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Radical Feminism: Sisterhood and Similarity

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RADICAL FEMINISM: SISTERHOOD AND SIMILARITY

A THESIS

The Honors Program

College of Saint Benedict / Saint John's University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Distinction "All College Honors"

and the Degree Bachelor of Arts

in the Department of History

by

Jill Schlick

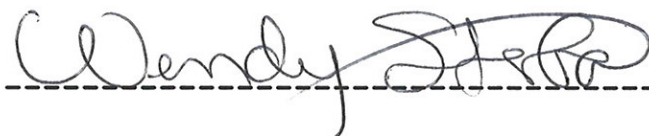
May, 1993

RADICAL FEMINISM: SISTERHOOD AND SIMILARITY

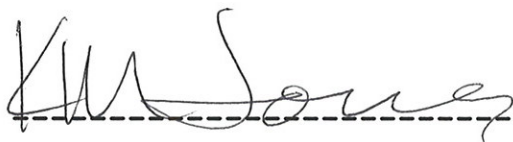
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Radical Feminism: Sisterhood and Similarity

Western culture has debated women's nature and women's role for thousands of years. Men, not women, have often used their cultural power to control this debate and to define women's appropriate characteristics and social status. As the women's rights movement developed in the 19th century, women increasingly contributed to this dialogue. With the rebirth of American feminism in the 1960's, its radical branch sought to reconceptualize women apart from any male influence. Radical feminism, which roughly spanned the period between 1967 and 1975, rejected women's maternal, relational roles as patriarchal and oppressive. In order to reach the core of women's selves, radical feminists disregarded all male-defined identities. In this process, they created a sisterhood based on women's shared oppression, shared search for identity and empowerment. They also, however, challenged this sisterhood by rejecting much of women's common experience and their distinct nature. A tension between sisterhood and gender similarity characterized the radical feminist movement.

This tension reflected an irony of means. Radical feminism dedicated itself to a vision of an equal society which included both women and men; it worked toward its goal, however, through an exclusively female movement.

Radical feminists believed that men and women differed only in their genitalia, and they argued that culture imposed all other differences of nature and role. In order to challenge these culturally imposed misconceptions, radical feminists brought women together to critically evaluate their social position. Radical feminists believed that men would also benefit from a new society, but only women possessed the incentive to create change. Thus, the radical movement worked to destroy the differential treatment of women and men, and it utilized sisterhood, a strategy of male exclusion, to achieve its goal. I will explore how radical feminists constructed both sisterhood and gender similarity arguments from 1967 to 1975 and how the relationship between these opposing theoretical facets developed.

Most historians cite organizational weaknesses or the political climate as reasons for radical feminism's decline.¹ I look rather to the tensions within the theory itself. These tensions created the conditions necessary for change.

I: What Is Radical Feminism?

Feminism involves both theory and activism. Historian Karen Offen defines feminism as both an "ideology" and a "movement for sociopolitical change" in which gender forms the basis of its conclusions.² This paper will

concentrate primarily on the ideology of radical feminism. Since radical feminism dedicated itself more fully to theory than to practice³, theory became especially vital in the radical movement.

Due to both women's interest and media attention, radical feminist theory deeply influenced American culture. The radical movement emerged about 1967 as radical feminists separated from Leftist organizations.⁴ In 1968, 2 radical feminist periodicals existed. By 1972, the radical feminist movement published 62.⁵ By about 1970, radical feminism claimed 10,000 - 500,000 members meeting in 50 groups in New York, 30 in Chicago and 25 in Boston.⁶ In the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, under the heading Women's liberation movement, 3 articles appear in the 1969-70 edition and 72 in the 1970-71 edition. Americans uninvolved in either the Left or feminism nevertheless became exposed to some activities and personalities of the radical movement. Protests like the 1968 Miss America demonstration and the 1970 Women's Strike for Equality (in child-care, abortion, employment and education) made good copy and awakened the American public to the rudiments of a feminist analysis.⁷ Radical feminism could claim direct responsibility for the establishment of 55 women's centers by 1972⁸; it also may have influenced the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision by its abortion reform activism. Radical feminism declined in popularity by 1973, and, by 1975,

cultural feminism thoroughly overshadowed it.⁹

Radical and cultural feminism formed two distinct movements in both chronology and theory. Historian Alice Echols described cultural feminism as a movement seeking a distinct culture for women, based on their different natures.¹⁰ Philosopher Alison Jaggar defined radical feminism more broadly than Echols, but she distinguished various factions. Her "feminist materialist" faction emphasized women's biological superiority to men;¹¹ this faction is equivalent to Echols's cultural feminism.

Radical feminism existed contemporaneously with liberal feminism, and these movements also differed greatly. Anne Koedt explained the radical movement as follows in 1973:

To me it means the advocacy of the total elimination of sex roles. A radical feminist, then, is one who believes in this and works politically toward that end. Basic to the position of radical feminism is the concept that biology is not destiny, and that male and female roles are learned -- indeed that they are male political constructs that serve to ensure power and superior status for men. Thus, the biological male is the oppressor not by virtue of his male biology, but by virtue of his *rationalizing* his *supremacy* on the basis of that biological difference.¹²

The similarity of women and men pervades this definition.

That idea differentiated radical feminism from liberal feminism, perhaps most commonly represented by the National Organization of Women. NOW explained in its 1966 Statement of Purpose its vision of women as equal but different.

According to NOW:

WE BELIEVE that this nation has a capacity at least as great as other nation, to innovate new social institutions which will enable women to enjoy true equality of opportunity and

responsibility in society *without conflict with their responsibilities as mothers and homemakers* (italics mine).¹³

From a liberal feminist perspective, the goal is to achieve new power in the public sphere without necessarily modifying traditional roles in the private sphere. From a radical feminist perspective, the goal is to dissolve all roles and the distinction between public and private spheres.

According to Alison Jaggar, when radical feminists denied the distinction between public and private spheres, they held a position closer to anarchy than to liberal feminism.¹⁴ These two movements certainly differed greatly, but liberal feminism gradually adopted more radical viewpoints. For the radical feminists, however, the liberal movement could never address the extent of their social criticism.

Radicals and liberals also differed personally. Maren Lockwood Carden compiled some comparative statistics based on her interviews with feminists. The typical radical feminist, according Lockwood, was in her early to mid-twenties. She probably had not settled into a career. She was less wealthy than a liberal feminist, but she did come from a middle or upper class home. She was white, a college graduate and, in the earlier years of the movement, probably a socialist. Half of the radical feminists were married.¹⁵

Liberal feminists fit another profile. A liberal feminist was generally a white woman in her mid-twenties to

early thirties with a BA (in 90% of the interviews), a successful career and a household income of over \$10,000 per year. 80% of liberal feminists were married. A liberal feminist was an independent or a democrat.¹⁶

Several observations can be made about these statistics. First, liberal feminists had established themselves more successfully in American society and thus had a greater stake in the status quo than radical feminists. It seems logical that younger, less established women took the more radical positions. Radical feminists also less often, as a result of their marital status, took part in the activities of childbearing and raising, housekeeping and family living of which they became so intensely critical.

Secondly, poor women and women of color played a relatively small role in both movements. At the bottom of the social ladder, these women remained in the greatest need of social change. Carden argues that middle class college graduates became feminists because of a conflict between American individualism and the feminine ideal and that lower-class women with fewer opportunities did not experience this conflict.¹⁷ Other reasons exist. Revolution -- feminism was a revolution in thought and non-violent deed -- often became a middle-class luxury. Lower-class women, though also aware of their oppression, perhaps lacked the education, time or energy necessary to respond.

Moreover, lower-class or minority women may have felt more heavily burdened by poverty or race than by gender.

The origins of radical and liberal feminism also distinguish these movements, and this comparison partially explains their differing membership. NOW formed on October 29, 1966 after members attended a Labor Department conference regarding the dismal status of working women.¹⁸ Liberal feminists created NOW in response to women's position in the public sphere and a dialogue with a government agency. In its earlier years, NOW primarily focused on public issues, i.e. education and jobs, and legal solutions. This background differed tremendously from the formation of radical feminism. Radical feminism formed in the Left which opposed government policy; and it responded to both women's public roles within the movement -- typing materials, demonstrating, etc. -- and their private roles -- their sexual relationships. Radical feminism's organizational structures and ideologies reflected this difference in origin. A more in-depth discussion of its beginnings explains both.

