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ON THE COVER Photographed for ON THE ISSUES by Robert Lorenz.
Ronni Sandroff

SPRING TUNE-UP

Increasing our visibility and influence among citizens and policy makers is one way we're seeking to fulfill *On The Issues*'s mission of fostering collective responsibility for positive social change. We're happy to report some success, even in these times of orchestrated anti-feminist propaganda (read Elayne Rapping's "The Ladies Who Lynch"). Major media columns in Boston and Washington, D.C. have reviewed the magazine and wrestled with its ideas. When a European visit by President Clinton focused attention on the war crimes tribunal at The Hague, the influential *International Herald Tribune* published a letter by Editor-at-Large Phyllis Chesler (whose column will return next issue) on the groundbreaking thesis of her article in the winter issue, "Rape As A War Crime." And we've been linking arms with other progressive groups by sponsoring events such as a series of lectures at New York's 92nd St. Y and a reading room at the feminist Expo '96 in Washington, D.C.

This issue, art director Joy Makon's thoughtful redesign has helped us take another step in clarifying our mission. A telling part of the transformation: Our Talking Feminist column has become a four-page section that includes an array of short, unexpected opinion pieces. You'll also find more readable typefaces, a cleaner approach to graphics, and a generally brighter, more polished showcase for our often distinguished, and always distinctive, writers.

In this issue's provocative cover story, for example, author Sheila Jeffreys challenges the "orgasm at any price, victims be damned" sexual promwtyo by the commercial sex industry. The chills and thrills of modern electoral politics, female style, are explored on the homestretch in Kay Mills's "Running Scared" and abroad in Peggy Simpson's profile of Italy's powerful young leader, Irene Pivetti.

Jill Johnston traverses the link between the private and the public ("£500 With Interest") as her quixotic quest for her aristocratic British father inspires her to try to overhaul the U.K.'s legitimacy laws. Art critic Arlene Raven also writes from the cusp on which the personal becomes political in her look at feminist contributions to public art ("Not Just Another Man on a Horse").

Lately we've had more smart, feisty, angry, and fascinating letters from readers than we have room to print in our Feedback section. Readers' letters will now be posted on our World Wide Web page (http://www.echo nyc.com/~onissues). You're invited to read, comment, and let us know what you think about our vision of building a stronger feminist community, one reader at a time.

OTI makes news.

"On the Issues" makes additional news available to those who don't want to wait for the print edition. You can find out about all the latest news stories by going to http://www.echonyc.com/~onissues.

*On the Issues* is a feminist, humanist magazine of critical thinking, dedicated to fostering collective responsibility for positive social change.

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ON THE ISSUES THE PROGRESSIVE WOMAN'S QUARTERLY, a feminist, humanist magazine of critical thinking, dedicated to fostering collective responsibility for positive social change.

ON THE ISSUES THE PROGRESSIVE WOMAN'S QUARTERLY (ISSN 0995-6014) is published quarterly as an informational and educational service of Choices Women's Medical Center, Inc., 97-77 Queens Blvd., Forest Hills, NY 11374-3317. Fax: (718) 997-1206.

E-mail: onissues@echonyc.com

Subscription Information: 1 year $14.95; 2 years $24.95; 3 years $34.95. Institutional rate: Add $10 first year, $5 each additional year. Add $4 per year for Canadian orders; $7 per year foreign (surface mail) or $20 per year foreign (air mail). Send to On The Issues, The Progressive Woman's Quarterly, P.O. Box 3000, Dept. OTI, Denville, NJ 07834. Second-Class Postage Paid at Forest Hills, NY, and additional mailing offices.

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Elizabeth I had a proper perspective on political marriage. Having seen both her mother and her stepmother beheaded by her father, Henry VIII, for political expediency before she was 10, she wisely decided to live and die the "Virgin Queen."

Elizabeth's personal history taught her that a politically powerful woman could be at great risk from emotional entanglements. She would ultimately come to view the marriage bed not as a safe harbor from the intense pressures and demands of power—but as an arena of threat and danger, where political power could be diminished or lost completely.

Tellingly, she revealed to an imperial envoy in 1563 that "If I follow the inclination of my nature, it is this: beggar woman and single, far rather than queen and married." She knew well the limitations that both biology and culture placed on her sex—and spent her entire life struggling against them. "I have the heart of a man and not of a woman," she said a few weeks before her death at 70. "I am not afraid of anything and my sex has not diminished my prestige."

Elizabeth was in a profound sense a power hermaphrodite. Not being a modern woman wanting to "have it all," she was willing to pay the price of being childless, despite constant pressure from her advisors to marry to secure the succession. "I am resolved never to marry," she told the Scottish Ambassador Melville in 1564.

"Your Majesty thinks that if you were married you would be but Queen of England," he replied. "Now you are both king and queen."

Her political position, however, did not prevent her from expressing her passionate nature. At 63 she embarked on the last great love affair of her life with the 34-year-old Earl of Essex, courting him with all the skill and power of her personality and loving him with all the intensity of her emotions. He responded by leading an open rebellion against her throne. Her answer to his betrayal was to cut off his head.

It was business—not personal.

For royals and other powerful men and women of the 16th century marriage was business—a purely political act to create alliances, reinforce dynastic lines, and cement geopolitical initiatives. There was no expectation of love or erotic desire. It was assumed and expected that these issues would be taken care of in other venues.

Four hundred years later, the power marriage has evolved from being the metaphoric killing field that it represented for Elizabeth I into a bourgeois institution that is expected to provide not only political advantage but personal fulfillment. Today's women of power are less honest and far more apologetic about
Like countless women, Diana was taught to view marriage as the last refuge of the romantic utopian.

their will to power than Elizabeth I. Just what are feminists to make of Diana Spencer, Princess of Wales, whose recent television interview and probable divorce have captured an Armada of airtime? To say nothing of the marathon TV interview of Rep. Enid Greene Waldholz (R-Utah), after the FBI arrested her husband Joe for questioning about forged checks and other financial irregularities. It is a rare woman leader who, like former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, finds a Dennis Thatcher, by all accounts a loving, supportive, and thoroughly trouble-free husband. And it is a rare power wife—be she married to a captain of industry, a movie star, or the Prince of Wales—whose husband does not feel entitled to take advantage of the extramarital adventures that come his way.

British biographer A. N. Wilson notes in The New York Times that Diana’s problem was that she had not been taught the “Edwardian rules of marriage,” which include presenting a “united front before the eyes of the world, concealing much adultery and unhappiness in private.” However, Princess Diana is not of the Edwardian school but of the Oprahian one—the one in which the personal is not only the political but the public.

In her recent television interview, shattering the last vestige of monarchical mystique, she shared with over 200 million viewers worldwide details about her continuing struggles with bulimia, postpartum depression and self-mutilation. Compared to Margaret Thatcher for her skill at media manipulation (she has even taken to similarly referring to herself in the third person), Diana’s performance was a superb and simultaneous combination of the revealing, the recovering, and the vulnerable.

And like Thatcher, who cloaked herself in the image of the warrior housewife when she invaded the Falklands, Diana’s power drives dress themselves in the traditional image of the lioness protecting her cubs. “She won’t go quietly. ‘That’s the problem,’ she told viewers. ‘I’ll fight till the end because I believe that I have a role to fulfill and I’ve got two children to bring up.’

But where Diana eschews tradition and, as British journalist Suzanne Moore points out in the Guardian, “embodies modernity itself” that she remains too well; one who trusted but was betrayed, not only by her husband and her husband’s family, but by her lover. Admitting to an adulterous affair with her former riding instructor James Hewitt, Diana said, “Yes, I was in love with him. But I was very let down.”

Women especially can relate and connect. We’ve been rejected also. She’s recovering just like us. She suffers from low self-esteem even though she lives in a fantasy land. Through her therapizing and talk-show representation of reality, she gives a voice to the nameless millions who are kept warm in the middle of the night believing that even if you are one of the richest women in the world—a fairytale princess—you too can be binging and purging yourself mindless, you too can see only a misperception of your beauty when you look in your mirror.

Yet strangely enough, this image of royal victimhood and traditional femininity (Diana wants to be the “queen of people’s hearts,” to embrace the young, the diseased and the despised) is held up as a “feminist role model.” So says journalist Sarah Lyall, writing in The New York Times. Her main piece of evidence: two sentences of Diana’s interview where she says, “You know, people think that at the end of the day, a man is the only answer. Actually, a fulfilling job is better for me.”

An admiring Moore sees the “ghosts of other brave women from Elizabeth I to Florence Nightingale in Diana’s sad eyes.” What one might well ask instead is why—unlike those earlier women—she took refuge behind her own skirts, presented the shopworn image of a woman wronged, and refused to pay the price of her position and her power. Betrayal, rejection, and self-destructive behavior do not a political consciousness make. “Feminist princess” is an oxymoron. The fact that Diana has been able to accomplish this transformation attests to the desperate eagerness of some writers to claim any sympathetic celebrity as...
a bona fide member of the sisterhood.

Perhaps no one was brutal enough to spell out the truth about marriage and power to the shy 19-year-old who became engaged to Prince Charles so long ago. Her own understanding of the implications of affiliative power—as well as her own power drives (consenting to marry the future King of England has everything to do with power)—may have been inchoate at best. The same cannot be said for Enid Greene Waldholz, described in one press account as a “sheltered Mormon princess,” who entered national consciousness a few months ago through another extraordinary tale of female love, trust, and betrayal in high places.

Unlike Diana, Waldholz was 35, a lawyer and a candidate for Congress when she married a Republican activist whose chief claim to fame, according to The New York Times, was as the “delegate with the silliest hat at the last Republican convention.” She had already lost one race for Congress in ’92 when she by her own account “miraculously” won a tight race—the most expensive Congressional campaign in 1994—after a late infusion of $1.7 million, a mysterious campaign contribution that may turn out to have been illegal.

Starting out as a freshman arch-conservative and a rising star in the Republican Revolution, Waldholz was named by House Speaker Newt Gingrich to the powerful Rules Committee. She had vowed to use her legal knowledge to protect Utah against being duped by big government. A quick learner and Congress’ only nursing mother, it didn’t take her long to hold a fund-raising “shower” where admission was a $500 contribution to her re-election campaign.

Yet for two years, until Joe Waldholz was arrested six days after fleeing from Washington’s National Airport, this experienced attorney dismissed warnings from her staff about her husband’s financial mismanagement—bounced checks, stiffed hotel bills, stolen checks (including one supposedly eaten by a dog). It is alleged that he even forged her signature on thousands of campaign checks that were then transferred into 15 different accounts.

One month after the arrest—and besting Geraldine Ferraro’s famous 90-minute 1984 press conference about her husband’s financial dealings—Waldholz finally went public with an intensely emotional 4½ hour Oprahian tell-all.
Waldholz wore her power like a coat she felt she not only could remove but should remove at home.

Shifting from teary-eyed, to sobbing, to musing, to lawyerly, to competent political, Waldholz told the sad story of her undoing through her marriage. "I loved Joe Waldholz and trusted him with all my heart," she said, explaining how blind love and trust resulted in her laying aside her power, her critical intelligence and her natural vigilance. "I know now from the experience of the last four weeks, the person I loved and trusted never existed."

Waldholz did not get the sympathy granted to Princess Diana. The press described her in terms like "vengeful single mother," "hard-driving," and "outspoken." And she was clearly no ingenue when she married. Still, there are curious parallels. Like Diana, Enid claims to have bought into the equity marriage myth. "I believed that marriage was a partnership of equals and that each partner in that marriage should do what they were best at," she told the world. And because Enid came to the conclusion that Joe was a wiz at finances—after all, he "gifted her with $5 million" when they married—she allowed him to be in total charge of not only her personal but her campaign finances.

Waldholz also shares a very modern unwillingness to admit the truth about marriage and power, and a very traditional female discomfort with the very notion of wanting it. She wore her power like a coat she felt she not only could remove but should remove at home. "For the first time in my life, I felt I didn't always have to be the strong one," she confided, sounding like a heroine out of Barbara Cartland. "I know it's hard to understand how someone who was a trial attorney, deputy chief of staff to a governor, and chairman of a national political organization can be so fooled. But it was exactly because I was weary of always being the strong one. I thought I'd found someone who could accept me completely, that it was OK when I cried and showed weakness and showed emotion."

Wanting so much not to be the "strong one," Enid went so far as to not learn the access code to her own home answering machine, leaving Joe to take care of those minor details (like annoying creditors) while she went out and led the Revolution. "I was campaigning day and night. I believed that he was the one person that I could truly trust." Enid presented her marriage as an institution that cancelled out all necessity of personal responsibility, as if the concept of a love partnership allowed for a dissolution of personal boundaries so complete that one could put one's entire personal, psychological, and political fortunes into the hands of another.

Although Enid held the power card, she expected that she could bifurcate herself in her marriage. She not only welcomed but consistently reinforced the notion of power and responsibility being not intrinsic to her psychology but external to it. It was as if power were a weight that could be shed at will—through traditional female role-playing or denial of reality. And that if she put her power in the safekeeping of her husband, she could trust that it would be returned at her request.

The courts must decide whether Enid Waldholz either had prior knowledge of or participated in the alleged fraud and abuse that her husband has been charged with. And the electorate will decide [as of this writing, she intends to run for re-election] whether she will get to keep the political power she so cavalierly set aside every night as she went through her front door. In her press conference Waldholz said, "We all have in our lives something that we hang onto—something that we know in our heart and our soul and is the core of us. For me that was honesty and integrity."

Guilty or innocent of potential legal charges, it appears that Waldholz has compromised the core of herself, lost her integrity, and allowed herself to be diminished by her sex and undone in her marriage.

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THE LADIES WHO LYNCH

For an entire weekend last October I found myself on the far side of Alice's looking glass, inhabiting a universe in which feminists had taken over the world and every one of them was named Catharine MacKinnon. Now to some this might seem like a dream come true. But I can assure you that even the staunchest of MacKinnon's supporters (and I happen not to be among them) would have found this version of feminist heaven a real nightmare.

The Washington, D.C. conference that took me into the twilight zone was titled "Gender Issues in the 1990s: What You Don't Know Can Hurt You" and was sponsored by the two-year-old Women's Freedom Network. The supposed rise of feminism to a national religion was described in the most gruesome of detail, from the keynote address on Friday evening by former U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick to the last panel discussion, on Sunday afternoon, called "Bogus Data." Speech after speech and paper after paper described the horrors that have accompanied sexual harassment laws, domestic violence policies, welfare bureaucracies, health care practice, affirmative action legislation, women's studies curricula, custody and adoption policy, even the United Nations. All of these institutions, I was informed, were being run according to a philosophy variously referred to as "radical feminism" (read: man-haters) or "state-ist feminism" (read: left-wing, pro-"big government"). And the disastrous effects of this political turn were everywhere apparent. Women, it seems, now have every economic and political advantage and privilege while the poor male of the species limps along in a state of humiliation, poverty, powerlessness, and despair.

Who are these people, you are no doubt asking, and why are they saying these incredible things about feminism? From our own point of view, after all, feminism is under siege and threatened as never before by the centers of male power. Why, suddenly, should this new organization have emerged to wage all-out war upon us, when we ourselves feel less powerful and influential than ever?

The Women's Freedom Network was founded by Rita Simon, a sociologist at American University, and Cathy Young, a columnist for the Detroit News. Simon told me she was moved to found her organization because she was distressed by what she saw as two dominant, extremist poles of gender politics—the Phyllis Schlafly conservative view and the MacKinnonite "radical feminist" view. Neither of these views, according to Simon, who considers herself a "real" feminist, represented "the beliefs of most American women." And so she gathered together a group of like-minded folks—most but not all of whom actually use the term "feminist" to describe themselves—for the purpose of establishing a site from which to enter the public debates around gender in the name of "the majority of American women and men."

While the group aims to speak for the masses, it has not, so far, recruited many of the silent majority. The Women's Freedom Network boasts only 650 actual members, all of whom are white and a quarter of whom, I was told again and again with inordinate pride—are men. Of that total, perhaps 75 were in attendance at the conference (again, with about a 4-to-1 ratio of women to men). But their small numbers should not be read as a sign of their insignificance. The group's real agenda—to judge by its publications and publicity packets—is to enter the mainstream debates around gender politics as a major player. And to do that, you need not have numbers, much less truth, on your side. You need only gain access to the media, a goal that they are already in position to accomplish.

For one thing, their board is composed of an impressive range of professional women—academics, attorneys, judges, medical professionals, journalists and authors, businesswomen, and public officials—who are well connected to powerful institutions. Among them are Jeane Kirkpatrick; Rikki Klieman of Court TV; Christina Hoff Sommers of Who Stole Feminism? fame; Edith Kurzweil, editor of Partisan Review; Mary Ann Glendon of Harvard Law School; Mona Charen, the conservative columnist and CNN pundit; and Jean Bethke Elshtain and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, two prominent academics who have writ-
The common theme tying all the papers together was that men are being shafted in the age of “femocracy.”

ten widely and influentially on gender matters.

Moreover, the Network is part of a wider movement of prominent, anti-feminist women claiming to speak for “most women.” There is, as The Wall Street Journal proclaimed in a recent piece by Paul Barrett, “a new wave of counterfeminists providing conservatism with a sophisticated female face.” The best known of these counterfeminist organizations is the Independent Women’s Forum, founded by Laura Ingraham, a former aide to Clarence Thomas and now a white-collar crime defense attorney. This group evolved from an ad hoc 1991 group, “Women for Clarence Thomas,” whose goal was to call into question the charges brought by Anita Hill’s and most sexual harassment charges. (Ironically, this very group was in the forefront among supporters of Paula Jones, in her far less plausible sexual harassment charge against Democrat Bill Clinton; but who cares about consistency when you’re playing political hardball?) IWF is a group of “media-savvy”—to use Barrett’s phrase—women, most of whom work inside the Beltway and are connected by marriage or career to powerful Republicans. Barbara Ledeen, the executive director, and a former Pentagon official, is married to former Reagan security adviser Michael Ledeen. Other prominent and well-connected members include economist Wendy Lee Gramm, wife of presidential hopeful Phil Gramm and NEA director Lynne Cheney, wife of former defense secretary Dick Cheney. Ninety percent of their budget comes from conservative philanthropies like the Olin, Carthage, and Bradley foundations. And because of their Washington connections, their bylines find their way, more and more regularly, to the op-ed pages of The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, and other major papers.

But while IWF women are all staunch Republicans who tend to toe the party line of the moment, most Women’s Freedom Network members are more intellectually and ideologically oriented and seem to follow a Libertarian, ultra-free-market, “government-out-of-our-lives” philosophy. Despite this difference, however, their agenda, on key political issues, is very much in sync with the political right.

And when it comes to gender politics, the two groups sound like political twins in their virulent antipathy to feminism. Both groups focus obsessively on the two central tenets of “radical feminism”: the tendency to view women as “victims” and the targeting of “men as the enemy.” “Man-haters” and “victims and whiners” are the two epithets that both groups constantly throw around when discussing feminism. And reporters—as anyone who is halfway awake these days knows—obediently eat them up and spit them back out, with relish.

While the IWF women tend to favor op-ed pieces, the WFN, with more academics and writers and fewer Beltway functionaries as leaders, tend to write more books. One of the keynoters at the conference, Daphne Patai, a former women’s studies professor, is currently making a career of exposing the evils of women’s studies. Her book Professing Feminism: Strange Tales from the Strange World of Women’s Studies put her on the lecture and media circuit. And she is currently finishing an even more brutal attack on academic feminism called Heterophobia, which will be an expose of “man-hating” and lesbianism among women studies professors. Indeed, the number of books by WFN members on display at the conference was quite large, considering the small number of actual participants. Among the other prominent titles on display were Mark Pendergrast’s Victims of Memory: Incest Accusations and Shattered Lives, Warren Farrell’s My Myth of Male Power, Anne Mitchell’s The Hypocrisy of Equality in Family Law Context, Judith Kleinfield’s Gender Tales: Battles in the Schools, and my very favorite, Tama Starr’s Eve’s Revenge: Saints, Sinners and Stand-Up Sisters on the Ultimate Extinction of Men. Cathy Young’s Gender Wars is forthcoming.

The anti-feminist thrust of all these books is obvious from their titles. Feminist-baiting, it appears, is a hot ticket to a book contract these days.

So what do these endlessly verbose women and men have to say for themselves, and why are the media and the publishing industry so eager to hear it? “I’m going to report on the U.N. Women’s Conference in Beijing, which I did not attend,” was Jeane Kirkpatrick’s opening sentence, and that said it all. She proceeded to trash the U.N. for its exploitation of women’s issues in order to further the hidden agenda of what she referred to as “the Soviet/Arab bloc.” Every once in a while she did remember that communism had fallen. And she did, eventually, get to the subject of women. But her main point about gender politics was that she, in her long life of travel and diplomacy, had seen real female oppression and exploitation in places like Africa and Asia, compared to which American women had little to gripe about.

Most of the speakers at the conference agreed with Kirkpatrick’s view of American feminists as “whiners and victims” who should be grateful for their privileges but who, instead, keep manufacturing things to cry about. All were in similar agreement about the feminist “man-hating” problem. These two themes were echoed in every session I attended, although other presentations seemed at first not to jibe with this anti-feminist agenda. I found myself in agreement, for example, with the views of Judith Simon Garrett (Rita Simon’s daughter, and the Secretary Treasurer of the group) who is a lawyer with the Bureau of Prisons. I too am appalled at the way defendants and prisoners are treated within the criminal justice and prison systems. I was also sympathetic to Ann Mitchell’s arguments, in the Family and Fathers’ Rights session, against the notion that women should always get custody of children because they are endowed with a “maternal instinct.”

It took me a while to figure out why such odd positions and issues were being discussed at a conference whose political agenda was to attack and discredit feminism. What did prisoners’ rights have to do with feminism? My own sympathy for the issue grows out of my class and race concerns. And wasn’t maternal instinct a right-wing notion? Where were they getting the notion that feminists espoused such a retrograde view of gender? But after a while, I finally got it. This conference was not primarily about women at all; it was about men. The common theme tying together all the papers presented was that men are being shafted in the age of “femocracy.”
spring 1996 • on the issues

earning his living by "sharing" his male identity, who was a professional "feminist male" in the 1970s, when that was fashionable, but has since switched careers and is now a professional "anti-feminist male," earning his living by "sharing" his male identity.

But the WFners gobbled up Patai's stories with gusto, just as they gobbled up every word uttered at this meeting, no matter how unlikely, how undocumented, how far from the realities of law and common sense. Indeed, it occurred to me more than once how odd it was that it is feminists who are accused of dogmatic, "politically correct" group-think, while the anti-feminists are seen, by the media, as independent thinkers, going against the grain of established thought. The truth is that feminist conferences—especially feminist academic conferences—are these days filled with healthy disagreement and dispute about gender politics, methodology, and strategy, as core feminist ideas are being challenged, refined, and revised. But never, even in the more doctrinaire days of consciousness raising, have I attended a conference in which there was so much repetition of the same stories and ideas, and so little disagreement or even shades of difference. It reminded me, actually, of a Tupperware party.

