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Women And The Men Who Oppress Them:  
Ideologies And Protests Of Redstockings, New York Radical Feminists, And Cell 16

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of History  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in History

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by  
Meggin L. Schaaf  
December 2007

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## ABSTRACT

Women And The Men Who Oppress Them:

Ideologies And Protests Of Redstockings, New York Radical Feminists, And Cell 16

by

Meggin L. Schaaf

The American civil rights movement created a ready environment in which exploited people protested their social status and demanded change. Among the forefront, women contended against their male oppressors and demanded autonomy. Ultimately, however, women disagreed amongst themselves regarding the severity of their oppression and the ideal route to implement change. Thereafter, radical feminism became a strong force within the women's liberation movement. Group members denied that capitalism oppressed women, and countered that women's status as a sex-class remained the essential component in their subjugation. To obtain true freedom, women had to reject the deeply ingrained social expectations. As radical feminists, Redstockings, New York Radical Feminists, and Cell 16 shared the goal of female freedom, but the process of acquiring freedom remained unique to each group. Nevertheless, although they focused on distinct issues, they each identified men as the source of female oppression and offered legitimate alternatives to social expectations.

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## CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT .....	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	3
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	5
2. REDSTOCKINGS .....	7
3. NEW YORK RADICAL FEMINISTS.....	31
4. CELL 16.....	56
5. CONCLUSION.....	91
WORKS CITED .....	93
VITA .....	99

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The 1960s proved to be a time of turmoil as well as radical change. Blacks, no longer willing to acquiesce to the regulations that dictated their lives, agitated for change and a significant place within American culture. The demonstration of oppressed blacks who demanded equal rights stirred up the consciousness of women as well, who realized that they too experienced subjection to oppression by the white male society. Books such as Simone de Beauvoir's, *The Second Sex*, and Betty Friedan's, *The Feminine Mystique*, caused waves of unrest among women tired of subordination within a male supremacist culture that assumed all women would eventually fill the roles of domestic housewife and mother. Thereafter, women spoke up and demanded such things as equality in the workplace, full reproductive rights, and a general recognition by society that women should have more options available to them than simply those of wife and mother.

Yet, women eventually realized that forming a cohesive and united movement would not be simple. One such problematic issue developed when white women tried to recruit black women into their movement. White women largely disregarded race as a possible barrier and believed that all women would see the urgent need for unity and recognize the commonalities that existed between the races. As history proved, however, circumstances played out differently.

Women, then, faced with the realistic view that they did not all hold the same ideals, eventually joined with others who shared similar beliefs. One group that emerged, the politics, blamed women's oppression ultimately on the role of capitalism within American society and the dearth of a female presence within its institutions. But the politics had their opponents, and in

1969, radical feminism emerged as a vital and dominant force within the women's liberation movement, as they rejected the politicians' assumption that capitalism oppressed women and, instead, argued that women represented a sex-class that must be eradicated from society.<sup>1</sup>

The radical feminist groups that emerged during this time included Redstockings, New York Radical Feminists, and Cell 16. While their ideologies converged at some points, they nevertheless diverged at others. Furthermore, their work on such heated topics as abortion, rape, and celibacy proved too controversial for many. Yet, although their beliefs are debatable, the efforts of these radical feminists should not be ignored. By focusing on three distinct areas of work within each of these groups, it becomes clear that in their unique ways they all sought to identify the source of women's oppression as men and male-run structures, and, furthermore, they offered realistic and practical alternatives to society's gender expectations.

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<sup>1</sup> Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975*, American Culture, eds. Stanly Arowitz, Sandra M. Gilbert, and George Lipsitz, no. 3 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 3.

## CHAPTER 2

### REDSTOCKINGS

While many have used the term “radical” within different contexts, Kathie Sarachild noted that the dictionary equated the word “radical” to the Latin word which denoted “root.” Contrary to what others thought of the women’s liberation movement, radical feminists aimed to focus on the problems that existed at the root of society and sought to “put an end to the barriers of segregation and discrimination based on sex.”<sup>2</sup>

Redstockings emerged as one such radical feminist group. Founded in February 1969 by Ellen Willis and Shulamith Firestone, they envisioned a militant group that would be an active force in the public committed to consciousness-raising among women, while it would also maintain a degree of leadership in action. Aside from Firestone and Willis, other key members included Sarachild, Irene Peslikis, and Pat Mainardi.<sup>3</sup> While the women held many issues as essential components in their group understanding, ultimately abortion, consciousness-raising, and the pro-woman line became the three prime areas of focus.

Redstockings, then, set its first target on the abortion issue. Near the end of the 1960s the medical profession, and other organizations based on family planning, swayed in favor of reforming the existing laws on abortion.<sup>4</sup> Thereafter, the state of New York decided in favor of hearings on abortion reform and chose thirteen men and one nun as “expert witnesses.” This selection of witnesses greatly disturbed women’s liberationists who, thereafter, picketed the

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<sup>2</sup> Kathie Sarachild, “Consciousness Raising: A Radical Weapon” (a compilation and expansion of text, notes and comments from a talk Kathie Sarachild gave on consciousness-raising to the First National Conference of Stewardesses for Women’s Rights in New York City on March 12, 1973), <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/fem/sarachild.html> (accessed 18 March 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Echols, 139-40.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 140.

hearing. Sarahild stood up in the midst of the hearing and demanded that the real experts, women, speak their opinion on the abortion reform laws. Instead of reforming the abortion laws, she argued, they should be repealed. After other Redstockings members voiced their opinions, a legislator tried to gain order of the hearing and requested that the women “act like ladies” but the protestors appeared anything but willing to back down.<sup>5</sup>

It can be argued that, in part, the abortion hearing gained a victory for the women’s movement. More women received access to legal abortions rather than the sole choice of back alley abortionists who proved to be less than concerned about women’s safety issues. Still, Redstockings believed that abortion reform failed to fully resolve the issue. There still existed a number of women unable to convince the panel that their situation warranted serious consideration. Redstockings, then, spoke out for women such as these.

After the success of their protest at the abortion reform hearings, Redstockings ventured to plan an abortion hearing of their own. While many of the women turned down the opportunity to talk about their own abortions because they feared the possible outcome, Peslikis and Barbara Kaminsky secured twelve speakers for the March 21st abortion action. As they dismantled preconceived notions about public and private life, the speakers talked about their own personal experiences with their abortions, which formed a connection between the personal and political. The fact that the speakers talked about their own experiences proved beneficial to the Redstockings’ abortion speak-out as it brought out strong feelings among those women who attended.<sup>6</sup>

Willis, a Redstockings member who vigorously advocated for abortion rights, responded to those who made the abortion debate into an issue of murder and contended that in the midst of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 142.

debates over the right of the fetus, the women's predicament was pushed aside and left unconsidered. "Murder," she said, "as commonly defined, is killing that is unjustified, willful, and malicious." She noted that most people would not split hairs over the question of killing within the context of self-defense, which included those wars fought to gain freedom from the oppressor. She argued, furthermore, that even pacifists would draw a line between violence committed in defense of oneself or another, and that no one would make the atrocities of Hitler's genocide against the Jews equal to the "killing of Nazi troops" by the rebel Jews of the Warsaw ghetto.<sup>7</sup>

Willis aimed to prove that judgments could not be passed on a woman who chose an abortion without also examining the context of her situation. For example, Americans lived in a society which defined a woman's primary responsibility as child bearer even if she did not desire this role. Compounding the problem, women fell short of securing jobs that provided them with the financial ability to care for a family, while they additionally lacked access to daycare facilities in the event that they located a good job. Willis argued that, faced with these circumstances, a woman forced into motherhood stared into a daunting future in which she had no control over her own life.<sup>8</sup>

It can be noted that Willis's argument does bear truth. The task of motherhood proved a difficult job, even for those who felt emotionally and financially ready for a child. Furthermore, for those women who lived in the midst of poor career options with little or no family support, the prospects appeared even more discouraging. The structuring of American culture certainly fostered an unfriendly atmosphere to those who occupied the lower echelons of society. Yet, her

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<sup>7</sup> Ellen Willis, "Abortion: Is a Woman a Person?" (originally published in *Village Voice*, 5 March 1979), in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (NY: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 472-73.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

argument concerning the difference between mass killing and killing of only a few people seemed to straddle the ethics line. Few would deny that Hitler's genocide of the Jews proved an atrocity far beyond everyday evils. Still, it appears that Willis downplayed the fact that in either case, people were killed.

Willis admitted that for some women pregnancy proved a gratifying time, but when a woman felt unhappy that she had to share her body, pregnancy seemed like an invasion. She made the analogy that the differences between the two attitudes felt like the "differences between lovemaking and rape." Moreover, while women tried to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies, the reality persisted that no contraception worked every time. In these cases, Willis stated that "abortion is by normal standards an act of self defense."<sup>9</sup>

Willis believed, then, that the best way to decrease unwanted pregnancies and abortions rested in making every method of birth control available to all women, providing sexual education and downplaying guilt, and rearranging those aspects of society and the economic state that made motherhood a trap for women.<sup>10</sup> But the argument of abortion as an act of self-defense, while some thoroughly agreed, failed to consider the life of the unborn baby. Some women viewed abortion as a defense tactic, but who defended the unborn when it could not even defend itself?

Willis freely admitted that a fetus contained features that made it human, but she also added that a woman, composed of the reality of self, replete with feelings and a past that included ties to the society, proved more important than a fertilized egg, who became more of a person the closer it came to birth.<sup>11</sup> Yet, even at such a young stage of maturation, the unborn

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

baby developed a heartbeat and eventually acquired fully formed body organs. While it took time for these changes to occur, Willis's view that the fetus became more human the closer it approached birth may have also led to the implication that an elderly person existed as a more complete human than did a newborn child.

Willis, who eagerly offered her opinion on abortion, remained well aware of the issues that pregnant women faced. She said that the birth experience of her own child, while wonderful, also proved extremely tiring and painful. She found joy, however, in the birth because she chose to have a baby. Additionally, her birthing experience, rather than turning her away from reproductive rights, made her empathize even more with those women who found themselves unwilling candidates for motherhood. After she took into account her own personal experience, she had a difficult time coping with the awful fear of those women who looked ahead to the days of motherhood with trepidation. Ultimately she wanted to know, can it be “. . . moral, under any circumstances, to make a woman bear a child against her will?”<sup>12</sup>

Willis further argued that a woman would never be free without the ability to be in charge of her own fertility. She pointed out that the female factor made a woman vulnerable to a drastic change in her life without any prior notice.<sup>13</sup> Feminism, then, aimed at eradicating the belief that one's anatomy controlled the outcome of their life. Willis claimed that abortion, if made available, would disallow a woman's biology to control her status within society, particularly that of her subordination as a mother.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ellen Willis, ed., “Putting Women Back in the Abortion Debate” (originally published in *Village Voice*, 16 July 1985), in *No More Nice Girls: Countercultural Essays* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1992), 76.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

Anatomy did play a large role in a person's life and the future that lay ahead. Without women, or men for that matter, the human race would eventually cease to exist, and many women gladly occupied the role of mother. But what of those women who did not? Even worse, what of those women pregnant because of rape? The case can be made that they should not have to suffer the consequences of someone else's poor choice. Many women did not view the growth taking place inside of them as a blessing of life because their main focus rested on the violent way their pregnancy came about. It remained a complicated ethical decision to make. Willis's line of argument stated that just because a woman had the ability to bear children it did not mean that she wanted this role. And if left without the ability to be the deciding factor in her own fertility, then she would continue to play the oppressed role that she had been relegated to within American culture.

Willis later explained that the abortion issue proved the prime embodiment and symbol of the demand of Redstockings; that women not only be granted equality but the ability to determine their own best interests. She further stated that reforming abortion laws, while a closer step toward women's reproductive rights, only allowed the largely male medical profession to choose who deserved an abortion and who did not. Those granted abortions usually received the decision based on extreme circumstances such as rape, the possibility of a deformity in the fetus, or in cases where the pregnancy endangered the mother's health. Redstockings did not wish to focus so much on the treatment that women received who maintained unwanted pregnancies, but they advocated the right to have the final say in their fertility which impacted the rest of their lives. Willis commented that although women failed to gain a full repeal of the restrictions on abortion, Redstockings secured the right for women to have abortions regardless of the reason.<sup>15</sup>

While Redstockings' abortion speak-out in March of 1969 proved a pivotal point in

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<sup>15</sup> Echols, with a foreword by Ellen Willis, viii.

educating women on the experiences of abortion, it also proved a high point of their action altogether. At times they joined other groups and organized various actions and also protested at another abortion panel staffed exclusively by males at Cooper Union, but the group's action lessened after March.<sup>16</sup>

Consciousness-raising, also called rap sessions, emerged as another vital aspect within Redstockings. Sarachild stated that Ann Forer equated the sharing of women's experiences with her heightened consciousness. Forer shared some of her own feelings about the way women played a role in order to gain acceptance by men. As she did so, the other women in the group realized the significance in this form of communication. Sarachild noted, "The whole group was moved as I was, and we decided on the spot that what we needed—in the words Ann used—was to 'raise our consciousness some more.'"<sup>17</sup>

Judith Hole and Ellen Levine noted, "Although consciousness raising had evolved out of meetings of New York Radical Women, its widespread use as both an organizing and an educational tool for the new movement must be credited to Redstockings, the first group to clearly articulate its function, purpose, and process, and to advocate its use."<sup>18</sup> Willis believed that one of the great things about Redstockings' form of radical feminism lay in its ability to be concrete. Consciousness-raising demanded that women step back and take a long look at the cause of their pain and frustration. Those who took the sessions seriously found that their openness and honesty instilled a desire to name their oppression and fight for its destruction.<sup>19</sup>

Oftentimes, people did not understand the cause of their pain. Left without a concrete

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>17</sup> Sarachild.

<sup>18</sup> Judith Hole and Ellen Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism* (NY: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 137.

<sup>19</sup> Willis, "Abortion Debate," 125.

example as to the source of their oppression, blame tended to fall on their own consciousness, and they believed that the reason for their problems must have stemmed from a poor decision on their part. Yet, while this idea sometimes mirrored reality, often it depended on something outside of one's control. It can be argued, then, that consciousness-raising sessions, while frequently belittled as an unnecessary component within women's liberation, offered women the opportunity, some for the first time, to pinpoint specific causes for their unfulfilled lives.

The Redstockings Manifesto stated that their present task aimed at fostering a class consciousness among women through the equal sharing of information based on past experiences, while at the same time, working to uncover the foundations of all institutions as sexist and oppressive to women. They further stated that consciousness-raising should not be viewed as therapy, which painted an image of solutions for an individual person, while it additionally supported the notion that the relationships that existed between men and women occupied a solely personal realm. Through consciousness-raising, Redstockings hoped to keep their program focused on the personal experiences of their everyday lives rather than on theoretical ideas. A key element in the rap sessions, then, proved to be the ability of women to be honest with themselves and others within the group, both publicly and privately.<sup>20</sup>

Consciousness-raising, however, met its own measure of resistance, especially because the group remained exclusionary in that it denied admittance to men. People often misinterpreted the point of the meetings and those involved failed to reach people and help them to understand the importance of the rap sessions. Others believed that that there remained certain areas of discussion that women should not broach, like the issues of housework, children, and sex. These, however, often proved to be the very components that oppressed women the most. And while

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<sup>20</sup> Redstockings, "Manifesto," in *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, ed. Robin Morgan (NY: Random House, 1970), 535.

most agreed that people should be paid equally for the same amount of work, “when women wanted to try to figure out why we weren’t *getting* equal pay for equal work anywhere, and wanted to take a look in these areas, then what we were doing wasn’t politics, economic or even study at all, but ‘therapy,’ something that women had to work out for themselves individually.”<sup>21</sup>

Carol Hanisch, another Redstockings member, took great offense in the idea that the consciousness-raising sessions remained just another form of therapy. She insisted that therapy implied that the source of the problem lay within the woman’s own decisions, rather than from outside sources. “Women are messed over,” she insisted, “not messed up!” She believed that the conditions that presented the source of oppression toward women must be changed rather than demanding that women cope with them. Therapy, unlike consciousness-raising, taught women to deal with the few options available to them and encouraged them to form their lives around the poor alternatives presented instead of demanding fair treatment in all areas of life.<sup>22</sup> Yet, regardless of opposition, consciousness-raising provided women the tools to honestly analyze their oppression, which they more clearly understood as time passed.

