ISSUES
THE PROGRESSIVE WOMAN'S QUARTERLY
FALL 1994 $3.95

Sexual Apartheid in Iran

LOUISE ARMSTRONG: WHO STOLE INCEST?

PHYLLIS CHESLER: MISSISSIPPI FEMINISTS ATTACKED

ANDREA DWORKIN & CONG. JOHN LEWIS: CAN WE STILL AFFORD NONVIOLENCE?

ANDREA PEYSER: O.J. SIMPSON CHRONICLES

SEXUAL NETWORKING: A RHODES SCHOLAR'S ACCOUNT
The world as women live it.

**I AM ROE**
My Life, Roe v. Wade, and Freedom of Choice
Norma McCorvey with Andy Meisler

Her search for a legal abortion led Norma McCorvey to become the anonymous plaintiff in the landmark Supreme Court decision. This book is her personal story, “a direct, unsentimental, and often harsh account of a real life at the heart of historical events.”
— Publishers Weekly

$11.00 paperback

**UNAMERICAN ACTIVITIES**
A Memoir of the Sixties
Sally Belfrage

The memoir of Sally Belfrage, daughter of radical writers Cedric Belfrage and Molly Castle, who yearned to be an “all-American girl” during her McCarthy-era adolescence in the conformist 50s.

“Wry and poignant.”
— Publishers Weekly

$12.00 paperback

**THE BALKAN EXPRESS**
Slavenka Drakulić

“Through short but deeply felt essays on everything from housepaint and high-heeled shoes to point-blank murder, Drakulić tells the story of the Balkan crisis as people are living it.”
— The Nation

“Moving and eloquent.”
— New York Times

With four new chapters
$11.00 paperback

**SINGING AT THE TOP OF OUR LANGS**
Women, Love, and Creativity
Claudia Deep and Jo-Ann Krestan

“A bold and original exploration of female inventiveness and courage.”
— Harriet G. Lerner, author of The Dance of Anger

“Buoyant and instructive... a welcome counterweight to the pressures society still exerts on women who want a life of their own.”
— New Woman

$12.00 paperback

**BLOODLINES**
Odyssey of a Native Daughter
Janet Campbell Hale

“With simplicity, and honesty, Bloodlines movingly describes Hale’s evolution and ultimate liberation. Powerful and poignant.”
— Chief Wilma Mankiller

“Mesmerizing.”
— New York Times Book Review

Winner of the American Book Award
$11.00 paperback

HarperCollins Publishers
Also available from HarperCollins Canada Ltd.
SEXUAL NETWORKING AT OXFORD
10
By Katherine Eban Finkelstein

A SACRIFICIAL LIGHT
14
Self-Immolation in Tehran
By Martha Shelley

SEXUAL APARTHEID IN IRAN
17
Tightening restrictions on women
By Mahin Hassibi, MD

OTI DIALOGUE
TOWARD A REVOLUTION IN VALUES
20
Congressman John Lewis and Andrea Dworkin connect feminism and civil rights

WHO STOLE INCEST?
30
Obscuring the political import of child rape
By Louise Armstrong

LOUISE BOURGEOIS' FEMINIST ART
33
By Arlene Raven

SAFETY NET PERFORMS VANISHING ACT
37
Will reform make welfare more un-fare?
By Lynn Phillips

OVARIAN CANCER
45
The myopia of medical power
By Beverly Zakarian

ADVENTURES OF GERTRUDE BELL
42
By Robert Kimball Green

TIME WARP IN THE TOY STORE
48
By Ellen J. Reifler

HOFFMAN
3
High Noon in Moscow

RAPPING
8
Why Roseanne Rivets Us

CHESLER
26
Mississippi Feminists Under Attack

TALKING FEMINIST
24
The O.J. Simpson Chronicles
By Andrea Peyser

COLUMNS

DEPARTMENTS

FRONT LINES
2

WIN SOME/LOSE SOME
5

BOOK REVIEWS
50

FEEDBACK
60

CUTTING SOME SLACK
64
Altar Girls? Excuse Me for Not Dancing at the News
By Susan J. Kraus

ON THE COVER
Cover Painting by Jody Williams

UPDATE
As we go to press, Taslima Nasrin has reached safety in Sweden (see “Death Bounty on Bangladesh Feminist,” page 6) and Dr. Nicolai Ivanovich Osipov has been relieved of his position as head of the Moscow Clinical Center Marine Hospital (see “High Noon in Moscow,” page 3).
Two Iranian women physicians approached me at an international medical conference in 1985. They wanted to tell a western woman journalist how the tightening fundamentalist restrictions were interfering with their ability to care for their patients. One doctor described rushing between medical buildings, hurriedly conferring with a male colleague on how to treat an emergency case. They were stopped on the street by two teenage boys with rifles who demanded to know why the woman doctor had let her chador fall open and expose her hair, and why she was conversing with a male who was not a relative. The two were detained for only 20 minutes—but long enough to throw the doctors considerably off their stride and allow their patient's condition to grow more desperate.

Since then, things have gone from bad to worse for women doctors, and all women, in Iran. Fundamentalist efforts to eradicate the presence and influence of women in the public sphere has been a particular burden for Iran's professional women, many of whom have studied and lived abroad. When a woman has tasted professional and personal freedom, its loss is horrific, and for some, ultimately unbearable (see Martha Shelley's "A Sacrificial Light").

Relentless anti-female dogma and ever-tightening restrictions serve a clear purpose in today's Iran; they help to distract the male population from the economic, social, and military failures of the fundamentalist regime, writes Mahin Hassibi, MD, in her article on "Sexual Apartheid in Iran."

Sexual apartheid? We choose that phrase because, ironically, "apartheid" now implies the hope of radical change. When black and progressive groups in the U.S. began their long campaign to end apartheid in South Africa, many doubted if international pressure and boycotts would help, or if anything short of a prolonged civil war could uproot the apartheid system. But we lived to witness the dissolution of a seemingly intractable system of social oppression.

If the freedom of women all over the world is to be protected, sexual apartheid in the fundamentalist Muslim world must someday meet a similar fate. While international support can help, ultimately, the hope of radical change is the responsibility of the women and men there—just as change in South Africa resulted, primarily, from the sustained and heroic efforts of its people. The special tragedy of sexual apartheid is that so many women in fundamentalist countries have incorporated the belief that misogynous separatism, couched as the will of God, is the only way to protect themselves from male harassment.

The positive synergy that can emerge from linking race and gender struggles is highlighted in two other pieces in this issue. Be sure to read the stirring—and surprising—OTI Dialogue between Freedom Rider and now Congressman John Lewis (D-GA) and feminist activist Andrea Dworkin. And check out Phyllis Chesler's visit to Camp Sister Spirit, a feminist education outpost under local attack, for a glimpse at what's changed, and what hasn't, in Mississippi.

For insights into how our world rulers are schooled to make the apartheid/gender oppression connection, see Katherine Finkelstein's "It's a Rocky Rolodex at Oxford." We're proud of many other pieces in this issue, too—so read on and please let us know what you think.
Someplace in the course of planning my latest journey to Russia I lost my fear of flying. It left me suddenly, without fanfare or notice. I simply came to the conclusion that fear of flying was an inappropriate phobia for a pioneer. And, so it was with great excitement and a sense of destiny that I boarded the plane for Moscow in early June, on a mission to actualize my dream of building Russia’s first feminist medical center.

The events that led me to this point began with the 32-year-old Russian woman who came to CHOICES in 1990 for her 36th abortion. Her amazement at my shock and concern was just the beginning of my gaining insight into the lives of women in Russia—lives that are full of multiple and dangerous abortions with no access to birth control. Sexually conservative, Russian society is notoriously biased against contraception, particularly the pill. Convinced that the pill causes cancer, most gynecologists preach the virtues of repeat abortions. Of course, the fact that many of them subsidize their $10 a month salaries by doing abortions in women’s homes might well have an influence on their thinking. The only contraceptive devices locally produced are condoms—and so badly (due to problems working with latex) that they are called “galoshes,” few men consent to use them. Russia is a country where the obstetric wards are empty of patients, and where it is estimated that one out of three women die in hospitals from the complications of second trimester abortions. I heard story after story of lives that were blighted by sterility, sexually transmitted diseases, and domestic violence. They so moved me that I began to think in terms of replicating my women’s medical center, CHOICES, in Moscow. There, I could offer Russian women state of the art family planning and counselling, as well as high quality abortion care. Yes, I felt that Russian women needed a safe harbor, a feminist outpost. I was, after all, a pioneer in the early ‘70’s, when I opened one of the first abortion centers in the U.S., and my subsequent 23 years of experience, I knew, had positioned me for this work. Arrogance, vision, or a touch of madness, whatever it was, I felt I had to go there.

I was aware of the odds; out of 3,300 American/Russian joint ventures formed last year in Moscow, only 300 are still operative. The American press carries endless stories of the difficulties of doing business in Russia. I knew that, apart from the basic challenge of negotiating with people whose core philosophy was for 70 years built around hostility to free markets, I had to take up the challenge of bringing a feminist consciousness to life in a medical setting, in a highly misogynist, authoritarian society.

Much had changed in Russia since my first exploratory visit in 1992. The rise of fascist nationalism promoted by Zhirinovsky, rampant inflation, and growing disillusionment with American capitalism due to the loss of life savings had left much of the population anxious, frustrated, and despairing. Organized crime had grown at alarming rates—a 43% rise in the last five months. The second day of my visit a car bomb exploded in the center of the city, maiming the occupant so horribly that iden-
utification was almost impossible. Gang violence, too, is so common that the Moscow Times reports that there is a bomb attack on the average of one every two days—mainly carried out against bankers and businessmen—as gangs battle for control of the city. Contrary to the relief I felt on my first visit to Moscow that pornography was almost non-existent, now I saw it everywhere. The Russian version of Cosmopolitan had just hit the stands, and an article entitled “Would I rather have sex or chocolate?” extolled the joys of sexual pleasure without mention of the horrific price paid by so many Russian women.

The opening of Russian markets to all things American, like Snickers Bars and McDonald’s, included imports of our special brands of fundamentalist misogyny: tapes of Jerry Falwell and Jimmy Swaggart now grace Russian television. Indeed, the American Right to Life Movement sponsors a weekly half-hour TV program; a recent Right to Life conference in Moscow boasted 500 attendees. So, somehow I was not surprised to learn that the attacks on me in the press began before I hit the ground. A former KGB General, one Alexander Sterligov, leader of the Russian National Assembly and an ally of Zhirinovsky, was worried that under Yeltsin the mortality rate exceeded the birth rate for the first time since World War II. Calling my plans to set up a women’s clinic in Moscow an “anti-Russian ploy,” Sterligov was quoted as saying: “We will not put up with Russians having more coffins than candles.” Not only are women the victims of repeat unsafe abortions—now they are being made to feel guilty for having them on both religious and political grounds.

On my first visit to Russia in 1992 my speeches and press conferences were mobbed by people demanding birth control information and free condoms. At Gynecological Hospital #53 my staff administered the first trial of Norplant. They taught Russian doctors and nurses how to perform safe abortions in hospital rooms where it had been common to perform three to four procedures at one time—with no anesthesia—and where the sterile technique is minimal (rubber examining gloves are washed and reused). In these rooms women stoically lie down on dirty tables for their fourth, fifth, or twentieth abortion.

I knew on that visit that even though I had passed the first obstacle and found partners with whom I could make the CHOICES EAST clinic a reality, I faced many challenges. Not least of them was transporting my philosophy to a culture that is inherently resistant to it. The Russian physicians are by training and orientation highly authoritarian, and not attuned to my concepts of interdisciplinarity, participatory health care.

But what I had learned led me to the realization that to graft my American feminist philosophy onto Russian reality would be a mistake. My mission was to work with the Russians on an equal basis; that way they could adapt the CHOICES philosophy of “Patient Power” to their Russian sensibilities. The philosophy could then grow organically and be replicated in other parts of the country.

And in this regard things were moving along well. In February I returned to Russia to sign the Protocol of Intent with my partners—the Moscow Clinical Center Marine Hospital and the Department of Marine Transport of the Ministry of Transport. CHOICES EAST would be built in the Moscow facility first and then in 18 other hospitals.

I took great care in having the legal documents drawn up because the law, like everything else in Russia, seemed to change almost daily. Of particular importance was the division of control. We agreed that both the American and Russian sides would hold equal shares in the venture, sharing in both the potential success and risk of the project. Needless to say, it took many phone calls and faxes to produce the detailed legal documents necessary to form the company.

The head of the Moscow Clinical Center Marine Hospital, Dr. Nikolai Ivanovitch Osipov, was a force to be reckoned with. He was previously Gorbachev’s private physician and a former high Communist Party functionary. In fact, I witnessed his difficulties in making the transition to the “new Russia” (during our meetings he would address his hospital staff as “my Soviet Comrades”). Nevertheless, Osipov seemed genuinely taken with my feminist ideas. He expressed concern over the state of women’s health, and appeared to be excited about what CHOICES EAST could potentially mean to the status and financial strength of his hospital.

At the end of my February trip, with much fanfare and press attention, we signed the Protocol of Intent that would lead to our agreement. On my return in June, we would finalize and sign the formal documents. Then the real work of setting up the clinic could begin.

In June, my first working day in Moscow was to be spent at the Moscow Clinical Center Marine Hospital, where I had signed the Protocol of Intent. Upon approaching the hospital, I noticed changes. Our cars were met at the gate by armed guards. And at our meetings, Osipov was either continually walking around or holding a cellular phone, like a new toy. In fact, he made calls every ten minutes. He seemed nervous and distant, his behavior was erratic.

When I questioned my Russian aides about this, they informed me that he had been involved in a business venture that soured, and been the victim of an attack that left him in a coma for three months. Because this is a country where being machine-gunned in the street adds to an entrepreneur’s risk of losing a financial investment, I was not terribly surprised. But I began to be concerned that whatever his motivations, Osipov did not seem willing to move forward on the terms we had agreed upon.

The meetings continued to evoke confusion in me and obstinacy in him. Finally, it was with a sense of shock and amazement that I heard him demand 51% of the company. In the meetings my advisers had with Osipov during my absence, he gave no indication that he wanted anything but the agreed upon 50%. Yet, here he was insisting that I had agreed to a 51/49 split.

I certainly had never agreed to this, nor could I now. To accomplish anything for women, I needed equal control of the project. Forty-nine percent would render me powerless to control the health-care CHOICES EAST provided, and would allow my Russian partners to make use

continued on page 54
**WIN SOME**

**GODFATHERS ON CAMPUS**

Ever wonder how the term “politically correct” became a fashionable weapon against progressive thinking on college campuses? It’s no accident. It’s part of a well-funded conservative marketing campaign to “win the next generation” and stigmatize, and redefine as bigotry, the academic inclusion of non-Western ideas, historically disenfranchised groups, environmental responsibility, and cooperative methods for resolving conflicts.

“The right has falsely presented itself as an oppressed minority on campus in order to undermine the progressive gains of the past three decades,” says Dalya Massachi, co-editor of a new 52-page report, “Guide to Uncovering the Right on Campus,” published by the University Conversion Project (UCP), a national clearinghouse for campus activism based in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The UCP report traces tens of millions of dollars spent by right-wing groups to dominate the campus political climate, including the funding of more than 100 conservative campus publications that reach more than a million students.

“This is the first time that these activities have been exposed as a nationally coordinated effort by a few wealthy right-wing foundations and organizations,” Rich Cowan, co-editor of the UCP report told *On the Issues.* “The groups have trained and sponsored thousands of conservative campus activists and journalists.”

Deep pockets include: the Carthage, Scaife, Olin, Coors, Bradley, and Richardson foundations, all of which have a long history of funding right-wing organizations. Three national conservative student organizations receive over $500,000 a year from these foundations: the Madison Center for Educational Affairs, Washington, D.C., the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, Bryn Mawr, Pa., and the National Association of Scholars, Rutgers, N.J., a conservative faculty network.

The right’s “send money” strategy effectively fools some of the students some of the time. A nationwide survey compiled by the UCP reveals a growing student distaste for political involvement and an increasingly repressive climate for students and faculty attempting to address such social issues as sexism, racism, homophobia, environmental destruction, and militarism. However, the UCP report finds that most students surveyed want more money spent on education, not war; most women are not abandoning their careers; and multiculturalism and gay rights are gaining acceptance.

The study kicks off the UCP’s ten-month Right Wing on Campus Alert campaign. The group, founded during the Gulf War to promote peace activism and investigative journalism on campus, will be present on more than 100 campuses to help student activists uncover the outside funding of conservative organizations seeking to undermine their aims. For more information, contact the UCP, PO Box 748, Cambridge, MA 02142.

—Suzanne Levine

### DAMNED WITH A HALO

First the *New York Times Magazine* runs a cover story on “Saint Hillary” in May, 1993. Then this May it ran “Reverend Reno” — also on the cover of the influential magazine. What’s your point, fellas? That women with power are goody-two-shoes who are not sophisticated (or sleazy) enough to be really political? Meanwhile, Janet Reno has blood on her hands from the Branch Davidian melee. And profiteering is one of Hillary Clinton’s marketable skills. But the press seems to have trouble grasping the point that most women in power (and elsewhere) are neither saints nor whores.—Ronni Sandroff

---

*On the Issues* Fall 1994
FOAL PLAY

Chances are that if you are seeking relief from menopausal symptoms, your doctor will suggest Premarin, a "natural" estrogen substitute. The drug, which doctors have been prescribing for 50 years, is extracted from the urine of pregnant mares. It's recently come to light that an estimated 75,000 foals a year are slaughtered as unwanted by-products of the manufacturing process for America's most widely prescribed drug.

The use of horses as urine-producing machines came to the attention of physicians, patients, and the animal protection movement in 1992 when Ayerst Organics, a Canadian-based company and sole manufacturer of the drug, announced a $123 million expansion in its yearly report. According to the report, Ayerst expects to triple its output in preparation for the approximately 20 million female baby-boomers poised on the menopause threshold.

Currently, about 80,000 mares each year are kept pregnant to produce the estrogen-laden urine. The foals born to these mares are slaughtered and sold on the Japanese and European markets for human consumption. The death toll of the foals could rise to 200,000 with Ayerst's expansion plans, according to the New York Post.

In addition to the slaughter of the foals, animal rights groups are protesting the abusive conditions to which the mares are subjected. The mares are strapped and tethered in cement-floored stalls about 4 feet wide and 5 feet long, according to Friends of Animals, an international, nonprofit organization based in Darien, Connecticut. Straps attached to the ceiling firmly hold a rubber cup onto the mare's urethra to catch the precious urine.

The horses are exercised about one-half hour each week. "Their front legs are often swollen from standing in one place," says Elizabeth Carlyle, coordinator of the Manitoba Animal Rights Coalition based in Winnipeg. "They hit their heads against the wall of their stalls out of boredom. They look worn." No laws or permits oversee the industry, except Ayerst's "Recommended Code of Practice."

Premarin is so widely prescribed because it is the oldest of the estrogen substitutes and is considered "natural." Today, numerous effective synthetics made from soybean and Mexican yams, such as Estrace (the second most popular estrogen, on the market for 18 years) are easily found. Women who choose to take estrogen substitutes have the option of asking their doctors to choose a synthetic alternative to Premarin.

—Dot Hayes

DEATH BOUNTY ON BANGLADESH FEMINIST

American feminists are among those mounting support for Taslima Nasrin, the Bangladeshi physician, poet, novelist, and newspaper columnist who has been an outspoken critic of Islamic traditions restricting women's rights. A statement by Nasrin on the Koran—"we have to move beyond these ancient texts if we want progress"—led to criminal charges of insulting the Muslim religion and demands for her death from Muslim clerics, one of whom offered a bounty equivalent to $10,000 to anyone killing the writer.

Nasrin has been in hiding and has appealed for refuge and help from western governments, writers' groups, and human rights organizations. According to the New York Times, she has written a series of graphic, sexual poems and said in interviews that Muslim women should have the right to the same number of husbands as the number of wives (four) permitted to men by the Koran. Her 1993 novel, Shame, depicted attacks on Bangladesh's Hindu minority. The novel sold 60,000 copies in the country before it was banned.

Muslim fundamentalist groups have used demonstrations against Nasrin to renew demands for the expulsion of foreign aid organizations which, they say, undermine Muslim mores by pressing for female education, birth control, and wider women's rights.

—RS
LATINA BEAT

"Latina—A Journal of Ideas," the spring 1994 issue of Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Arts and Politics, is a stirring collection of photography, art, fiction, poetry, and essays by U.S. feminists of Central or South American backgrounds. The beautifully designed, book-length issue looks at female experience through the "minority" lens—Latina, Hispanic, and "funny, you don't look Puerto Rican"—and also examines the lens itself. An insightful essay by Martha E. Gimenez notes that the label "Hispanic" creates a pan-ethnic identity that is convenient mostly for those who want to "minoritize" social problems. In another piece, Coco Fusco notes that performance art did not begin with Dadaist events, but with shows of "aboriginal samples" of people from Africa, Asia, and the Americas brought to entertain and educate Europeans. Fusco's 1992 performances in Madrid, London, Chicago, and Sydney turned the tables, demonstrating such authentic tasks as writing on a laptop computer, watching TV, and doing exercises. The joy of the issue is the chance to sample the lively work and personal experiences of 70 contemporary Latina artists. Heresies has been published biannually since 1978 by a revolving collective of feminist artists. To order "Latina," send a check for $8 payable to Heresies, P.O. Box 1306, Canal St. Station, NY, NY 10013. —RS

Hi-TECH PORN

Pornography has become the fastest growing area of interactive multimedia, according to CD-ROM Today. The new porn genre allows cybervoyeurs to "interact" with the women on the screen. One product from Kuki Co., Inc, a Japanese distributor of interactive movie games, gives the player the role of "Dr. Amour," who can "zap" the adult footage when he wants to switch women or sex positions. Jurisdiction problems and easy concealment have made it difficult to control the new porn traffic. Computer pornography investigations have been launched by the U.S. Secret Service, the U.S. Customs Service, and a number of state and local agencies, according to The Wall Street Journal. While obscenity jurisdictions remain unclear, manufacturers of electronic erotica are reportedly pressing mainstream computer stores and trade shows to carry their products. Just as printed porn has no place in mainstream bookstores, techno-porn does not belong in legitimate computer outlets, as we can all make clear to local vendors. —SL
**WHY ROSEANNE RIVETS US**

Time was when we feminists could easily agree on what a "negative" and "positive" media image was. Airheads, sex kittens, hausfraus, spinsters, femme fatales—those were the dominant female images, unanimously deplored by us all, back in the 1970's. And while there were no published guidelines, we—in our largely white, middle class political innocence (and arrogance)—mostly shared a common idea of what we wanted to replace them. Mary Tyler Moore's Mary Richards was a flawed but encouraging first step, we thought. And Candice Bergen's Murphy Brown was—for many of us, about right. Professionally successful, emotionally and economically independent, stylishly turned out in this year's Donna Karan or Adrienne Vittadini "bridge" wear; and cozily ensconced in a chic townhouse or condo; Murphy—and other descendents from Moore's matrilinear line—makes us proud.

But, while I'm grateful for Murphy, my heart belongs to a sitcom heroine who is very far from the classic guidelines for "positive role models." Fat, sloppy; and badly dressed, housed and employed, Roseanne (who has recently chosen to use only a first name)—more than Murphy, more than Madonna, more than Hillary, in my view—has most profoundly and positively changed TV gender norms for the better.

But while I feel safe, in feminist circles, calling up the name of Murphy Brown, I am uncertain, even defensive, in my praise of Roseanne. Lots of feminists, after all, deplore her. Where Murphy oozes political correctness, Roseanne is likely to set our progressive, enlightened teeth on edge with her flaws, failures, and faux pas. Yelling at her kids and bossing everyone else on her show; posing "indecently" and admitting to sexual and moral deeds and scars, she just doesn't make it as a "positive image" of feminist triumph.

Well, so what, I would argue. The "positive role model" thing is way overrated. Forget about the obvious, if unstated, class and race bias of most such criteria. There's also something unrealistic and unfair about putting forth standards of emotional and political perfection for women, which few, if any, can reasonably aspire to.

Roseanne offers an image of someone who doesn't have it all together, who hasn't achieved professional success or emotional and personal perfection. Someone who, rather, is stuck—like most of us these days—in the squalor of economic and emotional difficulty and struggling to manage in the most moral, loving, dignified way she can.

Roseanne isn't "movin' on up" to anywhere. With her bad hair, baggy pants, and oversized shirts from the lower level of the mall; with her burned meat loaf, tuna casseroles, and Malomars; with her rough language and politically incorrect child-rearing methods; with her dead end, minimum wage jobs—Roseanne is a living symbol of resistance against class, gender, and consumerist norms.

To appreciate Roseanne, perhaps we need to take a fresh look at another sitcom star, from another day—also no darling of "classical" feminists—the Lucille Ball of "I Love Lucy." The parallels between these two women are interesting, and reveal a lot about what has and hasn't changed for the women—white, working class and poor—who make up the female majority in this country (although you'd never know it from watching TV). Both were, and are, popular and powerful beyond the dreams of almost any woman performer of their times. And yet they presented themselves as out of bounds, loud, funny, noisy, wild women—all attributes which sexist culture beats out of most of us very early on. In a world in which females are enjoined not to take up too much space, not to make "spectacles" of ourselves, not to "disturb" but contain "the peace," women like Roseanne...
and Lucy have always been frightening, repulsive, indecent.

