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## Divisions and Conflict in the Women's Liberation Movement From 1965 to 1970

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Divisions and Conflict in the Women's Liberation Movement From 1965 to 1970

Senior Project submitted to

The Division of Interdivisional Studies

of Bard College

by

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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Dedicated to Kelli and Thomas DeFlora,  
who have been founts of encouragement throughout this process.

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## **Introduction**

My Women Rights, Human Rights class my Sophomore year was my first introduction to feminist theory and during the course of the semester I felt an entire world open before my feet. I experienced the thrill of self discovery and felt for the first time that I was a part of a legacy. There was so much stimulating, delightful, and difficult conversations held in that room, but, two class discussions are seared into my brain. These discussions were not particularly enlightening, quite the opposite, they were the least productive and most disheartening conversations held in that classroom. Shortly into these discussions clear lines were drawn and by the time the bell rang people were at each other's throats. The conversation completely broke down, nothing was produced and it seemed as though no one was really listening to each other. Everyone was anticipating the moment the person who had the floor would fall silent and they would have their chance to bark out their opinion. It became clear to me early on that the conversation was ill-fated. Opinions had been obstinately formed upon reading the material and no one in the room could claim to be nonpartisan.

For the next two years these conversations lingered in the back of my mind, perforating my psyche, like a prick. I needed to further understand this type of dissolution, was it an anomaly? Certainly not. I knew from my studies that feminism has been wrought with internal conflicts. If it was not an anomaly was it then a tendency? Or even a pattern? I endeavoured to survey the history of second wave feminism, in order to more fully understand the fault lines. I had intended to study the 1980s as they are primarily thought of as *the* time period in which feminism was marked by serious divisions. For instance, contributors and editors of *Conflicts in Feminism*, Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller said of the 1980s, it was "a decade of intense

mutual criticism and internal divisiveness; a decade in which the feminist illusion of 'sisterhood' and the 'the dream of a common language' gave way to the realities of fractured discourses.”<sup>1</sup>

However, through my research, primarily through my reading of Alice Echols book, *Daring To Be Bad*, in which she paints a picture of a perpetually divisive feminism from 1965-73, I found that the early days of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) were also marked by conflict and the feminist vision of sisterhood first saw its demise in the early 1970s. I chose to focus my research on the years 1965 to 70 in order to demonstrate that conflicts in feminism were not isolated to the sex wars, they can be traced back to the beginning of second-wave feminism and perhaps even further.

I conducted my research using the WLM groups' archives, for example, the Redstockings' online database. I drew heavily on *Notes From the First Year*, by the New York Radical Women, and *Notes From the Second Year*, by the Redstockings. I also drew on Journals and Newsletters produced by various groups for instance, The *Chicago Women's Liberation Union Newsletter* and *Women's World*. Additionally, I found several leaflets issued by the WLM groups in the Redstockings' archives. Finally, I drew on Echols' *Daring To Be Bad*, as inspiration for my narrative structure, used first hand interviews she conducted and identified key figures and events in the WLM through her work. I then researched those figures and found both primary source material and writings that were produced after 1970 that reflected on their experiences within the movement between 67-70.

Through my research, primarily through Echols work, I began to identify tactical fissures in the movement such as that of the WLM women from the New Left which directly generated

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<sup>1</sup>Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller, *Conflicts in Feminism* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall Inc. 1990), 1.

the WLM. The split from the New Left would produce a second tactical *internal* fracture among radical women between those who were resolutely committed to the Left's anti-capitalist stance and those who wanted draw upon their own experiences and create their own analysis and were more committed to the dictum the "personal is political" as a form of knowledge production.<sup>2</sup> I also, primarily through my reading of primary source material, identified WLM ideologies, e.g. sisterhood, a leaderless movement, and personal is political, that were extremely hard to live by and difficult to organize a movement around, and which I believe helped to facilitate *personal* conflict among already divided movement women.

The "personal is political" and the method of knowledge production it produced, *consciousness-raising*, would become a hotly debated issue among WLM groups and in this way contributed to the tactical divisions between the WLM women.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, I believe the focus on personal testimony sometimes caused radical women to become very personal in their criticism of each other positions and sometimes caused women to identify each other as adversaries opposed to patriarchal oppression. In addition, the loose structure of consciousness-raising sessions often served as an arena in which women could carry out these personal attacks. Furthermore, according to Echols, by deriving political ideas from analysis of their personal lives, many groups sought to remold the minds of their members, and produce a new ideal or *standard* of "woman."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Alice Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*.

<sup>4</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*.

This speaks to the homogenizing effect of the ideology of universal sisterhood which the WLM prized and often morphed to equate “sisterhood” with *sameness*. I believe that sisterhood prohibited a healthy expression of difference because no one could comfortably accept difference without destroying the rhetoric of sisterhood upon which the movement was based. Furthermore, according to WLM member Jo Freeman, sisterhood was sometimes weaponized through the establishment of standard of sisterly behavior by which those who do not conform were condemned because their existence is reminder that women are *different* and *difference* was often interpreted to mean *inequality*.<sup>5</sup> In their search for a singular unified definition of woman the WLM groups actually alienated and divided women further.

I believe, and Freeman asserts, that the subordination of radical women in the organizational structure of the New Left produces what will become a strong aversion to structure, organization, and leadership in the WLM and caused many movement women to proclaim leadership itself was “male,” and should be abandoned. The leadershipless nature of WLM was threatening to the movement as it generally produced impotent rage as opposed to facilitating effective political action.<sup>6</sup> This structureless ideology facilitated chaos and further aided the development of factions which represented certain agendas. I am not purporting that this was the cause of these divisions, nor that any ideological principle caused these divisions solely, merely that this feature of the WLM turned divisiveness into persecution and facilitated further divisions.

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<sup>5</sup> Freeman, Jo, “TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood,” Ms. Magazine, (April 1976).

<sup>6</sup> Freeman, Jo, “Tyranny of Structurelessness,” The Second Wave, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1972)



In this way, attempts to unify women rhetorically and theoretically using their personal experience and under an ideal of universality/equality can actually prove to be extremely divisive and produce new ways in which women oppress each other which, according to Freeman, often ends up reinforcing patriarchal values and the gender binary opposed to breaking free from them.<sup>7</sup> However, I certainly do not believe that these ideological principles are the sole source of the divisions in the WLM and I believe that they, especially consciousness-raising and the personal is political, have often been responsible for the advancement of the WLM. Conflict can be healthy in a movement and divisions over issues such as organizing independently or within a larger radical movement, balancing personal change and social change, focusing on reform or revolution, and how to have leadership in tandem with egalitarianism are classic debates among all radical groups. Furthermore, the WLM was often undermined by outside constraints such as lack of power, access to resources, etc. which also contributed to these divisions. However, I believe that the ideology of sisterhood, a leaderless movement, and the conflation of personal and political, were extremely hard to live by and difficult to organize a movement around, and I believe helped to facilitate *personal* conflict which went beyond normal organizational conflict and took the form of a vicious attack.

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<sup>7</sup> Freeman, "TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood,"(April 1976).

## **Chapter One: 1965 to 1967**

### **The Split from The New Left**

I will begin by discussing women in the civil rights movement and the New Left. This context is necessary because it is out of this movement and the organizations which comprised it that the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) emerged. Author, historian and feminist Alice Echols asserts that the actions of the black power movement and the anti-war protesters, and the rise of the New Left all contributed to a palpable feeling that the world could, and was, changing in front of people's eyes. Echols writes about the WLM in this time period, gathering evidence chiefly from first hand interviews with women's liberationists, and asserts that it was this atmosphere of radicalism as well as the exploitation these women experienced as radicals in the New Left which inspired them to act to change their own condition. According to Echols, the early women's liberationists not only learned organizing strategies and skills within the movement but first recognized their own oppression by men within the male dominated hierarchy of the New Left and becoming increasingly aware of their own oppression and frustrated by their invisibility within these organizations, they would eventually begin to organize separately.<sup>8</sup> This split from the New Left would produce an enormous internal fracture among radical women which subsequently generated factions, debates, and struggles over who would define, lead, and structure the direction of the WLM which would have lasting consequences both for the WLM and the ultimately the course of feminism.

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<sup>8</sup> Alice Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 31.

The New Left grew out of student socialist activism, especially as it intersected with, and was inspired by, the civil rights movement. The main New Left organization, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), was founded in 1959.<sup>9</sup> According to Echols, the New Left generally avoided traditional forms of political organization in favour of strategies of mass protest, direct action, and civil disobedience.<sup>10</sup> The young women who would go on to produce some of the earliest WLM literature and be the first to raise issues of women's subordination in the radical movement began in Leftist organizations such as the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). I will devote some time to profiles of these organizations as it was through them that the radical women first learned radical organizing tactics and within them that they experienced formal organizational subordination to men and were first able to conceptualize and articulate said subordination.

According to Echols, SNCC aimed to promote radical change, meaning they advocated complete political and social reform, something that the radical women of the WLM would also strive for.<sup>11</sup> SNCC was the regarded as cutting edge of the radical movement, they became one of the first civil rights group to oppose the Vietnam war and advocate black power tactics included deliberately provoked confrontations with the Southern power structure, as a result of this they gained a reputation as the "shock troops" of the civil rights movement.<sup>12</sup> SDS was founded in 1960 as a youth group of the League for Industrial Democracy (LID) a social democratic

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<sup>9</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 31.

<sup>10</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 31.

<sup>11</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 32.

<sup>12</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 32

educational organization which called for the revitalization of democracy and the replacement of stifling bureaucratic structures would be replaced by new institutions that would allow “the individual [to] share in those social decisions determining the quality and direction of his life.”<sup>13</sup> SDS described itself as anti-anti-communism and stressed “how late capitalist society creates mechanism of psychological and cultural domination over everyone.”<sup>14</sup> SDS was less interested in repairing society than in developing new forms that would prefigure the desired society, meaning that they did not aim to institute reform and instead aimed for revolution.<sup>15</sup> Similarly to SDS, The radical women of the WLM resented reform and sought revolution as well. Additionally, a faction of radical women shared SDS’s resolute anti-capitalist stance and often privileged this ideology over women’s liberation, this would produce an enormous internal fracture and two distinct factions who would eventually become known as the feminists and the politicians, but more on that later.<sup>16</sup>

These early WLM women, who were predominately white, were excited by the radicalism of these organization and wanted to incite change. It was due to their involvement in these organizations that white women were able to develop political skills and break out of traditional confining female roles. However, as previously mentioned, many of these women, found themselves in the same subservient roles inside the Movement they were forced to play outside the Movement, being confined to either the office or the freedom school. For instance, in

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<sup>13</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 31

<sup>14</sup> “Students for a Democratic Society” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Students-for-a-Democratic-Society>, (February 19, 2018)

<sup>15</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 33

<sup>16</sup> “Students for a Democratic Society,” (February 19, 2018)

an interview with Echols, Sociologist and Movement activist Wini Breines argued that the “fantastic amount of personal and political growth experienced by women” blinded them initially to the Movement’s sexism.<sup>17</sup> However, Breines also pointed out that women’s involvement in the movement provided them with the analytical tools which eventually enabled them to discern the disjuncture between the Movement’s rhetoric of equality and their subordination within it. For instance, Mimi Feingold, a woman who had been involved in the Movement since the Freedom Rides in the early 60s said, “here was a movement where women were playing the most unbelievably subservient role, because that was the only role the women could play, because women couldn’t burn draft cards and couldn’t go to jail so all they could do was to relate through their men and that seemed to me the most really demeaning kind of thing.”<sup>18</sup>

In addition to awakening women to their subordination within the organizations themselves Echols asserts The New Left contributed to the development of feminist consciousness in other ways. For, instance Tom Hayden, who co-founded SDS in 1961 and would later become its president, in 1962 called for a “re-assertion of the personal.” In the 1962 *Port Huron Statement* Hayden declared that the new left “must give form to...feelings of helplessness and indifference, so that people may see the political, social, and economic sources of their private troubles and organize to change society.”<sup>19</sup> Echols asserts that the inclusion of the *personal* in political discourse, paved the way for feminists *expand* of the Left’s definition of *personal to include* the private sphere, interpersonal relationships and emotions. Through this

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<sup>17</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 32.

<sup>18</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 33.

<sup>19</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 35.

lense they began view their own oppression as women as a political problem that was deeply entrenched in society. The “personal is political” would become a powerful dictum of the WLM and the premise of upon which women would attempt to organize a movement that directly related to their lives and upon which they would base much of radical women’s theory around personal experience. Furthermore, the “personal is political,” would become a hotly debated issue between the politicians and feminist, as the politicians wanted to focus more on anti-capitalist analysis while the feminists wanted to draw upon their own experiences and create their own analysis. The politicians would often dismiss the feminists by categorizing their theory and organizing tactics as too “personal.”

In 1965, Mary King and Casey Hayden, whom Echols asserts were powerful organizers in SNCC, along with Ruth Howard, Maria Varela, Dona Richards, Muriel Tillinghast, and Emmie Shrader began to raise the issue of sex roles within the organization.<sup>20</sup> King and Hayden wrote a position paper on women in SNCC entitled *Sex and Caste*. In 1965, King and Hayden circulated this paper on women’s position in The Movement based on their experiences within SNCC and it is widely regarded as one of the first documents of the emerging women’s liberation movement.<sup>21</sup> The early themes of the WLM such as the “personal is political” and their origin in the Radical Movement can be found in *Sex and Caste*. For instance, King and Hayden explicitly state that they began to conceptualize their own oppression and think radically about their own role in society through their experience in the movement, saying, they have "learned from the movement to think radically about the personal worth and abilities of people whose role

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<sup>20</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 35.

<sup>21</sup> Casey Hayden and Mary King, “Sex and Caste,” *Liberation* (Grossman Publishers, April 1966), 1.

in society had gone unchallenged before.”<sup>22</sup> King and Hayden go on to say that they then tried to apply these lessons to their own personal relationships. As previously stated this is something that became central to radical feminists; the personal is political. Women were coming to see private disputes with one’s husband or lover as representative of a larger social and political problem. As indicated earlier examining their oppression and the own relationships and trying to identify themes would become central to radical feminist theory-building.

Hayden and King go on to talk more about this process, saying that they were able to identify themes through talking to each other about “our own and other women's problems in trying to live in our personal lives and in our work as independent and creative people.”<sup>23</sup>

Hayden and King describe what would come to be known as consciousness raising or gathering in groups and discussing one’s oppression, identifying common themes, and drawing conclusions from them. Consciousness raising would become an important tool used by women’s liberationists and would become a method through which several theories of women’s oppression were produced. Consciousness raising also enabled women to produce their knowledge about their own situation opposed to relying on existing frameworks that had been developed by men, e.g. Marxism. Additionally, consciousness-raising would become an issue that would cause much debate between both the politico and the feminist factions as well as become an a structureless arena in which women began to viciously infight. This type of discussion was able to ensue because of these radical women’s involvement in the New Left, which put them all in the same place and provided them with the analytical tools to engage in their own personal situations.

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<sup>22</sup> Hayden, “Sex and Caste,” 2.

<sup>23</sup> Hayden, “Sex and Caste,” 1.

This process of consciousness raising, was often extremely fraught and demoralizing which Hayden and King identify as well, writing about "...the internal struggle occasioned by trying to break out of very deeply learned fears, needs, and self perceptions."<sup>24</sup> This quote demonstrates how the process of consciousness-raising was often challenging and produced a fierce internal struggle as it involved breaking free from deeply entrenched self-perceptions. Hayden and King write that the disruptive and discordant nature of consciousness-raising often put one at odds with oneself, this may account for the conflict that arose both within consciousness-raising sessions and about them, between radical women in the formation of the WLM and in the years to come. As previously mentioned consciousness-raising is premised upon the principle the "personal is political" which was inspired, as Hayden and King assert, by "...concepts of people and freedom learned from the movement and organizing."<sup>25</sup> This principle proved to be tremendously important to the WLM and paved the way for radical feminists to criticize things that were previously thought of as belonging to the "private sphere" such as, marriage, the family, and sexuality itself, and come to think of them as institutions with a political function.

However, I believe that this concept was at times divisive. Radical women found themselves divided over the principle itself and often attack each other when they felt the personal was becoming too central to the conversation or not central enough. Additionally, I believe that in their effort to create a movement that is directly related to women's lives at all times sometimes radical women avoided concretely organizing themselves as a movement and

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<sup>24</sup> Hayden, "Sex and Caste," 1.

<sup>25</sup> Hayden, "Sex and Caste," 2.



put too much responsibility on individual women. Finally, the focus on personal testimony sometimes caused radical women to become very personal in their criticism of each other positions. I believe that, at times, this produced a sort of call out culture in which movement women often became the culprit opposed to patriarchal oppression. Although this is not yet clear at this point in the story I believe the foundations are laid out here, in the split from the New Left and in Hayden and King's document.

