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SISTERHOOD IS POWERFUL...OR IMPOSSIBLE?

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ABSTRACT

The second wave of feminism is the time period in the United States that occurred from the mid-1960s and spans through the 1980s. This is a relevant time period in women's history and the development of feminism. The women of this era were successful in changing the political landscape of the United States, changing the culture of the United States, and making a huge impact on feminist theory and practice. Given the importance of this time period and its influence on feminist theory and practice today an understanding of two of the major players of the time period is beneficial to feminist scholars and activists today. An analysis of radical and black feminist discourse using the Kenneth Burke method know as cluster criticism, revealed three key terms that were shared by both groups of women: "oppression," "feminism," and "sisterhood." By unveiling the themes that cluster around these terms an understanding of these two groups of feminists is generated. Issues of racism and identity politics prove to be roadblocks for radical and black feminists to do political work together. Understanding why these issues exist and how they persists today is crucial to developing alternative political strategies that allow for coalition building and the creation of a women's movement that exists truly for *all* women.

PREFACE

First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Stephen Depoe for his immeasurable patience, guidance, and faith in this thesis and me. His roles as mentor, critic, and friend mean more to me than he will ever know. I would also like to thank Dr. Berryman-Fink and Dr. Crocker-Lakness for serving on my thesis committee. Their input and expertise greatly benefited my project and me. I would also like to recognize and thank the center for Women's Studies at the University of Cincinnati. Without their graduate certificate program and excellent instructors my project would not have been as well developed from a feminist perspective.

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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I set out to analyze and compare the discourse of radical feminists and black feminists that was produced during the “second wave” of feminism, which began during the 1960’s and stretched through until the end of the 1980’s. By analyzing black and white feminist discourse I believe that issues of exclusion and racism can be challenged, understood, and addressed. The discourse of black and white radical feminists that was published from the mid 1960’s through the 1980’s articulates the stance these two groups of women took on the theme of sisterhood and their respective prescriptions for an effective political agenda for feminist movement. I felt the most effective critical approach to unpack these two groups’ difference through an analysis of their discourse, was to perform a cluster criticism.

In Chapter One I will provide my readers with some essential information that is necessary to understand my research and results. First, I will briefly discuss and illustrate the schism between radical and black feminists. Second, I will discuss my critical approach that enabled me to perform the discourse analysis. And I will conclude with a brief description of the limitations of this project.

In Chapter One I introduce my readers to two groups of feminists who did much to shape the American political landscape and influenced the generation of current feminist theory. Let me briefly define radical and black feminism before going any further. Radical feminists viewed all women as being oppressed. International feminist scholar Chila Bulbeck describes radical feminists as believing that, “There is an independent oppression based on sex, and it occurs across time and tides” (1998, p.7). Radical feminists viewed the subordination of women as their central concern. Their

main political issues were reproductive freedom, women's autonomy, and representations of women in society. Most radical feminists were white, educated, and middle class. Black feminists are viewed as the response and critique of radical and other white feminists.

Black feminists were concerned with more than just issues of sexual oppression. Because black feminists were both black and women, they sought to look at all factors of oppression that could affect women's lives. Black feminists adopted a confrontational approach as opposed to radical feminists who adopted more of a coactive strategy to liberating women. Rhetorical scholars Stewart, Smith, and Denton define the confrontational strategy as the attempt by a person or group to bring legitimacy to their cause by challenging institutional legitimacy and then encouraging others to transcend the current structure of society (2001). Those who are confrontational usually have a "new" vision for how society should be structured. Stewart, Smith, and Denton (2001) define a coactive strategy as the attempt to still give merit to institutional legitimacy and still view current the structure of society as capable of working well. Coactive strategies require that the protest group be included in society because they deserve the same traditional rights of equality, justice, and dignity. Black feminists sought to tear down the old structure of American society and re-build it, whereas radical feminists merely sought to reform American society by making women and men equal.

In analyzing radical and black feminist discourse, I will highlight some of the major issues that have hindered both groups of women from achieving all they could politically while still pointing out both groups' strengths and invaluable contributions. Understanding black and radical feminists will shed light on where the women's

movement was, how radical and black feminists influence the movement today, and where the movement is heading and how it can get there.

