

COMMENTARY

Who are the Radical Feminists?

by MISTER Peter Hanus

The heart of lesbian feminist politics, let me repeat, is a recognition that heterosexuality as an institution and an ideology is a cornerstone of male supremacy. Therefore, women interested in destroying male supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism must, equally with lesbians, fight heterosexual domination--or we shall never end female oppression. -Charlotte Bunch, 'Not for Lesbians Only'

This is not an article bashing feminism. This is, however, an article coming in response to the feminist critiques provided by Dawn Ambler, Tracy Smith, Tracy Arsenault, Heather J. Morrison, and Libby Whelon. These critiques being directed at the editorial in the November 14 edition of the X-Press, where Mr. Editor attacked "extreme feminists" who are destroying credibility for the feminist movement. It will be assumed, as it was by Ambler and Smith, that he was referring to "radical feminists." Ambler attacks his editorial based on a definition of "radical" from the Oxford Dictionary, and then stating what some of the goals are of radical feminism. None of the others attempted a definition of "radical feminism" or "radical feminists"--in fact, Arsenault, Morrison and Whelon just took Mr. Large's editorial as a blanket attack on the whole feminist movement. Ambler's definition is not completely accurate (it is more the definition of "feminism"). This article intends on giving an accurate definition of radical feminism as defined by radical feminists--with sources.

Marlene Mackie, a noted Canadian academic feminist, describes radical feminism and radical feminists as follows:

Radical Feminism directs attention to the role played by sexuality and reproduction in keeping women down. . . . Since Radical Feminists regard women's child-bearing function and subsequent dependence on men as the root of female oppression, in their opinion, only a biological revolution will free women. Possibilities are extra-uterine reproduction or lesbianism. In general, Radical Feminists recommend, as a strategy of social change, separation from men in both domestic and economic spheres.

Susan Hawthorne describes "separatism" as:

Living in an all-women environment and having no contacts with any men. This is usually understood to be the standard separatist position.

Hawthorne then notes that this may not be practical for all women, given the number of men in society. But, as she notes, "The crucial factor in a separatist philosophy is that women do not need men." Thank God most women, or even feminists, don't think this way.

To further the radical feminist argument, separation from men is needed in order to usurp "Patriarchy," a system which supposedly dominates and oppresses women/womyn in all spheres of social life. Bernice Lott notes one possible historical source: "ancient goddess-worshipping matriarchal societies were disrupted by male revolts and men sought revenge for their earlier inferior status." This revenge has taken the form of socialising women/womyn into becoming dependent and compliant to males by instilling in females a form of "false-consciousness."

As noted above, this domination of women/womyn under patriarchy is in all spheres of social life. One way of changing this is to invert the traditional attractiveness code:

These women [radical feminists] generally wear jeans, or workmen's denim overalls, the baggy kind that hides the shape of the wearer. The pants may be topped by a man's t-shirt or workshirt. It is generally clear that they are not wearing bras. Their hair is not so much styled as there; they wear no makeup; steel-rimmed reading glasses or sunglasses are frequent; footgear is comfortable, with a predominance of men's workboots or sneakers; and jewelry is rare . . .

Radical feminists further argue that "fat is a feminist issue," a woman/womyn is not to become anorexic. Women/womyn are encouraged to respect their fat that says:

. . . 'screw you' to all who want her to be the perfect mom, sweetheart, maid, and whore. Take me for who I am, not for who I'm supposed to be. If you are really interested in me, you can wade through the layers and find out who I am.