It became easy to see that without a measure of honesty on everyone’s part, the consciousness-raising sessions would have been self-defeating as they sought to bring out those oppressions faced on a daily basis. Power resided in the collective voice in the reality that most women experienced similar situations. Moreover, when they spoke of their daily disturbances, women recognized the extent to which their oppression affected the larger society of women. When they realized that other women experienced similar situations and that their subjection to

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<sup>21</sup> Sarachild.

<sup>22</sup> Carol Hanisch, “The Personal is Political” (originally published in *Notes from the Second Year: Women’s Liberation*, eds. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (NY: New York Radical Women, 1970)), <http://scholar.alexanderstreet.com/download/attachments/2259/Personal+Is+Pol.pdf?version=1> (accessed 10 April 2007).

men did not remain a unique phenomenon, women gained a common desire to eradicate oppression not only from their lives but from American society as a whole.

Regarding the view of consciousness-raising as therapy, Peslikis made a good point as she noted that “when women get together to study and analyze their own experience it means they are sick but when Chinese peasants or Guatemalan guerillas get together and use the identical methods they are revolutionary.”<sup>23</sup> It can be assumed that the main point of difference rested on the gender issue. In American society in the 1960s, men considered women unladylike if they agitated and protested on behalf of their predicament. Numbers of men even believed that the way they treated women, by allowing them the opportunity to stay at home with the children and take care of domestic duties, presented a blessing and the best life for a woman. And to some extent, this idea rang true. Many women made it their goal to find a husband in order to ensure their security. With little opportunity to find and maintain a rewarding and successful career, numbers of women saw their only chance for comfort in fulfilling the roles of wife and mother.

But one should not assume that all women despised the domestic role. Without doubt, some men treated their wives with respect and love, and various women found their work extremely satisfying. But a number of married women, if allowed the chance to provide for themselves and offered an array of career choices, would have remained single rather than enter into a marriage agreement that placed them under someone else’s authority.

Peslikis, furthermore, noted the importance of consciousness-raising in that education alone would not bring forth revolution, but rather, when women became aware of the oppression that manifested itself in their lives, they would be stirred to action. Upon examination of those things that politicized the masses, education played some role, but the deciding factor rested

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<sup>23</sup> Irene Peslikis, “Resistances to Consciousness” (originally published in “Redstockings First Literature List,” Fall 1969), in *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, 337.

through the sharing of common experiences.<sup>24</sup> These experiences, Sarachild further explained, remained the lot that women drew from to convey their ideas to the larger society.<sup>25</sup>

The actions that came out of consciousness-raising resembled “zap action” in that they proved a form of political agitation as they called attention to the old traditions and beliefs that people carried, while they also offered new ones. Sarachild understood that in some ways they blazed a path, for they “would be the first to dare to say and do the undareable, what women really felt and wanted.” A general awareness and understanding of past hurts proved an essential ingredient in drawing women to action.<sup>26</sup>

The implementation of consciousness-raising in the movement also helped women remain focused on the truly important issues, rather than allow one area to become the focus of their action. Additionally, as women shared their common experiences of oppression, they internalized and analyzed their hurt which added fuel to the fire. As women understood that *any* woman’s oppression constituted oppression for *all* women, the fight for equality became personal and provided the fervor to demand equality. Stokely Carmichael urged “whites” to fight their own oppressors, and so consciousness-raising paved the way for women to speak out against the source of their own oppression rather than fight someone else’s battles.<sup>27</sup>

The changes that Redstockings members hoped to implement proved large obstacles that would take a significant amount of time and energy, along with perseverance, to fulfill. Centuries of male-dominated social structures relegated women to subjective roles and secondary status.

While it is true that women made significant social contributions through the rearing of children,

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 339.

<sup>25</sup> Sarachild.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

those who dared to step out of the culturally expected roles often endured a significant degree of chastisement and disdain for their liberal opinions and positions. And so it also proved true for Redstockings members who argued that women would only gain full equality when the social arrangements finally underwent a massive restructuring.

During the consciousness-raising sessions, after everyone shared their experiences with others in the group, there remained time to answer any questions that the women posed about the shared experiences. Then, at the close of the meeting, the women reflected on the different stories and decided what connections could be made between them.<sup>28</sup> Hanisch admitted that her own reasons for involvement in the group did not serve as a measure of devising personal solutions. The women understood that consciousness-raising served as a way of equating the personal with the political. The problems that each woman personally faced contained political significance. Additionally, the collective experiences of the women fostered joint action and solution.<sup>29</sup>

If radical feminists had not found a public voice, women may have suppressed their complaints and endured the daily struggles they faced as they had for so many years. It took the desire of women to open up their lives to others in a non-confrontational atmosphere in order to reveal what they truly wanted and needed. The consciousness-raising groups instilled women with the courage to speak out, as they also understood that other women wanted freedom just as much.

Consciousness-raising sessions, moreover, helped women to set aside their idealistic notions about their lives. They also saw the full extent of oppression that women, in general, found themselves under. The times of truthful, open, and raw emotional sharing revealed the

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<sup>28</sup> Hanisch.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

grim realities that many women faced simply because of their gender. And while Redstockings denied that the consciousness-raising sessions provided an opportunity for therapy, Hanisch stated that they proved therapeutic to the extent that they helped women to stop blaming themselves for the dire circumstances in which they lived. They realized, furthermore, that women could not make advancements if the present conditions continued to be the only available options. Redstockings, therefore, demanded a new social structure independent of gender.<sup>30</sup>

The format for consciousness-raising sessions did not always play out identically, as flexibility proved a necessary component. Similarly, Sarachild maintained that the important aspect of rap sessions consisted of the outcome, not so much the methods.<sup>31</sup> Yet, some groups tried to follow certain guidelines. The first goal of consciousness-raising aimed at helping women to understand their relationship to the society at large; mainly the oppression that women experienced due to the patriarchal structuring of society. As to the size of the group, they believed that the ideal number consisted of about eight people. Smaller groups provided more opportunity for all women to voice their opinions and share their own experiences. Still, they noted that even if the groups ranged higher than the ideal number, successful consciousness-raising could still take place.<sup>32</sup>

In larger groups women sometimes felt lost. Those women more comfortable with a large audience had no problem sharing their own experiences, but those women unnerved by such great numbers sometimes declined the opportunity to speak. By establishing a modest number of women as the ideal for consciousness-raising groups, the goal of attaining collective experience

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Sarachild.

<sup>32</sup> Women's Collective, "Consciousness-Raising," <http://www.cwluherstory.com/CWLUArchive/crguidelines.html> (accessed 8 March 2007).

and action stood a greater chance for success.

Another guideline set forward suggested that men not be involved in the women's group, but if they desired to start their own groups, they could do so.<sup>33</sup> If this guideline seemed exclusionary, that was its intent. Women often had a difficult enough time opening up to other women about their experiences of oppression from men and the patriarchal institutions. If men had participated in the consciousness-raising sessions, it would have hindered the progress of the group and have defeated the purpose of the meeting. Many women felt extremely uncomfortable airing their complaints in front of the generalized source of their oppression. Yet, by acknowledging that men may want to meet together, the women's group showed some degree of recognition that men could help to change the situations that presented such a problem for women.

Another guideline suggested that the place of meeting be a neutral setting so that one woman did not occupy the role of the hostess.<sup>34</sup> This guideline proved considerate on two points. First, it allowed all women to fully participate in each consciousness-raising session, and suggested that no group meeting was complete without the voice of all the women. Second, it cut away at the very oppression that women hoped to disengage themselves from; that of the domestic servant, ready and willing to cater to the demands of those in her company. If, then, any form of preparation or service took place, all women shared the burden at one point, rather than placing the entire responsibility on the shoulders of one woman in particular.

Financial aspects also came into play regarding the consciousness-raising sessions, donations of which came mainly, if not exclusively, from the women who belonged to the group. When they considered contributions, then, it was important that each woman gave gifts as she

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

had decided she could afford, rather than on a set fee, otherwise not all women could participate.<sup>35</sup> This remained a significant guideline for consciousness-raising sessions. Women's liberation groups often consisted of women from generally equal positions in society; women more or less alike in their social make-up. And while it should not be assumed that the above guideline proved that the group maintained a large degree of diversity, they should be lauded for their willingness to make sure all women could be involved who wanted to be. Women from any social class could join the group as active and involved participants.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, the availability of child care proved essential for women who otherwise could not have participated in the groups, even if that meant that the group as a whole took care of the expenses that this commitment involved.<sup>37</sup> Children, although accepted as a significant part of women's lives, took away freedoms, such as meeting with other women for a time of serious discussion. Any mother would agree that concentration on a serious discussion proved nearly impossible while they simultaneously tried to quiet a restless child. They could not share their own experiences uninterrupted, nor could they give their full attention to others who tried up about their lives. Child care, then, provided a good situation for both the mother, who thereafter fully participated in the consciousness-raising session, and for the child.

Concerning the equal opportunity for every woman to speak, some groups suggested the use of tokens as a way to guarantee that one person did not control the discussion. Still, women had more or less to say than at other times.<sup>38</sup> The group did not consider this an attempt to dominate the conversation if it only happened occasionally. The problem arose when it became a

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

regular occurrence and jeopardized the other members' sharing time. Although the token system seemed tedious at times, it helped women judge the amount of time they had left to share their experiences. This system, of course, did not mean that every token had to be used, but it may have encouraged those women who did not generally share as much information to try to use as many tokens as possible. Sarachild made it clear, however, that the "purpose of hearing from everyone was never to be nice or tolerant or to develop speaking skill or the 'ability to listen.' It was to get closer to the truth."<sup>39</sup>

Understanding human nature, an important guideline remained the ability to make sure that those issues discussed stayed focused on the topic of women's experiences.<sup>40</sup> Understandably, discussions sometimes branched off to several different topics. But, while this did not prove a major problem, leaders encouraged the women to do so at a time other than the consciousness-raising meetings; times designed to acknowledge experiences of oppression that, ideally, produced action.<sup>41</sup> Sarachild noted that by systematically allowing each woman a chance to speak, the topic eventually came around again to the main point of discussion.<sup>42</sup>

The rap sessions did not prove educational in the sense that women did not take tests over what they had learned. Yet, women received an education when they implemented those experiences and feelings of the others and made them a part of their new array of knowledge. Consciousness-raising, furthermore, provided a time for women to speak about their own lives, not about what other women had experienced.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Sarachild.

<sup>40</sup> Women's Collective.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Sarachild.

<sup>43</sup> Women's Collective.

While they could understand someone else's experiences, women only remained experts of their own lives. Additionally, as they understood that consciousness-raising sought to create an open, honest, and inoffensive atmosphere, women had to be careful that their comments remained equally innocuous. Speaking up about oppression proved a difficult step for some women. Realizing this, women needed to be sensitive and uncritical in their comments about another's experience of oppression. Furthermore, consciousness-raising sessions did not exist as a time to offer opinions on how someone should handle a specific situation.<sup>44</sup> Nothing proved worse than being transparent with others only to have them turn around and criticize the way the situation ended or offer a suggestion concerning the best way to fix a problem. Women asked for opinions when they wanted them.

One of the greatest aspects of the women's liberation movement rested in the different personalities of which it consisted. With this in mind, women tried to honor the differences rather than attempt to force everyone into a similar mold. Some women talked more than others; that was okay. Alienation of a member by forced conformity did not prove to be worth the risk. Once they felt more comfortable with the group, women would speak up if they so desired. Consciousness-raising, while it afforded a valuable opportunity for women to get issues out in the open, did not have to become a time when everyone told their deepest, most personal secrets. If the conversation led in such a way, that was fine, but it would happen naturally rather than expecting everyone to freely offer information.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, clear distinctions were made as to when the consciousness-raising time began and ended. First, it helped women focus on the task at hand as they realized that they had an

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

allotted amount of time available to share their experiences with others in the group. Second, it helped women to posture their minds toward a reflective attitude, able to think critically about how their collective experiences with oppression could produce action. It should again be noted that the suggestions set forth for conducting a consciousness-raising group remained flexible. Certain guidelines worked well in the past. But groups varied to the degree that each woman had a distinct personality. If one approach did not work well, various alternatives could be experimented with till a productive format existed.<sup>46</sup>

Sarah Davidson captured the true feel of a Redstockings' consciousness-raising session in 1969. Within the walls that displayed posters speaking of revolution sat about thirty women who crowded together on the floor in the small room for around five hours. Certain questions arose during the meeting such as why women chose to stay single or chose marriage. The women then took turns sharing instances of oppression in their own lives. When everyone had spoken, the group analyzed the experiences. The women came to realize that everyone dealt with oppression in some form or another. One woman stated that "if all women share the same problem, how can it be personal? Women's pain is not personal, it's political."<sup>47</sup>

Some may believe that the equal sharing of knowledge provided women the opportunity to clear their minds of the distress that their oppression caused. And while this certainly happened, Redstockings encouraged women to speak up, because through this process, collective oppression could be understood. They sought to cooperatively understand the situation of all women, not to analyze any particular woman. Sarahild stated that "analyzing our experience in our personal lives and in the movement, reading about the experience of other people's struggles,

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Sarah Davidson, "An 'Oppressed Majority' Demands Its Rights" (originally published in *LIFE*, 1969), <http://www.maryellenmark.com/text/magazines/life/905W-000-004.html> (accessed 10 April 2007).

and connecting these through consciousness-raising will keep us on the track, moving as fast as possible toward women's liberation."<sup>48</sup>

Firestone additionally commented that radical feminism could successfully establish an egalitarian social structure. "To question the basic relations between the sexes and between parents and children is to take the psychological patterns of dominance-submission to its very roots. Through examining politically this psychology, feminism will be the first movement ever to deal in a materialist way with the problem."<sup>49</sup>

But while consciousness-raising originally existed as a means to produce politics and action rather "than an end in itself," it eventually did become an end for Redstockings. Rap sessions caused women to focus inward and thereby center "almost exclusively on 'the personal.'"<sup>50</sup> One feminist viewed the dissolution as follows: "When you stop looking out, and turn exclusively inward, at some point you begin to feed on each other. If you don't direct your anger externally—politically—you turn it against yourselves."<sup>51</sup>

As noted above, one of the main functions of Redstockings' consciousness-raising existed to learn about, and understand, the oppression that women experienced because of male supremacy. The opinion that men oppressed women appeared in the pro-woman line, which stated that women acted in certain ways because of the conditions they found themselves in, not because they had been conditioned to act a certain way. Hanisch, one of Redstockings' foremost proponents of the pro-woman argument, stated that women would do well to continue to play the role of the pretty girl with no brains as a means of survival until the "power of unity" replaced

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<sup>48</sup> Sarachild.

<sup>49</sup> Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (NY: Bantam House, 1970), 39-40.

<sup>50</sup> Hole and Levine, 140.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

their oppression.<sup>52</sup>

Additionally, their manifesto stated that women were not to blame for their conditions, and that their submission resulted from daily pressure to conform to an expected role. They argued that men needed to change, not women.<sup>53</sup> Yet, while women often succumbed to an oppressed role, they additionally manipulated situations, although subtly, through “feminine wiles.” These tactics, instituted as a means of survival, did not help to lessen oppression.<sup>54</sup> Still, Hanisch admitted that a woman should use survival techniques when necessary. Whether a woman was stuck at home, or stuck in a job, she was ultimately stuck. Both remained poor options.<sup>55</sup>

Redstockings’ description of women’s oppression painted a grim picture as it proposed that “women are an oppressed class. Our oppression is total, affecting every facet of our lives. We are exploited as sex objects, breeders, domestic servants, and cheap labor. We are considered inferior beings, whose only purpose is to enhance men’s lives.”<sup>56</sup> The manifesto, furthermore, explicitly stated that women’s oppression directly resulted from the male supremacist power structures instituted throughout all of history, and that *all* men took part in their oppression.<sup>57</sup>

While it remained true that men oppressed women over the centuries, to place blame on every single male throughout all of history proved a vast generalization. But Redstockings

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<sup>52</sup> Echols, 144.

<sup>53</sup> Redstockings, 534.

<sup>54</sup> Carol Hanisch and Elizabeth Sutherland, “Women of the World Unite—We Have Nothing to Lose But Our Men!” (originally published in *Notes from the First Year* (NY: New York Radical Women, 1968)), <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes> (accessed 8 March 2007).

<sup>55</sup> Hanisch.