In Chapter Two, I provide my readers a historical context in which to situate themselves. There have been political opportunities for black and white women to build coalitions throughout American history. The second chapter explores and explains black and white women's political history by focusing on three major political eras: the abolitionist movement, the suffrage movement and the "second wave." It is possible to trace the tension that existed between black and white women throughout their political history. This exploration paints a picture of American women's political history and illustrates how the practice of exclusion of black women by white women was passed on like a historical baton from one generation of feminists to the next .

In Chapter Three, the actual cluster criticism is presented. When performing the cluster criticism I found three key terms that were present both in black and white radical feminists' discourse. These terms are "oppression," "feminism," and "sisterhood." At the end of Chapter Three, I provide a close reading of both groups' discourse through an in-depth analysis of two manifesto statements. For the black feminists I choose the *A Black Feminist Statement* (1977) by the Combahee River Collective, and for the radical feminists I chose *Towards a Female Liberation Movement* (1968) by Beverly Jones and Judith Brown. I chose the piece by the Combahee River Collective because of its huge impact on feminist theory. It is arguably the most influential and representative piece of black feminist thought from the second wave. I chose the piece by Jones and Brown because of its wonderful illustrative power. Out of all of the documents I read it did the most efficient job of summing up and explaining what the visions and goals were for

radical feminists during the second wave of feminism. The analysis provides the reader with examples and explanations of how the themes clustering around the key terms reveals significant differences between black and radical feminists' ideologies and political agendas.

In Chapter Four, I discuss the contributions and limitations, of both groups. By understanding the groups' contributions and limitations it is possible to search for more constructive theoretical alternatives that promote and foster participation, inclusion, and coalition building among different groups of women. Alternative theoretical and rhetorical strategies will be suggested in an effort to explain how these alternatives can better serve and create a more inclusive feminist agenda.

CHAPTER ONE

I. OVERVIEW: SCHISM BETWEEN RADICAL AND BLACK FEMINISM

The thesis focuses on the historical period known as the second wave of feminism. The second wave refers to the second major widespread occurrence of women organizing for the progression of women's rights in the United States. The first wave happened during the time of suffrage (mid nineteenth century through the early twentieth century) when women struggled for the right to vote. The second wave occurred many decades later, starting in the 1960s and continuing through the 1980s. The second wave began like many other social movements during that time period in the United States. Marginalized groups were organizing and working to change their oppressive conditions. Feminist scholar Linda Nicholson explains the importance of the second wave of feminism:

...I believe that something important occurred in the 1960s that is still spinning itself out...The political movements that came into being in the 1960s meant that a radical questioning of gender roles was being carried out not only by isolated scholars or marginalized groups, but in front of and with the attention of many national publics...Something happened in the 1960s in ways of thinking about gender that continues to shape public and private life (1997, p.1).

Tensions surrounding sisterhood, exclusion, and privilege have sparked debates within feminist theory and among feminists since the 1960's in the United States. A question that has long interested the women's movement and the academic field of feminist theory is whether or not universal sisterhood possible? Sisterhood could be defined as many things, but on the most basic level it can be described as a sense of connectedness generated through a shared identity. bell hooks defines sisterhood as a shared sense of solidarity between women based on an idea of a common oppression (1984). It is questionable if millions of women could all share an identity given how

diverse human beings are in general. Issues such race, class, sexuality, and age to name of few can seriously challenge the possibility of sisterhood. Questions of who does and does not have privilege and power can hinder the generation of sisterhood. The historical underpinnings of racism and classism in the United States are not easily forgotten or swept under the carpet for the sake of sisterhood.

Charges of racism became a highly contested issue during the second wave. Black women felt that a strict focus on gender was irresponsible and exclusionary on the part of white feminists. Lacking a focus on issues such as racism and classism, the radical feminists became focused solely on white middle-class women's issues. Black feminist Barbara Smith explained why race needed to become an important focus of feminism:

The reason racism is a feminist issue is easily explained by the inherent definition of feminism. Feminism is the political theory and practice to free *all* women: women of color, working class women, poor women, physically challenged women, lesbians, old women as well as white economically privileged heterosexual women. Anything less than this is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement (1981, p.61). (emphasis is original)

Racism was prevalent and crippling to the production of cross-race relations among women during the second wave. The ignorance of or complete lack of attention to women of color led to the division of white women and women of color. Black women often did not find support and help from black men or white feminists when they attempted to organize around a cause that was specific to black women's interests (hooks 1984). I assert that resentment and a lack of trust was justifiable by black women when dealing with white women because many white women did little in the early phases of the second wave to improve their relationship with black women and form coalitions with

them (Davis 1981, hooks 1984, Omolade 1998, Wallace,1998). Grant and Parker explained how women of color battled racism for years:

Racism has significantly undermined feminist organizing over the past two centuries. Despite the fact that campaigns for women's rights in the United States have been initiated by women of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, and that various women's organizations have fervently struggled against racist hierarchies and institutions, racism has persisted both within and beyond the movement (1998, pp. 496-497).