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Cover Shock
Was I shocked by my first cover of On The Issues? An Xmas gift from my daughter Sandy. No—memories of a rape in San Antonio about 13 or so years ago. She described it as a rough rope pulled back & forth through her for two hours. I had hoped I'd forgotten that. Then—there was her memory in my head again. On your cover, I haven't read your magazine yet. But I applaud the artist's rendition of such an appalling...well...rape. Very scary. Scary for the artist also. So...with trepidation I open your magazine.

Eunice
San Antonio, TX

Authentic Choices
Merle Hoffman's beautifully written article "Trojan Horses" [winter 1996] has articulated my great frustration with people, some in leadership positions, who say they support choice yet denigrate the choices that women make and refuse to dignify the authenticity of choosing abortion.

As a passionate feminist who runs a clinic and has endured five years of picketing at my home, I've noticed that about every four or five years we have someone who is convinced that s/he has the solution for defusing the abortion issue. It is a little bit like the Baptist minister who comes to town and discovers sin. In both cases, help!

Jeri Rasmussen
Midwest Health Center for Women

Whose Bill of Rights?
Thank you for printing Andrea Dworkin's article, "The Bill Of Whose Rights?" [fall 1995], giving her a venue where her thoughts and ideas are taken seriously. Many of us agree that the Constitution is guided by the fact that wealthy white men drafted it, and that it isn't working for everyone—in part because of its "freedom from" underpinnings. With the recent trend toward tipping federal power back to the states, this seems to be only getting worse.

The political right attacks pornography as filth and fails to link it with male dominance while liberals are hesitant to assert the "freedom to" speech. Both views are selective, hypocritical, and inconsistent in the way constitutional practice is applied. We will not "forget" history and thus perpetuate the status quo of injustice.

Monica L. Trent and members of the Media Action Alliance

Monica L. Trent and members of the Media Action Alliance

IT IS PAINFUL AND MADDENING to once again have Andrea Dworkin juxtapose words like "collusion" and "collaboration with pimps" in describing all the women who resist, the message is clear: We will tear you apart if you defend yourself.

“...When feminists claim pacifism while denouncing women who resist, the message is clear: We will tear you apart if you defend yourself.”

Andrea Dworkin replies: The only speech Leanne Katz can't tolerate is discussion of the political meaning of the First Amendment. My essay was an argument for broadening speech rights to include those silenced by sexualized subordination and systematic, constitutionally protected exploitation. Ms. Katz endorses a status quo in which pornographers have speech rights at the expense of women's rights to both speech and equality.

My book: Pornography: Men Possessing Women does not advocate banning
women as "speech-phobic." Feminists for Free Expression, showing her opposition to be propagandistic rather than thoughtful by characterizing feminists who critique pornography's constitutionally protected harm to women as "speech-phobic."

I suspect that without lies and insults, these sisters have a missionary position but no argument.

Politics of Self-Defense
I am grateful for Phyllis Chesler's brilliant call for women to take strategic self-defense into our own hands ["What is Justice for a Rape Victim?" winter 1996]. But Chesler's analysis of women's artificial pacifism misses some important points.

Women threatened with violence hesitate to harm our attackers not because we have been taught to prefer being hit to having to hit, but because we know that those who attack us are protected.

Nor are women passive toward systems of male violence against women. Unfortunately, we too often actively participate—in a scramble for our own safety, place in society, successful careers. The pretense of pacifism is a component of this participation. For example, soon after the acquittal of Lorena Bobbitt and the accompanying spectacle of so many panicking men, Ms. published a cover feature that trivialized women gun owners. The feature argued that women, as the morally superior gender, should choose physical helplessness, even death, over picking up a gun in self-defense. Lorena, who did not use a gun, was pointed to in the opening of the anti-gun argument as a phenomenon (not a person) that appeals to women's base, vengeful tendencies, but should nevertheless be repudiated in favor of women's traditional goodness.

When feminists claim "pacifism" while mocking or denouncing women who resist, the message to all women is acceptance a reality, we cannot ignore the participation of those who attack us and destroy those few who resist—ticated militant and pacifist resistance.

In the case of the feminist issue of the "Women's Right to Hold a Gun," Ms. MacKinnon, and the civil-rights ordinance. From the way the sister conducts herself, I can only assume she's sick of hearing about collusion and collaboration with pimps because, in her professional life as a lobbyist for the interests of pornographers, she does it, and doesn't want to hear the word harm because she knows pornography produces it.

In First Amendment jurisprudence the harm produced by speech is often weighed against the value of the speech in setting legal limits; so that, for instance, cigarette advertising is restricted and "Whites Only" signs are illegal. Ms. Katz's statement that harm is irrelevant is flat-out wrong. In a previous letter about my article [Feedback, winter 1996], Sandy Rapp, a member of Ms. Katz's anti-censorship group and a leader of the Penthouse-based Feminists for Free Expression, showed her opposition to be propagandistic rather than thoughtful by characterizing feminists who critique pornography's constitutionally protected harm to women as "speech-phobic."

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But if we are to make such organized resistance a reality, we cannot ignore the present dynamic by which we actively sabotage each other's potential for resistance, and destroy those few who resisted anyway.

Adriene Sere
Tucson, AZ

I was very disturbed by "What is Justice for a Rape Victim?". Violence is never the answer to violence. It is one thing to defend yourself while in the midst of an attack. But calling for women to rise up and stop crimes against women through the use of violence is asking them to give up their moral principles and spiritual beliefs that say violence against another person, any person, is wrong.

As hard and difficult as it is to endure the pain of hearing and watching how women suffer at the hands of men, we can't let ourselves slip into the quagmire of revenge and violence. We're women. We know how valuable life is, through our unique connection with the babies that grow in our wombs, through our desire to soothe another's pain and wipe away his or her tears, through our caring.

I'm not saying we should sit back and do nothing. We need a female leaders like Ghandi or Martin Luther King.

Cheryl M. Wenzel
San Jose, CA

Prozac Nation
Mahn Hassibi's article [...Why Change The World...When You Can Have a Prozac Moment?" summer 1995] really hit home for me. My family doctor prescribed Prozac for me about a year ago, for what he called "kitchen variety" depression, when I was having a hard time adjusting to a cross-country move. At first it seemed great because I was content to just go on the way and be home, get straight, go to work, etc. I found I didn't care if I cleaned house, have sex, or ate. Nor did I feel any elation or sorrow. Something like a Stepford wife. I came to understand the old adage that life is so much better if one gives up all hope. That's how I felt on Prozac.

Then it dawned on me I was getting nowhere fast with solving my problem. I know I wasn't going to get better by taking the drug. I'm way too feisty and outgoing to live like that. After three months I quit taking the pills. I once again became dissatisfied with my life and resumed trying to change the structure of my world.

Donna Drake
Sioux Falls, SD

Justice Speaks
Even though I was very committed to the passage of the Violence Against Women Act and knew some of the history behind it, I learned many things I didn't know in the article authored by David Frazee ("Gender Justice Breakthrough" fall 1995). More and more I marvel that the VAWA did pass!

Bonnie J. Campbell, Director
Violence Against Women Office
U.S. Department of Justice
And a Lot of Wieners Run Restaurants
"A lot of places serve good burgers. The Hooters Girls, with their charm and all-American sex appeal, are what our customers come for." —A Male VP for the Hooters Restaurant chain, responding to a recent decision by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission that found hiring only female waiters amounts to sex discrimination.

Equal Opportunity: It’s Come to This?
Susan Faludi has written in The New Yorker (Yes, The New Yorker) about men in the pornography business—the men in front of the camera. She says very little about women in pornography and nothing about the reality of those women’s lives ("Money Shots," October 30, 1995). It’s the put-upon men who command her attention, and according to them, women who perform in pornography are controlling bitches who can make or break a fellow’s career in what Faludi calls this “industry of feminine glamour.” As one guy says, though, men do have an advantage: “The one thing a woman cannot do is ejaculate in the face of her partner. We have that power.”

Oh Dear
Worldwide scientific evidence suggests that human male sperm counts have been plummeting.

What The New Yorker Didn’t Tell You About Susan Faludi’s Pimp
Faludi got most of her connections through Bill Margold, who took her on a pimp’s tour of the L.A. pornography industry, and she bought it. Margold figures prominently in two pro-pornography books whose authors he also showed around town: Porn Virgil to Dante’s Inferno. When the late TV journalist Rona Barrett interviewed Margold, she asked him about pornography in which a woman is fucked by an animal. Margold laughed and said maybe it was cruelty to the animal, maybe you should call the ASPCA, but nothing bad was happening to the woman.

Grrls Against Adulltism
“Grrl activists and feminist allies are challenging the (U.S.) National Women’s Studies Association’s annual conference” to be held at Skidmore College June 12–16, avers a press release on the Net from Generation GAP (Generation of Grrls Against Professionalism). Seems NWSA has not only left youth out of program planning but solicited sponsorship from a private psychiatric hospital that, says Generation GAP, “profits from pathologizing girls and women.”

She’s Inanely Fond of Me! (Affirmative! Affirmative! Affirmative!)
Even in its twilight, the Roseanne show is still better than almost anything else on TV. As Beatlemania threatens to engulf us, Roseanne reminded us of some apt lyrics written by those endearing mop-heads. Michael Jackson (who owns most Beatles lyrics) and ASCAP forbid direct quotes, so she had to paraphrase, but if you know Beatles’ music, you’ll get this hit (“Run for Your Life”): “You’re my woman, my property, and I don’t want any other man to have you. So don’t think of leaving me or I’ll kill you.”

Sisters Are Doing It to Themselves
Q. Which of these four United States senators helped pass the anti-welfare bill (later vetoed)? Barbara Boxer, Dianne Feinstein, Barbara Mikulski, Patty Murray.
A. All of the above.

A Thousand Points of White
Reading Michael Novick’s White Lies/White Power, our eye was caught by these excerpts from the report of the Independent
Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department, which monitored digital communications between police vehicles and between police cars and dispatchers:

- "I left a 14-year-old girl I met yesterday handcuffed naked to my chinning bar wearing nothing but a blindfold and salad oil. I'd like to check on her." (11/17/89, 8:28 P.M.)
- "I'm off this Friday. Let's do lunch. Do you still have that KKK meeting?" (11/7/89, 7:48 A.M.)
- "This hole is picking up. I almost got me a Mexican but he dropped the damn gun too quick, lots of witnesses." (11/20/89, 7:51 P.M.)
- "My shooting policy is based on nationality and looks." (10/22/90, 6:48 P.M.)
- "A day without violence is like a day without sunshine." (11/9/89, 12:40 A.M.)
- "We're just some studly big city gun-slinging crime fighters doing our job. Enough about us. What's up?" (6/30/90, 1:36 P.M.)

No More Bad Cops
In a statement to the press explaining why the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department has a group whose goals are to protect the rights of white male law-enforcement officers, the founder said the members were "distinctly averse to the proposal that, as a class, we be punished or penalized for any real or purported transgressions of our forebears. No member of this organization ever bought, owned, sold or traded a slave. None of us worked at Treblinka or Manzanar, nor sailed under Pizarro, nor rode to Wounded Knee. We just come to work every day and strive to do what is asked of us, seeking only to be recognized and rewarded according to our accomplishments."

Oh Dear, Oh Dear
This is not particularly a problem for anyone on the career track to pope, but since you started reading this, the average human male's sperm count may have dipped a teensy bit more.

Toilet Stalls Writ Large
Wittily testifying to their raging virility, however, four freshmen males at Cornell disseminated an e-mail message listing "Top 75 Reasons Why Women (Bitches) Should Not Have Freedom of Speech," and it got posted (and riposted) all over the Net. Among their reasons: "Because that stupid look on her face should not be accompanied by an equally stupid statement." "There are no speaking parts in pornos." "Whores get paid [sic] by the hour not by the word." Online campus activists against violence against women from across the country promptly "spam"ed (inundated) the electronic in-box of a university administrator.

Let Us Prey
Meanwhile, a professional priestly panel, all of them elegantly attired inhabitants of the Vatican, continues to man (sic) the sole religion with permanent observer status in the United Nations. One of them, the Holy Father, was perhaps understating matters when he predicted in a pre-Beijing encyclical: "The life of the Church in the Third Millennium will certainly not be lacking in new and surprising manifestations of the feminine genius."

Wanted:
Death Row Groupies
Yigal Amir, whose accomplishments include assassinating Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, has a hotline in his honor. According to The Jewish Week, a woman's voice on a Manhattan answering machine advises Orthodox young women who "may have an interest in marrying a great Jewish hero" (no word on his sperm count) to "leave a message describing yourself." Surreally—because Amir will never leave prison and the would-be bride will never be seen with him—the answering machine specifies that her height be under 5 feet 3 inches.

A professional rabbinical panel," it says, will screen candidates.

A Handy Word to Know
Dingbat (dmg-bat) n.
1. A whatchamacallit.
2. In magazine publishing, the typographical ornament at the end of a story.
3. In misogynist slang, an emptyheaded or silly woman.
4. An object, such as a brick or stone, used as a missile.
Massacre of the Weak

LAURA FLANDERS

Close to a million French women and men screamed a furious, collective "Non!" when they heard President Chirac's scheme to slash public spending on pensions, health services, and income supports for the unemployed. "We must fight—our backs are to the wall! It's now or never!" a striking railwayman declared on French TV as thousands of angry workers took over dozens of French towns last fall.

The French workers were shocked into action just as the U.S. Congress spat out an even more inhumane budget. But most U.S. media managed to avoid the comparison. In fact, the dominant media response here to the French strikes was a banal: baguette delays and snarled-up boulevards. Time magazine dismissed the protesting public workers as "coddled." The Wall Street Journal explained the root of the problem: The French people just don't understand.

But perhaps they understand more than American women, lulled to inaction by media assurances that the budget negotiations are the dullest subject on earth. Marion Wright Edelman, president of the Children's Defense Fund, was one of the few who seemed to notice. "It is immoral what is going on in Washington today. The country is sleeping through this revolution," she seethed to New York Times columnist Bob Herbert, calling the U.S. Congressional plan "an unbelievable budget massacre of the weakest."

As no class is more perilously poised than women—who, with children, make up the majority of the poor—it might have unglazed some eyes if reporters had covered the fiscal future from a working woman's point of view. Instead, we heard about "budget gridlock"—a traffic metaphor that implies that no one's really at fault, there are just too many interest groups on the road. The same TV networks that sent crews to the Grand Tetons to bemoan vacation-time closure of the federal wilderness ignored the provisions in the budget that would cut by a quarter the staff of the already strapped Environmental Protection Agency. Newsweek called the pre-Thanksgiving government shutdown "a stubborn, name-calling standoff." The New York Times referred to the "blame game" when 280,000 federal workers were furloughed for Christmas and 460,000 emergency employees toiled through the New Year without pay.

Then came the professional wrestling reports: the endless accounts of men in D.C. "bickering," "groping," "bloodletting," and "inch[ing] towards a budget deal." In fact, although President Clinton got to play the people's protector in his pitch for the Presidency at the Democratic National Convention, but Vice President Al Gore is all for the relaxing of government regulations—he calls it "Common-Sense Government."

Consider the impact of just one budget provision on the welfare of American women: the cuts aimed at the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Who are the more than 200,000 workers who have been killed and the two million who have been permanently disabled from job injuries since the Administration's founding in 1970?

Even though writers like syndicated columnist Ellen Goodman or The New York Times's Maureen Dowd haven't taken up the threat to OSHA as a "women's issue," heavy industry is no longer a male preserve. There are almost as many poultry workers as steelworkers in the U.S. today, and poultry workers are almost entirely poor, African American, and female. The average poultry processor makes 78 hand motions every minute, processing 90 birds a minute, with an injury rate worse than that of coal mining, construction, or auto work.

In an unusual piece of reporting last January, Tony Horwitz of The Wall Street Journal wrote about life at a contemporary poultry plant where women workers peed on themselves because they were forbidden to leave the production line without permission. And if this didn't clue reporters that OSHA was a women's concern, memories of the 25 locked-in women workers who lost their lives in the 1991 chicken-factory fire in Hamlet, North Carolina, should have set them straight. Clinton mourned for Hamlet in his pitch for the Presidency at the Democratic National Convention, but Vice President Al Gore is all for the relaxing of government regulations—he calls it "Common-Sense Government."

Common sense for whom? Who benefits when OSHA's feeble staff financing, which covered only 2,000 inspectors to monitor six million businesses nationwide, is reduced by a quarter? One rider to the '96 appropriations bill bars any regulation...
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Earth Ethics
LINDA CLARKE

"L.I. Blaze Eases With No Death And Little Loss," reads a recent headline in The New York Times. The story beneath the headline describes the firestorm that destroyed 12 square miles of pine barrens or pine woods on Long Island, NY. This translates into about seven thousand charred acres. There was no loss of life, the reporter sums up confidently. But every square foot of wild earth is crawling and growing. There had to be many, many deaths from this huge and terrible fire: not only trees and plants but fawn, deer, raccoons, badgers, rabbits, foxes, owls, beetles, turtles, wild dogs, birds. All had to perish in the boiling walls of flame. Furthermore, once the fire had burned itself out, the lack of ground cover has made this an even more dangerous place for animals. Yet according to the headline, there was no death, no loss. How strange to be so oblivious and indifferent to these hundreds of nonhuman creatures who until this catastrophe had long claimed the pine barrens as their habitat, their home.

Wild lives. As eager to be alive as we are. Animals, birds, insects struggle for survival all around us, each with wonderful capacities. They watch or sense the summer change to fall as we do. They too are burdened with endless chores. They too feel peace once they find a mate. They too must find a way to feed babies born each year. We tend not even to notice these creatures unless we find their dead bodies on some paved road. Skunk. Deer. Squirrel. Run over by a hurrying car.

As we move toward the twenty-first century, the happiness and peace of nonhuman creatures seems to mean nothing to us, as if their lives, their flourishing, are unreal. But the world's spiritual traditions tell us that bliss or happiness is the same for all creatures. There is a presence in a woodchuck that is the same as I find in myself once my mind becomes still, once I stop thinking, remembering, and expecting. Even naturalists have learned that animals can sense their oneness with humans if the human can remain peaceful and still. If you can be sufficiently quiet, a fawn might approach you and lick your face; a fox will walk by you without fear; a badger will be coaxed from its den to drink from your hand.

There is a real story taking place all around us, a story that is immense, nonhuman, and boundless. It is the story of all the creatures who share this universe with us. We are beginning to understand human beings as a species among species, and to ask if reality can ever be grasped from a single species point of view. To continue to maintain egoism and self-assertion as a species, to continue to think of ourselves as above all other living forms, is no longer adequate, no longer consoling.

Conversations
I Can't Have

CASSANDRA BYERS HARVIN

I watched the verdict in the O.J. Simpson case on a large screen in an auditorium at work, among a multiracial group of about 40 other employees. I'd just come from downstairs, where my immediate colleagues gathered around a TV for the same reason. Not wanting to see their reactions to the news, whatever it turned out to be, I found myself drifting away, darting into the smoking

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by whom we are less likely to be challenged. And when we do talk across the color lines, I suspect that we're more comfortable falling back on familiar formulas and politics and language, on sound bites.

It's relatively easy to talk about race in a very public kind of way—at social gatherings or at work. Such conversations are like the breaking of the pista: the Million Man March? black feminism? separate schools for black boys? Step right up and take a crack at them any way you want, 'cause they're loaded with intellectual and emotional goodies and there's plenty of stuff gonna fall out.

Take away as much or as little as you want. It's far less demanding on us as individuals to intellectualize and politicize race than to examine and challenge how it plays out in our everyday experiences.

A little white child announces to her mother that all black people carry boom boxes. The mother, so I am told by a friend of hers, corrects the child by saying, no, that's not true, but goes no further. I ask the parent telling me the story whether this woman has stopped to think why her child would have this impression. It seems that she has not. She is merely perplexed. Is this a luxury she can afford? Why didn't she have the conversation she could have had with her child, to search out the root of her daughter's innocent yet nonetheless racist generalization?

I often wonder what the parents of my young sons' white friends say to their children about race, if anything. And if nothing, what racial assumptions—from other family members, friends, the doggone television and the mall multiplex—are filling that void unexamined and unchallenged, because the needed conversations are not being had?

I am asked by a white editor to read the draft of an article and let her know whether there is anything "off" in terms of race, anything that could be offensive. It's not the first such request, but this is the first time I refuse. Then with a sneer "don't misunderstand what I'm about to say," I ask her whether she feels that she herself has a responsibility to read things with an eye for "off," offensive references, images, wording, assumptions. Part of being a professional journalist, I would think. But it seems that hurt feelings and surprise and defensiveness, as they so often do, stand in the way of her really hearing and understanding. I want her to know that it looks to me as if she's letting herself off the hook, shrugging any responsibility to think about race and passing it on to me.

In front of a computer in the public library, I try mightily to meet a writing deadline. But being incorruptibly gregarious, I stop to listen to a white woman, early-50s-looking, introduce herself as a writer and ask what I am working on. Putting it simply, I say, "Raising black sons in this society.

"'How is that any different from raising white sons?" she replies without taking time to blink, her tone making clear that she just knows I am making something out of nothing.

I politely make clear that we are not going to have that conversation. I can say it is because I am running out of time. The truth is that I am out of patience.

Mrs. Bland's Recipe

KATHY PASSERO

My great-grandmother died last May, but I didn't find out about the recipe until Christmas. My mother and I were sitting on the living room couch curled up on either side of my grandmother, three generations of women visiting the memories of a fourth, as we perused through a big, disorganized scrapbook that had belonged to "Grammy," my great-grandmother. Spilling out were newspaper articles from the early 1900s with ragged, yellow edges, party invitations with crumbling balloons pressed inside, black-and-white photos, and everything else Grammy had deemed worthy of shoving into her
A family secret links four generations of women

The full impact of that recipe didn’t strike me until later. And when it did, it took the abortion rights war out of the headlines and into my living room. Suddenly, all the muddy moral issues were distilled into one clear realization: I grew up in a generation accustomed to openly discussing abortion. I am not quite 30. By the time I was old enough to know what it meant, Roe v. Wade was firmly in place. I’m free to confess that when I wonder about the rights and wrongs of abortion, I sometimes feel guilty, worried that I’m a weak feminist, especially now, as I plan my own wedding and family. Many women I know dread that murky water between intellectual absolutes and emotion and personal experience. We may have aching moral doubts and double standards, but we don’t feel fear or shame voicing them. My friends and I can’t truly imagine a time when we wouldn’t be allowed to talk about abortion as a legal option.

To us, the right to discuss abortion seems part of our fundamental right to free speech. But it wasn’t for my great-grandmother. Or for all the other women who pressed urgently needed “recipes” into the hands of friends or the pages of “Important Books.”

Some of the most heartbreaking moments of my life have been tied to abortion: crying with friends who learned “bad news,” watching relationships end because a lover became a glaring reminder of difficult choices and sadness. One February midnight several years ago replays itself in my mind especially. I still see my hands shaking as I ran to the only all-night pharmacy in town for an emergency prescription of Methergine after finding a friend bleeding in a theater bathroom, hemorrhaging from an abortion a week earlier.

No woman or man I ever knew took the question of terminating a pregnancy lightly. But, in every situation, the ability to talk about what was happening was a powerful healing force. It got us through. And it moved us from ignorance to understanding, on both sides of the issue.

