be judged unacceptable or labeled "politically incorrect" would be to risk loss of "admittance permission" into the visible lesbian community. She may fear being tacitly frozen out at social and political functions--activities that, for her, may provide the only environment where even minimal contact has been established.

Women who report subtle rejection experiences in the lesbian community are often in predictable situations. Many are bisexual, or living with their children, or living with male housemates, or living a monogamous life style, or avoiding political visibility, or dressing in a style conventionally termed "feminine". Many are women over 40, or women who are physically handicapped. Some of these women have not experienced rejection at all but have found welcome acceptance as individuals. Ultimately, one cannot make generalizations about <u>any</u> community, including the lesbian community; diversity of political opinion, cultural and ethnic background, economic status, and choice of life style make generalizations impossible and undesirable. In fact, any community overly dependent on a thread of commonality such as lesbianism or oppression will overlook individual difference and political fragmentation to its own eventual detriment.

Gay and bisexual women who come to the counseling setting want the professional skills of trained personnel not available elsewhere. They want an accepting atmosphere where they can explore their sexual preference, build strengths to deal with their oppression in society, and, where applicable, find help with couple-relationship conflicts. Most importantly, they want an assurance that the counseling experience of open sharing will not be for them an isolated or singular experience. They look to the lesbian community for a forum to provide a conscious emphasis on knowing one another personally and emotionally as well as politically and intellectually. It seems vital to the continuing mental health of gay women that the lesbian community provide such a space--whether in the form of a rap group or planned weekly activity program--somewhere in its overall structure, in order to facilitate continuous contact among lesbians of diverse perspectives.

Community and the Big Mac

by Leslie

However the dictionary defines "community," I think of it in our case as synonymous with an immigrant neighborhood. Strangers in a strange land but diverse among ourselves, we are from different places, and we've arrived at different times. Some of us have made it in America, while some espouse the necessity of our own culture; to each other we look very different, but the rest of the world claims that it's easy to spot our sort.

Most of us lend a sharp ear to news of each other, especially news of romance or of success...("Why sure she's a dyke--they say she goes to gay bars all the time.") To some of us a "sellout" is instant shame; to others, shame is shorn heads or moon rituals. That bit of vulnerability to each other tells us that we're related.

It's as though we've had greatness thrust upon us. Since opportunities are not freely available to our kind, and since some of our happinesses are just what supposedly disgust or, anyway, baffle the majority of the world; we're an oppressed people. Apparently that's why even the most individualistic among us reacts to word of a "member" more than she would to the opinion of an ordinary person of any other category. Along with (in spite of? because of?) being an oppressed people, many of us consider ourselves a chosen people, better than the oppressors. Then, finding a certain woman among us offensive, most of us will be as catty as male propaganda calls females, yet if this same person is in trouble, we'll probably help her before we would an anonymous "outsider" against whom we bear no grudges...and then feel confused, maybe feel like suckers. We know that we're not purely a self-defined group, that our oppressors have classed us together as much as we've sought out each other.

Bonding us at least as much as our interest and caring for each other is the habit, sport, and science of woman-hating. A folktale told by black slaves in America illustrates the comparative security offered by a community with loyalties to its people. The story portrays a crackerjack whip wielder who could, with a single stroke of the whip, hunt down and tear into smithereens a butterfly or even a bumblebee. Asked to knock down a hornets' nest, the hero refused, because hornets are <u>organized.</u>

Feeling part of the other groups (co-workers at the workplace, cultural origin or interest groups, etc.) can sometimes be as satisfying as unity with a female identified community.

Mellowing, smiling at eccentricities that used to be scorned self-indulgences, seems to grow over time. Also, as in other "ethnic" communities, a kind of intermarrying of clans yields a cross-fertilization of attitudes; the activist can't resist the pool shark, and the professional woman falls in love with the Olivia woman; they all change or maybe just look at and act upon forgotten sides of themselves. Romance is not the only avenue of exchange; sharing a hobby or sport also does it. Thus mellowing occurs as we depend less on every one of us to be everything to us. This is macro-non-monogamy, a subject that needs a lot more study.

<u>PS</u> "Mellowness" should not be construed as a diminishment of identity into mush (except in those few cases where it's precisely that).
<u>PPS</u> My article is not a <u>roman a clèf</u>. I tried to illustrate the philosophies within my winding sentences but didn't try to choose real-life examples. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is unintentional.

graphic by Lynn

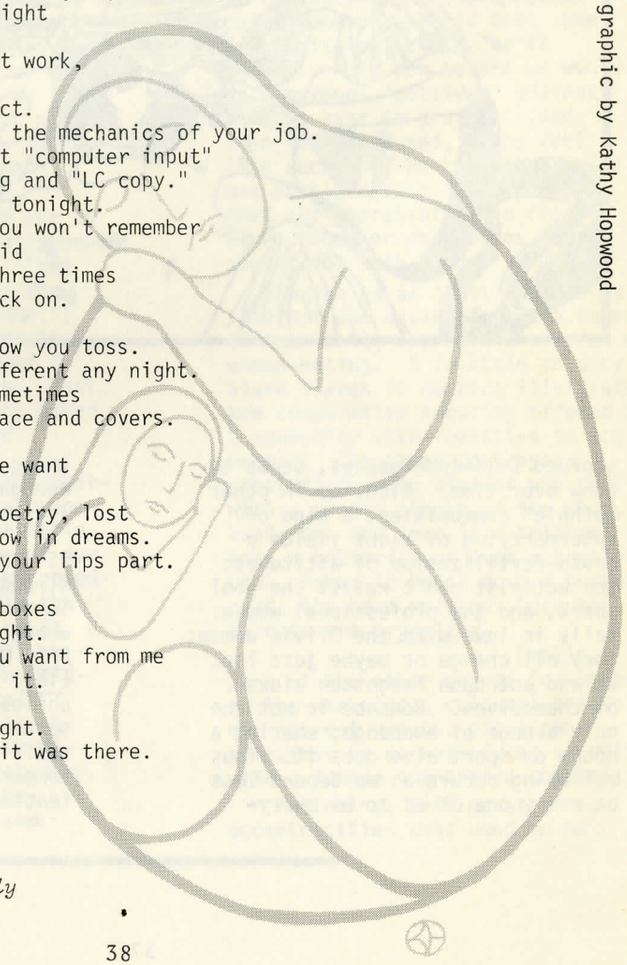
Staying Up While You Sleep

I am in the kitchen reading.
In the bedroom I can hear you breathing,
shifting for the third time in the last hour
and rolling the covers more tightly around your hips.
At times throughout the night
you have muttered things.
You've addressed people at work,
your sister, me.
I wonder how we all connect.
By day you talk little of the mechanics of your job.
Now I hear something about "computer input"
or the card you are typing and "LC copy."
You've called to me twice tonight.
We've talked and I know you won't remember
in the morning what we said
or how I had you repeat three times
the fragment you were stuck on.