<sup>56</sup> Redstockings.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

further argued that by placing blame on the institutions alone, men went free. Men, they urged, existed merely as “tools of the oppressor.”<sup>58</sup> Peslikis went on and argued that “when the oppressor is stopped he can no longer maintain his tools and they are rendered useless. Present institutions and our feelings about them should be analyzed in order to understand what it is we want or don’t want to use in the new society.”<sup>59</sup>

Hanisch confirmed the complete oppression of women in the economic, psychological, and social realms. Capitalism upheld male domination of women, although it did so in a subtle manner. At times, women received criticism for speaking out against their oppression, as some frowned upon their agitation for rights when others experienced more severe forms of oppression. But Hanisch and Elizabeth Sutherland argued that when “you’re being stepped on, you don’t stop to argue about whether the foot on your neck is heavier than the one on the neck of somebody else. You try to free yourself.”<sup>60</sup>

Marriage, additionally, presented a unique situation for members of Redstockings who denied that married women underwent brainwashing, and that in many cases, marriage proved the best option for women.<sup>61</sup> Echols noted, furthermore, that Mainardi did not think that the institution of marriage presented so much of a problem as did the sex roles and male supremacy that thrived in marriage. In Mainardi’s influential article, “The Politics of Housework,” she related her own marriage experience and the complications that arose. She suggested that it only seemed fair that both she and her husband should have equal share in the housework because they each had a career. Mainardi’s husband initially agreed to her proposal, but she eventually

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Peslikis.

<sup>60</sup> Hanisch and Sutherland.

<sup>61</sup> Echols, 145.

recognized that men are not conditioned to housework as are women. She said that men “recognize the essential fact of housework right from the very beginning. Which is that it stinks.”<sup>62</sup>

Unlike men, women felt guilt over a messy house and a responsibility to keep it clean. They understood that they would be judged based on the cleanliness of their home even if the men had made the majority of the mess. Mainardi recognized that society did not look down on men for a messy house, which they viewed solely as a woman’s responsibility.<sup>63</sup> Yet, most men who lived as bachelors did “not starve or become encrusted with crud or buried under the litter.”<sup>64</sup> The result seemed to be, then, that married men avoided housework, not because of their incapability of performing basic functions of cleanliness, but because they figured the wife would eventually take care of the mess.

The family existed as a further extension of marriage, which also raised strong feelings by Redstockings members. Willis stated that within the family unit, male supremacy remained the problem. She believed that while women filled subjected roles within marriage, most women felt forced into marriage in order to guarantee social and economic security and validation. She further supported her argument as she suggested that if the institution of the family continued to be a prime and unquestioned social relation, then the only options open to women would be subordination or abandonment.<sup>65</sup> Willis herself eventually married and became a mother. In light of this fact, her argument seemed harsh and hypocritical, but her point rested on the fact that

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<sup>62</sup> Pat Mainardi, “The Politics of Housework” (originally published in “Redstockings First Literature List,” Fall 1969), in *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, 447-48.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Willis, “Abortion Debate,” 126-27.

when a woman's sole option rested in finding a husband, that is when she became trapped.

Sarachild also railed against the male idea of womanhood and stated that women forced into marriage eventually believed that they could not expect a better situation. Women, furthermore, blamed themselves and adapted to their new roles, as they believed and suggested that they could be "happy as half a person, as the 'better half' of someone else, as the other of others, powerless in her own right." Sarachild recognized that numbers of women avoided the march at which she gave her speech because of the fear that their husbands would not approve, and that the march itself remained a silly idea. She believed, furthermore, that numbers of women did not join the march because they assumed they could not think for themselves.<sup>66</sup>

While Redstockings contributed a significant degree of importance to the women's liberation movement, the initial group ceased to function after the autumn of 1970. Some of the very tools that once aided Redstockings as their most powerful weapons eventually caused the movement to disintegrate. Issues such as "separatism, consciousness-raising, elitism, and expansion wore people down . . . . Firestone grew increasingly impatient with the pro-woman line and the consciousness-raising program of the dominant faction and was increasingly at odds with the minority faction that was pushing the equality issue."<sup>67</sup>

Others argued that Redstockings' ardent obligation to consciousness-raising and the pro-woman line further ensured their demise. Peslikis believed that after Redstockings completed their manifesto and distributed movement literature, they had completed the job they set out to accomplish. Additionally, new members joined Redstockings, though not all shared the same

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<sup>66</sup> Kathie Amatneik, "Funeral Oration for the Burial of Traditional Womanhood" (speech given in Washington, D.C. to the main assembly of the Jeannette Rankin Brigade on January 15, 1968), <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes/#funeral> (accessed 8 March 2007).

<sup>67</sup> Echols, 152.

ideals and group philosophy. Still, although outside sources played a role in Redstockings' downfall, "the group's most vocal dissidents had been with the group from the outset."<sup>68</sup>

Redstockings' views certainly contained a radical element, a prime reason that many grew suspicious of their activities. But even though not everyone agreed with their views, there is still a measure of wisdom to be gained from their work. Redstockings urged women to identify their source of oppression and instilled in them the confidence they needed to understand their victimization. They argued that while marriage proved beneficial for some, not every woman viewed it as ideal. Even today, more than thirty years later, while it is much more culturally acceptable for a woman to remain single, it is often viewed as unnatural. Single women were continually asked when they planned to get married. Then, if they did decide to marry, the question changed to, "When will you have children?" Redstockings' desired to change the social expectations so that women did not become enslaved to roles they did not want. Redstockings' ideals, furthermore, encouraged women to collectively analyze their circumstances in the hopes of producing political action. It is important to remember that all groups contain elements contrary to people's beliefs. Still, the good is often thrown out with the bad, in which case, useful values get lost and people miss out on potentially life-changing principles.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 152-53.

## CHAPTER 3

### NEW YORK RADICAL FEMINISTS

During the late 1960s in America, women voiced concerns about their real oppression and named their oppressors as the male supremacist society and, more particularly, as men. Concerning this second-wave feminism, Anne Koedt highlighted the numbers of several radical feminists groups that emerged within a year due to the realization that American society considered women secondary citizens at various levels, whether in leadership, or in the mere issue of gaining a responsive ear.<sup>69</sup>

Cellestine Ware noted one such group, New York Radical Feminists (NYRF), founded on December 5, 1969, by the Stanton-Anthony Brigade. Shulamith Firestone, Koedt, Diane Crowthers, and Ware hoped that the new group would fill the void of “political and organizational needs” that other feminist groups, up till that point, had largely ignored.<sup>70</sup> Alice Echols further noted that Firestone and Koedt hoped to build a “mass-based radical feminist movement.” Unlike other exclusionary radical feminist groups, they furthermore hoped that the group would “seed itself.”<sup>71</sup>

While other groups, such as Redstockings, epitomized consciousness-raising as an essential component to radical feminism, NYRF saw this exercise as a secondary issue. That is

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<sup>69</sup> Anne Koedt, “Women In the Radical Movement” (speech given at a city-wide meeting of radical women’s groups at the Free University in New York City on February 17, 1968), in *Radical Feminism*, eds. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine, and Anita Rapone (NY: Quadrangle Books, 1973), 318.

<sup>70</sup> Cellestine Ware, *Woman Power: The Movement for Women’s Liberation* (NY: Tower Publications, Inc., 1970), 56-57.

<sup>71</sup> Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975*, American Culture, eds. Stanly Arowitz, Sandra M. Gilbert, and George Lipsitz, no. 3 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 186.

not to say that they did not consider it a beneficial tool in fighting the oppressor, but they believed that it existed as a “stage of growth, not the ultimate stage of growth.” They feared that if consciousness-raising continued to hold its prominent status, the passion of radical feminism would stagnate and thus bring an end to the radical feminist movement.<sup>72</sup> While NYRF held several issues as essential to their ideology, three of their most prominent areas of work consisted of the identification of the politics of the ego, the formation of brigades, and speaking out on rape.

In their manifesto, NYRF defined the source of their oppression:

We believe that the purpose of male chauvinism is primarily to obtain psychological ego satisfaction, and that only secondarily does this manifest itself in economic relationships. For this reason we do not believe that capitalism, or any other economic system, is the cause of female oppression, nor do we believe that female oppression will disappear as a result of a purely economic revolution. The political oppression of women has its own class dynamic; and that dynamic must be understood in terms previously called “non-political”—namely the politics of the ego.<sup>73</sup>

NYRF saw women’s oppression as a political issue and understood that men relegated them to a distinct class simply because of their gender. Their goal, then, aimed at attacking and dismantling the “sex class system.” Men, furthermore, proved the oppressors insofar as they enjoyed the privileges that the male role offered.<sup>74</sup>

Koedt further expounded on the role of the male ego and stated that men did not destroy women’s egos in order to hurt them, but they did so to make women subservient. This subservience often played out in the role of femininity, in which a woman’s job consisted of

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<sup>72</sup> “Editorial: Notes From the Third Year,” December 1971, in *Radical Feminism*, 300.

<sup>73</sup> A.K. “Politics of the Ego: A Manifesto For N.Y. Radical Feminists” (adopted by N.Y. Radical Feminists at its founding meeting in December, 1969), in *Radical Feminism*, 379.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

being “dainty, sweet, passive, helpless, ever-giving and sexy.”<sup>75</sup> Specific institutions, Koedt further noted, such as marriage, motherhood, love, and sexual intercourse, further constructed a trap for women and existed to “keep women in their place” through a confusion of biological differences with women’s overall humanness.<sup>76</sup>

It thereafter became necessary for men to convince women of their inferiority in order to maintain their rights as oppressor. Through the destruction of the female ego, then, women believed in the validity of their inferior treatment and lost their means of resistance to male supremacy. Koedt argued that women’s liberation would only come about through an internal reversal of the psychological damage waged by male supremacy and by discounting the idea that women existed to serve men. She believed that women’s freedom would be gained after the creation of “alternate selves that are healthy, independent and self-assertive.”<sup>77</sup>

Echols noted additional aspects of the NYRF’s manifesto and highlighted the idea that men oppressed women because of their own need to feel powerful. The politics of the ego, then, remained psychological. Koedt stated that the “male ego identity” prevailed by “destroying women’s egos.” She believed, furthermore, that men who felt the most powerless would be the most likely to oppress.<sup>78</sup>

It remained true, after all, that numbers of women felt deeply oppressed; many had chosen to marry and found themselves subjected to inferior roles. At an abortion rally Koedt drew attention to the fact that several women remained home rather than attend. She did not blame the women, however, as she noted that they could hardly be expected to speak out for

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 380.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 381.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 381-382.

<sup>78</sup> Echols, 187.

themselves because they had been “oppressed, suppressed, depressed and repressed” all their lives by men and the social structures that subjugated them. Koedt, moreover, argued that women placed in solitary confinement for decades would not even begin to think of throwing off their chains because their sex-roles had been so adamantly drilled into their consciousnesses and they had, in numerous instances, evolved into just the suppressed women that men expected them to be.<sup>79</sup>

Koedt further noted that in the case of marriage, husbands forever reminded women of their inferiority in the relationship, which further reinforced their dependence upon men. But, she insisted that women would no longer stand for their roles as “passive vessels becoming impregnated for the greater good of society.” Women, she demanded, wanted a society that also worked for their good, not solely for the good of men. She also railed against the exploitation of women as pawns used to sell the latest feminine product and against the assumption that all women existed to occupy the roles of wife and mother.<sup>80</sup>

Some may criticize Koedt’s arguments as too harsh, but they represented the feelings of numbers of women who felt trapped in subservient roles, many of whom did not even deem their outlook worthy of consideration. Radical feminism, then, validated women’s opinions and offered them a means of voicing their frustration and anger. NYRF encouraged women to acknowledge their discouragement and demand equal treatment based on their humanness rather than on their biological differences.

Koedt shared her own definition of radical feminism which consisted of the complete eradication of sex-roles. Radical feminists, then, did not view biological differences as

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<sup>79</sup> Anne Koedt, “Abortion Rally Speech” (speech given at an abortion repeal rally in New York on March 24, 1968), <http://SCRIPTORIUM.LIB.DUKE.EDU/WLM/NOTES/> (accessed 8 March 2007).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

determinants of destiny but argued that women learned their sex-roles from “male political constructs,” who aimed to instill men with power and superiority. The biological differences of men, therefore, did not make them oppressors, but rather, their rationalization of their supremacy based on their biology.<sup>81</sup>

Any woman, then, who went against the expected norms of appropriate female behavior, whether she refused the role of motherhood, chose a career as a biochemist, or simply denied men the satisfaction of serving as their own personal ego booster, helped to destroy the “sex-role system.” This form of rebellion, though, was only radical when women aimed to eradicate *all* sex-roles rather than simply swear off men.<sup>82</sup>

With the inception of the phrase, “the personal is political,” the private lives of women took on a political aspect. Prior to this, women remained isolated from one another because they understood their experiences as solely personal, which further blinded them to their common oppression.<sup>83</sup> But NYRF believed that until women worked together to eliminate sex-roles, they would not gain freedom as a group, or personally, and men would continue to exert control over them<sup>84</sup>

When one understood radical feminism according to Koedt’s viewpoint, the movement as a whole appeared more plausible. While several radical feminist groups advocated largely unfamiliar and extreme ideologies, they have also been unfairly stereotyped as hostile to men in all respects. But, as Koedt argued, radical feminists did not so much seek to remove men from the social picture, but rather, aimed to reverse the idea that women and men must act according

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<sup>81</sup> Anne Koedt, “Lesbianism and Feminism” (originally published in *Notes From the Third Year*), in *Radical Feminism*, 248-249.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 250-251.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 257-258.

to larger social expectations, which proved burdensome to both genders.

It can be argued that the English language, while it now includes more politically correct descriptions, provided a further example of the primacy of sex-roles. Such words as “policeman” and “fireman” excluded a female presence and fostered the idea that professions such as these should only to be occupied by men. NYRF, then, would be pleased with the incorporation of such words as “humankind” as opposed to “mankind.” To some degree, then, the revised English language demonstrated the acceptance of similar ideas as those put forth by radical feminists.

Beauty expectations placed on women offered another example of oppression caused by the politics of the ego. Firestone noted that “beauty ideals serve a clear political function” and excluded a majority of women. As she relied heavily on “good looks,” a woman gained individuality through her appearance which society deemed acceptable or unacceptable based upon men’s approximation of beauty. With this understanding, women aimed to attain this invented standard through diets, beauty regimens, clothing, make-up, and whatever else they needed to win a man’s heart. Yet, the rebellion against this tradition proved disastrous in many cases, as a woman who disregarded the rules of the culture risked being labeled a social outcast.<sup>85</sup>

Koedt additionally supported Firestone’s views as she pointed out the threat of male rejection. Women could not get around the reality of their dependence on men “since it is through husbands that women gain economic and social security, through male employers that they earn a living, and in general through male power that they survive . . . .” She argued that women did not seek men’s approval solely for the thrill but, more importantly, because they had

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<sup>85</sup> Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (NY: Bantam Books, 1970), 151-152.

to.<sup>86</sup>

Firestone, moreover, highlighted the idea that women continually received advice on ways to improve their physical features, where to buy the products to achieve this end, and to keep track of caloric intake. She noted that “indeed, the ‘ugly’ woman is now so nearly extinct even she is fast becoming ‘exotic.’”<sup>87</sup> But Firestone additionally reminded women not to attack beauty itself; however, she defined beauty by different standards. She believed that a beautiful face on the cover of a fashion magazine should not be dismissed solely because of its physical attractiveness but, rather, accepted or dismissed based upon its portrayal of humanness. Does the beautiful face “allow for growth and flux and decay, does it express negative as well as positive emotions, does it fall apart without artificial props—or does it falsely imitate the very different beauty of an *inanimate* object, like wood trying to be metal?”<sup>88</sup>

Firestone’s evaluation of beauty provided a timeless lesson to women of all ages. Society’s view of beauty remained an unattainable goal that even models, who appeared to possess this ideal, did not actually enjoy. Only after a very skilled artist took care of perceived “imperfections” could the magazines be put on the market. Women could not even make purchases without being endlessly bombarded by society’s concepts of beauty, and it was no wonder, then, that women continually changed their appearances. Inevitably, as soon as a woman achieved the “ideal look,” fashions changed and women panicked about how to remarket themselves as the newest desirable products.

Susan Brownmiller also noted the role that femininity played in increasing a man’s ego as

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<sup>86</sup> Koedt, “Lesbianism,” 247.