Ironically, considering its largely white membership, radical feminism began to germinate in the civil rights movement of the 1960's. As the civil rights movement became larger and more hierarchical, it closed leadership positions to women.¹⁹ Female members did dishes and typed rather than use their full abilities.²⁰ When women developed the

feminist movement, they attempted to decentralize leadership in order to best utilize all members' skills. The unequal treatment women workers received by movement organizers led to growing discontent.

The sexual services male workers expected of women added to this inequity. Members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee complained that white women slept with black men to prove their liberal politics. When a male organizer, Stokely Carmichael, described women's role in SNCC, he said, "The position of women in SNCC is prone."²¹ This quote summed up effectively the complaints of female activists.

In that remark, Carmichael responded to a developing consciousness among SNCC women. In a 1964 conference paper entitled "The Position of Women in SNCC," Ruby Doris Smith Robinson critiqued women's role in the movement.²² The exclusion of white members from SNCC by 1966 contributed to a feminist analysis. According to a developing movement philosophy, people should organize to end their own oppression, not that of others; therefore, white men organized against the draft, and women struggled against sexism.²³ These events encouraged the development of a separate women's movement.

Radical feminism had roots in the anti-war movement as well. A Students for a Democratic Society slogan -- "Girls Say Yes to Guys Who Say No" -- exemplified sexist

attitudes.²⁴ In 1965, Casey Hayden and Mary King wrote a paper which examined women's status in Students for a Democratic Society. Women held workshops at both the 1965 and 1966 SDS conventions, but the conventions ridiculed the workshop organizers and prevented them from presenting their ideas.²⁵ At the 1967 convention, women claimed their position as a part of the Third World.²⁶ Women challenged the Left's Marxist analysis by exploring their oppression even within the economic oasis of America. These feminists increasingly found SDS did not support their concerns. The discriminatory practices of Leftist organizations suggested that, even away from the home, organizing jointly with men, women's private role as homemakers and sexual partners interfered with their more public activities. Male organizers exploited both women's labor and their sexuality; this exploitation followed the pattern of women's exploitation within the home. Perhaps this partially explains the radical feminist commitment to destroying women's private sphere roles and their concentration on traditionally private issues. Radical feminists made these issues public by their attention and thus negated the distinction.

Tensions between feminists and male organizers reached a critical point at the National Conference for New Politics in 1967. The convention rejected the women's civil rights plank which called for equal representation in leadership

positions. One attendee patted Shulamith Firestone on the head and told her, "calm down, little girl."²⁷ Firestone began to organize in New York, and Jo Freeman, a fellow conference attendee, organized in Chicago. The radical feminist movement was born.

Radical feminists increasingly questioned the genuineness of male revolutionary spirit. Ellen Willis, a founding member of the Redstockings,²⁸ explained, "All around me I see men who consider themselves dedicated revolutionaries, yet exploit their wives and girlfriends shamefully without ever noticing a contradiction."²⁹ Robin Morgan wrote,

A genuine Left doesn't consider anyone's suffering irrelevant or titillating; nor does it function as a microcosm of capitalist economy, with men competing for power and status at the top, and women doing all the work at the bottom (and functioning as objectified prizes or 'coin' as well). Goodbye to all that.³⁰

Radical feminists began to define radical in a manner which separated them from the male Left. Male hostility created and aggravated this separation.

Radical feminism began to transform itself from an ideology of both class and gender to one which posited gender as the only important category. Feminist groups which continued to give both class and gender theoretical attention can be considered socialist feminist or politico-feminist.³¹ Several events marked the transition. In January of 1968, women marched for peace in Washington, D.C. in the Jeannette Rankin Brigade. The group formed by

Shulamith Firestone on her return to New York, Radical Women, later New York Radical Women, staged an alternate event, the "Burial of Traditional Womanhood."³² Because the Radical Women had both politico and radical feminist members, the alternate protest created tensions.³³ The brigade demonstrated the divergent interests of radical feminism and the Left. Radical feminists chose to worship only one theoretical deity, the all-encompassing god of gender.

The New York Radical Women attended the 1969 counter-inaugural and burned their voter registration cards in protest. According to historian Judith Hole, male members of the Left reacted negatively to this event.³⁴ The counter-inaugural illustrated the ever-growing disenchantment between radical feminists and the Left and their disagreement about tactics. Moreover, the counter-inaugural exemplified radical feminist concepts of political change. When they burned their registration cards, the radical feminists rejected the use of a sexist system to create legal change in favor of the recreation of society. They would rely on grass-roots, horizontal means such as street theater and demonstrations rather than appeal to national, vertical systems. Though they added their own emphasis, they inherited these political concepts from the Left, and these concepts readily distinguished the radicals from the liberals.

Yet another event at the counter-inaugural encouraged a break with the Left. When Marilyn Salzman-Webb gave a politico-feminist address, male audience members yelled, "Take her off the stage and fuck her." Shulamith Firestone took the mike and told the male crowd "the end" had come.³⁵ The hostility of the male Left certainly encouraged the development of an independent feminist movement and the rejection of Leftist doctrine. The Left's legacy, however, deeply influenced radical feminism despite the animosity between the movements.

The anti-hierarchical structure of radical feminist organizations held much historical and theoretical significance. Historically, these organizations rejected the type of structure which had excluded women from the Left's elite. To the largest extent possible, these groups did not make power distinctions between members in their organizational structures. Theoretically, these groups worked to discredit distinctions among women, between men and women. The politics of sisterhood and similarity directly reflected the organizational principles of radical feminist organizations. Thus, their theory and practice formed a unified whole.

When Ti-Grace Atkinson left NOW in 1968 to form the radical group The Feminists, organizational differences created much of the incentive.³⁶ Liberal feminist Betty Friedan planned "to get women into positions of power;"

Atkinson, on the other hand, wanted, "to get rid of positions of power."³⁷ Atkinson committed herself to eradicating power. Ironically, this very commitment put her in a position of de facto leadership which created tensions within her organization.

Radical feminist groups avoided leaders. Both The Feminists and the Redstockings, a group which Firestone helped to found in 1969, adopted the lot system.³⁸ The lot system prevented particular group members from dominating more interesting or creative tasks. The Feminists also adopted the disc system of discussion which prevented any member from dominating a consciousness-raising session. Each time a member spoke, she used one disc. After she had used them all, the group no longer permitted her to speak.³⁹ Many other organizations copied these strategies.⁴⁰ Through these methods, radical feminism maintained a horizontal organization.

The method of consciousness-raising reflected this horizontal structure. In these sessions, women allowed each other the respect and speaking time so often denied them within the Left. They also had the opportunity to discuss their experiences as women in a forum composed only of women. Radical feminists used consciousness-raising to develop theory based on women's personal experiences.⁴¹ They developed consciousness-raising or c-r in Chicago and New York in 1968, but they looked to both the SNCC tradition

of testimonial and Mao's advice: "Speak pain to recall pain."⁴² The Redstockings particularly influenced the development of the consciousness-raising session in the late 1960's⁴³. A typical c-r session contained 5-12 members and lasted 9 months.⁴⁴ Consciousness-raising became an important tool for radical feminists.

This method further illustrated the distinction between radical and liberal feminism. According to NOW, "*Nothing* could be more conservative than consciousness-raising."⁴⁵ For NOW -- an organization devoted to action more than theory -- c-r would seem less valuable. Radical feminists who attempted to build a new world, not simply achieve power in the existing structure, considered c-r an honest appraisal of women's position in society and an integral step in the process. Consciousness-raising generated controversy which contributed to the Redstocking's dissolution.⁴⁶ Groups like WITCH focused on more demonstrations and less consciousness-raising.⁴⁷ Radical feminists, however, critiqued the volume and organization more than the technique itself.

Some historians have criticized the non-hierarchical organization of radical feminism as inefficient: decision-making by consensus took considerable time.⁴⁸ However, more pressing difficulties arose from threats to equality created by de facto leadership. Theorists Kate Millett, Gloria Steinem, Marlene Dixon, Roxanne Dunbar, Anne Koedt, Kathy

Sarachild, Jo Freeman and Ti-Grace Atkinson all received criticism for excessive leadership which prevented the development of other women.⁴⁹ In 1970, Pamela Kearon and Barbara Mehrof, members of the The Feminists, held a Class Workshop. They excluded Atkinson because of her upper-class status. They also decided that the organization should distribute all contact with the media according to a lot system. Atkinson decided to leave.⁵⁰ Mehrhof explained that women with a high secondary class status -- those attached to powerful men -- more easily attained power within the movement and used feminism, in an anti-revolutionary manner, to succeed within the patriarchy.⁵¹ Kearon described power within feminism as collective.⁵² Historian Alice Echols suggests that radical feminism's denial of any class distinctions among women, a response to the Left, ultimately created tensions and threatened the radical feminist movement.⁵³ The Class Workshop demonstrated the failure of sisterhood to bridge the gulfs of class difference.