Funny. I never noticed how you toss.
But I am sure it's no different any night.
You toss and we shift, sometimes
clashing, battling for space and covers.
At times we mumble:
perhaps we are cold, or we want
to see that airplane,
or maybe it's a line of poetry, lost
in the shuffle. Ideas glow in dreams.
We feed on them. I hear your lips part.

Perhaps we talk, sharing boxes
we dare not open in daylight.
Maybe you tell me what you want from me
and I tell you how to get it.
We are warm, satisfied.
It will return another night.
By dawn we will not know it was there.

by Emily



graphic by Kathy Hopwood

Three Muddied Words:
Language and the Women's Community

by Emily

I used to think I was a feminist. I still identify myself that way at times. It's convenient, really. Co-workers avoid telling me jokes they know to be sexist and tolerate my teaching a women's studies course. But in "feminist" circles I have begun to wonder if the label has any meaning.

In the last few months I have heard several women say, "I don't know how she as a feminist could do/say such a thing," or, "I thought she was a feminist," or, "As feminists we must confront this issue," and so on. The more I hear this word "feminist" being bandied about, the more confused I get. What is it about a particular act or statement that made a woman who identified previously as a feminist appear unfeminist? What is it that we all share that forces us to confront an issue? What storehouse is uniquely our own?

The purpose of this article is not to answer any of those questions. Instead I want to look at why these questions appear at all, at why I am as confused as I am about how I fit into a woman's community. Ultimately, I think this is something I will always be examining and it is something we are all examining in this issue of Feminary in bits and pieces and in our various ways. The bit I wish to examine here is how we use language, how we talk to each other, how we establish our community through verbal communication.

We talk a lot among ourselves. We have endless meetings - long sessions in which we hash out concepts and make decisions - and, as any hardcore meeting-goer knows, no decision comes easily in such gatherings. One thing I have noticed, though, is that after long debates, decisions seem to become almost immediately unanimous when a woman says something like what I described above: "This is important for us as feminists. We must do something about it." It's like a code word. Discussion dissipates. A decision is made.

Now in most cases I have few qualms about the decisions as such, but I do wonder what it is that makes the people (like myself at times) who had qualms about the issue at hand or felt perhaps that

a decision at that time might be too hasty - what it is that makes us silent, what it is that brings them/us/me around to agreement that the decision is not too hasty or uncertain.

Let me cite another example. How many discussions do you know of that have come to a halt at an accusation of woman-hating? I have yet to see one that doesn't. And I have yet to see any woman (most especially myself) turn to her accuser and say, "How was what I said/did a form of woman-hating? I don't understand." Being accused of woman-hating is like being called a racist: you know it's something you can do without knowing you're doing it. You know especially that others can better see you at it, so you defer to their opinions. Too often, however, I think we call "woman-hating" those things with which we are uncomfortable or which we simply don't like. It's certainly a handy way to dispel discomfort, but it's also a fine way to stunt growth. Just what is "woman-hating"? A simplified term for "misogyny"? A specialized label for attacks on women's energies? Understanding woman-hating is a first step in learning to conquer it.

One more example. How many women do you know who have been labeled "separatist" at one time or another? Probably quite a few. Yet, based on that group of women, can you determine any basic principles, beliefs, or lifestyles that you can clearly establish the meaning of "separatist" in your mind? I can't. I have heard women who live with men called

gruping by Sue Sneddon

"separatists". Things like this make me awfully confused.

So what's the point? The point is that we're using lots of terms, often assuming we share a knowledge of their meanings, when, in fact, we do not have such a common ground to work from. The most frightening part of all of this for me is that we believe we do have this common knowledge. To a degree, I believe we do have it, but I believe also that we have let it slip into a passive position. The words I have listed, as well as many others, all have meaning for us, certainly, and they probably had even more meaning

early in their careers; but each year that new women come into the community, they hear certain words and they see them applied. In this way they must learn only from impressions what a community's meanings are for those words. They learn that it is "unfeminist" or "woman-hating" to do or say something that they may have been doing or saying for years. In an effort to fit in with the community they may purge that element of themselves, but is it because they are coerced or is it because they (and we) understand why that element doesn't fit in? A new woman might also be told that another woman is a "separatist". That label can lead to many impressions based on an assumed knowledge about separatism that may be entirely false.

Several years ago I was the facilitator for a meeting to which Lee Comer, who had written a brillant book on marriage (Wedlocked Women), had been invited to speak. At that meeting, a man asked Lee for a concise outline of women's revolutionary theory. Lee offered several good answers, none of which pleased him. Eventually he began to dominate the meeting with his demands and it was only after I lost my temper and got rather nasty that he shut up. I left the meeting feeling angry at the man, of course, and at having lost my temper , but also at the frustrating inability we had demonstrated in not providing a satisfactory answer to the question about theory (i.e., one that would have made things clear to someone else).

Later, as we were discussing the incident, a friend pointed out that answering such a question is ridiculous. "The women's movement is a process," she said, "not a theory. A theory would make it static. It would inhibit the process. Besides, half of the movement takes place inside an individual woman's head." Half of a woman's "theory" then is of her own making. The other half is of our making, as we bring our many halves together. As new women come into our community and as we all grow, our process grows, expanding and incorporating all that we learn and discarding all that has become useless.