That's why they so appall so many.

I used to cringe when I watched "I Love Lucy," as a child. She filled me with embarrassment because she was so stereotypically "hysterical," so much a failure in her endless efforts to move out of the confines of traditional femininity and its many indignities (indignities otherwise kept hidden on TV).

I was far more comfortable, as a middle-class girl, with the persona created by Mary Tyler Moore. Unlike Lucy, Mary was perfectly groomed and mannered. She was sweetly deferential in her apologetic efforts at assertiveness; embarrassingly grateful for every nod of respect or responsibility from her boss "Mr. Grant." Ambitious, yes, but never forgetful of the "ladylike" way of moving up the corporate ladder, one dainty, unthreatening step at a time. Where Lucy embarrassed, Mary soothed.

But through Roseanne, I've come to take a different view of the very improper Lucy. For her time, after all, she was a real fighter against feminine constraints. She tried to do things, often with other women and always against the resistance of every man on the show. She was full of energy and rebelliousness and, yes, independence—to a point.

But, of course, she always failed, and lost, and made a fool of herself. Her show was pure slapstick fantasy, because, back then, the things she was trying to achieve were so far from imaginable that someone like her could only exist in a farcical mode.

Roseanne, too, is loud, aggressive, messy, and ambitiously bossy. Roseanne, too, has close relationships with other women. And Roseanne, too, is larger than life, excessive, and, to many, frightening and repulsive. But her show is no fantasy. Many would argue that it is the most realistic picture of gender, class, and family relations on television today. No more the harried husband rolling his eyes at his wife's antics. Where other sitcoms either ignore feminism and reproduce traditional relations or, perhaps worse, present perfectly harmonious couples—like the Cosbys—for whom gender equity comes as naturally as their good looks, Roseanne and Dan duke it out over gender and power issues as equals who seem really to love, respect and—not least—get really angry at each other.

Nor does Roseanne need to think up crazy schemes for achieving the impossible—a project outside the home. Like most of us, Roseanne needs to work. The jobs she is forced to take—sweeping up hair in a hair salon; waiting tables in malls and diners; working on an assembly line—are very like the ones Lucy nabbed and then messed up, to the wild laughter of the audience. But for Roseanne the humor is different. Roseanne fights with sexist, overbearing bosses; moonlights to get the family through the rough days when Dan is out of work; then lashes out at her kids because she's stressed out at work. And if these things are funny to watch, they are also deeply revealing of social and emotional truths in the lives of women and working class families today.

The most touching and impressive thing about this series is that it presents its progressive "messages" subtly, without preaching or condescending to audiences. Much was made of the famous episode, aired March 1, 1994, in which Roseanne was kissed by a lesbian character. (And it is surely a tribute to Roseanne's integrity and clout that what is perhaps the first televised lesbian kiss got past Standards and Practices review.)

But airing the kiss itself was really no big deal. Lots of shows will now venture a "Wow, did you see that?" one minute/one scene. Lesbianism, as an idea, an abstraction, a new entry on the now very long list of liberal tolerances to which the professional middle-class must pay lip service, was bound to hit prime time even without Roseanne.

What made the Roseanne "lesbian episode" remarkable was what followed the kiss—the startlingly honest discussions about homosexuality between Dan and his young son DJ. and, later, in bed, between Dan and Roseanne.

This segment was politically audacious because it did not lecture the vast majority of Americans who are, yes, queasy about homosexuality. Instead, it presented them with a mirror image of their own confusions and anxiety and led them to a position of relative comfort about it all, by sympathizing with their very real concern about radical social and sexual change.

This is how the show attacks all of its difficult issues, both sensational and mundane. Much has been made of Roseanne's way of yelling at her kids, even hitting them on at least one occasion. Clearly, this is not how parents have been told to behave, and for obvious and good reason. Nonetheless, to pretend that parents don't err—at most sitcoms do—is to condense to viewers who know the truth all too well.

On "Roseanne," parental failings are neither denied nor condemned. They are talked about. After hitting her son, for example, Roseanne apologizes and confesses, heartbreakingly, that she was herself beaten as a child and that it was wrong then and wrong now. It is this kind of honesty about negative feelings that makes the positive feelings of love and mutual respect within this battered, battling family so very believable.

The fictional Roseanne Conner, of course, is a lot more together and a lot more likeable than her real counterpart. Roseanne herself has said that her alter ego is "much nicer" than she. On sitcoms, the epitome of media sappiness, we see the Connors struggle against the odds and win, thrive, live happily ever after. That's the only kind of ending the sponsors will support, after all.

But in real life, as Roseanne bellows out to all who will listen, things are messier, even for those who have risen to the top by playing some version of the media game. Perversely, I like that about Roseanne, too. She is living proof—no matter what the "power" feminists, who so deplore "victimization," would have us believe—that women, even the most successful among us, struggle every day with the emotional and institutional demons of sexist culture and labor every day to eke out small and large victories from a world that has made it difficult for women to survive, much less succeed. And because Roseanne—in life and art—refuses to tone down or deny these ugly, embarrassing truths about women's lives, her every step up from victimization, appears as something of a small miracle—which indeed, I sometimes think, our collective survival and progress are, given the odds against us. So here's to Roseanne. Long may she strut her stuff.
November 25, 1988
Office of Mr. Ira Magaziner
Providence, Rhode Island

Less than a month before my interview for a Rhodes scholarship, I watch as my personal statement flutters through the air. Ira Magaziner, Hillary’s current health architect, is about to put me through a mock interview. He won the scholarship from Brown University in 1968. “Not serious enough,” he says of the essay, as he tosses it up and issues a snort of disgust. I had written of my experience at clown school. “Why do you want to go to Oxford anyway?” Magaziner asks. “It’s a sexist, racist institution.”

Ira was chosen the year before Bill Clinton, when rousing rabble was de rigueur. After all, they made the ’60s happen.

Yet I know nothing about the appearance of power. I stammer. I flush. I take to a chair. I am not yet the embodiment of effortless superiority. I have not yet learned to resemble a public-spirited individual. I say something to Magaziner like, “What better way to create change, than to be there.” Indeed.

December 10, 1988
St. Botolph Club, Boston

I slump on a settee and breathe deeply of Lemon Pledge. There are 11 other students near me, hoping to be Rhodes scholars. Our high-minded chat has evaporated. We wait in silence for the Regional Rhodes Committee to descend the stairs.

A floorboard creaks in the St. Botolph Club. Tasseled loafers pad the stairs. A line of men appear: lawyers, a state senator, a real estate executive. The single dress of a scientist flaps somewhere towards the rear. The appearance of power.

They stand. We stand. I drop my head. The stories of this moment are legend. The son of a famous intellectual fell into a dead faint in this very carpeted corner when they didn’t read his name. “Paul Carrese...” The first name is read. I know my alphabet and there is still room for me. “Katherine Finkelstein.” Then two more names. People press around me and shake my hand.

Cecil Rhodes drafted numerous wills as he refined the balance of qualities he wanted in his scholars: four-tenths scholarship, two-tenths athletics, two-tenths manhood, two-tenths leadership. In late 1901 he tinkered again: literary abilities three-tenths (down one-tenth); moral force of character three-tenths (up one-tenth). He assumed that moral force of character would result in the instinct to lead.

Certainly Uncle Cecil saw his own advancement as a holy mission. He developed his grand scheme for a scholarship before he had earned a cent. He went on to make his dream a reality by mining most of South Africa’s diamonds and inventing a permanent work force to help him—many call it apartheid.

Money cannot buy you love and Cecil wasn’t happy. It is known that he struggled with his homosexuality. But money can buy power, and even notoriety. Cecil’s Rhodents, drafted internationally from former British colonies, were supposed to grow familiar with the habits of supremacy at Oxford, then return to their mother countries and rule, impressing upon their loyal subjects (in between floggings), the virtues of British civility. The whole scheme lends weight to Dr. Johnson’s observation, ‘Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel.’

The road to Oxford was strewn with omens, all of which I ignored. Forstarters, Cecil wasn’t much of a feminist. He envisioned a global community of gentlemen, bound by their penchant for manly vigor and their love of ordering people around. “Manly” was changed to “physical prowess” in 1975, when women got to compete. The St. Botolph Club, a perfect interview spot, was even more retro. They didn’t admit women till 1988, just in time for me.

As winners, we were led upstairs to a private room and permitted one phone call. We were warned to prepare for the onslaught of media. That year, a Rhodent from a small town in Oklahoma had an avenue named after him. The main drag there will forever be ‘Jay Rubinstein Avenue.’ My name appeared in the New York Times, New York Newsday, and the Boston Globe. I was also featured in a Providence paper along with a general remark from David Alexander, American Secretary of the Rhodes Trust, that among this year’s nominees “was a tremendous interest in working for the homeless and the hungry.”

I looked forward with glee to the transformation of my life, which would come from spending two years with people chosen to improve the world. Unfortunately, I had great support for my inflated expectations. “It is as though a ray of light from heaven fell upon you,” said a family friend. The downside of being a chosen person is that you never know exactly for what you are chosen until it is too late.

For the next six months it was flowers and telegrams, and a “welcome to the network” letter from an ambitious
Arkansas governor. My classmates and I were feted at the Harvard Club, then we jetted off to Oxford. I deplaned with the myth of dreaming spires but was grounded by the reality—two years in a medieval dungeon with future world leaders for company.

**Early October, 1989**

**Port Meadow, Oxford**

I have been at Oxford less than a month and am jogging through Port Meadow, a marvelous expanse of greenery. Swans paddle in the nearby stream. Cows and horses graze. My running companion is a female Rhodent, sturdy, and attractive. In a cheery tone she tells me that she just returned from Calais. A male Rhodent invited her for the weekend. She was to be one of a large group but when she arrived it was only him, and there was only one hotel room. He grabbed her, they tussled, she warded him off. All night long she lay awake and by the first light of day she fled.

As we leap through scattered leaves, she mentions that he ripped her dress. She then adds, as an unrelated phenomenon, that she's been having nightmares. She attributes them to her duvet, the pattern of which is a little scary.

I skip along behind her on this rare, sun-drenched day and am left to wonder if there isn't, perhaps, some larger problem in the community.

The selection process favors those who doggedly seek advancement. You can apply repeatedly for the scholarship, up to three times. If found to be lacking in social commitment, you can go to Ethiopia, feed starving children, and return to try again. If lacking in leadership the second year, you can join a think-tank in the nation's capital. George Stephanopoulos, Clinton's senior adviser, employed this tactic as a two-time applicant.

I suppose serial applicants should be praised for their tenacity. People work to make themselves over in order to be selected. But in certain isolated cases, the campaign continues well after the election has been won. Rhodents arrive at Oxford still running on a ticket that was never theirs—saving eagles, promoting detente. They want further reward for their 'unctuous rectitude' (this was actually Cecil's phrase), and playmates to share their sense of entitlement.

The Rhodent doctrine of social change is best characterized by my aerobics instructor, who railed us mid-jumping jack, "It's not how you feel that matters. It's how you look."

Whether bringing apartheid to its knees or playing the knave/harasser, Rhodents cast about relentlessly for images of devoted manhood.

**Mid-October, 1989**

**The Porter's Lodge**

**An Oxford College**

I am standing on the cold, stone floor, groping through the F pigeon hole, where all my mail is delivered. The lodge is a way station between the college and the street. Outside is a grey day but the damp begins to revive me. I was drunk the night before. So drunk that I woofed into an empty shoe box on my floor. A male Rhodent had been my companion at the formal college dinner. He showed up beforehand in my room with a strong bottle of liquor, then jokingly took the Hippocratic oath to do no harm. After dinner, he steered me back to my room where I passed out in bed. I awoke just in time to exert moral force of character. But this is the least of my problems as I extract a letter from my pigeon hole. It is from another Rhodent: "You study *Paradise Lost* and I've found paradise in you. The highlighted sections of the enclosed article describe you." The article is about architecture, and "curving balustrades" (among other things) is lit up in neon.

A few cubby holes down the letter writer's Rhodent girlfriend is busily sorting her mail. They have been going steady since he proclaimed his devotion to her.

Thus far, my troubles were small, when compared with those of my colleagues. In less than a year there were nervous breakdowns, suicide bids, homosexual confessions, and epic quests for therapy. It was the process of becoming honest after having played the perfect Rhodent (doomed to run laps forever on the Rolodex wheel of power).

The first winter a Rhodent friend of mine threatened suicide, then finally came out of the closet. "I was awarded a Rhodes scholarship because I hated myself so much," he concluded. Having grown up in a Christian community, he had repressed his sexuality and in compensation tried to make himself perfect. The result: a Rhodes scholarship and a long, painful recovery.

The university was not a source of support. At the height of his crisis, he went to Oxford's counselling service and...
pledged, "I need to see a counselor."
"There is a waiting list of 16 weeks."
"What if I'm suicidal?"
"Then there's a waiting list of 14 weeks."

Among Rhodents, compulsive networking was a standard alternative to getting psychiatric help. One of my peers, a Southern politico, made a desperate link between drinking tea and future electorate. He invited every American Rhodent over, alphabetically, for Earl Grey and biscuits. Before him, there was Bill Clinton who never earned his Oxford degree, but instead became a prolific writer. While making loads of friends at Oxford, he stored their names on file cards (to later glance at when choosing his cabinet).

Oxford was a lethal combo of unstoppable egos and low stakes. We all suffered what psychologists call "narcissistic deprivation." To us it was simply, 'The Oxford Experience.' At the ancient school we weren't big shots. We were simply nuisances. No one cared what we thought or felt and so we clung to each other, a dysfunctional, foreign family that was good at sports. Prior to '75, maybe drinking games and career sabotage were the modus operandi. But for some of the modern, co-ed Rhodents with a pent-up need for recognition, there was harassment.

Many women who longed to be a part of the club ignored the social excesses of their male counterparts. But I felt the need for female bonding, especially after a West Point alumnus inquired of me with wide-eyed interest, "Have you ever been tied up?"

Together with the woman who used to go to Calais, I organized the Rhodes Women's Dinners. Potluck and apolitical, we held them once a month. The first two dinners were nice. Almost all the African women showed up, I suspect because they felt doubly left out, both at Oxford and among so many whites. The dinners filled a real need. We all had begun to crave good food and meaningful conversation. Over quiche and salad, I quickly discovered that some of the women were very bitter. One of them remarked to me, "I'd like to gouge out one of my eyes, so that I'd be known as the one-eyed woman, instead of as the Rhodes scholar."

Dinnergoers began to seek me out privately. They reported Rhodont-on-Rhodent harassment that ranged from the garden variety, "There's pubic hair in your tea cup," to real psycho-killer stuff: taping chopped-up love letters over a woman's doorbell, for example.

March, 1990
An Oxford College Room
It is a moment of collaboration as my friend and I hunch over a legal pad. She is an attorney and I am a writer. Together we build a respectable case in a letter to the warden of Rhodes House. We make three requests: fund the women's dinners; send an outreach letter to the incoming female Rhodents informing them of the dinners (we want them to know there is some support), and send a code of ethics to all incoming scholars that addresses the problem of sexual misconduct. We play the sanctuous rectitude card on the theory it has to be good for something. "As Rhodes scholars, our outstanding social concern should extend itself to personal dealings..."

Our request to the warden was greeted with a protracted period of silence. Upon inquiry, we received a stony British equivalent of "No can do." And so we made plans for another dinner, this time a little larger. We invited female academics, women from London, baronesses, a sprinkling of duchesses. And then the Rhodont with the taped-up doorbell had her door bashed in. It was a small community. The offender was the same man who looked at me and saw balastrades. And she was the same woman who used to go steady with him. She appealed to me for help and I reported him to Rhodes House. So began a whole new chapter.

October, 1990
The Porter's Lodge
The day is pleasant and from the archway the gardens appear green and lush. Today, at the beginning of my second year, I am prepared to believe that being here is a rare opportunity. I reach into my pigeon hole and extract an official letter. It is from a law firm in London. The Rhodont I reported has a solicitor. He requests that I write a formal apology and if not, he will sue me for defamation of character. There are so many cc's, they take up most of the page. This letter has gone out to 12 organizations—England, my home country, and his home country—to let them know he is innocent as charged and that I have defamed him. The baffled organizations would never have heard about it if not for him. He was merely tapped on the wrist and told not to contact his ex-girlfriend. That's where we left it over the summer, yet he has elevated paranoia and self-importance to an art form. I look out into the courtyard. The mist rises dreamily off ancient stone. It is time to find a lawyer.
Under the specter of countersuits, the giant women’s dinner loomed. There would be no apology forthcoming and with any further requests, his lawyer could contact my lawyer in London. But my adversary was clever. He took his case to the female Rhodents on my guest list and one by one, they stopped speaking to me. Their desire to remain in the network was stronger. Even the original victim (with whom I happened to be living in a household of Rhodents due to the caprices of college housing) turned her back on me. Her best friend, also a housemate, sat me down and said, “We don’t need a code of ethics. He was just having a hard day. You’re dividing the community.” If I broke down a door for every hard day I was having, there would be no doors left standing at Oxford.

At Brown, I was regarded as a mild feminist. But in the eyes of former dinneroers who had fallen under his spell, I had metamorphosed into a blot on nature complete with a snake hairdo.

My friend and I ignored them. We bought rotini and Stilton, planning our dinner regardless. The days leading up to the dinner were as dark as any in my life. I wrote home, “Oh, Mother, I am a soul worth saving.” Two days before the event, my co-organizer’s fiancé’s mother became critically ill and so she had to leave. Alone I prepared for the dinner, carrying tankards of apple juice and bails of pasta salad. I knew when the meal was over that I would leave the community.

I was already looking for Rhodent-free housing when I was summoned by the warden of Rhodes House who urged me to discontinue my dinners. “No need to upset anyone.”

By 1990 I had fled the network, and was living several miles outside of Oxford. For companions I had the BBC, some giant swans and the threat of a lawsuit. “There will be no apology forthcoming,” my lawyer continued to write. I hankered down with my final exams and pondered a single question. Why do men who want to be president (or prime minister, kaiser, tetrach, potentate) sexually harass women?

I outstayed Ira Magaziner, who left before two years were up. I did the President one better, and emerged with my degree. But the sum total of what I learned can be expressed in a proverb. You can’t outrun a Rhodent. You can only join him on the wheel or get off altogether.

Katherine Eban Finkelstein is a novelist who writes frequently on art and politics.
The tragic protest of Homa Darabi has become a symbol of female resistance in Iran and abroad. Shown here in her early 30’s, Darabi was 53 at the time of her death.
My sister ended her life as an act of protest against the way the Islamic Republic is treating Iranian women, especially the educated ones." Parvin Darabi talks softly, as though the Persian tongue has sanded over the rough edges of English. But her voice wells up with passion when she speaks of conditions in her native land. "The situation is so degrading and so painful and so terrifying that many women don't feel any way out. The general discontent among Iranian women is rising. The suicide rate has increased drastically."

Parvin's sister, Homa Darabi, M.D., had been politically active since her student days. In 1960, she married a classmate and, after graduating from the University of Tehran Medical School, practiced in a rural village.

Dr. Darabi obtained a residency in pediatrics in the U.S., where she lived for nine years and then returned to the Islamic Republic that has stripped women of almost every right they had obtained in the previous decades.

In 1979 Khomeini decreed that all women must wear the Islamic dress (hijab) at work. Dr. Darabi refused, and for a long time her unique status protected her. Then in 1990, the government transferred her to Imam Hussein Hospital. Its director, one of Dr. Darabi's former students, was a strict fundamentalist who insisted that she wear the full Islamic hijab, according to her sister. Dr. Darabi refused, saying it was too difficult for her to examine a patient while swathed in so much material. As a result she was dismissed from her position. She took the case to court, but the judges, who can deliver a death sentence in a matter of minutes, took four years to decide her case.

Like most Iranian physicians, Dr. Darabi had a private practice in addition to her work at the hospital. But the terrors of the revolution intruded into her home office. Parents would come to her, saying, "My daughter was arrested for wearing makeup and sentenced to 150 lashes. I beg you to write a letter certifying that she is mentally incapacitated so they won't punish her." The letters saved the girl from flogging at the cost of destroying her future; she would always be considered insane, and unsuitable for marriage. Dr. Darabi had two daughters of her own living in the U.S., notes her sister, and these incidents tortured her.

The regime began concerted harassment. Government agents made phony appointments. Once in Darabi's office, they harangued her for hours, demanding to know why she didn't wear the hijab. They refused to pay for the

"She has a chicken as a companion. Whenever she can, she lays her fleshy body down and from a bag in the corner, takes out some millet and pours it over her chest. The chick pecks at her white and tender skin with rapidity. Her heart dances with the happiness and under her breath she whispers endearing words to the chicken."


"Once you have children you just sit and bear it, whatever it is."


"My willfulness was her despair. Her Persian daughters were supposed to be meek and self-effacing and I was a contradictory square peg in her smooth round notion of what a real girl should be. Naturally, the necessity of making sure that nobody ever said the wrong thing was a constant strain on my mother's temper, which was normally frayed anyway."

“appointments.” Darabi believed her patients were harassed as well because they stopped coming for treatment. Unable to make a living, she closed the clinic.

For years Dr. Darabi had urged her sister, Parvin, an engineer living in California, to come home and help reconstruct her native land. Now it was Homa who wanted to leave. In 1991, Parvin traveled to Iran and asked Homa’s husband for permission to take her out of the country so she could start a new life. “In front of my entire family, the man turned obnoxious,” she says. “He told me that Iran was an Islamic Republic and he owned this woman, that I was nobody and my mother was nobody and there was nothing we could do. And he was correct. Under Islamic rule, a woman has no rights. And this is what bothers me the most, the feeling of helplessness.”

In January 1994 the government finished construction of a psychiatric hospital for children, which had been designed under Dr. Darabi’s instruction and to her specifications. They asked her to return to work as its director, as long as she followed their rules. Dr. Darabi refused.

On the tenth day of Ramadan, February 21, 1994, Dr. Darabi, who now rarely left the house, got dressed to go out. She put on her ropoosh, a long overcoat considered an acceptable substitute for the chador. She tied her headscarf, tucking every strand of hair out of sight, and got into her car. On that day, especially, she was apparently determined not to be stopped by the pasdaran (revolutionary guards) before reaching her destination.

Dr. Darabi drove to the local gas station and asked the attendants to fill her tank and a spare can. Then she drove to northern Tehran, to a plaza in an upper-class neighborhood.

Tajrish Square is incessantly noisy and crowded, even during Ramadan. The surrounding streets are residential, but the plaza itself is lined with offices, small shops and fruit stands. A loudspeaker from a nearby mosque broadcasts prayers and ritual lamentations. Many bus routes come through here. At each stop there are two lines, one for men and one for women, who must travel in separate vehicles, except on the larger buses where women ride in the back.

Dr. Darabi was familiar with the neighborhood. Her brother-in-law lived there. Sometime before, a girl of 16 or 17 had been shot in this square in a skirmish with an overzealous guard who had stopped her for wearing lipstick.

Dr. Darabi stopped her car and walked to the center of the plaza. It was 3:00 p.m. Passersby stopped, frozen, as she tore off her headscarf and emptied the gasoline can on her head. She began to shout at the top of her lungs, and her voice rang out over the noise of the traffic, over the wailing of the loudspeakers: “Death to oppression! Long live liberty!” Then she lit a match.

Homa Darabi died at 1 a.m. the next day, leaving one less physician to tend to the needs of the Iranian people. About 10,000 people attended her funeral, according to her sister. The news was first broadcast outside the country on Israel’s Farsi-language radio, then on the BBC. The Iranian press was silent until much later, when the regime portrayed Dr. Darabi as mentally ill. (Suicide by fire is not uncommon in Iran; on the same day that Dr. Darabi committed suicide, a 14-year-old girl set fire to herself to escape a forced marriage with a 44-year-old man.)

In California, when Parvin heard the news she sent a press release to U.S. television news shows, but there was no coverage of the event. “When I called them, they told me that this story wasn’t sensational because I didn’t have a picture of my sister burning in fire. I was really shocked and humiliated.”

Aghazi No (New Start), a Farsi-language journal, reports there have been public memorial services for Dr. Darabi in a number of U.S. and European cities. Like South African funerals before the end of apartheid, these commemorations became political rallies. Instead of observing a moment of silence for Homa Darabi’s death, mourners were asked to clap in celebration of her life.

Martha Shelley is a freelance writer and radio journalist in Oakland, California. Parvin Darabi invites people interested in working for human rights in Iran to contact her at the Homa Darabi Foundation, 11200 Donner Pass Road, #176, Truckee, CA 96161.

“Who We Are,” an art installation by Iranian-born artist Raana Bastani, displayed at California State University, Hayward, this spring, includes a burnt figure representing Homa Darabi; her story was written on the floor beneath her, in ash. The multimedia show included computer-generated sounds of a woman’s chorus, floral scents, and images of veiled women (see pages 18 and 19).
Subscribe to ON THE ISSUES and save up to 26%!