In *Sex and Caste*, Hayden and King are not writing about the sexual caste system in America but specifically referencing the sexual caste system in the New Left. For instance, they write, "women...who work in the movement seem to be caught up in a common-law caste system that operates...forcing them to work around or outside hierarchical structures of power which may exclude them."<sup>26</sup> Here, Hayden and King highlight that women are caught up in the sexual caste system and subordinated within the organizational structure of the New Left; a group which is, rather ironically, fighting for radical change and human and civil rights. I believe that it is this subordination experienced by radical women in the organizational structure of the New Left that produces what will become a strong aversion, if not an open hostility for structure, organization, and leadership in later radical women's organizations. Women's liberationist Joreen Freeman, who was a part of one of first WLM groups in the country, asserts that during the formative years of the WLM a great emphasis was placed on developing leaderless, structureless groups as the main organizational form of the movement.<sup>27</sup> Freeman asserts that this was natural

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<sup>26</sup> Hayden, "Sex and Caste," 2.

<sup>27</sup> Joreen Freeman, "Tyranny of Structurelessness," *The Second Wave*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1972), 1.

reaction against the “elitism of the Left.”<sup>28</sup> Freeman and Echols also contend that this dogged commitment to structurelessness proved to be extremely divisive and even ruinous for later radical feminists. In this way, the subordination of women in the sex caste system of the New Left had long lasting influence over and consequences for the WLM.

Casey and Hayden also cite their subordination in the New Left as evidence of the pervasiveness of the sex caste system because it is an arm of a movement fighting for human and civil rights. Along these lines they assert that the sexual caste system is more invisible than the racial caste system because many who are “...very hip to the implications of the racial caste system, even people in the movement, don't seem to be able to see the sexual caste system...”<sup>29</sup> To further demonstrate the invisibility of the sexual caste system they note that it is not a system institutionalized by law, that women have the right to vote, sue for divorce etc. but that this makes the system all the more sinister as women cannot withdraw from it or overthrow it, as they might were it perhaps a desire for national or political independence. Again this makes the “personal is political” even more essential to these women because their subordination is largely operating in the private sphere and is subsequently being viewed as a personal problem and they aim to make frame it as a political issue.

Casey and Hayden then go on to outline what would become an *extremely divisive issue* for early radical women attempting to organize themselves, they write, “A very few men seem to feel, when they hear conversations involving these problems, that they have a right to be present

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<sup>28</sup> Freeman, “Tyranny of Structurelessness,” 1.

<sup>29</sup> Hayden, “Sex and Caste,” 2.

and participate in them, since they are so deeply involved.”<sup>30</sup> According to Echols, the question of whether or not men should be allowed to be present and or involved in the women’s liberation movement produces conflict between what would become the politicians and the feminists later on. Many women’s liberationist did eventually agree that they needed meetings separate from men because as Casey and King write “...very few men can respond non-defensively, since the whole idea is either beyond their comprehension or threatens and exposes them.”<sup>31</sup> More important than this conflict, however, are divisions produced over the related questions regarding the role of the women’s liberation movement within or outside of the New Left. I see this debate as an offshoot of the problem proposed here by King and Hayden. This debate becomes particularly contentious and antagonistic because of the early radical women’s deep personal and political ties to the New Left and the organizational, as well as personal, subordination women had experienced within the New Left.

Although the question of whether or not to organize without men has different implications for Hayden and King as their goal is not necessarily to start a separate women’s liberation movement at this point. Hayden and King they are simply trying to raise the issue(s) of and produced by the sex caste system and writing a plea for tolerance, discussion of their oppression and some simple organizational restructuring that might alleviate their suffering as they had come to view the movement as a sort of refuge from the perpetual oppression faced in their everyday lives. For example, they write “...the chances seem nil that we could start a movement based on anything as distant to general American thought as a sex caste system...The

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<sup>30</sup> Hayden, “Sex and Caste,” 1.

<sup>31</sup> Hayden, “Sex and Caste,” 1.

very fact that the country can't face, much less deal with, the questions we're raising means that the movement is one place to look for some relief...<sup>32</sup> Hayden and King clearly did not believe in the possibility of a women's liberation movement, they wanted to continue their work within the larger radical movement that they had enjoyed and that they had come to feel very strongly about, just under conditions of relative equality.

They are also looking towards the New Left as a place in which new alternatives to the sexual caste system could be produced. For instance, they write "...we'd like to see discussion begin because this is one area where a determined attempt to apply ideas we've learned can produce some new alternatives."<sup>33</sup> As the New Left was committed to the production of new social structures and ways of thinking about human rights, Hayden and Casey reasonably thought that they could include women's issues in their efforts. This situated Casey and Hayden as the architects of the politico position that wanted to work on women's liberation as a wing of the New Left as opposed to their own women's liberation movement and was more committed to a socialist revolution than a feminist one which I will go on to describe in more detail in the following section. However, when it came to the women's oppression, Echols asserts that, the New Left's leadership was unwilling to give the issue serious attention. Echols asserts that the New Left also privileged the most oppressed and many movement men (and some women) did not view women's oppression as urgent or in many cases as real, as the subordination of black men and women and the plight of the Vietnam War. The issue of organizing within the New Left became so contentious later on within circles of radical women because many had already

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<sup>32</sup> Hayden, "Sex and Caste," 1.

<sup>33</sup> Hayden, "Sex and Caste," 1.

appealed to the New Left in the hopes of finding a place in which their problems could also be taken seriously and worked towards collectively. They were dismissed and this was painful for many radical women and they felt that they could not go on fraternizing with them. However, Echols asserts that even those who were the most vocal about the New Left's sexism saw themselves as criticizing the New Left from the Left and they were not themselves anti-left as many of the politico accused them of being.<sup>34</sup>

King and Hayden also begin to discuss problems that arise between women in the movement in their position paper. They describe conflict that arises between women "...with varying degrees of awareness of themselves as being as capable as men...or between women who see themselves as needing more control...than other women demand."<sup>35</sup> These discrepancies in awareness and demands can cause conflict between women who can come to identify each other as hindrances or threats to their own liberation. This statement seems to foreshadow conflicts that arise later on when women's demands, theories, and demeanors do not align. For instance, if a woman was more comfortable in a "traditional role" it could be seen as damaging to the movement.

For example, in *Women Women of the World Unite - We Have Nothing to Lose But Our Men*, Carol Hanisch and Elizabeth Sutherland put together a conversation comprised of various comments made by men and women on the subject of women's liberation, in response to the assertion that some women want things the way they are and are in favor of the traditional women's role, Hanisch and Sutherland write, "A lot of women who say they just want to play

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<sup>34</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 34

<sup>35</sup> Hayden, "Sex and Caste," 1.

traditional roles are simply fearful - or unable to imagine other ways of being...Freedom can seem frightening...”<sup>36</sup> This speaks to the psychological dimension of women’s oppression which many radical women emphasized and the idea, which was dubbed false consciousness, that many women are not aware of their own oppression. This term, similarly to the personal is political was a leftist term drawn from marx and expanded by the WLM.

In her article, *False Consciousness*, Jennifer Gardener asserts that this problem of false consciousness is two fold, she writes, “Women are put down for submitting to unequal treatment...they are accused of courting their own oppression.”<sup>37</sup> This idea of false consciousness proved divisive later on in the movement as it caused some radical women to identify the problem of women’s oppression in traditional womanhood and to seek to eradicate the definition of womanhood. The issue of some women demanding more control than others also caused conflicts in leadership as well. When some women began asserting themselves later on in the radical movement they were accused of “talking too much” and “dominating other women.” These women were often attacked for being domineering and assertive, they were accused of being “male identified” and of oppressing their fellow radical women. In this way, both being too assertive and too timid was seen as something that could be condemned by one’s fellow radical women.

King and Hayden also speak to the conflicts between white and black women within the movement saying “And there are problems with relationships between white women and black

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<sup>36</sup> Carol Hanisch and Elizabeth Sutherland, “Women Women of the World Unite - We Have Nothing to Lose But Our Men,” *Notes from the First Year*; (June 1968), 12.

<sup>37</sup>Jennifer Gardner, “False Consciousness,” *Notes from the Second Year: Women’s Liberation*, (Radical Feminism, 1970), 82.

women.”<sup>38</sup> Although King and Hayden do not elaborate on what the issues between white and black women were, Echols asserts these were issues of identification. When White women began raising issues of sexual inequality with SNCC and SDS black women often found themselves unable to identify with their struggles. Black women often did the same work as men within the organizations. For instance, Cynthia Washington, a black woman who directed one of SNCC’s projects stated that she neither understood nor sympathized with King or Hayden’s complaints of sex discrimination,

Casey complained that all the women got to do was type, that their role was limited to office work no matter where they were. What she said didn’t make any particular sense to me because, at the time, I had my own project in Bolivar County, Missouri. A number of other black women also directed their own projects. What Casey and other white women seemed to want was an opportunity to prove they could do something other than office work. I assumed that if they could do something else, they’d be doing that.<sup>39</sup>

Echols asserts that many black women within the movement shared Washington’s confusion and dismissed white women’s complaints. She asserts that this was due largely to the fact that middle class white women were struggling for independence and self sufficiency, things which racial and class oppression had often thrust upon black women. For instance, Washington went on to say “it seemed to many of us...that white women were demanding a chance to be independent while we needed help and assistance that was not always forthcoming.”<sup>40</sup>

In a later document, entitled *Women Women of the World Unite - We Have Nothing to Lose But Our Men* by Carol Hanisch and Elizabeth Sutherland, the two wrote, “Many militant black women see their struggle as a fight alongside their men for survival; some say that only middle-class white women can afford to worry about their freedom as women.”<sup>41</sup> Black and

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<sup>38</sup> Hayden, “Sex and Caste,” 1.

<sup>39</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 32.

<sup>40</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 32.

<sup>41</sup> Hanisch, “Women Women of the World Unite - We Have Nothing to Lose But Our Men,” 12.

white women lacked a common history which disinclined them from organizing together as a group for their common oppression. Furthermore, Echols asserts that the rise of black power in 1966 further disinclined black women from becoming involved in the WLM because the chief message of black power was to organize around one's own oppression and their struggles differ so greatly.<sup>42</sup> Echols asserts that when radical feminists began to organize on their own they derived inspiration from black power, which, enabled them to argue that it was valid for women to organize around their own oppression and define the terms of their struggle. For instance, *In Women and the Radical Movement*, Anne Koedt, an early and active member of the WLM in New York, wrote, "We found strong parallels between the liberation of women and black power struggle, being oppressed by similar psychological/economic dynamics."<sup>43</sup> However, paradoxically black power also privileged the struggle of the most oppressed which contributed to the trivialization of women's issues and would later cause tension within women's liberation groups and provide radical men with a rationale for ignoring, disparaging, and dismissing women's liberation as "bourgeois." This idea made it imperative for radical women to privilege women's oppression as the most oppressed group. They did this by subsuming all women under an umbrella of sisterhood and asserting that women themselves constituted a class and that "all women suffer from this kind of oppression."<sup>44</sup>

I believe the subordination and exploitation of radical women within the New Left provided the imperative for radical women to organize on their own behalf, and provided them

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<sup>42</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 33.

<sup>43</sup> Anne Koedt, "Women and the Radical Movement," *Notes from the First Year*, (June 1968), 26.

<sup>44</sup> Koedt, "Women and the Radical Movement," 26.



with the skills to do so, which directly generated the WLM. Additionally, the New Left contributed to the development of feminist consciousness through the dictum the “personal is political” which WLM women would expand to include their own oppression. Furthermore, I believe that the subordination of radical women in the organizational structure of the New Left produces what will become a strong aversion to structure, organization, and leadership in the WLM. I believe that because black power and the New Left privileged the struggle of the most oppressed, the radical women thought it was critical to establish women as the most oppressed group underneath the umbrella of sisterhood, which would become a defining and problematic aspect of the WLM. Additionally, the split from the New Left would produce an internal fracture among radical women between those who were resolutely committed to the Left’s anti-capitalist stance and those who wanted draw upon their own experiences and create their own analysis and were more committed to the personal as a form of knowledge production. These two distinct factions would eventually become known as the feminists and the politicos.

### **The Politico Feminist Divide**

The issue of women’s inequality resurfaced in the summer of 1967 two years after Hayden and King’s paper was distributed. Echols asserts that at this time many radical women felt themselves being pushed out of the Movement and felt more and more alienated from the issues they organized around, ultimately feeling that the movement was reinforcing their feelings of worthlessness as women, they would organize on their own behalf.<sup>45</sup> Echols asserts this split was extremely difficult for radical women. These radical women formed early women’s

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<sup>45</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 38.

liberation groups among which were The Westside group of Chicago and The New York Radical Women. The Westside group was located in Chicago and formed in the fall of 1967. Its membership included Heather Booth, Amy Kesselman, Naomi Weisstein, Jo Freeman, Evelyn Goldfield, Sue Munaker, Sara Evans and Shulamith Firestone. The New York Radical Women was the first women's liberation group in New York City. It was formed by Shulamith Firestone and Pam Allen in the fall of 1967. Among the group's membership were Kathie Sarachild, Carol Hanisch, Ros Baxandall, Ellen Willis, Anne Koedt, Robin Morgan, and Patricia Mainardi. Hanisch asserts that initially, both groups were very small and small enough to meet in the tiny apartments of their members.<sup>46</sup>

Anne Koedt of the NYRW writes that in these early days of the WLM "Our feminism was very underdeveloped," they decided to meet and to talk about their common experience as women as Hayden and King had done, but, they "didn't have any idea what kind of action we could take. We couldn't stop talking about the blacks and Vietnam."<sup>47</sup> Although they had agreed to meet and talk about their own oppression the issues they discussed and their mentality was still extremely embedded in the Left. As mentioned in the previous section the initial discord between radical women revolved around the nature and purpose of their separation from the New Left, they could all agree that they needed to meet separately from men, but, Echols asserts, they disagreed over the nature and purpose of the separation.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Carol Hanisch, "Struggles Over Leadership in the Women's Liberation Movement," in *Leadership & Social Movements*, ed. Colin Barker, Alan Johnson, Michael Lavalette, (England: Manchester University Press, December 2001), 17.

<sup>47</sup> Susan Brownmiller, "Sisterhood Is Powerful," *New York Times Archives*, (March 1970), 230.

<sup>48</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 51.

Echols asserts that the women of the Westside group were committed to women's liberation in varying degrees and for several of their membership the separation from the Left was extremely difficult and painful and produced discord among them.<sup>49</sup> Booth, Goldfield, Munaker, Weisstein, and Evans has been heavily involved in SDS and were especially committed new leftists and they were bound by their leftist mentality. For the most part, the membership of the Westside group believed that women's oppression derived from capitalism, or "the system," as they often called it, and maintained that women's liberation groups should remain connected and committed to the larger Movement. While they acknowledged that women needed to meet in separate, all-female groups, Echols asserts, they thought of women's liberation as an "important 'wing' of the left; perhaps even as a tool for organizing apolitical women into the Movement."<sup>50</sup>

The New York Radical Women, were split in their perspective some women believed that capitalism was the ultimate oppressor and that women's liberation should remain committed to the larger movement while others argued against the subordination of women's liberation to the left and blamed not only capitalism, but male supremacy and, men for women's oppression. Anne Koedt, Shulamith Firestone, and Ellen Willis were particularly adamant that that women's oppressor was man not a specific economic system.<sup>51</sup> After all they asserted male supremacy was still flourishing in the Soviet Union, Cuba, and China. This split occupied endless hours of debate during the New York Radical Women's meetings.

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<sup>49</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 58.

<sup>50</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 52.

<sup>51</sup> Brownmiller, "Sisterhood Is Powerful," 230.

Quickly, two warring factions emerged, and began derisively referring to each other as “politicos” and “feminists.”<sup>52</sup> Koedt, Firestone and Willis’ position on the split from the New Left, the reasons behind it, and the need for an independent women’s liberation movement are laid out in great detail by Ellen Willis in her article “Women and the Left,” this article was published in the Guardian in 1968, and was regarded as a cornerstone for the establishment of a radical feminist movement independent of the male-dominated left.<sup>53</sup>

In the article Willis writes, “The women's liberation movement was created by women activists fed up with their subordinate position in radical organizations.”<sup>54</sup> Willis describes movement women like Hayden and King, and many of the women described in the previous section, whose “goal was to take an equal, active part in the radical movement.”<sup>55</sup> According to Willis because these women created the movement this has lead some radical women to assume that the women’s movement is a branch of the Left and that their emphasis should be “...on contributing our special insights to the Left as a whole and using feminist issues as an organizing tool.”<sup>56</sup> Willis is referring to the politico faction who want to organize as a wing or constituency of the larger radical movement. For instance, Evelyn Goldfield of the Westside group advised that women’s groups should not focus exclusively on women’s issues but commit themselves to struggling against the war and racism as well. Goldfield was of the belief that “there can be no

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<sup>52</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 51

<sup>53</sup> Ellen Willis, “Women and the Left,” *Notes from the Second Year: Women’s Liberation, (Radical Feminism, 1970)*, 56.