The same must be true of our language. We cannot allow the words we use to become stagnant theories. If we do, they will become meaningless. We must give our language room to grow. This does not mean that we should stop every few months and come up with clear-cut definitions of the words we share in common. It does mean that we should accept responsibility for dealing with those words when it becomes clear that a common meaning for them has been lost. Thus, we must ask why something is woman-hating, why someone is called a separatist, and why feminists must confront certain issues. Otherwise we will be letting a rigid theory replace an everchanging and developing process. And otherwise, we will never know who we are and why we value such a thing as a women's community in the first place.

Author's note: The phenomenon described in this article is something that has baffled me for a long time. I have observed it at work among several women's groups and communities that have been around for a

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graphic by Lynn Ivey

PORTRAIT OF THE DYKE AS A YOUNG TYKE AND OTHER EPIPHANIES

BY MAB

When I was growing up in Alabama, not very successfully disguised to myself and everyone else as "normal," I read a lot. Without being able to say it, I felt that if I read enough books I could stack them all up and one day climb out over the walls of that town, of myself. I was looking for something, not knowing what. One summer afternoon, slightly post-puberty, I read (in Graham Greene, I think) of an island in the Carribean where lesbians lived. (I had only recently read in Life magazine what lesbians were). Tremors of recognition. My ocean floor shifting miles beneath. I dropped that information toward the back of my brain, as something I might need to remember. It grew there, silently, as in the succeeding years growing older did not prove to be getting better. This picture in my head: pastel houses leaning toward each other, picket fences under trees that laid deep pools of shade, women talking, nodding to each other.

The first time a women I loved wrote to me, "I love you too, but it would destroy us both," and I wrote back "Yes"--I thought, I have to go someplace where I can be myself, thinking, an island in the Carribean. But where I needed I couldn't reach by TWA. My definition of lesbian community still rises out of that early fantasy: a place where I can be myself, which means where I can love other women openly, accept their love for me. And it is something I have found, here in Durham, in the past year. (Reached finally by my own massive continental drift.) I cannot minimize my discovery: its importance to me, my gratitude to other lesbians for what they have done to make this possible. I realize the limitations of this community, sense and hear of tensions, pain, anger in these women I have found. But, to me, that does not negate community. Community is not utopia; utopia is rather a vision of community. And I feel a great need and responsibility to do what I can to give back some of what I have received, to make it also available to other women who think that they have to climb out of themselves to belong.

So I affirm: there is community here. A core of women with a shared sense of identity (women-identified: how wonderful not to pretend that men are more important) and values and goals (women's lives are precious, worth fighting for). Strong women--the least neurotic group of people I have known. Self-directed, independent, brave. I remember Bertha Harris saying, "Being a lesbian puts steel in your soul." Beyond, outside this community are women who have withdrawn because of disappointments, changing values; and lesbians who haven't entered because they do not share what they perceive to be its values and goals (and do not either trust the community or want to expend the energy attempting to refine or redefine communal direction and shape). And outside the community are many women choking in the darkness of their closets, unable to accept themselves sufficiently to enter a group that claims "lesbian" as a positive definition. Within the community are women operating at widely differing levels of intensity, "energy" as we call it; there are many disillu-

sioned women, many angry over unmet needs. But there is a group of lesbians here who realize their needs for each other and who try at varying levels at varying times to overcome their differences. We should give ourselves credit for that.

Lesbian community is the abstract (these are my 2 am musings, epiphanies that come before the traffic light turns green) must rise out of our terrible freedom. Both by choice and by necessity we are self-defined. I cannot get my identity from the husband I refuse to have, my children with golden hair. Very little of what I am is reinforced by the society I live in. I have cast that off--I have defined what I will not be: another person's projection, a shadow woman, a walking lie. That was hard enough. The move toward defining what I do want is infinitely more difficult. To move toward an open-ended future that is myself. That is a fearful freedom. Hard to keep my sights on. Requiring a strange kind of faith.

We are all so vulnerable to each other on so many levels. We meet each other as potential friends, potential lovers, potential competitors for friendship and love. So many of us come with a lifetime of defenses to overcome, needs to be fulfilled, fantasies to act out. Disappointment here, too, is so bitter. Yet often we bring it with us.

photo by Lynn Miller

I have spent much time in the last months thinking about local community, talking with other women, listening. I am appalled by the things that cannot be written down. Our silences to each other, about each other. I am reading lately of how easy it is for our silences to lie. For many, writing about lesbian community would mean coming to terms with the pain of its failures.

I sense in myself and other women around me a difficulty in articulating needs. Perhaps we feel on some level that other lesbians should know instinctively what we need without our having to ask. "I am lonely. You should be able to look at me, see that in my eyes, help. You must not care." I have heard this in and behind the conversations of women whom I had assumed had all the friends they needed. Other women have assumed the same about me at times when it was not true. All splashing in our own little puddles of loneliness. A kind of self-indulgence. I wonder if a simple two-part exercize might not help: (1) we should all resolve to ask women, periodically, beyond our immediate circle of friends--"How are you doing?" But only when we are willing to hear. (2) We should resolve that when someone asks us that question to answer honestly, at whatever level seems appropriate.

I hear in the history and mythology of this and other communities' beginnings what already seems to me a familiar motif: the political paradox. That a "raised consciousness" about our common oppression as women divides rather than brings us together. "Being political" seems to bring schisms--divisions about where to invest time and energy, how much time and energy to invest. Women who have lived in silence and impotence too long are reluctant to compromise voice and power. A period of internal (seemingly eternal?) struggle seems necessary, even inevitable. Yet the disillusionment accompanying such struggles among women can be devastating. A woman in Chicago tells me of the breakup of her community several years ago. The women who did not leave killed themselves. Her lover set herself on fire. Sometimes behind her beautiful eyes women still burn. I ask her why. "It was hard to be a dyke in those days." She talks tentatively of her new friends, her hopes for interactions that will nourish, not destroy.