White supremacist attitudes and ideologies were internalized by some white feminists, no matter how good their intentions were; often many did not deal with these latent ideologies. bell hooks described how racist attitudes were present in the second wave and divided white and black women:

As I write, I try to remember when the word racism ceased to be the term which best expressed for me exploitation of black people and other people of color in this society and when I began to understand that the most useful term when confronted with the liberal attitudes of white women active in feminist movement who were unlike their racist ancestors-white women in early woman's rights movement who did not wish to be caught dead in fellowship with black women. Yet when present, what we saw was that they wished to exercise control over our bodies and thoughts as their racist ancestors had-that this need to exercise power over us expressed how much they had internalized the values and attitudes of white supremacy (1989, p.112-113).

The women's movement of the second wave was *not* strictly a white woman's movement, but many white women often had the most time and the most resources to devote to political work. The combination of resources, time, media campaigns, and racism is what led to the second wave's white face (Hull and Smith 1982). When black women were organizing and putting bodies in the street, their faces were typically omitted from the camera operator's lens or if a person from the media chose to interview a "feminist" her face was always white. The media played a large role in ensuring the women's movement would be property of white women (Sloan-Hunter 1998).

Because of the large numbers of white women in the second wave, the movement was often centered on white women's needs. White feminists focused on white middle-class issues and were ignorant to the needs of those different from themselves. The priorities of women of color then were often not met or addressed by the broader women's movement (Smith & Smith 1981). Women of color and poor women needed to be present in the streets and at radical feminists' gatherings to ensure that their agendas would be addressed. Often when women of color were discussed, they were thought of as stereotypes. As Michelle Wallace asserted, "Today when many white feminists think of black women, they too often think of faceless masses of welfare mothers and rape victims to flesh out their statistical studies of women's plight" (1982, p.10). doris davenport explained how the white women she encountered perceived black women "...as the 'Other,' based on a menial or sexual image: as more sensual, but less cerebral; more interesting perhaps but less political than they are" (1981, p.86).

Black women were often discouraged from doing political work with white women because white women made them feel excluded and unwanted. There were many occasions when black women attempted to work with white women and they were turned away. White women could insinuate that white women should work with white women and black women should work with black women exclusively. If black women were "invited" to participate with white women, it was often on a token basis, one or two black women were to represent all women of color and then no charges of racism could be drawn.

Also, white women often used women of color as expendable labor (davenport 1981, Woo 1981). Women of color could participate if they were cleaning a women's

shelter or filing or making coffee; jobs like organizing and speech writing were the jobs were often times done by white women (davenport 1981). doris davenport explained her encounter with the “white women only” attitude that was prevalent during the second wave:

A few years ago in New Haven, I tried to relate to feminism through a local women’s center (located in a Yale basement). I was politely informed that I should ‘organize’ with Black wimmin. In other words, get out...Last year in Los Angeles, after volunteering to work for a local white feminist magazine, repeatedly offering my services and having my ideas and poems rejected, I was finally called to be one of the few token black wimmin at a reception for Ntozake Shange. And the beat, like the song says, goes on. From coast to coast, the feminist movement *is* racist, but that news is old and stale by now. It is increasingly apparent that the problem is white wimmin (davenport 1981, p.85).

Merele Woo, an Asian American woman, illustrates this situation: “Still in 1980, the injustices continue. I can give you so many examples of groups which are ‘feminist’ in which women of color were given the usual least important tasks, the shitwork, and given no say in how that group is to be run” (Woo 1981, p.143).