I can’t imagine being unable to answer questions a daughter or granddaughter of my own might ask. If today’s laws change, will it be the one to ask questions and see a young person I love shrink away from me in fear and shame?

My own mother teaches obstetrical and pediatric nursing. When I was a child, she crossed protesters’ lines to volunteer at our local chapter of Planned Parenthood. And when I was a teenager, she was often so honest about reproductive health issues that she made me blush. But she was just trying to help me grow up free of the taboos and misconceptions she’s seen, on both sides of 1973.

That spirit of openness finally convinced my grandmother to recount a few pages of family history that didn’t make it into Grammy’s book. After a long conversation over soda and pretzels at the kitchen table, she told us the following stories.

In 1947, shortly after my grandfather returned from the war in the Pacific, my grandmother discovered that she was pregnant again. The family had little enough money to take care of my mother, who was nine, and my uncle, who was two and, suffering from cerebral palsy, required constant medical attention. My grandmother was terrified of what a third child would mean both financially and emotionally for the family. In desperation, she implored a druggist for help.

This is what he told her: “Do you see this package of quinine? I can’t give this to you. I can’t charge you for it. But I can’t keep you from taking it off the shelf. Understand?”

She took the package home and swallowed doses of it for a month, feeling nauseated and tasting quinine in everything she ate. Finally she gave up, put the package in the cabinet, and resigned herself to having a third child. The next day she miscarried.

My grandmother also recalled an earlier day during the Depression, when the family lived in a single room. It was 1920 and she was just over two years old. She remembered her feet dangling over the edge of a horsehair chair in the doctor’s office, her aunt holding her still, while Grammy screamed in another room. “The doctor is murdering Mama!” she wailed over and over, listening in horror to the screams.

She was never sure what happened in that room that day, but she still maintains that Grammy had given herself a home abortion and then, as was common, gone to the doctor to get herself cleaned out.

Grammy’s sister-in-law wasn’t so lucky. She died of peritonitis infection from puncturing her uterus with a rusty nail, an old home remedy to terminate a pregnancy. There were more stories too, about neighbors and friends. Most from wealthy, WASP towns in the Midwest. Most were smart women, from “nice” families.

Four generations of women in my family, spanning close to 90 years, and abortion has touched each of our lives somehow. We’ve finally gotten to a point where my own grandmother thinks it’s better for me to write about Mrs. Bland than seal her up as a dark secret in the “Important Book.” How can we consider going back?
HOW ORGASM POLITICS HAS HIJACKED THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Why has the Big O seduced so many feminists—even Ms.—into a counterrevolution from within?

BY SHEILA JEFFREYS

The November/December 1995 issue of Ms., cover-lined HOT UNSCRIPTED SEX, showed a close-up of an African American woman licking her lipsticksticked lips. Despite all the feminist work that has been done in the last quarter-century to critique and challenge the male-supremacist construction of sex, none of the four articles inside made connections to the whole of the rest of women’s lives and status. Set in display type above one was a line from Barbara Seaman’s 1972 book, Free and Female: “The liberated orgasm is an orgasm you like, under any circumstances.” To judge from this issue of Ms., and from the shelves of women’s “erotica” in feminist bookstores, an unreflective politics of orgasm seems to have won out.

In the late 1960s and early ’70s, it was widely believed that the sexual revolution, by freeing up sexual energy, would make everyone free. I remember Maurice Girodias, whose Olympia Press in Paris published Story of O, saying that the solution to repressive political regimes was to post pornography through every letterbox. Better orgasms, proclaimed Austrian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, would create the revolution. In those heady days, many feminists believed that the sexual revolution was intimately linked to women’s liberation, and they wrote about how powerful orgasms would bring women power.

Dell Williams is quoted in Ms. as having set up a sex shop in 1974 with precisely this idea, to sell sex toys to women: “I wanted to turn women into powerful sexual beings.... I had a vision that orgasmic women could transform the world.”

Ever since the ‘60s, sexologists, sexual liberals, and sex-industry entrepreneurs have sought to discuss sex as if it were entirely separate from sexual violence and had no connection with the oppression of women. Feminist theorists and anti-violence activists, meanwhile, have learned to look at sex politically. We have seen that male ownership of women’s bodies, sexually and reproductively, provides the very foundation of male supremacy, and that oppression in and through sexuality differentiates the oppression of women from that of other groups.

If we are to have any chance of liberating women from the fear and reality of sexual abuse, feminist discussion of sexuality must integrate all that we can understand about sexual violence into the way we think about sex. But these days feminist conferences have separate workshops, in different parts of the building, on how to increase sexual “pleasure” and on how to survive sexual violence—as if these phenomena could be put into separate boxes. Women calling themselves feminists now argue that prostitution can be good for women, to express their “sexuality” and make empowering life choices. Others promote the practices and products of the sex industry to women to make a profit, in the form of lesbian striptease and the paraphernalia of sadomasochism. There are now whole areas of the women’s, lesbian, and gay communities where any critical analysis of sexual practice is treated as sacrilege, stigma-
Victims of the sex industry have become "sex experts."

Sexual capitalism, which has found a way to commoditize nearly every imaginable act of sexual subordination, has even found a way to repackag and recycle some of its victims. As a result, a small number of women who have had lifetimes of abuse and learned their sexuality in the sex industry serving men are now able, often with backing from male sex industrialists, to promote themselves as sex educators in the lesbian and feminist communities. Some of these high-profile women—who are hardly representative of most victims of the sex industry—have managed to set up sex magazines such as On Our Backs (for practitioners of lesbian sadomasochism) and stripping and pornography businesses. Many women have mistakenly accepted these formerly prostituted women as “sex experts.” Annie Sprinkle and Carol Leigh, for instance, have recirculated into women’s communities the woman-hating practices of the sex industry. These women have led the decisive laughter directed at those of us who have said that sex can and must be different.

At the same time, a few women who have profited from free-market capitalism in the ‘80s have demanded sexual as well as economic equality with men. They have escaped, and now want to use women as men do, so they consume pornography and demand strip clubs and brothels in which women will service them. This is not a revolutionary strategy. There is no threat here to men’s privilege, no possibility of releasing other women from their subordinate status. And once more, men have become the mechanism for more and more powerful orgasms is readily available through the good offices of the international sex industry. In the name of women’s liberation, many feminists today are promoting sexual practices that—far from revolutionizing and transforming the world—are deeply implicated in the practices of the brothel and of pornography.

How could this have happened? How could the women’s revolution have become so completely short-circuited? I suggest that there are four reasons.

**REASON NO. 1**

Victims of the sex industry have become “sex experts.”

We cannot construct a sexuality that will enable women to live without sexual terrorism without ending men’s abuse of women in prostitution. Within the women’s movement, however, the sex of prostitution has been explicitly advocated and promoted. Shannon Bell in Reading, Writing and Retailing the Prostitute Body (1994) argues that the prostituted woman should be seen as “worker, healer, sexual surrogate, teacher, therapist, educator, sexual minority, and political activist.” In this book Prostitutes of New York spokesperson Veronica Vera is quoted as saying we should affirm sex workers as “practitioners of a sacred craft” while affirming sex (presumably any sex including the sex of prostitution) as a “nourishing, healing tool.” But in fact the most powerful engine for the construction of male sexuality today is the sex industry.

Prostitution and its representation in pornography creates an aggressive sexuality requiring the objectification of a woman. She is made into a thing not worthy of the respect due to another equal sentient individual. Prostitution fosters a sexuality in which it is acceptable for the client to take his “pleasure” on and in the body of a woman who dissociates to survive. This is the model for how sex is conceived in male-supremacist society, and sexologists have developed their sex-therapy techniques from the practices of prostituted women who were paid to get elderly, drunken, or just plain indifferent men to have erections and be able to penetrate them. As Kathleen Barry has noted in The Prostitution of Sexuality, prostitution constructs a male-dominant/female-submissive sexuality in which the personhood and comfort of the woman, let alone her pleasure, is seen as irrelevant.

Prostitution is very big business and rapidly becoming globalized and industrialized. More than half the prostituted women in Amsterdam, for instance, are trafficked, i.e. brought there, often by deception, from other countries and often kept in conditions of sexual slavery. Australian women are trafficked into Greece, Russian women, into tabletop dancing in Melbourne, Burmese women, into Thailand; and Nepali women, into India. Millions of women in the rich world and many more millions in the poor world are being subjected to the abuse of suffering unwanted male hands on their bodies and penises in their bodies. Prostituted women do not like to experience this sexual abuse any more than any other women do. They are not different.

Prostituted women and children are expected to endure many of the forms of sexual violence that feminists would consider unacceptable in the workplace and the home. Sexual harassment and unwanted sexual intercourse are the basis of the abuse, but prostituted women have to receive obscene phone-sex calls, too. They work topless in retailing, car washes, and restaurants. Even as other women workers are seeking to desexualize their work so that they may be seen as something more than sex objects, women in prostitution and sexual “entertainment” are increasingly in demand. Men’s prostitution of women...
A LESBIAN VIEW

"Is This Why We Did It... So Women Could Use Whips and Chains?"

The African American lesbian-feminist poet Pat Parker composed these lines in 1983. They were occasioned by a historically specific event: "Three women," she wrote in her introduction, "were arrested for assault recently after they beat up a woman who put a swastika on another woman's shoulder during an S&M encounter." Parker, also a health activist, died of cancer in 1989 at the age of 45.

It's something you should write about. If you talk about it, then women will listen and know it's ok.

Now, envision one poet sitting in a bar, not cruising observing the interactions and then sitting face to face with a young woman who wants a spokesperson for sado-masochism among lesbians.

The first impulse is to dismiss the entire conversation as more ramblings of a SWG

(read Silly White Girl: derogatory characterization used by minorities for certain members of the caucasian race.)

The second is to run rapidly in another direction.

Polite poets do not run, throw up, or strike the other person in a conversation. What we do is let our minds ramble.

So nodding in the appropriate places I left the bar traveled first to the sixties back to the cramped living rooms activist dykes consciousness-raising sessions

I polled the women there one by one Is this what it was all about? Did we brave the wrath of threatened bar owners so women could wear handkerchiefs in their pockets? One by one I asked. Their faces faded furrows of frowns on the their brows. I went to the halls where we sat hours upon hours arguing with Gay men trying to build a united movement I polled the people there one by one

Is this why we did it? Did we grapple with our own who hated us so women could use whips and chains? The faces faded puzzled faces drift out of vision. I returned to the jails where women sat bruised and beaten singing songs of liberation through puffed lips I polled the women there one by one

Is this why we did it? Did we take to the streets so women can carve swastikas on their bodies?

Hundreds and hundreds of women pass by, no, march by

chant, sing, cry I return to the voice the young voice in the bar and I am angry the vision of women playing as Nazis, policemen, rapists taunts me mocks me words drift through

it's always by consent we are oppressed by other dykes who don't understand and I am back in the bar furious the poll is complete no, no no no this is not why we did it this is not why we continue to do.

We need not play at being victim we need not practice pain we need not encourage helplessness they lurk outside our doors follow us through the streets and claim our lives daily. We must not offer haven for fascists and pigs be it real or fantasy the line is too unclear. — PAT PARKER

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reduces the women they abuse and all women to the status of bodies to be sold and used. How can feminists ever expect to eliminate abusive practices from their bedrooms, workplaces, and childhoods if men can simply continue to buy the right to those practices on the street, or, as in Melbourne, in state-licensed brothels?

Tabletop dancing is a type of prostitution now being made acceptable in rich countries as "entertainment." (In poor countries dependent on sex tourism, all prostitution is called entertainment.) Along with other women from the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, I recently visited a strip club in Melbourne called The Men's Gallery. Some 20 or 30 women were "dancing" on tables. A cross-section of men—teenagers from the suburbs, men who looked like college lecturers and teachers, grandfathers, tourists—sat with their knees under the tables. Often in twos, these men would ask a woman to strip. Doing so, she would place her legs over the men's shoulders, gymnastically showing them her shaved genitalia from front and back in different positions for 10 minutes as the men put money into her garter. The woman's genitals would be inches from the men's faces, and the men would stare, their faces registering expressions of astonished and guilty delight as if they could not believe they are allowed such dominion. Were the men sexually aroused by the incitement of their dominant phallic status? Was this simple exhibition of female genitalia, sexually aroused by the incitement of their dominant phallic status? Was this simple exhibition of female genitalia, sexually aroused by the incitement of their dominant phallic status? Did we grapple with our own who hated us so women could use whips and chains? The faces faded puzzled faces drift out of vision. I returned to the jails where women sat bruised and beaten singing songs of liberation through puffed lips I polled the women there one by one

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something has gone terribly wrong with gay male liberation
A Gay Male View

"Something Has Gone Terribly Wrong With Gay Male Liberation"

One might have hoped, given the amount of political effort expended by feminist women on behalf of gay men, before and after the onslaught of AIDS, that the gay male community might join in and participate in the feminist struggle for sex equality. Unfortunately, quite the opposite has occurred. Many gay men have severed ties with early and present feminist commitments to social justice and have instead embraced an ideology far removed.

Something has gone terribly wrong with gay male liberation: The gay male community is obsessed with physical and psychological hypermasculinity. The message conveyed by gay male pornography, now readily defended by gay male activists and academics alike as liberating and progressive, pervades all aspects of gay male culture. With titles like #Fuck Me Like a Bitch, I Was a Substitute Vagina, Beat Me Till I Came, Muscle Beach, Slaves to the SS, and Stud Daddy, gay male pornography promotes a model of behavior concerned with self-gratification and the right to dominate and control.

What proponents of gay porn are really advocating is that we participate in a rather bizarre form of mutuality based on reciprocal abuse. We are expected to find strength in and be empowered by a model of "equality" that "liberates" by stressing that while I might be expected to assume the status of a weak, submissive, servient "bottom" at the hands of a descriptively more masculine "top," any resulting disempowerment is rendered nonharmful because I also have the option of becoming that top if I so desire. Frankly, I desire neither.

I neither want to control or be controlled. I neither want to dehumanize or be dehumanized. I neither want to overpower or be overpowered. What I want is real equality.

What is needed is a definition of gay male sexuality and identity that is radically subversive—one in which erotic empowerment is linked to companionship, trust, and partnership. This is needed is an identity that rejects assimilation, masculine mimicry, and the notion that power over someone is sexy—one that instead finds strength in compassion, self-respect, and respect for others.

—CHRISTOPHER KENDALL


Reason No. 3

Lesbians have been emulating gay men.

The feminist challenge to the prostitution model of sexuality has been especially resisted by many gay men and by lesbians who emulate them. As Karla Jay writes, apparently uncritically, in Dyke Life:

Today, lesbians are on the cutting edge of sexual radicalism.... Some lesbians now claim the right to an erotic freedom that was once associated with gay men. A few large cities have sex clubs and S/M bars for lesbians, while pornographic magazines and videos produced by lesbians for other women have proliferated across the United States. Our sexuality has become as public as our tattoos and our pierced bodies.

In gay male culture we see the phenomenon of a sexuality of self-mutilation and slavery, of tattooing, piercing, and sadomasochism, turned into the very symbol of what gayness is. Commercial gay interests have invested powerfully in exploiting this sexuality of oppression as constitutive of gayness. Much of the power of the pink (gay) dollar developed from the provision of venues, bars and baths, in which the sexuality of prostitution could be exacted, though now mostly unpaid. The cultural influence of gay male resistance to feminist challenges to pornography and prostitution has been extensive, heavily financed in gay media by advertising from the gay sex industry.

Some gay men have challenged the dominant/submissive sexuality that prevails in the gay male community, but few so far have ventured into print lest they experience the ire of their brothers. Gay men, raised in male supremacy, taught to worship masculinity, also have to struggle to overcome their eroticization of dominant/submissive hierarchies if they are to become friends to feminism.

The sex of prostitution has been central to the construction of gayness because of the role of prostitution in gay history. Traditionally male homosexuality was expressed, for middle-class men, in the buying of poorer men or boys—as done by Oscar Wilde, Andre Gide, Christopher Isherwood. This was not the model for lesbian practice.

In the 1980s, as lesbians lost confidence in their own visions, strengths, and possibilities—as feminism came under attack and the sex industry went from strength to strength—many turned to gay men as their models and began to define themselves as "sexual deviants." They developed an identity in total contradiction to that of lesbian feminism. Lesbian-feminists celebrate lesbianism as the apogee of woman-loving, as a form of resistance to all the practices and values of male-supremacist culture, including pornography and prostitution. The libertarian lesbians who rose up to decry feminism in the '80s attacked lesbian-feminists for "desexualizing" lesbianism and chose to see themselves as "pro-sex." But the practices of this "pro-sex" stand turned out to replicate the version of lesbianism that had traditionally been offered by the sex industry. The brave new "transgressive" lesbians were the very sadomasochistic, butch/femme constructions that had long been staples of heterosexual men's pornography.

Such lesbians embraced sex-industry (continued on page 58)
RUNNING SCARED

In these anxious times, will women make a difference?
Only if they're on the ballot.

BY KAY MILLS

CONGRESSWOMAN PATRICIA SCHROEDER'S CHRISTMAS card said it all: "Not being a 'femiNewtie,' I'm not excited about this holiday season. Give the season back, Gingrich!" Schroeder's decision to retire from the House, where she has served for 24 years, stole some of our excitement as well, leaving a sense of malaise reaching well into this year. While you have to applaud someone who wants to chart a new course for herself, why not a course to the U.S. Senate where a Colorado seat is open?

That's a selfish thought. Why should Schroeder want to do what few other sensible women and men want to do? The House and Senate are not user-friendly places these days. The voice of the radical religious right grows louder, and there's little interest in building consensus and attacking social problems in a positive vein. Legislators are leaving in droves—even a senior Republican and committee chair like Nancy Kassebaum of Kansas.

Unless you're a true-blue Newtie, it's hard to get excited about tearing down programs that benefit women and children. The Democrats, with few voices vigorous enough to reach us in opposition to the cutbacks and not enough strength when the votes are recorded, are looking a great deal like the Republicans.

So a lot of women ask why they should bother voting. What happened in '94, when 38.7% of the electorate elected us the Newtonian Congress that's doing the demolition job is one answer. "Sixteen million women stayed home in 1994 who voted in the 1992 presidential election," says Ellen Malcolm, president of EMILY's List, the Democratic fundraising group started in 1985 for pro-choice women candidates (EMILY as in Early Money Is Like Yeast, the leavening that lets women candidates rise to the top).

What do we have to look forward to in '96? Not another "year of the woman" like '92 when women ran for 22 percent of the open seats and, yes, it really did make a difference (see "The Lessons of '92," page 23). The number of women running for open seats is more like '94—fourteen percent, perhaps even less. And while women have maintained the 47 seats they hold in Congress, a record also achieved for the first time in '92, the politics of the women sitting in those seats is shifting. In 1994, five seats went to conservative Republican women such as Helen Chenoweth of Idaho, Enid Greene Waldholtz of Utah and Linda Ann Smith, while more progressive Democrats such as Jolene Unsoeld of Washington, Karen Shepherd of Utah, Lynn Schenk of California, and Marjorie Margolies-Mezvinsky of Pennsylvania were defeated.

The picture for women in state legislatures—an area of increasing interest as block grants move much of the action from Congress to the statehouses—isn't much better. There, too, women are just holding their own. While five times as many women now serve in legislatures as did in 1969, no gains have been registered since 1993. Women now hold 1,532 (20.6 percent) of the 7,424 state legislative seats in the country. It's not just that candidates who run for Congress often serve their apprenticeship in the state legislature, so no gain there can be pain on up the line. There's a need right now for organized aggressive state legislators as the states set their priorities for block grants.

Finding progressive women candidates who can grab the attention of voters is the first challenge. EMILY's List and the much smaller pro-choice Republican WISH list (Women In the Senate and House) are gearing up at the national level. So is the bipartisan Women's Campaign Fund, which devotes one-third of its money to state and local races. For some new faces to watch, see page 24.

EMILY's List, which Malcolm says raised $8.2 million for...
The “Year of the Woman” did so make a difference.

THE LESSONS OF ’92

ELECTING WOMEN TO CONGRESS MATTERS. All those women sent to Washington in 1992—the highly touted “Year of the Woman”—did make a difference, and not just in how they voted.

A study by the Center for the American Woman and Politics (CAWP) at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, shows a significant gender gap in votes on key issues, especially among Republicans. But it also found that the presence of more women helped expand the issues on the agenda of the last Congress, the 103rd, and to shape legislation. What’s more, the women advanced a collective agenda by working through their bipartisan caucus and using committee assignments to advantage.

In 1992, women almost doubled their presence in the House of Representatives—from 28 to 47—and went from two women in the Senate to six. They were beneficiaries of a harmonious convergence of the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings, open seats created by reapportionment (and resignations of members of Congress who didn’t want to run in reconfigured districts), a solid base of female candidates who had paid their dues in state and local offices, and the emergence of EMILY’s List as a big-bucks player.

The number of women elected provided an “unprecedented opportunity to conduct important research in the living laboratory of Congress,” says Ruth B. Mandel, director of the Eagleton Institute at Rutgers, CAWP’s parent organization, and one author of the study. Researchers charted women’s impact on legislation in areas including women’s health, abortion, health-care reform, and the crime bill.

In voting, the study found, for example, that 67 percent of Republican women backed the Brady gun control bill, while only 30 percent of GOP men did, 58 percent of Republican women—but only 19 percent of men—voted to ban assault weapons, and 50 percent of the party’s women opposed the Hyde Amendment to outlaw federal payments for virtually all abortions for poor women, versus 6 percent of the men. Democrats also had a gender gap in major votes—specifically when a higher percentage of women than men supported the assault weapons ban and opposed a version of the Clinton Administration’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy on gays and lesbians in the military. But the gap rarely yawned as large as in the GOP.

However, “The voting patterns of women in Congress tell only a small part of the story about women’s impact,” the study says. Congresswomen also “added issues to the Congressional agenda that had rarely, if ever, been addressed.”

Washington is a power town and “when people come to Washington, they want to get into power issues,” says Rep. Patricia Schroeder (D-Colo.), dean of the congressional women, who is retiring at the end of this term. Head Start and the Family Medical Leave Act, for example, are not big power issues. Having a group of women moving these issues raised their priority, Schroeder added.

Women’s health concerns were a prime example. Schroeder said she had been appalled to discover how little health research had been done with women as subjects or on diseases that particularly affect women, such as breast cancer. The National Institute of Health (NIH) “didn’t even use female rats,” she quipped. Operating across party lines, the Congresswomen won increases in funding for breast cancer research and other women’s health issues. Helping the process along: the presence for the first time of four women on the Labor, Health, and Human Services Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee.

The gap that existed between the votes of GOP women and men is no longer as great and the teamwork demonstrated in the 103rd Congress clearly has been missing in the 104th, which has attacked programs that benefit women and children.

“I wish I could say that if we had more women, that would make a difference today,” says Schroeder. “We have some wolves in designer clothing.”

What the study doesn’t say is that it also matters what political philosophies are espoused by those women. The gap that existed between the votes of GOP women and men is no longer as great and the teamwork demonstrated in the 103rd Congress clearly has been missing in the 104th, which has attacked programs that benefit women and children.

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Here are ten House and Senate candidates already endorsed by EMILY's List for the Democrats or by the WISH List for Republicans. Apart from being pro-choice these women differ widely on other issues. At press time, EMILY's List was backing 12 congressional candidates; the WISH List was supporting eight.