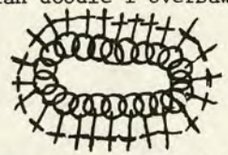
Perhaps the disillusionment about lesbian community that seems prevalent comes from our being in a middle place--having moved from the innocence and idealism of initial expectations to an inevitably disillusioning experience. Perhaps we are moving on a local and national level to a more realistic synthesis of ideal and experience. From what I hear and piece together, this community seems to be moving toward a synthesis; at the cost, some might say, of political focus and direction. But our staying together at all is the most transforming political act.

I listen to the metaphors that have become cliches. I try to fathom their original meanings. Raised consciousness. I get an image of women's heads floating, disembodied, bobbing at different levels, some looking down, others up. I wonder if there is not some hidden hierarchy lurking in the image that blocks community,

communication. "Yes, I was at your stage once until I moved on to higher (better/ more realistic/ more political/ less political) things." "You are probably optimistic because you are new to this community." "Ah, yes, I remember coming out. Don't worry, it will go away." I was recently informed that separatism is a stage on the road to capitalism. But do not on some level all stages of female consciousness have their own integrity, validity? Can we afford to make such judgments? Or can we afford not to?

Woman's energy. A code word I fast latched on to. I felt it first in the exhileration of being with women high on being with each other. I muse on this energy, wonder about the physics involved. I hear people talk about feeling "burned out." I think of electricity, generators, currents, fuses, shortcircuits. I sense that my energy is closely related to (but not equated with) my sexuality. That all my life I have been taught to fear the power of my intensities about women, my sense of my own intensity. That fear sets up friction in my currents and power lines. My fantasy is that if I feel this women-energy too intensely, I will blow a fuse, short circuit; sometimes I pull back instinctively. I wonder if other lesbians do not have the same fantasies which they respond to in their relationships with themselves, lovers, their community. I wonder if perhaps this fantasy does not acoount for many of our schisms. I know that in being with lesbians energy goes out from me to them; comes in from them to me. The more lesbians, so my gut level response goes, the more energy. Would an infinite number of lesbians diffuse my energy entirely? or feed too much energy in, make me too aware of my own powers? (I am not sure which is most frightening. I am beginning to suspect the latter.) I become relieved to learn that lesbians are divided. My fantasy will not be tested--my energy will not be either totally dispersed or totally concentrated. I wonder then if on some level we do not welcome our divisions because we have been taught to fear our power. I read Julia Stanley's explanations that she values a couple relationship because she fears the "dispersal of [her] energy." I hear women angry about "putting energy into" this community that they do not get back. Or women afraid that their "negative energy" will infect others. But I sense that as we learn to trust ourselves, our own power, we will begin to trust other women, to move together. Through deserts will reach power lines that stretch and sing.

Another musing--on a lesbian doodle I oversaw:



it seems to embody a dangerous flaw. I feel it means to convey strong women banded together in self and mutual protection. The women's crosses reach out like swords. Circles join intimately within. But it also looks like barbed wire. It is a picture of a prison. I wonder if in our defensiveness against a hostile society we do not fence others out, fence ourselves in. I know that when I joined this community I greatly needed to be accepted. That linked

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For Peg, Last Spring

this morning we woke up
to the first day of spring
after the hardest winter in years
I turned to you
with my winter doubts, my February fears
and shed them on the windy sheets

this afternoon we sat beside a stream
its water rippling over pebbles
caught their quick light
spread it into the far bend's sheen
like the stream, your face
was lit with new spring light
and mine the lassitude
that shown beneath the farther trees

we reminisced of childhoods
beside other streams and seas
naked play in pools of clear pacific water
encircled by a boulder's arms
the taut taste of salty skin
white boulders and red clay ravines
well-springs in childhood's winters,
long winters, passed

how thankful I am
that to my turning seasons come
the charity of spring
the clarity of love

--Mab

(This article is a response to some specific questions about local feminist businesses - questions which the Feminary collective asked in an effort to get more insight into the role of such businesses in our community. For the record, here are the questions: Describe your business briefly. Why did you start it? Did your business in any way rise out of your sense of women's community? How do you see your business feeding back into women's community? Any stray thoughts on alternative business/capitalism/community?)

Whole Women Press

Whole Women Press has been doing printing for local women and women's groups since 1976. We're a marginally operating business only, though, because Leslie works full-time as a press operator at a commercial press and I have a job as a darkroom technician at a weekly newspaper.

Until last summer, the only pieces of equipment we actually owned were a selectric typewriter and a light table. (We borrowed press time.) Since then, we've been sharing an office space with Feminary, and have acquired a Multilith press, a platemaker, another light table, and a paper cutter. The kinds of work that we are able to do with the equipment we have range from magazines to posters, brochures, stationery, and business cards.

I think our first sense of the potential of printing arose out of our being in a women's theory group and thinking about the dissemination of ideas. We also worked on Feminary and Whole Women Carologue (which was put together by a group of local women and then printed in Baltimore by Diana Press). Those experiences made us recognize the need for women's presses to exist nationwide; we realized, too, that we could start a press.

Leslie left library work and started learning how to print in 1975. Our first big job was Break de Chains of Legalized U.$. Slavery -- a book written by inmates at the North Carolina Correctional Center for Women, compiled and distributed by a coalition of some TALF members and the N.C. Hard Times Prison Project, and printed by Leslie.

Over the past few years, there's been a lot of support from local women for what we are doing. We started printing Feminary when the format changed and have done smaller jobs for the Raleigh Rape Crisis Center, Outdoor Crafts-

women, Durham NOW, and the N.C. Association of Women Attorneys. And certainly there's been a lot of encouragement from our friends. On the other hand, we suspect that some women patronize us merely because of our goal of providing good quality but inexpensive printing.

Going to the Women in Print conference during the summer of 1976 made us aware of the impact of women's presses in communities all over the country. It was important for us to come into contact with feminists who have chosen to work in ways similar to ours. Also, that conference brought us together with the women from Sinister Wisdom, and now we've printed several issues of that journal.

We have a pretty clear sense that the work we do offers an essential service for local women and women's groups and that people take pride in our existence. Just as many women prefer to go to female doctors, so do many want their printing done by feminists. We also feel strongly that the kind of work we have chosen isn't necessarily any more political or "righteous" than what any other feminist chooses. A variety of skills and a diversity of perspectives are what will ultimately make a community work and be successful -- i.e., make changes in the way things are. Ideally, everyone contributes what she can: resources, skills, money, and interests.