<sup>54</sup> Willis, “Women and the Left,” 56.

<sup>55</sup> Willis, “Women and the Left,” 56.

<sup>56</sup> Willis, “Women and the Left,” 56.

liberation for women outside a general movement for liberation, and no such movement can exist without a movement for women's liberation," and henceforth women should "not think of the women's movement as separate but a united force within the larger radical movement." She declared that a "women's movement which confines itself, which only affect women can't be radical."<sup>57</sup>

However, it is Willis' belief that this assumption was actually harmful to the women's liberation movement. Willis goes on to say that many women's liberationists, e.g. Firestone, Koedt, and herself, among others, have come to see the women's liberation movement as "...an independent revolutionary movement."<sup>58</sup> And that they intend to make their own analysis of the system and put their interests first.<sup>59</sup> Although she conceded that Radical Women may "cooperate with radical men on matters of common concern...We do not assume that radical men are our allies or that we want the same kind of revolution they want."<sup>60</sup> Willis acknowledges that at points the feminist revolution and the revolution sought by radical men will overlap, perhaps she is referencing the decimation of the capitalist system, although this is not explicitly stated. Echols asserts that the politicians frequently charged the feminists as being anti-left, interpreting their frustration at the Left's intransigence as a condemnation of the Left as a whole rather than its sexism.<sup>61</sup> Willis' statement supports this. Willis concludes that the goals of the two movements will overlap and the two will have to cooperate, however, she is making it clear that

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<sup>57</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 61.

<sup>58</sup> Willis, "Women and the Left," 55.

<sup>59</sup> Willis, "Women and the Left," 55.

<sup>60</sup> Willis, "Women and the Left," 55.

<sup>61</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 52.

radical men are not necessarily their allies. I interpret this as not an anti-Left analysis but a critique of the Left's treatment of women's liberation as peripheral. So Willis is not denouncing the Left but making the assertion that to work within and for the larger movement is to continue to subordinate women's issues to that of the larger movement, and to "perpetuate the idea that our struggle is secondary."<sup>62</sup>

Furthermore, Willis reminds radical women that they are not merely a special interest group with "sectarian concerns," that they are "...half the human race. Our oppression transcends occupations and class lines. Femaleness...is a biological fact...a fundamental condition."<sup>63</sup> Willis is asserting that the need for a independent women's liberation movement arises from the fact that women are half the human race and that their oppression transcends occupations and class lines. Essentially, Willis is asserting that women form a classless entity that are united in their oppression. In an effort to prioritize female oppression Willis evokes an early articulation of a vision of universal womanhood. Because femaleness is a biological fact and a fundamental condition, it transcends all borders, all differences. This assertion may be in response to the fact that The New Left ignored, disparaged, and dismissed women's liberation as "bourgeois" because they were not suffering as black men and women and their struggles was seen as less urgent. This idea made it imperative for radical women to privilege women's oppression as the most oppressed group. They did this by subsuming all women under an umbrella of sisterhood and asserting that women themselves constituted a class.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Willis, "Women and the Left," 56.

<sup>63</sup> Willis, "Women and the Left," 56.

<sup>64</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 42.

The assertion that women are a class would define the WLM making sisterhood a foundational doctrine. This made radical women very suspicious of difference among women as they premised the justification of a separate WLM on the assertion that women constitute a single class. I believe that this attitude toward difference caused much conflict between radical women in the years to come and exacerbated the politico feminist divide. Because they asserted that women constituted a singular class they expected their objectives, personal desires, and theories to align and when they did not this produced chaos and aggression. This also led to struggles over leadership, which I believe the politico feminist divide could be classified as, because it necessitated a unified movement united under the banner of “universal sisterhood” who were fighting for the singular goal of women’s liberation.

Willis goes on to justify the establishment of a separate women’s liberation movement saying that because the radical movement has been dominated by men, “It’s theory, priorities and strategies reflect male interests.”<sup>65</sup> I find this statement compelling because it seems to justify the feminists’ lack of emphasis on certain aspects of radical theory and strategies. For instance, the feminists do not place a great deal of emphasis on the anti-capitalist theory and its involvement in the feminist revolution. Willis says, “An anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist analysis is insufficient for our purposes.” It is statements like this that so offended the sensibilities of the politicos and caused such tension between radical women the politicos saw capitalism or the system to be the chief cause of women oppression. However, it is important to note that Willis says here that capitalist, anti-imperialist, etc. analysis of women’s oppression is not *enough*. Meaning that she is advocating for the development of a separate theory of women’s oppression and of patriarchy

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<sup>65</sup> Willis, “Women and the Left,” 56.

but Willis is not necessarily arguing that capitalism is irrelevant to women's liberation as Echols asserts the politico's accused the Feminists of arguing. Furthermore, Willis' rejection of the radical movement theory and strategies may also reflect some of the organizational struggles faced by the NYRW.

### **Disputes Over Leadership and Consciousness-raising in The New York Radical Women**

In her article, *Struggles Over Leadership in the Women's Liberation Movement*, Carol Hanisch writes, "NYRW members had felt hampered in attempts to exert...leadership in mixed groups of men and women."<sup>66</sup> This has been demonstrated in the last two sections. Radical women were placed in an subordinate position within the Movement, they were often confined to the freedom school or to secretarial work. This may have caused radical women to feel wary of leadership structures in which they found themselves subordinated, not only with in the Left, but in all walks of life in 1967. This, in turn, may have contributed to fact the the there was, as Hanisch describes, "no concrete theory of leadership explicitly discussed in the Women's Liberation Movement"<sup>67</sup> in its beginnings.

Hanisch asserts that the feminists in the NYRW agreed the "off-putting abstract, theoretical speeches and "revolutionary" posturing that many Left men engaged in"<sup>68</sup> was not what they wanted for leadership in the Women's Liberation Movement. Instead, inspired by the adage the personal is political, Hanisch wrote they wanted "a movement that was concretely

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<sup>66</sup> Hanisch, "Struggles Over Leadership in the Women's Liberation Movement," 18.

<sup>67</sup> Hanisch, "Struggles Over Leadership in the Women's Liberation Movement," 18.

<sup>68</sup> Hanisch, "Struggles Over Leadership in the Women's Liberation Movement," 19.



related to our lives at all times.”<sup>69</sup> This meant developing a distinctly female radical consciousness by sharing one personal experiences and developing theories of women’s oppression out of them. Willis also discussed the imperative of developing a radical consciousness, she writes, “We must provide a place for women to be friends, exchange personal griefs and give their sisters moral support-in short, develop group consciousness.”<sup>70</sup> Both Hanisch and Willis are describing what would be come to be known as consciousness-raising without using the exact terminology.

For the NYRW, consciousness-raising was the cornerstone of the women’s liberation movement. Kathie Sarachild pioneered consciousness-raising and in her essay *Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon* Kathie Sarachild wrote “The dictionary says radical means root, coming from the Latin word for root. And that is what we meant by calling ourselves radicals. We were interested in getting to the roots of problems in society.”<sup>71</sup> According to Sarachild the chief method of “getting at” the roots of women’s subordination could be uncovered through consciousness-raising. Consciousness-raising consisted of women gathering in groups and examining their own lives, uncovering new and different ways in which they had been oppressed and then attempting to trace this oppression to its source with the aim of dismantling it. In her essay, *A Program for Feminist “Consciousness Raising,”* she wrote, “In our groups, let’s share our feelings and pool them. Let’s let ourselves go and see where our feelings lead us. Our feelings will lead us to ideas and the to actions. Our feelings will lead us to our theory, our theory

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<sup>69</sup> Hanisch, “Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement,” 18.

<sup>70</sup> Willis, “Women and the Left,” 56.

<sup>71</sup> Kathie Sarachild, “Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon,” *Talk given at First National Women’s Liberation Conference*, (Chicago: November 1968), 1.

to our action, our feelings about that action to new theory and then to new action.”<sup>72</sup> Sarachild and the NYRW operated under the assumption “...that a mass liberation movement will develop as more and more women begin to perceive their situation correctly and that our primary task right now is to awaken ‘class’ consciousness on a mass scale.”

For Sarachild and many of the NYRW, consciousness-raising was the kind of action the radical women’s groups should be engaging in at this point in the movement, actions with “...the specific purpose of challenging old ideas and raising new ones, the very same issues of feminism we were studying ourselves.”<sup>73</sup> In her essay *The Personal is Political* Carol Hanisch says that “one of the first things we discover in these groups is that personal problems are political problems.” The personal is political was central to the development of radical-women’s consciousness because, as Hanisch asserts, it united women as it broke down the isolation that was an integral part of male supremacy and as women learned that there was a pattern to their oppression they no longer saw their problems as personal, and they developed political solidarity.<sup>74</sup> Hanisch also wrote in, *Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement*, that “So many falsehoods had been written about women” and “that we must test everything by our own life experiences, discussing and analyzing our feelings as a guide to the truth.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Kathie Sarachild, A Program for Feminist “Consciousness Raising”, Notes from the Second Year: Women’s Liberation, (Radical Feminism, 1970), 78.

<sup>73</sup> Sarachild, “Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon,” 1.

<sup>74</sup> Hanisch, “Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement,” 20.

<sup>75</sup> Hanisch, “Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement,” 17.

Certainly consciousness-raising was an extremely productive tool. For instance, in Shulamith Firestone's, *Women Rap About Sex*, a consciousness-raising session is transcribed. During this session many women in the group first discovered that they were not "frigid" and incapable of having an orgasm but that it was not uncommon for women not to orgasm during intercourse. One woman expressed relief, saying, "God, I'm so glad to hear someone admit it! I thought everyone else had them but me..."<sup>76</sup> Additionally, they discussed birth control saying, "No birth control, right? Who takes the consequences of sex? Women."<sup>77</sup> They determined that access to birth control was an integral part of women's liberation. Additionally, Echols asserts that it was through consciousness-raising sessions that many women first talked openly about their abortions determined that access to abortion was *also* an integral part of women's liberation.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, Echols asserts that many of many notable theories of women's oppression were conceived during these sessions. Shulamith Firestone, who wrote the book *The Dialectic of Sex*, Anne Koedt, who wrote the essay *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm*, Pat Mainardi, who wrote the essay *The Politics of Housework*, Kate Millett, who wrote *Sexual Politics*, Ellen Willis, and Robin Morgan, the author of *Sisterhood is Powerful*, among many others attending these sessions and drew upon what they learned in these sessions in their later work.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Shulamith Firestone, "Women Rap about Sex," *Notes from the First Year*, (June 1968), 2.

<sup>77</sup> Firestone, "Women Rap about Sex," 2.

<sup>78</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 52

<sup>79</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 53

Consciousness-raising and the goal of developing a group consciousness, did, however, have its drawbacks. Consciousness-raising was couched in the ideology of the personal is political and universal sisterhood and centered feelings. It was intended as a safe environment in which “sisters” could share testimony and as a group drawn political conclusions and develop “group consciousness.” However, it was difficult to develop group consciousness when testimonies were often conflicting and women analysis did not always align and this produced a lot of conflicts between group members. For instance, in an interview with Echols Willis said of consciousness raising,

There were *a lot* of arguments about how to interpret that material (did it represent these women’s true desires, their objective interest given a sexist culture, or the psychology of the oppressed) and what to make of the minority who disagreed (was the difference in their situation or their emotional makeup, did they have false consciousness, or what).<sup>80</sup>

In their attempts to create a theory of women’s oppression based on women’s personal experiences many feminists found that women’s personal experiences of oppression differed greatly. This, however, did not align with the universal vision of sisterhood on which movement was premised. Because of the anxiety within the WLM around difference, these discrepancies did not result in healthy debate but in personal attacks and veiled criticisms.

For instance, in *Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement*, Hanisch asserts that attacks against political conclusions being drawn from a testimony often operated conversely under the guise of a dispute over leadership of the group. Hanisch describes the meetings as productive but freewheeling, saying, “The only rules were to tell the truth and not to discuss someone else’s testimony outside the group.” Hanisch asserts that a consequence of this was that those who could best vocalize their own personal experiences with analysis or

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<sup>80</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 146.

had the facility to make astute political observations, many of whom were *middle class and educated*, were doing the work of leading. It was at this point, Hanisch writes, that attacks on leadership began to emerge in the form of complaints that some women “talked too much” and women wanted to know “what the quiet women thought.” Hanisch asserts, these accusation were sometimes warranted but more often than not the complaints against the “women who talked too much” and “dominated the group” was actually “a veiled criticism of the political conclusions being drawn from the testimony.”<sup>81</sup> Additionally, according to Hanisch, some women objected to having their experiences analyzed and questioned at all and often reacted defensively to critique or analysis.<sup>82</sup> Hanisch contends that this ruse became apparent to her when one member of the NYRW made the assertion that in a commune women got more respect from men because they did manual labor. Hanisch, who categorized herself as one of the “quiet women,” retorting saying that “...my mother, as a farmer’s wife, had done a tremendous amount of physical labor and all it had gotten her was calluses...not respect.”<sup>83</sup> She was shocked as were many other members of the group when the woman she was contesting retorted sharply, “You talk too much.”<sup>84</sup>

In *Let the Quiet Women Speak*, Barbara Leon, wrote about the effect of women silencing one another so that she a “quiet woman,” could speak as follows,

I was really interested in the discussions...although I didn’t contribute much...But what made me really uncomfortable were the discussions on “what was going on in the group.” There were women in the group who seemed to be supporting me. They criticized others for being dominating and monopolizing the meetings. In the

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<sup>81</sup> Hanisch, “Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement,” 17.

<sup>82</sup> Hanisch, “Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement,” 20.

<sup>83</sup> Hanisch, “Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement,” 21.

<sup>84</sup> Hanisch, “Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement,” 20

middle of a discussion, they would break in to say that those talking were not giving others a chance and would then add, “Let’s hear from the quiet women.” I knew that that meant me. I felt that I should be grateful and yet I would wince every time I heard that phrase...I felt angry and patronized by the women who were claiming to represent my interests. I felt attacked whenever another woman was accused of dominating me—since that implicitly meant I was easily dominated, weak, damaged, etc. Yet I continued to believe that it was for my own good and to wonder why it only made me feel worse. I also ignored my positive feelings toward those women who were supposedly “dominating” me.<sup>85</sup>

Leon’s analysis of in-fighting during the consciousness-raising sessions demonstrates how consciousness-raising could turn combative when discussions turned inward and focused on what was “going on within the group” as opposed to the content of the conversations.

Furthermore, Hanisch asserts that this was actually a veiled criticism of the content of one’s comment. It also demonstrates how in an attempt to empower a member, although, Hanisch claims these were actually attempts to silence other women with opposing political opinions, could actually be damaging, silencing, and demeaning. In this way consciousness-raising sometimes further divided women opposed to uniting them as sisters because as Leon described, she came to view women, whose ideas she actually resonated with, as dominating her and silencing. Leon also came to resent the women “defending” her and felt patronized by them. This effectively left Leon feeling isolated and alienated from the group.<sup>86</sup>

Hanisch asserts that these types of attacks were not limited to “leaders” in the group. In *Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement*, Hanisch writes, agreeing with a woman who was be attacked could mean being “labeled her ‘dupe’ by those who wanted to stop the group or movement from going in the direction she was advocating.”<sup>87</sup> This, Hanich asserts, made it necessary not only to defend your political position but also to stand up to the

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<sup>85</sup> Barbara Leon, “Let the Quiet Women Speak,” *Woman’s World*, (Redstockings Women’s Liberation Archives July 1972), 13.

<sup>86</sup> Leon, “Let the Quiet Women Speak,” 14.

<sup>87</sup> Carol Hanisch, *Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement*, pg. 3

“charges” of being a “leader” or a “follower.” In this scenario it was not safe to be an “outspoken” woman nor a “quiet” woman, to advocate a position nor to align oneself with another’s position. Clearly, this type of conflict among group members was not productive and effectively shut down what may have been productive conversations. In this way, I believe that the rhetoric of the personal is political and universal sisterhood which was wrapped up in the concept of consciousness raising could actually become divisive and produce adversarial conflict among women. Furthermore, I believe the NYRW’s, as well as other WLM group’s, aversion to the domineering leadership they experienced under the Left contributed to this problem. Because it produced an animosity towards leadership and leaders in general which became a means by which to attack one’s adversary as well as simply producing resentment and anger against women in the group.