<sup>87</sup> Firestone, 153-154.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

she stated that when women appeared feminine it increased a male's perception of his own masculinity and granted him an extra measure of gender distinction. Through this process, men felt "stronger, wiser, [and] more competent" than they did without a woman.<sup>89</sup>

An article written by a Redstockings member confirmed the oppression that women experienced regarding consumerism. She noted that media itself, with its endless beauty products designed to enhance female attractiveness, did not turn women into submissive servants willing to cater to every man's whim and fantasy, but, rather, women displayed this kind of behavior because the sexist society demanded it of them. She additionally stated that male supremacy existed long before media ads and that the true evil behind them was that they reinforced the preexisting "sexist status quo." Furthermore, when a woman donned a new outfit or applied her makeup in a particular way, it became work; one of the jobs men expected women to maintain, fitted with cosmetic tools that ensured her success.<sup>90</sup>

Femininity also served to ensure men of women's extreme dependence upon them, while its very aspect of frivolity presented "an effective antidote to the unrelieved seriousness, the pressure of making one's way in a harsh, difficult world." As a value system it promoted niceness, thoughtfulness and a measure of sensitivity in a world that "is sadly in short supply."<sup>91</sup> Brownmiller pointed out that while competition between males, both humans and animals, has always been a widely researched subject, the competition that existed between women had often gone unnoticed. Certainly, the battles that existed between women in the area of gaining a male partner remained the "chief competitive arena (surely it is the only sanctioned arena) in which

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<sup>89</sup> Susan Brownmiller, *Femininity* (NY: Linden Press/Simon & Schuster, 1984), 16.

<sup>90</sup> A Redstockings Sister, "Consumerism and Women," in *Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness*, eds. Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran (NY: Basic Books, 1971), 483.

<sup>91</sup> Brownmiller, 17.

the American woman is wholeheartedly encouraged to contend.”<sup>92</sup>

During the Miss America Protest in 1968, women’s liberationists aimed to deconstruct this false mentality of femininity to which women found themselves enslaved. They argued that society daily forced women to contend for the approval of men which they accomplished through believing, and reinforcing, the lie that beauty proved the surest product by which to win a man.<sup>93</sup> Brownmiller argued that throughout history artists have continually returned to the woman’s body, and at times particular parts, as subject matter, as they have doled out praise and exaltation, as well as criticism and judgment.<sup>94</sup>

Additionally, if women lacked femininity, perhaps in their greater height, men often despised them because their physical characteristics caused men to feel inadequate. These women, furthermore, undermined the “aggressor-protector” image that men depended upon, and put on an unfeminine air as they suggested that they did not need men’s help. These things all presented a difficult situation for the women unless they could make up for their height in some other way.<sup>95</sup>

This feminine ideal, however, did not exist only in the United States. In foot-binding, an ancient custom, the Chinese did not allow a woman’s foot to grow beyond a certain length so that it maintained a delicate appearance. Brownmiller vividly described her disgust with this custom:

To envision a Chinese nobleman’s wife or courtesan with daintily slippared three-inch stubs in place of normal feet is to understand much about man’s violent subjugation of women; what is less clear is the concept of exquisite feminine beauty contained within

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 29.

the deforming violence: the sensuousness incapacitation and useless, ornamental charm perceived in the fused, misshapen bones.<sup>96</sup>

Although American customs proved less physically destructive than their Chinese counterparts, women still underwent continual bombardment as to the proper image required of them. The primary function of breasts, for example, resided in feeding which could be accomplished regardless of size.<sup>97</sup> Still, men continually found them to be a provocative body part, and in many cases assumed that larger breasts were more desirable. Because of this commonly held belief, women who did not fit into this constructed mold felt inferior compared to other women. Brownmiller further noted this “frantic obsession” and stated that “the sight of a braless woman on the street in the late 1960s could inspire a strong negative reaction. The hoots and catcalls eventually subsided, but the initial emotion was something akin to rage. It was as if men had come to believe that taking off a brassiere somehow was their right and privilege.”<sup>98</sup>

To many, breasts seemed an irrelevant issue, but they presented numerous troubles for women who lived in a society so highly preoccupied with physical features. That is not to say that less fully endowed women did not gain men’s attention, but quite often voluptuous women found themselves the object of admiration whether they invited it or not.

The politics of the ego, one radical feminist claimed, could also be evidenced in marriage relationships, as some husbands allowed their wives to spend money as they pleased, especially if they had plenty to go around. A husband may have rationalized that because his wife stayed home all day she could decorate according to her taste, or perhaps he simply did not care about those aspects of detail. Still, the “veto power” remained with the husband; at any time, he could

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 45.

cut off her spending and she would certainly be informed of his reasons.<sup>99</sup>

It had been argued that the “myth of male superiority” continually reinforced the “pervasive image of the empty-headed female consumer” who constantly aggravated her husband because of her spending habits. Society, furthermore, continually portrayed women as incompetent consumers unable to handle money wisely, but content so long as they had a “new hat now and then.” Additionally, when women blamed consumerism for their oppression, men escaped culpability for their part in women’s subjugation.<sup>100</sup>

Many agreed that advertisement remained a powerful force within American culture, and while society often told women that they were naturally beautiful, it proved difficult to hear this voice over the louder voice of marketing. Firestone’s comment that the ugly woman became the new exotic ideal may have seemed trite, but her words bore truth. The basic idea existed that whatever physical characteristic the fewest women seemingly possessed, that became the new beauty ideal. Certainly many still viewed women as pretty who did not meet this standard, but they failed to attain the exotic look that men supposedly wanted. It proved an endless cycle in which every woman, no matter how beautiful, recognized some area in which she does not achieve perfection.

As far as the idea that femininity provided some kind of psychological ego booster for men, that could be argued for or against. There is no doubt that many couples fit the stereotypical image of a bigger man, and a smaller woman, but for some couples, just the opposite was true. Apart from asking the couples specific questions as to why they chose to date, the reasons can only be speculated.

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<sup>99</sup> A Redstockings Sister, 483.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 484.

It would not be surprising to find out that numbers of men did not want to date a woman who was taller, fatter, smarter, or better looking than themselves. In these instances, perhaps the politics of the ego came into play. But men could also be found who did not take issue with a woman who demonstrated a greater mental capacity, or who had a larger body structure than a man. The simple fact remained that men and women of all shapes and sizes dated one another and looked past these issues as insignificant, while others failed to see beyond the surface.

While NYRF viewed the politics of the ego as a major issue to combat, they also chose to fight against rape, a natural consequence of the politics of the ego and the idea of femininity. It became evident during consciousness-raising sessions that women seemed interested in the topic, and one woman, Sara Pines, began the process of relating her own experience.<sup>101</sup>

Brownmiller noted that when she heard Pines's story, her ideas of rape began to evolve as she understood that not everyone remained as wary and suspicious of the world as she did. After two others shared similar stories with the group, Brownmiller urged NYRF to hold a rape conference complete with "research papers and panel discussions." Other members, however, believed that a speak-out would offer the greatest success, one similar to the Redstockings' abortion speak-out. While Brownmiller did not think enough women could be garnered to openly share their experiences with a public audience, her fears proved unfounded.<sup>102</sup>

A rape speak-out, however, which put "an unashamed human face on a crime that was shrouded in rumors and whispers, or smarmy jokes," was a first. NYRF decided that a speak-out should be held as soon as possible with a rape conference to follow after three months. They made their plans, and the speak-out, which they labeled, "Rape Is a Political Crime Against

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<sup>101</sup> Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (NY: The Dial Press, 1999), 198.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

Women,” took place on January 24, 1971, at St. Clement’s Church.<sup>103</sup> The speak-out revealed that rape did not remain unique to a specific class, age, or race, but spanned all lines. Identified fears and the dismissive attitude of police concerning rape all astounded the women who left with a new measure of knowledge.<sup>104</sup>

Thereafter, the rape conference became the prime issue of discussion at the NYRF general meetings, and Brownmiller generously offered her own opinions on what issues should be addressed. She believed that the “psychology of the rapist, the psychology of the victim, rape and the law, rape in marriage, rape and sexuality, rape and the cultural climate, [and] rape during wartime” all proved essential components of a successful conference.<sup>105</sup>

It should be understood that the act of rape constituted “any assaultive or humiliating act perpetrated on a woman through her demeaned sexual status.” The act, furthermore, was not sexual at its basic level, but rather, aggressive, and its motivation stemmed from hostility as opposed to fulfillment of a sexual need. NYRF additionally noted that this form of hostility remained the ultimate and final act of oppression that women experienced.<sup>106</sup>

Brownmiller, an outspoken advocate of victims of rape, pointed out that although society could take specific measures to lessen the instances of rape, women could not be totally free of the possibility of this violent crime while America remained a “rape-minded culture.” She argued that for rape to be eradicated, the larger society had to first disregard the idea that masculinity directly correlated to sexual aggression. Still, she noted that rape victims often gave off a certain

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 200-201.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>106</sup> New York Radical Feminists, *Rape: The First Sourcebook for Women*, eds. Noreen Connell and Cassandra Wilson (NY: Plume Books, 1974), 82.

air that invited attacks; not all women used every possible measure to make sure they avoided victimization.<sup>107</sup> While it may seem that Brownmiller blamed women for their own vulnerability, this would be a misunderstanding. Rather, she pointed out that certain women remained more likely victims of rape and that certain measures could be taken in order to better a woman's chances of avoiding that situation.

To Brownmiller, warmer weather signaled the season for "street confrontations ranging from catcalls and obscene lip smacking to the blatant terror of an actual mugging or assault," all unwelcome and unnerving situations. She further realized that women became prime candidates for sexual assault because their smaller physical statures made them vulnerable. While not all women, of course, fit this description, those who did had weapons to fight back with. She noted that the Japanese, a generally smaller people, used techniques of combat in which they undermined superior size by rapidity in motions and a sense of balance. She argued that "if it works for them, it just might work for American women."<sup>108</sup>

Brownmiller stated that her own practice at the dojo created in her a "state of temporary euphoria." After only two months, the previously unfamiliar techniques came more easily as she practiced her moves on willing "accomplices." And while she realized that an actual case of assault would prove far more demanding, she had a heightened sense of self-defense in her newly acquired abilities. No longer willing to allow femininity a place in her own life, she implored society to confront its history of rape. "Accepting the history of rape," she argued, "is the first step toward denying rape a future."<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Linda Tschirhart Sanford and Ann Fetter, with a foreword by Susan Brownmiller, *In Defense of Ourselves: A Rape Prevention Handbook for Women* (NY: Dolphin Books, 1979), xiii.

<sup>108</sup> Susan Brownmiller, "Street Fighting Women," 18 April 1973, p. 47.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

In their manifesto, however, NYRF pointed out that it was not only strangers who assaulted women, but often the boyfriend or husband who took part in their victimization. In 1971, NYRF hosted a speak-out on rape in which several women recounted their own stories of assault. NYRF, through the vehicle of the speak-out, hoped to curtail the prevalent myths concerning rape. One myth set forth the idea that a man could not rape a woman against her will. A second myth assumed that women simply played the victim, while they really wanted to be raped. And a third myth existed that women lied about their experiences with assault. These myths may seem obviously untrue, but media willingly accepted them as truth, as did academia and professional corporations.<sup>110</sup>

Although NYRF wrote the above statement over thirty years ago, these myths are not unheard of today. It is not uncommon to hear people say that a woman must have been doing something to entice the man or she would not have become a victim. Perhaps she wore a revealing shirt or seemed to invite a physical encounter in some way. The fact remains, however, that even if these claims are true, a woman has the right to say no at any point and after she does any physical advance toward her becomes an act of aggression.

Brownmiller believed that men had good reasons to hold tightly to the myth that women invited rape. For example, because rape provided an opportunity to acknowledge men's masculinity, they believed that women must likewise desire rape in order to prove their femininity. She believed that not only did this assumption prove men's arrogance and insensitivity, but it additionally supported the belief of the "supreme rightness of male power."<sup>111</sup> So while some believed that women invited rape, and others said that rape existed merely as a

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<sup>110</sup> New York Radical Feminists, 27.

<sup>111</sup> Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 312.

figment of the imagination, in either case, women received the blame.<sup>112</sup>

Additionally, while rape was not a modern trend, the idea that women looked forward to rape first appeared with the beginning of Sigmund Freud's work. In a paper he wrote in 1924 entitled, "The Economic Problem of Masochism," Freud set forth the notion of the masochistic nature of women and stated that they crave the "lust of pain." He believed that masochism "is an expression of sexual maturity . . . obtaining from 'the situation characteristic of womanhood,'" through a woman's passive role in intercourse, to the birthing of a child.<sup>113</sup>

Freud, however, expressed extremely contentious assumptions. First, while his idea concerning women's passivity during the sexual act was not necessarily uncommon given his time period, they remained, nonetheless, only generalizations. Second, when he connected the act of rape to the act of giving birth he spoke out of complete ignorance. Granted, natural childbirth proved a painful experience and most women did not look forward to the seemingly endless hours of labor. Still, labor remained quite distinct from a masochistic act, such as rape, on several grounds. For one, while childbirth was painful, it existed as a natural progression to bring forth new life. Rape, however, although it was also painful, involved the act of violence and the essence of danger. Furthermore, a woman could endure the hours of labor and pain because she looked forward to the end result. The act of rape, however, left women victimized and often afraid to make their circumstances known. Beyond this, many could no longer trust men.

Brownmiller additionally noted that women feared being impolite, and thus created a

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 315.

further case for their continued oppression.<sup>114</sup> Raised to always display proper manners and act appropriately in all situations, women feared the possibility of offending anyone, and thereby further ensured their victimization. She also stated that while any woman could be a rape victim, in general, teenage girls were the most vulnerable.<sup>115</sup>

Brownmiller, not a victim of rape herself, began to see the need for society to understand the history of rape and its consequences. She thereafter wrote a book, *Against Our Will*, in which she shared her own research and opinions on the subject. She insisted that, unlike other creatures, humans did not have a predetermined season in which they mated. This reality meant that a man could take interest in a woman any time he wanted, despite her protests. “What it all boils down to,” she stated, “is that the human male can rape.”<sup>116</sup> Although a woman did have a specific time of fertility within her cycle, which could be approximated in some ways to a type of mating season, Brownmiller correctly stated that this time did not necessarily regulate the male-female sexual relationship regarding frequency. The sexual act could take place at any time, regardless of the woman’s desires.

Brownmiller further noted her own opinion that “one of the earliest forms of male bonding must have been the gang rape of one woman by a band of marauding men.” While her comment certainly bore an element of speculation, her later comments held more truth as she argued that rape remained a male prerogative as well as a weapon used to fulfill a man’s will and instill fear in a woman. Whether or not a woman refused sexual contact, a man could use rape to gain victory and prove his superiority.<sup>117</sup> “From prehistoric times to the present,” Brownmiller

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<sup>114</sup> Brownmiller, *In Defense*, xii.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>116</sup> Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 13.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

stated, “I believe, rape has played a critical function. It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men* keep *all women* in a state of fear.”<sup>118</sup>

Certainly Brownmiller correctly analyzed rape as a vital function of intimidation, but she also made gross generalizations about men. She was extremely critical, not to mention ignorant, when she said that *all men* used rape as a means of oppressing women, and numbers of men would be equally appalled by her statement. While the history of rape gave women a valid reason to be wary of situations of physical assault, Brownmiller’s statement could have led women to believe that every man wanted to assault them and that no man could be trusted. Yet, perhaps that was her intent.

Despite the prominence of rape, however, Brownmiller stated that it had the lowest conviction rate among “all violent crime.” While many quickly blamed the police, who exhibited some lack of responsibility given their unwillingness concerning investigations, one of the most significant reasons remained the fact that when a rape case came to trial, the victim, rather than the rapist, “is put on trial, judged, and found guilty or innocent.”<sup>119</sup>

This proved a poor situation in a number of ways. First, a rape victim often had a difficult time even admitting the circumstances that took place. Second, when the authorities made the victim testify before a courtroom, they forced her to mentally experience the process all over again. Third, the judge scrutinized and questioned the victim to decipher whether she told the truth or not. If the judge believed her story, then the victim prevailed. But if the judge decided that the victim lied about the circumstances, she was considered a liar while the true criminal escaped.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>119</sup> New York Radical Feminists, 125.

Additionally, rape remained unique from other crimes for obvious reasons. In specific cases of assault bodily damage could be evidenced, but “in the case of rape, the threat of force does not secure a tangible commodity as we understand the term . . . more precisely, in rape the threat of force obtains a highly valued sexual service through temporary access to the victim’s intimate parts, and the intent is not merely to ‘take,’ but to humiliate and degrade.”<sup>120</sup>

Thereafter, NYRF organized crisis centers and reached out to victims of rape who often had no other place to go. The crisis centers, furthermore, became a meeting ground between the community and other feminist groups. In certain areas, hospitals and police realized their ignorance about rape encounters and so they called on the crisis centers to gain information on the problem. Additionally, as the media’s interest rose concerning the rape problem, feminist groups who ran the crisis centers not only reached large audiences about the issue of rape, but shared several other feminist concerns as well.