☐ YES! Please enter my subscription to ON THE ISSUES: The Progressive Woman's Quarterly for the term and savings checked.

☐ 3 years (12 issues) Only $34.95
   Save 26% off the cover price!

☐ 2 years (8 issues) Only $24.95
   Save 16% off the cover price!

☐ 1 year (4 issues) Only $14.95

Name

(Please print)

Institution

(If applicable)

Address

(Apt. No.)

City

State

Zip

☐ Payment enclosed

☐ Bill me

Savings off $3.95 cover price. Institutional rate: add $10 first year; $5 each additional. Canadian subscriptions add $4 per year; other foreign add $7 (surface mail) or $20 per year (air mail) payable in US funds.
SEXUAL APARTHEID IN IRAN

The repression of women is the only visible “accomplishment” of the fundamentalist regime.

By Mahin Hassibi

Sixteen years ago, the Iranian revolution unleashed a puritanical impulse in Iran—fuelled by popular indignation in the face of official corruption, excessive consumerism, and the imported ideas and values of other cultures. Ayatollah Khomeini offered an idealized blueprint of a more familiar Islamic community as a replacement for the long-despised system of the Shah and as the remedy for all the socio-political ills of the nation. This vision had an overwhelming appeal for the majority of uneducated Iranians, and was also embraced by a significant portion of Iranian intellectuals.

From the start, however, efforts to bring about a utopian society were sabotaged by the pragmatic men who began to occupy governmental positions and by the political opposition that hoped to inherit the regime. The politicians began to modify, ignore, and change the decrees issued by Khomeini, with a single exception: Khomeini’s pronouncements restricting women’s activities and appearance were zealously and systematically carried out. Professional and executive women were forced to retire. Women judges and lawyers lost their jobs. Teachers, health care workers, and secretaries were forced to adopt the Islamic uniform, which allowed only their faces and hands to be uncovered. The legal age for female consent to marriage was reduced from 13 to nine years old.

The system of sexual apartheid, which characterizes today’s Iran, was established with unusual speed and unaccustomed efficiency. Enforcement was first carried out by random assault and harassment by men on the street, and then by the terrifying tactics of the Morality Squad, bands of armed young men and women with the power to check marriage licenses of mixed-gender couples on the street, and detain or arrest women not in complete Islamic garb.

As the male-centered ideology of the Khomeini regime emerged, the majority of Iranian men—if not openly applauding—did not raise any objections or experience any conceptual dissonance. The ease with which the systematic suppression was carried out was in part due to the pressure exerted on Iranian women by male members of their families. Women were told to comply with the new directives in order to spare their husbands, brothers, and fathers the humiliation and anxiety of having a female relative in the custody of the young men from the Morality Squad. Iranian men could not conceive of defiance by women relatives, knowing that tradition allows them to extract obedience regardless of the cost. Conversely, women’s experiences had shown that most men will not hesitate to use coercive violence against them.

Male power—and the primacy of the satisfaction of male sexuality as the organizing principle of society—has long historical roots in Iran. By all accounts the practice of isolating and segregating women through veiling predates Islamic conquest of Iran. In fact, the ban on female infanticide imposed by Islam on the Arabian peninsula is often cited by those who view the religion as the protector of women.

While the Shah’s regime (1941 to 1979) allowed women more freedom to dress, play a role in the economy, and obtain higher education and positions, patriarchal views remained intact. “What do these feminists want?” the Shah asked Oriana Fallaci in a 1976 interview. “You say equality. Oh! I don’t want to seem rude, but you are equal in the eyes of the law but not, excuse my saying so, in ability.”

Khomeini derisively pointed out that, in the Fallaci interview, the Shah had talked about women playing a “decorative” role in society. For less privileged males whose female relatives had to, by necessity, fulfill many more economically urgent roles, the Shah’s view of women’s role was elitist and insulting.

Male Sexual Needs: The Cornerstone

Khomeini believed women were equal to men in the eyes of God, but this belief had no bearing on the relationship between men and women. Differences in “natural propensities” (the assumed stronger sexual desires and needs of men) point to God’s informed consent to the subjugation of women in exchange for men’s protection of them and their brand.

The current Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Seyed Mohammad Khamenei, explains in a book called Women’s Rights: Comparing the Human and Civil Rights of Women in Islam and the Declaration of Human Rights that “a man is captive to his sexual desire,” while a woman is “interested in affection” and that “a man wants to own a woman,” while a woman “longs to be owned.” These alleged differences have been used frequently and authoritatively by men in many Islamic cultures to explain the apparent contradiction of their government’s willingness to sign international human rights declarations without feeling any obligation to extend these rights to women in their country.

Other articles of popular faith given the cloak of profound wisdom by the clerics declare that “women are interested in adjustment and compromise, free from war and danger, love keeping their house for their husband and adore their children,” as opposed to men who “by nature are more aggressive, adventurous, power hungry and inclined to rule.”
A woman who has contracted a permanent marriage does not have the right to go out of the house without her husband's permission. She must remain at his disposal for the fulfillment of any one of his desires, and may not refuse herself to him except for a religiously valid reason. If she is totally submissive to him, the husband must provide her with food, clothing and lodging, whether or not she has the means to do so. A woman who refuses herself to her husband is guilty, and may not demand from him food, clothing, lodging, or any later sexual relations.

—Ayatollah Khomeini

The specific task of women in this society is to marry and bear children. They will be discouraged from entering legislative, judicial, or other careers which may require decision making, as women lack the intellectual ability and discerning judgment required for these careers.

—Ayatollah Moehtakeri

The most suitable time for a girl to get married is when she can have her first menstrual period in her husband's house rather than her father's.

—Ayatollah Khomeini

The glorification of motherhood is added to assure the reader that the role of women is fully appreciated. These dogmatic generalizations are never examined or debated, their experiential source never clarified, and their meanings remain intentionally elusive.

For the theoreticians of the gender ideology, the reminder that hundreds of young Iranian women fought to the death in the guerrilla struggle which toppled the Shah and the many examples of the intellectual and professional achievements of educated Iranian women do not change the picture. A multiplicity of exceptions does not disprove the rule that women enjoy or must learn to enjoy their position as caretakers and homemakers for men and feel fulfilled when their social roles correspond to what nature intended.

The fundamentalist's ability to write the social rules according to the convenience of men have resulted in some startling inconsistencies. For example: nine-year-old girls are said to be legally competent to enter into a marriage contract, while women of any age are viewed as "too impulsive" or "too emotional" to be given the right to initiate a divorce proceeding. Any objection to this arrangement is brushed aside by the oft-repeated argument that a woman who is not wanted by her husband would not or should not desire to continue with the marriage, but a man's sexual needs are met even when the woman is an unwilling partner.

The majority of men in urban communities of Iran lack the luxury of having a functioning establishment to which to bring a child bride. But the law's practical effect is to define the woman's contribution to the marriage as her female body; the loss of interest by the man in the female body is adequate cause for divorce at a man's total discretion. It also justifies the notion that provisional marriages (time limited sexual contracts) between a single woman and any man, single or married, without any subsequent male responsibility toward the woman, are acceptable because they provide a religiously sanctioned outlet for male sexual appetite.

Today, women in Iran are denied the right and ability to describe their own realities, and there is an absence of women's voices from social discourse of all kinds. All issues regarding interactions between men and women—including sexuality—are referred to male clerics. These men, in turn, consult the judgments and opinions given by long-gone clerics about similar subjects. Consequently, one encounters dogmas and pronouncements about the age of women's menstruation and the intensity of female sexual desire made with great authority by the grand clerics and without any pretense that even one woman has ever been consulted. For example, the earlier appearance of puberty in female children is used as justification for treating nine-year-old girls as legally responsible adults, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of nine-year-old girls are physiologically pre-pubertal. The single characteristic of all this dogma appears to be to guarantee full expression and satisfaction of men's sexual desires, without any need to ask how the situation affects women.

Calculating "Women's Worth"

Ayatollah Khamenei describes women as "impressionable, emotional, and easily swayed by factors other than strict rules of logic." It thus follows that women's observations and perceptions about all aspects of the world are devalued.

Women do not become judges or serve on a jury regardless of their training. Women's testimonies in court are accepted only as corroboration of a male witness' account. When the required number of men have not witnessed a crime, testimony of two women is counted as equivalent of one male witness.

Boys are treated as juveniles until 15 years of age. But a female child of nine is tried and punished as an adult, an outgrowth of the adult status necessary to make a nine-year-old girl's agreement in marriage legally binding.

Crimes against men are twice as costly as those against women, in every case of injury to a fetus, child, or adult resulting in punitive damages.

Motherhood, the much glorified and universally acknowledged contribution of women to society, does not protect them against misogyny. In cases of divorce, which is mostly male initiated, the law gives the man custody of every boy above two and every girl above seven years of age. Even visitation rights can be denied a woman at the discretion of the man.

Economically, women retain sole ownership of their property even after the marriage. However,
husbands can deny their wives permission to work and can demand that, in return for a divorce, their wives forego any claim to alimony. The underdeveloped economic system and lack of public vehicles for investment in Iran have made it impossible for women to have any independent way of investing their money and creating wealth on their own. Furthermore, the laws on inheritance are strongly biased against women, since they receive only half of what their brothers inherit from their parents. Women are thus deprived of the political influence associated with economic power. The high cost of living and the necessity for two wage earners in the family have required women's continued participation in the labor market; the loss of personal freedom has not lightened their social or familial burdens.

Emotional Pressures Build

While an elaborate plan for the obliteration of women from public life has not been articulated by the government, many actions and maneuvering among contending factions have resulted in increased oppression of women. In the atmosphere of intense political rivalries among various political groups, women present the least threat left from communism, and other enemies have disappeared from the Iranian scene. Historically, women in Iran have engaged in all the socio-political struggles of this century with remarkable determination. Regardless of the cause, they have never assumed or solicited support from the clerics or presumed that changes can be introduced to the male-centered orientation of the religion. Currently, except for women in the socialist-Islamic group of Mujahideen Khalq now in armed struggle against the regime, other women activists try to pursue their goals of securing their rights as secular citizens. Women legal scholars attempt to identify and advocate changes in those areas where new laws can be introduced or disclose examples of inequalities in the eyes of the law in a consciousness-raising measure. Women writers have begun to describe and define the realities of women's lives in fiction, screenplays, and poetry. However, the high rate of illiteracy among Iranian women and the government monopoly on radio and television limits the impact of these activities. Foreign radio stations broadcasting to Iran pursue their own agenda and the voices of women must wait for the day that a Women's International Broadcasting Company fills the void.

"Whoever marries a girl younger than nine years of age must not have intercourse with that girl, whether the marriage is permanent or temporary. On the other hand, the husband can still enjoy himself with foreplay even if the bride is a baby being breastfed. Foreplay means loving, caressing, rubbing, kissing and seducing. Any man who has intercourse with a girl younger than nine years of age has committed an infraction even if the girl's vagina and rectum are not ripped. But if a man has intercourse with a girl nine years or older and he tears the tissues, combining the vagina with the rectum, he has not committed a crime and does not have to be responsible for the girl. However it is better if he takes care of the girl as long as she is alive."

—Javanshir Khamenei

"A woman should endure any violence or torture imposed on her by her husband for she is fully at his disposal. Without his permission she may not leave her house even for a good action (such as charitable work). Otherwise her prayers and devotions will not be accepted by God and curses of heaven and earth will fall upon her."

—Ayatollah Khomeini

"A woman should savor the night when her husband is not home. She calls this "the night free of submission."

Despite tremendous obstacles, women activists have not disappeared from the Iranian scene. Women present the least threat to the ruling party and every criticism of the regime as pro-

tective custody for women. Women, afraid of sexual harassment, have welcomed the opportunity to be separated from men, even though this is acquiescing in the government's policy of barely tolerating the presence of women in the public space.

Lack of power to actualize one's abilities and to express one's humanity have always caused women extreme depression and chronic anxiety. The added fear of public humiliation in the hands of the Morality Squad and the ever present insecurity regarding jobs, earnings, and interpersonal relations have plunged many Iranian women into despair. Suicide is no longer an unusual occurrence and public suicide by women has become all too frequent.

Urbanization, a chaotic economy, and the toll of the long war with Iraq have contributed to a remarkable erosion of family ties and the disappearance of the certainty that friends, neighbors, and the community will come to the rescue at moments of real need. Women today live constrained and constrained lives without the certainty that home, children, social standing, and family approval are thereby secured. This gives rise to a mixture of restless apprehension and uneasy resignation that underlies the permanent emotional states of women. In "The Drum of Midnight," by Fereshteh Moulavi (Pari-ye-Afsahi, Nashr-e-Ghatreh, Tehran, 1991) the woman protagonist savors the night when her husband is not home. She calls this "the night free of submission."

Mahn Char, an expert in psychiatry, says that home, children, social standing, and family approval are thereby secured. This gives rise to a mixture of restless apprehension and uneasy resignation that underlies the permanen
t emotional states of women. In "The Drum of Midnight," by Fereshteh Moulavi (Pari-ye-Afsahi, Nashr-e-Ghatreh, Tehran, 1991) the woman protagonist savors the night when her husband is not home. She calls this "the night free of submission."

Despite tremendous obstacles, women activists have not disappeared from the Iranian scene. Women, afraid of sexual harassment, have welcomed the opportunity to be separated from men, even though this is acquiescing in the government's policy of barely tolerating the presence of women in the public space.

Lack of power to actualize one's abilities and to express one's humanity have always caused women extreme depression and chronic anxiety. The added fear of public humiliation in the hands of the Morality Squad and the ever present insecurity regarding jobs, earnings, and interpersonal relations have plunged many Iranian women into despair. Suicide is no longer an unusual occurrence and public suicide by women has become all too frequent.

Urbanization, a chaotic economy, and the toll of the long war with Iraq have contributed to a remarkable erosion of family ties and the disappearance of the certainty that friends, neighbors, and the community will come to the rescue at moments of real need. Women today live constrained and constrained lives without the certainty that home, children, social standing, and family approval are thereby secured. This gives rise to a mixture of restless apprehension and uneasy resignation that underlies the permanent emotional states of women. In "The Drum of Midnight," by Fereshteh Moulavi (Pari-ye-Afsahi, Nashr-e-Ghatreh, Tehran, 1991) the woman protagonist savors the night when her husband is not home. She calls this "the night free of submission."

Despite tremendous obstacles, women activists have not disappeared from the Iranian scene. Historically, women in Iran have engaged in all the socio-political struggles of this century with remarkable determination. Regardless of the cause, they have never assumed or solicited support from the clerics or presumed that changes can be introduced to the male-centered orientation of the religion. Currently, except for women in the socialist-Islamic group of Mujahideen Khalq now in armed struggle against the regime, other women activists try to pursue their goals of securing their rights as secular citizens. Women legal scholars attempt to identify and advocate changes in those areas where new laws can be introduced or disclose examples of inequalities in the eyes of the law as a consciousness-raising measure. Women writers have begun to describe and define the realities of women's lives in fiction, screenplays, and poetry. However, the high rate of illiteracy among Iranian women and the government monopoly on radio and television limits the impact of these activities. Foreign radio stations broadcasting to Iran pursue their own agenda and the voices of women must wait for the day that a Women's International Broadcasting Company fills the void.

Mahn Hassibi, MD, is a psychiatrist, and native of Iran. She has lived and worked in the U.S. for 25 years.
OTI DIALOGUE

Congressman John Le and Andrea Dworkin

Towards a Revolution in Values

Sparks fly in the Congressman’s office, as John Lewis caucuses with Andrea Dworkin (left) and On The Issues publisher Merle Hoffman (center).
The Congressman arrived flushed with triumph. He had just been part of the victorious vote on the law to ban assault rifles. It was an auspicious beginning, for ON THE ISSUES publisher Merle Hoffman had invited John Lewis (D-GA) and feminist activist, author, and novelist Andrea Dworkin to talk about violence in American society and the links between the black civil rights and feminist movements.

During the height of the civil rights movement (1963–1966), John Lewis was arrested 40 times and beaten by mobs. He was a founder and the chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In 1977, he was appointed director of the federal volunteer agency, ACTION, and in 1986, elected to Congress, where he serves as Chief Deputy Majority Whip and sits on the influential Steering and Policy Committee.

Andrea Dworkin's books Intercourse (1987) and Pornography: Men Possessing Women (1981) broke new ground in the understanding of male power and women's subordination. Her recent works include Mercy, a novel about rape, and Letters From A War Zone, a collection of speeches and essays. She coauthored the first law recognizing pornography as a violation of the civil rights of women.

DWORKIN: John, I don’t have too many heroes but you are one to me. I remember reading about you on the Freedom Rides when I was a teenager. Then I became active with the War Resisters League and the Student Peace Union and knew people there who had worked with you. I thought you were really brave. There are so many political issues now around violence that I deal with—and the women’s movement really owes so much to the civil rights movement—that I thought we could talk about violence as a political issue.

I wanted to ask you about those early days in the Deep South, what you did down there, and how you felt then in a situation where there was an enormous amount of violence.

LEWIS: You must keep in mind that I grew up in the segregated south, in a very large, very, very poor family in rural Alabama. My father was a sharecropper, a tenant farmer. In 1944, he had saved $300, and with that he bought 110 acres of land. I was four years old and it was my responsibility to care for the chickens. I fell in love with raising the chickens, and I think my whole pilgrimage to nonviolence came through falling in love and raising those chickens. I saw them as sort of innocent creatures that needed to be sheltered and protected. I grew up with the idea of becoming a minister, and from time to time my cousins and I would gather all of my chickens, 100 or 200, and I would preach to the chickens. As I often say today, they never said “Amen” but at times they would bow their heads.

When my mother or father would try to kill a chicken for a meal, or try to sell one, it made me very, very sad. I would protest, I wouldn’t eat, I wouldn’t talk to my parents, I would go on a strike. I think that was my first introduction to nonviolence, not just toward human beings, but to the creatures of our environment. You don’t go out just killing or harming people, animals, or things.

HOFFMAN: I see a very strong connection between feminism and animal rights in terms of what I call a radical sense of compassion. Is that what you mean when you talk of a beloved community?

LEWIS: By all means. Why is it that all at once we are facing so much violence in this society? I really believe that in our own country, the greatest need is for a revolution of values—a revolution in the minds and hearts of people. I happen to believe that in every human being there is a spark of something that is greater than any of us. No one has the right to abuse or destroy that divine spark. But it’s not just hitting someone. The way you look at someone or stare also can be damaging and hurtful. That’s why I believe in the philosophy of nonviolence, not simply as a technique but as a way of life. The end must be caught up in the means. You cannot separate the two.

DWORKIN: For me, this is a question of tremendous personal moral crisis. I have believed in and followed the path of nonviolence for a very long time, from the time when I was young, partly influenced by you and by the way that your courage
spoke to me when I was a teenager, and with many other pacifists, standing up against the Vietnam War.

In the last ten years, I have had a real crisis around this issue of violence and I can't come to terms with it. I see women being raped on a level of frequency and with a kind of sadism that is increasingly horrible. And I see women being beaten in their own homes, so that for us it's not even a question of "Are the streets safe?" because most of us are killed in our own homes. And I see an almost complete devaluation of the worth of women—on the marketplace, through pornography, through prostitution and an attitude that women are almost subhuman—and a belief that men seem to have that they have a right to control women, to control access to women's bodies, on a visceral level. It has become impossible for me to tolerate the way the law is not working for

women, not operating on behalf of women.

I have come to believe that the only way to stop a rapist, a wife-beater, may be to kill him. If the society does not react to the violence that women experience as if it's an emergency, then a woman has to find a way to stop that man herself.

LEWIS: There has been so much violence against women in particular because our society is so male-oriented, and male-dominated. You know male chauvinism was at its worst during the early days of the civil rights movement. But during the latter part of the movement, we started trying to practice what we were preaching. If you preached equality, you have to live by your creed. Without women, the early movement would have been like a bird without wings, really. And women didn't get a lot of credit.

But now you have more women in Congress who are standing up and saying discrimination is wrong. They are educating men and having an impact. Violence is vicious; it destroys the self-worth of a person. You are right that the media and society have done things that are degrading women. Men have to be willing to stand up and say, this woman is my mother, my wife, my sister, my daughter, my aunt. She's another human being.

DWORKIN: But the situation of women seems to be almost the opposite of what you're saying. When you look at violence against women, you find that most of it is in the circle of those close relationships, in an environment that we call love.

LEWIS: Yes. I have seen it firsthand. When I was growing up, I had an uncle who was the meanest man. He was good to the community, the nicest human being you ever wanted to meet, but mean and vicious to his wife. He engaged in incredible physical violence. I always wondered why she just didn't leave, why she didn't take a piece of wood and just knock him in the head. But she stayed and took the abuse; apparently she didn't have any place to go. And it broke my heart.

Feminist activism:
Andrea Dworkin at a 1975 political rally.

HOFFMAN: So why shouldn't she have taken that piece of wood? We are not talking about premeditated violence; we're talking about violence that's in self-defense.

DWORKIN: The fact is that when women leave relationships, they are most at risk of being killed. And most women know that; that's one of the reasons that women stay.

LEWIS: I consider myself a pacifist and I detest violence. But at some point, you have to cross that line. In November 1992, right after the election, I took a Congressional delegation to Somalia where I saw hundreds and thousands of people die. I saw little babies literally dying in their mother's arms. That's when I said we have to intervene. And that was the first time that I've said to our government, you've got to send troops, to save people, to keep people from killing other people.

DWORKIN: I now think of myself as a failed pacifist, a lapsed pacifist. I see situation after situation where women are almost wrong not to use violence, not to stop the man in his tracks. He won't stop himself and the legal system won't stop him. Society leaves the woman isolated, to deal with his aggression, on her own, through whatever means she can manage.

LEWIS: I don't have the answer, but I do think that sometimes we have to use radical non-violence. You have to be aggressive. At one point during the days of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, there was a group of women who suggested that they would not have sex with the people in SNCC, or within the movement, if they didn't give them a role to play.

HOFFMAN: What happened? Did they do it?

LEWIS: Changes took place. One of my former colleagues said something that I thought was very demeaning and very derogatory about women, something that no one in a lead-
ership position or no male in his right mind should ever say.
He said that the position for women in the movement was
a prone position.

DWORKIN: It's a very famous, often repeated remark.

LEWIS: Too many males in our society see women only
in that light. That they're something to be used and abused.
We have to change that mind set. We need something very
radical. What's happening in American society is that we
have almost become immune.

DWORKIN: Yes. There's a level of desensitization, to pain.
to other people's suffering, and the acceptance of dehu-
manization. When people are put in an inferior status in
society they need to be dehumanized, otherwise people
can't feel superior to them. I mean that's part of that process
of hating people and making them subjugated. It seems that
a sense of superiority and a feeling that the woman is an
object is part of what men need to be with women sexual-
ly. So the fight for humanizing—women's assertions of
humanity, in the society—is always taken as some kind of
personal intimate sexual feuding with men. And the concept
of equality between men and women—and that equality
be real and not just social policy, but also in personal
and intimate relationships—doesn't even seem to register
in the minds of most people. It's very frustrating.

You have a political movement that is so worried about
making men more angry. Women are already being pun-
ished so much in their personal lives, or when they walk
down the street, or by the unofficial curfew of not being
able to go out after dark. The thought of making men angri-
er is something that keeps women from asserting our rights.
I used to think that women who have been raped should
get little buttons saying, "I have done my national service.
Leave me alone."

HOFFMAN: Or a button saying: "I've
been incested. I have given already."

DWORKIN: Yes, and this is the one day
that I would like to sit on this bench and
read this book and not be bothered. I only get one day in
my lifetime, this is it, today, now. So, please, today leave me
alone.

HOFFMAN: When anyone can trespass your boundaries,
you are not perceived as an individual with human dignity.
The definition of masculinity continues to be one that's laden
with violence; it's sometimes laden with misogyny. How do
you change that?

LEWIS: I think as a people, we've got to say that we are
all in this thing together. We're all in the same boat.
We've got to lay down the burden of race. We've got to
lay down the burden of sex. And I'm not so sure that
we're prepared as a nation and as a society to make that
great leap.

HOFFMAN: Because it functions, doesn't it? That burden
of race and sex functions to divide and conquer, and keep
the established power structure intact.
LOS ANGELES—The O.J. Simpson Saga—complete with beautiful blondes, buckets of blood, and a telegenic all-American icon running for freedom in that wild freeway chase—will go down in entertainment history as the first prime-time simulcast of an actual human life. It's no wonder that the entire nation is glued to the tube. But some of the reasons are not immediately apparent.

Beneath the surface, what looks like high drama boils down to melodrama: This is a tawdry and awful tragedy of beautiful, yet decidedly uninteresting people. A tale that is not so much epic as it is seamy; less grand opera than soap opera. In short, the plight of O.J. Simpson, charged with hacking to death his ravishing ex-wife Nicole and her friend, Ronald Goldman, has a lowest-common-denominator appeal that is closer to Buttafuoco than to Othello. We simply can't get enough of it.