The media perhaps helped to provoke these disagreements when it designated leaders without the support of the organization. Historian Leah Fritz argues the media purposefully chose false leaders, such as Gloria Steinem, to speak for the entire movement.⁵⁴ This created internal dissension over the leadership structure. The success of radical feminism in achieving national recognition often

exacerbated its inherent tensions.

Radical feminism's origins greatly influenced its future development. Its members' youth and distance from the establishment allowed them to critique the very foundations of American culture. Its members' involvement in Leftist organizations illustrated their developing social critique and commitment to social change. They drew from their experiences with the Left's political tactics, organizational structures and analytical concepts, but they directed these strategies toward an entirely new analysis.

II: The Politics of Sisterhood

Sisterhood began to form when female organizers in SNCC and SDS started to talk with each other about their treatment as women. Sisterhood became the organizational means of the radical feminist movement; women needed to talk with each other, apart from men, to understand their social position. Radical feminist theory also upheld sisterhood. Because this theory based its analysis entirely on gender, women shared one primary, ontological category. Women shared the oppressive experience of living in a patriarchal society; they shared the socially expected roles and conceived nature of modern American womanhood. Only together could women challenge the social constructs which bound them. Sisterhood involved shared experience and

shared commitment to change. Sisterhood was indeed powerful,⁵⁵ and it shaped radical feminist theory.

Radical feminists based their theory on the idea of personal politics. The New York Radical Feminists, a group founded by Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt in 1969,⁵⁶ defined radical feminism as a political action taken to end the class oppression of women which men maintained through the use of political institutions.⁵⁷ Kate Millett, an influential feminist author, defined politics simply as "power-structured relationships."⁵⁸ These concepts of politics included the private sphere. Heterosexual relationships fit easily the description of politics; therefore, radical feminists targeted political institutions such as marriage, the family, heterosexuality, and motherhood. They believed that the institutions which influenced women most intimately played the largest political role in their oppression. Personal politics meant "private" life had political meaning and became a sphere for political action.

In the radical feminist concept of politics, two opposing parties existed -- women and men. Personal politics developed the class consciousness of women. Beverly Jones, a member of the Gainesville SDS, began arguing for a separate women's movement in 1968.⁵⁹ She expressed the concept of personal politics as follows: "We are a class, we are oppressed as a class, and we respond within

the limits allowed us as members of that oppressed class....There is no personal escape, no personal salvation, no personal solution."⁶⁰ Jones stressed women's common social position and common path to liberation.

The Redstockings manifesto clearly illustrated the connection between personal politics and a class analysis. The Redstockings wrote, "In reality, every such relationship is a *class* relationship and the conflicts between individual men and women are *political* conflicts that can only be solved collectively."⁶¹ The Redstockings, a New York group founded by Ellen Willis and Shulamith Firestone in 1969⁶², held the unique position of the pro-woman line. According to Alice Echols, a pro-woman feminist believed that political necessity forces women to conform to their role: their socialization does not convince them it is appropriate.⁶³ This analysis influenced the Redstockings' view of politics. Their description of women as a class also suggested a socialist influence.

Radical feminists used specific means to develop class consciousness. These feminists described a cultural unity among women, a unity based on shared oppression rather than shared biology, maternity or personal characteristics. This resulted from their rejection of any characteristics which distinguish women from men. Because radical feminism worked to discredit gender differences in nature and role, it based sisterhood on differences of culture, not nature. Women

came together because they shared a social situation and a goal; they did not share a distinct nature. Sisterhood did not contradict the theory of gender similarity which allowed a balance between these two facets. Rejecting differences in nature allowed women to disregard negative social images and love themselves and each other. Radical feminists rejoiced in breaking the patriarchal structures and misconceptions which kept women from relating to each other, and they discovered strength and truth in sisterhood.

Radical feminists further developed sisterhood when they described gender as the most important historical determinant. Firestone explained that Engels ignored the "sexual substratum of the historical dialectic." Engels did possess the vision to connect production and reproduction; but, according to Firestone, he failed to understand that gender, not class, created all dualism throughout history. That initial biological division justified all later divisions of people into categories such as class.⁶⁴ Firestone argued strongly for gender's importance to history.

Radical feminists envisioned a cyclical structure in which new systems supported the gender divisions that allowed for their creation. Ti-Grace Atkinson founded the Feminists, originally the October 17th Movement, in 1968. The Feminists argued:

All political classes grew out of the male-female role system, were modeled on it, and are rationalized by it and

its premises. Once a new class system is established on the basis of this initial one, the new class is then used to reinforce the male-female system.⁶⁵

The Feminists, an organization devoted to equality among members, reflected in its own structure the belief that any inequality supports the primary inequality between men and women. The Feminists emphasized the ontological significance of gender roles.

Alison Jaggar, a philosopher of the radical feminist movement, offers some insights about these sources. According to Jaggar, the ideologies of Firestone and the Feminists represented two different "strands" in the web of radical feminism. Firestone represented a "feminist materialist" strand which emphasized biology while the Feminists emphasized psychology.⁶⁶ Though the Feminists and Firestone did differ in their concentrations, both sought an origin -- whether biological or psychological -- for society's patriarchal structures. These analyses dovetailed in their ends despite divergent concerns.

In their analysis of gender, radical feminists reacted against Leftist ideas. The Left's emphasis on class or race and complete exclusion of gender caused the birth of the women's movement. Firestone and the Feminists believed their analysis of the male-female dualism contained Leftist analyses of class or race; similarly, the Left believed a class or race system contained women's oppression. Radical feminism theoretically rejected the Left by claiming the

larger vision.

The development of gender analysis contributed significantly to sisterhood. This idea justified the sisterhood because women shared a primary, ontological category. This idea led the movement to take positions which threatened the very basis of American culture because gender issues lurked deep within the foundations. This idea also forced the movement to dismiss as secondary any differences between women in class or lifestyle. Alison Jaggar criticized this consistent gender analysis because it denied real differences in the power of individual women and men.⁶⁷ Gender analysis did create tensions when it denied differences in the power and status of women. When Jaggar questioned the importance of gender, however, she questioned the basis of feminism. Gender analysis was valid despite differences among women. Gender analysis supported personal politics: it searched for the origins of power structures.

Radical feminists built sisterhood of personal politics, class unity and gender analysis. All of these arguments rested on women's similar socialization, whether conditioned or forced, and women's experience of patriarchal oppression. Radical feminists chose not to base sisterhood on inherent differences between women and men (for example, biology inclines women to nurture) or on common roles (women as mothers). Sisterhood became the means of the radical feminist movement, the method to overcome the patriarchy,

the bond well-supported by radical feminist theory. The particular construction of sisterhood allowed it, the means, to serve the goal of supporting gender similarity. These two facets of radical feminism, sisterhood and gender similarity, created a constructive tension between them.

III: The Politics of Gender Similarity

Radical feminists discarded layers of patriarchal definitions as they redefined their womanhood. They argued against the anti-feminist assumptions often made about women by the "feminine mystique," as liberal feminist Betty Friedan termed it. They knew washing dishes did not fulfill women disproportionately because of their biology. They assumed that, beneath all the misinformation, men and women would discover their true human, not male or female, nature. According to their analysis, only the sexual difference existed as a natural phenomenon. Culture imposed all other differences, from personality traits to maternity. This narrow definition of nature created an opposing facet to that of sisterhood, one which supported the basic similarity of women and men.

Heterosexual love comprised one layer of women's identity peeled away by radical feminist analysis. Radicals defined love as a political phenomenon. Firestone explained, "The panic felt at any threat to love is a good

clue to its political significance. Another sign that love is central to any analysis of women or sex psychology is its omission from culture itself, its relegation to 'personal life'."⁶⁸ Because romantic love was personal, it was political.

Radical feminists argued that love distracted women from their true situation. Atkinson described heterosexual love as the "psychological pivot in the persecution of women" and a "psycho-pathological state of fantasy."⁶⁹ Beverly Jones wrote, "Romance, like the rabbit at the dog track, is the illusive, fake and never-attained reward which for the benefit and amusement of our masters keeps us running and thinking in safe circles."⁷⁰ Millett argued that society used love to disguise a woman's true status and further limit her behavior.⁷¹ In Atkinson, Jones and Millett's opinions, society invented romantic love as a method of social control.