Brownmiller made an interesting analysis of childhood fairy tales and the role they played in instilling fear of men into little girls. Before they even knew how to read, she stated, girls experienced indoctrination of “a victim mentality. Fairy tales are full of a vague dread, a catastrophe that seems to befall only little girls.” She highlighted the story of Little Red Riding Hood to prove her point, in which she noted that the caring little girl went off to take care of her grandma in the dark forest. But she, of course, was not alone, for the wolf lurked within the shadows and waited to devour her.<sup>121</sup>

She further emphasized her point when she stated:

*Red Riding Hood* is a parable of rape. There are frightening male figures abroad in the woods—we call them wolves, among other names—and females are helpless before

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<sup>120</sup> Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 377-78.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

them. Better stick close to the path, better not be adventurous. If you are lucky, a *good, [male] friend* . . . may be able to save you from almost certain disaster . . . In the fairy-tale code book, Jack may kill giants but Little Red Riding Hood must look to a kindly huntsman for protection. Those who doubt that the tale of Red Riding Hood contains this subliminal message should consider how well Peter fared when he met his wolf, or even better, the survival tactics of the Three Little (male) Pigs. Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf? Not *they*.<sup>122</sup>

While it may appear that Brownmiller psychoanalyzed the true meaning of the fairy tale, her argument remained valid. While she only drew on three fairy tales to make her point, she could just as easily have continued her list of stories in which little girls, and women, found themselves in situations where they awaited rescue from danger by the superior male. Interestingly enough, other women often put these vulnerable girls in danger, such as Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, The Little Mermaid, and Rapunzel. Disney, furthermore, shared a great deal in promoting this ideology which numbers of little girls observed on a daily basis. With movies like this it was no wonder that girls, who one day became women, thought they had to be beautiful and have just the right personality in order to win “prince charming.”

To more fully grasp NYRF and its actions, it is also important to understand how the founding cell and various brigades formed and how they functioned. The initial cell, named the Stanton-Anthony Brigade, took its name from prominent leaders of first-wave feminists, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony.<sup>123</sup> Brownmiller noted that the particular naming of the brigades exhibited a bold move against leftists who belittled the earlier suffragettes as racist and consisting of only white, upper-class women.<sup>124</sup> Stanton-Anthony believed that the “sister system,” made up of two or three members from each group, furthered their efforts in the

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 310.

<sup>123</sup> Cellestine Ware, *Woman Power: The Movement for Women's Liberation* (NY: Tower Publications, Inc., 1970), 57.

<sup>124</sup> Brownmiller, *In Our Time*, 78.

women's movement.<sup>125</sup>

The brigades consisted of around fifteen women, and the groups had no particular leaders or structure. Since this system had worked well in the past, NYRF believed it would continue to work in the future. Additionally, the smaller group numbers fostered trust that further encouraged intimacy within the group. Closely connected to each others' lives, they shared a "common political awareness" and "a working internal democracy." Their work in groups of two or three also proved a prominent means by which they overcame their oppression.<sup>126</sup>

The Stanton-Anthony Brigade, which originally had only five members, grew to forty women within the first month. The group decided to plan an action to speak out against the sex-role stereotyping evidenced through the giving of Christmas toys. Due to a lack of organization, however, as well as conflict over the action, the protest never occurred. After that point, NYRF divided the brigade into smaller units, or core groups.<sup>127</sup>

But the process by which they built the core groups proved a long ordeal. The group, called a phalanx, first worked its way through a six-month period following the procedures presented within the "Organizing Principles of the NYRF." During this time, the group's numbers increased to about fifteen, while geographical location proved the best means by which they united. Before the phalanx became a full brigade it went through a three-stage process, the first three months of which the women spent in consciousness-raising in order to more fully grasp their oppression.<sup>128</sup>

The second three months the phalanx read and discussed various modern movement

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<sup>125</sup> Ware, 57.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 57-58.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 61-62.

literature as well as “feminist history and theory” as they hoped to educate the women on several different levels. First, NYRF wanted to introduce women to the current politics within the “Women’s Liberation Movement.” Second, they wanted to access radical feminism within the larger movement context and see how it differed from other views. Third, in order to better understand their place within the feminist movement, NYRF hoped women would understand their own experience in relation to the “feminist political tradition.” Fourth, they desired to lay a foundation on which women could make their own later analyses. And fifth, they wanted “to give the group some basis on which to choose its name.”<sup>129</sup>

After they completed the preliminary stages as a phalanx, the group, then a full brigade, chose a name for their group represented by radical feminists. After they chose their name, the brigade wrote a booklet that pertained to the feminist that the group adopted as their representative. All members then signed the NYRF manifesto and thereafter chose delegates to take part in the “NYRF Coordinating Body” that maintained a rotating membership. NYRF also hoped that the brigade would plan a type of action from beginning to end and allow other groups to join the process. After the completion of all of these steps, the brigade existed independently within NYRF “in whatever aspect and by whatever method it shall decide, including effective . . . action, serious analysis, work with the media, writing and publishing, films, lectures, etc.”<sup>130</sup>

While some viewed the probationary period as essential to the betterment of the group, others felt that it generated a measure of stress and isolation among its members. “Brownmiller, for one, felt that Stanton-Anthony members took the position that ‘they were the feminists, the rest of us were the colonies. We all thought that we were equal, and already full members.’” Ann

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 62-63.

Snitow additionally sympathized with Brownmiller's view and felt that "the probationary period might have been excessively long given those hypertrophied times when revolution seemed" so near.<sup>131</sup> Firestone described one brigade action that occurred on January 15, 1968:

In addition to a speech written and delivered to the main body of the convention . . . we staged an actual funeral procession with a larger-than-life dummy on a transported bier, complete with feminine getup, blank face, blonde curls, and candle. Hanging from the bier were such disposable items as S & H Green Stamps, curlers, garters, and hairspray . . . Finally, by way of a black-ordered invitation we "joyfully" invited many of the 5,000 women there to attend a burial that evening at Arlington . . . of Traditional Womanhood . . .<sup>132</sup>

Through the mock funeral procession, the brigade hoped to unite different women's groups to show their opposition to the Vietnam War. Firestone, however, noted that instead of successfully dismantling the stereotyped role that women acquired, they only further reinforced this idea. "They came as wives, mothers and . . . mourners; that is, tearful and passive reactors to the actions of men rather than organizing as women to change the definition of femininity to something other than a synonym for weakness, political impotence, and tears."<sup>133</sup>

Even though Stanton-Anthony viewed their leadership as temporary, they ultimately became the leaders of NYRF which caused tensions especially "at a time when all leadership was seen as nefarious." Snitow proposed that Stanton-Anthony also consisted of women who "were seen as the 'fancy girls,' 'the flashy bunch . . . a thrilling intellectual cauldron.'"<sup>134</sup>

Brownmiller noted that among all the different groups in the women's movement, the Stanton-Anthony Brigade proved the most receptive to "unaffiliated women who were

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<sup>131</sup> Echols, 191.

<sup>132</sup> Shulamith Firestone, "The Jeanette Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?" (originally published in *Notes from the First Year* (NY: New York Radical Women, 1968)), <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/notes/> (accessed 8 March 2007).

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Echols, 191.

desperately trying to find their way into, or reconnect with, the movement.”<sup>135</sup> But eventually, only six months after the founding of NYRF, the members confronted Stanton-Anthony for their elitism and they did away with the rules for membership. Firestone, greatly offended by the members’ accusations, wanted to speak her mind on the subject, but Snitow counseled against it because of fear of a rift.<sup>136</sup> Firestone took her advice and they calmly returned to the group and informed them that the Stanton-Anthony Brigade would no longer exist and that they planned to leave the organization. In their absence, then, West Village-1 organized a successful speak-out and rape conference that made people aware of the reality of the issue.<sup>137</sup>

Brownmiller noted that NYRF, at its high point, boasted four hundred members in various New York cities, and among their list of activities they “had staged pioneering speak-outs and conferences on rape, prostitutions, marriage, motherhood, and the sexual abuse of children.”<sup>138</sup> Despite its downfalls, then, NYRF proved a prominent voice and presence within the community. As they addressed the politics of the ego they uncovered the secrecy and the power in such things as advertisement and how it supported the traditional role of femininity. This role, they argued, forced women to live according to the dominant cultural expectations, regardless of their own desires. They noted, furthermore, that women’s feminine roles set them up to be victimized by rape, in which a man displayed his masculine superiority in accordance with a woman’s perceived femininity. NYRF, additionally, sought to dispel the social myths concerning rape, namely that women wanted to be raped. And while the Stanton-Anthony Brigade did create tension within NYRF, this type of organizational group also encouraged

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<sup>135</sup> Brownmiller, *In Our Time*, 78.

<sup>136</sup> Echols, 192.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>138</sup> Brownmiller, *In Our Time*, 78-79.

women to feel comfortable as they shared their oppression with other women. Ideally, once this took place women would unite according to their forged bonds and together throw off their chains of oppression.

## CHAPTER 4

### CELL 16

The revolutionary climate of the 1960s set the stage for the formation of the radical feminist group Cell 16, which Roxanne Dunbar established in 1968. Dunbar, through the medium of an underground paper, drew others to the group, including Dana Densmore, Jeanne Lafferty, Abby Rockefeller, Lisa Leghorn, Jayne West, and Betsy Warrior. One of Cell 16's main tools in spreading its beliefs was their radical feminist journal, *No More Fun and Games*, one of the first of its kind.<sup>139</sup> Within its pages, Cell 16 members passionately voiced their outrage over the status of women, while they simultaneously urged them to be the first to labor toward their freedom. And, although the scope of their work encompassed numerous topics, Cell 16's attention to the issues of sex-role conditioning, separatism from men, and celibacy played a major part in exposing the depth of women's oppression and discouraging socially constructed gender expectations.

Cell 16 differed from Redstockings in their opinion on women's behavior, because while Redstockings believed that women acted out their roles as a natural progression of their social conditions, Cell 16 viewed women's behavior as a product of their "sex-role conditioning." The group believed that "women's interest in sex, fashion, make-up, and children" revealed their damage, as well as their compliance, with the male system. Cell 16, furthermore, maintained that the constructs of the social system afforded men the ability to oppress women. In order to become individuals, then, women had to take "off the accumulated emotional and physical flab

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<sup>139</sup> Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975*, American Culture, eds. Stanly Arowitz, Sandra M. Gilbert, and George Lipsitz, no. 3 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 158.

that kept them dependent on men.”<sup>140</sup>

Densmore highlighted this dependence and argued that men gained social acceptance and led successful lives without women, but unless women had men, life remained “meaningless and unnatural.”<sup>141</sup> She also noted that the overwhelming majority of topics in the popular women’s magazine, *Cosmopolitan*, centered on men as the ultimate importance and interest for women, and that through their attainment of men, women secured full lives.<sup>142</sup>

In truth, most women in the United States depended on a man in one way or another to provide them with their basic necessities. Furthermore, few women had access to education that may have provided them the ability to raise a family on their own. But, even if this option existed, Warrior claimed that most women did not have the energy or time to use their education after a draining day of household chores and responsibilities.<sup>143</sup>

Yet, despite Warrior’s assertions, some women took jobs outside of the home. Most jobs proved grueling and unpleasant, but they offered women an opportunity to leave the house, if only for a time. After they cooked and cleaned for the family and took care of children, women left to “go out and keypunch or push a mop in a hospital all night. The paycheck might not be enough to live on, so they are still dependent, but it is a touch with reality.”<sup>144</sup> Despite these cases, however, most women still chose to stay home, even if welcomed by employers, because

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>141</sup> Dana Densmore, “On Female Enslavement . . . and Men’s Stake in It,” *No More Fun and Games* Reprint 1 (Dec 1969), unpaginated.

<sup>142</sup> Dana Densmore, “Women’s Magazines and Womanhood, 1969: Part I—Sex,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 3 (Nov 1969): 30.

<sup>143</sup> Betsy Warrior, “Females and Welfare,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 3 (Nov 1969): 46-7.

<sup>144</sup> Dana Densmore, “On Unity” (speech given at A Conference to Unite Women in Washington, D.C. on October 16, 1970), in *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 5 (July 1971): 55.

they understood that society disapproved of career women. The sex-role conditioning, so fully integrated within society, mandated the roles of wife and mother as the only respectable options for a woman.<sup>145</sup>

Not all women, of course, shared similar home lives and some managed to escape physical exhaustion at the end of the day. Yet, even those who spent their days relaxing around the house experienced oppression because they had little control over their daily activities. Like other women, they received support from their husbands, but all the while they labored at their real job, which was to “keep him happy.” And if unforeseen circumstances arose and the wife found herself without her husband’s support, then “she is helpless until . . . she can find another job, either for a paycheck or bed-and-board.”<sup>146</sup>

It may be easy to criticize women for not “doing something” to improve their conditions. Today, plenty of women remain single and work at highly successful jobs that cater to an indulgent lifestyle. But in the 1960s, women simply did not have many viable options apart from marriage and motherhood. Densmore, then, highlighted the reality of women’s oppression and lack of choice under the social conditions of the time.

And while some women managed to escape financial dependence on fathers or husbands, they often found themselves later dependents on the state and welfare; other male-run systems.<sup>147</sup> Warrior argued that even if mothers managed to “change their material and political position,” they would not be free until they understood their oppression as a direct result of the roles they played and thereafter destroyed those roles. When women failed to recognize their

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<sup>145</sup> Dana Densmore, “The Plea for Gradualism,” *The Female State: A Journal of Female Liberation* 4 (April 1970): 90.

<sup>146</sup> Densmore, “On Unity,” 56.

<sup>147</sup> Betsy Warrior, “The Quiet Ones,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 2 (Feb 1969): 69.

“inferior status as women” they ensured their continued victimization.<sup>148</sup> Dunbar finally understood this concept for herself after a number of years. Even if she excelled she would never “‘make it’ in this society” because she was a woman and not a man.<sup>149</sup>

When society defined women’s status as inferior, it necessarily denoted that men held superior status, and Densmore offered four reasons why men seemed reluctant to let go of their power. First, she claimed that as men identified feminine traits in themselves after the establishment of a disingenuous separation between masculine and feminine traits, they questioned their own sexual identity. Thereafter they amplified their masculine traits “by making women ‘more womanly.’” Second, men postulated women’s suitability to “women’s work” because they did not want to do the degrading work themselves. Third, if they held power, it ensured that someone looked up to them and admired them. And fourth, men found their lives very comfortable, which would necessarily change if they lost their power.<sup>150</sup>

Densmore’s arguments proved legitimate. When society specified particular qualities as masculine and feminine, it forced men and women into definite roles. Even today, women are often left in charge of household duties even if the man and woman both work outside of the home. Any blurring of the well defined social roles caused society to look askance at those who went against the expected norms.

Dunbar further expanded on this idea as she noted that in caste systems all members of society fit into a specific category, whether they wanted to or not. While perhaps the different castes still had contact with one another, society most certainly regulated that contact, and there

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<sup>148</sup> Warrior, “Females and Welfare,” 47.

<sup>149</sup> Roxanne Dunbar, “Country Women (Excerpts from an Autobiographical Essay),” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 3 (Nov 1969): 42.

<sup>150</sup> Densmore, “Female Enslavement,” 13.

existed virtually no upward mobility by the lower castes. Men and women, furthermore, had limited contact in all cultures as society rounded them into a “woman’s world,” and a “man’s world.” While men often approached women, women did not share the same ease of approach toward men.<sup>151</sup> In light of her own experiences, Dunbar alluded to country women and noted that when needed, they did their share of heavy labor in the fields. Men, on the other hand, never took care of the children because they considered this a woman’s job.<sup>152</sup>

Caring for children remained a certainty for most women, and it could have been a potentially fulfilling job had the society regarded it accordingly. In reality, however, the culture forced women into this role and labeled it “women’s work,” and it thereafter existed as a degrading job. Leghorn noted that because of society’s view of housewives, even those women who chose to stay home dealt with the consequences of being viewed as slaves to the household.<sup>153</sup>

Although females certainly remained the more oppressed group compared to their male counterparts, Densmore argued that both men and women experienced oppression from society, which made men even less willing to give up the power they had. “Pushed around himself, exploited and dehumanized, he has a compulsive need to push someone else around to regain his pride. Women are perfect for this, since there are lots of them and they don’t fight back.”<sup>154</sup>

And although the working world provided a degree of competitiveness, men ultimately remained passive even in this area. Left with little other choice than to work within the existing

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<sup>151</sup> Roxanne Dunbar, “Caste and Class (Excerpts),” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 4 (April 1970): 6.