We feel helped in our work by friends, by a network of feminist presses, and by a sense of personal pride from contributing to women's media. Still haunting Whole Women Press, though, are questions of individual commitment, accomplishment, and growth. How can we protect ourselves from getting burnt out? Printing can be so demanding! Both of us also worry about self-respect and public relations. For example, many of our customers automatically think first of Leslie, who runs the press, when they have questions, ignoring the importance of all phases of printing (mine too), and also sometimes interrupting Leslie at critical times. Another concern is that a writer may believe her creativity is higher in value than the printing by us. If by chance we don't admire the writer's work but print it anyway, we're doing it just for the money -- to build our press and to save for someone else's job.

One more issue between us and our constituents has to do with capitalism. As buyers of paper and chemicals, we do not circumnavigate the system. The fact is that we're part of it. Any woman who deals with us because we're an "alternative" must bear this in mind. We look forward to a stronger feminist network that would recycle money -- women-run paper companies, distributors, etc. -- but don't know how this can evolve with success and integrity. (Although some European Jews acquired money and connections, the Nazis decimated them.)

On a more immediate level, we know that running a business would take an aggressiveness which we don't now possess. Being full-time would also mean risking income security, even as we took on commercial (non-feminist) jobs. Maybe we should continue in the way we've been operating, printing as a feminist activity rather than for a livelihood. I'm afraid that my view may be a little romantic, but I still want Whole Women Press to be a whole business.

photo by Lynn Miller

My Life in the Community

by Susan

A Little History

It took me several years to decide to seek a community of lesbians. I had known I was a lesbian for much longer than that but had considered myself a loner, or at least not a group person. Gradually, however, I realized that I wasn't being honest with myself in this. In fact, I was refusing to admit that I was frightened - of going into new situations, of meeting other women - and I was refusing to admit my own need for community.

The full realization of this hit me about three years ago, after which I contacted women in TALF and *Feminary* and began to find my way into the local lesbian/feminist community. I had not been in a relationship with a lover; and I had a rather idealized notion of what such a relationship should or would be like. Still I felt that I wanted more than just a lover (although I certainly did want a lover). I also wanted what I described to myself as a family of women.

Politics

I had already sensed some connection between community and politics - and that frightened me a bit, because I had never considered myself a political person. It wasn't that I disdained politics. I had a dim awareness that political activity on the part of women and minorities was important, but I couldn't picture myself involved in it. (It is interesting to me now that I participated in a few anti-war marches while in college, and once I marched in support of a food workers' strike. Still I didn't see myself as political.) It seemed to me that engaging in politics was (or ought to be) an all consuming task, that it would take up all of a person's life, leaving no room for anything or anybody else. It seemed that becoming political would be something like "giving your life to God," which I had done once and later regretted.

My perspective on politics has changed a great deal since then. But sometimes I still wonder how much we (or anyone) can accomplish politically without tremendous sacrifice. I am sceptical of that phrase, "our lives are our politics," though I don't entirely disagree with it. Yet I often think about Sylvia Pankhurst, who said that she couldn't paint pictures as long as there were poor people in the East End of London.

I realize that most of what I'm saying here about politics is a digression. But I almost wish that I could write an article - or that someone would write an article - about how we use the words "politics" and "political" and, in particular, what we mean when we say that someone either has or doesn't have "politics." (One idea I have is that our use of "politics" is fairly close to the historical definition of politics as a

branch of ethics - in fact, I think that many times when we say "politics," we could as easily say "ethics" - and that "politics" as we often use it has more to do with thought, values, and analysis than with action.)

Anyway, the point I was originally making is that I never used to consider myself political but that, when I came into the local lesbian/feminist community, I found my way into groups which defined themselves as more or less political - chiefly TALF and *Feminary*. I was intimidated at first. But I found many things I liked about these groups. I want to emphasize these things now so that presently, when I talk about some of the problems I see in our community, it won't seem as though I'm being entirely negative. My experience in our community has been a mixture of happiness and unhappiness, but I definitely feel that I've learned valuable things about myself and others and about being a woman which I wouldn't have learned in any other environment.

Growth

One of the first things I liked about those groups was the responsibility and dedication of the women in them. You could depend on people to do what they said - particularly in *Feminary* - and this was remarkable to me at first since everyone had jobs and other obligations. I admired the motivation and stick-to-itiveness of these women (and I still do although

I've learned that we're all limited in what we can do and how long we can keep doing it).

I remember telling a few of my old friends that I had joined a women's political discussion group (a subgroup of TALF which met for about a year) and that we met once a week to discuss issues like collectivity, capitalism, racism, and violence. They asked whether everybody came every week, and they were impressed when I said, "Yes." I will never deny that group discussions can be tedious and inconclusive and that communication often breaks down. But I have developed a respect for the potential of groups where responsibility is really shared. And, along with this, I've developed a confidence about what women working together can accomplish - and about what I can accomplish. Sometimes it's hard for me to imagine how we're ever going to change the world, although I trust we will. Yet, at least, I know that we can print magazines, build houses, start businesses, and repair cars.

Something else I liked about these groups was that the women in them cared about the quality of their relationships with each other and tried to structure the work of the groups so that the importance of relationships would not be overlooked - like combining dinner with a working meeting, or just remembering to leave some time to find out about each other's lives. (I think we've lost some of this - for reasons I can understand - yet I regret the loss.)

One final thing I liked was being in an environment where I could learn (skills, politics, or whatever) from other women. I have always felt that I've learned as much from my friends as from books and classes. And I feel that the groups in which I've participated in this community, in spite of their faults and shortcomings, have all given me opportunities to learn.

Reflections

I realize that my positive feelings about groups, and about our community in general, have come from my experiences in small groups (*Feminary* and the discussion group I participated in) and that women who've attempted to make their way into the community without the aid of a small group may have justifiably more negative feelings.