During the second wave black women were often expected to do all the work when forming coalitions with white women. It was usually left up to black women and other women of color to teach white women about their racism and to teach them about women different from themselves. There existed an assumption that black women possess some essence or mysterious authenticity. Many white women expected black women to inform them of what it was like to be black, and white women usually expected this account to be consistent with stereotypes. If a black woman was college-educated and studied in Europe, then they were not “black enough.” Black women and other women of color then became the “bridge” between black and white women. It was up to the black woman to reach and stretch to be invited into the privileged white space

of feminism. White feminist Ellen Pence explained how feminism was a privileged space: "Our idea of including women of color was to send our notices. We have never came to the business table as equals. Women of color joined us on our terms" (1982, p.46). In a *Letter to Ma*, Merele Woo vented her frustration:

And I get so tired of being the instant resource for information on Asian-American women. Being the token representative going from class to class, group to group, bleeding for white women so they can have an easy answer and then, and this is what really gets to me—they usually leave to never continue their education about us on their own (1981, p.143).

Ellen Pence again admitted that white women were not thorough or fair when tackling their own racism:

As white women, we continually expect women of color to bring us to an understanding of our own racism. White women rarely meet to examine collectively our attitudes, our actions, and most importantly, our resistance to change. The oppression of men toward women is in so many ways parallel to the oppression of white women toward women of color (1982, p. 46).

White women needed to reevaluate their attitudes and actions. It was not enough to consider oneself radical and a feminist and then one's hands were clean of classism and racism. Often times white women had difficulty recognizing their position as an oppressor. White women constructed a hegemonic movement and were often naïve about doing so. White women needed to address their white privilege and power if coalitions between them and women of color were to ever thrive and to create a movement that exists for all women. Women of color experienced denials by white women as betrayals, and fragile alliances could not survive unless a frank discussion on how to tackle racism began (Grant & Parker 1998, p.499). White feminists needed to be responsible for knowing their history and recognizing their internalized racism, as Mariana Valverde explained:

...it is the responsibility of white feminists to reconceptualize our own history, to reconceptualize feminism itself through an awareness that being outspoken and even radical on feminist issues has not meant historically and does not now mean, that racism is either non-existent, or (as white feminists often claimed), the racism of x or y white feminist is an unfortunate external blot due to "the racism of the time." The racism of white feminism is neither externally caused nor accidental: it is integral to what the mainstream Anglo-Saxon tradition has called "feminism" (1992, pp. 161-162).

II. CRITICAL METHOD

Cluster criticism is an analytical approach grounded in the rhetorical theory of Kenneth Burke. The cluster approach is related to Burke's view of language that he labeled dramatism. According to rhetorical scholars Foss, Foss, and Trapp dramatism is the analysis of language and thought action (1991). To Burke language is not merely a way of conveying information; it is a way of doing. Burke believed that through the use of Dramatistic analysis one can understand why someone acts in the way they do; dramatism unveils motive. People's words create attitudes that color their interpretation of reality and these attitudes then produce motives. Burke believes it is words that make people act as they do. Burke asserts that words generate motives and motives generate actions. He goes on to say that language is the product of freedom and choice; therefore, language is at the heart of one's motives. So if someone were to analyze another's language, then the person doing the analysis would be able to determine the other's motives. Foss, Foss, and Trapp quote Burke to explain:

We or he may disclose by objective citation the structure of motivation operating here. There is no need to 'supply' motives. The interrelationships themselves are his motives. For they are his situation; and *situation* is but another word for *motives*. The motivation out of which he writes is synonymous with the structural way in which he puts events and values together when he writes...(1991, p.184).

Dramatism is an appropriate theoretical approach to use when analyzing discourse because it allows the researcher to uncover what the rhetors' language is communicating to the audience. Motives and the following actions can be better understood and anticipated. Dramatism also reveals why two people who seem to share similar beliefs or belong to the same culture could possibly act out in quite different ways. Rhetor's language is the rhetor's action because they own that language and chose to use the words that generate action. I believe people choose their words that will in effect determine what their actions will be.

One method that Burke recommends to uncover a rhetor's motive is cluster criticism. The cluster criticism as a method was outlined by rhetorical scholar Sonja Foss. She explains that to perform a cluster criticism, a large amount of a person or group's discourse is analyzed to determine what the rhetor/rhetors' key terms are (1996). Key terms are chosen and then scrutinized because key terms are powerful words loaded with rhetorical intent. Key terms are identified by their frequency and placement in discourse. When reading discourse of a particular group or person, a researcher will find that certain terms will emerge quite often. Because of the frequent use of the terms and the words clustering around the terms, it can be concluded that these terms possess great power and carry with them much insight into the rhetors' motives. Key terms are useful to the researcher because they reflect the rhetor's worldviews and ideologies. Once the key terms have been determined, the researcher then analyzes the words clustering around the key terms. These clusters reflect how the rhetor(s) define the term and then the researcher can determine what rhetorical significance the words hold and what function they perform.