<sup>152</sup> Dunbar, “Country Women,” 40.

<sup>153</sup> Lisa Leghorn, “Child-Care for the Child,” *The Female State: A Journal of Female Liberation* 4 (Apr 1970): 26.

<sup>154</sup> Densmore, “Female Enslavement,” 12.

social system, men became competitors of one another and fought for the top position among the “equally oppressed and dehumanized rats.” Like women, men did not question the conditions they endured, no matter how degrading. Faced with this reality, men and women replaced their freedom of autonomy with the accumulation of material goods, because “deprived of being, they substitute consuming; they . . . drown their sorrows and frustrations in THINGS, seek fulfillment and self-expression and status and power through them.”<sup>155</sup>

Females remained especially victimized by the endless roles they played, yet, because no woman successfully occupied all of the roles, consumerism became a substitute to symbolize her wholeness as a woman. “She is coddled as a consumer, and feels flattered. She finds her reality, her identity in fantasy.” Even men failed to escape the media’s manipulation as they hurried to attain products that created a counterfeit persona.<sup>156</sup>

Densmore did not seek to alleviate the blame on men for their oppression of women; on the contrary, she fully believed that they took an active role as oppressors. She also freely admitted that at times men lowered themselves and helped with some of the household chores. But instead of viewing this as a kind act and one that gave their wives an element of freedom, Densmore believed that it ultimately served as another opportunity in which men garnered praise. “He, in the power and glory of his maleness, condescended to do something for her.” She further asserted that a man’s help to his wife “will never mean more than that until the basic power relations are changed.”<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Dana Densmore, “The Oppression of the Male Today,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 2 (Feb 1969): 38.

<sup>156</sup> Roxanne Dunbar, “The Man and Woman Thing—Review of an Article,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 2 (Feb 1969): 36.

<sup>157</sup> Dana Densmore, “Without You and Within You,” *The Female State: A Journal of Female Liberation* 4 (Apr 1970): 48.

Additionally, Dunbar and Leghorn specified that no man escaped the role of oppressor, but rather, they all shared an active part. They further asserted that the distinctions between male and female only existed because men acted out their role, enjoyed the rewards they received from it, and crushed women in the process. “Men not only support the caste system; they are terrified of losing any part of it.”<sup>158</sup> Moreover, while some men did not seem to fit the role of oppressor, they remained just as guilty as the more blatant oppressors of women and often proved even more dangerous.<sup>159</sup>

On a sarcastic note, Densmore suggested that perhaps men just could not avoid their role as oppressors because they lived in a society that demanded it of them, or maybe women shared some role in their own victimization. If this proved true, she stated, “then we will see that demonstrated in their response to our rejection of our role as victim and our criticism of the institutions that cast them into the role of oppressor.”<sup>160</sup>

Media also played an important part as it furthered the idea of specified sex roles for women. Dunbar explained that if women wanted to know how society truly viewed them they had only to spend a few hours in front of the television, particularly in commercials, to see females “always armed with the tools of Slavery—a baby in arms, a broom, some detergent, a man’s cigar, or Lady Clairol.”<sup>161</sup>

Warrior further noted the effects of sex-role conditioning in school performance between

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<sup>158</sup> Roxanne Dunbar and Lisa Leghorn, “The Man’s Problem,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 3 (Nov 1969): 25.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>160</sup> Dana Densmore, “Who is Saying Men are the Enemy?” *The Female State: A Journal of Female Liberation* 4 (Apr 1970): 5.

<sup>161</sup> Roxanne Dunbar, “Slavery,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* Reprint 1 (Dec 1969): unpaginated.

males and females. She stated that one reason for differences between female performance in school early on compared to their later performance rested in women's role as "docile, submissive, and passive" people, all conditioned traits in females. Women rarely assumed leadership positions later in life and failed to secure a place for themselves.<sup>162</sup>

And in Berkely, California, at a conference that discussed the differences between the sexes, D.W. Taylor offered evidence that supported the idea that problem-solving differences between males and females mainly existed because of attitudes and training. The reality that boys excelled in math and science only as they aged showed that the process of their learning had a great deal to do with this fact. The more girls interacted with the outside world, they acquired "a defeatist attitude toward problem-solving, or what psychologists prefer to call traits of passive-acceptance, docility, and submissiveness."<sup>163</sup> Girls also scored higher in field-dependence as they approached adulthood, which further supported the idea of sex-role conditioning. Women, forced to play roles, lost their problem-solving skills in addition to other setbacks.<sup>164</sup>

As a woman, she had to play the assigned role because she had no training in any other career, lacked the confidence to try another route, and, in general, did not even have a complete education. A woman only attended college, after all, to find and marry a man.<sup>165</sup> What good would a degree be to a housewife?

This is the important thing. Women have been PROGRAMMED, not just coerced. They

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<sup>162</sup> Betsy Warrior, "Sex Roles and Their Consequences," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 2 (Feb 1969): 22.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>165</sup> Dana Densmore, "The Slave's Stake in the Home," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 2 (Feb 1969): 14.

aren't at home because hubby locks the door as he leaves each morning. She is at home because her mother and all her friends are at home, and when she turns on the television or opens a magazine she has reinforced the idea that being at home is honorable, creative, and fulfilling, that she is lucky to have this leisure, or to be self-employed, as it were, even if she is too busy to have much leisure."<sup>166</sup>

She never even questioned her role because she remained so caught up in the attempt to perfect it in order to survive another day.<sup>167</sup>

To say that women did not question their roles is not to suggest that they shared responsibility for their own oppression; they simply saw no better option. Their role existed as a part of the social structure and gained reinforcement by "parents, television, books, the media and . . . friends" on a daily basis. A woman's job consisted of being a successful role player. "This is what has been termed conditioning. The word *conditioning* excludes the factor that one can only be conditioned insofar as one desires to be accepted by those who condition."<sup>168</sup> And Leghorn's argument mirrored reality as women willingly played wife and mother because to reject these roles meant that ultimately they would be the ones rejected.

Social acceptance played a major factor in keeping women in their proper roles, and the fear of rejection worked as a tool of coercion in most instances. Although plenty of women remained dependents because they had no other means of financial security, others certainly had enough economic stability to live independently. Again, the problem existed because of the social expectations. Hilary Langhorst suggested that if a woman had nothing else, "her status as wife and mother protects her from mistreatment by a society . . . and from some of the loneliness and worthlessness she feels as a female." Of course, her work as a mother and wife still

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid. 17.

<sup>168</sup> Lisa Leghorn, "Dialectics of Oppression," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 3 (Nov 1969): 4.

contributed to the society; not on an economic level but on a moral level. Moreover, she did not gain significance through her individual efforts but through a connection to her husband.<sup>169</sup>

Langhorst's argument proved extremely disheartening. Several contributions went undiscovered simply because millions of bright and intelligent women, relegated to the home, remained unable to develop educationally after society excluded them from the "man's world."

Densmore further asserted that "woman is the sustainer. She does not express her unique individuality, does not create, does not act. She is a purely biological creature, living in an alien world she did not make and does not influence . . . precisely in the same way the lower animals do."<sup>170</sup> Densmore urged women to comprehend "the magnitude and horror of this systematic mutilation of humanity, the unthinkable atrocity of the castration of billions of women over millions of years" as society took away a woman's right to mature as a complete human being. "Woman, determined by biology and merely supportive, is a human being with human potential forced to live like an animal."<sup>171</sup>

Stella Kingsbury, angered over the role that women played as sustainer, insisted that as women, we "have had everything against us." She believed that ever since creation women remained an afterthought to Adam and to the rest of men throughout time. Women played the sidekick and the continual support for their men, whether to a "husband, father, son, lover, [or] brother . . . ." Yet, most women happily acted their parts and did not even question their roles. And most likely, Kingsbury claimed, future generations of women would continue to do the same without a second thought, which thereby secured men's position, and women's place in

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<sup>169</sup> Hilary Langhorst, "'Motherhood' and the Subordination of Females and Children," *The Female State: A Journal of Female Liberation* 4 (Apr 1970): 22.

<sup>170</sup> Dana Densmore, "Our Place in the Universe," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* Reprint 1 (Dec 1969): unpaginated.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

relation to them.<sup>172</sup> Some may be convinced by Kingsbury's assertions, yet, it failed to surprise many that women did not entertain thoughts outside of marriage and a family as the repercussions afforded more difficulty than most women wished to endure.

Concerning women's roles as sustainers and comforters, Densmore highlighted the hypocritical social expectations on women. She pointed out that if a man came home disgruntled after a long day at work, it showed how hard he had labored for her. Her job, then, consisted of rushing to meet his every need, as she made sure he was comfortable and not bothered by noisy children. But women could never be grumpy around their husbands, no matter what kind of day they had been through, because men did not care about women's petty problems. "But after all," Densmore inquired, "why should she protect him from screaming kids? It is she who has been locked up with them all day!"<sup>173</sup>

Perhaps women responded to Densmore's question with a resounding, "Amen!" There is no doubt that men experienced days when all they wanted to do was come home and relax without having to deal with any other problems. But men often assumed that because women stayed home all day, they did absolutely nothing. Occasionally, husbands spent the entire day at home with the children so their wives could have a day off. Most likely, when the wives came home they found their husbands just as exhausted as they felt every day, if not more, because they dealt with this kind of work on a regular basis. In reality, both men and women experienced stressful situations and needed time to relax. To assume that a woman did not need this kind of emotional release displayed ignorance toward reality.

Yet, a woman's role consisted not only of her dependence on men but also in her ability

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<sup>172</sup> Stella Kingsbury, "Women Up Against the Wall," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* Reprint 1 (Dec 1969): unpaginated.

<sup>173</sup> Dana Densmore, "Women's Magazines and Womanhood, 1969: Part II—Marriage," *The Female State: A Journal of Female Liberation* 4 (Apr 1970): 34.

to make her physical person more appealing. Because of the fear of social rejection, most women did not complain about this but did all they could to make themselves more feminine.<sup>174</sup> And although at first some women rejected their sex roles, society's scare tactics, such as the possibility of losing one's attractiveness, kept them in place. And it worked. Women understood that without their physical beauty, they cut off all ties to "their qualifications, their ticket, to the approval of men, and they know that without it they cannot have a normal, meaningful life."<sup>175</sup>

In society's opinion, created beauty proved a vital component to the goal of catching a man. Most likely, a woman's personality and uniqueness as an individual did not garner enough special attention on their own. But rather, in order to draw attention, she created the desirable woman. She molded herself into a character that no man could resist. She manufactured the role and acted it out.<sup>176</sup> But Densmore argued that the "plain unvarnished self" would never have drawn attention on its own. Yet, at this point it was too late. The woman had forever marked herself as a "traditional role-playing" woman who enjoyed the degrading life she helped create. Additionally, Densmore noted the inevitable effects of media's power that propagated specific messages about sexual identity and, therefore, affected women's self-image.<sup>177</sup>

Densmore also highlighted the awkward and disheartening phase in which teenage girls attempted to remake themselves according to social standards. Later, when the cosmetics failed to deliver the desired results, as they almost always did, girls remained entirely broken because

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<sup>174</sup> Densmore, "Female Enslavement," 10.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>176</sup> Dana Densmore, "Sex and the Single Girl," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 2 (Feb 1969): 74.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

neither the painted nor the unpainted face proved sufficient.<sup>178</sup> Or worse, having thought themselves beautiful, they masqueraded as gorgeous objects when really their plain selves had started to show through. In this later realization and humiliation, they retreated into self-despair and agony at their artifice. “That beautiful object we stand in awe before has nothing to do with the person we know so well, it is altogether outside, separate, object, a beautiful image, not a person at all. A feast for the eyes.”<sup>179</sup>

Culture propagated the view that women existed as a “feast for the eyes,” and because of this, society perceived women differently than men. A woman’s thoughts and will did not matter; only her appearance, because her importance rested in facade.<sup>180</sup> More than that, if a woman lacked physical beauty she proved offensive to her role because she failed to be a true woman and offensive to other women who believed in the whole appearance sham.<sup>181</sup> “Only as we slip into the schizophrenic world of play-acting and narcissism will we be able to enjoy the beauty we create.”<sup>182</sup>

The dynamics that played out because of the insistence on physical beauty took a heavy toll on women. Those with plainer features remained in a constant struggle for acceptance. But even “natural beauties,” as society labeled some women, fought against nature. No one escaped imperfections, even if men demanded it of them. What could a woman do when she showed signs of aging? From the beginning, a woman had no chance of fulfilling her social obligations all of the time.

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<sup>178</sup> Dana Densmore, “On the Temptation to be a Beautiful Object,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 2 (Feb 1969): 43.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

So men wanted, and expected, women to be beautiful even if it required a lot of work. But a woman also had to be careful not to overdo her make-up. Others despised her, “not because she is artificial, but because the obviousness of her artificiality make her NOT BEAUTIFUL.”<sup>183</sup> Men failed to admit, however, that the male-run society produced the overdone women they quickly dismissed.<sup>184</sup>

Drawing again from personal examples, Dunbar noted that the Hollywood image, while it bore a fairly close resemblance to men in real society, resembled very little the true appearance of women. This caused women to try and mold themselves into the images they saw on the big screen, although the attempts proved highly unsuccessful. “The sight of country women in rhinestones and platform heels and brief dresses over their muscular bodies was a pitiful one indeed. So the men left them (in fantasy) for Hollywood . . . .” And because they failed to attain the Hollywood image, they then demanded it of their daughters. ““Pretty as a movie star”” described girls who fit the image; a girl with “curly, blond hair, blue eyes, rosy complexion, and a soft round body.”<sup>185</sup>

This idea of achieving the look of Hollywood remained unrealistic. First, many ignored the fact that actors and actresses had personal make-up crews who spent hours perfecting their looks. Second, the reality that it took hours to perfect their looks should have sent the message that in real life they did not even resemble the characters they played. And that is just what they proved to be; characters that played roles, just as women did everyday.

Countless numbers of women wasted themselves on “extremes of monkish dieting,

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<sup>183</sup> Dana Densmore, “Against Liberals,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 2 (Feb 1969): 60.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>185</sup> Dunbar, “Country Women,” 42.

padding out and girdling in, tinting and dying, curling and straightening, painting and plucking, not to mention the great modern innovation plastic surgery.” Moreover, the desire to manipulate one’s body in these ways stemmed from “male-run advertising, designing and retailing firms” that created the images that women frantically adopted in their insecurities.<sup>186</sup> “The female, being nothing, APPEARED: painted, perfumed, coiffed, clothed in the latest most appealing fashions.” Men identified her by her body, so she spent herself on decorating it in order to feel important.

Yet, not only did women fall prey to the lies of advertisement, but the men did as well. Previously, men had too much personal respect to care about how they looked; their personalities and talents had been enough. But advertisers encouraged men to free themselves and suggested individuality and self-expression through fashion as the key because their personalities remained insufficient.<sup>187</sup>

Delpfine Welch noted further differentiations between men and women in the intentionality that “male bodies are called builds and female bodies are figures.” A build conjured up the idea of strength, while a figure pleased the eye. This idea was also evidenced in women’s fashions which “expose legs, arms, shoulders, [and] necks. They are displaying their very weakness as beautiful.” Society separated body parts into objects for viewing.<sup>188</sup>

Chivalry remained another area in which American culture differentiated between genders. From an early age, society taught men that they should open the door for a lady and pull out her seat so she could sit down; in short, they treated her with special care. But, Densmore

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<sup>186</sup> Marilyn Terry, “Dress to Go Human In,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* Reprint 1 (Dec 1969): unpaginated.

<sup>187</sup> Densmore, “Oppression of the Male,” 39.