Both Echols and Hanisch assert that there was much opposition to this style of activism by the politico factions within the movement. Many politicos felt that consciousness-raising was not action oriented nor *organized* enough, they likened their consciousness-raising sessions to bitch sessions, navel-gazing, and personal therapy and deemed that they were certainly not political.<sup>88</sup> For instance, Echols writes that Evelyn Goldfield of the Westside group took NYRW to task for concentrating on consciousness-raising rather than action. This conflict among the two factions over consciousness-raising is directly related to the idea that the personal is political. The feminists used this concept as the basis of their consciousness-raising sessions and although the politicos certainly saw women’s issues as political issues they believed that women’s oppression was rooted in capitalism and did not see the need to develop women’s theory from the

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<sup>88</sup> Carol Hanisch, *Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement*, pg. 1

ground up. Furthermore, Goldfield and many others also took issue when many of the women involved in the sessions came to the conclusion that all men oppressed women, a belief which would later come to be known as the pro-woman line.

In *Conscious Raising: A Radical Weapon* Sarachild wrote that when they began to discuss male chauvinism in consciousness-raising session “some people really got upset.” They retorted ‘You can’t say that men are the oppressors of women! Men are oppressed, too!’<sup>89</sup> Echols asserts that many politicians depicted radical feminists as “man-haters” who ignored the inequalities of capitalism. Hanisch, lamented “If we don’t blame the capitalist system for everything, they think we hate men. They can’t seem to get it through their heads that we can blame men and capitalism at the same time.”<sup>90</sup> However, this reaction from the politico camp may have been due in part to the fact that feminists often neglected anti-capitalist theory and Leftist rhetoric and strategies, in part due to the discrimination they had experienced in the movement, and countered that women’s liberation would automatically undermine capitalism. For instance, Willis contended that “to attack male supremacy... consistently, inevitably means attacking capitalism in vulnerable places.”<sup>91</sup>

Politicos often dismissed feminists solely based upon the idea that they were “man-haters,” Hanisch wrote, “They are so concerned we think men are the enemy that they can’t hear anything else we say. They call us everything from ‘reactionaries’ to ‘cultural nationalists.’” In this way, the politico feminist conflict went past the point of healthy debate and turned into a

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<sup>89</sup> Kathie Sarachild, *Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon*, 2

<sup>90</sup> Sarachild, “*Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon*,” 2.

<sup>91</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 79.



sinister adversarial relationship. For many politicos feminists drawing on their own experiences became intolerable when they implicated men in the suppression of women. I believe this was due into part to the fact that this sort of analysis made politicos extremely uncomfortable because it directly implicated men in their lives, their fathers, their husbands, etc. In this way the personal is political, although extremely fruitful theoretically drove women to take political positions personally and subsequently to personally attack one another. So when feminists discussed male chauvinism politicos felt inclined to attack them saying they were “women who complained all the time, who stayed in the personal realm and never took any action.”<sup>92</sup> However, the personal is political was by no means the only source of this conflict as I have detailed these women were divided over questions of tactics and were struggling with balancing personal change while advocating for social change.

Willis talks about the criticism of consciousness-raising flung by Left-oriented politicos in *Women and the Left*, writing about how they challenged Feminists questioning ““How can we indulge in group therapy while *men* are dying in Vietnam?””<sup>93</sup> Carol Hanisch debunks the idea that consciousness-raising was therapy in her essay the *Personal Is Political*, she writes although consciousness-raising groups have been called “‘therapy’ or ‘personal’ groups by women who consider themselves ‘more political,’” therapy implies that there is a “personal solution,” and that is not what the goal of consciousness-raising is. She articulates that the goal of consciousness-raising is not to solve any personal problems, there are no personal solutions to

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<sup>92</sup> Sarachild, “Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon,” 3.

<sup>93</sup> Willis, “Women and the Left,” 56.

women's oppression as this time, there is only "collective action for a collective solution."<sup>94</sup>

Hanisch highlights how the personal is political and consciousness-raising were wrapped up in the idea of universal sisterhood. The goal was not just to examine one's personal experience to understand one's own oppression but to examine one's own and other's oppression in order to understand the oppression of women as a class. As I have articulated earlier this became problematic because women's testimonies and analysis did not always align and this produced a fair amount of discord among women. Sisterhood proved to be extremely challenging for the WLM and will be critiqued by women of color in the years to come. I believe part of the issue here is that movement women, even those in the feminist camp, as still being constrained by leftist ideology e.g. a marxian binary. So although they are trying to think through the complexities of women's oppression they are still stuck in the male/female binary which makes the discrepancies all the more difficult to grapple with because women are still being constituted within this binary.

In *Women and the Left*, Willis asserts that it is a radical woman's imperative "to build a specifically feminist radical consciousness...we must do our best to foster this consciousness...or we will not be a revolutionary vanguard but reactionary obstructionists."<sup>95</sup> The last few words of Willis' statement highlight the adversarial relationship between politicians and feminists around the issues of the personal is political and consciousness-raising. Willis is essentially calling the politicians who are resistant to consciousness-raising "reactionary obstructionists." This is extremely harsh language and it echoes the insults flung at the feminists by the politicians, e.g.

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<sup>94</sup> Carol Hanisch, "The Personal is Political," *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*, (Radical Feminism, 1970), 77.

<sup>95</sup> Willis, "Women and the Left," 56.

“reactionaries.” I believe this is due in part to the fact that these theories are being developed from these women’s own experiences, so just as the politicians are disturbed and offended by the notion that their father and husbands oppress them, so too, are the feminists disturbed and offended by the accusations their arduous work to develop theories of women’s oppression that directly relate to their own lives are no more than therapy. And they react defensively when politicians try to impede this most important work. The irony of Willis’ words are highlighted by the statement that precedes them, in which, Willis writes, “We must provide a place for women to be friends...and give their sisters moral support...”<sup>96</sup> The contrast here is stark. Willis describes the women’s movement as a place where women can be friends, sisters and support one another and in the same breath she calls her “sisters” “reactionary obstructionists.”

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<sup>96</sup> Willis, “Women and the Left,” 56.

## **Chapter Two: 1968-1970**

### **Trashing: Testimonies of Radical Women From The Chicago Westside Group and The New York Radical Women**

The adversarial, personal nature of conflict between women in the WLM is illustrated by Jo Freeman's account of her experience in the Westside group. As previously mentioned the Westside group was dominated by the politico faction, however, the lines that divided politics and feminists were neither frozen nor static. For instance, Freeman felt very much the feminist in Chicago's politico-dominated Westside group, but she felt much more like a politico when she encountered the feminists of NYRW.<sup>97</sup> Echols asserts that Freeman did not disregard the sexism of the New Left and advocated for the establishment of a independent movement, but she also believed that for the women's liberation to divorce itself entirely from the New Left was a mistake when the both the tactics and network could be utilized by women, for women.<sup>98</sup> Freeman argued that women's oppression "is a social problem of national significance not at all confined to our struggle for personal liberation within the Movement."<sup>99</sup> Whereas politics advocated that women should fight "the system" or capitalism and imperialism - Freeman advocated "organizing ourselves for our own liberation and....organizing all women around issues which directly affect their lives."<sup>100</sup> However, Freeman thought that this organization

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<sup>97</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 52.

<sup>98</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 60

<sup>99</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 60.

<sup>100</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 60.

should take place within the larger Movement, this stance situates her somewhere in between the politico-feminist divide.

Straddling the line between camps Freeman was torn apart by the Women's Liberation Movement.<sup>101</sup> Freeman felt ostracized by the Chicago group. Freeman may have been singled out not just because her views diverged from the rest of the group but because she possessed strong leadership qualities. Shulamith Firestone, who was very much the feminist and also possessed strong leadership qualities, was briefly a member of the Westside group but left almost directly after joining to move to New York and organize the New York Radical Women in 1967. If she had not left perhaps she would have experienced similar ostracism. Freeman talks about her own personal experience of the tensions within the Westside group and the consequences of being a radical woman who did not quite fit the mold in her article *TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood*.

*TRASHING* was written for Ms. magazine in 1976 and it evoked more letters from readers than any article previously published, almost all of them relating their own experiences which mirrored Freeman's.<sup>102</sup> In *TRASHING*, Freeman asserts that she had her character and very self attacked by the Women's Liberation Movement. She contends that she was the first woman in the Westside group to experience this and that it took her years to recover. She goes on to say, that ever since she left the group in 1969, she has been "...watching for years with increasing dismay as the Movement consciously destroys anyone within it who stands out in any

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<sup>101</sup> Jo Freeman, "TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood," Ms. Magazine, (April 1976), 49-51, 92-9.

<sup>102</sup> Freeman, "TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood," 49-51, 92-98.

way.”<sup>103</sup> Freeman’s statements echoes Hanisch’s assertion that those who distinguished themselves were often torn down by their sisters. I believe this is in part due to the ideology of universal sisterhood which was often morphed to equate “sisterhood” and “equality” with *sameness*. This is also due in part to the movements’ aversion to leadership which was a consequence of its origins in the Left.

Freeman writes about when conflict within the WLM goes beyond healthy debate and morphs into personal attack, dubbing it “trashing.” She says “trashing” is, “not disagreement...not conflict...not opposition.”<sup>104</sup> Freeman asserts that these are perfectly ordinary in a movement and when engaged in mutually, and not excessively, they keep an organization healthy. Trashing is a “vicious form of character assassination,” that is, “manipulative, dishonest, and excessive.”<sup>105</sup> Although, she notes, similarly to Hanisch, that it is often disguised by the rhetoric of honest conflict. However, unlike honest conflict it is not done to “expose or resolve differences...It is done to disparage and destroy.”<sup>106</sup> Freeman asserts that often trashing is obscured by the guise of the “latest group techniques of criticism/self-criticism.”<sup>107</sup> I believe Freeman is saying that trashing often takes place during consciousness-raising sessions although she does not explicitly say so. This corroborates my assertions that consciousness-raising although extremely productive often facilitated personal attacks against movement women because the material and the process was itself very personal and because as Hanisch asserts the

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<sup>103</sup> Freeman, “TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood,” 49-51, 92-98.

<sup>104</sup> Freeman, “TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood,” 49-51, 92-98.

<sup>105</sup> Freeman, “TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood,” 49-51, 92-98.

<sup>106</sup> Freeman, “TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood,” 49-51, 92-98.

<sup>107</sup> Freeman, “TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood,” 49-51, 92-98.

freeform structure of the sessions sometimes produced a power differential between women which made many movement women, who were wary of difference and leadership, feel threatened.<sup>108</sup> However, I would like to make it clear that these conflicts themselves were not necessarily caused by consciousness-raising. There were many there were real tactical organizational issues, issues of class differences, and issues of access to resources that caused divisions in the WLM, however, I do believe that consciousness-raising provided an arena for women to express grievances that were at times more personal than political.

Freeman asserts that her trashing took the form of ostracism, she writes that if

...a collective article was written, my attempts to contribute were ignored; if I wrote an article, no one would read it; when I spoke in meetings, everyone would...continue the discussion as though I hadn't said anything; meeting dates were changed without my being told; when I didn't receive mailings, and discovered that my name was not on the mailing list.<sup>109</sup>

Freeman's account of her treatment in the Westside group clearly goes beyond healthy organizational conflict, in fact, Freeman did not even seem to really engage in conflict she was blackballed. Freeman endured this treatment in the Westside group until she left at the end of 1969, her departure was quiet, she simply stopped attending meetings. Before this moment Freeman interpreted her experiences as being due to "personality conflicts or political disagreements" which she believed she could rectify with time and effort.<sup>110</sup> After she left no one ever reached out to her, no one called, no one sent any mailings but three months later "word drifted back that I had been denounced by the Chicago Women's Liberation Union (Westside Group)."<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Freeman, "TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood," 49-51, 92-98.

<sup>109</sup> Freeman, "TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood," 49-51, 92-98.

<sup>110</sup> Freeman, "TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood," 49-51, 92-98.

<sup>111</sup> Freeman, "TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood," 49-51, 92-98.

Freeman asserts that being involved in the larger movement, she had been a member of SDS, she was accustomed to conflict and criticism. Surely many of the struggles and conflicts within the WLM are common among other radical movements, e.g. struggles over leadership styles and factionalism. In *On the Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective*, Freeman wrote that, she “been at odds with the radical faction in the Free Speech Movement...and in the mostly...male Civil Rights Movement, I wasn't “one of the boys,” but I never doubted that I was one of “us” not “them.”<sup>112</sup> Yet Freeman asserts that among the radical women of Chicago she was a “pariah.”<sup>113</sup> Freeman heard allusions to my being “too male” and then an “elitist” being thrown around.<sup>114</sup> This may be due to the fact that Freeman was an outspoken, well-educated, journalist who demonstrated strong leadership and writing skills.<sup>115</sup> Hanisch asserts that many women in the NYRW who demonstrated similar skills and backgrounds were often singled out and attacked for being “domineering.”

According to Freeman what made the attacks so debilitating was the WLM's “sweet promise of sisterhood.”<sup>116</sup> Because the WLM was allegedly a “...haven from the ravages of a sexist society,”<sup>117</sup> and “a place where one would be understood,”<sup>118</sup> when Freeman was rejected

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<sup>112</sup> Jo Freeman, “On the Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective,” in *The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices from Women's Liberation*, ed. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Ann Snitow, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 187.

<sup>113</sup> Freeman, “On the Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective,” 187.

<sup>114</sup> Freeman, “On the Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective,” 187.

<sup>115</sup> Freeman, “On the Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective,” 187.

<sup>116</sup> Freeman, “TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood,” 49-51, 92-98.

<sup>117</sup> Freeman, “TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood,” 49-51, 92-98.

<sup>118</sup> Freeman, “TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood,” 49-51, 92-98.



from it she judged herself worthless. Freeman asserts that it was her very “need for feminism and feminists that made me vulnerable.”<sup>119</sup> Along these lines Freeman writes that trashing was frequently masked by “the rhetoric of sisterhood.” Because the values of the WLM proclaimed that every woman was a sister, and that every woman was acceptable.<sup>120</sup> This was frequently articulated by radical women in the previous sections. Freeman was not accepted by the Westside group. However, the rhetoric of sisterhood upon which the WLM was premised permitted anyone from explicitly saying this. Because no one could admit she was not acceptable without destroying the rhetoric of sisterhood Freeman was ostracized and no one talked openly about it.

Freeman asserts that with other trashings, “sisterhood has been used as the knife rather than the cover-up.”<sup>121</sup> Freeman writes that a standard of sisterly behavior is set up then those who do not meet those standards are condemned. This speaks to the homogenizing effect of sisterhood as device by which an ideal or *standard* of “woman” is produced. Freeman contends that the standard is “vague and utopian,” and can be used and shifted to exclude those not desired as sisters.<sup>122</sup> She observes that women who fit the mold of an the achiever or an assertive woman, are commonly trashed. This echoes what Hanisch writes in *Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement*, when she describes attacks being made on women who possess strong leadership skills, who could best articulate and analyze their own personal experiences. Freeman asserts that these women were often accused of being “male-identified.”<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Freeman, “TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood,” 49-51, 92-98.

<sup>120</sup> Freeman, “TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood,” 49-51, 92-98.

<sup>121</sup> Freeman, “TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood,” 49-51, 92-98.

<sup>122</sup> Freeman, “TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood,” 49-51, 92-98.

<sup>123</sup> Freeman, “TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood,” 49-51, 92-98.

I believe this term “male-identified” highlights the fact that the WLM women are still very much stuck in the gender binary and that this produces conflict among them because they come to identify women who demonstrate strong leadership qualities as “male” and “threat to the movements,”

In this way, Freeman and Hanisch demonstrate how women exhibiting potential for achievement were sometimes punished by the rhetoric and values of the WLM. Freeman elaborates on this writing that within the WLM to achieve is viewed as ““making it off other women's oppression””or that one thinks oneself “better than other women.”<sup>124</sup> The quest for sisterhood and egalitarianism that the WLM prized has more frequently manifested in “an attempt to tear down those women who show leadership qualities, than to develop such qualities in those who don't,”<sup>125</sup> Freeman’s statement is substantiated by Leon’s account, a self-proclaimed quiet woman, who found the attempts to intervene on her behalf patronizing and actually, paradoxically filled her with self-doubt so that she “...did not even trust her own perceptions.”<sup>126</sup>

The WLM’s worship of egalitarianism and sisterhood has become confused with sameness and women who stand out are attacked or as Freeman would say “trashed” because their existence is reminder that women are different and difference was often interpreted to mean inequality. Freeman asks, “What is it about the WLM that supports and even encourages self-destruction? Why has consciousness-raising not raised our consciousness about trashing?”<sup>127</sup>

Freeman determines that the answer to this is rooted in their oppression as women, that it

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<sup>124</sup> Freeman, “TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood,” 49-51, 92-98.

<sup>125</sup> Freeman, “TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood,” 49-51, 92-98.

<sup>126</sup> Leon, “Let the Quiet Women Speak,” 14.

<sup>127</sup> Freeman, “TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood,” 49-51, 92-98.

involves self-hatred. However, she asserts that not all women trash, so the phenomenon of trashing cannot be rooted in women's oppression alone.