A number of critics have employed the cluster criticism method to analyze rhetorical discourse. For example, Carol Berthold utilized the cluster criticism method to reveal the content and meaning behind President Kennedy's discourse (1976). Berthold shows her readers how JFK used discourse to invoke specific images of freedom in Americans' minds. Using what are known as god terms and devil terms, Kennedy was able to provoke certain images of good and evil in the minds of Americans. Freedom, Kennedy's most powerful and prevalent god term, became synonymous with peace and strength. Strength is seen as a product of freedom. The themes of peace and strength lent themselves to making the connection to national defense and unity. These were connected in Kennedy's discourse because of their use in similar contexts in his speeches. A triad of freedom, strength, and security was constructed by JFK to serve as a stark contrast to Communism. Communism is labeled a devil term because of its frequency of appearing in opposition to freedom.

Another example of a critic's employment of the cluster method is an analysis of the debate in the Episcopal Church over the ordination of women, performed by Sonja Foss (1996). She first located the four key terms: "Church," "Priest," "Male," and "Female." These key terms explain the logic behind the church's hierarchy refusing to ordain female priests. Female priests were viewed as sacrilegious and breaking the traditions of the church. By performing this analysis Foss reveals the sexist undertones behind the Episcopal Church's judgment to prohibit female priests. Without this analysis the hidden, latent reasoning behind the church leaders' judgment is unclear.

To locate my key terms I decided to start my research by examining popular anthologies. I initially read several anthologies of radical and black feminist discourse to

determine what terms were appearing with great frequency. My research was not limited to but was largely represented by radical feminists' anthologies, *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970) and *liberation now!* (1970). The black feminist anthologies were *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981) and *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave* (1982). When reading through the discourse I also located terms that appeared in both groups. If a term was prevalent in one group but not in the other I did not chart it. After determining that "oppression," "feminism," "liberation," and "sisterhood" were the four key terms of radical and black feminists during the second wave of feminism I then went back through the discourse and determined what themes and words clustered around the key terms.

III. ORGANIZATION AND LIMITATIONS

The project has a number of limitations. It is important to mention that the discourse analyzed in this project is not exhaustive of the discourse produced during the second wave of feminism. I read printed discourse that was limited to mostly anthologies. There are many other forms of discourse that are present in this analysis. I did not view any old news footage. I did not locate and analyze any pamphlets or flyers. I did not listen to any interviews that may have occurred on the radio nor did I listen to any recorded speeches. I should also mention that I am not only drawing a generalization about one group of women but two. I had a great deal of literature to read through and it is arguable that perhaps if I focused on one group I could have produced a more exhaustive analysis of just one group. I chose, however, to make a comparison so there was no way around forming generalizations about two groups of feminists. My findings do not speak for *all* radical or black feminists, just the majority of the ones that I

researched. This a limited representation of two groups of feminists and it is also important that I mention that my research contains no statistical data (hence of my usage of the word some when referring to the women in my study). The women in my study are proclaimed white radical feminists and black feminists; both groups of women are from the United States. While there may be some similarities between these women of the “second wave” and women in other countries during the same time period, these two groups only represent the sentiments of feminists in the United States.

By the end of Chapter Four, I hope that the reader will have a better understanding of the political history of American women, particularly the strengths and weaknesses of radical and black feminists. I hope that my readers are able to recognize both groups’ contributions to feminism. Finally I hope to provide a vision for the future of a more inclusive feminist movement where all women have a comfortable and productive political space.

CHAPTER TWO

Black and White Women's Political Involvement in American *Herstory* Spanning From the Abolition Movement through the Second Wave of Feminism

In Chapter Two I provide a historical context for my readers. By providing a familiarity with black and white women's political history in the United States, one can better process the tension between black and white women discussed in the first chapter. This chapter is divided into three major sections: an overview of the abolition and suffrage movements and their connection to one another, the emergence of the second wave of feminism and radical feminists, and an overview of the emergence of black feminism and the end of the second wave. I will first discuss the abolition movement, which occurred approximately from 1810 through the 1860s. This movement sought to liberate African Americans from slavery. Occurring after and connected to the abolition movement is the suffrage movement that spanned the years of 1848 through 1920. This political movement is often labeled the first wave of feminism because of the large number of women actively demanding the right to vote. The second section focuses on the beginning of the second wave that began in the early 1960s. This section also shows how radical feminism grew out of the second wave's beginning. The last section explores the emergence of black feminism as a response to an often-racist white women's movement and a sexist black liberation movement.