<sup>188</sup> Delpfine Welch, “On Health,” *The Female State: A Journal of Female Liberation* 4 (Apr 1970): 103.

claimed that when a man acted this way, he tested a woman's dignity even though she knew that society expected her to appreciate such gestures. Furthermore, she believed that chivalry sent the message that male supremacy remained an active force, and that women should thank men for their thoughtfulness. If they did not, then they felt ashamed because they interpreted it as a sign of their incompleteness as women.<sup>189</sup>

To suggest that chivalry degraded a woman often sent men into a fit. They argued that if they did not offer women special treatment, then what alternatives remained? Should they "slam the door back in her face rather than holding it?" To this, Densmore replied, "I would ask him, has he ever slammed a door back in a man's face? Of course not. He holds the door until the next man walking through can reach it, then walks on. Men and women should treat each other the same way men treat men and women treat women. Somehow such things are never an issue in those situations; the natural rational procedure emerges automatically."<sup>190</sup>

Again, it is important to understand the context in which Densmore made her argument. When men offered women special treatment simply because of their gender, it further reinforced the idea that they could not take care of themselves but needed men to help them with even their most basic needs. Today, however, it is not as common to see these simple gestures. It can be argued whether the disposal of chivalry is beneficial or not, but it should be understood that some women liked this treatment and others did not. The key point of Densmore's argument rested in her belief that women should not feel ashamed if they disliked special treatment and their feelings should be respected. Additionally, Densmore made a good point as she noted the unnecessary existence of two extremes: opening the door for a lady or slamming it in her face.

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<sup>189</sup> Dana Densmore, "Chivalry—The Iron Hand in the Velvet Glove," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 3 (Nov 1969): 61.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

Most certainly, men had the ability to show respect for a woman as an individual and yet not patronize her with chivalric actions.

One might question why society assigned women a unique role apart from men. Densmore argued that men rationalized the use of sex-role conditioning because they insisted that a woman's nature proved essentially different than a man's, and that nature programmed women for their roles. They surmised that women remained "gentle, loving, unaggressive, tender, modest, giving, patient, naive, simplistic, simple, irrational, instinctual, intuitive, [and] home-centered."<sup>191</sup> In reality, some women did not exhibit these traits, while some men did. So then, what happened when a woman acted differently than expected? Most likely, society viewed her as unwomanly and rejected her because she did not fit the mold. Or, what if a man did exhibit these traits? Most likely, society rejected him as well. For people who did not perform their expected roles, society offered little room.

Densmore further highlighted society's false assumption that men had "egos," but women did not, as an ego denoted one's awareness of their individuality. Women, rather, had "feelings" that often suffered injury. But men did not have to worry too much about that, Densmore sarcastically noted because women were simply "overemotional and oversensitive."<sup>192</sup> In reality, women quite often disregarded their own good in place of "concern for others. They were taught to be promiscuously empathetic, moral, and thoughtful of others, to the point where they always took the smallest piece of pie or, more likely, waited until everyone else had selected a piece and then took the piece no one else wanted." Since they had been denied self-worth and any measure

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<sup>191</sup> Densmore, "Female Enslavement," 10.

<sup>192</sup> Dana Densmore, "The Man Problem: Ego and Adulthood," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 5 (July 1971): 86.

of self-consideration, women rarely took their own needs into account.<sup>193</sup>

Furthermore, a woman did not exhibit kindness because she thought she would receive the same measure in return but because she knew no other way. Looking out for the good of others had been a general rule for her and empathy a conditioned trait. She suffered along with those who suffered, even for men whom, Densmore noted, suffered “over their slipping position of supremacy.”<sup>194</sup>

Densmore’s arguments may cause mixed feelings. On one hand, while women often did put others ahead of themselves, it was not necessarily because only they had been taught to do so. Good parents taught their children, whether boys or girls, to be thoughtful of others and to put the interests of others before one’s own. Yet, Densmore spoke of this generosity as a detriment to women. But while not everyone practiced these teachings, society would have been much worse off if everyone only looked out for their own best interests. Most likely, however, Densmore argued not so much against women’s kindness but, rather, against women’s kindness to their own frequent disadvantage. They lacked self-confidence because of their role as women and, therefore, they rarely, if ever, put their needs before those of another, even when necessary.

Angered by the roles that women played, Densmore warned that as long as male supremacy remained, women would continue to be oppressed and only receive hand-outs when it worked to men’s advantage.<sup>195</sup> Dunbar additionally stated, “We are damaged—we women, we oppressed, we disinherited . . . . The oppressed trust those who rule more than they trust themselves because self-contempt emerges from powerlessness. Anyway, few oppressed people

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 88-9.

<sup>194</sup> Dana Densmore, “The Quaker,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 2 (Feb 1969): 87.

<sup>195</sup> Densmore, “Slave’s Stake,” 20.

believe that life could be much different . . . .”<sup>196</sup>

But Cell 16 did believe that life could be different and they urged women to reject their programmed roles. They also warned, however, that if women did this they should expect to be viewed as “freaks, misfits in a man’s world . . . .”<sup>197</sup> Women remained unhappy with the feminine identity assigned to them, and so they understood that to become individuals they needed to start “creating the new person—in ourselves, and not by breeding heirs.” Cell 16 urged both men and women to reject their sex-roles and consider the destructive nature of the society and their part in its promulgation.<sup>198</sup>

The idea of autonomy remained a key issue in Cell 16’s work, and they argued that women must become individuals before they could do anything to gain their freedom. Dunbar argued that unless a person exhibited complete autonomy, the revolutionary spirit could not exist. She further suggested that if one remained secluded for a number of months and only had the most basic necessities, then that person would begin to “feel a self-mind and body inseparable.”<sup>199</sup>

Additionally, Dunbar argued against the idea that the couple remained essential to the beginning of a revolutionary society, as it presupposed the subordination of women and children to men. Instead, she believed that the individual “is the basic unit of Humanity,” and in the best society individuals did not compete against each other. Although this idea seemed utopian,

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<sup>196</sup> Roxanne Dunbar, “Who is the Enemy?” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 2 (Feb 1969), 55.

<sup>197</sup> Lisa Leghorn, “How We are Lunatized,” *The Female State: A Journal of Female Liberation* 4 (Apr 1970): 16.

<sup>198</sup> Roxanne Dunbar, “Female Liberation as the Basis for Social Revolution,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 2 (Feb 1969): 110.

<sup>199</sup> Dunbar, “Slavery,” 7.

Dunbar argued that the “problem is wanting such a society, not making it. Women want such a society, so they must make it.”<sup>200</sup>

Densmore also warned women that if they did not revolt against their sex-roles, the effects would be felt throughout all society. She noted that society respected men equally, although they varied in their abilities and talents, because of their role as individuals. But, she argued, women should also be respected for their unique abilities. “Her imagination, her heart and brain should be out there acting on the world to make it better, restructuring it into an unoppressive place for all people, making her contributions toward a richer world for everyone, developing and expressing her individuality as a useful contributing member of the *human* society.”<sup>201</sup> Densmore understood that it would take much work to undo the harmful effects of sex-role conditioning, but as women began to understand their oppression and sought to remake themselves as individuals the revolutionary spirit increased.

After women gained autonomy, they had to form a cohesive unit and fight against the system on a united front. Leghorn noted that only if “women as a group assert feminism at every level can there be hope for substantial change.”<sup>202</sup> Warrior spoke at an early women’s liberation meeting and mentioned that some women had called and expressed their desire to join the group, but their husbands would not allow them to participate. Disgusted with this confession, one woman frowned upon the idea that a woman should obey her husband’s orders. But Warrior argued, “If we don’t believe that women are bullied and oppressed by men in various degrees

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<sup>200</sup> Roxanne Dunbar, “What is to be Done?” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* Reprint 1 (Dec 1969): unpaginated.

<sup>201</sup> Densmore, “Place in the Universe,” 69.

<sup>202</sup> Leghorn, “Lunatized,” 16.

and different ways, then what is Female Liberation hollering and fighting for?”<sup>203</sup>

Some women, however, managed to escape various aspects of the destructiveness of sex-role conditioning, but many of these eventually rejected other women as they shrank back in horror from their own gender. They asserted that women actually enjoyed being conditioned because they proved too lazy to change the system. Densmore argued, though, that “only a low self image could produce that kind of self-destructive conduct . . . .” Women often did not change, not because of laziness, but because they had been so fully indoctrinated with the idea that they could only be true women as wives and mothers. The false idea existed then, that if they wanted anything different for themselves it showed the degree of their selfishness of which they should be ashamed.

Another myth existed that wealthy women led a better life than poorer women based on their financial conditions. Leghorn argued, however, that whether a woman had wealth or not, she still experienced oppression because her man owned her. Wealthy women, tricked into thinking they had power because of their social and financial status, often viewed themselves as superior to their other, poorer sisters. When this happened, wealthy women could not trust anyone and failed to create community with other women. Not only this, but wealthy women proved less likely to revolt because they believed they lived out the best possible option.<sup>204</sup>

It may be easy to understand why upper-class women complied with sex-role conditioning. After all, perhaps they had more free time because of a maid’s help, and fewer responsibilities in the areas of cleaning and cooking allowed them to spend their time volunteering in different areas. From the outside it seemed that such women had it made. They

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<sup>203</sup> Warrior, “Quiet Ones,” 70.

<sup>204</sup> Lisa Leghorn, “Women of the Ruling Class,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 3 (Nov 1969): 43.

did not have to work and were not bogged down all day with grueling and time-consuming activities. But, Leghorn suggested that these women, owned by men, maintained an oppressed status just as much poorer women and still experienced degradation and humiliation. Additionally, since they already occupied the upper echelons of society, no chance for upward mobility existed. So to mask the depression they drowned their sorrows in consumerism and a social life.<sup>205</sup> “This life that they thought would be their emancipation-this life which they so hate, but so fear to admit to themselves that they hate; if this life isn’t good, where does a woman go?”<sup>206</sup>

Leghorn made a convincing point. Countless numbers of lower-class women at least saw the opportunity for upward mobility. Striving toward a goal provided hope and endurance. But the women who failed to see any better option continued their role-playing because they believed they had the best life. Furthermore, the different classes of women failed to find common ground, an essential component of unity in women’s liberation. “We are all one. All the same influences have acted on us. If you have somehow escaped the consequences of your conditioning you are lucky, not superior, not different. We are all sisters.”<sup>207</sup>

Once the women attained a significant sense of unity they would be ready, both emotionally and psychically, to fight for their independence. Dunbar noted, however, that without force it would be difficult to convince men to follow their revolution. Most men felt uncomfortable with the ideas that women’s liberation stood for, especially “solitude, separateness, [and] wholeness” because masters did not usually exhibit these qualities as did the

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>207</sup> Dana Densmore, “On Sisterhood,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 2 (Feb 1969): 118.

humble. And although women made up half the population, this did not necessarily ensure their success because they still lived under male oppression. Dunbar, therefore, argued for a “vanguard of women” that showed others the way to a new life. After they effectively completed their job, they hoped more women would continue to join the movement.<sup>208</sup>

Dunbar noted that in the past women dealt with men’s resistance to female liberation through the acceptance of the “man-hating, man-baiting” role because they had not received opportunities to share their problems within society. She believed that while this type of attitude possibly allowed women to understand their true oppression, the time for revolution had come and they would “take the masses of women and men with us.” She also stated that if people fully understood female liberation, there would be just “as many males as females committed to their own salvation and that of humanity.” Dunbar did not suggest that female liberationists should intentionally try to draw men to their movement, but that every avenue of information be made available.<sup>209</sup> Additionally, Dunbar warned women that just as men competed with one another and lost sight of their real enemy, so too, women often grasped for power positions and acted out the masculine role.<sup>210</sup>

It is important to understand that within the first issue of *No More Fun and Games*, Cell 16 did not accept the idea that men and women were different because of biological reasons, but rather, attributed the differences to sex-role conditioning. But by the second issue it appeared unclear whether Cell 16 aimed to reject sex-role conditioning or to reevaluate femininity. In only four months time, Dunbar went from believing that motherhood ensured a woman’s slave status to believing that it encouraged the female principle, which she understood to be “maternal,

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<sup>208</sup> Dunbar, “What is to be Done?” 62.

<sup>209</sup> Dunbar, “Who is the Enemy?” 57.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

materialist, and peaceful,” to overtake the male principle. Furthermore, Dunbar favored “the term ‘female liberation’ to women’s liberation, because it suggested that the movement’s goal remained the liberation of the female principle.” While Cell 16 believed that men could work with women toward liberation, they “defined maleness as the problem, [and] they worked at banishing it from their midst.”<sup>211</sup> Thus, Cell 16 most likely first suggested the idea that women pull away from men both personally and politically.<sup>212</sup>

In order for women as a group to separate themselves from men, they first had to share a common goal. Cell 16, thereafter, called radical women to break off all ties with “male-oriented, male-dominated radical organizations” and take part in women’s liberation groups as the best way to establish their individuality and banish all oppression from society. Concerning the black liberation movement, Maureen Davidica argued that they did not want to liberate women because they had “vested interest in women’s enslavement.” As she noted the work the radical movement had done to condemn racism, she further stated that it took no aims to dismantle marriage and motherhood, which oppressed women just as much as slavery ever did. Because of this, she did not believe that the radical movement sought to remove all oppression from society, but rather, ensured freedom for men. Cell 16, then, encouraged women to join groups that desired liberation for all lifestyles. Yet, Cell 16 expected women “to stand independently,” Davidica stated, “to demand a society not based on an enslaving family unit with its male/female dependency, but based on the liberated individual, a sexless society where there is no distinction between the roles of male and female.”<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Echols, 160-61.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>213</sup> Maureen Davidica, “Woman and the Radical Movement,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* Reprint 1 (Dec 1969): unpaginated.

While it may appear that Davidica called for the entire destruction of the family unit, this was not necessarily true. Rather, she argued against the family as the foundation of the society because of the way it enslaved women through sex-role conditioning. Furthermore, she attempted to dismantle the distinct roles that men and women played out in the family unit, those that gave men unquestioned authority, while women played the household slave.

It may seem obvious that Cell 16 viewed men as women's enemy; however, this would be a hasty assumption because the group itself wavered on their stance. Early on, the group identified all men as the enemy, which meant "any man who 'has a woman' or wants to 'have a woman.'"<sup>214</sup> Warrior, furthermore, highlighted that men held power in all major social structures, and even though they too experienced a measure of dehumanization by these systems, they ultimately received advantages from their part in them. Their participation in such systems allowed them to oppress women, who never gained advantages as men did. Because of this, Warrior argued that unless men proved otherwise, they remained the enemy. Cell 16 cautioned women, however, of the probability that men would exhibit hostility toward them because of their alienation but to not let this be an obstacle to separation from men.<sup>215</sup>

In the fourth issue of *No More Fun and Games*, however, Densmore drew attention away from men as the enemy, but rather, argued that the social structure put men in the position of oppressors. Additionally, she highlighted the common misinterpretation that if women did not accept all men, that they necessarily "regard them as 'enemies' in the sense of an opponent so all-powerful and implacable that he must be killed in order to be neutralized."<sup>216</sup> Densmore

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<sup>214</sup> Dunbar, "Slavery," 2.

<sup>215</sup> Betsy Warrior, "Battle Lines," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 3 (Nov 1969): 28-9.

<sup>216</sup> Densmore, "Men are the Enemy?" 4.

denied such actions as unnecessary. Instead, she concluded that the “real enemy . . . is sexism and male supremacy . . . .”<sup>217</sup> She further contradicted Dunbar’s and Warrior’s view of men as the enemy and urged women to stop playing enemy games. Her solution to the problem proved direct and exact, “If they ridicule us or try to smear us or isolate us, we must laugh and walk out.”<sup>218</sup>

Yet, Densmore cautioned women that leaving men would not be easy because they had to defend themselves not only against individual men but also against the social structure. But if women wanted any chance of independence from men and respect as individuals, they could not “afford NOT to dump him off. As long as he’s there, as long as she’s denying herself for crumbs of his approval she’s only an appendage to him—useful within context but not respected.”<sup>219</sup>

Additionally, Leghorn stated that men and women faced an identity problem as they searched for a relationship with the opposite sex and felt a sense of insecurity if a partner could not be found. While she did not encourage men and women to date, she did note that a healthy relationship could be attained only if both persons regarded each other as individuals and respected each other as such.<sup>220</sup> She believed, however, that if women reevaluated their relationships with men, they would see the destructive nature of such situations and would choose to live as autonomous individuals. “Until men wake up and start to work towards overcoming their oppressive attitudes,” Leghorn stated, “it is certainly healthier for us to stay

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>219</sup> Densmore, “Place in the Universe,” 69.