**NATALIE DAVIS**, a political science professor is running in Alabama for the Democratic nomination for the U.S. Senate seat from which fellow Democrat Howell Heflin is retiring. Davis had raised $280,000 by the end of 1995 and has good visibility from her commentaries on local TV and CNN. She has one or possibly two primary opponents and wants to raise what she calls "generational issues" like being forced to choose between caring for elderly parents and providing good education for one's kids.

**DOLORES BRIONES**, a hospital administrator in El Paso, Texas, is running for the House seat vacated by fellow Democrat Ronald Coleman. A community activist, Briones has been especially concerned with issues that affect immigrants and with other border questions. The [70% Hispanic] district is considered strongly Democratic.

**KATHLEEN A. DONOVAN**, first woman to chair the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and the Bergen County clerk, is running for the House seat being vacated by Democrat Robert G. Torricelli. A former state legislator, Donovan has also chaired the state Republican Party and served on Governor Christine Todd Whitman's transition team. A moderate Republican, Donovan was active in the legislature on environmental issues and also hopes to stress children, senior citizens, and domestic violence.

**GALE NORTON**, Colorado's attorney general since 1991, is running for Hank Brown's U.S. Senate seat. Norton is a pro-choice Republican and tends toward the conservative side on environmental and economic issues. When she won her second term in 1994, she was Colorado's biggest vote-getter.

backing. Whether these pro-choice candidates can make a dent under these circumstances depends in part on whether they receive the technical and financial support they need, says Goldman.

The one bright side—both Republican and Democratic pollsters agree—is that the issues voters are concerned about are the kind they tend to trust women candidates to handle well. "Voters are not as angry as they were in 1994, but they are more anxious now," Republican political consultant John Deardourff told a San Diego meeting of women in state legislatures sponsored by the Center for American Woman and Politics last fall. He believes voters think the message of the Republican Congress is right but the plan it has come up with is wrong. They are worried about holding on to their jobs and disturbed that they haven't gotten the changes they thought they were voting for in both 1992 and 1994. He thinks voters will be confronted by the "choice of the least worst" candidate.

"If there is going to be a change in this mood, the one group in which people have confidence is women," Deardourff continued, adding that his numbers show a close match between what people want from their leaders and what women candidates are supposed to offer.

Democratic pollster Celinda Lake agrees. Her polling has sought to identify what voice women can have. She has found three areas where women are concerned and where female candidates could show leadership: the economy, values, and change. "Voters think in kitchen-table terms," her data show. They are annoyed with candidates who don't know what a price scanner is (as Presi-
IN '96

NANCY KASZAK, currently an Illinois state representative, wants to take Dan Rostenkowski's Chicago House seat back for the Democrats. Before she can oppose freshman Republican Michael Patrick Flanagan, however, she must win a primary against fellow legislator Rod Blagojevich, son-in-law of powerful city alderman Richard Mell. As a legislator, Kaszak has been an advocate for issues involving children and women, especially women in small businesses.

JANE M. SWIFT, a Massachusetts state senator whose district includes the Berkshires, is running for the House seat held since 1991 by Democrat John Olver. Republican Silvio Conte represented the district for 32 years before his death that year. In her third term in the state senate, Swift was named to the Republican leadership team in 1993. If elected, Swift says she would belong to the GOP's moderate bloc. She supports the balanced budget amendment, campaign reform, and term limits.

NANCY MAYER, Rhode Island's state treasurer, is a candidate for the U.S. Senate seat of retiring Democrat Claiborne Pell. An attorney and pro-choice Republican, she was chief legal counsel for the state agency regulating banking, insurance, and securities before her election to the treasurer's post in 1992.

DEBBIE STABENOW, a former Michigan state senator and gubernatorial candidate, is running against freshman Republican Dick Chrysler. A moderate Democrat with no primary opposition, she sponsored legislation that eliminated property taxes as the source of money for school districts, halving those taxes for many homeowners. She opposes Republican plans on Medicaid and Medicare and phasing out the Small Business Administration and Commerce Department, which her opponent backs.

DALE MCCORMICK, a Democratic state senator in Maine and open lesbian, plans to challenge freshman Republican Rep. James B. Longley, jr. in a district that has sent as many Democrats as Republicans to Congress since 1968. Longley won his '94 race by 52 to 48 percent after its Democratic incumbent unsuccessfully sought the open Senate seat Olympia Snowe won handily.

MAGGIE TINSMAN is the only woman and only pro-choice candidate in the Republican primary for the Senate seat held by Democrat Tom Harkin of Iowa, who is running again. A state senator and former county supervisor, she describes herself as a fiscal conservative.

dent Bush discovered in '92) or what gas costs. "They want people they think they could meet in the grocery store." People—and especially non-college women who didn't vote in '94—want politicians to address real-life issues that would improve their prospects. "If the Democrats are viewed as maintaining the status quo," Lake says, "people won't hear their message at all."

Campaigning on these kinds of issues may not be as dramatic as announcing that you believe Anita Hill—which galvanized voters in '92—but feminists should insist that the candidates they support talk in terms that reach a wide range of women in these economically anxious times. And they need to push likely women to run. "There are very few highs for women in politics right now," says Betsey Wright, executive vice president of the Wexler Group, a government relations firm. Wright, who headed a national program that trained women candidates and campaign managers in the '70s, says that women's political organizations find themselves asking, "Do we dare talk our friends into running for office?"

"I say, 'Get over it!'" and get on with the business of electing progressive women, Wright declares. "You've got to be proactive," says Harriett Woods, former Missouri lieutenant governor and two-time Senate candidate. "Conservative women were motivated to run," she says of '94. "They had a cause."

Think of it this way: '94 was a wake-up call. Who gets elected in '96 will determine whether the last two years were an acceleration of a permanent shift in how government works or a temporary blip on the radar screen."
WHERE FEMINISM ROCKS

From riot grrrls to Rasta reggae, political music in the '90s is raw and real.

by Margaret R. Saraco

The Lunachicks were playing at a New York City nightclub and I had to walk past a slew of bikers to get in. Given the bouncer's nod, I entered a huge dark room filled with people milling about the bar and seething on the dance floor. Some were dressed in black leather and chains and wore an array of hair color, everything from fuchsia and electric orange to ebony black and bleached white. Skin was pierced and tattooed, as decorated as the clothes.

I had on my usual inconspicuous black T-shirt, jeans, black boots, and baseball cap worn backward. Though I have been reporting on the music scene for several years, I wondered whether I was in the right place. It felt like a rite of passage.

Downstairs, in a split-level room, I could see the Lunachicks, four women bopping and yelling onstage, their makeup purposely grotesque, screaming and screeching on guitars and drums in colorful baby-doll outfits that might have been designed by Betsey Johnson. People were dancing and yelling back at the stage. Suddenly one of the singers shouted into her mike: "Let the girls up front! Let the girls up front!"

I stood still at the back. A few "boys" groaned. A surge of "girls" moved forward, screaming and waving their fists. Rude, crude, and loud, the Lunachicks sang.

Take this! Take that! But no one is ever going to take my
fucking rights back! Don't touch me in the street!
'Cause we ain't your tits & meat/
Just because we're fucking women/That's right.

Momentum built to a crescendo. I got caught up in the fervor of the crowd of fans—both male and female—enraged, excited, outraged, and I found myself feeling more powerful than when I came in.

Where are the younger generation of feminists? people often ask me. Have we lost them? My answer is always the same: "You're looking in the wrong places."

There is strong anti-sexist and anti-racist manifestos present in today's music. You don't have to be a teenager or a twenty-something to appreciate it, and you don't have to be a rock and roller to respect it. All you have to do is listen—it's where the pulse of young feminism beats.

Many of the artists don't call themselves feminists. They always consider themselves musicians first. Yet they sing about feminist themes—often with an earl sense of humor, as the Lunachicks do, decked out in wigs and platform shoes, in "Binge & Purge."

Mom won't let me eat too much/
But, in my room I go and stuff/
I scream & f*ck & are my best friends/
I'll have my head in the toilet 'til the end.

The Lunachicks, known to sing bluntly about bodily functions, are no model for politically correct jargon or theories. Yet like other bands today, they are compelled to make changes in attitudes and perceptions, dismantling old-fashioned images and role-playing. They sing about what they know.

When I went online to do research for this article—I asked for leads to feminist musicians, no matter what genre—I was overwhelmed by the response. Fans on listservs and newsgroups all over the Internet e-mailed me names of albums, songs, and bands that have yet to record an album. A generation ago, pop music with any politics was rarely found outside the ranks of earnest folkies. Not to disrespect those earlier balladeers, but today politicized voices are loud and angry and everywhere.

The riot grrrls, for instance...
(that's girl with an angry growl), are a loose amalgam of bands and fans who identify with an outlook based on equality and grounded in feminism and rock. Among high school and college students, their message has spread like wildfire.

Fascinated by riot grrrls' dedication to one another and addicted to much of their music, I talked online with Tamra, a member of the three-piece L.A. band Lucid Nation. I asked her what defines a riot grrrl. No one riot grrrl can speak for all riot grrrls, Tamra explained. "Riot grrrl is whatever it means to whoever hears it. I guess to me it's anybody who lives in the awareness that abuse is out of control in this country. Anybody who votes so that women can have the right to choose, anyone who works with us and treats us with respect, everyone who sees the world 'raw and wrong and real'—anybody who knows our reality and wants to change it—is riot grrrl to me." Riot grrrl is also not gender specific. Kurt Cobain, the late lead singer of Nirvana, is deemed by many fans, including Tamra, a true riot grrrl.

Being on the Fringe Is Just Fine with Riot Grrrl Bands (and Many Other Recording Artists). They Don't Trust Much of Anything in the Mainstream—and Why Should They? Active and deadly serious, riot grrrls network through fanzines, meetings, conventions, and the Net. At a riot grrrl concert you might find people collecting food and clothing for the homeless, raising money for a battered women's shelter or AIDS, and demonstrating self-defense techniques.

The riot grrrl phenomenon began in 1991 with two all-female punk rock bands. Kathleen Hanna, an ex-stripper and the lead singer of Bikini Kill, began communicating about the state of women in rock and roll with members of Bratmobile—known by male musicians and fans as "fox-core." Molly Newman of Bratmobile was studying women's issues at the University of Oregon when, with Hanna and fellow band member Allison Wolfe, they published the zine Riot Grrrl—the first time the phrase appeared in print. The mass media have distorted riot grrrls' approach, described their music as an obnoxious sad, and dismissed them as man-haters. To Tamra, those are fighting words. "Anytime strong women assert equality, resistance intensifies."

They're not the only ones fired up. Feminist rock and roll, rap, reggae, and folk artists are in open rebellion against sexism and sexist slurs, dysfunctional family life—including incest and child abuse—date rape, media portrayals of violence against women, and the possible loss of reproductive rights. Some are angry musicians excluded from feminist politics because they are rockers—or shut out of popular music because they are outspoken feminists—and many are recording on independent labels, which are cropping up all over the country. For musicians pushing personal, often nonmainstream, feminist agendas, this "indie" market is a perfect venue.

But not all are on the fringe. Some—like Tori Amos, PJ, Luscious Jackson, and Babes in Toyland—have crossed over to the mainstream and can be heard on radio. Amos's popular album Little Earthquakes includes a song about experiencing sexual assault, "Me and a Gun." A capella, Amos sings:

With her subsequent album Under the Pink, Amos attempts to break the victim cycle and heal.

Funk-folk singer Ani DiFranco (pronounced All-fnco) has turned down several major recording contracts. Thumbing her nose at music-industry execs, whom she calls "heterosexist suits," she prefers to produce albums on her own label, Righteous Babe Records. At 24, she is so popular that her seven albums since 1990 have sold over 150,000 copies. Consistently performing for standing-room-only crowds, she delivers her chilling songs in a lyrical, yet insistent, voice. Her provocative "Out of Range," from her album by the same name, could well be a young feminist's anthem:

If you're not angry then you're just stupid/Or you don't care/Or else you can't react/When you know something's so unfair.

Some artists, and some fans too, find that playing by corporate rules usurps both power and message. But after recording for several years with indie labels, Consolidated, a San Francisco-based hip-hop band, decided to sign with London Records, and so far they seem to have maintained artistic control. The members of Consolidated are three straight white guys—Adam Sherburne, Mark Pastel, and Philip Stelt. A common misconception, they have said, is that because they are a "feminist, vegetarian, homo-supporting band," they must be wearing skirts or Birkenstocks. In fact their buffed, buzz-cut image comes closer to that of the hard-core band Danzig. Their music is confrontational and interactive, and their lyrics denounce violence against women, heterosexism and homophobia, racism, militarism, and animal cruelty. On Business of Punishment, Consolidated's first album for London, lead singer Sherburne does a rap disputing the pro-porn line on stripping ("No Answer for a Dancer"). Mixing that track, the band slipped in a "sample," or uncredited audio quote, from a speech by Andrea Dworkin.

The raps on recordings by the British band FunDaMental, another male-feminist hip-hop band, center on equality, sisterhood, female role models, getting rid of exploitive images of women, and speaking out against racism. FunDaMental is composed of Aki Nawaz and MC Mushtaq, both Asian, and Impi D and Hot Dog Dennis, both Afro-Caribbean. Their newest album, Seize the Time, draws correlations between racial inequality in Europe and in America ("Seize the Time") and attacks "money grubbing" religious hypocrisies ("Dollars of Sense"). "Mother India," written and (continued on page 57)
THE NEW REVOLUTIONS PER MINUTE

Some of these albums are available in major record stores; others can be ordered directly from the label or from the Ladsilipper Catalog (800-634-6044).

- Jamie Anderson's Bad Hair Day (Tsunami Records) is a funny, lesbian-folksy romp. On the title track she wants to form a support group for women who are having a bad hair day. In "Wedding Song" she warns a former lesbian friend who's getting married that she'll come to the wedding but "don't ask me to dance with the groom, 'cause/t want to dance with the bride!"

- Any album by Rory Block, a fine blues guitarist, is a treasure. On Angel of Mercy (Rounder) she sings about human dignity ("Angel of Mercy"), the homeless ("Somebody's Baby"), and sexism ("Big Bad Agent Man").

- Consolidated's Business of Punishment (London) moves like a rhythmic male-feminist litany with a rock-hard, explosive, bare sound. "Butyric Acid" rages against abortion foes: "i want to talk about media distortion ad/ campaign telling lie about abortion standing/there call yourself a good christian break yourfucking sign because you're causing me friction/ignorant group operation rescue if you treat/women then they might even kill you randall/terry says they're soldiers of god if you ask me/i'd say they're smoking much profi!

- Lunachicks', Jerk of All Trades (Go-Kart) includes "Fallopian Rhapsody," a pro-choice fight song. And "Brickface and Stucco" is a turnaround love story about a boy who becomes a drag queen and a girl who becomes a dyke sea captain. Together they bear a child named Formica Linoleum. Whoah!

- Susan McKeown and the Chanting House, Bones (Sheila-Ria-Gig Music, PO Box 2349, New York, NY 10009-2349; e-mail: sheilagig@aol.com). A Duhliner, McKeown sings women's stories in urban-Celtic, acoustic-rock chanteys. "Snakes," a song for Irish women, ends with a verse sung in Irish from a song called "Women of Ireland." McKeown told me that "this was a traditional form of lament passed down among women."

- Sister Carol is devoted to the Rastafarian Gospel and is a "real roots girl" in the title song to Call Mi Sister Carol (Heartbeat), she sings of racial equality: "Mi come fe educate and eradicate hate/ism and schism I will kick and we nuh respect/debate! I love her intro to "Blackman Time": "You're not the brother of my mother/or the brother of my father so I just don't understand. How and when you became my/Uncle Sam."

- Skunk Anansie—the name comes from the animal's smell and the follicular spiker/human protagonist—is the first rock and roll band fronted by a black woman. Her name is Sin, and she often writes things on her forehead, like "c!t rock." This multiracial British quartet is filled out by Ace (guitar), Case Lewis (bass), and Mark Richardson (drums). Their album Paranoid & Sunburnt (One Little Indian/Epic) includes "Intellectualize My Blackness," which begins: I hit him with a piece of his philosophy/Anglo-Saxon muck in his type of greed/ what did he do to deserve such hate/ (He tried to) intellectualize my blackness."

- In their disturbing "Little Baby Swastika," about how some parents are raising their children to be racists, a baby scrawls swastikas on the wall. The "queer-core" band Tribe 8 has a savagely satiric song called "neanderthal dyke" in which they shout: "Patriarchal standards of beauty/is what my p.c. girlfriend would have me refuting/she's got a great mind and an even better body/it makes me feel like raping and looting."

The refrain, from Fist City (Alternative Tentacles), goes: "neanderthal dyke/ neanderthal dyke/never read dworkin/i ride a big bike/feminist theory gets me uptight/get in some heels and lipstick/and i'll spend the night!"

Don't look to these grrrls to make you feel comfortable. Their bare-breasted, sexually graphic music is not about holding hands for a walk in the park.

- Women's control over their own bodies is something that Zrazy, an Irish duo of Maria Walch and Carole Nelson, feel passionately about. "I'm in Love with Mother Nature," on Give It All Up (Vélo), establishes their agenda right up front: Our music says no to the last 5000 years/look at the wars, making the news/they make the news/know what I mean?/they say this is a man's world/they're absolutely right/it's crazy isn't it?/when you think about it/ but it doesn't have to be this way/no it doesn't have to be this way."

Celtic folk chants rhythmically groove to easygoing dance music. Zrazy's politics are not just in their lyrics; they list the phone number for nondirecive pregnancy counseling in the Republic of Ireland. (At the time the album was released, that number was illegal, even though counseling was not.)

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Spring 1996 • ON THE ISSUES

AN OPINIONATED PICK

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Jamie Anderson

Sister Carol

Susan McKeown

Consolidated
WHY ANNIE GOT HER GUN

"Every intelligent woman should become familiar with the use of firearms," said Annie Oakley, shown here at age 65. Ambidextrous, she fired pistols with her left hand, rifles and shotguns with her right.

Photograph from the collection of Bess Edwards, The Annie Oakley Foundation, Greenville, Ohio.

Annie Oakley trusted bullets more than ballots.
She knew what would stop another "he-wolf." BY CAROLYN GAGE

ANNIE OAKLEY HAS ALWAYS BEEN A PROBLEM FOR FEMINISTS. The world's champion sharpshooter, she stalwartly refused to align herself with any of the women's reform movements of her day, including suffrage.

Who should have understood better the need for the bloomer costume than the woman who made a career of slogging through marshy bogs at dawn with all-male hunting parties, practiced trick riding, and engaged in trapping shooting competitions in the sports arena? But Oakley "abominated" bloomers. Instead she wore gaiters and shortened skirts, rode sidesaddle for her stunts, and designed her own special skirt with hooks and grommets after she took up the sport of cycling.

Oakley refused to participate in the suffrage debate, expressing her fear that not enough "good" women would vote. Married to the same man for 45 of her 66 years, she
She argued that safety would not be an issue if both women and children were properly instructed in the use of guns.

In her lifetime, Annie Oakley taught thousands of women to shoot. On her first visit to London, she took out a newspaper ad offering to give lessons on the use of pistols, rifles, and shotguns “to ladies only,” and back in the States she continued her campaign of free lessons. In 1897 she wrote a series of articles titled “Without Shooting Herself, Taught by Annie Oakley,” in order to dispel one of the most persistent and prevalent myths about women who own guns.

In these articles, Oakley insisted that nervousness was the principal obstacle for women to overcome in handling guns, but she assured her readers that shooting was “one of the best tonics for the nerves and for the mind.” In 1898 she went so far as to send a letter to President McKinley offering “to place a Company of fifty lady sharpshooters” at his disposal. “Every one of them will be an American and as they will furnish their own arms and ammunition will be little if any expense to the government.” Twenty years later, in 1917, she made a similar offer to President Wilson: “I can guarantee a regiment of women for home protection, every one of whom can and will shoot if necessary.” Needless to say, both offers were politely ignored.

After her retirement from the arena, Oakley continued to teach classes for women at the various resort hotels where she took up residence. Despite her refusal to be drawn into political debate on the “women’s question,” she actively opposed state laws banning firearms in the home. She argued that safety would not be an issue if both women and children were properly instructed in the use of guns. According to Oakley, “Every intelligent woman should become familiar with the use of firearms.” She anticipated the day when women would handle guns “as naturally as they handle babies.”

Shunning any kind of sensational publicity, she was nevertheless willing to pose for photographers, demonstrating the correct way for women to carry a concealed weapon in public. She advised them to hold a revolver ready for use in the folds of their umbrella, arguing that in an assault situation, they would not have time to retrieve it from their purse. In 1906 she posed by her bedside table, serenely loading a revolver for the nightstand drawer.

Annie Oakley had learned the hard way that independence is something to be asserted, not granted. Far from being old-fashioned and conservative on the subject of women’s rights, Oakley was radical and farsighted. She seemed to understand that the shortest distance to reforms for women was not through the muddled machinations of the electoral process, but by the mere presence of a female population universally armed and presumed dangerous.

We have yet to catch up to Oakley’s vision of a world made safe by women.

Contributing editor CAROLYN GAGE is a lesbian-feminist playwright. Her play collection The Second Coming of Joan of Arc, excerpted in On The Issues last spring, was a national finalist for the 1995 Lambda Literary Awards.
THE HOT POLITICS OF ITALY'S ICE MAIDEN

At 32, Irene Pivetti is the youngest speaker of the Italian Parliament in history.

BY PEGGY SIMPSON

Irene Pivetti has a reputation as an antifeminist. She earned the nickname “ice maiden” early in her tenure as the youngest president of the Chamber of Deputies—the Italian equivalent of Speaker of the House—because of her blunt dealings with political peers as well as with the one-time ally whom she later helped unseat as prime minister, media and political tycoon Silvio Berlusconi.

She is a new breed of political woman for Italy. She is neither heir to a famous name nor a jiggling prostitute-as-politician. She is a rightist reformer trying to bring democracy and morality to Italy. Going on 33, she jogs early each morning with weights (“I run for real, not like [Bill] Clinton,” she told a magazine in late 1994) and was startoff runner for the Rome marathon in March 1995.

Pivetti is likened by some to Newt Gingrich: an opinionated, controversial right-winger. She supports the pope’s efforts to ban abortion and challenges his decisions on religious pluralism. She offended many with an early interview in which she said, “The best things for women and families were done by Mussolini,” and alienated others by protesting the building of a mosque in Rome and commemorations for Jews lost in World War II.

The parallel goes only so far, however. Pivetti has questioned why women today have to take their husband’s name. And when her economist husband, Paolo Taranta, apparently wanted more of a wife-and-mother partner, she chose her work over him and asked for an annulment. Her lawyer told the weekly news-magazine l’Republica that the marriage broke up “for political and idealistic reasons” and because she didn’t want to have children.

Many feminists from the Left consider her a significant addition to Italian politics today. She has broken through the “glass ceiling” in politics at a time when the men from the Left talk a good game of equality but don’t practice it. And many Left women are grateful to Pivetti for her tough confrontations with Berlusconi, in what they see as a showdown over democracy itself.