Radical feminists believed romantic love relied on inequality between the sexes. The Feminists explained that love falsely appeared to overcome the narrow gender roles which they attempted to discredit. Men defined themselves as "humanity;" women hoped to escape their more limited role through a relationship with a man.⁷² The New York Radical Feminists argued that love actually reinforced gender roles. When, in love, the woman's "ego" submitted to the man's, she fulfilled her "natural function."⁷³ Atkinson asserted that

inequality created a woman's attraction for a man and her desire for union with him, and that equitable love could not exist.⁷⁴ According to these analyses, women loved men in order to receive a vicarious identity and deny their true selves. Society considered the process "natural." Women accepted through love, in light of this theory, the societally-imposed power differences between women and men.

Romantic love, according to radical feminist theory, also developed women's nurturing personality. Atkinson described love as a nearly religious desire for unity in which the derived, defined or secondary - woman - made herself a part of the whole, beyond definitions or primary - man.⁷⁵ Women came to the union of love as a lesser party who catered to the more powerful, men. The Feminists argued that love relied on women's other-centeredness, their unilateral giving.⁷⁶ Typically, the Feminists evaluated love in terms of women's roles. Because romantic love formed an inequitable union, women gave more of themselves in order to maintain it. Thus, women's nature changed to reflect their cultural reality.

Radical feminists criticized love for making women vulnerable. The Feminists explained, again describing roles, "Love promotes vulnerability, dependence, possessiveness, susceptibility to pain and prevents the full development of women's human potential by directing all of her energies outward in the interest of others."⁷⁷ Atkinson

argued the isolation of women living with one man, apart from other women, made them vulnerable.⁷⁸ Millett, in her description of sexual politics, stated that men used love to pressure women. She wrote, "The concept of romantic love affords a means of emotional manipulation which the male is free to exploit, since love is the only circumstance in which the female is (ideologically) pardoned for sexual activity."⁷⁹ For these radicals, love reinforced men's power over women and forced women to conform to a societal expectation of vulnerability.

According to the radical feminists, patriarchal society used certain tools, such as violence, to support the institution of love. The Feminists wrote that love protected women from other men.⁸⁰ For Atkinson, love related intimately to fear. She wrote, "What is love but need? What is love but fear? In a just society, would we need love?"⁸¹ These arguments suggested the developing critique of rape within the radical feminist movement. By 1975, Susan Brownmiller, a radical feminist, wrote the bestseller Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape, and rape became a national issue. Basically, feminist theory argued that patriarchy obtained its power over women by creating a society in which women could not live safely without men.

The radical feminists also connected love to economic dependency. Firestone wrote,

"To participate in one's subjection by choosing one's master often gives the illusion of free choice, but, in

reality a woman is never free to choose love without external motivations. For her at the present time, the two things, love and status, must remain inextricably intertwined."⁸²

Firestone reflected the Redstockings' pro-woman philosophy in this argument because she said women's social position, not their socialization, caused them to fall in love. Since women had a lower class status, they had to improve their social position through their relationships with men. Thus, economics provided the incentive for love.

Both Firestone and the New York Radical Feminists, however, distinguished romantic love from a purer form. Firestone, again examining women's class, defined "romantic love" as "love corrupted by its power context -- the sex class system -- into a diseased form of love that then in turn reinforces this sex class system."⁸³ The New York Radical Feminists explained,

Radical feminism believes that the popularized version of love has thus been used politically to cloud and justify an oppressive relationship between men and women, and that in reality there can be no genuine love until the need to *control* the growth of another is replaced by love *for* the growth of another.⁸⁴

These theorists did not believe separatism necessary but instead worked to dispell the myths of women's and men's differences which romantic love propagated. Feminists who doubted this possibility leaned toward the separatist strategy which would eventually develop within the movement.

Radical feminists targeted romantic love because of its

political significance. Romantic love blinded women to its political nature, enforced inequalities between women and men and created gender-specific traits in women. Romantic love violated the concept of gender similarity because it forced women to conform to a specific role and nature. Women in love adopted the subordinate role and characteristics such as vulnerability and nurturance. Thus, radical feminists critiqued romantic love in order to uncover a true gender similarity.

Marriage also received their criticism. Marriage and slavery formed a standard comparison in movement literature. Ti-Grace Atkinson wrote,

If women were free, free to grow as people, free to be self-creative, free to go where they like, free to be where they like, free to choose their lives, there would be no such institutions as marriage or family. If slaves had had those freedoms, there wouldn't have been slavery.⁸⁵

This quote exemplifies the extent of the critique and how greatly radicals felt marriage limited their self-determination.

According to the movement, marriage treated women as property. WITCH, a radical feminist organization, wrote,

The wedding ceremony is the symbolic ritual of our legal transference from father's property to husband's property. The name is changed from one man's to another's, and our role as chattel in a male house remains the same. And this is the highlight of our lives, our only festival.⁸⁶

WITCH's socialist influence became apparent in this argument. WITCH broke away from Radical Women in 1968 and formed a more action-oriented organization dedicated to

street theater and protests.⁸⁷ In 1969, WITCH staged a demonstration at a Bridal Fair to protest both marriage and the commercialism which promoted it.⁸⁸ Marriage symbolized women's lower status.

This critique had a firm basis in law. Sheila Cronan defined marriage as legal slavery. The organization to which she belonged, The Feminists, limited membership of married women to only one-third in order to prevent the spread of this practice.⁸⁹ The Feminists again demonstrated their commitment to destroying sex roles. Cronan explained that the courts annulled unconsummated marriages but not marriages without love though the contract mentioned love, not sex.⁹⁰ A husband, moreover, had the legal right to rape his wife.⁹¹ According to judicial precedent, a husband could not pay his wife for housework since the law required it of her.⁹² The legal system also charged a wife with desertion who chose not to live at her husband's residence and exercised her freedom of movement.⁹³ The blatant discrimination of these regulations enforced marital inequities and a distinct differentiation between husbands and wives.

The Feminists concluded that marriage comprised fraud because the contract failed to describe the terms. They published a list of facts about marriage which included the legality of rape, the wife's status as the "husband's prisoner" without freedom of movement, and the United

Nations definition of marriage as "slavery-like."⁹⁴ The Feminists distributed this pamphlet at a demonstration at the New York City Marriage License Bureau and charged the bureau with "fraud with malicious intent against the women of the city of New York."⁹⁵ Radical feminists specifically documented their disagreement with marriage law.

Their critique of marriage differed from that of love because it included a legal analysis. For a movement dedicated to personal politics, this initially appears incongruent. Radical feminists, however, supported their legal analysis by attempting to change laws not through formal channels but through protest. They did not seek to repeal specific laws but rather to abolish the entire institution. Nevertheless, some tension between reformism and radicalism existed in this analysis. This issue perhaps appealed to the radicals because it belonged to the private sphere. Marriage also enforced a different treatment of women than of men which violated their concepts of gender similarity.

Radical feminists understood marriage as a paradigm for other types of oppression. They believed that a society which oppressed women within marriage would oppress them outside of marriage. Cronan wrote that women could not assert their rights before they destroyed marriage. If they had no right to equal pay inside the home, they couldn't

legitimately demand it outside the home.⁹⁶ Besty Warrior argued that housework and childcare must become paid labor. If these functions became a part of the paid economy, women would have reason to demand better wages outside the home.⁹⁷ Warrior belonged to the Boston organization Cell 16 which argued for maternity and against sex.⁹⁸ Oppression in the private sphere allowed more public discrimination. In these arguments, radical feminists analyzed a traditionally liberal concern, equal pay, in light of a traditionally radical concern, marriage.

According to their analysis, marriage also created the standards of male-female relationships followed in dating relationships. Cronan wrote that men often believed they had the prerogative to extract labor and sex from girlfriends as well as wives.⁹⁹ The Feminists wrote, "All the discriminatory practices against women are patterned and rationalized by this slavery-like practice. We can't destroy the inequities between men and women until we destroy marriage."¹⁰⁰ Here again, the institution of marriage cut a pattern which the larger society followed.

These arguments emphasized marriage's importance because they extended its influence to unmarried women. They explain the depth of feeling in the radical feminist critique. The Feminists' policy of allowing only one-third of their members to marry has new meaning in light of these arguments: any marriage affects all women. This policy

produced disagreements, however, as some members decided to leave the organization.¹⁰¹ Here a commitment to eradicating gender differences interfered with sisterhood.