<sup>220</sup> Lisa Leghorn, “All or Nothing,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 3 (Nov 1969): 85.

away.”<sup>221</sup>

Cell 16 encouraged single women to stay single and to take control of their own lives as individuals. They also praised the idea that a woman might live alone as it proved a rewarding experience. Yet, because of the understanding that special circumstances sometimes made single living impossible, female communes became a second option apart from dependence on a man.<sup>222</sup> In this way, women did not have to rely on men for their basic needs, while it also eased financial burdens. Furthermore, this situation proved beneficial because it united women against the enemy as they gained the daily support of others who sought similar independence. Cell 16 encouraged women to take other practical steps of separation from men, such as a change in one’s name so that no patriarchal ties remained, whether to a husband or father.<sup>223</sup>

Densmore urged women to understand that the ultimate work rested “with ourselves, with other women, and with society as a whole, with the established, institutionalized attitudes of society.” If women disengaged themselves from their oppressive roles, Densmore argued, then men would have no power over them and their greatest tool would be to leave them behind. Most likely, the decision to leave would be the last straw in women’s oppression.<sup>224</sup>

In addition to Densmore’s suggestions, Dunbar and Leghorn noted that this new attitude of independence encouraged women to avoid relationships with men who did not similarly fight for women’s independence. And while Cell 16 realized that “hatred and resentment” toward men proved insufficient issues to prolong their fight, these feelings inevitably increased the more fully

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>222</sup> Editorial, “What Women Want?” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 2 (Feb 1969): 9.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>224</sup> Densmore, “Men are the Enemy?” 6-7.

women understood their oppression.<sup>225</sup> An issue of great importance proved to be women's acknowledgement of themselves as individuals and not as another person's slave. "Woman must stand up right where she is and say NO.' . . . I am not an animal, NO, I am not the inessential, NO, I will not be the oppressed, the slave, the sub-human. She must cry, I AM! She must walk out into the world determining her own destiny and defining herself."<sup>226</sup>

Cell 16 not only considered general relationships with men as oppressive, but they further viewed men's insistence on sexual needs as a disputable point. "From the first issue of *No More Fun and Games*, Densmore argued that sex is 'inconvenient, time-consuming, energy-draining, and irrelevant.'" Yet, not even a year later, Cell 16 further argued that sex could prove destructive to the women's movement, and that "women's hyposexuality was essential to the cause." And while it should be noted that Cell 16's call for separatism from men laid the theoretical groundwork for lesbianism, the group did not advocate this lifestyle.<sup>227</sup> Densmore argued that men and women turned to homosexual relationships because of the roles society forced them to play. Women, unable to handle the oppressive attitudes of men, sought shelter in a relationship with another woman. Men did not respect women, so they sought a respectful partner in another man. "The false male-female dichotomy is then responsible for homosexuality."<sup>228</sup>

Densmore also attacked the idea that all humans needed sex and further suggested that this idea stood in the way of true female liberation. While she did not argue against sex as a natural part of life, she suggested that it should be dethroned as an essential need, such as

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<sup>225</sup> Dunbar and Leghorn, "Man's Problem," 27.

<sup>226</sup> Densmore, "Place in the Universe," 69.

<sup>227</sup> Echols, 164.

<sup>228</sup> Dana Densmore, "Sexuality," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* Reprint 1 (Dec 1969): unpaginated.

breathing or eating. Additionally, many people never engaged in the sex act, “including fine, warm, happy people.” She further lifted the lid on the real reason for culture’s fascination with sex, which society itself manufactured. In its ability to be used as a product endorser, media programmed people to feel that they needed sex like they needed air. Further, it promised many things not offered in the daily routine and often existed as one of the only forms of power that women held. Still, after several unsatisfying sexual encounters, women believed that the next situation would bring about the satisfaction they had been in search of for so long.<sup>229</sup> Dunbar also agreed with Densmore’s opinion and refuted the idea that people really needed sex, but rather, it remained a conditioned need that “can be unconditioned.”<sup>230</sup> Similarly, Rockefeller echoed Densmore’s and Dunbar’s claims and noted women’s lack of comfort in the parallelization of the sex need with other needs such as eating or ridding the body of waste, “because they don’t need sex in this way.”<sup>231</sup>

These arguments brought to light society’s enthrallment with sex and its sometimes virtual insistence on sex as a duty. And as time went on it seemed that people are engaged in sex at much earlier ages than ever before. While American culture once commonly viewed sex as a sacred act of marriage alone, the pressure from peers, co-workers, and friends to engage in sex often proved too overwhelming. Some may be appalled at the rising number of sexual encounters outside of marriage, but the greatest shock was that many people often engaged in a one-night-stand simply for a thrill. Not only did they lack a commitment to the person they shared such an intimate union with, but, at times, they did not even know their partner’s name.

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<sup>229</sup> Dana Densmore, “On Celibacy,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* Reprint 1 (Dec 1969): unpaginated.

<sup>230</sup> Roxanne Dunbar, “Asexuality,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* Reprint 1 (Dec 1969): unpaginated.

<sup>231</sup> Abby Rockefeller, “Sex: The Basis of Sexism,” *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 6 (May 1973): 15.

The important thing to realize, Densmore stated, was that people misunderstood sex as a major need versus a minor one. And the frequent misunderstanding of a sex need often proved to be a desire for other physical attention, “recognition or love, desire to conquer, humiliate or wield power, or desire to communicate.” Densmore urged people to honestly analyze their sexuality and to suspend their view of celibacy as an anomaly but, rather, to see it as a state which could even be advantageous. “How repugnant it really is, after all, to make love to a man who despises you, who fears you and wants to hold you down!”<sup>232</sup>

After a thorough analysis of Densmore’s opinion, it became clear that she did not call for an end to sexuality altogether, but, rather, she wanted people to stop to question whether engaging in sex proved the best option. Obviously, if no one ever had sex again, humanity would soon die out, which made universal celibacy an unrealistic option. But along Densmore’s line of argument, to engage in sex without weighing out the options proved an equal disservice to humanity. Moreover, while some used sex as a way of expressing love to another individual, others used it to degrade and dominate. Situations such as the latter remained the issue that Densmore highlighted as especially harmful.

Densmore further supported her opinion that people did not need sex when she noted the example of sexual practice among animals. She stated that animals mated by instinct to reproduce and not simply for enjoyment. This kind of practice, she believed, provided a better way for people to regard sex; as a means of replenishing the species rather than as a form of recreation. And while she admitted that sex could sometimes be pleasurable, she believed that “erotic energy” could be “transformed into creative, meaningful activity . . . .”<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Densmore, “On Celibacy,” 22.

<sup>233</sup> Densmore, “Sexuality,” 53.

Some may have psychoanalyzed that Densmore stated her argument based on her own sexual repression, of which she needed to be freed. While this was a presumptuous assertion, room existed for argument concerning her opinion. Through her deconstruction of the purpose of sex as a means of reproduction alone, she took much of the beauty and complexity out of this intimate union. Plenty of married women dreamt of having children someday but later experienced infertility. Did this mean they should have sworn off sex with their spouses? If one accepted Densmore's line of argument, then the answer had to be, "Yes."

Still, Densmore made a good point as she suggested that perhaps people really sought to gain a sense of closeness with another person through sex; a desire to overcome the "isolation of individualism." Although some argued that sex offered the pleasure they so desperately needed, she refuted this idea and noted plenty of things that produced pleasure that people lived without. "What I want to suggest is not that sex is by its nature evil and destructive, but that it is not an absolute physical need: the assumption that it is an absolute physical need is evil and the patterns of behavior that grow out of that assumption are destructive."<sup>234</sup> Densmore argued that if people needed sex as culture claimed, female liberation would almost be doomed from the start. "Fortunately, it is not true."<sup>235</sup>

For many male radicals who supported female liberation the question remained, "What about sex?" Dunbar noticed that it seemed that male radicals encouraged female liberation as long as it did not interfere with their access to sexual favors; the only real reason men kept women around. She then disregarded their question based on its lack of importance and further stated that women should be in control of their bodies and not consent to sex solely out of a fear of being labeled a prude or of losing a man's attention. Men often responded to her opinion

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<sup>234</sup> Densmore, "Without You and Within You," 52-3.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 55.

negatively and accused her of having a repressive attitude. To counter their assertions, Dunbar stated that sex remained a man's problem and women had more important things to worry about.<sup>236</sup>

Yet, men argued that women should rejoice in their newfound "sexual liberation" that allowed them to enjoy sex with whomever they wanted. They further quipped that if women failed to enjoy sex there must be something wrong with them. Densmore stated that liberal men had "permitted her to enjoy sex, or rather . . . [have] permitted her to ADMIT it, supposedly she was wild about it all along, and if she DOESN'T admit it or even worse, doesn't ENJOY it, she is sick, warped."<sup>237</sup>

Dunbar additionally questioned what commonality existed between sexual freedom and female liberation, when the sexual freedom movement really stood for men having free sexual access to women whenever they wanted. Moreover, the movement brainwashed women into thinking that they should embrace free sex. But, Dunbar stated, this was like "encouraging someone to dive in the water for the first time. Teaching someone to swim by encouraging her to jump in the water is one thing; but the fact is that the pool is dry." People had defenses for a reason, and until women gained freedom, Densmore believed it was wrong to encourage them to get rid of "the few protective defenses they have." She also noted that while men often pressured women to be sexually liberated, society gave little attention to the option of "liberation *from* sexuality . . . ." Dunbar highlighted the fact that numbers of women preferred celibacy because they related sex with brutality, violence, subservience, and the possibility of becoming pregnant.

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<sup>236</sup> Dunbar, "Female Liberation," 110-11.

<sup>237</sup> Densmore, "Against Liberals," 63.

This equation, then, often caused women to view sex as dirty rather than pleasurable.<sup>238</sup>

Cell 16 members also endorsed celibacy as a means of attaining a pure form of love and wholeness with oneself. Ellen O'Donnell suggested that it led to a quietness of soul that thereafter led to "graceful loving," rather than the attempt to mold another person through a sexual relationship.<sup>239</sup> Densmore, moreover, stated that the affection and love that people sought through sexual relationships could also be found in friends who loved you for your personality, not for how you looked.<sup>240</sup> Dunbar believed that monks had attained true normalcy and morality through their celibacy. She further suggested that others might try a similar lifestyle wherein one attained overall unity and wholeness within themselves. She claimed that these people generally exhibited more sensitivity and understanding than any sexual being.<sup>241</sup>

Some of these arguments proved valid as people did, at times, use sex as a tool of manipulation. Additionally, no one wanted to be admired for their physical appearance alone. Yet, while monks certainly carried out a lifestyle that required more quietness than the average person experienced, sexual relationships did not demand every waking moment of an individual's day, and time could certainly be set aside for solitude and contemplation.

In all of the talk of abstention from sexuality, however, Densmore highlighted that the main point rested in accepting celibacy "as an honorable alternative" that proved a better option than degrading sexual relationships, while it simultaneously led to complete liberation. She warned, however, that if a woman ended her role-playing and practiced celibacy, she would be

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<sup>238</sup> Roxanne Dunbar, "'Sexual Liberation': More of the Same Thing," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 3 (Nov 1969): 49-52.

<sup>239</sup> Ellen O'Donnell, "Thoughts on Celibacy," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* Reprint 1 (Dec 1969): unpaginated.

<sup>240</sup> Densmore, "On Celibacy," 22.

<sup>241</sup> Dunbar, "Asexuality," 50.

viewed as unnatural and as a threat to men, the very same men that she could just as easily have enticed with her womanly charm. Yet, why would the very same men who despised celibate women willingly share a bed with them? Densmore claimed that it rested in the fact that they never respected them to begin with. It would benefit women, then, if they willingly accepted men's anger and disapproval of their celibacy as a natural outcome, because in the end, Densmore believed, women would not reciprocate love to these kinds of men.<sup>242</sup>

In order to highlight some of the benefits of celibacy, Densmore interviewed Indra Allen, a practicing celibate. Allen suggested many reasons for choosing celibacy, one being that it allowed a person to "escape many of the downfalls of a noncelibate lifestyle, such as jealousy on the part of someone else." In addition, celibates did not have to consider their partners' desires when they wanted to do something they found interesting.<sup>243</sup> Moreover, she highlighted the inevitability that after sex, men always related to women on a different level and a simple friendship became impossible. Allen stated that when a guy knew a celibate woman, he could no longer relate to her sexually, so he had to relate to her as a fellow human being.<sup>244</sup>

In the end, Dunbar argued that questioning sexuality within the existing social conditions proved a fruitless task since Cell 16 sought to liberate humanity according to a new social structure. But, she did not seem to mind the uncertainty of the future results. "What does it matter? I will take the results blind whatever they are. And I will do without the crumbs offered in our own hung upside down society."<sup>245</sup> In response to the opinion of Gloria Steinem's

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<sup>242</sup> Densmore, "On Celibacy," 22-4.

<sup>243</sup> Indra Allen, interview by Dana Densmore, San Francisco, CA, April 1972, transcript, "Why I am Celibate: Conversation with Indra Allen," *No More Fun and Games: A Journal of Female Liberation* 6, (May 1973): 39.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-3.

<sup>245</sup> Dunbar, "Asexuality," 50.

colleague, Rockefeller stated that “‘if the women’s movement succeeds’ as Gloria Steinem’s colleague puts it, what sex there is will surely be better, because it will be compatible with the other values of the people involved. But when female power is a reality . . . although sex will be better, there will most certainly be less of it.”<sup>246</sup>

While many of the ideas that Cell 16 postulated caused suspicion among the general population, both male and female, several women clung to their ideologies as they hoped to gain freedom from the oppressive conditions that they experienced on a daily basis. Through their focus on sex-role conditioning, Cell 16 helped women to resist social expectations and reject their socially programmed roles. Furthermore, through women’s separatism from men, they gained a sense of personal identity and established themselves as autonomous individuals. Women realized that dependence on men proved an unnecessary component for survival in a male-dominated culture. This realization, then, gave further credibility to Cell 16’s questioning of the sex need and their insistence on celibacy as a serious and feasible option. While all of these issues certainly gained Cell 16 strong enemies, they also instilled many women with a sense of personal respect, along with the determination to restructure their lives, not on society’s terms but on their own.

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<sup>246</sup> Rockefeller, “Sex: The Basis of Sexism,” 36-7.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

U.S. social conditions in the 1960s displayed a strong preference toward men, while they additionally corralled women into narrowly defined roles and offered little means of female autonomy. While men had any number of career options available to them, women did not, and society expected them to be content with this reality. Women, thereafter, displayed restlessness and began to reject their expected roles and demanded freedom from male oppression. Given the social context it was understandable that men, and a considerable number of women, felt uncomfortable with this rejection of social standards that had been followed unswervingly for so long. But proponents of women's liberation did not let this obstacle deter them from gaining rights for women.

Yet, while some feminist groups worked on attaining gender equality in the workplace and offered women honorable alternatives apart from motherhood and marriage, radical feminists went even further in their analysis of women's oppression. They believed that women did not benefit solely from acceptance into male-run systems, but that society as a whole needed to be fundamentally restructured so that sex-roles no longer existed, and people had value based of their status as human beings alone.

Still, not all radical feminist groups agreed on the best way to free women from male oppression, and their work spanned various issues. Redstockings' focus on abortion laws gained a victory for radical feminists who wanted women to have more freedom to exert control over their own bodies, while it also placed major life decisions within women's hands. Additionally, consciousness-raising fostered a group understanding among women as to the depth of their

oppression. Finally, as they highlighted the pro-woman line, Redstockings suggested that women's oppression stemmed from conditions outside of their control.

NYRF, however, believed that women experienced oppression because of the politics of the ego; the idea that men oppressed women to fulfill a psychological need. Additionally, they believed that brigades, in which women identified their subjugation and then acted according to this knowledge, remained the best format by which to fight oppression. Thereafter, much of NYRF's action focused on rape as they exposed the myths that surrounded this issue.

Finally, in disagreement with Redstockings, Cell 16 noted that women remained a vital component in their own oppression because they accepted the sex-role conditioning that society encouraged. In order to attain freedom, they had to willingly separate themselves from men and male-run structures, regardless of the aftermath, and accept celibacy as a valid alternative.

Although the revolutionary and controversial nature of radical feminist groups caused many to criticize their work, they nonetheless desired complete freedom for women and fought for a society in which women made choices based on their own interests. Given the long-term acceptance of females as an inferior sex-class, the extremism of radical feminists can be better understood as a necessary component to instituting change. Yet, while it is not necessary to accept every ideology of these groups, ultimately, their efforts should be appreciated for the way they challenged the source of female oppression and made female autonomy a lived reality.

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