Pivetti contradictions abound. When L’Espresso newsmagazine polled politicians about her two years ago, Michaelangelo Agrusti of the centrist PPL party said she was “like acid...she’s bitter, both in her tone and in her words. Having a wife like her would be a nightmare.” Yet young beauties in the Miss Italy contest overwhelmingly chose Pivetti as their role model.

Welcome to Italy and its upside-down politics.

Birth of an Activist
The issue of women in Italy conjures up images of fantastically sensuous nudes captured in centuries-old paintings; of the elegance of this century’s mega-movie star, Sophia Loren; or of some highly publicized women in Parliament today, including a rambunctious porno actress and Mus-
solini's granddaughter. Pivetti is none of that. She is serious political stuff, not a flirty skirt.

She was born in Milan, center of Italy's industrial north. Her grandfather was a famous linguist; her father is a theater director, her mother an actress. When her high school peers were active in public-education battles, she was away from the fray in a Benedictine convent. At Milan's Catholic University, she helped found the "Dialogue and Renovation" group, a grass-roots Catholic activist movement, and was its campus counselor and newspaper editor until her graduation in 1986. Afterward, she stayed active in the group while helping revise dictionaries at a publishing house and editing Catholic newspapers and magazines.

This proved to be a back-door way into politics. In November 1990, after the League won a local by-election, Pivetti wrote a critique of the victory and sent it to the party's boss, Umberto Bossi. Their subsequent pizzeria meeting was the beginning of a political relationship. Pivetti brought the Renovation group into the new Liga Norte or Northern League political party and ultimately was elected to Parliament in 1992. In April 1994, Parliament elected her to Italy's third most powerful office, president of the Chamber of Deputies.

She came on the scene at a time of significant disarray in politics. The fall of communism internationally destabilized the Italian communists, who had been an entrenched opposition force for decades. Then the lid blew on top-to-bottom corruption scandals implicating leading industrialists, Christian Democratic power brokers who had ruled Italy for the past 45 years, and organized crime bosses. The northern magistrates pursuing the corruption cases became heroes—and assassination targets.

With the meltdown of the monopoly Christian Democrats, new parties (there are nearly two dozen parties) were scrambling to get their footing. The Milan-based Northern League staked its future on a "clean hands" campaign—sometimes insinuating that the industrial North was "clean," the South was "dirty,"—and helped form the center-right coalition that elected Forza Italia party head Silvio Berlusconi, owner of three national TV channels and various other outlets, as prime minister in May 1994.

Pivetti, with only two years' experience as deputy, was a surprise coalition selection for speaker of Parliament.

The Center-Right's Woman Strategy

Pivetti's rise in the Northern League had been notable from the start. She was a young, outspoken Catholic woman, not a middle-aged male. Her party had consciously recruited women between the ages of 25 and 40. Her elevation to be a middle-aged male. Her party had consciously recruited women between the ages of 25 and 40. Her elevation to be speaker had even more symbolic import.

"She signaled a break with the past," says deputy Pietrantoni, Northern League caucus leader in Parliament. Previous speakers were at the end of their careers, not the beginning; the only woman had been a matronly wife-of. "The fact that it was possible to find someone who was intelligent and a strong person was obviously essential. Not all women, or young women, would have been able to fill that job," he says.

"This appointment of a woman was almost seen as a provocation, as a challenge," Pierwigi explains, undermining Leftist opposition arguments that the Right was dominated by machismo-oriented, fascist, and anti-family politicians, that only the Left cared about equality and fairness.

And Pivetti was a provocative choice. In her first two years she'd hardly gone unnoticed. In fact, her early interviews after arriving in Rome were political bombshells. She was portrayed as a Northern bigot wanting to cut off welfare from the needy South; as a Catholic fanatic intolerant not only of Muslims but of the Jewish religion; and as an anti-abortion activist trying to rock the boat in an overwhelmingly Catholic country where abortion is legal.

A Different Kind of Catholic Politician

Chiara Valentini, a reporter with L'Espresso, who keeps track of Pivetti, calls her "a completely new figure in Italian politics," not just because of her rapid rise from obscurity but because "she is a Catholic fundamentalist," a rarity in Italy, even rarer among politicians.

Her goal, Pivetti says, is to "give a voice to all those Catholics" who don't recognize their faith as practiced by the former Christian Democrat power-brokers—or by the Church's cardinals who carried water for them or by the cardinal who runs the curia "like a business corporation." She has condemned the "hypocrisies" of the monopoly politicians and said the grass-roots "reformation" Catholics "are a big problem" for the Catholic intellectuals and the ruling bishops because "we are living proof that Catholics can organize themselves politically outside the Christian Democrats, outside their monopoly."

Pivetti sees abortion as a wedge issue between what she called the "new world" Catholics and the ostensibly Catholic power-broker politicians from the past. She favors a review of options for banning abortion: "We want the law to be reviewed from head to toe, as the Pope asks," she told L'Espresso in late 1992.

In that interview she said the final decision on abortion "will be up to the woman." But she said "clinics have become abortion factories," and "you should teach young people to control their sexuality, which means not handing out the pill so easily. There should also be objective doctors to counsel."

She also wants to liberalize adoption laws in a reform she said would "emphasize life" and would also be an "an-
One element of Italian life that makes Pivetti's rise especially astonishing to the American observer is the truly staggering use of women as sexual objects in public life. These quasi-pornographic images go well beyond anything even dreamed of in U.S. markets, where women in compromising positions on billboards-ass-first jeans ads-draw protests and where "porn" magazines proliferate but have to be kept out of view, or sold in brown wrappers in family drugstores or food stores.

"We often see naked women on the covers of L'Espresso and Panorama. It is inconsistent with what's being covered inside the magazines. This distorts the image of women," said Carla Sepe, a top aide to the mayor of Rome at one of two 1995 conferences she and the mayor's office sponsored on building a women's movement from the grass roots up.

Sepe said editors claim women aren't interested in politics; therefore they aren't among their readers; thus the women-porn covers don't offend their readers-and they sure sell a lot of newsstand to male voyeurs. Women don't fare much better on TV or on billboards. "Women anchors should not have to look like showgirls...And on buses, we see naked women in advertising....We don't know what strategies we [in the women's movement] should be following," says Sepe.

Television uses exercise and entertainment shows as vehicles to feature naked bums, with sometimes only a G-string visible; mainstream morning shows feature "exercise story" closeups of a woman's rear end jiggling. There is more "tits and ass" stuff than most porn movies could squeeze in.

Tellingly, some of this was pioneered by former Prime Minister Berlusconi in his media-mogul capacity. Journalist Daniela Brancati of TV's state-owned channel 3 news, a rival station, remembers hearing Berlusconi talk about his "tits and ass" strategy for building a private media empire: First, use them to get viewers and with viewers in tow, pull in advertisers.

"It was in 1980, and I was a journalist on a monthly magazine covering a socialist party media meeting," says Brancati. "We were discussing commercial media possibilities. There was only state media at the time. Berlusconi was just beginning. He spoke, for the first time, about his plans. And about his use of women. He said something so disgusting-about the role of the female form and how you could get a lot of advertising off of naked women. And in these 15 years, this is just what he has done. And worst of all, the state channels-to have more audience share-have followed him in this."

The real impact is that the porn-covers "confirm the invisibility of women" in men's worlds. "I think we should be annoyed at seeing the intelligence and abilities of women be ignored," essayist Lidia Menapace told Sepe's conference. Sepe herself is gambling that contact with other women (including looking at how the media treats women in other countries) can help women in Italy grapple better with their own dilemmas.

Women may not cross ideological and political lines for candidates. But it is conceivable that they might debate the impact of "women-as-porn" images and find common ground in taking action to curb them. This could help jump-start a women's-rights movement in Italy, to get women to start talking, as was happening at Carla Sepe's two 1995 seminars. The nascent women's movement might try to raise the stakes for publishers—and politicians—who take women so lightly.

Pivetti, who is paving new paths for serious women in politics, could be a change agent by her very presence. Women from diverse ideological backgrounds are watching closely.—P.S.

Defining Moment

Pivetti was well on her way to earning a loose-lips, mistake-prone reputation that would make her a liability in politics when the constitutional showdown with Berlusconi occurred last winter. Magistrates produced evidence they said showed that Berlusconi himself was linked to the corruption scandal. Pivetti suddenly had no time for a learning curve; she had to preside over explosive parliamentary procedures that ultimately led to the collapse of Berlusconi's government in January 1995 when onetime allies in the Northern League—led by Pivetti's mentor Bossi—withdraw their support. A new prime minister, Lamberto Dini, a former banker and political independent who had been treasury secretary under Berlusconi, was selected; he was still in office at press time. (Since she was appointed by Parlia-
The feminists on the Left...are grateful for her prominence in national politics—hoping that their own older-male political leaders can see that it pays to have women in visible leadership jobs.

Pivetti got high marks for her even-handed handling of the parliamentary drama. She also caused shock waves with initiatives of her own, which critics said overslept her authority. As Berlusconi continued to fight for his political life, Pivetti took to the podium at a Northern League political gathering to talk about the dangers to democracy, to say that political influence on media-monopoly economic issues would not be tolerated. Everyone knew exactly what she meant and whom she was addressing.

Veteran political organizer and Center Party deputy, Elisa Possa Tasca, recalls the parliamentary aftermath when Berlusconi-backed deputies challenged Pivetti about her partisan speech. She cut that short, Tasca says: “She took the floor away and asked them ‘Is this on the agenda today?’ It was very direct.”

Overnight, Pivetti became a figure of near adulation in the media. “In six months’ time she went from being a right-wing woman who had to be attacked to a very acceptable person. And, considering the political chaos we are experiencing here in Italy, she did very well in her political behavior. She was very severe and austere in all her undertakings,” says L’Espresso’s Chiara Valenti. Center Party deputy Elisa Possa Tasca was “very skeptical” of Pivetti, especially since she was only two years older than Tasca’s daughter, “but then I saw her at work and she’s better than four men. She’s very good at her job.... She’s very authoritative. Very straight. Very direct, as a person. She’s young and has a young face, a very beautiful smile. But when she talks business, something unexpected comes out.... She has a strong will and a big soul, with big feelings.”

Leftist enemies of the past joined with the right-wing reformers in the Berlusconi defeat. “It was obvious she is a person who has been very skillful at handling a very complex situation and handling the fall of the Berlusconi government,” says Pierwigi. The fact that Pivetti turned out to be media-savvy proved a valuable commodity in the battle not just for credibility, but even for airtime, in the era when Berlusconi still controls much of the media.

Forging New Female Alliances
This realization is occurring amid growing discussions about ways to create a grass-roots women’s movement. “Feminism”—in the political social-welfare and egalitarian sense, more than the personal-identity sense—is seen by some analysts as captive of the Leftist political blocs. It has not had much of an autonomous bottom-up base of individual women organizing around issues.

Women are not seen to have much political clout here although many have economic power, as entrepreneurs and partners in family-owned businesses, including some that are quite large and are a part of Italy’s diverse economic base. Until now, this has meant women from ideological opposite parties didn’t talk, let alone address common concerns. Being politically independent is not possible in Italy, Brancati says.

Brancati talked publicly about this at two 1995 meetings sponsored by Carla Sepe, top aide to the Rome mayor’s office. “We need a new cultural knowledge [of how women have organized in other countries, such as the United States]. Everything, small and large, is useful. But most useful is a women’s network—an Italian women’s network, not just an international network. I have been talking about this for two years. And it is very, very difficult. Carla Sepe has been helping us but the (continued on page 57)
Abducting young women is not, indeed, a lawful act; but it is stupid to make a fuss about it. The only sensible thing is to take no notice; for it is obvious that no young woman allows herself to be abducted if she does not wish to be. —HERODOTUS, 500 B.C.

DIARY OF A RAPE-CRISIS COUNSELOR

Volunteer work challenged her boundaries...and her love life.

by KATHERINE EBAN FINKELSTEIN

There were 1,001 reasons why my relationship with my boyfriend, B., ended, but during the intensive, three-month rape-crisis training, I could feel it grinding to a halt. By the night of February 14, I was home alone with my manual, Protocol for Emergency Room Volunteer Counselors, and my beeper, charged with fresh batteries. Of the 17 counselors in our rape-crisis program, I had volunteered to cover Valentine’s Day. I figured, best to serve the community when I didn’t have a date. It might even help me get over my recent breakup. I was tense around the house, even taking my beeper into the bath. I figured there would be some dirty tricks on a night universally devoted to love. But it was quiet. No one was brought to the emergency room.

In September, when an assistant district attorney came to our training and told us about a “good case”—a stranger had cut up a woman’s labia with a kitchen knife and eyewitnesses had seen him flee the scene—I explained to B. that my sexual interest was temporarily waning. Secretly, I feared that enjoying sex would be some collaboration with terrible, dark events. One night in a windowless basement room at the hospital where we trained, I asked my fellow volunteers: “Is anyone else having trouble with...sexual relations? I mean, I’m not feeling so interested in sex.” A few of the women in the room nodded and approached me afterward with similar stories.

Rape, whether the prospect of it or the consummated act, is part of every woman’s life. Yet going through the training was like living with the rapist, becoming intimately acquainted with the frightening him—behind the violation. The grim recurrence of rape was the bedrock of our training: In America, a rape occurs 1.3 times every minute, 78 times an hour; one in three women are raped before age 18. The physical realities were our responsibility: We would hold the survivor’s hand during evidence collection, which included everything from combing pubic hairs to photographing bruises. We would stay with her as the police asked minute questions about penetration. We were to be the consolers and the tour guides to the judicial system.

Through the intensive training, I hoped to resolve an event in my own past. I had been 14 years old, on a family vacation, when a man who worked at the resort where we were staying dragged me down to the beach and raped me. Year after year, the event kept returning as a long, slow tide of grief. Sand, stars in a black sky, waves falling on the shore were continually suffused with terror. The rape-crisis training seemed to hold the solution, to provide sandbags against the erosion of both my dignity and feelings of intactness. Yet it was also a slow-burning fuse between me and my boyfriend. By the time my training ended and my emergency room stint began, we had separated.

It was a July evening. I was on call. On numerous occasions I had waited for someone to need my help, yet all had remained quiet. So when my beeper went off it was a sound so strange it took me a while to realize that it was neither the smoke alarm nor the coffeemaker. I called in to the charge nurse and learned only the barest details: A young woman in her 20s, Nancy, had come in just moments ago. It was a date rape that had taken place the night before. The woman had already showered. Real evidence collection would be difficult, if not impossible. I grabbed my manual, my beeper, my purse and was out the door, with little time to reflect. The emergency room was a warren of activity. Behind the numerous patients in curtain-off cubbyholes lay the GYN room. I pushed open the heavy air-lock door and entered the refrigerated space. There sat a young, attractive woman huddled on the examining table. She had wrapped herself in a hospital bed sheet.
"Nancy," I began slowly, "are you all right?" She nodded her head thoughtfully. We had been trained for every imaginable response to rape. Some women wept. Others laughed uncontrollably. Others were sullen. Nancy was fully rational, and open to the comfort and help I could provide. Slowly and with evident relief, she told me her story.

At a nearby beach, she had met a young man who introduced himself as a rock singer by the name of Tiger. He had been surrounded by friends. He spoke of his manager and agent. He had elegant dreadlocks. He dazzled her. They arranged a date and later that week, he picked her up at work in his friend's van. They returned to the beach and spent a romantic evening under the stars. At 2 A.M., they were driving back to the city when he pulled off the highway with the claim of a flat tire. He then climbed back into the van and raped her vaginally and orally. He attempted anal penetration but as she struggled, he lost his erection. As he drove her back to the city, she recalled, he said, "We shouldn't have done that. I should have used a condom."
He dropped her off at home and she showered three times. The next morning, she went to the local police station and told them she'd been raped. Because she was unsure about whether she wanted to press charges, the police told her to return only if she decided to do so.

The longer I stayed with Nancy, the more upset I became. To me, there was absolutely no doubt that she'd had sex against her will. Yet to Nancy, her own case had all the dark ambiguities, twists, turns, and long dark alleys of date rape. Was it her fault? Had she wanted it? Did she fail to resist? Was it all the product of some giant misunderstanding? I sat there and held her hand. I asked her whether she wanted to press charges. She said that she didn't know. She was afraid. He knew where she lived. She feared what it meant to go up against a budding rock star. I continue to believe the man was no one but a rapist. He had sold her a bill of goods.

In real terms, she didn't have much of a case. She had no visible injuries. She'd already showered, so there would be little evidence left. Of course, the doctor would proceed with thorough evidence collection. Yet it would remain her word against the rapist's. She didn't know on what highway or in what borough the event had taken place, which would create a problem of jurisdiction. Beyond any court of law, however, was the issue of her life. Without formal acknowledgment of the injustice, what would become of her self-esteem? I asked Nancy to visualize going to sleep that night. What would it feel like to have pressed charges? What would it feel like to not have? She asked me to call the police.

Y TRAINING BEGAN ONE YEAR AGO IN A SMALL HOSPITAL-basement room. Each week, 17 women gathered for a three-hour training session on everything from evidence collection to rape and racism. I had anticipated a touchy-feely gathering of wounded women, a cynical view that insulated me from my own fear. Yet the volunteers who arrived were as distinct as the faces of rape victims: a brassy TV producer in a power suit and patent-leather high-heeled loafers, an actress with large soulful eyes and a stripe of red lipstick across her face, a community activist with frizzy hair and the exhausted look of someone who has been hunched in a back room sending out mailings.

Our private reasons for joining the training never became public. To this day, I have no idea who among us had been raped. All I know is that some of the women had been drawn to the training in the hope that they could ameliorate the personal suffering of rape survivors. Others, like myself, were more intent on systemic justice. Rape occurred, the crime was terrible. But we were most interested in where grief met the system. How did a rape get reported? How did it get prosecuted? What are the hurdles a rape survivor must overcome before she achieves justice? I felt more comfortable taking the practical tack that had eluded me at age 14. We were trained to expect and demand that the police ask very detailed questions about the facts of the case: Did the rapist penetrate the survivor orally, vaginally, anally? Did he attempt to? Was it partial penetration? These questions were not to be regarded as voyeuristic or lascivious. They were crucial to the arrest of the rapist and made a world of difference in court. Even if there was only penetration by a millimeter, it was rape, not attempted rape. The leering police officer of legend, keen on all the sordid details, had been supplanted by the dutiful chronicler of abuse.

We, the rape-crisis counselors, were supposed to hover over these questions to ensure they got asked and that the results were duly recorded. The fact of the matter is that many rapes have gone unprosecuted because it is too painful and uncomfortable for people in the business of justice to press their way deep into the bodies of women who have been raped.

Divisions soon emerged among the volunteers in our program. Some objected to the legal system. They felt it was harsh and unfeeling to subject survivors to mincing interrogations about their body parts, that it was cruel of district attorneys to distinguish good cases from bad. The system should believe in, support, and take the side of women unequivocally. By contrast, I viewed such hazing as one defeat on the route to justice. I was grateful that rape victims had taken their rightful place at the interrogation table. Was I an apologist for a sexist legal system? When I was 14, most rapes had just been bad dates or painful misfortunes, like falling down the stairs. There were finally systems in place through which complaints could be processed.

As my training intensified, my relationship with B. deteriorated. I felt suffused with anxiety about physical intimacy. After one particularly difficult training session in which a rookie district attorney had lectured us about the virtues of brutal open-and-shut cases, I ran down the street, late to meet my boyfriend at a nearby restaurant. He was perchéd on a barstool drinking a gin and tonic. It was a relief to see him. “God,” I exclaimed, “I don’t know if I can handle this.” I explained how painful the session had been. I told him that my feelings about sex were growing more difficult. I felt that old wave, that old shadow, creeping back. He said that he understood, that we didn’t have to have sex. It was the only thing for an enlightened ‘90s man to say.

Even though B. heard the words and responded with appropriate patience, nonetheless he felt hurt. He took my anxiety and distance as a personal reproach, as though he had failed to be sensitive. Back and forth, we traded silent and angry responses to rape. I felt that his hurt relegated my experience to the small and personal, just as I was struggling to understand the political and social ramifications of rape.

A piece of me had simply fallen away. As we lay in bed, as he kissed me or held me, a piece of me simply did not exist. I couldn’t. I could no more have imagined, let alone wanted, any male body part inside of me than I could have wanted hostile aliens to land outside my apartment. It was simply impossible. Unimaginable. I had shut down. Ever since time began, I imagine there has always been a struggle between two bodies: one that wants and the other that
MAY AFTER B. AND I SEPARATED, AND SHORTLY BEFORE GOING ON CALL, I BEGAN A NEW RELATIONSHIP. THE MAN (I WILL CALL HIM D.) IS BOTH MORE SECURE AND LESS INTROSPECTIVE THAN B. TO HIM, RACE AND ITS ECHOES ARE MATTERS FOR ME TO RESOLVE—WHATEVER THAT MEANS FOR OUR RELATIONSHIP. HE TAKES THE SEXUAL ISSUES THAT ARISE BETWEEN US SERIOUSLY, BUT NOT PERSONALLY. IN D., I HAVE FOUND A MAN WHO IS INTERESTED IN WHAT RACE MEANS FOR ME AND IS RELATIVELY UNCONCERNED WITH WHAT IT MEANS FOR HIM. WITH D., I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO BEGIN THE LONG AND TORTUOUS PROCESS OF RECOVERY BY FILLING IN THE BLANKS: REIMAGINING THAT NIGHT ON THE BEACH AND REWRITING MYSELF BACK INTO IT. INSTEAD OF RETREATING INTO THE NATURAL SETTING, THE STARS, THE WAVES, THE SAND, I AM NOW AGAIN THE FURIOUS AND TERRIFIED GIRL, SUBJECT TO AN UNNATURAL ACT.

IT WAS 12 MIDNIGHT ON THAT FIRST JULY EVENING BY THE TIME I SAID GOODBYE TO NANCY AND LEFT THE EMERGENCY ROOM. SHE HAD GIVEN A REPORT TO THE POLICE. THEY HAD TAKEN THE EVIDENCE. SHE WAS DETERMINED TO PRESS CHARGES. I PUT HER IN A TAXI AND PROMISED TO CALL HER THE NEXT DAY. I REALIZED AS I WALKED THROUGH THE DARKENED STREETS THAT MY LOVEMAKING WOULD NOT BE A MUTATED VERSION OF MY ECHOING EVENT IN MY PAST. MY LONG-STANDING FEAR WAS ASSUAGED AND I HAD BEEN FREE FROM LINGERING SHADOWS.