Radical feminists also argued against marriage from the more personal level of how it affected their daily lives. Firestone, again suggesting the pro-woman analysis, wrote that love did not form the actual basis of marriage; after marriage, women realized they and their husbands had other motivations. Moreover, women failed to really improve their status in marriage because they became dominated by someone else.¹⁰² Beverly Jones explained how gravely the lack of intellectual stimulation and isolation of married women affected them; she suggested they reject their romantic ideals to reclaim their intellectual independence.¹⁰³ Judy Syfers, on the other hand, ironically explained that she would like very much to have a wife of her own, someone to care for her children, home, sexual needs, entertaining and become expendable when she wanted someone else.¹⁰⁴ These feminists critiqued marriage because it failed to meet women's expectations, removed them from the world, exploited their labor and negated their rights and identity. Just as marriage formed a legally fraudulent contract, according to the radical feminists, it formed an emotionally fraudulent situation in which societal concepts did not equal realities. This fraud denied women equal treatment.

Nevertheless, as Carden discussed, half of radical

feminists had married. Robin Morgan's poetry expressed her difficulty in maintaining her relationship with her husband and son. The following excerpt originated from "Quotations from Charwoman Me":

You're tired of living without any joy.
 You think you're going crazy.
 You need my friendship.
 You're afraid to demand the right
 to be afraid.
 You're trying very hard.
 I know that, and you can't imagine
 how I wish it were enough.¹⁰⁵

In these lines she described her frustration in applying her feminist analysis to her traditional role as a wife. Her title suggested a play on the Quotations of Chairman Mao. Her description of herself as a charwoman, a janitor, emphasized her low social status. This double meaning rejected Leftist analysis because it posited gender as the primary category of analysis. Trapped within an oppressive system, yet loving the men in her family, her emotions and her politics caught her between them. Morgan demonstrated the real difficulties involved in building this new society. She later wrote, "I'd stop this if I could, believe me, my dear, / I'm dying of bitterness."¹⁰⁶ Personal politics involved large sacrifices and difficult compromises.

Opposing marriage did not equate with supporting free love. As the Catholic bishops have recently blamed the radical feminist movement for spreading the sexual revolution, this distinction appears particularly important. Dana Densmore reflected Cell 16's support of

abstinence when she explained that liberation must involve more than sex. Historically, society often denied women the "right" of sexual gratification, but the sexual revolution had attempted to make this a "duty."¹⁰⁷ If society determined unmarried women's sexuality, it denied them personal choice and identity. Densmore argued that society used sex to control unmarried women's lives.

The sexual revolution, according to radical feminists, reinforced traditional ideas. Firestone, in another pro-woman argument, explained the revolution allowed men to exploit women more easily and subtly.¹⁰⁸ The experience of women within the civil rights and anti-war movements may have influenced this criticism. Pat Mainardi, a member of Redstockings, also criticized the 1960's communes where men treated women as sexual objects, expected them to do all the housework and denied them birth control.¹⁰⁹ Free love translated into the freedom to pay all the consequences and a lack of freedom of choice. Radical feminists wanted not simply the elimination of marriage but also the restructuring of heterosexual relationships which did not involve marriage. Marriage only symbolized and legally enforced larger inequities.

For the radical feminists, marriage enforced societal differentiation between women and men on two levels. Legally, women received prejudiced treatment. Personally, women spent their energies in an unfulfilling manner, lost

their contact with the larger world and their ability to determine their own identity. Society imposed, through laws and customs, a role --homemaker -- and an identity -- that of their husband -- on women. Thus, marriage defined women's nature as distinct from men's. Radical feminists rejected this culturally imposed role and identity in order to examine women's true nature. They proposed a society without gender differentiated roles; this suggested their support for a basic similarity between women and men.

According to the radical feminist analysis, the family functioned as effectively as love or marriage to create a false difference between men and women. Firestone explained that the primary male/female dualism created the family; the family created all hierarchy and oppression. In pre-history, women relied on men because their biological function consumed their energy. The mother's function of reproduction divided labor, and all other divisions of labor such as class systems followed.¹¹⁰ For Firestone, the family originated from a small natural dualism or difference which resulted in a large cultural difference.

The family played an especially significant role in a more modern society. According to Firestone, since, in an industrialized society, women often disregarded biological roles, the family defined itself more rigidly to maintain the status quo. The nuclear family became prominent in the United States, and society held women in "mock worship" for

their work in maintaining these families.¹¹¹ Firestone rejected the happy housewife image of the 1950's and 1960's as a lie. She minimalized the significance of women's cultural role and thus emphasized the basic similarity between women and men.

The family became the last bastion of social control. Kate Millett wrote, "Mediating between the individual and the social structure, the family effects control and conformity where political and other authorities are insufficient."¹¹² The family reinforced the cultural differences between women and men.

The critique of love, marriage and family responded to two currents in American culture. This criticism stemmed in part from these feminists' experiences within the male Left and with Leftist men. Radical feminists rejected the roles that shackled them equally in their private and public lives. Besides the Left, however, they responded to an image -- the happy housewife. This image, fraught with prescriptions of women's nature, supported the love-marriage-family equation. Radical feminists attempted to shatter it by recognizing the housewife as a woman applauded for her submission while society limited her options and degraded her person.

The reality dawned slowly on 1960's America that love, marriage and family could not meet all of women's needs. Sociologist Jessie Bernard explained married women's

tendency toward psychological disorders. Though married women claimed happiness more often than single women, they suffered from severe neurosis at three times the rate. One-half described themselves as "passive," "phobic," or "depressed."¹³ Betty Friedan eloquently described the plight of the American housewife in her bestseller The Feminine Mystique. Radical feminism developed in the context of this female disillusionment. It cohered as a voice disagreeing that women, because of their biology, need take a distinct societal role. It argued that love, marriage and family, rather than being the concerns most suited to women's nature, in fact artificially constructed their nature.

One exception existed to the critique of imposed difference -- sex. According to radical feminist theory, society constructed gender roles and identities based on a simple sexual difference. Yet, society purposefully misinterpreted and diminished the difference on which it based its entire theory of gender identity. Sex formed the one exception in which radical feminists supported women's difference from men. They critiqued the myth of the vaginal orgasm.

According to their theory, the patriarchy upheld this myth for various reasons. Alix Shulman, a member of Redstockings, explained that the myth allowed men to exploit women and freed them from any responsibility for their

enjoyment.¹¹⁴ Anne Koedt, a member of The Feminists, argued that the myth of the vaginal orgasm existed to define women's sexual experiences in terms of men's sexual needs.¹¹⁵ Atkinson described the myth as a "political construct" used to control women when marriage became less effective in that capacity.¹¹⁶ Radical feminists protested this myth of false similarity because society used it to control women.

This myth strongly affected women. Anne Koedt explained: Looking for a cure to a problem that has none can lead a woman on an endless path of self-hatred and insecurity. For she is told by her analyst that not even in her one role allowed by a male society -- the role of a woman -- is she successful.¹¹⁷

Radical feminists worked to dispel this myth because it took power from women.

Some feminists argued that women did not need sex at all. Dana Densmore reached this conclusion when she described sex as a socialized need and not an "absolute physical need."¹¹⁸ Her organization, Cell 16, supported celibacy.¹¹⁹ Atkinson defined intercourse as "anti-feminist" because it does not involve the clitoris; it also connects the wife and mother roles.¹²⁰ In these arguments, the critique of sex became more pervasive.

Through dispelling the myth of the vaginal orgasm, radical feminists attempted to uncover women's true nature. They supported the one natural difference between women and men -- their sexual difference. They placed sexual

relations within the cultural sphere; this emphasized their narrow definition of nature which included only the sexual difference. The denial of women's sexual needs by some radical feminists strangely echoed nineteenth century views of women's pure nature, but it also followed logically from their understanding of biology. They focused specifically on the good of women: their views often did not encompass men and children. Thus, since intercourse appeared to favor men, abstinence seemed a reasonable step.

Radical feminists directed their energies toward a more equitable understanding of human nature. They critiqued the false difference of love, marriage and family and the false similarity of sex in order to reach this understanding. Their conclusions formed the premise of the radical feminist movement: men and women are basically alike, and society should treat them equally. This premise supported their critique of any social institution which did not treat women and men equally. This premise also became increasingly distant from the means of the radical feminist movement -- sisterhood.

IV: Internal Contradictions

The tension between the politics of sisterhood and gender similarity ultimately reached a breaking point. In their extremes, these two facets excluded each other. As

lesbian politics began to dominate the movement, radical feminism lost its focus of achieving equitable relationships with men. When gender similarity politics denied women's maternal role, they greatly challenged sisterhood. The balance between these two politics veered decisively in the favor of sisterhood, and the internal contradictions of the movement became apparent.