For those who need to excuse their fascination in this savage crime and its surreal aftermath by focusing on the "issues" involved, this case has it all: spouse abuse, celebrity, and a hero jock who's never heard the word "no" spoken with authority. Enough to fuel a year of Oprah, Maury, and Phil. But oddly enough, in a town that's suffered through riots and Rodney King, the case brings up another deeply troubling issue that is on the minds of nearly everyone, but almost never spoken aloud: Race.

It could be that the racial question is too complex, too mired in social booby-traps to probe publicly. O.J. was a black man who lived "white" and took it as a supreme compliment when Hertz, for which he was a pitch man, determined that TV audiences perceived him as "color-
less.” He became successful, and married blonde.

If race is the one four-letter word no member of the intelligentsia wants to get caught uttering on the record, the rest of the planet is hardly so sensitive. My grandmother in Miami Beach didn’t hesitate to tell me, “What does she expect, a pretty white girl like that going with the colored? It must be for money.”

On the flip side, Vicki, an African-American woman I met at the L.A. courthouse, told me: “He gets rich and famous, and he dumps his black wife for some white tramp.”

Where do you go from there?

In a column I wrote recently for the New York Post, I started to say the Simpson drama had it all: beauty, wealth, murder, and race. But the “R” word raised a red flag, even in a tabloid known to take no prisoners, and an editor suggested I bleep it out. I agreed.

Is the Simpson Saga about race? No. And yes.

We desperately want to see the case of O.J. and Nicole as a tragedy involving a man and a woman, a husband and an ex-wife. Period. But then, there are those thoughts we can’t control...

Fact is, O.J. came of age in the pre-hip hop era, when equality meant making it in a white man’s world. He rehearsed being unthreatening to whites. Marrying a young white woman was the epitome of California success. He’d bought the entire program.

Now O.J. will be resented by blacks who would accuse him of selling out. By black women, bitter that successful men often choose to marry white women. And by white men, angry that white women they believe cross the color line in search of money and status.

If O.J. is guilty, did race play a role? Hard to say. But the whole matter begs the question of whether O.J. Simpson may have harbored some deep resentment against his wife. If O.J. is as full of narcissism and self-doubt as it now appears, did he become obsessed asking what this gorgeous blond was doing with him? As fast as O.J. could move, was he ever able to outrun the stereotypes plaguing interracial love?

Race shouldn’t matter, but it will. Mixed-race couples, already facing difficult odds, will be confronted with the O.J. debacle in much the same fashion that wife beaters will forevermore be compared to O.J. Simpson. It’s not fair, but it’s real.

By now, O.J.’s chronic wife-beating is well documented. In fact, if one good thing has come out of the O.J. Chronicles, it’s that abusive spouses have been put on notice. But I’m starting to wonder if the universal themes of this case will outlive the process of discovery. As the layers of the Simpsons’ deeply warped relationship continue to come unglued, we’ll find the marriage willfully defied easy categorization into any title on the pop-psych checklist.

Some of the more startling revelations, several of which I uncovered in the course of my investigation for the Post are not surprising when you consider the players: O.J. used cocaine, as did Nicole. Infidelity was part and parcel of this marriage—on both sides.

O.J. employed a stable of Los Angeles cops, trained in the ways of Secret Service agents. They helped stalk his former wife and guarded this ex-jock and Grade-B actor as if he were a world leader, or a mobster. O.J. provided jobs to Nicole’s father and her close cousin. While members of her family were aware of the abuse, they, too, remained unerringly loyal to The Juice. Nicole was in deep. And she did everything possible to stay put.

What’s astonishing to me from where I sit, here, on the surface of Planet O.J., is the lightening speed with which every pundit or person with a cause has clasped a claw onto O.J. Simpson, molding this terrible murder/wife-abuse/celebrity-downfall case, and packaging it to suit his or her needs. Transforming it into what is known here as “Product.”

Perhaps digesting a complicated murder case into subject matter suitable for a movie-of-the-week will wind up saving lives. If only everyone were so noble.

Reducing this case to an “issue” enabled L.A. District Attorney Gil Garcetti, he of chiseled cheekbones and good TV “Q” rating, to take the talk-show circuit by storm. Cloaking his comments in the language of fatherly concern, he was able to trash O.J. for wife-beating without having to dirty his hands by pronouncing the man guilty before trial. I wonder who will play him in the film?

Then, of course, there is the issue of celebrity—did O.J. get treated differently from other men?

Yes. And no.

Wife beaters routinely get breaks from a justice system ill-equipped or unwilling to handle battles between spouses. Some of it may be due to sexism, but let’s not underestimate how frequently the one getting hit fails to press charges. This was the case with Nicole Simpson.

The difference was, O.J. was so revered by everyone in Hollywood, so lionized by the media and so protected by his stable of Yes Men, it was easy for him to believe he could do no wrong. As his sickening “suicide” note indicates, the man actually believed he was “an abused husband or boyfriend.” And that his biggest crime against Nicole was “loving her too much.” Everyone, it seems, conspired to make him a monster.

Despite protestations to the contrary, the precarious existence in which the Simpsons revelled was well-known in Hollywood circles. Drugs. Sex. Beatings. O.J. may be smooth on camera, but his temper, his drug use, his wife’s bruises were the subject of endless Timelinetown cocktail chatter.

Which is why it amuses me to no end to see the bit players in the O.J. story, as if acting a scene out of Casablanca, pretending to be shocked—shocked!—at the smarmy parlor games of the rich and idle.

In the end, to make any sense of O.J. Simpson’s life and Nicole’s death, we are required to bring them to our level. We hold their catastrophe of a marriage up against the values ruling our fantasy relationship—fidelity, gentleness, trust—and rate the Simpsons accordingly. But closer examination of their reality makes that no simple task. The rich, F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote in The Great Gatsby, are not like you and me.

And may God help them.

Andrea Peyser is a columnist for the New York Post.
SISTER, FEAR HAS NO PLACE HERE

By Phyllis Chesler

Some say lesbians are dangerous. I'd always hoped this was so, but time and experience taught me that lesbian—and for that matter, heterosexual—feminists are not dangerous enough. Feminists of all sexual persuasions often sport a brand of politics more royalist than democratic, more academic than activist. And, like brotherhood, sisterhood is an ideal, not a reality. Feminist homophobia, racism, and misogyny have, over the years, driven many feminists out of coalitions and into “queer” or “racial” organizations—or back into civilian life.

It’s hard to remain radical in feminist terms when your sexual preference is feared and hated, not only by your opponents, but by your comrades. It’s hard to remain “in service” to others when you yourself remain unsafe at every moment. That’s why what Brenda and Wanda Henson are doing at Camp Sister Spirit, a 120-acre feminist education retreat in Ovett, Mississippi, is so important. The Hensons have not dropped out—or have they sold out. In the face of violent attacks, they and their full-time supporters—Pam Firth, Arthur Henson, Andrea Gibbs, Cheri Michael and Kathy Wilson—are maintaining a level of visibility and virtue that is almost pure science fiction.

Ovett (population 1,200) is about three hours northeast of New Orleans and about 40 minutes northeast of Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Driving from Louisiana to Hattiesburg, I search the horizon for some sign that we’re in the South: a bayou, a creek, a weeping willow. But at any given moment you could be anywhere, in New England or in the Pacific Northwest; the same familiar chain-stores and motels you passed 50 or a 100 miles ago are always waiting to greet you. There’s always a Holiday Inn, a Howard Johnson’s, a Burger King, a Wendy’s—as if there’s nothing indigenous left in America, except the trees maybe, and the sky—as we move fast, hurtling forward into the future, on the great American
highway.

At a local restaurant in Hattiesburg, a woman tells me she lives in Ovett.

"Ovett?" I say. "Isn't that where Camp Sister Spirit is? What's going on there?"

"Oh," she sighs, "I think the media's been exaggerating things. Local folk—as long as you leave them alone, they'll leave you alone." Lowering her voice, she adds, "Well, truth is, they're very strict in Ovett. They're not as liberal as they make out. They're Baptist."

(Later I learn that the Baptist church has prevented local people from opening a bar where they can drink, smoke, and dance; disgruntled locals are beginning to identify with and encourage the women at Camp Sister Spirit.)

Then the woman says, "I'm glad to meet someone from a big city. I miss that. I once spent some time in Chicago."

"Greyhound still goes to Chicago," I say.

"Oh, I can't leave," she says, in a resigned and matter-of-fact voice. "If you're married to a redneck, you can't go nowhere. And even if you do, he'll come after you and bring you back."

In another restaurant, another hostage in Ovett says this: "Those women (at Camp Sister Spirit) are going to die. It's only a matter of time. See, Ovett folk don't like outsiders and they don't like anyone who's different. The people in Ovett are crazy. They're all kin, or married to kin. Once, the phone company installed a phone booth in the center of town. Some of the boys just wrenched that booth loose and towed it out of town on top of their car."

Given the local attitudes, I found it remarkable that American feminists, lesbians mainly, but not exclusively, are risking their lives, not as saleable commodities, not for their own bedroom entertainment, not even for the sake of money, or careers, but for the right to practice feminism.

I wanted to meet the Hensons and their supporters, gauge who'd be there after the media and the federal mediators were gone, the initial money depleted, and the national community's attention diverted elsewhere.

Volunteers Lucy, 37, a hairdresser and long-time abortion clinic defender from Sacramento, and Sasha, 23, a recent college graduate from Pittsburgh, drive us on the back roads from Hattiesburg to the camp. Our headlights are the only lights for miles around; there are no streetlights and few houses. Lucy makes casual conversation. "Yes, we still hear gunshots around the periphery of the property," she says. Sasha adds: "The fear we feel is so real, but we're learning to deal with it. You work it out by keeping busy. This creates a positive energy. It helps you distance yourself from what can happen."

Lucy interrupts to remind us: "Pam Firth from Mississippi—she's here permanently—was shot at five times in a drive-by shooting. She had to jump into a ditch to avoid being killed. She tried to make a citizen's arrest. It took a long while but now the police are at least charging the man with disturbing the peace."
There we are, me and my friends, unarmed visitors with overactive imaginations, driving a long distance in the darkness, without guns or walkie-talkies, trying to act safe, not scared. For one moment, I allow myself to feel terrified. It's not hard. I think of Emmett Till, James Meredith, Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King, Jr., Violet Liuzzo, and especially of the murdered civil rights workers James Chaney, Micky Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman.

Many warriors have both waged and ultimately lost the "good fight" in Mississippi. In 1971, 20 acres were purchased near Jackson for a separate nation to be known as the Republic of New Afrika. The FBI and the state police smashed the residences on the land, arrested 11 people, and sentenced them to long prison terms for sedition. In the mid- to late 1980's, Mississippi mothers Karen Newsom and Dorrie Singley were forced to 'kidnap' their daughters and/or flee the state to rescue their (allegedly) sexually abused children from court-awarded paternal custody. (After Newsom's arrest, the Hensons picketed the jail on her behalf.)

I remind myself of the steadfast bravery of Mississippi black women like Fanny Lou Hamer, Ruby Doris Smith (Robinson), and Unita Blackwell, who is now the mayor of Taylorsville, Mississippi.

I half expect the state police or the Klan or church terrorists to suddenly stop our car, but no one does, and we proceed on to Camp Sister Spirit.

The moon's out, and it's enchanted. Twenty women, from at least ten states, are sitting in an open-air circle in the sultry southern night. They introduce themselves by name, age (21 to 65), and sun sign, and when I mention that hours before I was hit on the head and neck in a freak accident, a woman immediately materializes out of the darkness and starts giving me a massage; someone else brings me ibuprofen and an ice pack. It's unimaginable that guns and hate are trained on women like these.

"We do not seek tolerance and acceptance. We seek freedom from oppression, intimidation, and harassment. We seek justice and a legal system that is capable and willing to defend our rights."

Camp Sister Spirit is like Woodstock, Lesbian Nation, and the Michigan Women's Music Festival, but it's also like Mississippi Freedom Summer, the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, a Goddess Grove, and a Girl Scout Camp. Ah, it's like nothing else. It's as if Diana Rivers' tale about a tribe of psychic-military lesbian feminist warriors (Daughters of the Great Star) has come to life, and I'm sitting with them. (Magically, Rivers herself is here, too.)

Camp Sister Spirit is not a young, butch, para-military encampment. True, there are swaggers, buzz cuts, muscles, and bared breasts galore, but there are women in skirts and jewelry here, too, women in their 50's and 60's, mothers and grandmothers with gray hair, and smiling wrinkles. No one has come here to die. They are here to support the kind of grassroots work that feminists have been doing for years.

"Our family members are terrified. Many family members have asked us to leave the land. The legacy of the old South mentality is frightening to us."
Brenda and Wanda Henson certainly did not have confrontation in mind when they first bought these secluded 120 acres. In fact, they wanted to get away from the harassment they'd previously suffered on rented lands. The two met on January 15, 1985, defending an abortion clinic in Pascagoula, Mississippi. Each had been married at 16, quickly had two children, and then fled violent husbands. Brenda had vowed that “if I ever got away from this fool and got some place safe, that I would devote time and energy to the battered women’s movement.” Wanda was also battered—by a man and by one lesbian lover—and lost (but re-gained) custody of her children for being a lesbian. Brenda and Wanda legally took the single name of Brenda’s supportive mother, Henson.

Although the Hensons have painted their tractor and many trees (!) lavender, their version of feminism is essentially one of service. They’re not “do me” feminists; they “do” food banks and clothes closets, they counsel battered women and incest and rape victims. After witnessing numerous prisoner-beatings and some so-called prisoner “suicides,” including the “suicide” of the son of the President of the NAACP in Mississippi, the Hensons’ daughter, Andrea Gibbs, led a successful campaign to close down the Jones County jail. (It’s back in business, though.)

Camp Sister Spirit was created as a feminist and progressive education retreat. The camp is utterly sober: chemically, psychologically, and politically. The women are security-conscious—they have to be. Like nuns, they patrol the property in pairs, and communicate with walkie-talkies. Camp Sister Spirit has been forced, very much against its will, to build a fence around the property. (“We could have fed 100 families for ten years with the money the fence is costing us,” Wanda Henson says.) The women are legally armed. Everyone keeps track of where everyone else is. It’s scary, isn’t it, when women really start loving themselves enough to draw boundaries and defend their bodies, minds, and way of life from attack.

Questions abound. Why should the feminist government-in-exile choose Jones County, the historical heart of the Klan, as its first outpost on earth? Why build a future where you’re not wanted? (Tell that to the Israelis and the Palestinians). “Why not in Mississippi, the poorest state in the nation, and the most oppressed?” Wanda asks. “It’s where I was born, it’s where I’m from.” Anyway where exactly are radical lesbian feminists wanted? And where is land as cheap (120 acres for $60,000) as in Ovett, Mississippi?

I ask: “Are you afraid?” “Absolutely,” Brenda says. Wanda tells me about her trips to San Salvador and Mexico to help women and children. On one occasion, most volunteers had canceled making a trip to San Salvador out of fear. The organizer, who’d been previously tortured and imprisoned in San Salvador, said to Wanda: “Sister, fear has no place here.” Wanda can thicken her southern accent until it becomes as thick as the sweetest syrup and I’m tasting it and it’s making me giddy. The only time that tears interrupted Wanda’s high-spirited flow was when she told me that “black bodies still float down the Mississippi rivers. Where are they coming from? Who’s killed them?” she asks, and she cried for others, not for herself.

When the Hensons decided to buy land, with the help of a grant from Lesbian Natural Resources, they sought to establish a place of refuge, not con-

“The traditional Southern standard that lesbians and gay Americans are sub-human must end. Democracy must be restored... We have one option. We will continue to live in freedom. And we intend to defend our lives.”
In 1978, when people asked what I'd written about, I'd say "incest." And they would then most often ask, "Oh? Are you a feminist?"

Now, when I say (with some reticence) that I have written about incest, people ask, "Oh? Are you a psychologist?"

Incest, the sexualization of children cast in Procrustean form, has been transmogrified—hijacked. From a political issue framed by feminists as one of male violence against women and children—a sexual offense on the part of men, for which we demanded accountability, and censure—incest has, in these years, been coopted and re-formulated by the therapeutic ideology, as an illness in women, to be treated. In children, it is a prediction of illness to be treated.

In 1971, we spoke of what caused child sexual abuse and its role in socializing women, and training them for sexual submission.

By now, you will hear few speak of what causes incest. Most speak only of what incest causes: sleeplessness, lack of trust, sexual acting-out, timidity, aggression, destiny itself. Children, raped by fathers and stepfathers, are said to be
doomed—to become depressed, dissociated, drug-addicted, suicidal...

The issue of incest is now one of illness.

It is not social, but medical.

The response is not a call for change, but a call for "treatment."

It is not that we were wrong. Far from it. We identified incest as something fathers and stepfathers had done throughout history and continued to do, not in spite of the fact that they knew it was wrong, but because they believed it was their right: justifiable.

And this is what the offenders said as well. ("It's natural; it's perfectly normal.") By 1980, men were helping our understanding still more, as academics and other professionals spoke to us as the "pro-incest lobby" of "positive incest." They told us that "children have the right to express themselves sexually, even with members of their own family." They told us that, in any case, "the rate of incidence is so high as to make prohibition absurd." They told us that incest could be beneficial.

Well, we knew it could be, too. And we knew who benefitted.

We knew that incest was not only the grotesque absurdity of men turning the full power of adult male sexuality against infants, toddlers and pre-teens. It was also a form of violence against women. Our fathers had helped us out here as well. ("This would kill your mother if she found out." "She's not good for anything anyway, the bitch.")

During the 1980's, we had further corroboration that incest was not confined to the rape of children, but among the many male violence against women. Children, we learned, were now being abused by fathers in retaliation for divorce. And they were being abused with far less finesse.

Yet by then we knew, what could be seen from the evidence, had already been overridden, suppressed by male-protective forces. From the moment of our first speaking out, newfound experts on the rape of children had risen full-blown from the sea, pronouncing with the authority of mental health professionals, knowledge. The oddest thing was that even they knew that the rape of daughters was also violence against women. They said so. In their own language, of course, their own sort of way.

The mothers of incest victims, they pronounced, simply did not put out enough, weren't attractive enough, weren't nice enough to their men, they were rejecting or frigid (or sexually rapacious). This, they said, is what drives men to the beds of their five-year-olds, this "incest mother."

Well, this was not exactly the way we would have put it. But it meant these new experts saw what we did: That when men sexually assault their children, it is often driven by rage at women.

There was a subtle but serious distinction between the "pro-incest" folks and the new experts. The "pro-incest"ers wanted incest legalized, where the new experts wanted it "de-criminalized." Legalized had the virtue of candor. But decriminalized won. That meant that as a matter of policy, incest was subject to state intervention: civil, not criminal. An intervention that would target—not rapist fathers, but—incest families. Civil statutes were now written that faulted the mother who "knew or should have known." Well, looked at generously, even that message was not so very different from ours: women should know that men feel at liberty to rape children.

One problem with their way of putting things was that in order to have "intra-familial child sexual abuse" for which the woman was equally (or more) culpable, you absolutely had to have this "incest mother" hanging around, in the picture, choosing her husband over her child, denying what the kid said... You had to have her, alive or dead ("sometimes the incest mother is absent from the home, or terminally ill").

So women who, discovering the abuse, left and tried to protect the child were simply not playing their role in the drama as now scripted. For this outrageous failure to read their lines as written (in a script essential to defraying male accountability), the mothers had to be viciously punished. And so these women, "vindictive, hysterical," lost custody of their children—to the alleged abusers. They were that dangerous. They threatened to expose the whole conceptual fraud. War on children and their mothers had been declared.

Another problem with the new experts' way of putting things was that in practice a policy of de-criminalization not only resulted in punishing women and children, it also diminished the import of adult survivors' testimony. It rendered individual survivors vulnerable to the newly emerging specialists in problem management—those in the therapeutic arena who, alone, assured survivors that what had happened to them mattered.

Alas, in this medicalized world, survivors' experience mattered in direct proportion to the degree of manifest illness. How sick you were proved how bad it was. Checklists offered expanding lists of expected symptoms, the display of which was said to be evidence of your past abuse.

Within this individualized universe, some individual survivors sought personal, rather than united political, action: they did battle against statutes of limitation and instigated lawsuits against alleged perpetrators. Making incest a pocketbook issue for offenders, of course, galvanized a spirited, quickly organized, political response. The oxymoronic False Memory Syndrome was born. War on adult survivors' credibility had been declared.

On both fronts of this war against children and mothers and against adult survivors—it was the other side that had the army and the medics. Individualization, medicalization had precluded political organization.

By now, friends-in-this-struggle would say, "Things are not going well."

To which I replied, "Things are going very well. Just not for us."

We have been re-silenced. Within the larger world. And within a world that is labeled feminist as well.

You cannot hear us anymore—those who spoke out early on and have spoken out since about incest as a licensed abuse of male power. Our voices have been drowned out by those who speak of incest as "gender neutral." Drowned out by those who speak of incest-as-illness—who would have us hear only that women survivors have been made fragile and helpless by the event in their childhood vaguely rendered
by the word incest. Women are portrayed to us, in tones of
great sympathy, as damaged, suffering from diminished capac-
ity. And signs of damage in women, signs of diminished
capacity—working backwards—are taken as “indicators”
that they have been wounded by incest. Incest has become a
metaphor for all the oppressions that feminism named.

What has happened in this brief 15 years since feminism
first spoke out on incest is the explicit exoneration of fathers,
the implication of mothers—and the infantilization of women
as survivors.

The personal is political. You may still hear the words, but
you can no longer hear the meaning behind them. You cannot
hear that the point of speaking out was to identify com-
monalities that, once identified, could lead to political action
for change. We spoke out publicly to break a silence—when
there was a silence to break. But speaking out was never
meant to be all there was.

We endorsed help for individual women. But that was
never meant to be all there was: the building of field hospi-
tals to tend a predictably endless supply of wounded.

You cannot hear us anymore. Even though—in the tim-
tests of this country—you cannot any longer hear silence on the prevalence of incest, you cannot anywhere hear
what all this talk of incest means. You can’t hear that it is about
a license that is historical. Or that, until recently, what silenced
women was not reticence or shame, but intimidation. You
cannot hear that, as recently as 1978, the law in Texas, for
instance, held the complaining child liable as an accomplice-
witness, a “participant,” an instigator. For all the loose talk of
the “crime” of incest, you can’t hear that this male abuse of
power continues to be quasi-semi-more-or-less legal in this
country. Or that the children and their protective mothers
refuse to be silent—they will be silenced by the courts,
and punished. And you cannot hear that these things are all
connected, all part of the same weave. That the truth of the
incest “tried,” that the exclusive focus on victim pathology is
all tailored to protect the male offender. You can’t hear this
even within most gatherings of feminists.

Even the incest stories you now hear are selective. The sto-
ries of children yanked into the child welfare system are
unheard. The stories of these children placed under psy-
chiatric surveillance, sometimes institutionalized, presumed
according to mental health doctrine to be at risk of emo-
tional disturbance because their fathers raped them—are
unheard. And yet we are everywhere told that we are, at last,
listening to the children.

Nor do survivor’s stories speak dearly of incest as male
violence, nor of the deliberateness of that violence. Indeed,
with the focus so heavily on illness, you can barely discern
the fact of human agency: it is as though “incest” is on the
order of a natural catastrophe—not rape by Daddy, who
could just as easily have not done it

What you can hear now is that we are, at last—15 years
after women began publicly speaking out, ten years after the
televising of the breakthrough documentary, “Something
About Amelia,” five years after every talk show in the nation
has maximize the strength of incest stories—breaking the silence.

Women continue to speak out, but seldom in their own,
authentic voices. Rather, their speech echoes that of ther-
apiats, they speak the language of mental health—of their
disorders, and their path to healing. They speak of being in
recovery as though it were a geographical space. Their sto-
ries are absent context, without larger meaning.

In being framed as medical, incest has been rendered trivial.
Somehow, mental health ideology infiltrated and subvert-
ed feminist rationality. Once incest was re-formulated by
bretters and healers, speaking out itself was transformed. Its
meaning was changed. The personal became public, but not
political. It was not the abuse of male power, but individ-
ual women and their symptoms who needed to change.

What we are speaking of here is not therapy, the private
event. It is the therapeutic ideology—a way of seeing the
world that enlarges the personal, with no agenda for the
political. It is a belief system, a way of seeing the world that
subverts the goals of feminism: it promotes the personal to
the paramount, sells belonging in suffering, offers consola-
tion that what afflicts you is not politically engineered, but
an individual fate. When the therapeutic ideology triumphs—
feminism loses.

Also, it has proved very seductive. The therapeutic ideol-
ogy infiltrated feminism through the issue of incest. It hijacked
the issue from under feminism’s nose. It pretended to fem-
inism by hijacking feminist language.

Combining that language with mental health credo, it
offered to survivors something it called empowerment. All
women needed was the courage to come out, to speak.
The language promised liberation, spoke of the struggle. By
the early 1990’s, you no longer distinguish what survivors
were calling the survivor movement from what everyone
else was calling the recovery movement. And all of this in
the name of feminism.

Speaking out—topped free from all political foundation—
was bankrupt. No more than confession. It was now said to be
a “stage” in healing.

But who would dare challenge such things? To speak out
on this is to seem to be making rude noises on an intensive
care ward. Whom among us is brutal enough to speak against
healing?