IN AUGUST, ONE MONTH AFTER MEETING NANCY, I WAS CALLED TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM FOR GENEVIVE, 31, A LARGE LATINO WOMAN WITH AN IQ OF 60. IN A RAMBLING AND DISORIENTED WAY, GENEVIVE TOLD ME THAT SHE HAD BEEN RAPED AND BEATEN BY A CON塞尔OR AT THE GROUP HOME WHERE SHE LIVED. ACCORDING TO THE FEMALE COUNSELOR WHO BROUGHT HER IN, GENEVIVE HAD AN ABUSIVE BOYFRIEND AND A HISTORY OF ACCUSING THE STAFF. WHEN I ASKED GENEVIVE WHETHER SHE WANTED TO PRESS CHARGES, SHE NODDED HER HEAD ENTHUSIASTICALLY. YET IT WAS CLEAR THAT SHE HAD NO IDEA WHAT THIS WOULD ENTAIL OR EVEN WHAT IT MEANT. WITHIN 15 MINUTES OF MY PHONE CALL, THERE CAME A KNOCK ON THE GYN DOOR. THERE STOOD TWO POLICE OFFICERS. ONE WAS AN OLD IRISH MAN WITH THICK WHITE HAIR AND A STOMACH THAT PROTRUDED OVER HIS BELT BUCKLE. DESPITE THE FACT THAT I WAS WEARING SHORTS AND A T-SHIRT, I HAD MY HAIR IN A PONYTAIL, AND MUST HAVE LOOKED 18, HE LOOKED UTTERLY RELieved WHEN I INTRODUCED MYSELF. I GESTURED INSIDE THE ROOM AND ASKED, "ARE YOU GOING TO MAKE A REPORT?"

HIS FACE TRACED OVER IN FEAR. "YOU'RE GOING TO BE IN THERE WITH ME, AREN'T YOU?" HE DID NOT WANT TO FACE GENEVIVE ALONE, A MENTALLY RETARDED WOMAN WHO HAD BEEN BRUTALLY ABUSED BY HER COUNSELOR. HE DID NOT WANT TO SIT IN THE GYN ROOM FACE-TO-FACE WITH HER WHILE SHE WAS HALF-NAKED AND ASK HER UNCOMFORTABLE QUESTIONS, WHICH IT WAS HIS JOB TO DO.

"I'LL BE WITH YOU THE WHOLE TIME," I REASSURED, AND WITH THAT WE WENT IN TOGETHER.

INSIDE THE GYN ROOM, THE COP LOWERED HIMSELF APPEARENTLY ONTO A STOOL. HE PRODUCED THE NECESSARY PAPERWORK AND BEGAN HIS QUESTIONS, GAZING DOWN AS THOUGH LOOKING FOR A PLACE TO HIDE. GENEVIVE, WHO REFUSED TO SIT DOWN, WAS SO DISORIENTED THAT SHE COULD NOT EVEN ANSWER QUESTIONS ABOUT HER ADDRESS OR NAME WITHOUT MY GENTLE AND POINTED COACHING. WHEN THE QUESTIONS TURNED TO HER BODY, THINGS GOT EVEN MORE DIFFICULT.

TURNING A SHADE OF BEET-RED, THE POLICE OFFICER ASKED, "DID HE PUT HIS PENIS INSIDE OF YOU?"

GENEVIVE NODDED. "I Fought him off."

THE POLICE OFFICER AND I LOOKED AT EACH OTHER. "BUT DID HE PUT HIS PENIS INSIDE OF YOU?"

"HE WAS HITTING ME," GENEVIVE RESPONDED.

I INTERRUPTED. "GENEVIVE, DID HE ACTUALLY PUT HIS PENIS INSIDE YOUR BODY?"

"YES," SHE SAID CLEARLY. "HOW LONG DID HE KEEP IT INSIDE OF YOU?"

"FIVE," GENEVIVE CHOSE. "BUT WHEN HE DOES IT, IT'S NICE. WHEN THIS MAN DID IT, IT WAS SICKNESS."

I EXHALED SLOWLY, SADDENED BY HER OBSERVATION. WITH THE GRIM FACTS SEEMING TO TAKE SHAPE, THE COP THEN ASKED, "HOW LONG DID THIS MAN KEEP HIS PENIS INSIDE OF YOU?"

"THREE HOURS," GENEVIVE DECLARED.

IT WAS CLEAR THAT WHATEVER HAPPEnd, IT SEEMED LIKE THREE HOURS TO GENEVIVE. I KNEW WHAT SHE MEANT. SOMEWHERE IN THE FLOATING ISLAND OF THE BRAIN, WHATEVER HAD HAPPENED TO ME WHEN I WAS 14 SEEMED TO BE EXTENDING INDEFINITELY OVER THE COURSE OF YEARS.

GENEVIVE, WHO WAS DAZED FROM THE QUESTIONS, BEGAN TO Wobble. THEN, AS THOUGH IN SLOW MOTION, SHE FELL OVER AND CAME CRASHING DOWN ON TOP OF ME. I FELL OFF MY STOOL. MY COFFEE CUP WENT FLYING FROM MY HAND. ITS CONTENTS SPLASHED AGAINST THE WALL. GENEVIVE LAY PRONE ON TOP OF ME. THE COP LEAPED UP, NURSES CAME RUNNING. IN CERTAIN CASES, THIS ONE AMONG THEM, IT WAS JUST NOT POSSIBLE TO GET ALL THE ANSWERS.

AS IT TURNED OUT, THE POLICE TOOK GENEVIVE'S REPORT BUT WERE UNABLE TO SUBSTANTIATE HER CLAIM. WHEN ALL THE FACTS CAME TO LIGHT, HER CHARGE WAS QUIETLY WITHDRAWn. WHAT I DID SEE IN HER CASE WAS THE SYSTEM'S WILLINGNESS TO LISTEN TO, TO INVESTIGATE, THE CHARGE OF RAPE. AS I WAS LEAVING THE EMERGENCY ROOM, THE POLICE OFFICER TOOK ME ASIDE AND ASKED NERVOUSLY, "WHAT IF IT WASN'T THIS GUY WHO DID IT TO HER? WHAT IF IT WAS HER BOYFRIEND?"

I SAID TO HIM, HABIT-SCHOOLDLY. "IT ISN'T OUR JOB TO DECIDE THAT, NOW IS IT?" AFTER ALL, IT WAS A MATTER FOR THE DETECTIVES AND THE DISTRICT ATTORNEYS. THE POLICE OFFICER AND I WERE SIMPLY THERE TO HELP GENEVIVE THROUGH THE THRESHOLD AND INTO THE SYSTEM. HE NODDED IN AGREEMENT. FOR ALLEGATIONS OF RAPE, THERE WAS PROTOCOL. HIS RESPONSIBILITY WAS CLEAR.
Personal twists on public art

NOT JUST ANOTHER MAN ON A HORSE

BY ARLENE RAVEN

Several years ago I found myself on the Today show giving lip to and receiving vituperation from Congressman Richard Armey (R-Texas). The subject was the value of Robert Mapplethorpe’s anatomically explicit and effusively beautiful photographs of men. Armey believed that the federal government via the National Endowment for the Arts should not fund Mapplethorpe’s “homosexual pornography.” I claimed freedom of expression for artist and audience. But the real subject of this kind of debate—and the reason that such a conversation could now take place—is rampant, ever increasing xenophobia and intolerance for difference in the U.S.A.

To my astonishment, artists have become the mythical, dangerously contaminating “others” of the moment, particularly those described with hyphenations like queer-, female-, community-based-, multicultural-, elderly-, or infirm-creator. The formerly esoteric subject of the inherent values embedded in art has become a subject for televised debate, with the most improbable of colleagues joining in.

When did Congress begin to care about whatever artists

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might have to say? Face it, the National Endowment has—ever since its inception in the mid-1960s—been tiny. So why are critically acclaimed artists with a point of view losing even this minimum of financial support and public access for their work?

Despite the traditionally marginal to nonexistent role artists have had in determining American policy, the political and aesthetic stakes here are high. Progressive women may not be much moved by the traditional American public art works that populate cities and stix alike: marble war memorials and bronzed heroes on high horses. Many are equally puzzled by today’s public art displays: artist-planted corn and waving wheat in urban centers; testy, artist-originated texts on T-shirts; or even Mapplethorpe’s pictures (excluded from NEA exhibition funding and ultimately from exhibition at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C.), projected as gigantic guerrilla slides projected on the façade of a government building.

The public art of any era is, nevertheless, always that body of works which (because of placement and in some cases permanence) is most accessible to all people in a given locale. Art in parks, on sidewalks, in university libraries, and corporation lobbies—these images are a part of everyone’s American landscape. The potential of this genre to reinforce the status quo or to envision the new is as expansive as the population itself. Monumental art becomes fixed in the national memory.

While feminism has been famous for 15 minutes for declaring the personal political, feminists take political issues personally too. Artists who work in the public arena have concretized their perspectives within the depersonalized yet emphatically patriarchal common space in this country as if it were our own.

STATEN ISLAND-BOUND ON THE FERRY, I FLOATED PAST THE Statue of Liberty. Despite her patriarchal past and imposed designations, I still see an inspiring, open-hearted Amazon from the corner of one feminist eye. I can American-dream too.

On the Staten Island side of the crossing, the Snug Harbor Cultural Center mounted “In Three Dimensions: Women Sculptors of the ’90s,” in conjunction with the New York Chapter of the Women’s Caucus for Art and curator Charlotte Streifer-Rubinstein. “Issues of Gender” and “Beyond Gender” occupied virtually all available indoor space in the galleries of Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art, with the work of 113 sculptors. On Snug Harbor’s sizable

Details of Ora Lerman’s luminous 60-foot mural, a colorful recast of the Biblical story of the Flood, for the cathedral ceiling of the library at P.S. 176 in Manhattan, commissioned by Percent for Art/New York. Oil, 1993 to 1995.
The public art of any era is always that body of works which, because of placement, is most accessible to all people in a given locale.

Grounds, sculptures by 19 artists were also part of “In Three Dimensions.” But the transition between inside and outside changes the picture altogether. Without gallery or museum walls earmarked for art, there is a fundamental alteration in the context for assessing artists’ responsibilities, assuming art’s audience, and even understanding the cultural meanings of these works.

A bronze memorial full-body portrait of Snug Harbor founder Robert Randall was positioned to look onto the same waters that Liberty lights, both figures exemplifying the most enduring public art form of the past century and its mission. When you approach the statue of Randall up close, he stands on a stone base so tall that you have to look straight up as he stares you down under his three-cornered hat. The larger-than-life experience of the subject fulfills the essential purpose of such sculptures: the creation of awe.

Surrounding the bronze Randall are eight works by Rhonda Roland Shearer. While they were not fashioned after the representational figure they encircled, their placement suggested that they wanted to engage in an exchange with the elder artwork. Also made of bronze and raised on bases (though much lower), Shearer’s mighty homemakers were linear and airy—drawings in space with literal holes in their forms—rather than solid vertical masses. They didn’t just stand there. They vacuumed, cleaned the toilet, pushed laundry carts, and carried children. Shearer’s feminist comment on the pointedly patriarchal tradition of public art used many of its properties while taking issue with the system of values that conventional public sculpture conveys in representing both men and women.

Sheila deBretteville’s “Path of Stars” also offers a commentary on other monuments. DeBretteville, an internationally renowned graphic artist and director of the graduate program in graphic arts at Yale University, proposed her work to the “Percent for Art” jury for New Haven, Connecticut’s Ninth Square development project, which was looking for public art to celebrate and help define the revitalization of the historic downtown district.

“Path of Stars” is based on the Hollywood “Walk of Stars,” but it celebrates, instead of luminaries of the large screen, nonfamous yet noteworthy New Haven citizens. DeBretteville researched three centuries of area residents and chose to commemorate 20 individuals, including dentist Emmaline Jones (1873), janitor and community representative Joseph A. McAlpine (1955), dressmaker and milliner Elnora Bess (1954), and typesetter/journalist/activist Augusta Lewis Troup (1872). “Path of Stars” is intended to be incomplete. DeBretteville hopes that “stars” will be perpetually added to her path as the New Haven community unfolds.
The author, who never knew her father, has a score to settle.

I have flown to London, my birthplace, on many occasions as an adult, but last September I went to see what I could do about my missing birthright—the inheritance of my long-dead father, whom I had never met and who never married my American mother.

My once-dated personal circumstances—in the 1960s both United States and Western European laws and customs began to change, embracing rights for children born ex paterinis—had become oddly au courant. I could now see my lot reflected in recent political struggles in America over welfare mothers, single mothers with children born out of wedlock, in the restoration of the very word illegitimate without quotes around it, and the attempt to rehabilitate marriage as man’s exclusive domain for recognizing offspring.

As I was raised very nicely outside patriliny—a limiting, prohibitive, death-dealing institution, a system inherently oppressive to women—why would I want from it a belated acknowledgment of my existence? Having grown up in a kind of fugitive matriarchy, knowing only my mother and various maternal female relatives and finally only women in prep schools and colleges, I was given the most unusual illusion of freedom—sans father, sans any kind of male at all (no brothers, uncles, nephews, cousins, stepfathers, or mother’s boyfriends) who might promote the idea that I was worth less than they were, that I couldn’t do all the things they did, or that I was here just to serve their interests.

The immediate reason for my retrograde venture, during this past summer of my 66th year, was the abrupt if not unexpected death of my father’s widow in England at the age of 93, which potentially changed my status from filius nullius, meaning “the son of nobody,” to “one of my father’s children”—an expression of a legal concept indicating proper membership in patriarchy. Filius nullius for all practical purposes means the heir of nobody. While I was of course “the daughter of nobody,” the feminine ending, filia nullia, does not exist in common law literature on illegitimacy, presumably because daughters were not inheritors, whether products of a legal marriage or not.

As the child of a post-colonizing force—the British Empire before it fell—I have always deemed the father, both personal and generic, to be a figure of enormous power and remoteness. Watching the tell-all BBC interview with the besieged Princess Diana, rebroadcast here last November, I could identify with her solitary and unequal struggle against the English royal establishment. With a “marital war” at issue, perhaps all women can. I quavered especially for her myself, with cause for protest and action no less compelling, if not exactly of note to the universe. To get the attention of palace and people, which Diana obviously has, thus to be able to make my case (as dubious to the powers that be as hers) most effectively, I would have to do something a lot more drastic than Diana, whose acts look suicidal enough. Since I am half American, even should I, say, crash the Queen’s bedroom to obtain an audience, my complaint would seem about as serious to the descendants of George III as would a suit to compensate former colonists for defective Rolls-Royces.

Diana’s situation is instructive, highlighting the prefeminist yet still existent destiny for women as
wombs to incubate male heirs. Very much the daughter of somebody (Lord Spencer) but given away to a stranger (Prince Charles), Diana has had as her primary if not sole purpose to produce the sons of his high somebodyness. The marriage of a daughter, at least as traditionally understood, has been a form of de-legitimation—a state my mother avoided by remaining single, even as she courted high censorship by violating the marital code and having a child unsanctioned by a man. Now we see Diana, a woman divested of her marital status even while married, swinging in an abyss of abandonment by husband and his family—not so unlike the problem I inherited from my mother, whose daughter I most assuredly was.

By no means have all bastard children known who their mothers were. In America, not long before I was born, it became possible, with the Adoption of Infants Act of 1926, for parents to give up their parental rights in a clear and unambiguous way—a boon to young unmarried and pregnant middle-class girls who could now save selves and parents the terminal embarrassment and shame of bearing illegitimate progeny in full view of their extended families or communities. With that and subsequent adoption laws, the transfer of property (child) from biological mother to adoptive parents, engineered in secret by state authorities, ensured the future sealed identities of both mother and child. The child, who would be “legitimized” through adoption by a woman properly married (i.e., able to give the child a man’s name), would never know who her parents of origin were; and the birth mother, while going on presumably to exemplary womanhood by marrying at some future date—no one but herself and her parents any the wiser—would never know her child’s adoptive identity.

**My Mother’s Ingenious Scheme for Keeping Me Secret**

My mother’s ingenious scheme for keeping me herself was made possible by having me abroad (akin to a “home” where prospective mothers like her were often sent while lying in) and by having selected a man to sire me who, while a frequent traveler to America (she met him on shipboard circa 1925), would never (have to) be known to family, friends, or fellow workers. He came on business; the moment I was born his business excluded my mother; for all intents he existed safely 3,000 miles away. Still, once my mother returned to American soil, ready to present me to her mother and assorted maternal relatives, she had to have a story. Obviously she couldn’t just say oh I met this wonderful Englishman a few years ago and then I became pregnant and he wanted me to have an abortion and I decided to have the baby and then he would have nothing more to do with me. The stigma of unwed motherhood was simply extraordinary at that time (a demonization that Mr. Gingrich and the Christian Coalition are dedicated to reinstating, with even a revival of orphanages for the unfortunate children). My mother knew her options—she had to have been married and divorced or left widowed by the father of her baby. And since divorce was itself a stigma, also difficult to obtain then, and the father of her baby was already virtually dead by reason of considerable distance, she opted for widowhood. This made sense for the additional rationale, which perhaps my mother understood, that her ex-nunnematus was legally dead to both of us.

Her story established, our new name Johnston set...
a recent movement to make records available, establish registries, create private and TV reunions, have open adoptions, all opposing traditional forces) reveal wide fissures, if not pathologies, in the modern nuclear family, in the dying institution of marriage as we have known it, in patriarchy itself.

With open adoptions and legal abortions, secrecy obviously no longer defines them. Co-existing now with the continuing blight of illegitimacy is the fledgling form of legitimate parenthood by couples who are unmarried. Complicated as this may make new legal terms for naming and inheritance, and presupposing an end to exclusive male rights, it also promises, in principle at least, that children will no longer be shrouded in secret origins. I can see myself poised awkwardly somewhere between my mother's time—charged with serving her interests, and mine as she saw them (to protect me from prejudice, from certain social pariahdom)—and the present, when efforts to undo broad damaging consequences of a secret upbringing may appear anachronistic at best. This seems true in America even as patriarchal presumptions of the ownership of children are under redefinition. In England, where I have close relatives still unaware of my existence, and where the law still considers me filius nullius, I have no sense whatever of being "out of my time." My position seems oddly analogous to that of the young Diana—a modern woman, child of a modern divorce, challenging an archaic system entered in ignorance, imagining that her mistreatment under its unequal conditions will be understood and reparations made. The members of my father's family, royal minions to the core, cannot feel any more obliged to jeopardize their status by acknowledging me, an illegal child, than Charles and his are moved to undermine their position by recognizing the claims of Diana, a mere abused wife.

My father himself did acknowledge me, however obliquely, in his will. He died in 1950 (at which very moment, aged 21, I learned simultaneously of his death and of his existence—my mother having sent me, with a cover letter, his *New York Times* obit). A paragraph in his will, which it did not occur to me to obtain until 1984, asks his wife to dispose of £500 as he had indicated to her "without any legal obligation." A month later I found three mentions of that £500 next to my mother's name in my father's trustee papers. One entry notes that the trustees were writing to my mother and enclosing an extract of the will, saying they understood that my father's widow intended to send her this sum. To obtain these telling documents, I had only to call the legal establishment at Gray's Inn (which held them), identify myself as the daughter of a long-dead client of theirs (whom I named), go over and collect the massive bundle (which had been moldering there for decades), and stagger into a taxi with it.

At that point I only thought, naively as I would learn, that the "proof of paternity" clearly spelled out in the papers might give me a certain cachet with my father's family. With my father's widow still alive, inheritance per se could not be an issue. And I had long understood that my inheritance was my story, or what I could make out of it. My goal had always been to meet family to find out more about myself, and to feed my autobiographical project, plotted to culminate in a volume featuring my father. I had a potential intermediary in my half brother, the only family member I knew, and the only one who knew of me, apparently. In 1978 I had located him and introduced myself, whereafter we would meet for "secret" teas and lunches. In 1984, emboldened by my "proof of paternity" and the further evidence it provided that my half brother's mother knew of my existence, I pressed him to meet her. As a result, both my relationship with him, such as it was (he was always tight-lipped for instance on the subject of our mutual father), and my efforts to open a lock to his family ended abruptly. Having no intention of acknowledging my existence (in relation to her dead husband), his mother was hardly inclined to meet me. His "main concern," he said, was "for his mother and her feelings."

I could understand that, and I went on my way doing what I had been for the past three years—circumnavigating the family, criss-crossing the country researching lineages, excavating histories, e.g. my father's career, which exists plentifully in the public record, not only abroad but in America. In this I must have conformed to my outlaw profile, waiting till my mother, who had always warned me not to enter the fatherland, much less try to contact family, had died.

A new gloss for my "proof of paternity" was provided when I met Helena Kennedy, well known in Britain for her defense of battered women, also of
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I was left with my biggest legal fantasy of all: a public apology by Queen and Parliament, for the undue trouble one of their subjects caused me and my mother.

one of the Guildford Four. Today she is a QC (Queen's Counsel) and "one of Britain's leading barristers," according to a recent Newsweek cover story that quoted her describing Princess Diana as "a post-feminist woman of the '90s who feels she's got rights." After our first fateful meeting in April 1988, over tea at the Waldorf in London, it became easy for me to imagine that access to my family might be created only through legal pressure. When Kennedy asked me to list my "priorities," I developed great legal fantasies on the spot, never hitherto conceived. Remembering the words of an American lawyer friend several years earlier that I could "spontaneously invent a movement for reform," I said right off I wanted to change the law, meaning the Family Law Reform Act of 1969, which granted new rights to the illegitimate but was not retroactive. Kennedy then blew my mind by explaining that there simply had to be a cutoff point (69), because what's left of the British Empire would crumble if it all the scullery maids' children, those products of all the king's men's mistresses or one-nighters, were to crawl out of the woodwork and lay claim to inheritances. "Think of the thousands of cases...." Imagine, she added, what "terrible pain" it would cause. "It would totally undermine the whole economic system." No, the law could not be changed, she pronounced with finality, but I could, she said, be a "special case."

My "special case" would pivot upon something called a Declaration of Paternity, which is where my "proof" would come in handy. A "live issue" had to be concocted first—a probate, or any interest my family might have in suing me, like over my book project. Kennedy saw us getting a "publicized declaration" to a higher court. Leading to a meeting with family in the "inner chambers" of a Lord she knew, a trajectory that could lead eventually to his father seemed promised. Upon learning last summer of the death of my father's widow—the keeper of his flame and all I saw an obstacle apparently removed, the way obviously cleaner.

THE "LIVE ISSUE" OF PROBATE, RAISED BY Helena Kennedy back in '89, was now established. The potentiality existed of becoming "one of my father's children" through his will, a document of relevance once his widow died. Between last June and September my file shows 48 communications by fax and phone back and forth New York/London with Kennedy and various solicitors. In the end, despite evidence in my father's will of his intent to benefit me (along with his "legitimate" children) through his mention of that £500, which could be shown to be directed to my mother, no solicitor saw a loophole to exempt me from having been born before 1969.

Now another approach to family, strangely never imagined before, hove into view. One solicitor, Nina Solomon of Stephens Innocent, a firm recommended by Kennedy, held out hope—to "find some way to create a lever against the Johnston family to allow [me] access to papers," and wanted £1,000 for the consideration. At the same time her boss, Mark Stephens, referred me to a "professional counselor," encouraging me to connect with "a group that works with adoptive children who want to find their real parents."

Here it was—that inescapable traditional connection between adoption and illegitimacy, suggesting that in my case, as I had long recognized, I had been my mother's de facto adopted child, with the identity of half my parentage "sealed." Modern agencies for reuniting parents and children act in the gap between the law and the general human good. Man's law made women in effect illegitimate. Add further: an appreciation that every child should inherit every benefit of the system into which it is born—i.e., until such time as we have a fully equal society, why should not all women have the advantages I had inside a supportive insurgent matriarchy (without of course the onus of secrecy that cast a shadow over my blessings)? But within these assessed indignities must lie a deeper emotional issue: the desire for intimate knowledge of the father. With the death simultaneously of my father and of the possibility of knowing him, a trajectory that could lead eventually to his family seemed promised. Upon learning last summer of the death of my father's widow—the keeper of his flame and all I saw an obstacle apparently removed, the way obviously cleaner.