The ideology of sisterhood expressed itself clearly in the lesbian separatist politics of the movement. The issue of lesbianism took many feminists by surprise, yet it seems a logical outcome of a movement which concentrated on sexual politics and the class solidarity of women. Radical feminism's new interest in lesbian politics also reflected a larger national movement. By 1970, gays marched for their rights in Central Park.¹²¹ The same year, the Lavender Menace disrupted the Congress to Unite Women; they turned off the lights, took over the microphone and read the position paper "The Woman-Identified Woman."¹²² Lesbianism became influential enough that many heterosexual women left the movement; some participated in more "mainstream" activities.¹²³ Though lesbianism began its tenure in the closet, it soon became an extremely divisive public issue; it represented well the tensions between creating sisterhood and reconstructing relationships with men, between affirming women's similarities and denying their patriarchal roles.

According to many feminists, women and men could not

achieve a relationship uncomplicated by a power difference. Lesbians believed they, unlike their heterosexual sisters, looked for equitable relationships, not a "knight in shining armor."¹²⁴ If men could not yet accept women as equals, the love between them would damage one party -- the woman.¹²⁵ Lesbianism ostensibly rejected the politics of dominance-submission involved in male-female relationships.¹²⁶ Charlotte Bunch, a member of the Washington, D.C. lesbian consciousness-raising group The Furies, founded in 1971, argued that since heterosexual sex benefits only men, women should not submit to it.¹²⁷ She staged take-overs of liberation workshops to convince other feminists of her position.¹²⁸ She wrote: "If marriage is legalized prostitution, then heterosexuality is socially approved rape."¹²⁹ This argument closely resembled Atkinson's criticism of sex, though Atkinson advocated celibacy rather than lesbianism. It also reflected the developing critique of sexual violence; this issue received wide attention by the mid-1970's. Lesbians believed they escaped these pervasive inequalities.

Lesbians also hoped to escape gender roles. Homosexuality allowed feminists to base roles within relationships not on societal standards for each member but on consensus.¹³⁰ According to a lesbian separatist, a woman intimately involved with a man risked being defined, categorized, stereotyped by him. The lesbian avoided the

role of the virgin, the career woman or the sexpot, definitions which denied her full self.¹³¹ According to the position paper "The Woman Identified Woman," in relationships with men, women divided their energy between fixing the relationship and searching for their true selves, apart from the definition of their man or their society.¹³² Lesbians wanted freedom from socially constructed roles.

Lesbians argued their sexuality allowed them a stronger connection with other women. Lesbians described their nature as "woman-identified"; for them, heterosexuality placed "men first" in a hierarchy of priorities.¹³³ Some radical feminists believed that only in lesbianism could women attend to themselves first; and only in lesbianism did women give to other women the love and energy generally given to men.¹³⁴ Lesbians believed they had attained a greater commitment to sisterhood.

Lesbianism stressed sisterhood, however, at the expense of dividing the movement. Lesbians believed they had discovered how to deny their patriarchal faces. If they did not have sex with men, they did not risk definition by these men. Lesbianism also meant, however, the denial of traditional roles in which women may find identity, like maternity, and the splintering of sisterhood into two camps, the lesbians and the heterosexuals. If feminists built sisterhood as lesbian separatists, they did so without the help of many of their sisters. Lesbian separatism

represented the ultimate expression of sisterhood because it advocated the complete exclusion of men. Yet, separatism also challenged sisterhood when it expected all women to conform to a sexual standard.

The arguments for lesbian separatism suggested cultural, not natural, differences between women and men. Thus, these arguments maintained a balance with gender similarity politics. Lesbians argued that power dynamics made heterosexual relationships untenable, and they suggested women turn to each other. Lesbian separatism marked a distinct break, however, from the sense of possibility prevalent in the movement's beginnings. Lesbian separatist politics seemed to reflect a certain cynicism gained through experience. These politics did not deny gender similarity arguments, but they did turn from this goal.

Lesbianism increasingly tested the limits of radical feminist theory. Radical feminism premised itself on the idea that culture, not nature, created nearly all differences between men and women; therefore, the conclusion that women and men cannot love each other sexually appears extreme. Alice Echols argued that lesbian feminists moved toward the vein of cultural feminism because of their separatist ideology: they predated a feminism which accepted as a premise women's unique, shared nature.¹³⁵ Lesbian separatists withdrew from the struggle against a patriarchy

which they found impossibly entrenched.

Controversy embroiled lesbian politics. Feminism made lesbianism political, but not all feminists agreed that lesbians acted out of truly political feminist consciousness. Anne Koedt argued that lesbianism involved personal choice, not political solutions; a true lesbian feminist must have a commitment to social change.¹³⁶ In her opinion, lesbianism really formed a civil rights issue, not a radical issue.¹³⁷ Pat Mainardi believed both leftists and lesbians disrupted the movement and attempted to take it over with foreign ideologies. She described this as the "left-lesbian alliance against feminism."¹³⁸ These feminists felt that lesbian separatism deviated from the goals of the movement.

According to some radical feminists, through role-playing, lesbians failed to challenge gender roles. For Mainardi, when lesbians treated feminists as potential sex partners, they oppressed them in the same manner as men do.¹³⁹ Atkinson and Koedt believed lesbianism reinforced the status quo through role-playing.¹⁴⁰ As members of The Feminists, Atkinson and Koedt demonstrated their interest in gender roles. According to Atkinson, lesbians oppressed themselves because they usurped the male role of domination and based their ideology on the main premise of male oppressiveness -- sex.¹⁴¹ These feminists questioned the radical nature of lesbian politics.

Radical feminists also questioned whether lesbians maintained a truly separatist lifestyle. According to Atkinson, lesbians deceived themselves in the extent of their "woman-identified" lifestyle. Though not sexually involved with men, lesbians relied on them in some ways in a male-dominated culture. For instance, a man may employ them. Also, they existed in opposition to the patriarchy.¹⁴² Atkinson doubted that separatism formed a realistically attainable goal. Atkinson herself, however, advocated in celibacy a sort of separatism.

Despite these criticisms, radical feminists soon recognized the many reasons to publicly accept lesbians in the movement. Abbott, a radical feminist theorist, explained that in the free, equitable society which radical feminists attempted to create, lesbianism would become acceptable.¹⁴³ The Radicalesbians argued that men used the label "lesbian" to force women to conform to their prescribed role.¹⁴⁴ Further, if feminists did not accept lesbianism as a premise of their movement, men would use it against them. If men defined the response of women to lesbianism, women failed to assert their independence.¹⁴⁵ Supporting lesbianism became the most viable feminist strategy and certainly the strategy most likely to build a diverse, inclusive sisterhood.

Practical necessity often compelled feminists to support their lesbian sisters as well. In December of 1970,

the media severely criticized Kate Millett for her lesbianism. Many prominent feminists held a press conference in her support.¹⁴⁶ Perhaps they believed a divided movement made better prey for the press and could not survive.

Lesbianism created disagreements within the movement because it changed the focus of radical feminist politics. Critics of lesbian politics believed that separatism would fail. Moreover, they perceived that lesbians no longer worked to create equal, roleless relationships between men and women. The private sphere politics of the movement did not originally pertain to a lesbian lifestyle. Lesbianism fit the pattern of personal politics, but lesbians would not necessarily have an interest in many issues previously covered by the movement. Lesbians also had less interest in maintaining relationships with men. The organization of the movement had always excluded men; now, the vision of lesbian separatism did the same. Lesbian politics resided uncomfortably within the bounds of radical feminist theory.

The politics of gender similarity expressed themselves in their most extreme form when radical feminists tackled reproductive issues. They focused on these issues in order to challenge the societal differences between women and men. In their arguments, they took a slightly different approach than on other issues: they proposed using technology to overcome difference. This theory constructed a similarity

rather than simply revealed it, and it further widened their definition of culture.

Radical feminists challenged women's maternal role. Atkinson wrote, not surprisingly, considering her views on sex, "*The function of childbearing is the function of men oppressing women.*"¹⁴⁷ She suggested women reject their responsibility for children. Just as the slaves did not establish the new economy of the South before emancipation, in Atkinson's comparison, women were not responsible to decide who would raise the children.¹⁴⁸ Charlotte Bunch contended that society used women's reproductive function to construct an ideology of their position which included marriage, heterosexuality, the family and housewifery.¹⁴⁹ Bunch avoided her reproductive role entirely through lesbianism. Atkinson and Bunch argued that women's maternal role, a social construct, reinforced other institutions of social control.