We have been re-silenced.

Fathers and stepfathers continue to rape children. Children
pay a high price for that. Their mothers pay a high price for
that. The cost benefit analysis of incest remains the same.

The fact of incest, the incidence of incest—routine, banal,
non-exotic incest—is the sexualization of children in every-
day reality: the expression of rage at women by wounding
them, in everyday reality.

Pictures in the media of children sexualized are signifiers of
the licensed act. Images of women dressed as children, of
children made up and photographed as little women, are
signifiers, a warning of license.

As long as the act itself remains uncensured, and the aggres-
sors remain publicly unchallenged as a collective force, by
a collective force as long as feminist analysis and energy is
submerged in and overwhelmed by mental health doctrine, images
of the sexualization of children are (to use the old incest
clutch) the “tip of the iceberg.”

The iceberg remains the socially tolerated act of child-rape
by fathers.

Louise Armstrong is author of the groundbreaking Kiss Daddy
Goodnight (Hawthorn Books 1978; Pocket Books 1979, 1987)
and numerous other books on feminist issues. Her forthcoming book,
Rocking the Cradle of Sexual Politics: What Happened When
Women Said Incest, will be published by Addison-Wesley in October.
DON'T DARE CALL IT FEMINIST

The powerful art of Louise Bourgeois falls between categories—when male thinking dominates the category-making.

By Arlene Raven

Louise Bourgeois is definitely not history. At 83, she is still hungry, angry, and wildly creative.

Bourgeois' current surge of artistic power is atypical for an octogenarian artist. She might be expected, in her “later” work, to refine the discoveries of earlier inventions or literally rest on her laurels.

But this artist's state of imaginative being follows a more exemplary and a more typically female professional shape, as seen at a show at The Brooklyn Museum this spring and at the most recent Venice Biennial. As any honest woman in the arts will tell you, the key to success is: Live long. Be strong.

Bourgeois worked with a minimum of public support from the 1950's until the 1970's, when female art professionals active in the women's movement acknowledged her contribution and began to delve into the feminist meanings of her forms. Her new visibility arrived on the heels of a lifetime of underrepresentation in chronicles about the history of modern art and isolation among her peers as someone who was “outside of categories.”

No one can deny that the Bourgeois retrospective in 1982 at the Museum of Modern Art when she was 71 was long overdue—if compared to the survey expositions of men of equal or lesser accomplishment. But much better late than never. The recognition of her achievement was, I believe, good for her artistic soul. The drawings, sculpture, and installations of the past 11 years in “Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory, Works 1982-1993” are surprising in their consistency as well as rewarding in their location of new conceptual and material ground for the artist. Since
Sensuous pink marble and a shapely doll's foot contrast with the stark amputated limb image in "Untitled (With Foot)," Louise Bourgeois, 1989.
then, Bourgeois' productivity has soared, and her inventiveness has flowered even further.

Because the international art world has of late embraced Bourgeois, it may now seem diminishing, and possibly impolite, to call her a "feminist" artist. Such a designation would invite critics, historians, and curators to continue to marginalize her work and to leave her standing outside of the perimeters of "great art" or even "art" itself.

The early appreciation by feminist women of the arts is thus all but erased from the documentation of Bourgeois' career as it has been most recently written. And feminist esteem, when mentioned, goes by any other name.

"I worked in peace for 40 years," says Bourgeois, graciously, in a 1993 interview with Brooklyn Museum Curator of Contemporary Art Charlotta Kotik, (mis)remembering the devastating obscurity of most of her art-productive life.

Kotik colludes in the cover-up of what has to be the cardinal moment of Bourgeois' creative history when she writes in the exhibition catalogue that the artist was recognized by "propo-nents of change in the late 1970's. She became an example for those with the courage to draw inspiration from their innermost feelings and to turn away from the spent modernist tradition toward the darkly subjective and elaborately eclectic realm of postmodernism."

The use of "categories" such as modernist and postmodernism is meant to empower Bourgeois' art. Women artists are frequently seen as outsiders, as if critics are overwhelmed by the 'differences' in a female vision and can't see the similarities with others in the artists' geographical (New York School) or stylistic (20th-century biomorphic abstraction) school. This serves, consciously or subconsciously on the part of the art historians, to keep women like Bourgeois and Georgia O'Keeffe out of the historical canon—the record of artistic achievement.

But redressing this error should not be done at the cost of neglecting Bourgeois' most profound messages. "Feminist" is what Bourgeois' art is and has always been. Yes, there are various, and sometimes contradictory facets of the feminist philosophy, history, aesthetics, and ethics now on the ideological table. And all are also subject to a generational revisionism. Nevertheless, there are still some basics we might all call "woman-
identified” or “feminist” characteristics and issues. These can be found in Bourgeois’ work from the start.

Bourgeois’ first sculptures, made during the late 1940s, are tall slender figures that serve as symbolic stand-ins for members of her biological family. Born on the legendary Left Bank of Paris in 1911, Bourgeois spent her childhood among the historical tapestries in her parents’ gallery. Restoration of these tapestries was constant labor in the household studio opened right after World War I in 1919. To participate in the family business, Bourgeois learned drawing as a child in this domestic, and at the same time, professional milieu. More than 70 years later, Bourgeois draws her mother as the spider who spins so far and wide that she still largely authors Bourgeois’ inner world.

A marble facsimile of Bourgeois’ childhood home in Choisy-le-Roi, a suburb of Paris, is enclosed in a cage (cage also being a translation of “choisy”) that could hold a human or two. But beware of assumed “family values.” To enter the mysterious translucent mansion, one must pass under the guillotine the artist has constructed. Off with your head.

Bourgeois’ troubles began with the head of the house, her father and betrayer. Always known to include “autobiographical content”—the term kept deliberately nebulous—she startled readers of Artforum magazine where she composed the artist project pages in the early 1980’s. Her photographs and texts told of treachery by her father during her adolescence when her English tutor Sadie was also her father’s mistress and lived for a sneaky ten-year existence under the family’s roof.

Sexual politics unfurl in Bourgeois’ preoccupations with the female figure and the image of the house. In some of her most poignant statements, these icons and the concepts they embody, merge to tell of the complex relationship of women and home.

“Femme Maison,” a white marble statue of 1983, is a sweeping triangle of darts and folds. The curvy diagonals look almost like real fabric instead of stone, and the female figure assumed to be present underneath the filmy garment seems fully represented by her “clothing.” A hard-edged rectangle that is unmistakably an abstracted house serves as a head or headpiece, sitting at the apex of this triangle, formally at odds in every way from the rest of the sculpture.

Bourgeois’ images of the “house woman” or “woman-house” since the 1940’s are contemporary with Simone de Beauvoir’s pivotal The Second Sex (1949), and prefigure Betty Friedan’s The Feminine Mystique (1963), and the 1971-
SAFETY NET

Say you have three children. You get too sick to keep your $14,000-a-year job, so you lose your health insurance. Your Significant Other can't find a job (or took a powder awhile back). Your parents are dead (or abusive, or too poor themselves), so you borrow from friends, but they're soon tapped out. Tomorrow the heat and electricity get turned off. The kids are living on Trix. And you realize you're too nice (and too unpracticed) to steal.

Turn to the welfare system and you're treated like a thief anyway. Officials make you knit silk purses out of red tape to prove your eligibility. You may get no relief for months, and what you do get when you total up your food stamps, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), and other benefits may not cover carfare to a job interview. Because you are at your most vulnerable and thin-skinned, the process makes you feel degraded, despised, and hopeless. Perhaps crudest of all is your realization that, as President Clinton prepares to "end welfare as we know it," so few feminists seem to be carrying your banner. While some feminwn leaders have lent support to economic issues, most of the ground troops—the college-educated, take-down-that-pinup-mister-or-else marchers, and letter-writers—have been church-mouse quiet.

The silence is puzzling. The majority of our nation's welfarers are women. And AFDC is the only institution we have that admits, however begrudgingly, that mothering and homemaking has social and economic PERFORMS VANISHING ACT

From welfare to un-fare? That's how it will go unless feminists rally behind better reforms.

By Lynn Phillips
# Wonking Off: A Thumbnail Guide to the Welfare Policy Wars

There are nearly as many approaches to rehabbing welfare policy as there are policy wonks. Here are the most au courant.

## End Federal Welfare

Dismantle federal welfare entirely. Let states and private agencies care for the poor.

- Poverty has not decreased in response to quadrupled spending. As the welfare system expanded, labor force participation among young black men declined, despite increased opportunities. That's because welfare lets young people duck in and out of jobs so easily they fail to develop stick-to-it-ness and other skills needed for independence.

- In aiming policy primarily at the small percentage of people who are welfare dependent, you shirk your obligation to help the struggling majority of welfare families, defeating the purpose of welfare.

This policy is the legitimate baby of American Enterprise Institute policy guru, Charles Murray, author of Losing Ground (HarperCollins Basic Books, 1984), and the adopted bastard of neo-dems, neo-cons, a few vindictive con men, and pundits galore.

- Richard M. Nixon originally proposed this idea, it is now being championed by ex-welfare mother, Theresa Funiciello (Tyranny of Kindness), the National Welfare Rights Union, the National Union of the Homeless, the National Anti-Hunger Coalition, and NOW.

Don't let this idea define the debate.

## Guaranteed Annual Income (GAI)

Dismantle welfare and social services plus the entire welter of poverty pimps in the not-for-profit private sector. With the billions saved, give everyone enough to live on—no questions asked, no dignity lost.

- Social security survivors' benefits already do this for widows (for life) and their 1.8 million children (up to 18).
- Why should unemployed or abandoned mothers get less? The reason poverty increases despite quadrupled spending is that the money doesn't reach the poor. Bureaucratic costs have soared and the tax-deductible poverty sector is a thicket of mismanagement, waste, and fraud.

Studies show conclusively that guaranteed subsidies decrease people's willingness to work by about 9%, too big a dip if we're to compete globally.

Dismantling the poverty establishment would put too many Democrats out of work.

GAI is a good idea if you want to redefine the debate, but has little real-world success potential right now, so pick a back-up plan.

## Cut-offs

Put a two-year lifetime limit on welfare payments. After that, require all able-bodied people to work to get benefits (unless they've just had a kid). If there are no jobs, create jobs—WPA-style government jobs or government-subsidized private sector jobs.

- Welfare oxes people a hand so that they can get back on their feet, and a push to get off their duffs. Making people work will help them develop the job skills with which they can, if they're industrious, eventually become independent.

- Two years? Infant brains develop most rapidly in the first three years, and by four years nearly 80% of welfare recipients are off the rolls anyway (vs. only 50% in two years). Job creation costs more than welfare. No-skill jobs don't give welfare skills needed for independence. Furthermore, low-wage welfare jobs will displace union jobs that pay a decent living.

- Proposed by a majority of House Republicans, and now being tried experimentally in Wisconsin, South Dakota, Vermont, Florida.
- Some feminists insist, "Mothering IS work." Others want to enable people to work, not force them. Feminists who favor "work requirements" demand case-by-case management. Mary Jo Bane (Welfare Realities), an official at the Department of Health and Human Services, opposes cut-offs, as do unions.

Worse idea since mandatory sentencing. Welfare cases should be handled on a case-by-case basis. No two year limits should die a natural death; four is the minimum tolerable cut-off. Public education is needed on this.

## Earnfare/Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)

Earnfare lets welfare recipients keep more of their welfare allotment as they start to work. EITC provides supplements to bring the working poor up to the poverty line.

- Both programs are designed to discourage dependency on welfare alone by making it actually pay to work.

- Be careful: if those on Earnfare do better than unassisted low-wage workers, it will be an incentive to go on welfare, not to get off. And EITC gives corporations powerful incentives to underpay their employees. Hey, even in the hell pits of the 19th century, industrialists had to pay you enough to keep you alive.

- Women's advocates and neo-Dems like Earnfare because it offers work incentives but isn't mean. Seventeen states are trying it. Clinton loves EITC, but Martha Burk of the Center for the Advancement of Public Policy (CAPP) in D.C. dismisses it as a subsidy to McDonald's. Done right, EITC might be a quiet way to boost the wages of childcare workers.

- Earnfare rates an A-. Take a nap. This one should win without you. EITC is dicier; it will take smart strategies to make this a useful, not a destructive measure.

- Women's advocates and neo-Dems like Earnfare because it offers work incentives but isn't mean. Seventeen states are trying it. Clinton loves EITC, but Martha Burk of the Center for the Advancement of Public Policy (CAPP) in D.C. dismisses it as a subsidy to McDonald's. Done right, EITC might be a quiet way to boost the wages of childcare workers.

- Earnfare rates an A-. Take a nap. This one should win without you. EITC is dicier; it will take smart strategies to make this a useful, not a destructive measure.

## Community Development Programs and Enterprise Zones

Tax breaks, grants, and subsidies to businesses and organizations in poor areas.

- The government, together with business, can play a constructive role helping blighted neighborhoods develop if they provide the leadership and the plan.

- Scooie! Pork us! Community development programs have a dismally fruitless history and enterprise zones are a corporate giveaway.

- Clinton and (male) black leaders seem to like these programs. Conservatives and racists don't. Women's groups have been indifferent.

- This is the off-shore oil allowance for inner-city sharpies. Bad-mouth it to get chummy with conservatives, but let it pass.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FINGERPRINTING</th>
<th>BEHAVIOR MOD</th>
<th>FERTILITY SANCTIONS</th>
<th>WEDFARE</th>
<th>JOB TRAINING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fingerprint workers to discourage welfare fraud</strong> from double-dipping (registering for benefits in two or more states).</td>
<td><strong>Use sanctions to discourage irresponsible behavior.</strong> Examples: Popfare cutbacks if you don't establish child's paternity; Healthfare cutbacks if you fail to get your kids inoculated; Learnfare cutbacks if your children are truant.</td>
<td><strong>Examples:</strong> Teen Mom Tourniquet: Discontinue benefits to moms younger than 18. Family Caps: Eliminate or reduce benefits of women who have babies while on welfare. End Infertility Aid: End Medicaid-funded reversal of vasectomies and tubal ligations to single mothers on welfare.</td>
<td><strong>Adjust welfare payments to reward two-parent families.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Get people off welfare by teaching them skills that earn a living wage.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare fraud must be contained. Fingerprinting is a little draconian, but it's in the interest of honest welfare recipients to keep bad apples from rotting the barrel.</td>
<td><strong>Kids need shots, dads, and schools, and society suffers when they don't get them. If we're paying people to raise kids, they have to meet certain minimum standards of competence. If compassion, reason, and parental affection don't motivate parents to care for their kids properly, maybe money will.</strong></td>
<td><strong>The social contract requires people to refrain from having children whom they know they cannot support. Make teens think twice about having kids it's impossible to support. Provide orphanages for children whose mothers become destitute (another of Murray's offspring). Offer poor people fertility help only when they're working and earning.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Two-parent families are far more likely to be self-sufficient, and should be encouraged. Children, in order to become properly socialized, need both a mother and a father. God wants parents to marry.</strong></td>
<td><strong>As we lose low-skilled jobs to cheaper labor markets we have to upgrade the workforce.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>People submit to invasive, insulting airport security checks because airport security is a matter of life and death. But this sort of I.D. checking will cost about as much as it'll save and its only function will be to erode liberty and to degrade and humiliate the innocent.</strong></td>
<td><strong>There's no evidence that economic sanctions will cure bad or ignorant parenting habits. All these cutbacks are guaranteed to do is to take food out of siblings' mouths. Intervention isn't cheap, but it works better. Most fathers, for example, will register voluntarily at their baby's birth if asked.</strong></td>
<td><strong>These disincentive policies are based on bad theory. Remember: The world's highest birthrates occur in places with no welfare at all. If welfare enables teen pregnancies, how come black teen birth rates shot up as the value of AFDC benefits declined? Money is the last thing on a teen mom's mind. Most have histories of family abuse and neglect. Most are impregnated by adults who are unconcerned with the girl's welfare.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Why should a parent with a partner get more aid than one who was abandoned, or one who has left an abusive spouse?</strong></td>
<td><strong>A waste of money. The most successful government-run job training program studied, a federally funded project in Riverside, California, reduced welfare rolls by only 10%. The best job training is on-the-job. Teach 'em how to set an alarm clock, say, &quot;Yes sir!&quot; and get 'em a job—any job. If they apply themselves, they can get ahead.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York and New Jersey are big on this following the discovery of a double-dipping gang in the tri-state area, but it will be challenged by rights activists in court.</td>
<td><strong>The majority of House Republicans favor Popfare (HR 3490). Wisconsin is trying Learnfare. Maryland is trying Healthfare. Children's and women's advocates generally favor the carrot over the stick.</strong></td>
<td><strong>House Republicans, suddenly sour on full-time mothering, have asked for Family Caps (HR 3490). New Jersey made Family Caps law, and is being sued by rights groups. Maine, Massachusetts, and Wisconsin are all banning fertility aid for welfare mothers. This year, privacy rights defenders and reproductive choice advocates naturally oppose fertility laws, but not as strenuously as you'd expect.</strong></td>
<td><strong>California, Florida, Iowa, Illinois, New Jersey, Utah, Virginia, Vermont, and Wisconsin have all asked for permission to try this out experimentally.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Many women's advocates push upgrade training in hopes of improving low-earning women's skills.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sieg Heil. Kill it before it reproduces.</td>
<td><strong>Well-intentioned policies in a grotesquely punitive form. Monitor experiments and publicize failures.</strong></td>
<td><strong>We must do something, but not this. Support positive, not negative incentives. Rated F for Fight it!</strong></td>
<td><strong>It's acceptable, if same-sex parents are included. It's theocracy if they aren't.</strong></td>
<td><strong>A hard C, like the last sound in pork. Rest up for the real battles.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
value outside of the patriarchal family. Humane welfare policies are strategically essential to feminism's other goals.

Without welfare’s “fuck-you-money,” poor working women and most middle class mothers can’t afford to stand up to an unfair or harassing employer, or to leave an abusive or reckless mate. No sane mother will rebel if it means her kids will starve; that’s the bottom line.

And that bottom line is under attack. The 18th-century satirist Jonathan Swift was kidding when he suggested that the Irish, having too little food and too many children, could solve both problems if they would only eat their young. But equally gruesome fare graces today’s policy options, unsalted by so much as a titter of irony.

Welfare mothers, who can’t afford image consultants, tend to get defined not by the group’s norm but by the few who abuse the system. Since false assumptions about welfare mothers consequently abound, it surprises most people, whatever their political bias, to learn that only 1% of the U.S. federal budget is spent on AFDC, that only 50% of families qualified for AFDC bother to endure

---

**Not for Attribution**

_Who Said:_

I don’t like to put this in moral terms, but I do believe that having children out of wedlock is just wrong.

Dan Quayle ____ Bob Packwood ____ Donna Shalala ____ (Shalala).

_Who Realized:_

If American society recognized homemaking and child rearing as productive work to be included in the national economic accounts... the receipt of welfare might not imply dependency. But we don’t. It may be hoped that the women’s movement of the present time will change this.

Robin Morgan ___, Joycelyn Elders ___, Daniel Patrick Moynihan ____


_Who Asked Welfare Applicants to:_

State any events or things that you remember about the dates on which you had sexual intercourse. List parties attended with the father; motels in which you stayed with the father; nightclubs, bars, restaurants and/or other places that you went with the father. Name all the men you had sexual intercourse with while you were having sexual intercourse with the father.

The Gestapo ___, The Swedish Sex Council ___, White County, Arkansas Department of Human Services ____

(White County, Arkansas, Bill Clinton’s state. The questionnaire was discontinued due to bad publicity).

_Who Fantasized:_

The welfare state and its programs have the effect of encouraging 12-year-old girls to have children and 15-year-old boys to promiscuously impregnate them.

Roman Polanski ___, Michael Jackson ___, Sen. Newt Gingrich (R-GA) ____

(Newt! What an imagination!)

---

**ENDING WELFARE AS WE KNOW IT, THE**

Because many single mothers can support families better on welfare than they can working full time at today’s wages, they stay on the dole. The political tragi-comedy of welfare reform is that conservatives and some New Democrats hope to break this welfare dependency by manipulating benefits rather than by raising working women’s pay. Their fantasy? That women will rely on husbands, rather than either the state or their own efforts, for financial support.

To end welfare as we know it without re-instituting Victorian patriarchy, here are six steps that should precede any welfare benefit cuts:

1. **Strengthen pay equity law.** Currently, sending a single mother to college doesn’t get her to the pay level of the average penised married high school dropout. Why? First, employers can break existing discrimination laws with impunity. Second, trade off-constant’s jobs (childcare, teaching, sewing, etc.) usually pay less than comparable men’s jobs that are equal in difficulty, danger, stress, and responsibility, or require equal education and experience. Pay equity legislation, like Eleanor Holmes Norton’s Fair Pay Act aims to correct many of these imbalances. (Call National Committee on Pay Equity: (202) 331-7343 for more information.)

2. **Raise the minimum wage.** This, not Clinton’s earned income tax credit (EITC), is the way to free women from dependency on the state.

Women make up 66% of minimum wage workers, of whom a staggering three out of four live in poverty. Raise minimum to equal the buying power it had before the “feminization” of poverty and welfare: a hike of $1.10/hour at least. Why are businesses that can’t pay a living wage considered “competitive?”

3. **Enforce child support laws.** Currently, nine out of ten children on welfare are owed child support. Forty percent of our welfare dollars go towards children whose non-custodial parent can afford to pay, but doesn’t. Rep. Lynn Woolsey, D-CA (the only former welfare mother to ever serve in Congress), and the Senate’s Carol Moseley-Braun favor turning child support collection over to the IRS because state collection systems are uncoordinated, overloaded, and often corrupt. Alternately, since it’s costly to dismantle the state system, some experts, like Richard Casey Hoffman of the Child Support Enforcement Agency in Austin, Texas, prefer to reform state collections using regulated private agencies to cut caseloads. In either case, Rep. Woolsey suggests, unpaid child support should be listed by law on credit reports, so that the many deadbeats who work “off the books” can’t pay off their houses and boats while neglecting their kids.

4. **Support universal health & child care.** Because so few low-wage employers design to pay health benefits, many single mothers must go on welfare just to get coverage for their families. The Clintons’ health care package (devoted to protecting the insurance industry) is pricey, and business is pressuring them to make it
**SEVEN-STEP PROGRAM**

costlier still. To apply counter-pressure, support the more consumer-friendly alternative, single payer legislation (HR 1200 and S 491). Call SPAN (Single Payer Across the Nation) for information: (216) 241-8558.

If they’re going to demand that mothers work, or if we want women of all classes and ethnic groups to have real reproductive choice, we must provide childcare, licensed and well-paying, a mother can trust, which means government subsidized. And it must be an option for all, since offering it to welfare mothers, and not to the working poor or the middle class encourages welfare dependency the same way medical benefits do now. Inexcusably, an effective push for childcare is 25 years overdue.

5 Strengthen unions. Unions need to update their tactics to address charges that they push wages up too high, depress worker productivity and make it harder for us to compete internationally. We need strong unions to keep corporations from overexploiting workers and impoverishing families. In some industries, like the garment industry, conditions have regressed below 19th century standards. Support laws that prohibit companies from replacing striking workers, which will make it easier for women to unionize.

Roberta Startler-Roth from the Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR), Karen Nussbaum from the Women’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor, and women’s union caucuses believe that unionization is an important tool for working women, despite current male chauvinism in the labor movement. Says Martha Burk of the Center for the Advancement of Public Policy (CAPP): “Women have to fight within unions as well as for them.”

6 Repeal the foreign tax credit. Companies may now deduct any foreign taxes from their U.S. returns on a dollar-for-dollar basis. In other words, it costs them nothing to move abroad and hire sub-standard wage labor. Why should we encourage this, Burk asks. We can’t raise women’s wages (and status) unless we de-fang the constant threat of job export by corporations.

7 Stump for an international minimum wage. The main impediment to raising wages or requiring employers to help finance health insurance in the U.S. is that companies can evade these obligations by moving abroad where female labor is cheaper still. Demanding an international minimum wage may be so wildly unrealistic right now, it’ll get you laughed out of the loop in most policy circles. But in a global economy it represents the only long-term solution to poverty, so aim high.

In the meantime, monitoring and boycotting products that are produced for abysmal wages under sub-standard conditions would be a good move. Women have a lot more potential muscle as consumers than as either striking workers or sidewalk demonstrators, because you can’t lose your job for refusing to shop.

---

**Welfare That Dare Not Speak its Name**

Most folks who oppose the concept of government assistance are, in fact, getting some themselves. A partial list of welfare programs for those not on welfare include:

- Tax-deductible mortgages on second homes
- Nonprofit tax breaks to politically active religious groups and charities with high paid executives
- College scholarships and student low-interest loans
- Survivors’ social security benefits
- Pharmaceutical profits from products created by federally funded research
- Timber from U.S. forest lands sold to private corporations at a $1-2 billion loss; U.S. land and mineral sales to private industry at similar losses
- Farm and oil subsidies
- Research and development subsidies to failed nuclear power industries
- State tax breaks for industries that relocate
- Corporate bailouts, savings & loan rescues
- Bankruptcy laws that allow companies to function while ducking environmental cleanups and union contracts
- The diminishing but ever-green business entertainment deduction

the indignities of applying for it, and that the majority of welfare recipients are white, don’t live in cities, and are under 18.