WHY WOULD I WANT TO JOIN AN INSTITUTION that originally miliarized, and still does, against me, my mother, indeed all women, by obtaining a Declaration of Paternity? The answer must lie in a sense of outrage I carry, contradictory as it may seem, that any father should be allowed, even encouraged, to sire a child that he can refuse to recognize, not to mention support, or can endow with a lifelong stigma. Add to that the political understanding that women by themselves cannot legalize their offspring.
Why do women fall in love with reading? In this engrossing, provocative book, Suzanne Juhasz traces her own life through the books she loved, showing how fiction becomes a place where women can experiment with new ways of feeling and being. "Reading from the Heart has forever changed the way I understand myself and my own story." — Michele Slung, Editor of Fever: Sensual Stories by Women Writers

...and for women who love women

CHLOE PLUS OLIVIA
An Anthology of Lesbian Literature from the Seventeenth Century to the Present
EDITED BY Lillian Faderman
WINNER OF THE LAMBDA LITERARY AWARD

The bestselling author of Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers covers four centuries of lesbian and bisexual writing in this startling volume, the most complete compilation of its kind, and one that radically redefines the whole notion of "lesbian literature."

I engaged the counselor on the spot, but the next day, still hoping to change England, which remains in thrall to a 1575 paternity act formulating the father's begetting of a bastard as "an offense against God's law and man's law." I kept my appointment with Nina Solomon on the premises of Stephens Innocent. Quite pregnant, and looking at me with a sort of droopy, apologetic expression, head cast down and sideways, large brown eyes up from under, Solomon might have been saying she couldn't do anything for me but I had to pay her anyway. And indeed, once seated in her office, after she collected me from the waiting area by the reception desk where I had been given a very large tumbler of coffee, I learned that a barrister she'd engaged in my case, one Alexandra Mason, had no positive news for me either, that it was useless to go over to see her, but that nonetheless I owed both of them the £600 (reduced from £1,000) Solomon had agreed to. So now I shaved off another £50, thus giving back (to England) the amount my father's widow once sent my mother—plus interest!

I was intimidated, it's true, by the country that once intimidated my mother, causing her to sail away meekly with her "stolen" child, but I was mindful also that it was perhaps in my best interest to pay the solicitor who recommended the mediator who could do what he could not—and in so doing render unto the royal Caesars for so kindly providing my mother—with their estimable seed.
DIVIDED WE STAND

Media coverage of the Million Man March on Washington generated five stories for every one accorded the Gay Rights March on Washington in April 1993—this despite the fact that the National Parks Service estimated both marches drew roughly the same number of participants. So noted a press release issued last November by the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), which also stated that the difference in mainstream attention caused “envy and disappointment.” The board of directors of GLAAD was criticized for this statement by the Lesbian and Gay People of Color Steering Committee as “speaking on behalf of a predominantly white, middle-class organization,” and a public apology was demanded for this “ignorant and insensitive” press release.

Yes, it was ignorant and insensitive: an example of how one group in a “movement” can promote its own agenda, oblivious to the diversity within its own ranks and counter to that organization’s commitment to justice and freedom for all. The feminist “movement” has a history of similar blunders, and while many of us are angry and vocal when they occur, there is very little continuing dialogue about the work we must do around racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia within our organizations.

The importance that this continuing dialogue plays in any movement for change is an integral part of Urvashi Vaid’s Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay & Lesbian Liberation. This ambitious book is an effort to assess where gays and lesbians are at this moment in our history, and how we got here. It is also a plea for an inclusive “movement,” an analysis of our conflicting agendas, and a suggestion for how we might strive to meet the needs of an extraordinarily diverse group of people. This makes for a dense, sometimes confusing, and often fascinating read.

Urvashi Vaid is no stranger to political life. An activist for gay and lesbian rights for more than 15 years, she was named not long ago, one of Time magazine’s “Fifty of the Future,” a list of America’s most promising leaders aged 40 or under. Another way the mainstream sows those seeds of “envy and disappointment” is by bestowing attention and a meaningless title on a single activist.

I spoke to Vaid in Minneapolis during her book-promotion tour and asked who was attending her readings and lectures and what concerns they were voicing. I was eager to have her define the “lesbian and gay ‘movement.’” Well, she told me, there were men and women, both of color and white. They were old, young, closeted, veterans, activists, “newly out,” conservatives, and progressives. Their agendas ran the gamut from a place at the table to revolutionary social change. So, can we call this a “movement”? Not really, answers Vaid, who also confesses to being very tired. I can imagine why.

In Virtual Equality, Vaid is constantly wrestling with our diversity. What unites us? What divides us? It isn’t easy to answer the former. Our common bond seems to be that we seek partners of the same gender, Vaid notes, and sex remains problematic to Americans: “When a public health expert like former Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders can lose her job for merely acknowledging that people masturbate, sex itself is not respectable, and queer sexuality has a long way to go.” During her tour, Vaid was struck by the number of people in her audiences who had nothing in common but who were committed to coming to agreement. But there can be no agreement, she says; we are a contradictory lot. At this point in history, she admits, gay and lesbian centrists and rightists do appear to dominate the discourse, which disappoints progressives. Vaid sees as key the negotiating of the tension between legitimization and liberation—two divergent but compatible goals. “The former makes it possible to imagine the latter.”

By promoting single-issue politics, Vaid states, we gloss over divisions among us. But what constitutes a gay and lesbian issue? Well, it depends on who you ask. “For lesbians,” says Vaid, “the status of women is a lesbian issue; for black gay men, racism is a gay issue; for poor gay and lesbian people, the issue is...
working to raise the minimum wage and expand job training. For middle-class white men, stigma due to homosexuality itself is the issue." Searching for the single issue, she says, flattens these deep disagreements, and until we face that which divides us and confront it head on, we are going to continue to make mistakes. "We must end the silence and develop a movement courageous enough to articulate gay liberation's approaches to broad social crises," Vaid writes. "Gay people do not fight for freedom to live in a lavender bubble, but in a more just society."

Virtual Equality is at its best when Vaid takes on the differences between gay men and lesbians: "Gay male leaders talk about a coalition with the women's movement as if it were something separate to begin with. Conversely, the mainstream women's movement has retreated from its critique of gender itself to the less threatening critique of gender inequality. Lesbian activists who bridge both movements are handicapped by the sexism of the former and the homophobia of the latter, and have been unable to make either acknowledge the value of accepting both movements as subsets of one common movement." She also insists that we take responsibility for our mistakes. Because consensus was favored over majority vote at the National Lesbian Conference held in Atlanta in 1991, it was impossible to reach conclusions. To this day, she reminds us, no lesbian has taken any responsibility for the waste that conference represented.

We often trip ourselves up in our eagerness to reach our place at the table. "Our use of racial analogies is suspect," writes Vaid, "coming as it does from a movement deepely splintered over the relevance of racism to the fight against homophobia. Interestingly, even those who believe that the racial justice movement should be completely distinct from the gay rights movement often draw analogies in order to defend gay rights. This dichotomy between our actions and our rhetoric leads a largely white gay movement to sound hollow and opportunistic and fuels tremendous resentment." Vaid herself was strongly criticized for organizing protests against the Rodney King verdict. What, she was asked, did this have to do with gay people? "If we believe our analogies, we must act as if we cared about racial discrimination as much as about homophobia," writes Vaid. "We must have positions on affirmative action, welfare, and economic justice. Our tendency to see ourselves as an exception, as a special category rather than as one group of many, backfires. We lose the respect of those who could be our allies."

Vaid also cautions about how we view mainstream political avenues for change. When we celebrate victories for gays and lesbians in the courts, for instance, many of us have a tendency to overlook the class discrimination that is an important part of this country's legal system. She uses two adoption cases from 1993 to dramatize this. In Virginia, a state supreme court denied a lesbian mother the custody of her own child, while in Massachusetts, the Supreme Judicial Court allowed the adoption of a child by the lesbian lover of the mother. What made the difference, Vaid writes, was the economic status of the two sets of mothers. "Upper middle class gay people are the first to benefit from the progress the movement makes—but such progress is not automatically available to working-class or poor working people."

Gays in the military, explains Vaid, was an issue for women way before it became the political hot potato of the 1992 election. "In the military, women were discharged for homosexuality at a far higher rate than men, and 'lesbian baiting' was used against straight and gay women. If a woman refused a man's sexual advances, she was threatened with being labeled a 'dyke,' an accusation that could trigger a career-ending investigation. As soon as men got behind the gays in the military issue, the experiences of women in the military became nearly invisible."

A notable omission from Virtual Equality is any in-depth discussion of pornography and S&M in the gay and lesbian movement. Vaid makes passing references, but she does not give these subjects thoughtful attention, which they surely merit in a book of this scope. She notes that we have a tendency to see these issues in terms of those who are for or against us and cautions us against simplifying the complex. Yet, early on in Virtual Equality she jumps together those not aspiring to middle-class mainstream life—drag queens, effeminate men, butch women, political radicals, multi-culturalists, sadomasochists, etc.—as if those groups themselves were monolithic. Later on in the book, Vaid agrees with Suzanne Pharr's assertion that "in order to develop positive community standards we should hold sexual practices up to the ethical question: Is there use of power and violence and control to violate integrity, autonomy, and wholeness of another person? If so, then we know we oppose that behavior." If ever there was an assertion that begged for discussion in the gay and lesbian community, it is this one. And yet Vaid chooses not to deal with it, leaving it where it originated—with Suzanne Pharr. In a book that advocates vigorous, honest discussion around issues that divide us, this omission is major. Vaid seems more comfortable discussing mainstream electoral politics. Although she is a staunch advocate of the ballot box as an effective tool for change, she admits that the theory of electoral politics is far simpler than the practice. The theory is: Elect people who support you, and they will do the right thing. Gays and lesbians, like the country as a whole, have been unable to learn that this is untrue. Vaid believes that when a broad-based protest movement shifts its major focus from community organizing to electing their own, the movement loses momentum even as it gains mainstream acceptability. She quotes Harry Hay, co-founder of the Mattachine Society: "The Mattachine after 1953 was primarily concerned with legal change, with being seen as respectable—rather than self-respecting. They wanted to be dignified by professional 'authorities' and prestigious people, rather than by the more compelling dignity of group worth." This trend continues today. The AIDS movement, Vaid tells us, "substituted nondiscrimination for liberation and instead of placing its political faith in training and organizing gay and lesbian people and our allies into an electoral coalition, it placed its faith in high places."

Gays and lesbians are as susceptible as anyone else to the attention we receive from people in power, and this has led
MANAGE MY MOODS

As I write this, Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus has been a New York Times bestseller for 140 weeks. More than four million copies in 86 languages have been sold since the book's release in 1992. Struck by the phenomenal success of this self-help tract, an opus on how to make heterosexual relationships work, I set out to question some readers and marketers about the book's appeal.

"People are desperate," a sales staffer at a Barnes & Noble supermarket in Manhattan told me. They want to make their relationships work. They'll try anything and everything.

While those desperate for a relationship quick-fix come in all ages and colors, the lion's share of the book's purchasers are women. Fabrienne Serignese, a student at the New School for Social Research, admits that she bought the book at a time when "my boyfriend and I were fighting about everything. I was in a bookstore and saw it and said, 'Oh, a book that will help us get along.'"

And if you believe the hype, John Gray can do just that. But developing committed relations is tough stuff and easy answers are rarely, if ever, helpful. That, however, is what Gray provides. In The World According to Gray, gender divisions are clear-cut, simple, and universal. Men, or Martians, are goal-oriented and strive for autonomy as a "symbol of efficiency, power and competence." On the other hand, women, or Venusians, are relationship-oriented and value connections as "a source of love, support and affection." Gray calls the book "There is no exception. Vaid calls it "There are Things to Do" and includes some unsurprising suggestions, one of which is participation in an organization such as GLAAD.

Vaid calls it "There are Things to Do" and includes some unsurprising suggestions, one of which is participation in an organization such as GLAAD.}

Virtual Equality is far from comprehensive, but it is one of the few books for gays and lesbians that tries to open up a dialogue around our differences. As committed people, we have an obligation to heed Vaid's exhortation to examine our attitudes toward one another, be conscious of the contradictions, and seek ways to be inclusive. Virtual Equality does not provide the answers, but it asks many of the right questions. And for that, it should be commended.

ELEANOR J. BADER is a freelance writer and teacher from Brooklyn, New York.
the other hand, women, or Venutians, 
"value love, communication, beauty and 
relationships."

In Gray’s dichotomized view, women want love and empathy while men want respect and adulation. The question of what the sexes need is easily answered. Men need to feel needed while women need to feel cherished. Yes, cherished.

Yet for all its aphorisms and smug conclusions, *Men Are From Mars* offers men scant advice on how to go about cherishing, supporting, and nurturing their girlfriend or wives. In a section called “101 Ways to Score Points with a Woman” he offers (italics added): “If she usually washes the dishes, occasionally offer to wash the dishes, especially if she is tired that day; offer to sharpen her knives in the kitchen; open the door for her; give her four hugs a day; notice when the trash is full and offer to empty it; wash before having sex or put on a cologne (if she likes that).” Aside from these minimally demanding hints for the guys, the book reads like a primer for women who want to become better doormats, Stefford wives, or 1950s stereotypes.

**Gray gives lip service to the belief**

that men and women should be equal; unfortunately, he then blithely offers the most familiar, regressive advice. “To approve of a man is to see the good reason behind what he does,” Gray writes. “Even when he is irresponsible or lazy or disrespectful, if she loves him, a woman can find the loving intention or the goodness within him. To approve is to find the loving intention or the goodness behind the outside behavior.”

Still not convinced? Other examples make Gray’s point even more blatant: “She asks for his support but he says no, and she is not hurt by his rejection but trusts that he would if he could... When he asks her to do something she says yes and stays in a good mood... When he withdraws she doesn’t make him feel guilty. When he emerges she welcomes him and doesn’t punish or reject him.”

For some, Gray’s message is helpful, comforting even. “*Men Are From Mars* makes it so easy,” Caroline Hamill, a California publicist told me. “Gray speaks in a way that isn’t preachy or full of psychobabble. Just knowing not to take things personally in my relationships has gotten me through so much. I’m able to focus on the person I’m with instead of on myself. It takes the pressure off communicating when you have Gray’s words and techniques to use.”

Despite record sales, other readers find Gray’s dictums off-putting, if not downright nonsensical. “This book is written for females,” says writing student Serigneuse. “It’s a book of rules to follow so you don’t upset your husband or boyfriend. It is written to teach women how to appease men. It has no message for men. I agree that men and women do communicate differently and deal with problems differently, but it’s conditioning, how we’re brought up. Gray reinforces stereotypes about how men are. He doesn’t talk about what causes the problems in a relationship.”

Just who is this highly successful defender of the status quo? The fifth of seven children born to a Texas oil family, Gray became a devotee of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi while in his late teens. According to a biography supplied by his publisher, Gray received both his B.A. and M.A. in Creative Intelligence from Maharishi European Research University, a college that is not listed in any of the major education directories. Nor is Gray a licensed psychologist; his Ph.D. in Psychology and Human Sexuality comes from Columbia Pacific University, a well-known California mail order program. Interestingly, his first marriage, to New Age heavyweight Barbara DeAngelis, author of *Secrets About Men Every Woman Should Know*, ended in 1984 and Gray has since remarried and become a father.

It is fascinating and frightening to contemplate the industry that has grown up around this mail-order psychologist: calendars with inspirational messages, audiocassettes, videos, a CD ROM, public appearances, and romantic weekend getaways.

Gray’s latest book, *Mars and Venus in the Bedroom*, was released in the spring of 1995. While sales are not as brisk as those of *Men Are From Mars*, by all accounts the book is doing well. (Among the pronouncements in *Bedroom*: “Women are like the moon in that their sexual experience is always waxing and waning. Men are like the sun. Every morning it rises with a big smile... He wants sex, she wants romance... The difference between a woman and a man is that she doesn’t feel her strong desire for sex unless her need for love is first satisfied.”)

“Gray splits everything directly down gender lines,” said *Men Are From Mars* reader Abeni Crooms, a research assistant from New Jersey. “He is too rigid in how he defines men and women. He never says ‘if your partner does this...’ It’s always men do this, women do that.
But people are people. Who is he to assume that we all work this way?"

"Men and women are supposed to be different," Gray counters in Men Are From Mars. "When you remember that your partner is as different from you as someone from another planet, you can relax and cooperate with the differences instead of trying to change them. Relationships do not have to be such a struggle."

But while it is almost a pop-psychology cliché that many problems in relationships come from our thankless efforts to change our mates, how exactly are women to achieve equality unless men change at least some of the ways they behave in relationships? John Gray's philosophy that gender differences are inborn and immutable neatly eliminates any possibility or obligation to change. It's not the system, it's not patriarchy, it's not oppression. Relationship difficulties are simply a personal problem that women can solve for themselves; striving for social change is thus unnecessary, pointless.

Leonard Narlow, a Brooklyn-based activist in both the men's and feminist movements, believes that this message is a reaction to the scrutiny and deconstruction that gender relations have undergone in the past two decades. "People may feel threatened, and so becoming attached to something that tells them that what's being scrutinized is OK and normal is reassuring. Gray's book takes common biases and turns them into a theory where gender roles are quintessentially monolithic and unchangeable. It reads like 100 Rules of Chivalry. I see its popularity as a mass reaction to an uncomfortable change."

Fighting against anti-feminist backlash and at the same time continuing to develop feminist arguments and theories is no small task. Already, feminist thinkers have created an important body of work analyzing the relationships between men and women. While many questions remain about how women and men can better coexist on a day-to-day basis, Gray's vapid solutions are clearly not the answer.

"As long as we can't imagine men free of patriarchy, men will not be able to be free of patriarchy," notes educator and author bell hooks. "I think in the long run it won't serve feminism well for us to buy into biological determinism. Any ideology of hopelessness that says, 'Well, this is how men are, and women are different,' stands in the way of progressive movement."
I ON THE ISSUES.

BY JOHN STOLTENBERG

POST-CHOICE OFFFING
RAIN WITHOUT THUNDER
Orion Home Video/99 minutes

IF YOU FOUND THE MOVIE OF A Handmaid's Tale preposterously arch—or a yawn, as I did—you might not think another film set in a post-choice future, Rain Without Thunder, could be complexly affecting. It takes place in the year 2042, 20 years after abortion has been outlawed by constitutional amendment. A young white college student (Ali Thomas) sits in a cell block, prosecuted for fleeing off to Sweden to obtain a "fetal murder," along with her "accomplice," her wealthy suburban mother (Betty Buckley). Among the film's ironic twists is the fact that the new law under which these two women are charged, The Unborn Child Kidnapping Act, has been passed to plug preferential race and class loopholes in the old anti-abortion act.

In a stunning, star-studded cast, we also meet the young woman's white liberal lawyer (Jeff Daniels), a black by-the-book prosecutor (Iona Morris), a skeevy warden (Frederick Forrest), and a very frocked priest (Austin Pendleton) who explains dryly why the Roman Catholic Church, although it has agreed to permit condoms, deems each and every conception sacrosanct: because that fertilized egg might be the Second Coming.

But it is this film's knowing depiction of civil rights struggle that is its most astonishing strength. "Women have never organized into a voting bloc," says a smug, revisionist historian (Graham Greene), puffing his pipe. "This is so because women are inclined to collaborate with men," he shrugs, "both in their public and private lives...and they will do so even to the detriment of other women."

And they will do so even to the detriment of other women."

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In two deftly drawn female characters, whole chapters are conveyed about fierce feminist resistance and cowardly capitulation. One is named Marilyn Yastrow (crisply played by Linda Hunt), the 40ish spokeswoman for a reformist political organization called (with a nod to novelist Margaret) the Atwood Society. "It's not our policy to have a confrontational public image," Yastrow explains. "The Atwood Society would not survive financially if it was to be viewed as a fringe group." The organization has completely given up women's absolute right not to have their bodies interfered with by the state. Aptly mirroring contemporary pro-choice "liberals" who have bargained away a Medicaid coverage for poor women here, a legal protection for minors there, the fictional Atwood Society has let civil rights slip-slide away for the sake of the freedom of fewer and fewer. More politic than principled, the group lobbies to have only "terminators" (abortionists) punished, because, as Yastrow argues, pregnancy makes women too enfeebled to consent to a crime.

The truly awesome character, the only one for whom the moral lives of women are still real, is Rosalind Hart (played by the stately Sheila Pinkham in a break-your-heart performance). She is 80ish, the founder of the Atwood Society, and considered by Yastrow to be "strident." Hart is in fact a truth-teller shrouded in grief. Her shadowed, mournful eyes sparkle with tears as she recalls:

A woman's movement was born in the mid-twentieth century—a women's political movement which spread like a fire burning the landscape built by men.

Eloquently bespeaking the civil rights faith still ablaze within, Hart tells an investigative reporter (Carolyn McCormick) what happened next:

Our season changed. By the year 2000, a chill was developing. Our spring only lasted two generations. But it only takes two generations. It takes one generation to fight for liberty. It takes only one generation to lose it.

The film's title is a quotation from the former slave Frederick Douglass, who once said, "Those who profess to favor freedom and yet avoid confrontation, are people who want crops without plowing up the ground; they want rain without thunder and lightning...." One senses that in the tension between Yastrow (the political pragmatist) and Hart (the diehard radical), Rain Without Thunder has prophetically sketched the strategic rift in today's feminism between that lobbying which is fundable and that civil rights activism which may be more fundamentally necessary. Evidently privy to this fissure, writer-director Gary Bennett, a white man, has had the nerve to bring it to the screen.

A LONG COMES THIS MOST REMARKABLE feature-length film ostensibly about abortion—a movie that could have altered the outcome of congressional debate about the "partial-birth" procedure, a movie that could rock the 1996 elections—and I happen upon it, unhyped, at my local video shop. Rain Without Thunder, shot in 1991 while an anti-choice Republican was President, had a brief, unprepossessing art house release beginning in 1992. Why was this powerful film not huge? Why had I never heard of it? Orion, its distributor, was coming out of a money mess at the time. Yet when Rain Without Thunder finally reached theaters in some 20 U.S. cities, why didn't it garner attention as did other superb recent films exploring feminist themes—Priest, say (which, despite what many critics said, was centrally about child sexual abuse), or Once Were Warriors (about battery) or Planned Parenthood in New York, for instance, "was absolutely rude to us."

Coproducer Nanette Sorenson told OTI that older women were often moved during screenings of Rain Without Thunder, but younger women could not relate to such a civil rights rollback, and "feminist organizations were too busy in the political arena" to lend it support: "Planned Parenthood in New York," for instance, "was absolutely rude to us."