I also realize that in all of this I have not said whether I worried much about being accepted in the community. I know now - although I didn't then - that many women have felt it was hard to find friends in our community and hard to gain acceptance, particularly from the so-called "political" women. I don't believe that I admitted to myself the extent to which I invested emotionally in being accepted. But I did realize that I had waited a long time to make my move toward community, and I was willing to persist until I found some kind of place in it. I do think now that our community needs to talk about whether we are as accessible as we should be, or want to be, to new women.

One more thing along these lines. Mab has written in her article that at one time she felt she must learn to say racist-sexist-classist in one breath in order to belong. I used to feel it was very important for me to learn to understand those words. Perhaps part of my feeling did come from a desire to be accepted by the women who already could say racist-sexist-

classist. Nevertheless, I've come to believe these are essential words, that they embody complicated concepts, and that they explain a lot of what goes on in our culture. Recently, though, I've also come to believe that those of us who've read, thought, and discussed the hell out of these words have a responsibility to explain what we mean when we say racist-sexist-classist.

Problems

I had wanted to write a short, coherent essay about what I perceived were some of the problems in our community. But I couldn't do it. The more I thought, the more I realized how random my thoughts were. I couldn't come up with any topic sentences, transitions, or conclusions; and every time I started to write a sentence, I became painfully aware of all the exceptions there were to what I was going to say. I suffered this agony for days while people kept asking whether I'd finished my *Feminary* article. So finally I decided just to put thoughts down randomly rather than to give up. I persisted, because I'm sure that some of my thoughts, or at least some of my concerns, are shared by others in the community.

Many of the problems in our community (even some of the "political differences") have to do with our individual needs and expectations and with our reactions to disappointment. After all, we do expect to get practically everything we need and want in the way of love, friendship, and emotional support from the community, or from individuals within it. Maybe we even expect the community to make it up to us for all the pain we suffered before we came out. This is a lot to expect and sets us up for being disappointed.

Because we want and expect so much from each other, and perhaps because we care more about each other than we ever have about anybody, we fear rejection from each other more than from people outside our community (except maybe our families). This sets us up for feeling insecure in our relationships.

It isn't at all strange or shameful that we have these disappointments and feelings of insecurity at this point in our history. But we should look at them as obstacles we must overcome on our way to community.

Sometimes it's hard for a new woman to find a comfortable place for herself in the community, because we are all at different stages in our processes of coming out and of defining ourselves as lesbians and as feminists - not to mention the fact that we just plain have different interests.

We need to be careful in trying to apply our feminist politics to our relationships and in using them to judge each other's relationships. Although I feel that feminist values should pervade our lives, I think there is much danger of mistakes and misunderstanding in their application.

The terms exclusive and non-exclusive, which seem to be associated with a feminist analysis of relationships, are sometimes used in our community; and being exclusive is viewed negatively. I have thought in these terms more than I've

photo by Deborah Swanner

talked in them; still I've occasionally had bad feelings about women I thought were being exclusive. At the same time I've realized that others may have thought I was being exclusive.

My present idea on exclusivity is not that there's no such thing but that we have used it as the sole explanation for too many different things. For example, I think we've used it to explain why individuals drift apart and why certain groups of women don't interact much with other groups. And I think there are many more complicated reasons than exclusivity why these situations have come about.

Often I think we view the failure of friendships to develop or of needs to be met as a failure of community, or as our failure to live up to our feminist values. Sometimes these failures could just as easily be attributed to individual differences or to conflicts of time, etc. And I wonder if we aren't being too hard on ourselves and each other when we say that the community has failed.

Conflicts of time, however, present a lot of problems for community. In our community we have values and commitments which tell us that we should put a great deal of time and energy into a variety of personal relationships, into political causes, into community activities. And we can end up with no time for ourselves. Or we can find ourselves running from one time commitment to another without feeling fulfilled.

Feminism has taught us that, as women, we need to learn to stand up for what we need and want out of relationships and situations and that we need to learn to express our anger. These are valuable lessons, but I feel that they sometimes put us at cross-purposes in our efforts to create a community. And I've begun to think that, once we've learned to be angry with each other, maybe we need to re-learn how to be gentle with each other.

Questions

Sometimes I go to parties and look around me and feel guilty, because something (maybe "non-exclusiveness") tells me that I should be able to relate equally to everyone there. And I know that I can't possibly. But I know that as a community we need to find ways to give each other support - or just to let each other know we care - even though we all can't be best friends. What are those ways?

Sometimes I worry that the existence of our community has little or no effect on the lives of other women (these are the times when I think about Sylvia Pankhurst). For example, what good does it do all the battered women in Durham and Orange Counties that there is a lesbian community here and that a few women put out a magazine called *Feminary?* Am I being too pessimistic, or shortsighted? Or is our community too insulated?

Notes Toward a History,
continued from p. 28

attended Sagaris, an experimental "school" for radical feminist theory and analysis, located in Vermont. It seems to me that whatever has come to be called "radical" in our community grew out of the convergence of all these people and events.

Since 1975 we have seen several developments which probably deserve more reflection and analysis than we've yet given them: (1) the appearance of *Break de Chains of Legalized U$ Slavery*, a book of writings by women in Women's Prison, published and distributed by a group composed chiefly of local lesbian feminists; (2) the beginning and the end of the Triangle Women's Union, a frustrated attempt to create a working coalition of all the women's groups in the Triangle Area; and (3) the start of the annual Southeastern Gay Conference, which has involved about as many lesbians as gay men.

But the real history of our community is not in these events *per se*. It is in our own diversity - a diversity with which we have not yet become comfortable - and in the interplay of our lives, our different politics, and our feelings. There are many parts of it which have not yet been spoken or written.

Susan

for the Collective

continued from p. 9 - Vision of Community

Within the Lesbian sub-culture, which once did validate Lesbian couples in their attempt to establish permanent relationships, and much disdain for those women still seeking such relationships. We now find that Lesbians who wish to relate intimately on a one-to-one basis no longer can obtain validation for the structure of their lives from the one source where they might expect to find it: The Lesbian sub-culture....I would like to suggest that the tendency to declare some lifestyles as more valid than other lifestyles reflects the persistence of patriarchal dichotomies in our attempts to define a Feminist value system. If we continue to say this is "better" than that to each other, we cannot hope to establish a viable community of Lesbians.