Media stories about welfare slackers with litters of neglected kids fail to mention that AFDC households usually have two children or less, that welfare mothers have a lower birthrate than the general population, that over 50% of welfare mothers work outside the home at least some of the time they’re on welfare, and that most of those who don’t, can’t.

Nevertheless, there are problems with “welfare as we know it” that feminists who advocate for welfare mothers need to face. While approximately 80% of all welfare recipients are off the rolls in four years, for example, those who linger on for eight years or more are a real financial drain on the public purse. They account for over half of those on welfare at any given moment.

The U.S. rate of increase of unwed mothers, although climbing, has not been greater for any racial and ethnic group. But the average age of unwed mothers has plummeted disproportionately among African-Americans, few of whom have Murphy Brown’s resources. An awesome 80% of unmarried black teen mothers end up on welfare. This is framed as a female-created problem, with little publicity given to the U.S. Public Health Service report that 71% of “teenage” pregnancies were sired by males over the age of 20.

To strengthen your grip on the current welfare reform debate, here’s an opinionated guide to the most commonly flogged proposals for its redesign, along with a seven-step program to de-feminize the poverty that forces us onto the dole to begin with.

Lynn Phillips was the editorial and opinion-page editor for Her New York and writes widely on women’s issues.
ADVENTURES OF A KING-MAKER

A Watercolor of Gertrude Bell (1868-1926), by Flora Russell, 1887.

Lawrence of Arabia gets the glory, but Gertrude Bell was the power-broker.

By Robert Kimball Green
Gertrude Bell led a life riddled with inconsistency. She roamed freely in the mountains and deserts of the Middle East, alone or accompanied only by local guides, but did not venture into the London streets unescorted. She supported her family’s liberal political views, but became an agent of her country’s imperialist policy. Her ambitions and achievements took on heroic proportions in light of the restrictive social customs of Victorian and Edwardian England, yet she actively opposed women’s suffrage. And, though there was little likelihood that an English woman in 1915 would have such intimate knowledge of Middle-Eastern lands and peoples that she could advise British administrators on the formation of war-time policy for the Middle East, Gertrude Bell became invaluable in Middle Eastern affairs, ultimately influencing the crowning of the first king of Iraq.

The name Gertrude Bell was well-known in her day. When she died in Baghdad on July 12, 1926, she was eulogized by both the King of England and the King of Iraq. The newspapers heralded her as “the uncrowned queen of Iraq,” “Daughter of the Desert,” and “King Maker.” Today she is largely forgotten, her reputation overshadowed by the highly publicized (and somewhat exaggerated) exploits of her contemporary, T.E. Lawrence.

Letters flowed easily from her pen and her life is remarkably well documented. The letters have been collected into two daunting volumes. An account of her life was woven from the letters by Elizabeth Burgoyne, entitled Gertrude Bell: From Her Personal Papers, which appeared, also in two volumes, in 1958. One then wonders why this remarkable woman has been so overlooked by history. Had she been a man, able to take up arms and lead picturesque revolts in the sands of Arabia, would she share the glory of T.E. Lawrence, still the subject of controversy and admiration?

Victorian Days
Gertrude Margaret Lowthian Bell was born on July 14, 1868, to one of England’s leading industrial families. Between family homes in England, Gertrude grew up in idyllic surroundings, riding her pony, reading, and, later, listening to discussions of industry, science, and politics. She attended the first women’s college at Oxford University, Lady Margaret Hall. The value of higher education for women was hotly debated in Gertrude’s day; only a handful of women were admitted to universities. By strict Victorian standards, Gertrude was the least pleasing type of student; she was scholarly. She took a “first,” or honors degree, in history in 1888.

After Oxford, Bell’s life became a whirl of introductions, high-society dinners, and travel. She toured Europe, staying with family friends and meeting such notables as Emperor William II of Germany. In May, 1899, Bell visited Constantinople, glimpsing the Orient for the first time. A few years later, she traveled to Persia to visit her uncle Sir Frank Lascelles, ambassador to Teheran.

Arabian Nights
“Persia,” she commented, “is the place I have always longed to see.” Her impressions of this journey are captured in her first travel book, Persian Pictures, published in 1894. Persia, of which she dreamed since her school days, seems not to have disappointed her. The Orient captured in Persian Pictures is the Orient of the Arabian Nights:

The whole bazaar resounds with talk, with the cries of the vendors, the tinkling both of the caravan, and the snow of the stalls’ hammers. The air is permeated with the curious smell, half musky, half aromatic, of fruits and flying meats, merchandise and crowded humanity. The light comes from the top through a round hole in each of the countless tiny domes of the roof through each hole falls a shaft of brilliant sunshine, cutting the surrounding darkness like a sword, and striking the hurrying multitude in successive flashes.

In preparation for her sojourn to Persia, Bell began the arduous task of learning Persian. Her able mind made quick progress. She was soon reading Persian with ease and translating the poems of the 14th-century poet, Hafiz. The Teachings of Hafiz, Bell’s only verse translation, appeared in 1897, winning her great acclaim for its artistic quality. Critics, who have claimed that Bell’s rendering of Hafiz’s poems captures the spirit of the original, place The Teachings of Hafiz on the level of Edward Fitzgerald’s translation of The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.

Later, traveling in Syria, Beirut, and Palestine (present-day Israel), Bell began to study Arabic. While in Jerusalem she commented: “I may say in passing that I don’t think I shall ever take to Arabic, but I go on struggling with the hope of mortifying Providence by my persistence!” But less than a year later she was reading the Arabian Nights in Arabic: “just for fun.” The school-girl tone of her letters often masked her remarkable feats of scholarship.

In 1900, Bell made her first desert excursion. Dressed in the most up-to-date fashions of London and Paris, she tottered off at the head of her camel train into the Syrian desert. Fashionable clothing was one of Bell’s many passions, which in the desert became one of her many eccentricities. It is curious that Bell, who had always shown signs of non-conformity (such as smoking cigarettes in her university days, an act considered most un-feminine by Victorian standards), never lost respect for the flourishes of her time and class. Even in severe desert climates, silver and china glittered from her linen-draped dining table.

Bell admired individuals with courage and determination—those who could prove themselves, as she had done—so many times (a mountain in the Alps still bears the name “Gertrude’s Peak,” honoring her famed skill as a mountain climber). However, her surprising position on women’s suffrage will always remain a riddle. Though Bell admired other successful women of her time, such as the author Vita Sackville-West, she helped found the Woman’s Anti-Suffrage League in July, 1908, to quell the growing agitation for women’s suffrage.

Bell held that most “common” women did not have the sense to add constructively to the electoral process, and the self-righteousness with which they demanded equality (that is, the very manner in which they protested) offended her pietistic sensibilities. It is possible that this was more a question of class than of gender for Bell. If this theory is true, however, we must once again be surprised that she alienated so freely and eagerly with persons from all classes abroad.

Romancing Politics
The Middle East drew more and more of Gertrude Bell’s
Syria: The Desert and the Sown. The trip was recorded in *Syria: The Desert and the Sown*, published in 1907, in which she sheds some light on her love of travel: "To those bred under an elaborate social order, few such moments of exhilaration can come as that which stands at the threshold of wild travel." It would seem that the vast stretches of Middle Eastern wilderness gave her reprieve from the restrictive social customs practised in the cities of Europe.

It was on one of her trips to Syria that she met Thomas Edward Lawrence (later known as Lawrence of Arabia) who was digging at the archaeological site of Carchemish with Dr. David Hogarth, curator of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Bell shared the enthusiasm of Hogarth and young Lawrence for archaeology. Her knowledge of history and languages as well as her wanderings in the East gave her a sound footing for archaeological pursuits. She wrote two archaeological works, *A Thousand and One Churches* (1909) and *The Palace and Mosque at Ukhaidir* (1913), and a final travelogue of her days in Syria, *From Amurath to Amurath* (1914), before the First World War swept her, along with Hogarth and Lawrence, into the dangerous game of British war-time policy in the Middle East.

The Arab Bureau was created in 1915 to formulate British policy in the East. Hogarth was appointed director of the Bureau and Bell and Lawrence were recruited into its ranks. British forces had attempted to invade Turkey shortly after the Ottoman Empire proclaimed itself an ally of Germany. The invasion failed. Agents of the Arab Bureau, therefore, were attempting to foment revolts in Ottoman lands to erode the Empire from within.

Bell's personal relations with tribal leaders in Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Mesopotamia (roughly present-day Iraq) allowed her to report on political sympathies in those regions and open relations with tribes who sought to throw the yoke of Ottoman rule. She was posted to the city of Basra in present-day Iraq as Oriental Secretary, where she kept in close touch with the pulse of nationalist feeling and Turkish strength in the region.

As the Ottoman Empire crumbled and the First World War neared a close and the Ottoman forces were driven back toward the Turkish border, Bell moved her office to Baghdad to establish order in the newly liberated territory. While T.E. Lawrence was fighting the Turks on the eastern coast of the Arabian peninsula, Gertrude Bell was laying the foundation of government in Iraq. She became so entrenched in the politics of Mesopotamia and such a friend of the Iraqi people that she remained in Baghdad for the rest of her life.

The King Maker

European colonial powers, who still had a hold in the Middle East after the First World War, unfurled their maps and began to draw up what we know today as the modern Middle East. The British retained influence in Jordan, Mesopotamia, and Palestine. Syria experienced a brief spell of independence under Prince Feisal, whom the British had backed and with whom Lawrence had fought in an effort to defeat the Turks in Arabia. But Feisal, faced with near chaos in Damascus, finally yielded Syria to French colonial aims.

Feisal became a sore reminder to the British of their dubious war-time promises of independence for those who fought against the Turks. Feisal had led the most successful desert revolt against Ottoman rule and he expected to be rewarded in the post-war settlement. His ancestral lands, the Hejaz, in western Arabia were swiftly overrun by a rival clan under the leadership of ibn-Saud, founder of Saudi Arabia. Lawrence, feeling that the British owed a debt to Feisal in particular, pushed for a kingdom for the unrewarded Prince.

Meanwhile, Bell was campaigning for the independence of Iraq. Feisal needed a kingdom and Iraq needed a King. Lawrence and Bell arranged for elections in Iraq with the help of the British. Feisal won by an overwhelming majority and was crowned the First King of Iraq.

Gertrude Bell, much needed by Feisal in establishing order in Iraq, set about settling disputes among tribal leaders and formulating a modernization policy for the new kingdom. Feisal and Bell remained friends until the end of her life. She never married and her later days in Baghdad were spent protecting the archaeological treasures and excavation sites in her newly appointed position as Provisional Director of Archaeology. Her efforts to protect the remains of the early civilizations of Iraq laid the foundation for The National Museum of Iraq, the main wing of which was given her name by the grateful King Feisal I.

It is ironic that Gertrude Bell's efforts to help create the modern nation of Iraq—pursued with the sincere and noble belief that non-Western nations have the right to determine their own forms of government—fell within the confines of the overall short-sighted view of colonial policy that so scarred the Middle East. Colonial powers drew boundaries with more attention to oil and trade interests than tribal or religious differences. This is evident in Iraq today, where Saddam Hussein's military regime is still attempting to crush the Kurdish tribes in the north of Iraq and the Shiite religious minority in the south with the most brutal methods.

Today, it is easy to view Gertrude Bell as someone who fell just to the good side of a bad policy; someone who fought for independence from colonialism, but who, in hindsight, was part of the system that has left the Middle East reeling. And with her resistance to women's suffrage, she hardly fits the modern idea of what a feminist should be. But it is for her courageous free-thinking, which often flew in the face of convention, that we can celebrate her today. She snubbed many of the Victorian views that kept women from the public arena, forged her own path, and managed to lead a self-determined life.

Robert Kimball Green is a freelance writer living in New York City. He is currently writing on historical subjects for Franklin Watts Publishers.
HIDDEN OVARIAN CANCER, BURIED ISSUES

The medical establishment makes it clear, once again, that it doesn't need any input from women patients, thank you.

By Beverly Zakarian

A forlorn female figure—picture if you will Botticelli’s Birth of Venus rendered in trendy plum and shocking pink—adorns the cover of the program for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Consensus Development Conference on Ovarian Cancer. Her hands conceal her breasts and pubis from curious eyes in either modesty or shame and even her flowing, knee-length hair—a startling embellishment for women who are often chemotherapy-bald—is bunched up to further enshroud the genitalia. Her body is boneless, wispy, insubstantial. But it is the head that truly startles: poised submissively on the neck is a Modigliani-like face, eyes downcast, forehead furrowed; the very image of grief. A moment’s reflection...something is jarring, dislocating... ah! Where the mouth should be there is only a blank space. It is the image of a woman who cannot speak for herself, apparently, at the NIH, the image of women with ovarian cancer. The illustration reveals more about the twin issues of ovarian cancer—medical controversy and institutional arrogance—than two days of rapid-fire scientific papers presented at the conference. The controversy is understandable for a cancer that no one is certain how to treat; the arrogance is par for the course in a scientific bureaucracy that keeps women in the dark about medical issues that concern us.

Labs in Ivory Towers
The National Institutes of Health, the agency responsible for, among other things, the health of American women, is an offspring of the Department of Health and Human Services and parent to the National Cancer Institute (NCI). A sprawling scientific/medical bureaucracy and old-boy network, it was caught short by the women’s health movement of the late ‘80s. Advocates discovered that women’s health issues had been systematically excluded from research. Breast cancer research is the quintessential example—it was begun on men.

Many heartfelt press releases later, two large and controversial clinical trials were established. One was the PLCO (prostate, lung, colon, ovarian)—even here we couldn’t get
IF THERE AREN'T ANY SYMPTOMS, WHAT WOULD YOU CALL THESE?

Standard medical opinion holds that there are no symptoms of ovarian cancer. However, women often find that the symptoms they report are often rebuffed or not taken seriously. You will not find symptoms of advancing ovarian cancer on the common lists of cancer's warning signals.

"I was asymptomatic," says Sarah (all names have been changed) ironically, when asked to describe hers. No symptoms? "I was bloated, my abdomen was swollen, and I had cramps. I was getting fat, but no matter what I did, I couldn't lose weight. And I had unusual fatigue; it was as if night were descending on my body." Evocative descriptions like Sarah's were repeated over and over by women who were later diagnosed with advanced ovarian cancer.

We women listen to our abdomens. We know when our hormones kick in before menstruation; we don't need a calendar to know what time of the month it is. Cravings for chocolate? Twinges? Predictable and periodic. A tiny corner of our consciousness monitors what's happening down there from the time of our first menstrual periods, when we learn the beautifully simple fact that our bodies have a rhythm all their own. The habit of awareness continues as we age, through menopause and beyond.

Early detection is the single most important factor in determining the course of treatment and the outcome of a diagnosis of ovarian cancer. Although most ovarian growths are benign, more women die of ovarian cancer than cervical, uterine and all other gynecological cancers combined. The NIH concluded that the lifetime risk is only one in 70, but the incidence appears to be rising. In 1984, 18,500 new cases were diagnosed; this year, 24,000 women will learn they have the disease. Sadly, survival rates remain constant at only one-third of those affected.

**Warning Signs**

If you have any of these warning symptoms, go to a doctor and trust your own knowledge; don't take no for an answer.

- You feel bloated, swollen around waist and abdomen, especially if it does not go away when you get your next period. If you are using safety pins to keep your clothes together, go to a doctor! The reason might be the presence of ascites, fluid that accumulates from the metabolism of a rapidly growing tumor.
- You have abdominal pressure, discomfort, twinges, or even pain; it feels vaguely pre-menstrual, but doesn't go away.
- Unexplained spotting or bleeding requires an explanation.
- Other possible symptoms include low backache, urinary urgency, a feeling of fullness when eating. You are tired, listless; you don't feel well.

**Risk Factors**

- Family history of ovarian, breast, or colon cancer on either mother's or father's side of the family. Although hereditary risk of ovarian cancer is low, a very small percentage of women have a specific gene that places them at high risk for the disease. Be sure that the doctor has a record of your family medical history extending to second and third degree relatives if possible, that is, at least to grandparents and parents' brothers and sisters.
- Age is a risk factor, especially if any of the above conditions are present. Although medical tradition holds that ovarian cancer is a disease of older women, in fact more than 60 % of all cases are found in women younger than 65. The relative risk of younger women is debatable, but from about the age of 35, risk escalates. Many cancer advocates believe that the incidence of ovarian and breast cancers has risen dramatically in women in their thirties, but this remains to be statistically borne out.
- Women who have had breast cancer have twice the average risk of developing ovarian cancer, while women with ovarian cancer have four times the risk of developing breast cancer. The use of oral contraceptives might lower the risk of ovarian cancer, but taking hormones may also introduce additional risk. The use of fertility-stimulating hormones may increase risk as well.

**Early Detection**

The NIH did recommend a thorough gynecologic exam annually, more frequently if there are any risk factors (although they did not specify that it should be done by a gynecologist; patient activists believe it should). A careful exam begins with a _simultaneous_ vaginal and rectal (medspeak: "bimanual rectovaginal") internal examination. Although the technique is not yet standard, the usefulness of a simultaneous vaginal and rectal internal examination was emphasized at the NIH meeting. The vaginal Pap smear for cervical cancer is NOT diagnostic of ovarian cancer. Women with risk factors or symptoms may need a CA 125 test and transvaginal—not transabdominal—ultrasonography (TVS). A new test, color doppler imaging (CDI), may be used as a supplement until its value as a diagnostic tool is established. For one patient, Bonnie, it already is. Her doctor attempted to explain away her symptoms—bloating, tiredness, and some blood spotting—as early menopause (she is 45). Only when she had CDI was a baseball-sized tumor found. "Until then," she said, "my gynecologist didn't believe it."
exclusive attention) and the other misnamed “healthy women’s trial” of tamoxifen as chemoprevention for breast cancer (actually a study of women at high risk for the disease).

But with the harsh light of the media momentarily glaring elsewhere, NIH seems to be back to business as usual. The ovarian cancer meeting was the 96th in a series of Consensus Development Conferences run by the Office of Medical Applications of Research (OMAR) to develop agreement on treatment issues so that advanced clinical practices may be recommended to clinicians. Questions intended to be the key ones are posed, and researchers in the specific medical field are invited to present their views. A panel is appointed to deliberate and arrive at consensus recommendations, which are announced at a press conference.

In theory, efficient and practical. In practice, problematic.

In April, it was ovarian cancer’s turn under OMAR’s knife. When patient advocates learned of the planned meeting, they raised important questions of their own in a “Patients’ Consensus Statement,” including:

- Is consensus needed at this time, or might standardization suppress diversity of thinking and innovative research?
- Are the five questions advanced by the NIH the key ones to ask about ovarian cancer, and will they help advance the science?
- Does the research presented fairly represent the range of thinking?
- Are the interests of patients represented?

Once More: Seen But Not Heard

The cover art for the meeting program proved prescient. Patient and advocates were barred from participating in the deliberations. In responding to their pleas, Dr. John Ferguson, longtime director of OMAR, took a patronizing stance. When someone reminded him, off the record, that both Dr. Samuel Broder, director of the NCI, and Dr. Harold Varmus, new NIH Director, had issued statements supporting public involvement in similar meetings, his response was, “This is the way we’ve always done things, and this is the way we are going to continue to do things.”

Indeed, Elsa Bray, Ferguson’s assistant, seemed unaware of the irony involved when she insisted earnestly to one advocate, “We need people like you—in the audience.”

Particularly offensive to patient groups was the appointment to the panel, as a “consumer representative,” a woman who has never had cancer herself and lacks the expertise that was readily available to OMAR through the patient groups. As the government’s standard designee whenever it must deliberate and arrive at consensus on schedule allowed little opportunity for discussion and less for dissent. Real diversity of opinion came primarily from the audience rather than the scientists, many of whom have evidently been recipients of NIH research support and may wish to continue to be.

The conference did come to some conclusions. Among them were these:

- Mass screening is not feasible because it could lead to excessive surgeries to rule out suspected malignancies.
- Surgical removal of the ovaries is recommended for women at higher risk and for those undergoing pelvic surgery when childbearing is completed or at age 35.
- Surgery for suspected ovarian malignancy should be performed by a specialist in gynecological oncology.
- Patient advocates firmly believe that more questions were raised than resolved at the meeting. For example, in arguing against early screening, Dr. Vicki Selzer, the meeting’s chair, said, “We may be increasing morbidity and mortality with screening.” Because one of the many unanswered questions is whether the risk of surgery is greater than the risk of late diagnosis, patient advocates fear that cost-containment is the primary concern in the recommendations against screening.

Other urgent questions were never even discussed. Why did some women, under widely varying treatment regimens, become long-term survivors? Is there something about their disease, or their own physiology or biochemistry, that makes them more likely to survive? Is their treatment responsible? Or are they just lucky?

The meeting cost taxpayers’ health care dollars. Was the money well spent? Can women with ovarian cancer feel confident of the results? Or are we being asked once again to play the voiceless, powerless role of the Botticelli wannabe? And one more critical question: Does this meeting inspire confidence that our government can manage health care reform in the best interests of patients?

The sad, bitter irony for women is that the deadly disease arises in the same organs that are essential to the creation of new life. We need answers for ourselves and our daughters. It is up to us to get them.

Beverly Zakarian is a designer and writer turned activist as a result of her own experience with cancer. She is the Executive Director of the Cancer Patients Action Alliance (CAN ACT), an advocacy group...
Inequality still flourishes in the playground. What's behind the rigid gender

Last week Linda went to the drive-up window at McDonald's and ordered a kid's meal for her daughter. "Is this for a boy or a girl?" asked the clerk. Annoyed, Linda turned to Shaina and translated.

"Do you want the Hot Wheels or the Barbie?"

"I want the car, Mommy."

How can this conversation be possible in 1994? Our children's world is littered with the sex role stereotypes we adults have tossed in the garbage.

It is 25 years since newspapers stopped categorizing their help-wanted sections by male and female. It is illegal to deny a job to someone on the basis of gender. But despite the resolve of many parents of the '70s, in the '90s there is still a firmly-entrenched time warp in the toy store. Girls play with dolls, tot-sized housewares, and make-up, reflecting the holy trinity of childcare, housework, and seduction. Boys play with cars, construction sets, and superheroes; that is, they operate vehicles, erect buildings, and rescue people.

Obsessed by Gender

The rigid role-typing starts at birth. Try dressing a child in a gender-neutral way and see what happens. People are mortified when they guess the wrong sex. Once when I was out with my four-week-old son, who was dressed in yellow, an admiring grandma commented, "What a pretty girl." "Thanks, but he's a boy," I responded. Visibly embarrassed, she quickly countered, "What a big boy!"

Something similar happened after I gave birth to my daughter. Like all newborns, she bore a remarkable resemblance to Winston Churchill. However, the nurse felt socially obligated to comment on her girlish features. "Only little girls have such feminine eyebrows," I was told. In fact, she does have beautiful brows, which angle sharply down, just like her father's.

Beyond Pink and Blue

Studies show that girls are handled, cuddled, and spoken to more than boys, and we have all observed that parents bounce and roughhouse more with their sons than with their daughters.

By kindergarten, children have received thousands of hours of gender conditioning. We also interpret their individual characteristics according to our preconceived notions, disregarding what doesn't fit. Watch a child playing quietly, building something in a sand box. Do you see a good girl playing quietly or a boy who is a budding engineer? Same sandbox, only now the child has lost interest and is throwing sand. Is she manipulating for attention or is he acting out his natural aggressive instincts?

Culture Cops

Why? Why is a tantrum-throwing girl labeled manipulative and a tantrum-throwing boy called aggressive? Why is a clinging girl, who cries when Mommy leaves, seen as timid, while the same behavior in a boy is labeled oedipal? (Or, as one parent put it, "Little boys just have a thing about their mommies!")

Children can even become their own gender police. After all, one of the jobs of childhood is trying to figure out what it means to be a girl or a boy. My five-year-old daughter was told by another little girl, "You shouldn't watch Power Rangers, that's a boy's
This year, give the gift your friends are sure to love... and save up to 20%*, too!

My 1st gift to:
Name
Address
City State Zip

My 2nd gift to:
Name
Address
City State Zip

My name is:
Name
Address
City State Zip

Include my subscription  Total order at $11.75 each $
□ New  □ Renew  □ Payment enclosed  □ Bill me

Holiday Gift will be mailed in your name. New subscriptions begin with the Winter 1995 issue. Canadian subscriptions add $4; other foreign add $7 (surface mail) or $20 per year (air mail) payable in US funds. ON THE ISSUES is published quarterly. Savings off the $14.95 basic 1 year price.
categories of a child's world?

By Ellen J. Reifler

The latest toy, the Power Ranger (below), is rocketing off toystore shelves, while Barbie (left) still reigns supreme with girls.

show.” Clearly, my child could skip this show without missing out on a culturally enriching experience. But it does make me angry that someone is trying to stop her from identifying with superheroes (Anyway, at least two of the five “Power Rangers” are women).

What’s going on here? It seems so easy for parents to accept, and even encourage, this sex-typing. And so hard to accept the obvious truth that children's personality traits and interests are not gender-based.