Coproducer Gary Sorenson, her spouse, told OTI that cable rights have not yet been bought. Big mistake, HBO. This rental is cinematic samizdat. •
FOR YEARS I'VE PONDERED THE HOLLYWOOD MARKETING PHENOMENON OF THE "WOMAN'S PICTURE." DOES THE TERM IMPLY THAT WOMEN PRODUCED, DIRECTED, OR WROTE THE FILM? OR THAT IT'S A PICTURE THAT ONLY WOMEN ARE EXPECTED TO LIKE? AND, SINCE THE LATTER DEFINITION IS USUALLY USED, WHY ARE FILMS ABOUT WOMEN AUTOMATICALLY CONSIDERED "WOMEN'S PICTURES" WHILE MOVIES ABOUT MEN ARE FOR EVERYONE? NEVER MIND. EVERYONE KNOWS WE WOMEN ARE ALL ALIKE AND CAN'T RESIST A GOOD THREE-HANKY CRY.

SOME OF THE BEST RECENT WOMEN'S PICTURES, NOW AVAILABLE ON VIDEOTAPE, WERE DIRECTED BY MEN. TWO SUCH FILMS, STEEL MAGNOLIAS AND FRIED GREEN TOMATOES, BOTH A BIT SENTIMENTAL AT TIMES, ARE WELL WRITTEN (TOMATOES IS BASED ON A BOOK BY FANNIE FLAGG) WITH FIRST-RATE ENSEMBLE ACTING. ENCHANTED APRIL, A BRITISH FILM, IS AS ENCHANTING AS ITS TITLE SUGGESTS. MY PERSONAL FAVORITE, PASSIONFISH, IS WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY JOHN SAYLES.

WELL, WHEN WOMEN'S FILMS ARE WRITTEN, DIRECTED, AND PRODUCED BY WOMEN, CAN WE EXPECT A MORE HONEST PICTURE OF WOMEN'S LIVES? WITH THE RECENT RELEASE OF HOW TO MAKE AN AMERICAN QUILT, THE UNFORTUNATE ANSWER IS NO.

QUILT HAS A SIMPLE PLOT. FINN (WINONA RYDER), AFTER ACCEPTING A MARRIAGE PROPOSAL FROM LIVE-IN BOYFRIEND SAM (DERMOT MULTONEY), GOES OFF TO VISIT GRANDMA (ELLEN BURSTYN) FOR THE SUMMER TO FIND THE INSPIRATION TO WRITE HER COLLEGE THESIS ON "WOMEN AND RITUAL." GRANDMA LIVES WITH HER RECENTLY WIDOWED SISTER (ANNIE BANCROFT) AND TOGETHER THEY SPEND THEIR NIGHTS QUILTING IN THE COMPANY OF A GROUP OF LOCAL WOMEN (JEAN SIMMONS, KATE NELLIGAN, ALFRE WOODARD, AND LOIS SMITH), GUIDED BY THE CREATIVE SCRUTINY OF MAYA ANGELOU. WHEN FINN ARRIVES SHE LEARNS THAT THE GROUP IS WORKING ON HER WEDDING QUILT WITH A DEVOTION, LOVE, AND COMMITMENT THAT FINN ISN'T SURE SHE HAS FOR HER OWN IMPENDING MARRIAGE. WHILE SWIMMING AT THE LOCAL POOL SHE IS SEXUALLY DRAWN TO "A MAJOR HUNK" AND BEGINS TO QUESTION HER DESIRE TO MARRY SAM. THE INTIMATE STORIES OF THE QUILTING WOMEN ARE SUPPOSED TO HELP FINN IN HER QUEST TO LEARN ABOUT LOVE, LOSS, JEALOUSY, ADULTERY, AND THE UPS AND DOWNS OF MARRIAGE.

"IS IT BETTER TO MARRY A FRIEND OR A LOVER?" FINN ASKS THE SINGLE, BOHEMIAN ALFRE WOODARD. "I WOULD MARRY MY SOUL MATE," WOODARD REPLIES, CLUTCHING A TATTERED PIECE OF PAPER THAT WE SOON LEARN CONTAINS A POEM WRITTEN BY A MAN SHE MET YEARS AGO IN A PARIS RESTAURANT. AFTER AN EVENING OF JOYOUS CONVERSATION, SHE REALIZES HE WAS HER SOUL MATE; WHAT SHE DIDN'T KNOW WAS THAT HE WAS MARRIED AND SHE WOULD NEVER SEE HIM AGAIN. SO INSTEAD OF DELVING INTO THE INTERESTING "FRIEND VS. LOVER" QUESTION, THE VIEWER IS LEFT TO PONDER: "WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU MEET YOUR SOUL MATE AND HE'S MARRIED?"

THAT, IN A NUTSHELL, IS WHAT IS WRONG WITH THE SCRIPT OF QUILT. IT TRIES TO IMPRESS BY RAISING DEEP QUESTIONS OF THE SOUL BUT ANSWERS THEM WITH IRRITATINGLY WOOLY THINKING.

QUILT TEASES US WITH THE PROMISE OF A QUANTUM-MOUNTAINOUS FEAST OF STRONG, INDEPENDENT, INSPIRING ACTRESSES, BUT INSTEAD IT SERVES UP A HASH MADE FROM THE LIVES OF WOMEN WHO DEFINE THEMSELVES SOLELY BY THE MEN THEY HAVE LOVED OR LOST. JEAN SIMMONS'S CHARACTER IS THE LONG SUFFERING WIFE OF AN ARTIST WHO HAS BEEN UNTRUSTWORTHY FROM THE DAY THEY MARRIED, JUSTIFYING HIS ADULTERY BY THE ARTISTS' "NEED" TO "SHARE IN ALL THE WORLD'S BEAUTY." SHE STAYS, TURNING HER ANGER INWARD, BECAUSE SHE LOVES HIM AND FINDS HER THE MOST BEAUTIFUL OF ALL! THE MORAL: A GOOD WOMAN IS THE THREAD THAT HOLDS THE MARRIAGE QUILT TOGETHER, NO MATTER HOW FRAYED THE EDGES, SELF-RESPECT BE DAMNED! GRANTED, WOMEN OF THE PREFEMINIST GENERATION HAD LIMITED CHOICES. BUT THE YOUNG FINN, TOO, PROVES THAT NO MATTER HOW LIBERATED WE HAVE BECOME,

REGARDLESS OF OUR DIVERSITY OF CHOICES, WOMEN STILL DEFINE THEIR EXISTENCE BY MEN. PASS ME THE TISSUES, THIS IS A THREE-HANKY CRY!

ANOTHER SUBTLE, DANGEROUS ELEMENT OF THE FILM IS THAT THE TWO AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN, MAYA ANGELOU AND ALFRE WOODARD, WHO PLAY MOTHER AND DAUGHTER, ARE THE ONLY WOMEN WHO LOVE A MAN FOR A BRIEF MOMENT AND THEN DO WITHOUT HIM FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES. WHAT'S THE MESSAGE HERE? THAT WOMEN OF COLOR AREN'T GOOD ENOUGH TO SUSTAIN A LONG TERM RELATIONSHIP OTHER THAN THAT OF MOTHER AND CHILD? IN HOLLYWOOD, THE CAGED BIRD NOT ONLY DOESN'T SING, SHE SLEEPS ALONE FOREVER!

THEN THERE'S THE WHOLE IDEA OF WOMEN AND RITUAL, EVOKED HERE BY THE ART OF QUILTING, BY FINN'S COLLEGE THESIS, AND, OF COURSE, BY THE RITUAL OF MARRIAGE. BUT THE THREAD UNRAVELS WITHOUT LEAVING US WITH ANY INSIGHT INTO THE IMPORTANCE AND MEANING OF RITUAL IN THE LIVES OF WOMEN.

THE MOVIE CO-OPTS THE IDEA THAT DURING THE TIME OF THE GODDESS WOMEN WERE FULLY EMPOWERED AND RITUAL WAS OFTEN
used to express true feelings about
magic and the totality of life. In the film,
however, the only worthwhile ritual for
magic and the totality of life. In the film,
generally made this messy
gender stuff. Indeed, these women—like
careers without dirtying their hands with
this messy
careers without dirtying their hands with
this messy
careers without dirtying their hands with
this messy
careers without dirtying their hands with
this messy

What does it all mean, though? Why
the generous expenditure of time and
energy constructing this absurdly
cartoonish 'feminist' straw woman to
attack? Opportunism and careerism are
certainly part of the mix. With
conservatives now in power everywhere,
many women are carving out places for
themselves by identifying as the 'good'
kind of feminist that neither threatens nor
undermines male power. But still,
why bother with feminism and gender politics
at all? Surely Jeane Kirkpatrick, Lynne
Cheney, and most of the others were
doing just fine professionally without
ever dirtying their hands with this messy
gender stuff. Indeed, these women—like
all token women—have generally made
their way up the ladder by pointedly
avoiding all mention of gender.

As I mulled over my notes and
documents on the plane home, I was particu-
larly concerned about the charges made
against feminists. Did we indeed bring
this backlash on ourselves? Certainly—
and I think we all should be willing to
admit this—there are grains of truth in
many of the claims. We have—certainly I
myself have—at times accepted and
quoted statistics on women's issues given
by other feminists which we should have
checked more carefully. Certainly, as in
any group and any movement, we have
our share of loonies and zealots whose
deeds and words are absurd and ill-
founded and who, unfortunately, are like-
ly to get the major media attention. (Al-
though there is great irony in the fact that
the WFN should be accusing us of either
sin!) And to the extent that this confer-
ence raised legitimate issues, it made me
awake of our responsibility, now that we
are so closely scrutinized by the media, to
be accurate and fair.

BUT, HAVING GIVEN THE DEVIL HER DUE,
our sins, whatever they may be,
could not possibly account for the enorm-
ity and exaggeration of the attack
made upon us. In fact, the real meaning
of this counter-feminist movement is, I
think, far more complimentary to us
than critical. For the truth is that we
feminists have inspired this backlash by
the sheer power and effectiveness of
what we have been doing for the last 30
years. We have put gender issues and
gender equity on the public agenda. We
do so, men in power never had to worry
about it. Until we challenged them to
deal with it. Until we challenged them to
do so, men in power never had to worry
about "domestic" issues, never had to
defend their patriarchal positions and
assumptions. But now that we have, the
male right never needed a women's auxiliary
to help them out on these matters. So good
for us. Even in these days of right-wing
ascendancy, the fortress of patriarchal
power and authority seems shaky and
under siege. Those who in the past
eschewed gender politics as too trivial and
demeaning to worry about are now
forced to use a lot of energy to try to
prop up a crumbling system.
MUSIC (continued from page 28)

rapped by poet Subi Shah, pays homage to eastern women:

Brothers you can no more control
those who love, than you can control
the path of love itself. // Respect your
mothers, sisters, lovers and
daughters, for all they are, for all they
give you. // Beneath your mothers
feet—lies heaven. * 

Basic human rights and social rights, the group believes, are just fundamental—and Nawaz has said that he's worried less about making the charts than about being murdered by Combat 18, a paramilitary arm of the far-right British National Party.

Strength and depth of conviction is not measured by beat and volume alone. Tish Hinojosa, a folk singer who identifies as Texas-Mexican and sings in both Spanish and English, is a Gloria Anzaldúa of song. She speaks and sings of living in the psychological borderland between two countries, belonging to neither. When I heard her at the Bottom Line in Manhattan, the audience was clearly moved, especially when she sang "Something in the Rain," about a child of migrant worker parents who dies without proper health care. That night she dedicated the song to Cesar Chavez. In her liner notes on her album Culture Story, she asks her fans to "take a stand for human dignity and pesticide control at the table."

There is a whole range of liberal, radical, and socialist feminists who just happen to be recording musicians. They may be hard-pressed to tell you which type of feminism they believe, and they may not agree to be branded at all. Polly Jean, lead singer of the alternative band PJ Harvey, for instance, has written songs that are clearly anti-sexist but claims to be neither a feminist nor a man-hater—an elision that annoys some of her fans.

The tough "queer-core" band Tribe 8—the name plays on tribale—is not for the timid. Make no mistake, they want revenge and justice. In their song "frat pig" they vent:

You say she was a slut/she wanted
money she gave the quarterback

PIVETTI (continued from page 35)

political parties are very strong."

The conservatives’ recruits, Brancati says, "are young women, from 20 to 40, and they do not agree with those of us from the left-wing movement about political ideas, about the organization of society. But we [mostly] agree about abortion, about sexual harassment, and this is a very new phenomenon."

Across-party women's coalitions are beginning to show up, Brancati reports. "Last summer, the women deputies in Parliament from the Left to the conservatives on the Right sponsored, all together, a proposed law on sexual harassment. This included Ms. Mussolini. That's very new. And they presented this law project to Irene Pivetti. That's new." 

Currently, sexual harassment is considered a violation under "public morals" laws; the proposed change would make it an offense against women, as individuals, "so it is a change in mentality—and you also would have to change the judges’ mentality. In Italy, this is seen by some men as not terrible but a 'cultural thing.'"

Where does Pivetti fit in to all of this? Brancati says Pivetti apparently has no "sensibilities to women's problems... Life was good to her; she's successful. But she understands that women have problems, and in her role, she will approach this problem. So she has no personal sensibilities but she has political sensibilities." In fact, later on Pivetti reportedly blocked passage of the new sexual harassment bill in the Chamber of Deputies citing the lack of a quorum, despite the protests of the women's caucus.

At press time, Pivetti's immediate political future was unclear. In January Prime Minister Dini resigned under pressure from the Berlusconi group in Parliament, although it was considered possible that he might be asked to form a caretaker government. New elections loom as early as spring. Despite his corruption trial, which began as this magazine went to press, Berlusconi continues waging comeback efforts.

Life is "very different than it used to be," says Pierwigi. "It means that the democratic institutions have been able to hold up. And this is partly due to the major role of Irene Pivetti." Whatever her fate in this latest shift—a new Parliament means the speaker job is up for grabs—the last four years have shown that she has the potential to continue to be a major player in Italy's future. •
practices as constituting who they really were, the font of their identity and their being. But all the time they felt deficient because their idea of radical, robust sexuality, that practiced by some gay men, seemed always out of reach. In publications such as Wicked Women magazine from Sydney, in the work of Cherry Smyth and Della Grace in the U.K. and Pat Califia in the U.S., these lesbians bemoaned their inadequacies at toilet sex, at one-night stands, at managing to be sexually attracted to children. Lesbian sex therapists, such as Margaret Nichols, became an important part of a new lesbian sex industry.

Now there is a tendency in feminist and mainstream women's magazines to represent this lesbian sexuality of prostitution as a tantalizing dish for heterosexual women to sample and consume. "Transgressive" lesbianism, derived from the sex industry and mimicking gay male culture, is now presented as a progressive "woman's" sexuality, a model for how heterosexual women could and should be.

**Reason No. 4**
**Being subordinate can feel sexual.**

There is no such thing as a "natural" sexual pleasure that can be liberalized. What gives men or women sexual sensations is socially constructed out of the power relationship between men and women, and it can be changed. In "sex," the very difference between men and women, supposedly so "natural," is in fact created. In "sex" the very categories "men," persons with political power, and "women," persons of the subordinate class, are made flesh.

Nor is sex a mere private matter. In liberal male thought, sex has been shoved into the private sphere and seen as a realm of personal freedom where people can express their individual desires and fantasies. But the bedroom is far from private; it is an arena in which the power relationship between men and women is most revealingly played out. Freedom there is usually that of men to realize themselves on and in the bodies of women.

Sexual feelings are learned and can be unlearned. The construction of sexuality around dominance and submission has been assumed to be "natural" and inevitable because men learn to operate the symbol of their ruling-class status, the penis, in relation to the vagina in ways that ensure women's subordinate status. Our feelings and practices around sex cannot be immune from this political reality. And I suggest it is the affirmation of this power relation, the assertion of a distinction between "the sexes" by means of dominant/submissive behavior, that gives sex its salience and the intense excitement generally associated with it under male supremacy.

Since the early '70s, feminist theorists and researchers have uncovered the extent of sexual violence and how the experience the fear of it curtails women's lives and opportunities. Child sexual abuse undermines women's ability to develop strong and loving relationships with their own bodies and with others, and confidence about acting upon the world. Rape in adulthood, including marital and date rape, has similar effects. Sexual harassment, voyeurism, flashing, and stalking undermine women's equal opportunities in education, at work, in their homes, on the street. Women who have been used in the sex industry develop techniques of dissociation to survive, an experience shared by victims of incest, and deal with damage to their sexuality and relationships. Awareness of the ultimate threat clouding women's lives, the possibility of sexual murder, is brought to us regularly by newspaper headlines about the deaths of women.

The cumulative effects of such violence create the fear that makes women limit where they go and what they do, be careful about locking in the back seat of the car, locking doors, wearing "safe" clothing, drawing the curtains. As feminist research such as that of Elizabeth Stanko in Everyday Violence (1990) shows, women are aware of the threat of men's violence and change their lives in response to that fear even though they may not have experienced serious assault. Against this everyday reality of ordinary women's lives, the notion that an orgasm "under any circumstances" could vanquish that fear and remembered vulnerability is perhaps pseudo-feminism's cruellest hoax.

Men's sexual violence is not the work of psychotic individuals but the product of the normal construction of male sexuality in societies like the United States and Australia now—as a practice that defines their superior status and subordinates women. If we seriously want to end such violence, we must not accept this construction as the model for what "sex" really is.
Sexual pleasure for women is a political construction, too. Women's sexuality as well as men's has been forged within the dominant/submissive model, as an artifact to appease and service the sexuality constructed in and for men. Whereas boys and men have been encouraged to direct all feeling into the objectification of another and are rewarded with "pleasure" for dominance, women have learned their sexual feelings in a situation of subordination. Girls are trained through sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and early sexual encounters with boys and men in a sexual role that is reactive and submissive. We learn our sexual feelings as we learn other emotions, in male-dominant families and in situations in which we lack power, surrounded by images of women as objects in advertising and films.

Doe Graham's wonderful 1994 book Loving to Survive looks at female heterosexuality and femininity as symptoms of what she calls societal Stockholm Syndrome. In classic Stockholm Syndrome, hostages bond with their captors in terror and develop submissive cooperation in order to survive. Handbooks for those who might be taken hostage, such as I was once given when working in a prison, describe survival tactics that resemble the advice offered in women's magazines for how to win men. If you are ever taken hostage, say these handbooks, you should talk about the man's interests and family to make him realize you are a person and to activate his humanity. Stockholm Syndrome develops among those who fear for their lives but are dependent upon their captors. If the captor shows any kindness, however small, a hostage is likely to bend even to the point of protecting the captor from harm and entirely adopting his point of view upon the world. Graham defines the sexual violence that women routinely face as "sexual terrorism." Against this background of terror, Graham expresses, women develop Stockholm Syndrome and bond to men.

Because women's sexuality develops in this context of sexual terrorism, we can eroticize our fear, our terrorized bonding. All sexual arousal and release is not necessarily positive. Women can experience orgasms while being sexually abused in childhood, in rape, or in prostitution. Our language has only words like pleasure and enjoyment to describe sexual feelings, no words to describe those feelings that are sexual but that we do not like, feelings that come from experience, dreams, or fantasies about degradation or rape and cause distress despite arousal.

The "sex" promoted by women's and even feminist magazines, as if it were quite separate from women's real-life subordinate status and experience of sexual violence, offers no hope of deconstructing and reconstructing either men's sexuality or women's. Sadomasochism and "fantasy" scenarios, for instance, in which women attempt to "lose" themselves, are often utilized by women who have been sexually abused. The orgasmic excitement experienced in these scenarios simply cannot be felt in those women's bodies if and when they remain grounded and conscious of who they actually are. The orgasm of inequality—from encouraging women to seek to create a sexuality commensurate with the freedom feminists envision—merely rewards women with "pleasure" for disassociating.

So many women, including feminists, lowered their eyes from the vision of how to make women free and decided to get stuck into having more-powerful orgasms in any way that worked. The pursuit of the orgasm of oppression serves as a new "opium of the masses." It diverts our energies from the struggles that are needed now against sexual violence and the global sex industry. Questioning how these organs feel, what they mean politically, whether they are achieved through the prostitution of women in pornography, is not easy, but it is also not impossible. A sexuality of equality suited to our pursuit of freedom has still to be forged and fought for if we are to release women from sexual subjection.

The ability of women to eroticize their own subordination and take "pleasure" from the degradation of themselves and other women to object status poses a serious obstacle. So long as women have a stake in the sexual system as it is—so long as they get their kicks that way—why will they want change?

I suggest that it is not possible to imagine a world in which women are free at the same time as protecting a sexuality based precisely upon their lack of freedom. Our sexual passions must match the passions of our political imagination for an end to a world based on all abusive hierarchies, including race and class. Only a sexuality of equality, and our ability to imagine and work for such a sexuality, makes the freedom of women thinkable.
WHAT ARE BIG GIRLS MADE OF?

The construction of a woman:
a woman is not made of flesh
of bone and sinew
belly and breasts, elbows and liver and toe.
She is manufactured like a sports sedan.
She is retooled, refitted and redesigned
every decade.

Cecile had been seduction itself in college.
She wriggled through bars like a satin eel,
hers hips and ass promising, her mouth pursed
in the dark red lipstick of desire.

She visited in '68 still wearing skirts
tight to the knees, dark red lipstick,
while I danced through Manhattan
in mini skirt
lipstick pale as apricot milk,
hair loose as a horse's mane. Oh dear,
I thought in my superiority of the moment,
whatever has happened to poor Cecile.
She was out of fashion, out of the game,
disqualified, disdained, dis-
memberefrom the club of desire.

Look at pictures in French fashion
magazines of the 18th century:
century of the ultimate lady
fantasy wrought of silk and corseting.
Paniers bring her hips out three feet
each way, while the waist is pinched
and the belly flattened under wood.
The breasts are stuffed up and out
offered like apples in a bowl.
The tiny foot is encased in a slipper
never meant for walking.

On top is a grandiose headache:
hair like a museum piece, daily
ornamented with ribbons, vases,
grottoes, mountains, frigates in full
sail, balloons, baboons, the fancy
of a hairdresser turned loose.
The hats were rococo wedding cakes
that would dim the Las Vegas strip.
Here is a woman forced into shape
rigid exoskeleton torturing flesh:
a woman made of pain.

How superior we are now: see the modern woman
thin as a blade of scissors
She runs on a treadmill every morning,
fits herself into machines of weights
and pulleys to heave and grunt,
an image in her mind she can never
approximate, a body of rosy
glass that never wrinkles,
ever grows, never fades. She
sits at the table closing her eyes to food
hungry, always hungry
a woman made of pain.

A cat or dog approaches another,
they sniff noses. They sniff asses.
They bristle or lick. They fall
in love as often as we do,
as passionately. But they fall
in love or lust with furry flesh,
not hoop skirts or push up bras
rib removal or liposuction.
It is not for male or female dogs
that poodles are clipped
to topiary hedges.

If only we could like each other raw.
If only we could love ourselves
like healthy babies burbling in our arms.
If only we were not programmed and reprogrammed
to need what is sold us.
Why should we want to live inside ads?
Why should we want to scourge our softness,
to straight lines like a Mondrian painting?
Why should we punish each other with scorn
as if to have a large ass
were worse than being greedy or mean?

When will women not be compelled
to view their bodies as science projects,
gardens to be weeded,
dogs to be trained.
When will a woman cease
to be made of pain?
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Nuclear testing bans.
Health care clinic access.
End banks' discrimination against minorities.
Handgun control.

Just a few victories Working Assets customers helped win.