....because two women are partners in the relationship, and because most women have been trained to nurture, even in the situations in which roles are most clearly defined, there is mutual emotional support within the unit, whereas the male is not expected to provide nurturance in a heterosexual couple....

Overcoming Patriarchal Thought Processes

First, I think we have failed to make a distinction between bonding, which is the process of establishing a kind of intimacy in which vulnerability is possible, and binding, which is a state of dependency. Second, as a result of our failure to distinguish between bonding and binding, we have not had to consider definitions of intimacy and the implications of such definitions for our use of energy. Third, because we haven't defined intimacy for ourselves, we have accepted too easily the patriarchal equation of sexual liberty with personal autonomy and independence....

....persons who are bound to each other (or among themselves) relinquish certain specific measures of their own power over their lives, giving up or repressing those aspects of their personalities that hinder the binding of one to the other. Binding is inherently crippling, it requires individuals who do not think of themselves as whole unless they have formed an attachment to someone else, and the definition of self favored by such relationships can change only through expedience. Unfortunately, most Lesbian relationships are binding relationships, because we have not yet had the time or the opportunity to become self-realized individuals....

In contrast, bonding is the process of creating strong links between and among women, linkages based on mutual respect for the wholeness and strength of other women. It requires self-defined individuals whose identity does not depend upon the existence of a relationship. Bonding is the process we are seeking when we speak of "sisterhood," and sisterhood will be a difficult attainment as long as we are not self-defined....Power inheres in the individual, not in one's relationship to another, and bonding cannot occur between or among women of unequal personal power. In

addition to mutual respect, bonding requires mutual trust. At least part of the bonding process involves a willingness to become vulnerable, and an environment in which one's vulnerability to another woman will not be dangerous. I am willing to become vulnerable only to someone I trust, and I only trust those with whom I have already established a considerable degree of intimacy.

In order to begin the process of bonding, we must somehow create an environment among ourselves in which intimacy is possible, a degree of intimacy in which we can become vulnerable to each other. Because of the risk involved, intimacy with another woman frightens me. I am willing to go "just so far" in making myself vulnerable to other women, and then I stop. My own reluctance has led me to reflect on the meaning of intimacy in my own life, and I have come to believe that there are varying degrees of intimacy that are possible, and that one means of clarifying myself has become the desirability of defining the degrees of intimacy possible for me and those I wish to avoid.... When I speak of becoming intimate with another woman, I am referring to the entire process of gradually opening myself up to her understanding and analysis. Someone with whom I am being as honest as I can finds out things about me that I don't tell everyone else with whom I come in contact. I share my fears with her, my self-doubt, the things about myself I don't like, and the things about myself that I do like. If trust is not possible, then each shared idea I have about myself becomes potentially dangerous once I have made it available to another woman. For this reason, I do not become vulnerable to every woman; in each encounter my defenses are up, and bonding, when I am being watchful every moment, is an impossibility. It may be that my defenses are an inherent flaw in my personality, but I doubt it. I've constructed my defenses because I've been hurt when I was vulnerable. To ask all of us to put aside our defenses when dealing with other women is unrealistic and destructuve, because we do not live in a context in which trust is a real possibility.

Because of the patriarchal definitions of intimacy with which we have grown up, sexuality has become one of the most dangerous weapons among us for establishing and maintaining power in our relationships with each other..... I think that too many of us have accepted the male definition of "liberation": sexual liberty.... I think we have accepted a male definition of freedom that we find particularly attractive since women's sexuality has been repressed and bound to the nuclear family for so long. It seems to me that this acceptance of a male concept of freedom is not a necessary part of the process of liberating ourselves,....

Alternatives to Coupling

...celibacy, because it frees us from having to deal with problems, or at least gives us the space in which we <u>can</u> deal with them, ends the trememdous dispersal of energy involved in trying to work through intimate relationships. I am extremely confused about what my sexuality "means," if it "means" anything, (and it does, to some people), and celibacy is a constructive way of using my energies for other activities. Instead of scattering my energies in confrontations and painful situations, celibacy gives me the time to concentrate my energies on those activities "in the world" that have meaning for me.

The other alternative that I find attractive is the possibility of having multiple relationships in which intimacy is present but never intense. Such free-floating involvements would also permit a woman to engage in those activities that are important to her, without creating situations in which her energies are drained off in confrontations. If one chooses this alternative, she must be explicit about her limitations, her needs, and her own expectations. Such relationships, which do not require constant and high-level expenditures of energy for their maintenance, may eventually lead to bonding, instead of binding, if only because they are initially begun with explicit expectations and honesty. For those of us who do not require intimacy or on-going relationships for our well-being, both celibacy and casual involvements define situations in which we can use our energies in those places where they are the most constructive for us....

Conclusion

But before we can begin the process of becoming a community, there will have to be trust among us, and we cannot trust each other until we can be honest with ourselves. In order to be honest with ourselves, we must first become real to ourselves....

Personally, I am most comfortable in a one-to-one relationship because I am only willing to spend my energy in forming one intimate relationship. My energies go in too many other directions for me to spend my time working through all of the pain and intricacies of trying to accomodate myself to more than one woman at a time. I resent the drain, and I'm not convinced that relationships are <u>that</u> indispensable. At this level, the survival unit of one becomes the most attractive alternative, and I am then left wondering what we are really talking about. I hope we are talking about community.