Trashing, Freeman purports, is much more prevalent among radical feminists, she asserts that this is due to the fact that radical feminists "stress personal changes" as well as institutional changes, and "can see no victories short of revolution."<sup>128</sup> However, I think this is a bit of an oversimplification because radical feminists did more than just seek personal changes and ultimately did not seek personal solutions as pointed out by Hanisch in her essay *The Personal Is Political*. Although, many thought that their personal lives *should* reflect their politics. And although they did not seek personal solutions but collective action they stressed the personal and sought a movement that was "concretely related to our (women's) lives at all times."<sup>129</sup> I believe, as does Freeman, that this often led to political, tactical, and organizational conflicts distorting to become personal attacks and vice versa. This is not to say that this ideology is responsible for these conflicts but that it may contribute to conflict morphing into "trashing."

Freeman also suggests that "trashing" is more common among those striving for revolution. Is this because revolution is such an abstract goal, that would materialize in the distant future, especially because as previously stated by Hayden and King patriarchy unlike nationalism cannot be withdrawn from? Additionally, because, in their quest for revolution, radical feminists are undermined by a lack of resources and power they become very frustrated, enraged, and ultimately turn upon each other. Freeman asserts that rage is the logical result of oppression and that rage demands an outlet. Logically this rage should be directed towards men

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<sup>128</sup> Freeman, "TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood," 49-51, 92-98.

<sup>129</sup> Hanisch, "Struggles Over Leadership in the Women's Liberation Movement," 17.

but women have learned that is unwise to attack men as they wield power, and there are real, sometimes violent, consequences for confronting men. As a result of this their rage is often turned inward producing self hatred. Freeman asserts that “The WLM is teaching women to stop this process, but in many instances it has not provided alternative targets.”<sup>130</sup>

Almanina Barbour, a black militant woman in Philadelphia once pointed out to Ti-Grace Atkinson, “The women’s movement is the first in history with a war on and no enemy.”<sup>131</sup> Atkinson wrote in response to this criticism “Only two responses came to me, although in looking...I realised the it was a question that carefully avoided...The first...answer was society...the second, was men.”<sup>132</sup> While the men are distant and cannot effectively be attacked, as they wield power, and the "system" too is distant, and one's "sisters" are close at hand. Attacking each other is easier and the results can be more quickly seen than by attacking amorphous social institutions.<sup>133</sup> When the group breaks up or a faction forms and leaves, or one demonstrates against other women and distribute a list of demands, this becomes more “productive” on its face than incremental machinations towards large institutions which are often met with so much resistance that one can only really move backwards.

By deriving political ideas from analysis of their personal lives, many groups have sought to remold the minds of their members, and change the definition and conception of “woman” and this has sometimes produced both personal and collective conflict which has proved debilitating.

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<sup>130</sup> Freeman, “TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood,” 49-51, 92-98.

<sup>131</sup> Ti-Grace Atkinson, “Radical Feminism,” *Notes from the Second Year: Women’s Liberation*, (Radical Feminism, 1970), 32.

<sup>132</sup> Atkinson, “Radical Feminism,” 32.

<sup>133</sup> Freeman, “TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood,” 49-51, 92-98.

When women fail to meet the high standards set by sisterhood they become impediments to the goal of women's liberation.<sup>134</sup> In this way Freeman asserts that radical women are discouraging one another from stepping out of place using "...psychological manipulation...this was something that feminism was supposed to liberate us from...instead we have created alternative means of enforcing the traditional culture and values." Freeman is basically saying that instead of decimating the oppression of women, women are oppressing each other in new and creative ways, which often end up reinforcing traditional patriarchal values as opposed to breaking free from them. Therefore the emphasis on the "the personal is political" although in many cases useful has, according to Freeman, made it "easier for trashing to flourish."<sup>135</sup>

Despite the WLM attempts to foster a supportive environment this environment has not proved supportive for *everyone* to develop their *individual* potential, due to the emphasis on sisterhood and egalitarianism. This emphasis has not allowed women to flourish and develop their leadership and analytical skills, as demonstrated by Hanisch, which would ultimately aid them in their goal of eliminating patriarchy. Freeman elaborates on the movement's phobia of leadership and the Media in, *On the Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective*, Freeman writes, "The movement in general had an aversion to the press...They blamed it for negative coverage...I had no such aversion."<sup>136</sup> This proved true for many WLM groups, for instance, during the Miss America protest in 1968 the NYRW were instructed not to speak to the press, although some did anyway. Despite the protests of her

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<sup>134</sup> Freeman, "TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood," 49-51, 92-98.

<sup>135</sup> Freeman, "TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood," 49-51, 92-98.

<sup>136</sup> Freeman, "On the Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective," 187.

“sisters” in the Chicago group Freeman wanted to get their story out. She felt that although the press didn’t always write what the radical women of the Chicago group wanted that if they could give them good information about the movement then perhaps reports would be more positive. Additionally, she felt that publicity would be good for the movement because no matter how negative the press reports were the women who read them would know “something was happening and look for groups to join.”<sup>137</sup>

So when the press came looking for WLM women in Chicago to profile, Robin Morgan told them to call Freeman. However, Freeman asserts that the women of the Westside group “criticized anyone named in the press for being on an ego trip.”<sup>138</sup> Once her name appeared in the press, Freeman was asked to appear on some local Chicago talk shows. After doing a couple, Freeman asserts “the roar of ‘ego trip’ was so loud that I stopped.”<sup>139</sup> Freeman was caught between her desire to get the WLM’s message out and her “...vulnerability to personal attacks from my ‘sisters.’”<sup>140</sup> She then asked her academic advisor, Ted Lowi, who was a regular on the Chicago talk-show circuit to appear on behalf of the Chicago Women’s Liberation Movement. Freeman briefed him and she writes that, “he became one of our best propagandists...No one I knew attacked *him* for ego tripping.”<sup>141</sup> It is very intriguing that Freeman writes that no one attacked her academic advisor for representing them in the media. Is this because he was a man

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<sup>137</sup> Freeman, “On the Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective,” 188.

<sup>138</sup> Freeman, “On the Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective,” 189.

<sup>139</sup> Freeman, “On the Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective,” 189.

<sup>140</sup> Freeman, “On the Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective,” 190.

<sup>141</sup> Freeman, “On the Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective,” 191.

and not held to the standard of sisterhood? Or is it because as a man he was expected to take a leadership role? To engage in an ego trip?

After dropping out in 1969 Freeman became swept up in the great press blitz about the WLM that was active from 1969 to 1970. Freeman asserts that if she “...hadn’t dropped out, I would have turned most of them down to avoid sisterly disapproval.”<sup>142</sup> But since she was no longer a part of the movement she accepted speaking appearances and interviews with the press. Freeman explains that this was her way of staying in touch with the WLM after being blackballed. Although, she writes, that she “felt like a fake; I was speaking about a movement that I was no longer part of.”<sup>143</sup> Because there was such a strong aversion to both leadership and the media in the WLM that as a consequence many women outside of the movement ending up becoming its spokespeople. For instance, Hanisch writes about the “rush to the media to fill the leadership gap...effectively cut off the original, radical movement from its constituency.”<sup>144</sup>

No longer hampered by her “sisters” as a featured speaker Freeman reports that she was “fearless,” handling hecklers as though they were “mere opponents in a friendly game.”<sup>145</sup> However, in front of Women’s Groups Freeman experienced something akin to post traumatic stress, she writes, “I displayed an allergic reaction to women’s groups-all of them. A feeling of coldness would come over me; I would withdraw and become distant.”<sup>146</sup> Freeman traveled the country making movement appearances. In New York Freeman sought out Anne Koedt, who she

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<sup>142</sup> Freeman, “On the Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective,” 190.

<sup>143</sup> Freeman, “On the Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective,” 190.

<sup>144</sup> Hanisch, “Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement,” 26.

<sup>145</sup> Freeman, “On the Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective,” 191.

<sup>146</sup> Freeman, “On the Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective,” 191.

calls “one of the few founts of sanity in the movement.” According to Freeman, Koedt, too had been trashed. Echols reports that Koedt underwent anti-leader attacks in *The Feminists* after helping to found the organization, she then left the organization over the egalitarian issue.<sup>147</sup> In June of 1970, Koedt gathered a bunch of radical women, including Freeman, at her apartment. Freeman asserts the group compared notes and realized just how pervasive the personal attacks had been. Freeman wrote, “...we were all suffering as a result and most were leaving as well.”<sup>148</sup> Freeman said they sardonically dubbed themselves the “feminist refugees.”

It was at this meeting of radical women that Freeman met Anselma Dell’Olio, who had given a speech about trashing, although not by that name, Second Congress to Unite Women in the spring of that same year.<sup>149</sup> Dell’Olio had been a member of the New York Radical Women and in her speech entitled *Divisiveness and Self-Destruction in the Women’s Movement* Anselma Dell’Olio announced that she would be leaving the WLM. She said she had been “destroyed” and “defeated,” perhaps by herself but with “...a big push from my sisters in the struggle.”<sup>150</sup> Unlike, Freeman Dell’Olio refused to leave quietly and she decided to deliver her “swan-song” in front of hundreds of women in the hopes of “preventing others from being destroyed...as I have been.”<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 167.

<sup>148</sup> Freeman, “On the Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective,” 191.

<sup>149</sup> Freeman, “On the Origins of the Women’s Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective,” 192.

<sup>150</sup> Dell’Olio, “Divisiveness and Self-Destruction in the Women’s Movement,” *Newsletter Chicago Women’s Liberation Union*, (July 1970), 5.

<sup>151</sup> Dell’Olio, “Divisiveness and Self-Destruction in the Women’s Movement,” 5.



Dell'Olio asserted that she joined the WLM in the hopes that it would unite women who were divided against one another and filled with impotent rage. To her bitter disappointment she proclaims that this rage "...masquerading as a pseudo-egalitarian radicalism under the 'pro-woman' banner, has turned into frighteningly vicious anti-intellectual fascism...used within the movement to strike down sisters."<sup>152</sup> Dell'Olio is referring to the personal attacks to which women in the movement, particularly those who have managed any degree of achievement and display leadership qualities, have been subjected under the guise egalitarianism and sisterhood. Dell'Olio asserts that the most common and pervasive form these attacks take are "character assassination." The second form Dell'Olio identifies is a "purge." Dell'Olio contends that the ultimate tactic is to "isolate" a woman, similarly to what was done to Freeman, when she was barred from contributing collective papers and taken off the mailing list.

Dell'Olio writes that "collective attack" is used to draw out grievances or problems that are likely to exist in any group.<sup>153</sup> For instance, the accusations of leadership and following prevalent among the NYRW. Both leaders and followers will emerge in any group but when leaders are regarded collectively as obstruction to equality and followers are regarded "as too stupid to make their own decision,"<sup>154</sup> who would want to be labeled as either? Dell'Olio asserts that generally, women who were "trashed," fell into the same category; those who appeared publicly, published books or articles, gave lectures, or spearheaded an organization, in short, leaders. According to Dell'Olio if you fell into this category you were labelled a "thrill-seeking

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<sup>152</sup> Dell'Olio, "Divisiveness and Self-Destruction in the Women's Movement," 5.

<sup>153</sup> Dell'Olio, "Divisiveness and Self-Destruction in the Women's Movement," 5.

<sup>154</sup> Hanisch, "Struggles Over Leadership in the Women's Liberation Movement," 17.

opportunist...out to make her fame and fortune over the dead bodies of selfless sisters who have...sacrificed their ambitions for...Feminism.”<sup>155</sup> She goes on to say, that if you are outspoken and articulate, you are also accused of “being power-mad, elitist, and A MALE IDENTIFIER!”<sup>156</sup> These were accusations hurled at Freeman by the Chicago group. Dell’Olio account demonstrates that leaders in the WLM were regarded with suspicion and thought to jeopardize the egalitarian nature of the movement.

Dell’Olio goes further than Freeman does in her article *TRASHING: The Dark Side of Sisterhood*, as she wishes not only to expose this phenomena but to offer concrete guidelines to correct the situation. Dell’Olio cautions women criticizing achievements made by other women in the movement and asks them to examine their motives.<sup>157</sup> She also encourages women to confront their fear of competition and to examine their motives when telling other women “what’s good for her.”<sup>158</sup> Finally, she asks that movement women be cautious about using movement rhetoric to justify personality conflicts or personal grievances. Essentially, Dell’Olio is warning movement women about the dangers of policing the personal for the sake of the purity of the WLM and sisterhood. Similarly to Freeman, Dell’Olio asserts that these attacks on women instead of decimating the oppression of women, women are oppressing each other in new and creative ways, which often end up reinforcing traditional patriarchal values. For instance, she

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<sup>155</sup> Dell’Olio, “Divisiveness and Self-Destruction in the Women’s Movement,” 6.

<sup>156</sup> Dell’Olio, “Divisiveness and Self-Destruction in the Women’s Movement,” 6.

<sup>157</sup> Dell’Olio, “Divisiveness and Self-Destruction in the Women’s Movement,” 5.

<sup>158</sup> Dell’Olio, “Divisiveness and Self-Destruction in the Women’s Movement,” 6.

writes that women with aggressive personalities are being accused of being “male-identified” by women opposed to being accused of being “un-ladylike,” by men as they had been previously.<sup>159</sup>

Dell’Olio cautions women to keep in mind the destructive potential of consciousness-raising and lays out guidelines for the sessions.<sup>160</sup> She asserts that participants in consciousness-raising sessions should learn to deal with personal animosities towards members of the group openly and honestly and explicitly *during the session itself*.<sup>161</sup> That the discussion should be motivated by a genuine desire for mutual enlightenment rather than subterranean desire for personal attack.<sup>162</sup> Clearly, Dell’Olio’s experience of the NYRW was comparable to Hanisch’s, who referred to attacks on women dominating the conversation in the consciousness-raising sessions as “veiled criticisms of political conclusions.” I believe if *veiled* criticisms and personal attacks were being made based upon either personal qualities or political conclusions the discussions could not have been motivated by a mutual desire for enlightenment because transparency and honesty about the issues at hand are required to reconcile differences.

Members of the WLM that distinguished themselves were often torn down by their sisters through “trashing” which goes beyond healthy organizational conflict and takes the form of a vicious attack often disguised by the rhetoric of honest conflict. I believe trashing was so prevalent in the WLM due in part to the movements’ aversion to leadership which was a consequence of its origins in the Left but chiefly because of the ideology of universal sisterhood

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<sup>159</sup> Dell’Olio, “Divisiveness and Self-Destruction in the Women’s Movement,” 6.

<sup>160</sup> Dell’Olio, “Divisiveness and Self-Destruction in the Women’s Movement,” 7.

<sup>161</sup> Dell’Olio, “Divisiveness and Self-Destruction in the Women’s Movement,” 7.

<sup>162</sup> Dell’Olio, “Divisiveness and Self-Destruction in the Women’s Movement,” 7.

which was often morphed to equate “sisterhood” and “equality” with *sameness*. I believe that sisterhood prohibited a healthy expression of difference because no one could comfortably accept difference without destroying the rhetoric of sisterhood upon which the movement was based. Furthermore, sisterhood was sometimes weaponized through the establishment of standard of sisterly behavior by which those who do not conform were condemned because their existence is reminder that women are *different* and *difference* was often interpreted to mean *inequality*. By deriving political ideas from analysis of their personal lives, many groups have sought to remold the minds of their members, this speaks to the homogenizing effect of sisterhood as device by which an ideal or *standard* of “woman” is produced. In this way, I believe that radical women are discouraging one another from stepping out of place using new and creative ways, which often end up reinforcing traditional patriarchal values as opposed to breaking free from them.

### **The Jeanette Rankin Brigade Protest and Struggles Over Leadership**

The politico-feminist divide, the consequences of leaderless structure, and the problematic nature of sisterhood were perhaps best illustrated by the events that transpired between the factions of the WLM in January 1968 at the Jeanette Rankin Brigade protest in Washington, D.C. The Brigade was a coalition of women’s groups opposed to the Vietnam war. The brigade aimed to mobilize American women to petition Congress for an immediate withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Vietnam. Women in NYRW and the Chicago group criticized the idea of organizing an anti-war demonstration *based upon maternalism*, as the women organizing the protest plead to congress petitioning them as mothers and invoking maternalism

in their chants. The NYRW also criticized the idea of organizing women for an anti-war demonstration in general. Although, many politico women wanted to organize within the larger movement and for the anti-war effort Heather Booth, Sue Manaker, and Evelyn Goldfield of Chicago argued that “until women go beyond justifying themselves in terms of their wombs and breasts and housekeeping abilities, they will never be able to exert any political power.”<sup>163</sup>

If assertiveness and aggressive personalities were attacked so too were passivity. Perhaps then these disputes are not just rooted in leadership and pseudo-egalitarianism but also in the arduous struggle over how to grapple with gender roles in the WLM. The rhetoric espoused at this demonstration makes it clear that they are not trying to abolish gender but create a new vision of womanhood and this process is discordant as the universal sisterhood *is a lie*. For instance, in her article, *The Jeanette Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?*, Firestone, at this point a member of the New York Radical Women, wrote about the action, saying

“...the Brigade was playing upon the *traditional female role in the classic manner*; that is, tearful and passive reactors to the actions of men rather than organizing as women to change the definition of femininity.”<sup>164</sup>

Firestone accuses the brigade of playing upon the traditional female role which she believed, as did many of the NYRW, they should be trying to subvert. She identifies the actions of the brigade as directly oppositional to radical feminism which aims to produce a new definition of womanhood. Along these lines, Firestone identifies the traditional female role as a threat to radical feminism. Perhaps it this type of rhetoric and the struggle over the definition of womanhood that provoked radical women to denounce “strong” women who display leadership qualities such as Firestone. Firestone was later subjected to the types of attacks described by

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<sup>163</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 58.