Radical feminists doubted the naturalness of childbirth. Atkinson stressed maternal death rates, post-partum depression, infanticide and the physical unpreparedness of women's bodies.¹⁵⁰ Firestone wrote that a civilized society transcends the natural and requires change in conditions which appear as biological facts.¹⁵¹ In Firestone's perfect society, children would develop independently of their parents, and both parents would raise them equitably. "Natural" delivery would become an option,

not a necessity.¹⁵² Firestone believed women's reproductive role caused their oppression in pre-history, so she hoped to overcome this role through the use of modern technology. The Feminists suggested, in order to avoid reproductive roles, "extra-uterine reproduction" and shared childcare.¹⁵³ Roxanne Dunbar, the founder of the Boston group Cell 16, proposed that "public childcare" replace the family.¹⁵⁴ In all of these arguments, the radical feminists broadly defined the influence of culture to include both giving birth to and caring for children.

In these extremes of gender similarity politics, concepts of culture and nature received their greatest challenge. This theory demonstrated problems inherent to a movement which based its ideas primarily on women and men's similarity. Women's maternal role, though subject to much societal influence, forms a unique experience which biology does not permit men to share. In order to deny this difference, radical feminists resorted to the use of patriarchal technology. Abortion's appearance as a protest issue may have stemmed from these beliefs about technology. In January of 1969, The Feminists demonstrated for free abortions.¹⁵⁵ That same year, Redstockings disrupted an abortion reform hearing, which fourteen men and a nun chaired, and they held a speak-out attended by 300.¹⁵⁶ Radical feminists used technology to solve this dilemma of difference.

Technology creates difficult questions about gender equality. Men and women differ in that only women can bear children. If equality relies on similarity, women can draw only two conclusions. Either equality remains unattainable, or equality only becomes attainable with the help of technology. The first option more closely resembles anti-feminist arguments; it obviously would not appeal to the radical feminists. They chose the second option which created more questions.

High technology stems from the kind of patriarchal culture which radical feminists attempted to change. The same culture manufactured the bombs radical feminists had protested in their SDS days and the contraceptives which freed them from their reproductive systems. The same culture sold women appliances and gave them abortions. On technological issues, radical feminism's thorough critique of patriarchal society softened to ambivalence. The movement strongly depended on the surrounding culture for its survival, and this dependence became most apparent regarding reproductive issues. Radical feminists argued that men and women are inherently equal; they also argued this equality cannot exist without technology. This contradiction and limitation (all women do not have equal access to technology) suggests the need for a feminism which would include difference.

Reproductive issues demonstrated the tension between

gender similarity and sisterhood politics. When radical feminists denied women's maternal role, they failed to utilize a similarity which could draw women together. Karen Offen argued,

It has been one of the paradoxes of the contemporary Anglo-American women's movement that women's claims for a radical and thoroughgoing individual equality of rights with men would, if realized, preclude the possibility that there may be value for women in sexual distinctions. After all, solidarity among women is based not solely on recognition of a common oppression but also, historically speaking, on a celebration of shared and differential experience as members of the same sex, the childbearing and nurturing sex.¹⁵⁷

Gender similarity politics limited sisterhood. Alison Jagger validly emphasized women's right to bear children.¹⁵⁸ Thus, this anti-maternal stance ultimately divided women and restricted their possibilities for personal and communal growth.

Reproductive issues also contradicted the ecopolitics of the movement. The idea of women's inseparable connection with nature, an idea particularly important to cultural feminists, existed in the radical movement as well. Roxanne Dunbar wrote,

The female, like the land, became private property under masculine dominance. Man, in conquering nature, conquered the female, who had worked with nature, not against it, to produce food and to reproduce the human race.¹⁵⁹

Dunbar believed women nurtured both children and the environment; men disturbed this balance. Yet, Dunbar also critiqued women's maternal role. Robin Morgan described women as people, "whose bodies are also unavoidably aware of the locked-in relationship between humans and the biosphere

-- the earth, the tides, the atmosphere, the moon."¹⁶⁰ If, according to radical feminists, women understand and uphold the natural environment, they should hardly need to obtain equality through artificial means.

The newness of the radical movement may explain this particular stance. As women rejected male-imposed identities and searched for their own persons, they removed layers of patriarchal faces, of false conceptions of women's role and nature. They listened to their own voices and looked for the truth beneath the misconceptions. In this process, women may have, of necessity, first rejected most of their social identity before deciding which parts to reclaim as their own. Robin Morgan explained in the introduction to her book, Going Too Far, that she and other radical feminists took a stand against motherhood in reaction to society's expectation that they become mothers. In later years, other feminists would disagree.¹⁶¹ These beliefs formed a step in a longer process.

The politics of similarity competed with sisterhood for influence in the radical feminist movement, and sisterhood gained the upper hand. Issues raised by the politics of similarity received continued interest in the feminist movement. Examples include reproductive technology and

sexual violence. Liberal and cultural feminists took on these topics. As the radical feminist movement declined in the early 1970's, however, the lesbian politics of sisterhood eclipsed issues of gender similarity.

This happened largely because separatist strategies, unlike cultural reconstructions, become effective immediately. In their private lives, some radical feminists preferred to withdraw from men through lesbianism. As cultural feminism developed, women would increasingly do so in their public lives through institutions, businesses and religious rites devoted exclusively to women's needs. Sisterhood became the strategy for survival in a patriarchal world.

Radical feminism of necessity worked toward its goal of gender similarity through a common bond between women. When this bond overshadowed its goal, radical feminism lost its ideological focus. The movement declined because its means became its end. In sisterhood, radical feminism constructed the base for feminism's metamorphosis. In its concepts of gender similarity, it challenged thousands of years of theory regarding women's nature, and it raised issues still debated today. It declined as a result of its internal contradictions yet provided the fertile seed from which future ideas sprang forth.

Radical feminism left two legacies -- one practical and one theoretical. American culture has changed dramatically

since 1967, and radical feminism certainly influenced that change. Marriage laws are far more equitable in most states. Abortion is now legal for all women and does not depend on a doctor's approval. It is generally easier to win a sexual assault case, and victim/survivors receive better treatment. Sexual harrassment is also now a major issue in American culture. Radical feminists sometimes precipitated these changes through their direct actions. They influenced all of them through their theory.

Their theory contributed to a gender analysis. The idea of personal politics helped make possible the changes which have occurred during the last two decades. America now more readily translates personal issues into political and legal action. Radical feminists validated seeing the world through gender-aware eyes.

Radical feminism's influence did not end with its decline. This period of intense questioning left its mark on American culture. The feminist utopia has not arrived, but it may be coming. Perhaps metamorphosis would better describe this movement in the early 1970's. The issues that concerned radical feminists have not vanished, and American culture continues to develop them. The seed grows.

1. See for example Alice Echols, Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Myra Marx Ferree and Beth B. Hess, Controversy and Coalition: The New Feminist Movement (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985); Judith Hole and Ellen Levine, Rebirth of Feminism (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1971).
2. Karen Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach," Signs 14, no.1 (Autumn '88): 119-57.
3. Maren Lockwood Carden, The New Feminist Movement (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1974), 16.
4. Flora Davis, Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America Since 1960 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 69; Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 243.
5. Winifred Wandersee, On the Move: American Women in the 1970's (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988), 3.
6. Gayle Graham Yates, What Women Want: The Ideas of the Movement (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1975), 10; Carden, New Feminist Movement, 64.
7. Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 4.
8. Carden, New Feminist Movement, 67.
9. Davis, Moving the Mountain, 69; Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 243.
10. Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 243.
11. Alison Jaggar, Feminist Politics and Human Nature (Sussex: Rowman and Allenheid, Publishers, 1983), 94-5.
12. Anne Koedt, "Lesbianism and Feminism," in Radical Feminism, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), 249.
13. National Organization of Women, "Statement of Purpose," in It Changed My Life, Betty Friedan (New York: Random House, 1976), 90.
14. Jaggar, Feminist Politics, 254-5.
15. Carden, New Feminist Movement, 19-30. For additional support, see Barbara Mehrhof, "On Class Structure Within the Women's Movement," in Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation: Major Writings of the Radical Feminists, ed. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (1970). For an opposing,

though less supported, viewpoint of the class background of radical feminists, see Leah Fritz, Dreamers and Dealers: An Intimate Appraisal of the Women's Movement (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 46.

16. Carden, New Feminist Movement, 19-30.

17. Ibid., 29-30.

18. Yates, What Women Want, 5.

19. Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 33.

20. Hole and Levine, Rebirth of Feminism, 110.

21. Echols, Daring to be Bad, 29, 31.

22. Yates, What Women Want, 8.

23. Hole and Levine, Rebirth of Feminism, 111.

24. Echols Daring to Be Bad, 38.

25. Hole and Levine, Rebirth of Feminism, 112.

26. Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 44-5.