One reason may be a deeply-ingrained desire to perpetuate the family line. Parents may want their son to grow up to be the kind of father who willingly shares the childcare, but they fear that if he’s too "sensitive" there may be no grandchildren at all.

But parental fears probably go deeper than this. Most of us didn’t have kids to create a grandchildren factory. Besides, we’re all aware of gay men and lesbians who joyfully had babies or adopted them and who are wonderful parents.

I believe that the real answer lies in our deeply rooted homophobia, grafted onto our cultural conditioning. Some of our best friends may be gay but most parents are dead set against such a fate for their own children. Partly, they fear the social stigma. Parents are not lulled by the veneer of acceptance found on TV talk shows. They know the world is harsher and harder on those who are different, and they want to protect their children from that reality.

Add to this the fear of AIDS and you have a potent brew of paranoia. And parents’ fears are not only for their children, but for themselves, too. What would it say about them if their children turned out to be gay? Deep-seated fears like these explain why so many people who believe in equal opportunity still want to preserve the illusion that boys and girls are intrinsically different. Unfortunately, the result is that these fears, unconscious or deliberate, limit their children’s world.

A Modest Proposal

What do I suggest? Since I don’t advocate censorship or toy burning, I don’t want to ban “Barbie” or “GI Joe.” What I would like to do is get rid of the artificial categories. When I walk into a toy store, I want the clerk to ask, “Do you want construction toys or dolls?” instead of “Is this for a boy or a girl?” Furthermore, if I were in charge, I would put the action figures on the same shelf as the Barbies. Yes, it will be a hundred years, if ever, before boys buy baby dolls in the same proportion as girls. So what? My point is, let’s open up their universe and not limit it. Give girls more chances to build and to rescue and give boys more dolls to love.

I have seen one of my own children, at age four, play happily with a doll house and then 20 minutes later, stage a fight with toy soldiers. I can remember watching my son, at age six, play fight games with his favorite action figure (actually a boy doll but never described as such in TV ads) in the afternoon. At night, he made a bed out of a shoebox and lovingly tucked his action figure into it. Despite all the messages my six-year-old been exposed to, he remained open to the whole range of “Let’s pretend.” Shouldn’t we help that process? Life will place limits on our children all too soon. It’s our responsibility to expand their world and let them find their own individual place in it.

Ellen J. Reifler, M.P.H., is a Boston-based freelance writer. A former hospital and women’s clinic administrator, she is co-chairwoman of the Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition’s October 1994 conference entitled “Breast Cancer and the Environment: Our Health at Risk.”

ON THE ISSUES FALL 1994

49
In her first novel since winning the 1991 Nobel Prize for Fiction, Nadine Gordimer gives us an engrossing portrait in the character of Vera Stark, a middle-aged woman in the painful process of making what may be the first fresh start of her life. For years, Gordimer, a white South African and long-standing foe of apartheid, has cast her perceptive eye on fellow South Africans, white and black, to show how politics and personality intertwine in her country. Subtly, in *None to Accompany Me*, she draws parallels between Stark's attempt to live honestly and the first rocky stages of South African independence. By the novel's end, Stark has stripped away her every mask as South Africa has stripped away the deceptions underlying its national identity. It is clear that Gordimer's extraordinary ability to illuminate character and build narrative tension gets more exceptional with time.

Vera Stark is a lawyer and executive in a legal foundation that reclaims land from white owners for dispossessed blacks. When we first meet her she is giving a party, celebrating with her husband, Bennet, not only their wedding anniversary but Nelson Mandela's release and the opening of the prisons. Their son, Ivan, is visiting from London and joins the group of friends, black and white, who had worked long years against apartheid.

Contrasted to the celebration is a flashback that reveals a deception that Stark has perpetrated on her family with barely a twinge of dismay. We witness her final parting from her first husband, a break-up brought about by her passionate affair with Bennet. Their good-bye includes a spontaneous sexual encounter that leaves Stark unsure about which man is Ivan's father. Acknowledgement of her strong sexual nature—to her way of thinking a form of self-recognition, of honesty—impelled her to leave her husband and marry Bennet. But as the years pass, she realizes that this first deception has influenced many of her subsequent personal choices.

When, for instance, she is attracted in mid-life to a younger man it becomes, to her way of thinking, axiomatic that she will have an affair with him. "If Ben had taught her that the possibilities of eroticism were beyond experience with one man, then this meant that the total experience of love-making did not end with him." She continues to make love to both men under the credo that anything is permitted "so long as no one was hurt." When her daughter, Annick, reminds Stark of the night she sat at the kitchen table doing homework and her mother arrived happily worn out by her lover, Stark sees that Annick's perception affected her whole concept of her place in her mother's life. For the passion they offered, it was clear that men came first.

No longer able to rationalize the hurt she has inflicted on those close to her, Stark finds herself in desperate need of salvation. And even as she knows she can help to effect change on the political front, that change is not altogether positive. Good people will die in the process. The blacks with whom she works understand that there is violence and bloodshed; to function effectively she must understand it, too. But the implications are only made clear as she becomes more deeply involved in her work.

Many novelists are more than content to create the personal, familial lives of their protagonists. That is, after
After an ostentatious banquet with some tract people from what they really lack."

Stark is preoccupied with the multitude of obstacles that must be surmounted as South Africa establishes a new government. Close as she is to the action, her whiteness keeps her from fully understanding what apartheid has done to blacks. A friend at the office, a young clerk named Oupa, sheds some light on the experience. Like many blacks, Oupa spent several years in prison. Recalling the murderers and gangsters who were with him, he tells her prison meant nothing to them, that they could intimidate anyone. "She made no remark," writes Gordimer, "on what he had just innocently confirmed: something of the unacknowledged self that came into being in prison still existed within him, a pride in and defiant community with anyone, everyone, who had the daring to defy the power of white men, to take from them what was not theirs, whether by political rebellion or by the gangster's gun; silent because this was a self that, by nature of what she was, could not exist among her selves."

The novel's central political action is the struggle of Stark's foundation. With the help of a black colleague, Zeph Rapulana—a man whose magnetism will change the course of her life—she manages to get the land for her constituents, but not before the Afrikaner farmer and his henchmen have killed nine blacks. She is horrified, and it is only Rapulana's companionship that enables her to carry on. Floundering as she sets a new course, Stark senses in Rapulana an old soul, a person ageless, wise, committed, and indomitable. As bloodshed and violence stain their land, she looks to him as an anchor in whatever may be the new political reality.

As she tries to make sense of the surreal kaleidoscope that is South Africa, Stark realizes that the dissonance extends to her marriage. Years ago Bennet gave up trying to make a success as a sculptor in order to support the family. The businesses he's worked in are anathema to her. While Vera's foundation "upheld the right of land and shelter, the object of Bennet's market research consultancy was to discover enticements that distract people from what they really lack." After an ostentatious banquet with some of his clients, she muses, "the power of being white has been extrasensory for so long, they feel it within them like a secret ability to bend metal by looking at it." But what is most disturbing is the realization that Bennet lives only for her. Stark does not want that burden; does not believe human beings should find their sole meaning in the existence of others. Almost brutally, she separates herself from him.

Gordimer moves back and forth between the public and private Stark, weaving her different selves together so astutely that her protagonist achieves tragic dimensions. Selfish, willful, kind, committed, Stark is dislocated until she can find a way to face herself. She doesn't like herself for deceiving a loved one, and wrestles throughout the novel with the realization that she consistently puts her needs ahead of others. Gordimer does not make her lovable; she makes her real.

A quote from the 17th century Japanese poet Basho introduces the book: "None to accompany me on this path: Nightfall in Autumn." It sums up this superb novel, which is ultimately about the search for spiritual peace.

Valerie Gladstone writes frequently on arts and culture for numerous publications, including Mirabella, Elle, and the New York Times.

MIDDLEMARCH
by George Eliot (Modern Library, N.Y., $19 hardcover)

By Annabel Davis-Goff

Yuppies, we knew, were greedy, shallow, and small. They made their own pasta. They would rather play racquetball than read Middlemarch. "Go home and read Middlemarch," Eleanor once shouted at a pastel jogger, who glanced sideways to see Eleanor and me zipping by in Eleanor's car.

— Lorrie Moore, Anagrams

Middlemarch rather than, say, Pride and Prejudice or Wuthering Heights, one offering more fun and the other greater passion. Both books by women and milestones in the progress of the 19th century novel. There are novels which are great works of literature and there are novels which are both great and alter forever, for writer and reader alike, our perception of what the novel is and can be. Middlemarch along with, for instance, Ulysses, Mrs. Dalloway and Tristram Shandy is such a novel. Why is this and how did Eliot do it?

Why is Middlemarch a great novel? Because of its range, its substance and, above all, because of its ideas. Within a plot and a cast of characters as substantial as one of Dickens's most ambitious works, George Eliot describes a time and a place—English provincial life in the early 19th century, on the brink of change—with a complete picture of the social order, accelerated political and scientific progress, a psychological portrait of men, women, old, young, good, evil, weak, strong, intelligent, stupid, from the landed gentry and intelligentsia to the narrow-minded and illiterate. Above all it is a novel of ideas. The central idea—the one which touches us most closely—is one of aspiration. The main characters, Dorothea and Lydgate, have what Eliot describes as "a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity." Dorothea aspires to "be part of the divine power against evil," and Lydgate, the doctor, seeks to alleviate suffering and to solve some of the mysteries of the still primitive science of medicine. Even the minor characters, as carefully and sympathetically drawn as the heroes, heroines, and villains, dramatize what the scholar W.J. Harvey described as "man's various attempts, often fumbling and frustrated, to chart his destiny in a world so deeply swayed by the random tides of change and contingency." Given the loftiness of their aspirations, Dorothea and Lydgate both make egregious choices. Dorothea, blinded by her certainty of what the novel is and can be. "A certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity." Dorothea aspires to "be part of the divine power against evil," and Lydgate, the doctor, seeks to alleviate suffering and to solve some of the mysteries of the still primitive science of medicine. Even the minor characters, as carefully and sympathetically drawn as the heroes, heroines, and villains, dramatize what the scholar W.J. Harvey described as "man's various attempts, often fumbling and frustrated, to chart his destiny in a world so deeply swayed by the random tides of change and contingency." Given the loftiness of their aspirations, Dorothea and Lydgate both make egregious choices. Dorothea, blinded by her certainty of what the novel is and can be.
agent, and vain Rosamund Vincy, and defeated by her bourgeois cunning and self-serving practicality, he gets into debt and compromises himself. Although the ‘random ties of change and contingency’ present the opportunities for tragedy, it is the weakness or fatal flaws of the characters which harm or destroy them. This is what makes Middlemarch, among other things, a tragedy.

How did Eliot do it? The sad news for us, living in this era of condensed books and unearned grace, is that she did it the hard way. She worked for it. She found her material—ideas, plot, and characters (the talent was presumably, like all talent, Godgiven) through education and life. The random ties gave Eliot an advantage they withheld from Jane Austen and the Bronte sisters, social mobility, the most important aspect of which was, perhaps, being born into a less elevated but also less restricted social strata. The education, to a great extent self-given and entirely self-motivated, was constant. Her life was a series of clearly defined steps and huge changes, and she gathered material from each step and learned from each change. From an intensely religious young woman who searched her soul about the morality of reading fiction and later in life claimed that her right hand was larger than her left from working in her father’s dairy, Eliot became a woman who lived with a sense of duty and a desire to broaden her experience, and to meet many of the great thinkers and writers of her time. Lewes was protective and supportive, filtering unpleasantness from the outside world, helping with research, pouring tea while she talked to visitors. Although Eliot had no children of her own, she was a devoted stepmother and brought up Lewes’ children.

Thanks to the recent Masterpiece Theatre series of the BBC production, Middlemarch is enjoying a revival (it hit number one on the English bestseller list). This handsome Modern Library edition has a brief introduction by A.S. Byatt, author of Possession, which won the Booker Prize. For those who wish to read a more detailed critical analysis, the Penguin paperback edition has an excellent introduction by the late W.J. Harvey. In either case, take Lorrie Moore’s advice. Go home and read what Virginia Woolf described as “…one of the few English novels written for grown-up people.”

Annabel Davis-Goff’s most recent book is Walled Gardens, a family memoir. She is currently editing an anthology of gambling in literature.

Gallant’s people, like most of us, lead ordinary lives touched by disappointment. And they are introduced in prose so tenderly detailed that each becomes a familiar spirit. If I may resort to our masculinized language of praise, her command of the simple, direct, undorned but emotion-freighted sentence is masterly.

The most recent Gallant portrait gallery is to be discovered in Across the Bridge, a collection, her ninth, published last December by Random House and about to be issued in paperback by Carroll & Graf. Since 1950, she has also produced two novels and a book of essays, but it is as a writer of short fiction that Gallant is surely a virtuoso. A short story, she once commented, is “what you see when you look out the window.” The difference between Gallant and the rest of us is that she has x-ray vision. If prize juries did not so routinely esteem size—more pages, more characters, more events—she might, by now, have been garlanded with the honors usually conferred on novelists.

Gallant’s venues are familiar territory. Most of the 11 stories here take place in Paris where she settled more than 40 years ago. Four are centered on Montreal, the city of her birth and childhood. Her emotional neighborhoods are islands of emigres and spiritual orphans, of people who talk and hardly communicate, of the old disconnected from younger generations, and the young tethered to ingratidune. It should come as no surprise that Gallant’s literary sensibility has been shaped by her early life. She was ten when her father, a painter, died; her mother swiftly remarried, relocated in New York, and apparently lost interest in her only child.
Some years ago, Gallant told an interviewer, “I think it is true that in many, many of the things I write, someone has vanished...And there is often a sense that nothing is very safe and you’re often walking on a very thin crust.”

I don’t want to suggest that her fiction is relentlessly gloom-ridden. In fact, she has a fine gift for surprise, for the glint of humor or wry commentary that illuminates a character or a culture. In one of a series of Montreal stories about a French-Canadian family, a mate is found for Marie, who lacks the cerebral power to make her way unaided through life. The girl’s personal explanation for her odd state is that “the blood in her arms and legs congealed, leaving her brain unattended.” The widowed mother who supplements her income with fancy sewing instructs her other daughter that she must never describe her as a seamstress; she is to say, “My mother is clever with her hands.”

In “The Fenton Child,” a teenager caring for a stranger’s baby imagines it knows her thoughts. Infants, she believes, “came into the world with a gift for mind reading, an instinct that faded once they began to grasp the meaning of words.” It is tempting to think of these fluent surprising sentences as effortless, but I would wager money that Gallant slaves at every feathery line.

The title story, “Across the Bridge,” offers us Sylvie as she confronts lavish wedding plans for her arranged marriage, and complains about the efforts demanded “just so I can marry a man I don’t love.” Sylvie’s mother responds that she hasn’t tried: “It takes patience, like practicing scales.” This is France where middle class rituals are so systematized no one needs a rule book. Gallant’s tales of these matters are a bit like vivid anthropological accounts of tribal life on some remote island; the customs are both exotic and familiar.

And they are touched with sadness for trapped girls. Sylvie is an object who must find a way to believe that she is the engineer of her own future. After a day of large boredoms and small surprises with her fiance, she persuades herself that “true life” was “almost ready to let me in” and believes herself to be happy. The reader suspects she has merely learned to make the best of an arrangement. And in Montreal, after the dim little seamstress’s daughter is married off, her older sister suddenly under-
of my status, name, and the investments I had arranged. They knew my motivation was not financial gain; the possibility of the clinic making a profit was minimal; my goal was to make it self-supporting.

Osipov began to claim he was directed by his “collective” (the employees of the hospital) to accept only a controlling share. I knew that this was an outright lie. My deputies had been at the meetings in which the employees had voted to move ahead with an equal share, and they told him so to his face. I caucused with my aides; they believed that this was a negotiating strategy, political theater, designed to gain a controlling share, and that in the end he would sign.

I was on a deadline. I had scheduled a press conference to announce the signing of the agreement; 70 international journalists planned to attend. I would have to cancel it. I gave Osipov my ultimatum: by noon the next day he would have to agree to the terms laid out in February, or the deal was off.

He looked at me quite arrogantly and said, “If you are so concerned about saving women’s lives, what’s one percent to you?” I replied coolly, “It’s because I want to save lives that I have to have control.”

The next day, at noon, I asked Osipov for his decision. He answered, “fifty-one/forty-nine.”

It hit me like a body blow. So much work undone, so many hopes dashed. I stood up, shook his hand, wished him well, and walked out of the room, my dreams on hold. Osipov’s aides were amazed. If Osipov was surprised he seemed to hide it well. After all, I am sure he felt that this “little girl from America,” who came with such big dreams, who spent so much money, who went to so much trouble, had arranged a huge press conference, would not walk out. He underestimated me.

The press conference was canceled, but I did give many private interviews. The reporter from *Izvestia* was dismayed. She asked me, “What will Russian women do now? How long will they have to wait?” We discussed organizing a feminist grassroots movement. She cautioned me that Russian women would be difficult to mobilize on an issue of women’s rights, but that if we could appeal to them to mobilize for the benefit of their children and then slip in issues concerning their own lives we would have a better chance. I mused over the irony of women once again reinforcing the traditional role of being there for others—Mother and Wife—and not for themselves. Indeed, the women who had begun to “do it for themselves” were in great danger. I met with a young American woman who had been working on setting up the first battered women’s shelter in Russia. The day that she opened the hotline they received 400 calls. But in the last year, two of the “volunteers” were murdered by their husbands.

Now, back in New York, I think of the two murdered women, of the birth of feminism in Russia, and of all the midwives in attendance who must put their lives on the line, and sometimes lose them, in the process of bringing this feminist consciousness to life. I tell myself that the struggle for reproductive freedom is a global one, that the battlefields may change, the strategies vary, but the war remains the same. I remember that the qualities needed for the long haul are patience, persistence, and stamina, and that the answer to the reporter’s question—how long will Russian women have to wait— is that they will have to wait as long as it takes to birth a society where women have full reproductive freedom. This midwife intends to be there to help make it happen.
people hurt by pornography a cause of action, a way of going into court and holding the pornographers and profiteers responsible for what they are doing to people to make that money. It's not any kind of censorship issue, it's not prior restraint. But it does say, "If you hurt a human being when you do this, you're going to pay for it."

LEWIS: I support that effort. That's what we had to do in the civil rights movement.

DWORKIN: I think the civil rights movement showed the world that the concept of human dignity is not an abstract idea. It has to be real when you walk into a public place, it has to be real in the way that you can make your living. It has to be real in the way that people talk to you; it has to be real in a way that affects your self-regard. The classic civil rights struggle was around the ways in which African-Americans were excluded from the body politic in the U.S. and were excluded from the experience of human dignity.

LEWIS: Right. We were visible, but invisible. And that's the way women have been treated. Blacks, African-Americans, became objects in a sense, to be used, to be abused. Women are subjected to that same status in American society. As participants in the civil rights movement, we African-Americans had to make ourselves visible. During the 1960s, there was a lot of dirt and filth under the American rug, in the cracks and in the corners—and people didn't see it. So we had to do something. By dramatizing the evil of segregation and racial discrimination, by dramatizing the denial of human dignity, we made ourselves visible and then you had the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and that type of thing. Now in 1994, as we move toward the 21st century, women have to become more visible. They have to bring the dirt out of the bedroom, out of the closet, and let people see it. So, we are no longer invisible.

DWORKIN: And the visibility includes, then, the fact that when somebody goes into court and says, "I have been hurt in this and this and this way," they suddenly also have speech that's visible. So I thank you for your support of the ordinance, because it does seem to me that there is an apathy developing out of some kind of fear. People seem terribly afraid of change. They seem terrified—they seem to feel things can only get worse. That nothing can ever get better. That nothing is ever a chance for those who have been hurt to say the ways in which they have been hurt and to try to get the society to redress the grievance.

And I really believe that the most marginalized women in our society are those who are or who have been in prostitution, who are usually kids who have run away from home, who were sexually abused as children, and who, of course, come from poverty, not from wealth. This is the population that the pornographers exploit, primarily, in making their product.

And then their product gets used on women, especially in the home, which is that dangerous place for women to be. And so, we have no homes. I mean, we're kind of the ultimate homeless population. You link to the law to set the standard for the kind of human community you want to create. What equality is going to be. What is it that you absolutely do not have a right to subject other people to.

HOFFMAN: Aside from the legislative process, how do you get a spiritual sense of values to the country again? Because I truly believe that we've lost it, if we ever had it. How do you bring that back?

LEWIS: When you hurt another person, you are hurting yourself. It's a type of self-hatred. Because to deny someone else their own humanity, you're almost denying your own humanity. It's a lack of what I call self-respect, self-worth and as you suggested, you've got to be in charge, you've got to be superior. You've got to have power. You've got to control somebody.

HOFFMAN: We're looking at a society that only gains power through the diminution of others. How does that begin to change?

LEWIS: Through the whole question of community—that we live in a community. That we're not alone, that we're in this boat together, we're family. I don't mean family in the traditional sense, I mean the human family.

HOFFMAN: A few books have been written recently about middle-class black rage, talking mainly about male rage. What is happening there?

LEWIS: I think there is a feeling that we have made it to the point and we cannot go any further. It's similar to what women call the glass ceiling. And so you have a growing sense of despair among black middle-class males and among young blacks, in particular.

HOFFMAN: I understand you're involved in the Coalition for Soviet Jewry and you have disavowed Khalid Abdul Muhammed, I believe, and Louis Farrakhan. That must have taken a lot of courage to stand up to.

LEWIS: Well, I think that the great majority of my colleagues in the Congressional Black Caucus have said we will not have an agreement with Mr. Muhammed or Mr. Farrakhan. During the 60's, I saw blacks and Jews shedding their blood together, dying together. There was a sense of solidarity and any time you see racism, big-
Paradoxes of Gender

Judith Lorber

This compelling book challenges our most basic assumptions about gender. Arguing that gender is a social institution comparable to the economy, the family, and religion in its significance and consequences, Lorber calls into question its inevitability and necessity.

"A compendium of every conceivable way in which contemporary industrial society tries to assign women to second class status." — Alan Wolf, The New Republic $13.00

New in Paperbound

Mother-Infant Bonding

A Scientific Fiction

Diane E. Eyer

"Move over Hillary: working mothers have a new heroine. She's Diane E. Eyer whose lucid and dispassionate analysis of the bonding mystique not only punctures a hyperinflated theory but beautifully skewers those experts on motherhood who make no distinction between science and wishful thinking." — Laura Shapiro, New York Times Book Review $13.00

The Lenses of Gender

Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality

Sandra Lipsitz Bem

"A stimulating and tightly argued treatise on how American and Western culture defines gender.... Offers suggestions for revaluing the male 'standard,' for increasing social support of the bearing and raising of children, and for dismantling gender polarization. A thought-provoking study." — Kirkus Reviews $14.00

To order call 1-800-YUP-READ

Yale University Press

P.O. Box 209040, New Haven, CT 06520

— Henry, you think you are alone. One of the important things for a political movement to do is to let you know that you're not alone. If you're battered and you ask for help, nobody will help you—or help.
you enough—and then you think that not only are you alone, but nothing you say means anything to anyone or makes any sense. And you start to feel as if you don’t even exist, because you can’t convince anyone that you matter.

LEWIS: I think part of the problem is the mindset of so many men in places of responsibility, in positions of power. There need to be more women in powerful and responsible positions who can use the resources at their hands to make a difference.

HOFFMAN: Andrea, why haven’t those individual experiences of pain motivated women to come together collectively, and put all their bodies on the line to make these kind of changes? That’s what happened in the civil rights movement.

DWORKIN: The way women are situated in society is almost exactly the opposite of the way African-Americans were to white people, which is to say, we’re not segregated—in a sense we are almost forcibly integrated.

Women run the gamut in personalities, capabilities, and possibilities, but we’re really socialized to compete with each other for men. And to overcome that, to have a communal solidarity is hard. The way we’re socialized, including sexual abuse, breaks us into pieces inside. We try to fix it but maybe fixing is not what we need to do. Maybe we need to let all the broken parts sort of shake around a little and make a little bit of noise.

Many women believe that they are being hurt because the person who is hurting them has been insufficiently loved and that if that person is loved enough, that person will stop—and that’s not the case. Why doesn’t this country commit real resources to making women’s lives safe? Is it that many of the men who control those resources still have this contempt toward women?

We are visible, but not seen. And visible always when we are at our most vulnerable, most naked, most degraded, most...with our legs spread open, I mean, literally, when we don’t even have the defenses of our own body posture to protect us. Women will not admit how afraid they are of men. And so there’s a kind of stance of, you know, “I’m a woman, I’m free, I’m for equal rights.” But that draws a line beyond which women won’t go, because they will not face the fear that they experience, and therefore, that they cannot overcome.

HOFFMAN: And women don’t really connect with each other. There are major philosophical and class fault lines within the women’s or feminist movement. Pornography is a major one; abortion is another; homosexuality is another. So women themselves divide and conquer and don’t coalesce. So how can we get these two movements to have a communal agenda?