<sup>164</sup> Shulamith Firestone, “The Jeanette Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?,” *Notes from the First Year*, (June 1968), 18.

Freeman, Dell'Olio, and Hanisch in the Redstockings and was essentially pushed out of an organization that she co-founded.

Firestone and NYRW planned a mass counter action against the brigade. Firestone writes, "...we came as a group not to appeal to congress, but to appeal to women not to appeal to congress...we believed that such a...gathering should be used to...build up real political strength."<sup>165</sup> Firestone is in short of identifying not congress, a patriarchal structure, but other movement women as the enemy. She asserts the strength of their protest is not *real* strength and she aims to teach them how to build real political strength, this rhetoric is patronizing. The struggle at hand is not *against* capitalism or patriarchy but *between* women over how will the movement, gender, and womanhood be defined and who will do it. For their counter-action the NYRW staged an actual funeral procession with an enormous dummy representing traditional womanhood, "...complete with feminine getup, blank face, and blonde curls."<sup>166</sup> The women carried large banners, reading "DON'T CRY: RESIST!" They distributed several pamphlets, including one which read

TRADITIONAL WOMANHOOD IS DEAD. TRADITIONAL WOMEN WERE BEAUTIFUL....BUT REALLY POWERLESS. "UPPITY" WOMEN WERE EVEN MORE BEAUTIFUL....BUT STILL POWERLESS. SISTERHOOD IS POWERFUL!<sup>167</sup>

Firestone wrote that this demonstration was intended to be "not in the least offensive." However, this head-on action against other movement women, taking the form of a rather offensive model, further polarized the already divided factions. It is ironic that the pamphlets being distributed were being distributed read "SISTERHOOD IS POWERFUL!" when the actions of the NYRW

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<sup>165</sup> Firestone, "The Jeanette Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?," 18.

<sup>166</sup> Firestone, "The Jeanette Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?," 18.

<sup>167</sup> Firestone, "The Jeanette Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?," 19.

could hardly be thought of as unifying. In fact in their search for a singular unified definition of woman they are actually alienating and dividing women further. I believe this is what Freeman was referring to when she spoke of the dangers of a vague standard of sisterly behavior.

Furthermore, the action proved unproductive, Firestone writes that,

Later, 500 women split off in disgust from the main body of the convention to call a counter congress. Although predictable under the circumstances, nevertheless it was unexpected. We are not really prepared to re channel this disgust, to provide the direction that was so badly needed. There was chaos. The women were united only in their frustration, some calling for militancy of any kind at that late date, and other for more organization for the future. They were all keenly disappointed, and fully aware of their impotence. It was a great moment. But we lost it.<sup>168</sup>

Here, Firestone describes this impotency of their action. NYRW were clearly unprepared to organize the women who were affected by their demonstration, consequently the demonstration resulted in unbridled chaos. The NYRW's ineffectuality may have been due in large part to their resistance to leadership. Because the NYRW had no concrete theory of leadership, they were very accomplished consciousness-raisers, but they struggled to channel/organize the ensuing rage, as demonstrated by Hanisch's account. As a result of this, leadership was not prepared to step up and provide direction for the movement women following the action. And as a consequence of this lack of direction women were united only in their frustration. This is a common theme, the leaderless nature of the WLM generally produces impotent rage as opposed to facilitating effective political action. As pointed out by Freeman conflict can be healthy in a movement and conflict, struggles over leadership, etc. are common elements of all radical movements. However, I believe the adversarial, impotent nature of said conflict is furthered by WLM principles such as the "personal is political," universal sisterhood, and the commitment to "egalitarianism," although I certainly do not believe that they are the sole source of these issues,

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<sup>168</sup> Firestone, "The Jeanette Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?," 19.

I believe that they have been responsible for the advancement of the women's movements at times as well.

Firestone closes her reflection with the following statement,

Despite all this discouragement...the Washington experience was not entirely wasted. We learned a lot. We found out where women, even so-called "women radicals" were really at. We confirmed our worst suspicions that the job ahead, of developing even a minimal consciousness among women, will be staggering...<sup>169</sup>

This statement is very revealing. Firestone asserts that this demonstration was not entirely wasted by the NYRW's worse suspicious about other movement women, even *so-called* radical women have been confirmed. By labeling movement women *so-called* radicals Firestone is essentially calling them frauds and asserting that they do not possess radical consciousness, in fact, that developing even minimal consciousness among them will be *staggering*. Although, I do not deny the validity of Firestone's statement I believe through her proclamation a hostile relationship between women, even radical women, is being postulated. Firestones use of the words "real" both in reference to *real* radical women and a *real* women's movement here suggested that those who disagree with the tactics of the NYRW are not *real* radicals and cannot be part of a *real* women's liberation movement. I believe that this type of rhetoric and thinking promotes disunity among feminists, just as Freeman and Dell'Olio assert, and it contributes to, although is not responsible for, the split between the radicals and the politicians. I believe consciousness-raising was incredibly productive. However, I believe that this type of patronizing rhetoric sometimes correlated with consciousness-raising is counter productive, if you want to raise consciousness you need to meet women on their level and as Dell'Olio asserts open and honestly with the goal of *enlightenment* not *agitation* and *dismissal*.

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<sup>169</sup> Firestone, "The Jeanette Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?," 19.



The disparity between the rhetoric of universality and equality and the reality of difference and struggles over leadership that ensue is perhaps best exemplified through *The Funeral Oration for the Burial of Traditional Womanhood* written by NYRW member, Kathie Amatniek before the action took place. Amatniek wrote,

...our march today contributed to the lady's (traditional womanhood's) timely demise...And it was particularly frightening to her to see other women, we women, asserting ourselves together...in some kind of solidarity, instead of completely resenting each other, being embarrassed by each other, hating each other and hating ourselves.<sup>170</sup>

Amatniek writes about how the action was intended for bring women together to assert themselves in solidarity opposed to resenting each other. However, the counter-action resulted in the division of the masses of women into several different factions. In this way, attempts to unify women rhetorically and theoretically can actually prove to be extremely divisive. Firestone's depiction of the event demonstrates that there was minimal solidarity among the women involved in the protest she even goes so far to assert that they were united *only* in their frustration. Furthermore, the counter-action was essentially premised on hatred of women's definition and of the brigade's organizing tactics.

Amatniek goes on to say,

...although our problem is Traditional Manhood as much as Traditional Womanhood, we women must begin on the solution... We women must organize so that for man there can be no "other woman" when we begin expressing ourselves and acting politically...And that is why we must bury this lady...tonight, why we must bury Submission alongside Aggression.<sup>171</sup>

What is really at issue is the definition of gender roles, the NYRW don't yet have a "gender" frame, meaning they are not necessarily thinking about the gender relationally as we do today. Therefore, the NYRW specifically identify "womanhood" as the primary territory that is in need of immediate modification. Manhood is mentioned briefly and is determined to be as much a

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<sup>170</sup> Kathie Amatniek, "The Funeral Oration for the Burial of Traditional Womanhood," *Notes from the First Year*, (June 1968), 21.

<sup>171</sup> Amatniek, "The Funeral Oration for the Burial of Traditional Womanhood," 21.

problem as womanhood, but it is womanhood that needs to be redefined, and subsequently, it is women that need to redefine themselves. This places the responsibility solely upon women and their behavior. This is what Freeman and Dell'Olio refer to when they write about an impossibly high and vague standard of women's behavior.

Although, the NYRW did not identify personal solutions to male supremacy they did believe that their personal lives should reflect their political choices, e.g. they believed in policing the personal for the purity of the WLM, in keeping with both the principles the personal is political and universal sisterhood. However, Amatriek articulates another reason for the death of traditional womanhood; so that "traditional women" no longer existed for men once the WLM start asserting themselves politically and making their demands. This rhetoric is extremely troubling because it postulates universal sisterhood as a tactic by which to create singular definition of women available *to men*. This quest for a universal sisterhood and a singular definition of woman is harmful, and becomes a new way in which women oppress each other which often ends up reinforcing traditional patriarchal values as opposed to breaking free from them.

I believe that the disputes that erupted during the Jeanette Rankin Brigade are not just rooted in leadership and pseudo-egalitarianism but also in the arduous struggle over how to grapple with gender roles in the WLM. The rhetoric of the NYRW at the demonstration reveals that they are not trying to abolish gender but create a new universal vision of womanhood and this process is disruptive as universal sisterhood *is a lie*. I believe part of the issue here is that they are still stuck in the male/female binary, inherited in part from the left, which makes the discrepancies between women all the more difficult to grapple with because women are still

being constituted within this binary. Along these lines, the struggle at hand is not *against* capitalism or patriarchy but *between women* over how the movement, gender, and womanhood will be defined and who will do it. In their search for a singular unified definition of woman they are actually alienating and dividing women further. This is the danger of universal sisterhood and a standard of sisterly behavior.

However, the leadershipless nature of WLM is equally threatening to the movement as it generally produces impotent rage as opposed to facilitating effective political action. The NYRW were unprepared to organize the women who were affected by their demonstration, consequently the demonstration resulted in unbridled chaos. I believe this was due in large part to their resistance to leadership. And as a consequence of this lack of direction women divided into several factions and were united only in their frustration. In this way, attempts to unify women rhetorically and theoretically under an ideal of universality/equality can actually prove to be extremely divisive and becomes a new way in which women oppress each other which often ends up reinforcing patriarchal values and the gender binary opposed to breaking free from them.

### **Redstockings: Struggles Over Leadership and The Politico Feminist Divide Cont.**

The debates between the politico and feminists as well as the debates over leadership continued to ravage the movement with the formation of new WLM groups. The Redstockings were a New York based group founded by Shulamith Firestone and Ellen Willis in February 1969 after the dissolution of the New York Radical Women. Carol Hanisch asserts that the dissolution of the the NYRW occurred after a faction of women who were the proponents of a structureless movement with no leaders and absolute equality within the groups began to fervently push their

agenda.<sup>172</sup> According to Hanisch, following the rise of this faction attacks on leaders became even more common, supplanting what could have otherwise been instructive debates on both political positions and the style of leadership for the WLM.<sup>173</sup> Although there was a legitimate aversion to the style of leadership women had experienced in the Left due to their experiences of subordination within its organizational structure many proclaimed leadership itself was “male,” and should be abandoned.<sup>174</sup>

The faction advocating egalitarianism devised the lot system in which the members of NYRW drew lots to determine what tasks they would undertake.<sup>175</sup> By 1968 the NYRW had approximately 50-60 women attending weekly meetings and many members wanted to split into smaller groups. Although, according to Hanisch the founders, Shulamith Firestone, Pam Allen, Kathie Sarachild, Ellen Willis, Anne Koedt, and Hanisch herself resisted this split. They were overruled by a majority vote that decided the group would split by lot. One of the groups that formed out of this dissolution was not lot-assigned and included many of the founding members of the NYRW. This group continued to build on the radical consciousness-raising tradition of NYRW, and furthered the earlier group’s radical analysis of the condition of women, including the prowoman line.<sup>176</sup> They took on the name "Redstockings" to represent the union of two traditions: the "bluestocking" label disparagingly pinned on french feminists of earlier centuries- and "red" for revolution. Redstockings women championed and spread knowledge of critical

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<sup>172</sup> Hanisch, “Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement,” 24.

<sup>173</sup> Hanisch, “Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement,” 24.

<sup>174</sup> Hanisch, “Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement,” 24.

<sup>175</sup> Hanisch, “Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement,” 25.

<sup>176</sup> Hanisch, “Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement,” 25.

women's liberation theory, slogans and actions such as the personal is political, sisterhood is powerful, the Miss America Protest, and their famous "speak out" that would break the silence around subjects like abortion in which women testified in public about their abortions for the first time ever.<sup>177</sup> Notable figures among its membership included Kathie Sarachild, Irene Peslikis, Ellen Willis, Patricia Mainardi, Barbara Mehrhof, Carol Hanisch, Ti-Grace Atkinson and Pam Kearon.

Because the Redstocking was formed by many of the founders of the NYRW in the wake of the dissolution of the group, the Redstocking tried to avoid some of the mistakes that had contributed to its demise. For instance, they made a step towards greater organization by establishing a set of principles, statement of purpose, and orientation sessions for new members in the hopes that only women who were in political agreement with them would join and they could avoid debilitating schisms like the one that racked the NYRW.<sup>178</sup> Included in this set of principles was an elaboration on the pro-woman line. The pro-woman line is a theory which arose from consciousness-raising sessions in the NYRW.

The Pro-woman line stemmed from the basic idea recognition that it was imperative to fight male supremacy as a movement, that women were oppressed by both individual men and "the system" and this oppression was not the fault of the individual woman. The pro-woman line challenged the old anti-woman line that used spiritual, metaphysical, and pseudo-historical explanations for women's oppression with a real, Marxist materialist analysis for why women do what we do. The pro-woman line represented the position that "women are messed over, not

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<sup>177</sup> "About Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement," <http://www.redstockings.org/index.php/about-redstockings>, (February 18, 2018).

<sup>178</sup> Hanisch, "Struggles Over Leadership in the Women's Liberation Movement," 25.

messed up.”<sup>179</sup> This effectively took the focus off individual struggle and put it on group or class struggle, exposing the necessity for an independent WLM to deal with male supremacy.<sup>180</sup> Through consciousness-raising Redstockings began to devise a theory for the explanation of male supremacy which was based on an examination of “who benefits” from women’s oppression. They began to develop the understanding that their oppressive situations were not their own fault, or in the language of the time, “all in their head.” In this way, the pro-woman line gave many women, the courage as well as a solid theoretical foundation on which to they could begin to fight for women’s liberation.<sup>181</sup>

According to the pro-woman line, women’s behavior was the result of immediate external conditions and not, as many other radical feminists argued, the result of their conditioning. In the Redstockings’ manifesto they wrote, “women’s submission is not the result of brainwashing, stupidity, or mental illness but of continual daily pressure from men.”<sup>182</sup> For instance, rather than argue that women marry because they have been conditioned into dependence on men Redstockings argued that women marry because remaining single is “truly difficult” and requires that one work at a “boring and alienating job.”<sup>183</sup> Hanisch, one of the main proponents of the pro-woman line even argued that looking pretty and acting dumb were survival strategies which women should continue to use until such time as the “power of unity” could replace them.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Carol Hanisch, "The Personal Is Political" <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>. (24 Feb. 2018).

<sup>180</sup> Hanisch, “The Personal Is Political” (24 Feb. 2018).

<sup>181</sup> Hanisch, “The Personal Is Political” (24 Feb. 2018).

<sup>182</sup> “The Redstocking Manifesto,” <http://www.redstockings.org/index.php/rs-manifesto>, (July 1969).

<sup>183</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 144.

<sup>184</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 144.

Similar to consciousness-raising in the NYRW, there was dissent within the group regarding the pro-woman line. For instance, Ellen Willis argued that the pro-woman line glossed over the complicated psychological issues produced within women through male supremacy and oppression. However, she did not discount the importance of the pro-woman line either, Willis maintained that the pro-woman line “did tend to put power issues into very sharp focus. If you simply ignored the complicated psychological issues which [the pro-woman line faction] didn’t agree existed and just talked about the particular power relations that were happening .... You still learned a lot.”<sup>185</sup> A faction pushing the pro-woman line headed by Kathie Sarachild emerged, which included Barbara Leon, Irene Peslikis, Patricia Mainardi, and Carol Hanisch, among others.<sup>186</sup>

Redstockings, especially the pro-woman faction, argued that there were no personal solutions, but, rather, “elements of resistance and accommodation” in personal choices.<sup>187</sup> In this way, Redstockings often refrained making moralistic judgements about other women and consequently avoided some of the problems I identified in the earlier women’s groups, such as the condemnation of those whose did not meet the high and vague standard of sisterly behavior. For instance, Redstockings’ member Barbara Leon argued that “all the talk of conditioning or brainwashing falsely divided women in two groups-those who are ‘militant’ and those who are

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<sup>185</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 145.