THE SECOND WIMMINS MUSIC FESTIVAL: AMAZON CULTURE

continued from p. 13 - Amazon Culture

formed a grey drizzle into an occasion for howling joyous communion with the Lady of Mud, the tiny baby athabascan girl and the french amazon laughing in each other's arms at the center of the circle of dancers at the drumming/traditional rhythms workshop. those drummers, tireless muscles sweating and euphoric with the steady beat they held on saturday when the sound broke down, when they played beneath the full moondeep into the night. howling stomping dancers, arms against the sky. lovers in the bushes. the mushroom phosphoresence of newly shaven heads.

wakin before sunday dawn on the hill behind the stage and hearin a steady silver river of sound, someone playin the piano, and then the golden rainbow ocean of Kay Gardner's chorus...cool grey wind in the baby pines... silent smiling eyes affirming each other, yes we share this vision, yes it is begun...

and then sunday night - WHAM! back to the boys' world! at the first restaurant we walk into we stare in mingled curiosity revul-

sion and dismay at the funny fat stiff awkward boys in suits - what are these creatures? - until their insolent pompous return stares remind us - hey we're the aliens, the minority; they think we're wierd! the shock looses me my appetite. back in the car turn on the radio - male voices everywhere telling stories of boys. newspapers too. the few wimmin in the streets are furtive wary alone, they walk without pride and defer to the boys. THEY control the airwaves, the streets, THEY control the world. how in 4 days could i begin to forget this?

how indeed! many wimmin shared this culture shock! i wonder if intense condensed Amazon livingspace was available to feminists on a more regular basis, as a space to retreat to and work out of, if we wouldn't begin to find the culture shock almost unbearable? if we wouldn't begin to support each other in our anger and pride to really try to take some of the world's space back for us? it's so hard to take this shit when it's so hard to even work out our own! our differences at least are creative, positive, inspiring - they give us something to work on. boys' reality often just seems so overwhelmingly untouchable! i live to shatter that image. and yes it has begun.

any feedback on other wimmin's experiences of issues raised in this article, and especially any ideas, comments or criticisms of more structured community organizing in wimmin's environments, would be appreciated.

Note: it's been pointed out to me that my criticisms are based on my projecting my anarchist-collectivity - social responsibility values onto the environment of the Festival, and that most wimmin probably don't share those values. how can we "fall short" of something no one consciously set out to do? is it presumptuous of me to call my ideals the "goals of radical feminist community"? to believe that others share their ideals and values? what are the "goals of radical feminist community" - who defines them?

continued from p. 24 - Separatism

I am living now as an "individual." I go to meetings of the Lesbian Center Group because I need to be around lesbians. I still need to always remember the things I learned from separatism about society, because otherwise the world would be an incomprehensible ball of goo. And I need to talk with other lesbians who help me to remember. I also need to keep trying to understand the effects of classism, racism, ageism, and of course sexism on me and my life because I need to keep changing. But I have no movement and absolutely no vision.

I hope that other lesbians will try to think more seriously and respectfully about separatism. The theory it represents is too important, and the women who are trying to live it are too much a part of what we are all doing, for any lesbian or feminist or lesbian-feminist to be willing to disown separatism completely, or to scape-goat it out of fear and insecurity. I have no movement now, but I do still feel that there is a "we," and I hope that we are moving.

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To oppose and protest, write N.C. Representatives Ike Andrews (Wake and Durham Counties) and L.H. Fountain (Orange). Or support the National Abortion Rights League, 706 7th St., SE, Wash., DC 20003.

Margaret Sanger

continued from p. 30 - Lives Together

We take pictures of ourselves--at home, working on the car, on the roof, walking and exploring on a picnic--we create a new scrapbook of our lives together, a continuation of the photo albums from our childhoods. We plan gardens together--deciding on seeds and tools and rows--we plant a space where growth and energy are sustained and multiplied, a solid piece of ground on which to thrive. That these pastimes are settling to my life right now is my starting place. The photo album will be put away, the garden will be put under, but my sense of self with others will be retained.

continued from p. 31 - "My Past Is Why My Present Is"

My own anger, then - what I am seeking - is to shift the basis of my life from a stable, stagnant past to an everchanging present. I have to be able to stand on a moving platform. I will not learn to do this by wrenching myself free from all foundations, leaving me foundationless and causing me to topple. Instead, I must replace the past grain by grain with the present, recognizing the reasons for, and implications of, each grain I choose. This is not as dramatic as shedding a cocoon and flying away in reborn splendor, and not as easy either. But then I am not a playmaker; I am a revolutionary.

continued from p.46
Portrait of the Dyke

up on some level with having short hair on my head, long hair on my legs, learning to say "sexist-classist-racist" in one breath, liking soybeans. I have mastered most of these dyke-feminist arts, but I am not sure why. They feel contradictory to my sense that lesbian community requires freedom. I realize that now I am tempted to look for such conformity in other women. If you're not for us, you're against us. Prove yourself. I talk with a dear friend reexamining her sexuality, her relationships with men. We go to a meeting of lesbians in her city--a solstice celebration, replete with all the dyke trappings. She is disappointed, put off; realizing all she will have to learn to do and say before she will be accepted. She is reluctant to give up one conformity for another. Although I sense in the meeting the commitment of these women to each other, I see her point.

I recognize that in myself this push towards conformity comes because, for most of my life, I have expected that the women I loved would put men before me; a part of my compulsion to test rises from my need for assurance that a woman I "invest" (as the capitalists would say) my energy in will not leave me for a man, for the world of men. On one level this is a positive step for me--claiming my right to have needs met within my network of relationships. If I don't validate my own worth, noone else will. But I realize that such needs can rigidify into a set of scenarios in which I force others to play the roles I assign them, that even in doing this I write myself into the very corners I try to avoid; any script that attempts to control anyone other than myself is self-defeating because rising from a sense of powerlessness.

I am coming to believe that this sense of powerlessness in women is the greatest block to community because the greatest block to personal growth. It makes us accept negative definitions and react against other people rather than for ourselves. This powerlessness rises because we fear our powers--we have been conditioned to fear them by a "patriarchal" world that fears women; that understands our strength in many cases far better than we do.

The journey towards personal and communal power seems long, arduous, and given the society we live in, dangerous. But, as always, it is the only journey really worth making.

How difficult it will always be to be true to that girl reading in her front porch swing, her sense of what life should be, that Alabama afternoon.

continued from p. 41 - Language

while. New groups and communities don't seem to be affected by it. Perhaps the reason for this is that new groups and communities generally consist of women who have just come together and who have few assumptions about each other.

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(3) We further reserve the right to edit an article and then return it to its author for changes, or to print it together with our disclaimer or editorial reply. In the case of articles - but not poetry and fiction - we may occasionally edit for style and grammar without returning the material to its author.

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