LEWIS: I think we have to reveal a coalition that transcends sex, race, class, all of them. Because there are people in America that are being dehumanized. And we have to find a way to dramatize it so people can see it, people can feel it. They felt Selma. The American people couldn’t stand seeing innocent people being trampled with horses and beaten with night sticks. And we have to find a way, even in Congress, even in the White House, the city halls, the state capitols, the board rooms, to sensitize, to make people feel it in their guts.

I think we have to organize and keep organizing. We don’t rally anymore. We don’t rock any more. We don’t march anymore. We don’t stir up hell anymore. This country is too quiet and the world is passing us by. We need to agitate.

DWORKIN: I think that the dignity of the people in South Africa and the dignity of the leadership there, the magnanimity of their souls, has been a real lesson for all of us who thought that it’s not possible to remain deeply human when being so horribly oppressed. I feel that the women’s movement came directly out of the civil rights movement, sometimes in opposition to the male chauvinism of the civil rights movement, but also that it continues with the same goals that the civil rights movement had. Very inadequate sometimes, in being able to say what those goals are, with very impoverished means to confront society in a way that will make our meaning clear.

But I also find myself in a women’s movement that refuses to do what is necessary. It wants to settle for the few gains for the few professional women that made them. Still, the women’s movement now is certainly an international movement.
“Offers hope for the multitudes of women who have swallowed their pain.” Evelyn C. White, editor of The Black Women’s Health Book

Based on in-depth life history interviews with African-American, Latina, and lesbian women, this book chronicles the effects of racism, sexism, acculturation, and sexual abuse on women’s bodies and eating patterns. Thompson dispels popular stereotypes of anorexia and bulimia as symptoms of vanity and stresses the risks of mislabeling what is often a way of coping with society’s own disorders.

$17.95 cloth/jacketed 176 pages

at bookstores or from
University of Minnesota Press
1-800-388-3863

HOFFMAN: Oh, absolutely.

DWORKIN: Yet in every country of the world, we see women who really think it’s all right to have women on street corners selling themselves. They insist on defining that for us as an example of choice, instead of it being an example of what happens when you have been deprived of human sovereignty from the time you were a child. And that causes me great despair. But I think that what the Congressman is saying is very important and I just hope that women will listen. Because you don’t make change without sacrifice.

LEWIS: Frederick Douglass said that in 1857: “There can be no progress without agitation.” You’ve got to make some noise, you got to be willing to move. You cannot get lost. You cannot stay still. You have to have hope and you got to stay in motion. You cannot become bitter, you cannot become hostile. Women have got to continue to push. Life is a constant struggle. It shouldn’t be. But it is a constant struggle.

I speak a great deal about the beloved community. And it’s not here yet, maybe it’s in the process, but it’s going to take more than one year, a few years. It may take a lifetime, but we’ve all got to continue to work on it.

DWORKIN: How did you deal with the factional fighting inside the movement?

LEWIS: I saw these friends, brothers, and sisters as part of a large family. You
have some of your most bitter disagreements and conflicts with the people you’re closest to. You don’t necessarily fall out with them. You may fall out for a day, a week, a long month, or maybe a year. But somehow, in some way, you have to reconnect. You don’t have the luxury of being divided. And so you regroup and you rebuild and you move on. And in some coalitions, you work on those things that you can agree on and then maybe you have to drop someone here and pick someone else up and go on the next mile, down this long revolving or evolving rambling road. It’s like keeping your eyes on the prize; you just keep on, keep going.

In the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, we used to say, you go through this period, you go through this phase, you bring people to the point they can come and they may not be able to make the next step, maybe around this bend. And you may have to leave some people at this point, and maybe they will catch on later and maybe they won’t.

HOFFMAN: But you keep going. You keep going.

LEWIS: You hang in there, you don’t give up. You don’t get lost in the sea of despair. You just keep going. And I tell you the journey that I’ve been on has been an incredible journey. You know, you have the high places and the low places. You have the bitter moments and the sweet moments. But the changes that I have seen up here in Washington are just unreal, unbelievable.

If someone had told me in 1963, when I was speaking at the March on Washington here when I was 23 years old or when I was being beaten on the bridge in Selma in 1965 when I was 25, that one day I would be in Congress, in the leadership of the House, a Chief Deputy Majority Whip, that I would have an opportunity to go to South Africa and meet with Chief Buthelezi, Nelson Mandela, and then President Frederik de Klerk, and go back as an honored guest at their inaugural—I would have said you’re crazy, you’re out of your mind, you don’t know what you’re talking about. So, I think that change is possible. You don’t give up! And women must not give up! Just keep pushing. We have lost something in America. And maybe, maybe, just maybe, the rest of the world is going to teach us something. Because it was Arnold Toynbee who wrote: “It may be the Negro that takes a message of non-violence to the Western world.” The world was mesmerized by what happened in South Africa. People by the hundreds, by the thousands, by the millions, wanted to vote—in spite of the violence. They wanted to participate. We saw old women being pushed in a wheelbarrow to a polling place. We saw an old man coming on the back of his son to vote. We saw a person saying, “I voted. Now I can die. I can go home now.” Maybe, maybe, just maybe, it will be South Africa, whites and blacks and coloreds, taking this whole idea of a multiracial family to the rest of the world.
FEEDBACK

"I" sympathetic men really care about our cause, why don't they confront their fellow men head-on?"

"We feminists who ardently supported Anita Hill cannot turn our backs on Paula Jones."

"SEX WORKER" RESPONDS

As a Jewish woman, who happens to be a prostitute of 15 years and an activist, I am particularly insulted, shocked, and saddened to see my political perspective ranked as worse than the neo-Nazis in the article by John Stoltenberg (Spring 1994). I understand that there is a sexual holocaust, but I differ from Mr. Stoltenberg in regard to strategy. To be targeted so cruelly as the enemy in On The Issues (the most open-minded of feminist forums) scares me.

Apparently this column was part of a series of escalating attacks between rival feminist organizations, but I am surprised that you invited Stoltenberg to use the forum of your magazine for this vicious humor. I understand that feminism sometimes expresses itself in repressive strategies for social control (i.e. criminalization of prostitution, prohibition of alcohol) but I was hoping that your magazine might have some resistance to these repressive strategies—at least when they come in the guise of a man who claims to speak for women.

Apparently Stoltenberg opposes the view of sex workers who are not victim-identified, but his "spoof" was hate literature, aimed at the part of the feminist movement with which he disagrees. In fact, Stoltenberg recently signed and promoted a pledge of resistance to "interrupt the oppression of women—even when it is women who are promoting other women's oppression by actively collaborating with pimps and pornographers." Stoltenberg calls on his brothers to disassociate from "...organizations infiltrated with prostitutes and pro-pornography leadership (including the National Organization for Women)."

Many women are struggling against difficult odds to end laws that allow police into our bedroom to arrest us in the name of protecting society. As sex workers and entertainers in the sex industry, we are denied civil rights and ostracized by family and friends. I greatly appreciate the work of the Feminists for Free Expression. I don't know about the "Penthouse connection" to which he referred, but the women I know in this organization include your basic feminist activists, some academics, some civil libertarians, artists, writers, critics, and numerous progressives. In other words, this is not a group of evil and misguided sellouts, but women who are a lot like those who read your magazine. The Feminists for Free Expression are some of the only feminists who come close to speaking for sex workers' rights at a time when feminist strategies place the needs of working porn models and prostitutes at the bottom of the list.

Although your magazine has featured articles on the feminist debate about sexual representation, you have neglected to include articles written by prostitutes and other sex workers on this topic. In the interest of fairness, you should solicit materials from prostitutes, models, actresses, and pornographers for a future issue.

Carol Leigh
San Francisco, CA
SWAC (Sex Workers' Action Coalition)

The document Carol Leigh quotes out of context, "A New Principle of Accountability for Pro-feminist Men's Activism Against Pornography and Prostitution," may be obtained by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Men Against Pornography, P.O. Box 150786, Brooklyn, NY 11215-0786.

John Stoltenberg

NINJUTSU

Lisa Susan Skittone hits it on the head! ("Ninjutsu," Spring 1994). Today's woman needs this type of training to boost self-confidence on the streets and subways of any city. Male harassment of females has to end. Perhaps if males thought a woman might fight back, they won't start to begin with.

Ninjutsu training seems to be the best because it offers psychological responses to threats. Its training also provides a good work-out and a chance to get used to hitting someone. Today's women are becoming more assertive. Martial arts training is an excellent choice to back up this assertiveness. Since Thanatos-type males only understand violence, what better way to meet that understanding. Besides, women are natural leaders/warriors; remember the Amazons. Ninjutsu brings this out in women. Ladies, just remember, always carry a whistle and always, always, go for the groin.

Anthony Sayegh
Femina Society Trainee
Federal Correctional Institute
Oxford, WI

CHRONE-OLOGY

Irene Davall's review of Menopausal Years:
new insights. See Katherine Eban Finkehtein’s article about what to say about the mega-publicly

Editor’s note: We thought long and hard about the politics of the alleged harasser. But the bottom line is that, if a woman is allegedly sexually harassed by a man, women to government posts. I also have a Clinton supporter who great-

Sue Holling
Woodstock, VT

WOMEN-ONLY SPACE?
The Summer issue of ON THE ISSUES convinced me to renew my subscription because all the articles are written by women—as they should be! I subscribe to the magazine because I want to hear news about women from a woman’s point-of-view—not a man’s. You may argue that there are men who care about our liberation, but this does not justify their taking over our spaces—one of the few that we have. If they want to work for women’s equality, why don’t they publish articles in the mainstream press? They have easier access to it than we do. If these “sympathetic men” really care about our cause, why don’t they prove it by confronting their fellow men head-on? That would show far greater sincerity than seeking admis-

CACOPHONY ON THE PIANO
As I read Rebecca Shugrue’s words (Summer 1994) about The Piano (“Take away the fact that Baines is physically bigger for a minute, and it becomes clear that Ada really has the upper hand. She is getting what she wants; Baines is not”), I literally jumped from the chair in outraged. Then I simmered down and read Carolyn Gage’s brilliant analysis.

Having seen the film just two nights earlier, every scene vivid in my mind’s eye, Shugrue’s inept argument, and your willingness to print the horrific women-only space quoted above, led me to the following conclusion: You did Ms. Shugrue a dis-service by printing her piece and juxtaposing it with Gage’s remarkable insights.

Dinnae Mauquhan
Mountainsair, NM

ATTACKS ON DISABLED
It is unfortunate a photograph of a disabled woman with a swastika carved on her face, later revealed to be a hoax, was used to illustrate my article (Spring 1994). It would be much more unfortunate if ON THIS ISSUES readers and the public in general were therefore to conclude that violence against people with disabilities doesn’t occur.

German disability activists Otmar Miles-Piut and Dinah Radtke detail several shocking incidents in their report, “Violence Against Disabled People in Germany,” including the beating of a visually disabled man in Siegen (he died on the way to the hospital), attacks on deaf students in Halle, and the suicide of a wheelchair-user in Hanover who had been ridiculed by school children, spat upon, and pushed down the stairs of a subway station. During several incidents the attackers were heard to say, “Under Hitler you would have been gassed,” a reference to the murder of disabled Germans in the Nazi campaign against those whom Hitler labelled “useless eaters.” Given this history, German disability activists are rightly alarmed at the rise of the far right in Germany and across Europe. Here in the U.S., there have also been several reports of what can only be described as hate crimes against people with disabilities, so much so that the New York City Police Department has begun, for the first time, to keep statistics on these assaults.

Fred Pelka
Northampton, MA

SUPPORT PAULA JONES
I was very disappointed by the glaring absence in the Summer issue of an article concerning Paula Jones’ accusing then-Governor Bill Clinton of sexual harassment. While many differences between Jones’ case and that of Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas do exist, the basic premise is the same: a powerful man is being accused of sexually harassing a woman whose career he controlled. I do not believe that we feminists who ardently supported Anita Hill can turn our backs on Paula Jones simply because the man she accuses of sexual harassment is a pro-choice Democrat. I do not even believe that she should be summarily discounted by feminists because she is backed by right wing factions. The same tactics were used to discount Hill.

I am a Clinton supporter who greatly appreciates the things he has done for women, most notably his appointments of greatly talented, highly qualified women to government posts. I also have doubts about the validity of Jones’ claim. But the bottom line is that, if a woman is allegedly sexually harassed by a man, feminist support should not depend upon the politics of the alleged harasser.

Christine Self Davis
Lubbock, TX

Editor’s note: We thought long and hard about what to say about the mega-publicized Paula Jones case that might provide new insights. See Katherine Egan Pinkblatt’s piece on harshesters and the cult of ambition in this issue.

Learn your M.A. Degree through Independent Study

We offer one of the few accredited M.A. Programs available through independent study. You’ll have the support of a local mentor, a local support group, and a Norwich faculty mentor. Award quarterly; register and complete your degree in about 18 months.

Design your studies in areas of the humanities and social sciences including women’s studies, counseling psychology, education, writing, organizational development, multicultural studies, and much more.

To learn more, call 1-800-336-6794

Vermont College of Norwich University
A City of Norwich Degree Program for Working Adults
Box 654, Northfield, Vermont 05662 802-828-8500 1-800-336-6794

ON THE ISSUES FAL 1994 61
BOURGEOIS (continued from page 36)

Woman-house in Los Angeles.

Bourgeois explored abstract art; she had firsthand experience with modern art movements in both Europe and the U.S. Arriving here in 1938, she was an eyewitness to the rise of abstract expressionism, a participant in the community that spawned the New York School, and anticipated process art and minimalism. But her central preoccupation remained the sexed figure.

A majority of her forebears and peers sought to eliminate the body's vulnerability and inevitable decay from their portrayals, focusing instead on the enduring and unchanging nature of its materials. Brancusi, for example, smoothed facial features to an absolutely seamless surface, achieving an unblemished, "purified" body, which was, in the end, a bodiless ideal. Duchamp referenced the body as a perfect machine that never broke down or died. Bourgeois is distinct in celebrating the mortal matter of which we are made. Her bodies may be fragmented, with parts that stand for the whole, but the physical human never loses her fundamental integrity.

Bourgeois craved stability and continuity. She was drawn to Euclidean geometry as a young woman because "the rules are eternal, and the points of reference do not change from day to day." But she instead embraced the risky topology of her art. She avoided both life casts, in which the presence is captured yet the person is absent, and death masks, the "perfect" molding of the human face or figure, commemorating eternity. Her sculpted and drawn figures are not corpses, either living or dead. The courageous truth in all of her work points to the fixed facts of change, of human mortality, as experienced in the female corpus. It is the most profound implication of Bourgeois' work that can help us "place" her considerable gifts to 20th-century art as both modernist and feminist.

Art historian Arlene Raven, Ph.D., has published six books on contemporary art. She writes criticism for the Village Voice and a variety of art magazines and academic journals. Raven was a founder of the Los Angeles Woman's Building, the Feminist Studio Workshop, and Chrysalis magazine.

CHESLER (continued from page 29)

frontation. Harassment, however, has been persistent: a 9mm bullet hole tore through their mailbox; two sanitary napkins and a dead female puppy shot through the stomach were draped across their mailbox; they received a stream of threatening phone calls and letters and bomb threats; shots were fired at their front gate; roofing tacks placed on their roads (with eight tires flattened as a result); their American and rainbow flags were torn down; intruders kept appearing on their property; low-flying planes took photos. "The local shopkeepers won't sell to us, or they charge us two to three times the going rate for something," Brenda said. A local lesbian supporter's house was mysteriously burned down three weeks ago. One caller warned, "Expect the KKK to burn a cross on you."

Combating violent, visible hate and racism is part of what Camp Sister Spirit is about. (The Hensons conduct a Passover seder every year partly because they're entranced by its vision of freedom—and as their way of taking a stand against anti-Semitism.) Until the media "discovered" Ovett, one drinking fountain outside the local courthouse was painted white, the other black. Overnight, both were painted white. The first time the Hensons, Pam, and Shirley, believed the death-threats might be real, they put out a call for help. Ben Chaney (yes, the brother of murdered civil rights worker James Chaney) came and spent the long night with them.

The media descended on Ovett in November of 1993. By mid-February of 1994, Attorney General Janet Reno had directed the Department of Justice to mediate the situation. The Hensons were thrilled that Janet Reno's mediators both turned out to be African-Americans; they thought this was ironic, a comeuppance, a measure of progress—and as their way of taking a stand against anti-Semitism."

..." (continuation from page 29)
to deal with violence directed at homosexuals.

Ironically, understandably, despite everything they know, the camp is also trying to work 'within the system.' They've turned to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, local lawyers, the Center for Constitutional Rights, the Lambda Legal Defense Fund, the National Center for Lesbian Rights, and the Justice Department. But Camp Sister Spirit is totally without protection—and is prohibited, by both law and custom, from arming itself. Everyone at Camp Sister Spirit knows they exist in a "no-man's land" where, although the law may punish them for trying to protect themselves (they cannot carry loaded firearms anywhere but on their own property), the law—including the FBI—may not be able to protect them or punish their persecutors.

"The Hensons are feminists who happen to be lesbians," Lucy tells me. "Their deeds speak for them. Despite everything, calls for food and for help with abuse are starting to come in. A grandmother gave her pregnant 14-year-old granddaughter the number here. Gifts of tools, machine-parts, vegetables, or other staples are made surreptitiously; local, especially black supporters, have chosen to remain anonymous lest they suffer reprisals. (This year's Memorial Day Festival drew women from 18 states, all white. Women of color who've attended before felt their presence would put themselves and the camp at even greater risk.)

Sasha tells me that the Hensons' son Arthur, who is 20 and "incredibly hard-working and loyal," is the only man who permanently lives on the land. "He left to make the festival an all-woman space." Sasha also says that other men, including a friend of hers from Pittsburgh, have come to help. "What we're doing is a principle. The Camp's outreach to the poor infuriates the locals. I've always stood up for what I've believed in."

Sasha also points out that, in the ten-mile stretch between the towns of Petal and Ovett, there are about 16 churches. "Local lesbian support isn't that good—a lotta of them are in-the-closet Republicans." Brenda says that the local folk, who stand to gain the most from the camp's presence in the community, are being lied to and stirred up by Donald Wildmon's group, Mississippi Family Values, which is sponsoring anti-gay initiatives all over the country. They are also attempting to outlaw homosexuals from living in certain parts of Mississippi.

That the Hensons and their valiant volunteer supporters face danger daily can neither be denied nor exaggerated. The extraordinary willingness of so many presumably 'ordinary' and life-loving American women of all ages to share the Camp's fate is what's newsworthy. The fact that thousands more haven't been able to set aside their apathy, narcissism, terror, addictions, or political differences, is old news. Camp Sister Spirit has received thousands of letters of support (from both women and men in every state of the union, and from Europe and Asia, too); they've received donations, and volunteers. This is nothing less than a miracle.

Some ask: Why is the Camp courting such danger? Why not retreat to some "safer" place? That would be nice, but women are always in danger: in our homes, on the street, at work. One by one, as we're picked off by violent men, non-violent women (and men) deny that things are that bad, or they look the other way when women are humiliated, harassed, cut down to size, over-worked, underpaid, raped, beaten, or killed. Refusing to become conscious about one's oppression doesn't make you safe; it just keeps you confused about what's happening to you.

At Camp Sister Spirit, the women are very conscious of danger: their own, and all women's everywhere. They've chosen to face the danger together, collectively. At Camp Sister Spirit, no death will go unmourned or misunderstood.

As Wanda told me: "A woman at the farmer's market put her hands on me and stood real close to me and said, 'Honey, what's your name?' I told her my name was Wanda Henson. She said, 'I thought so. This doesn't have anything to do with the fact that you're different.' I asked her what she meant. She said 'What's happening to you is about to do with the fact that you're a woman. Look, I've been living in Ovett for 53 years and I'm a woman landowner and I still have men trespassing on my property. Keep doing what you're doing because you're doing it for all of us.'"

Editor-at-large Phyllis Chesler, Ph.D., is the author of six books, including Women and Madness and Mothers on Trial.

I was in third-grade religion class at St. Mary’s School when our pastor, Father Kevin, came to recruit altar boys. He explained that altar servers had to have faith, humility, dedication, and a desire to serve. A willingness to learn the Latin prayers and good timing for ringing the bell were also useful. The recompense: aside from the priest, the servers at Holy Mass were closest to God at that moment of sacred consecration.

I knew God was talking to me through Fr. Kevin. My hand shot up when he asked for those who felt “called” to volunteer. At first I didn’t know what the laughter was about. I hadn’t understood that this time the generic use of “he” as a pronoun was not intended to be inclusive.

“But I felt it, I really did,” I explained later.

“You couldn’t have,” Sister said, not unkindly, but factually. “You’re a girl.”

Years later, under the guidance of another mentor-nun, I learned to be a sacristan. During school lunch hour, I would go to the sacristy, consult the ordo to determine the color of the vestments to be worn the next day, and carefully lay them out. It was invisible work, women’s work. As I did these tasks, I whispered the Credo softly in Latin. I had memorized all the altar boy responses, the prayers. Sometimes, in my dreams, I would serve a Mass: It was always a Saturday morning, sparsely attended. A priest (never Fr. Kevin, always one of the younger associates) would walk to the front of the altar.

“There is no altar boy. Is there anyone here who can serve this Mass?” he would ask. And I would quietly stand and come forward. “Dominus vobiscum,” he would chant.

“Et cum spiritu tuo,” I would echo. Our voices would rise gently in prayer. I held to my dream.

Year after year, I would pray that the Holy-Father-in-Rome would wake up one morning, give his old Italian head a shake, and say, “Altar girls. Why not? Mama mia, are we waiting for hell to freeze over? It’s the heart and soul that matters, not the packaging.”

No such luck, although in the ’60s and ’70s, Pope John XXIII came pretty close.

Growing in understanding of my church, I came to realize that the generic “he” was intentionally exclusive, and that the prescribed role for my gender was defined and limited not by God but by churchmen. To complain was futile and only labeled one a malcontent. I kept silent, trying to accept my gender-fate as God’s will. I wore little doilies on my head. I watched as smirking boys slouched around the altar, incoherently mumbling their responses.

Canon 230 in the 1983 Code of Canon Law now seems to say that girls can, maybe, if deemed appropriate, be altar servers. With prior instructions and explanations, of course, to the congregation, so nobody has a heart attack. With final arbitration of disputes of interpretation done by the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts. With the understanding that liturgical ministries are “temporary tasks” that imply no rights. And that the decision whether or not to permit girls is optional for each Bishop, based on local pastoral needs, based on “pastoral necessity.”

Who says we’re still second-class citizens?

The phrase “pastoral necessity” evokes my childhood dream: a priest, ready to begin a Mass, lacking a server. A moment when gender is irrelevant, when all that matters is faith and a longing to fully participate.

But gender is never irrelevant for Catholics. In my dream, there are no justifications, rationalizations, qualifications. There are no Pontifical Councils waiting to interpret or adjudicate. In the dream, there is only the clear light of God’s love and acceptance, the mystery of transubstantiation, the ritual to which we Catholics cling to help us find our souls.

“Vatican okays altar girls” is 36 years too late for me. Even if finally ‘okay,’ I am no longer qualified. Somewhere along the road I lost the faith, the humility, the dedication. I serve, abundantly, but in other ways.

“But it’s not too late for your daughter,” a friend comments.

“A ‘calling’ is not genetic, or an inheritance,” I rebut. “You can’t pass it down from one generation to the next.”

The truth is, it is not my daughter’s dream, her hunger. I was the one denied my rightful place at the altar. So, excuse me for not dancing at the news.

“Vatican Okays Women Priests.” Now, for that headline, I might decide to dance.

Susan J. Kraus, M.S.W., is a feminist therapist and freelance writer in Lawrence, Kansas.
Discover the ad-free Ms. & get Gloria Steinem's newest book FREE!

Get a hardcover copy of Gloria's powerful new book, Moving Beyond Words, FREE. It's our gift to you for discovering the power of the revolutionary new Ms.

With no advertising and 100 pages of fresh, frank editorial in every issue, it's a Ms. of substance, sustenance, and spirit. It's a Ms. of breakthrough investigative reporting, crucial political insights and actions, fiction, poetry, the great feminist voices of the world.

It's Ms. as it was meant to be: a clear, true voice linking feminists worldwide. Take advantage of this special introductory offer!

Yes! Send my FREE hardcover copy of Moving Beyond Words (retail value $23) and enter my introductory subscription to the ad-free Ms. I'll get 6 big bimonthly issues with 100 pages in each for only $35. That's a total value of $68 for only $35.

Your Name (please print):

Address:

City/State/Zip:

Payment enclosed. □ Bill me.
Charge my □ Visa □ MasterCard

Card#: Exp. Date

Signature:

Canada: 1 yr. $42
Foreign: 1 yr. surface mail $42 1 yr. airmail $78

Payment must be in U.S. funds.

Book available at Waldenbooks and wherever fine books are sold.
FORTY-TWO PERCENT OF ALL MURDERED WOMEN ARE KILLED BY THE SAME MAN.

Each day women are beaten to death by their husbands or boyfriends. Just as frightening, each day neighbors just like us make excuses for not getting involved. For information about how you can help stop domestic violence, call 1-800-777-1960.

THERE’S NO EXCUSE for Domestic Violence.

Family Violence Prevention Fund