<sup>186</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 146.

<sup>187</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 146.

<sup>188</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 146.

still ‘brainwashed,’”<sup>188</sup> which ultimately kept women apart and prevented them from realizing their common oppression.<sup>189</sup>

Despite this materialist analysis the Redstockings did uphold a vision of sisterly unity and assumed that their “common oppression” united women more than class, race, or political orientation divided them. In their manifesto, Redstockings tried to mitigate class and race divisions by “defining our best interest as that of the poorest, most brutally exploited women.” Redstockings’ analysis suggested that a multi-class and multi-racial movement could be achieved if white, middle-class women would simply renounce their privileges and altruistically identify with women who were less privileged than they. It was a nice fantasy, but it did not materialize.<sup>190</sup>

Despite Redstockings’ attempt to keep the group ideologically homogenized by laying out a set of guiding principles, women who disagreed with the principles to the point of wanting to change the group’s direction joined anyway. Both those who stressed the leadership issue and those who could be classified as “politicos” flocked to the group.<sup>191</sup> In the article *Them and Me*, an anonymous Redstockings member describes an early meeting of the group in which the politicos held the floor, she writes, “...the meeting was the nature of a three-hour confrontation between them and me.”<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 147.

<sup>190</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 147.

<sup>191</sup> Hanisch, “Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement,” 25.

<sup>192</sup> “Them and Me,” *Notes from the Second Year: Women’s Liberation*, (Radical Feminism, 1970), 63.



They began the meeting by reading Juliet Mitchell's article, *The Longest Revolution*, in which she uses the term "social mother." The anonymous Redstockings' member brought up the point that "there is no reason why the socialiser has to be a woman." The rest of the group dismissed her argument saying that she was "...dealing in semantics and they didn't care enough to look them up in the dictionary."<sup>193</sup> The Redstockings' member goes on to say that the "semantic line was used against me constantly whenever I got too close as a way of saying my argument may be true but it's shit."<sup>194</sup> This is an yet another example of *veiled* criticism, or dismissal of a woman's testimony based upon something superficial, such as semantics, which was actually a criticism of their political position. This is something that occurred in the NYRW and the Westside group as well.<sup>195</sup>

Despite the Redstocking attempts to keep the group closed to those didn't agree with their guiding principles e.g. the pro-woman line, consciousness-raising, etc. the politico faction did not want to discuss women's experiences, gender conflict, or men at all. The anonymous Redstocking asserts that the politicos preferred not to mention "gender conflict because they say it leads into personal statement and therapy and misses the main analysis."<sup>196</sup> This was a criticism that the politicos in the NYRW often made about consciousness-raising and demonstrates how the principle the personal is political was central to the politico/feminist divide. For instance, when the anonymous Redstocking tries to speak from experience she write the politicos reacted

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<sup>193</sup> "Them and Me," 63.

<sup>194</sup> "Them and Me," 63.

<sup>195</sup> "Them and Me," 63.

<sup>196</sup> "Them and Me," 64.

with “General revulsion.”<sup>197</sup> This type of “collective attack” was a very effective tool because because the Redstocking reports she began to “...feel embarrassed and ashamed to share my experience.”<sup>198</sup> This tactic was used to quell many movement women into silence and similarly to Freeman the anonymous Redstocking report feelings of embarrassment and shame resulting from being singled out and besieged by one’s “sisters.” This type of attack, rampant among WLM groups, accomplishes nothing other than leaving the victim feeling alienated and ashamed.

The Redstocking member asserts the politicians were not only resistant to the pro-woman line but there was anti-woman feeling in the group. She writes that they did not trust women’s own analysis of their condition and when she “...tried to point it out...everyone got so uptight and they forbade me to use the word anti-woman again. They said it was a semantic question and meaningless and...they weren’t anti-woman because they were oppressed.”<sup>199</sup> The semantic line is used once more, this time to deflect the observation the Redstocking had made about the group’s anti-woman sentiment. Even more interesting is the fact that the group then bars her from using the term anti-woman again. I believe this confirms that collective enlightenment and insight are not the purpose of this meeting. The politicians are committed to their analysis and they are censoring a member trying to articulate *her own* analysis. Dell’Olio’s guidelines for discussions such as these state that they should be motivated by a genuine desire for mutual enlightenment rather than subterranean desire for personal attack and that if the discussion is motivated by the latter than the discussion may become very destructive.

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<sup>197</sup> “Them and Me,” 64.

<sup>198</sup> “Them and Me,” 65.

<sup>199</sup> “Them and Me,” 66.

After banning the Redstocking from using the term anti-woman the politico faction dominating this meeting announced that the meeting was over and that “everyone should stop talking or else it would get unpleasant.”<sup>200</sup> Supposedly, the discussion was cut short for the sake of the anonymous Redstocking, as the politico women expressed concern that she was being ganged up on. But the Redstocking said she, “didn’t mind if they continued talking. I figured I was getting somewhere but they all clammed up and refused to talk.”<sup>201</sup> I believe that this demonstrates that the meeting is being called to a close not for the benefit of the this woman but to simply stop her from elaborating her political position any further. In this way, the politico faction is using the *protection* of this Redstockings as a guise in order to shut down political discourse. The Redstocking goes on to say that after the group meetings everyone is “...embarrassed at still being together and very nervous and conversation is stilted,” this she asserts produces a “...feeling of great isolation. Conversations don’t continue out the door; no one is comfortable.”<sup>202</sup> Freeman described a great feeling of isolation in the Westside group, no one talked to her outside of meetings and there was no feeling of community outside the groups, and this caused her to feel very isolated. As I have demonstrated this feeling in a WLM group member was not atypical and not only is it not in line with the movement’s universal vision of sisterhood but it may have stunted and silenced women who could have been valuable contributors to the WLM.

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<sup>200</sup> “Them and Me,” 66.

<sup>201</sup> “Them and Me,” 67.

<sup>202</sup> “Them and Me,” 68.

Clearly, the Redstockings' attempt to keep the group ideologically homogenized failed miserably. By spring 1969, only several months after Redstockings were founded, group members found themselves increasingly divided on ideological, organizational, and strategic questions. Kearon, Mehroof, Cronan, and Feldman constituted the minority that pushed for more action, and a more egalitarian or leaderless group structure. They resented the group's, Kathie Sarachild in particular, commitment to consciousness-raising, an activity they felt resulted only in more consciousness raising, never in action, and the pro-woman line. This faction succeeded in imposing the confining lot system, which had been imposed on the NYRW, upon the group. They used the lot system to divide the pro-women feminists and subsequently hindered their ability to organize and to produce theory.<sup>203</sup> In 1970, Joyce Betries, another advocate of leaderless structure, challenged Sarachild's leadership of the group. Betries succeeded in getting the group to adopt a set of consciousness-raising rules designed to minimize the power differential within the group and keep the group leaderless. The rules effectively limited many of the groups outspoken membership, such as Sarachild and Koedt, from speaking for more than a finite amount of time. The rules were reactionary and constricting according to Cellestine Ware, a black radical feminist whom would go on to help found the New York Radical Feminists, and even prohibited members from commenting on another's experience.<sup>204</sup>

Redstockings insistence that all men oppressed women and its nonjudgmental stance toward non-Movement women were valuable correctives to the prevailing Leftist analysis which attributed women's oppression solely to the "system" or to women's "false consciousness."

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<sup>203</sup> Hanisch, "Struggles Over Leadership in the Women's Liberation Movement," 24.

<sup>204</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 151.

Nevertheless, the pro-woman line was in many respects problematic, especially as it was elaborated by Sarachild and others.<sup>205</sup> Even as late as 1973, Sarachild maintained that “what was moving behind radical women was that we understood we were basically the same as other women and therefore what would turn us on would turn other women on.”<sup>206</sup> But despite their efforts to identify with those women most victimized by the system, the movement remained largely white and middle-class and the vast majority of working-class women and women of color were not “turned on” by their feminism. Their declaration, “we will always take the side of women against their oppressors,” ignored the possibility that women’s interests might in fact be oppositional and reaffirmed the WLM intolerance of difference.<sup>207</sup>

Redstockings continued to function until the fall of 1970. But the battles over consciousness-raising, elitism, and egalitarianism wore people down. Firestone was increasingly at odds with the faction that was pushing the “equality issue” and was also becoming more involved writing her book, a fact which undoubtedly made some of the women resentful as Dell’Olio asserted that distinguishing oneself from the group was often viewed by members as betrayal. Along these lines, Echols asserts that Firestone was often coming under attack for being male-identified. In an interview, conducted by Echols, Mehrhof noted that by late June, Firestone was “slipping out of the group.”<sup>208</sup> Within a few months she would leave the Redstockings to begin to organize New York Radical Feminists with Anne Koedt and Cellestine Ware. In fall of

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<sup>205</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 153.

<sup>206</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 151.

<sup>207</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 153.

<sup>208</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 152.

1969, Willis moved to Colorado to participate in the GI Coffeehouse movement and to try to initiate a radical feminist movement there. Shortly after their departure, Sarachild, Peslikis and Mainardi left the group as well. According to Echols, the group's detractors, e.g. the politicians and the egalitarian faction, maintain that Redstockings demise was brought about by its dogmatic commitment to the pro-woman line and consciousness raising.<sup>209</sup>

### **The Feminists: Struggles Over Leadership Cont.**

After leaving the Redstockings Ti-Grace Atkinson founded The Feminists. Before becoming involved in the Redstockings Atkinson had developed a relationship with Betty Friedan one of the founders of the National Organization for Women and she facilitated Atkinson's involvement in the organization. In December 1967, Atkinson was elected president of New York NOW, by far the largest and the most radical of all NOW chapters. Kate Millet, Anselma Dell'Olio the author of *Divisiveness and Self-Destruction in the Women's Movement*, and Florynce Kennedy were among the more radical women who belonged to this chapter.<sup>210</sup> Atkinson wanted NOW to take "unequivocal positions....on abortion, marriage, the family." However, these were the very issues which many members were anxious that the organization avoid.<sup>211</sup>

Increasingly, Atkinson staked out positions that were on the cutting edge of feminism. For instance, abortion-rights activist Cindy Cisler contends that it was Atkinson who first pointed

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<sup>209</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 155.

<sup>210</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 167.

<sup>211</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 168.

out the inconsistency of supporting both the repeal and the reform of abortion laws. Atkinson asserted that the divisions in the WLM were between those who wanted women to have the opportunity to be oppressors, too, and those who want to destroy oppression itself. Atkinson claimed that she wanted to get “rid of the positions of power, not get up into those positions.”<sup>212</sup> As a consequence of this mentality Atkinson was a large proponent of leaderless structure of the movement. In fact, according to Hanisch, when she split from NOW in 1969, it was in part because of her anti-leadership stance as well as her objection to their reformist tactics.<sup>213</sup> Atkinson split from NOW and joined the Redstocking briefly before leaving to form The Feminists with Anne Koedt, Lila Kearon, Marcia Winslow, Linda Feldman, and Barbara Mehrhof.<sup>214</sup>

Hanisch writes the The Feminists operated strictly on the lot and disk systems in order to ensure egalitarianism.<sup>215</sup> Member Lynn O’Connor described their organizational structure in a pamphlet entitled *Instructions from the Woman’s Page on Method, Organization and Program* that was given to prospective members. O’Connor wrote,

Our goal is a just society all of whose members are equal. Therefore, we aim to develop knowledge and skills in all members...Members who [are experienced in writing and speaking] are urged to withdraw their names from a lot assigning those tasks.<sup>216</sup>

The lot and disk system meant that women be assigned task by lot as opposed to based upon their abilities. O’Connor admitted that the system may involve a “...loss of efficiency,” but asserted

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<sup>212</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 170.

<sup>213</sup> Hanisch, “Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement,” 25.

<sup>214</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 168.

<sup>215</sup> Hanisch, “Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement,” 25.

<sup>216</sup> Lynn Ellen O’Connor, “Instructions from The Woman’s Page on Method, Organization and Program” in *The Woman’s Page*, no. 5, (May 1971), 31.

that ultimately it would allow all members to acquire the skills for revolutionary work. As the above quote demonstrates the lot system were slanted against writers who were discouraged from writing in order to give other women the opportunity to do so. Additionally, Once one had drawn a lot to speak or write they had to withdraw their names.<sup>217</sup> Koedt maintained that these rules would effectively silence members, like herself, who were just beginning to find their voices. In this way, the leaderless structure that Atkinson pushed for actually constrained women, like Koedt, were not trying to exercise power over other women but simply exercise their own self-determination.

The Feminists rejected Redstockings' view that theory and action should follow from consciousness-raising. According to Echols, they argued that consciousness-raising with its "detailing of reactions and feelings" and its "eschewal of judgement as moralistic" was hampering the movement's growth.<sup>218</sup> The Feminists rooted the problem of women's oppression in sex roles-who conformed and who refused and, in the words of their manifesto, they sought to "annihilate" the sex-role system. Unlike the Redstockings who had asserted that women were "messed over not messed up" The Feminists asserted that "women were messed up" as well as "messed over" because they had internalized their oppression. Similarly, the NYRW as articulated during the Jeanette Rankin Brigade action, The Feminists stressed the psychological dimension of women's oppression and Atkinson contended that if women wanted to change their situation they would have to "eradicate their definition," would have to "commit suicide."<sup>219</sup> This

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<sup>217</sup> O'Connor, "Instructions from The Woman's Page on Method, Organization and Program," 31.

<sup>218</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 170.

<sup>219</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 171.



rhetoric calls for the redefinition of women and suggests that The Feminists are seeking a singular definition or ideal of woman. Along these lines, The Feminist put a great deal of emphasis on their membership's personal lives reflecting their revolutionary goals. This not only held women to ludicrously a high standard but facilitated infighting and fissures when this standard was not met.

For instance, The Feminists determined that the major function of sex "as a social act" is to reinforce male dominance and female subordination and advocated that women engage in auto-eroticism and not engage in intercourse with men. Along these lines they demanded that no more than one-third of their membership can be participants in either a formal (with legal contract) or informal (e.g. living with a man) instance of the institution of marriage.<sup>220</sup> In this way The Feminists advocated for female separatism. In addition to these rules, in her pursuit of egalitarianism Atkinson was pushing for The Feminists to become a disciplined, revolutionary, vanguard group with strict membership and attendance regulations and even more draconian rules to ensure egalitarianism. Koedt, Karp, and Rainone—all of whom opposed the rules and female separatism—decided to quit.<sup>221</sup> Not only did The Feminists subject their own membership to these strict and invasive rules but they sought to impose their rigid structure on the WLM as a whole at the Second Congress to Unite Women in New York City.

The Feminists distributed a leaflet by written by member Jessica Fury, demanding that all participants adopt their structure

[The lot system] says women, all women, are capable of power, of leadership, but that we no longer want the male values imposed on us, that of hierarchy. It also says that, unless controlled, women, in an anarchic

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<sup>220</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 171.

<sup>221</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 171

situation...will grab control...and dominate others...become “stars”...cater to the press...and enter into a position they could not have outside the movement...on top! Only you’re on top of us. So get off our backs. Become Feminists!<sup>222</sup>

Not only did Fury urge all the WLM Groups to adopt the lot system but, similarly to Firestone’s assertion that the women leading the Jeanette Rankin Brigade were not real radicals, she essentially states that if they did not adopt the lot system they were not *real* feminists. The Feminists are making the assertion that all women must conform to their system if they want to be feminists. Not only do The Feminists hold other WLM groups to an impossible standard but they assert that women unless “controlled” will dominate one another. They assert that they are being oppressed by other movement women who distinguished themselves, that these women are imposing male values upon them. However, I believe that this type of declaration is oppressive and postulates an adversarial relationship between women.

According to Hanisch, the leadership issue also became tied directly to class. When Barbara Mehrof and Pam Kearon, both of whom had advocated for egalitarian structure in the Redstockings and The Feminists, organized the class workshop in the winter of 1970 class became directly implicated in the question of leadership. The class workshop included both the Feminists and the Redstockings. Almost all of the women involved in the workshop were raised in lower-middle class and working class families. Hanisch was in attendance and she asserts that the group not only used the lot system but they handed out disks to ensure that no one talked more than anyone else. Each person received an equal amount of disks to be thrown each time she spoke. When the disks were gone the member could no longer speak. Hanisch asserts that the

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<sup>222</sup> Jessica Fury, “A Leaflet signed ‘Jessica Fury of The Feminists,’” in *Jessica Fury’s Collected Works*, (May 1970), 23.

disk system actually structured consciousness-raising in such a way that debate, judgement and comments on what someone said were not allowed.<sup>223</sup>

The women of the class workshop issued this statement in their 1970 *What Can We Do about the Media* leaflet.