27. Wandersee, On the Move, 3.

28. Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 139-42.

29. Ellen Willis, "Sequel: Letter to a Critic," in Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation: Major Writings of the Radical Feminists, ed. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (1970), 58.

30. Robin Morgan, "Goodbye to All That," in Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist (New York: Random House, 1977), 123.

31. Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 3.

32. Hole and Levine, Rebirth of Feminism, 118.

33. Wandersee, On the Move, 5.

34. Hole and Levine, Rebirth of Feminism, 133.

35. Carden, New Feminist Movement, 62.

36. Wandersee, On the Move, 6.
37. Ibid.
38. Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 175, 142-53.
39. Ibid., 179.
40. Davis, Moving the Mountain, 99.
41. Carden, New Feminist Movement, 37.
42. Yates, What Women Want, 104.
43. Hole and Levine, Rebirth of Feminism, 137.
44. Carden, New Feminist Movement, 34, 71-3.
45. Wandersee, On the Move, 55.
46. Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 142-53.
47. Hole and Levine, Rebirth of Feminism, 126.
48. Ferree and Hess, Controversy and Coalition, 65.
49. Carden, New Feminist Movement, 90.
50. Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 180-81. Atkinson has also been criticized for exaggerating class differences. See Leah Fritz, Dreamers and Dealers: An Intimate Appraisal of the Women's Movement (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 49.
51. Barbara Mehrhof, "On Class Structure Within the Women's Movement," in Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation: Major Writings of the Radical Feminists, ed. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (1970), 107.
52. Pamela Kearon, "Power as a Function of the Group," in Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation: Major Writings of the Radical Feminists, ed. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (1970), 108-110.
53. Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 9.
54. Leah Fritz, Dreamers and Dealers: An Intimate Appraisal of the Women's Movement (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 67.
55. The phrase "sisterhood is powerful" originates from a pamphlet written by Kathie Amatniek (Sarachild) of the N.Y. Radical Women and distributed at the Rankin Brigade of 1968. Yates, What Women Want, 101.

- 56.Hole and Levine, Rebirth, 152.
- 57."Politics of the Ego: A Manifesto for N.Y. Radical Feminists," in Radical Feminism, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), 379.
- 58.Kate Millett, Sexual Politics (New York: Avon, 1969), 43.
- 59.Yates, What Women Want, 92.
- 60.Beverly Jones, "The Dynamics of Marriage and Motherhood," in Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Random House, 1970), 59.
- 61."Redstockings Manifesto," in Radical Feminism, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), 534.
- 62.Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 139.
- 63.Ibid., 142-53.
- 64.Here I follow Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution (New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1970), 5-7. Alison Jaggar criticized this argument because it failed to understand history and biology as "inseparable," cyclically creating each other. Jaggar, Feminist Politics, 111.
- 65."The Feminists: A Political Organization to Annihilate Sex Roles," in Radical Feminism, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), 370.
- 66.Jaggar, Feminist Politics, 91, 87.
- 67.Ibid., 117.
- 68.Firestone, Dialectic of Sex, 142.
- 69.Ti-Grace Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey (New York: Link Books, 1974), 289.
- 70.Jones, "Dynamics of Marriage," 59.
- 71.Millett, Sexual Politics, 61.
- 72."The Feminists," 375.
- 73.Ibid., 381.
- 74.Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey, 290.

75. Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey, 290.
76. "The Feminists," 375.
77. "The Feminists," 375.
78. Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey, 288-89.
79. Millett, Sexual Politics, 61.
80. "The Feminists," 371.
81. Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey, 7.
82. Firestone, Dialectic of Sex, 156.
83. Firestone, Dialectic of Sex, 165.
84. "Politics of the Ego," 381.
85. Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey, 5.
86. "WITCH," in Radical Feminism, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), 546.
87. Hole and Levine, Rebirth of Feminism, 126.
88. "WITCH," 544.
89. Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 176.
90. Sheila Cronan, "Marriage," in Radical Feminism, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), 214.
91. Ibid., 215.
92. Ibid., 216.
93. Ibid., 217.
94. Feminists, "Women: Do You Know the Facts About Marriage?," in Radical Feminism, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), 536-7.
95. Feminists, "Facts About Marriage," 537.
96. Cronan, "Marriage," 219-20.
97. Betsy Warrior, "Housework: Slavery or Labor of Love," in Radical Feminism, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), 212.

98. Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 161-6.
99. Cronan, "Marriage," 219-20.
100. Feminists, "Facts About Marriage," 537.
101. Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 176.
102. Here I follow Firestone, Dialectic of Sex, 159-60.
103. Jones, "Dynamics of Marriage," 58-9.
104. Judy Syfers, "Why I Want a Wife," in Radical Feminism, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), 60-62.
105. Robin Morgan, Upstairs in the Garden: Poems Selected and New 1968-88 (New York and London: N.W. Norton and Company, 1990), 26.
106. Ibid., 27.
107. Here I follow Dana Densmore, "Independence from the Sexual Revolution," in Radical Feminism, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), 111.
108. Firestone, Dialectic of Sex, 162.
109. Pat Mainardi, "The Marriage Question," in Feminist Revolution: An Abridged Addition with Additional Writings, ed. Redstockings (New York: Random House, 1975), 120.
110. Here I follow Firestone, Dialectic of Sex, 8-9.
111. Here I follow ibid., 165-6.
112. Millett, Sexual Politics, 55.
113. Jessie Bernard, "The Paradox of the Happy Marriage," in Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness, ed. Vivian Gornick (New York and London: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1971), 89-90.
114. Alix Shulman, "Organs and Orgasms," in Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness, ed. Vivian Gornick (New York and London: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1971), 204.
115. Anne Koedt, "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," in Radical Feminism, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), 199.

116. Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey, 13-14.
117. Koedt, "Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," 204.
118. Densmore, "Independence from the Sexual Revolution," 114.
119. Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 164.
120. Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey, 86.
121. Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 447.
122. Davis, Moving the Mountain, 264.
123. Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 240.
124. Coletta Reid, "Coming Out," in Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations between Men and Women, ed. Alison M. Jaggar and Paula Rothenberg Struhl (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1978), 295.
125. Sidney Abbot and Barbara Love, "Is Women's Liberation a Lesbian Plot?," in Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness, ed. Vivian Gornick (New York and London: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1971), 449.
126. Charlotte Bunch, "Lesbians in Revolt," in Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations between Men and Women, ed. Alison M. Jaggar and Paula Rothenberg Struhl (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1978), 124.
127. Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 228.
128. Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 229.
129. Charlotte Bunch, "Lesbians in Revolt," 297.
130. Ibid., 450.
131. Martha Shelly, "Notes of a Radical Lesbian," in Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Random House, 1970), 307.
132. Radicalesbians, "The Woman Identified Woman," in Radical Feminism, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), 245.
133. Bunch, "Lesbians in Revolt," 127.
134. Ibid., 124.

135. Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 243.
136. Anne Koedt, "Lesbianism and Feminism," in Radical Feminism, ed. Anne Koedt, Ellen Levine and Anita Rapone (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973), 250.
137. Ibid., 252.
138. Mainardi, "The Marriage Question," 122.
139. Ibid., 121.
140. Koedt, "Lesbianism and Feminism," 249-50; Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey, 86.
141. Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey, 86.
142. Here I follow., *ibid* 85. Interestingly, Atkinson's argument could also be applied to the radical feminist movement in general. The movement responds to patriarchal definitions of women's nature. These definitions shape radical feminist theory because radical feminists feel compelled to discard them all.
143. Abbott and Love, "Lesbian Plot," 450.
144. Radicalesbians, "The Woman Identified Woman," 241.
145. Ibid., 243.
146. Wandersee, On the Move, 66-67.
147. Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey, 5.
148. Ibid., 6.
149. Charlotte Bunch, "Lesbians in Revolt," 296.
150. Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey, 14-17.
151. Firestone, Dialectic of Sex, 10-11.
152. Ibid., 12.
153. "The Feminists," 376.
154. Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 158; Roxanne Dunbar, "Female Liberation as a Basis for Social Revolution," in Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation: Major Writings of the Radical Feminists, ed. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (1970), 52. This argument has a definite Leninist influence.

155. Echols, Daring to Be Bad, 170.
156. Davis, Moving the Mountain, 89.
157. Offen, "Defining Feminism," 155-56.
158. Jaggar, Feminist Politics, 292.
159. Dunbar, "Female Liberation," 49.
160. Morgan, "Goodbye to All That," 126.
161. Here I follow Robin Morgan, Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist (New York: Random House, 1977), 8.

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