...as a reaction to the oppression we as women of the working class experienced in the movement, and because of the leadership of upper-middle class women within the movement... The feminist movement began because we were tired of being led by men. But neither do we want to be led by women.<sup>224</sup>

Similarly to Fury, the women of the class workshop link the struggles over leadership directly to maleness and men. This statement calls directly for a leaderless movement and the class workshop, similarly to the Feminists, pushed for both the lot and disk system to be adopted by the the rest of the WLM.<sup>225</sup> The class workshop also attacked professional women writers at the Second Congress to Unite Women. They even went so far as to propose that congress pass a resolution attacking Susan Brownmiller, a writer who helped to organize the Ladies Home Journal. Echols interviewed Brownmiller and according to her the resolution read, “We condemn Susan Brownmiller for seeking to rise to fame on the back of the women’s movement by publishing articles in the establishment press.” Although there is no doubt that both class and race were overlooked by the WLM, partly in response to the idea that women were a monolithic class on to themselves, and were in desperate need of articulation. Hanisch wrote that she was disturbed by the way the class workshop so completely linked speaking and writing abilities to class. Hanisch asserts that though she considered class a factor and sometimes felt uncomfortable

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<sup>223</sup> Hanisch, “Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement,” 25.

<sup>224</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 205.

<sup>225</sup> Hanisch, “Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement,” 25.

as a “rural hick” among the more educated members of the group she had learned that something besides class background gave people the ability to speak in the language of revolution.<sup>226</sup> Hanisch contends that it had a lot to do with clarity of purpose and the ability to put into words the thoughts and feelings that spoke simply to the actual conditions and hopes of the oppressed.<sup>227</sup> The women of the class workshop took over the Second Congress to unite women and demanded the discussion be devoted exclusively to race and class and that they were the *only relevant issues*. In their preface to their proposals they declared that “everyone in the movement must be in groups which operate COLLECTIVELY and that “ideas don’t belong to any individual.” Although this was I believe mostly a reaction to the lack of intersectional analysis in the WLM and the domination of the movement by middle class white women I still believe that implicating leadership as the culprit and condemning it as male was a misguided maneuver that contributed to the attacks made on individual women that proliferated the WLM.

### **The Tyranny of Structurelessness**

As I have previously demonstrated, from the beginning in conscious raising sessions and in all forms of organizing the radical feminists went to great lengths to avoid a decidedly male authoritarian structure enacting rules that prevented women from speaking for more than an allotted period of time in x amount of instances per meeting. Unfortunately, the movement’s dedication to egalitarianism and collectivism often inhibited its effectiveness.<sup>228</sup> Fed up with the

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<sup>226</sup> Hanisch, “Struggles Over Leadership in the Women’s Liberation Movement,” 25.

<sup>227</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 204

<sup>228</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 204

attacks on leadership and becoming increasingly aware that the movement was losing its forward thrust because it was unable to speak with an organized powerful voice some women began to speak publicly against the ultra-egalitarianism ideology. Among them was Joreen Freeman, a fallen member of the Westside group and the author of *Trashing: The Dark Side of Sisterhood*.

Freeman wrote about this sometimes misguided commitment to egalitarianism in her article, *the Tyranny of Structurelessness*, the earliest version of this article was given as a talk at a conference of the Southern Female Rights Union in May 1970. Freeman wrote it up for Notes from the Third year, which was published in 1971, but the editors, Koedt and Firestone, decided to omit it. Freeman wrote, that during the formative years of the WLM a great emphasis has been placed on what developing leaderless, structureless groups as the main organizational form of the movement.<sup>229</sup> Freeman asserts that this was natural reaction against an “over-structured society...and the continual elitism of the Left.”<sup>230</sup> I have previously asserted, Freeman locates the dogged commitment to a leaderless movement as a reaction to the elitism of the Left. I believe that this elitism has caused movement women to identify both leadership as male and consequently suspect. Freeman substantiates my claim saying that the emphasis on leaderlessness often morphed into suspicion and animosity towards more outspoken and articulate women, especially towards women writers, such as Shulamith Firestone, and Anne Koedt.<sup>231</sup> Certainly, structure and leadership are often misused and misguided but they are not inherently bad.

Freeman writes that instead of being a healthy counter to the abusive hierarchical tendencies of

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<sup>229</sup> Jo Freeman, “Tyranny of Structurelessness,” *The Second Wave*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (May 1970), 1.

<sup>230</sup> Freeman, “Tyranny of Structurelessness,” 1.

<sup>231</sup> Freeman, “Tyranny of Structurelessness,” 2.

the Left and larger society the idea of a leaderless movement has become “a goddess in its own right.”<sup>232</sup>

Freeman writes, as I have previously asserted that, this idea of idea of leaderlessness first emerged from early consciousness-raising sessions, in which, “the looseness and informality of it encouraged participation in discussion.”<sup>233</sup> Consciousness-raising was intended to be a freeform, a gathering in which women could commune as equals and share things without fear of judgement. However, I have shown that this did not always happen and sometimes the more educated, middle-class women dominated the conversation. This led to the idea of a leaderless movement becoming a feature of radical feminism and as Freeman says, “a goddess in its own right,” as a result of this draconian rules in which women’s speaking time was limited and women could not comment on each others statements were established.

In an effort to avoid adversarial confrontation and to keep power equally distributed the opposite was actually achieved, women were silenced and were dominated by other women, exactly what was trying to be avoided. I believe these rules and regulations are a result of trying to fit women and feminism into a certain ideal of what women, and feminism should be, that is egalitarian, just, uniform, etc. By limiting women’s right to speak, their ability to discuss things openly, and their ability to be lead and develop their writing skills feminists actually employed old patriarchal tactics to silence women in new forms. This structureless ideology facilitated chaos and the development of factions which represented certain agendas. I am not purporting that this was the cause of these divisions, nor that any ideological principle caused these

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<sup>232</sup> Freeman, “Tyranny of Structurelessness,” 2.

<sup>233</sup> Freeman, “Tyranny of Structurelessness,” 2.

divisions solely, merely that this feature of the WLM turned divisiveness into persecution and facilitated further divisions. Freeman goes on to say, “there is no such thing as a structureless group. Any group of people...will inevitably structure itself in some fashion.”<sup>234</sup> And that to strive for a structureless group is akin to aiming for “an ‘objective’ news story.”<sup>235</sup> Because that the idea of structurelessness is an unrealistic, utopian goal it then becomes a smokescreen, similarly to the idea of sisterhood, for the strong or the lucky to establish hegemony over others. And this hegemony is all the more easily established because the idea of "structurelessness" does not prevent “the formation of informal structures, only formal ones.”<sup>236</sup>

### **Conclusion**

As previously demonstrated, by deriving political ideas from analysis of their personal lives, many WLM groups have sought to remold the minds of their members, police their personal lives, and produce a new ideal or *standard* of “woman” in line with the ideology of universal sisterhood which the movement prized. WLM groups often equated “sisterhood” with *sameness* and women who were judged different were regarded with hostility because their existence was reminder that women are *different* and *difference* was often interpreted to mean *inequality*. Issues over policing the personal, leadership and inequality, esp. disputes over race and class proved very divisive because the WLM had from the outset been so focused upon

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<sup>234</sup> Freeman, “Tyranny of Structurelessness,” 2.

<sup>235</sup> Freeman, “Tyranny of Structurelessness,” 2.

<sup>236</sup> Freeman, “Tyranny of Structurelessness,” 3.

creating a sisterhood and was consequently extremely nervous about exploring women's differences. As a result of this, Echols asserts, the WLM became paralyzed by political purism.<sup>237</sup>

Echols asserts that the leadershipless nature of the WLM allowed feminists outside of the movement to co opt the it from many of the radical women who had faced so much internal criticism that they had been rendered ineffectual. In the early 1970s, many feminists outside of the movement, such as the women of NOW, came to agree with radical feminists that there was a political dimension to personal life.<sup>238</sup> While radical feminists were committed to social transformation and adverse to personal solutions these feminists, who Echols dubs cultural feminists, advocated self-improvement.<sup>239</sup> However, although the WLM women were opposed to personal solutions, its frequent conflation of the personal and the political laid the groundwork for cultural feminists to assert that individual solutions are political solutions.<sup>240</sup> According to Echols, cultural feminists furthered the WLM's notion of a global sisterhood and the characterization of "woman" as a unitary category, but they went further depicting men as irrevocably sexist and upholding conviction that feminism was the single transformative theory. Echols asserts that this set the stage, quite unintentionally, for the sort of analysis articulated by some anti-pornography feminists in the 1980s sex wars.<sup>241</sup>

Since, the late 1980s, many of the disputed topics I have covered e.g. sisterhood, the ideal of woman, and equality are now understood as via intersectionality. Kimberle Crenshaw coined

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<sup>237</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 208

<sup>238</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 208

<sup>239</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 209

<sup>240</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 208

<sup>241</sup> Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-75*, 210.



the term intersectionality in 1989. Intersectionality is an analytical framework which explores how interlocking systems of power impact marginalized groups, it considers race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, etc. not as existing separately but as complexly interwoven.<sup>242</sup>

Intersectionality is a major conceptual advancement in feminist theory and practice, but it alone does not necessarily solve the issues of feminist equality, solidarity and conflict over tactics, etc. Take, for example, the recent #METOO movement, which began on twitter and has primarily taken place in traditional and social media.

Beginning in 2017 and continuing today a wave of celebrities, politicians, academics, blue collar workers, citizens, and noncitizens have spoken out against sexual harassment. #METOO was first tweeted by Tarana Burke, 10 years ago, but rose to prominence in the wake of high-profile accusations of sexual harassment and assault made against producer Harvey Weinstein, when actress Alyssa Milano tweeted, “If you have been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘Me Too’ as a reply to this tweet.”<sup>243</sup> After Milano popularized the hashtag thousands of women came forward, sharing their stories of sexual harassment, sexual violence, and the pervasive damage wrought by their experienced violation.<sup>244</sup> Despite the integration of intersectional analysis into feminist theory the strongest and loudest voices in the #METOO movement are female celebrities and other women, mostly white, of relative advantage.

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<sup>242</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* Vol. 1989, no.1, Article 8.

<sup>243</sup> Bill Chappell, “#MeToo Movement Is Person Of The Year, 'Time' Says.” *NPR*, [www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/12/06/568773208/-metoo-movement-is-person-of-the-year-time-says](http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/12/06/568773208/-metoo-movement-is-person-of-the-year-time-says), (December 6 2017).

<sup>244</sup> Chappell, “#MeToo Movement Is Person Of The Year, 'Time' Says.”

For instance, Staff reporter for the New York Times and woman of color, Jenna Wortham, wrote in her article *We Were Left Out*, “amid the torrent of reports of sexual misconduct, women of color are conspicuously absent.”<sup>245</sup> Similar to the accusations hurled against the WLM, #METOO been called elitist. In her article, *Know Your Power*, Zoe Heller expressed disappointment that the movement has remained so focused on metropolitan elites, writing that she had hoped “...we would begin hearing about sexual harassment and abuse in the farm industry, in fast food, in retail, in hotel housekeeping.”<sup>246</sup> Heller asserts that instead much of the conversation among women on social media has been taken up with identifying lesser forms of male misconduct, “dirty jokes, unsolicited shoulder massages, compliments on physical appearance.”<sup>247</sup> She accuses the movement of spending an inordinate amount of time “parsing the injurious effects of low-level lechery on relatively advantaged women.”<sup>248</sup> In this way, the #METOO movement is repeating many of the mistakes made by the WLM by claiming to represent the interests of all groups but actually representing the experiences of only a few privileged women.

Additionally, trashing has flourished in the #METOO movement. As previously mentioned, Jo Freeman coined the term “trashing” which is used when conflict goes beyond healthy organizational conflict and takes the form of a vicious attack. Whereas during the WLM trashing flourished in consciousness-raising session today social media has become the arena in

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<sup>245</sup> Jenna Wortham, “We Were Left Out,” *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/12/13/magazine/the-reckoning-women-and-power-in-the-workplace.htm>, (December 13, 2017).

<sup>246</sup> Zoe Heller, “Know Your Power,” *New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/12/13/magazine/the-reckoning-women-and-power-in-the-workplace.htm>, (December 13, 2017).

<sup>247</sup> Heller, “Know Your Power,” (December 13, 2017).

<sup>248</sup> Heller, “Know Your Power,” (December 13, 2017).

which these vicious internal attacks, often resulting in bitter frustration and disillusionment take place. In October of 2017 a list entitled “SHITTY MEDIA MEN” which was a collection of misconduct allegations and rumors against men in media which ranged from “weird lunch dates” to accounts of rape and assault was released and produced a fair amount of controversy, sparking intense debate among women, primarily through social media.<sup>249</sup> Author of the list Moira Donegan wrote in *New York Magazine* that commentators on social media alternately condemned the document as “reckless, malicious, or puritanically anti-sex.”<sup>250</sup> These criticisms echoes those made by the pro-sex feminists about the anti-pornography ordinances in the 1980s.

Katie Roiphe, criticized both the list and the the #METOO movement more generally, in her article, *The Other Whisper Network: How Twitter feminism is bad for women*. Similarly, to the politico’s attacks on the feminists Roiphe attacked the movement for it’s “rampant and slippery...tendency to...blame all men.”<sup>251</sup> As I have previously demonstrated man-hating became a very contentious issue among the politicians and the feminists. Roiphe asserts that what makes it difficult to engage with the feminist movement is the “sense of great, unmanageable anger.”<sup>252</sup> This echoes Freeman’s sentiments about the WLM’s impotence when it came to channeling the rage that resulted from women’s oppression.

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<sup>249</sup> Doree Shafir, “What To Do With ‘Shitty Media Men’?,” *Buzzfeed News*, [https://www.buzzfeed.com/doree/what-to-do-with-shitty-media-men?utm\\_term=.nb57yOD2K#.denr13eap](https://www.buzzfeed.com/doree/what-to-do-with-shitty-media-men?utm_term=.nb57yOD2K#.denr13eap), (October 12, 2017).

<sup>250</sup> Moira Donegan, “I Started the Media Men List,” *New York Magazine*, <https://www.thecut.com/2018/01/moira-donegan-i-started-the-media-men-list.html>, (January 10, 2018).

<sup>251</sup> Katie Roiphe, *Harper’s Magazine*, “The Other Whisper Network: How Twitter feminism is bad for women,” <https://harpers.org/archive/2018/03/the-other-whisper-network-2/4/> (March 2018).

<sup>252</sup> Roiphe, “The Other Whisper Network: How Twitter feminism is bad for women,” (March 2018), 2.

Roiphe says before she even published her article *The Other Whisper Network: How Twitter feminism is bad for women* twitter fury over her piece was unleashed which made it difficult for her to find people to openly share their misgivings about the movement and caused some who had already been interviewed to ask Roiphe to omit their names. Before the piece was published, Roiphe says “people were calling me ‘pro-rape,’ ‘human scum,’ a ‘harridan,’ a ‘monster,’ a ‘ghoul,’ a ‘bitch,’ and a ‘garbage person.’”<sup>253</sup> A self proclaimed Twitter feminist Jessica Valenti called Roiphe’s article “‘profoundly shitty’ and ‘incredibly dangerous’” without having read it because it had not yet been published.<sup>254</sup> Roiphe says that she received death threats and asserts that social media has enabled a more “elaborate intolerance of feminist dissenters than ever.”<sup>255</sup> In this way, online feminism has taken to thought policing onto a new level that would disturb even, those who advocated for draconian consciousness-raising rules. Although, Jo Freeman was blackballed from the Westside group no one ever threatened her with death. With this level of thought policing, it is difficult to imagine that anything productive could be produced.

Roiphe goes on to say that “It feels as if the feminist movement is, at times, providing cover for vindictiveness and personal vendettas... and that what we think of as purely positive social change is also, for some, bloodsport.”<sup>256</sup> In this way, similarly to the WLM, feminists are being *personally* attacked for voicing opinions that are divergent and a movement that is

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<sup>253</sup> Roiphe, “The Other Whisper Network: How Twitter feminism is bad for women,” (March 2018), 2.

<sup>254</sup> Roiphe, “The Other Whisper Network: How Twitter feminism is bad for women,” (March 2018), 3.

<sup>255</sup> Roiphe, “The Other Whisper Network: How Twitter feminism is bad for women,” (March 2018), 4.

<sup>256</sup> Roiphe, “The Other Whisper Network: How Twitter feminism is bad for women,” (March 2018).

supposed to free women from having to live in silence is also silencing women's voices. This dynamic is similar to what occurred on in the consciousness-raising sessions and what Freeman meant when she talked about using new and creative tactics to silence women.<sup>257</sup> Many of the issues that faced the WLM are still prevalent today, although, the way in which these mechanisms operate have changed. Implicating maleness is still a very contentious issue, women are still viciously attacking one another for expressing divergent opinions, these attacks have become even more ferocious with the advent of social media, the #METOO movement, similarly to the WLM, is still claiming to represent the best interests of all women, and accusations of anti-sex and pro-rape are still being flung at women similarly to the debates of the sex-wars.

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