I. The Abolition and Suffrage Movements

Racism in the women's movement has been passed down like a baton from one generation to the next. It is important to note that racism within the movement is also a reflection of society as a whole. Oddly enough, despite the presence of racism, the first

instance of large groups of black and white women acting politically was the movement to abolish slavery in America during the nineteenth century. Even though white women were seeking to free black women and men, they did not typically see black women as equals and shied away from organizing with them (Parker 1998). Shirley Yee describes how many white women refused to organize with black women:

The issue of challenging the custom of race segregation sometimes erupted into heated public debates among men and women in the movement. In Fall River, Massachusetts, for instance, the predominantly white female antislavery society nearly disbanded when white abolitionists Elizabeth Buffman Chace (1809-1899) and Lucy Buffman Lowell (n.d.) invited a 'few very respectable young colored women' to join as members. A number of white members threatened to quit, arguing that while the Black women could sit in on meetings, to offer them membership implied that they were the social equals of white women in the society (1998, p.2).

Despite the presence of white supremacist attitudes in the United States at that time, many white women in the movement identified with slaves and free black people. Women were beginning to recognize their second-class citizen status. White women saw parallels between the treatment of women and the treatment of black people by the dominant group of white men in American society. They realized that their ties to white men were not that different from blacks. These white women gained experience in organizing and public speaking through their involvement with abolition, but their activity was often frowned upon and discouraged by men because these activities were not "lady-like." Many white women found that the freedom for blacks and the freedom for women were two parts of the same problem (Bray 1977). White women used the experience they gained from abolitionists' work to foster the suffrage movement as Angela Davis explains:

As Eleanor Flexner's outstanding study of the women's movement reveals, women abolitionists accumulated invaluable political experiences, without which

they could not have effectively organized the campaign for women's rights more than a decade later. Women developed fund-raising skills, they learned how to distribute literature, how to call meetings-and some of them even became efficient in the use of petition, which would become the central tactical weapon of the women's rights campaign (1981, p. 39).

The legacy of racism was also carried over to women's fight for the right to vote, and it is during the suffrage movement that racism openly reared its ugly head.

In 1869, two groups formed to promote women's right to vote in the United States: the National Suffrage Association and the American Women's Suffrage Association. Anti-suffragists had two main arguments: that men had natural capabilities and that women had natural incapacities and the allowing women to vote would prove damaging to the family. Women were up against incredible odds considering that the majority of men in the United States believed these two arguments (Coleman 1982).

Black women did participate in the struggle for suffrage, but they often faced the struggle alone because many white women were racist and exclusionary and often black men were sexist. Angela Davis discusses the importance of the Seneca Falls Declaration (1848) and how it served as a major divider for black and white women:

The inestimable importance of the Seneca Falls Declaration was its role as the *articulated consciousness of women's rights* at mid-century...However, as rigorous consummation of the consciousness of white middle-class women's dilemma, the Declaration all but ignored the predicament of white working-class women, as it ignored the condition of Black women in the South and North alike. In other words, the Seneca Falls Declaration proposed an analysis of the female condition, which disregarded the circumstances of women outside the social class of the document's framers (1981, p.53-54).

Even though black women were in attendance at the Seneca Falls conference, the white women's documents make no mention of them (Davis 1981).

Not all white women were exclusionary, and some white women did seek to work with black women because they believed that they were their equals. Two remarkable

examples of this are the revolutionary sisters Angelina and Sarah Grimke. They crusaded to end slavery in early through the mid-1800s. They were from a slave-owning family in North Carolina. They moved to Philadelphia and became Quakers because of their deep spirituality. They wrote many anti-slavery articles and addressed various groups of women. It is also impressive to note that these sisters spoke publicly to large mixed audiences, men and women, black and white. They were attacked for not being in the place that their detractors said God intended women to occupy. Because of their strong faith they were deeply insulted by these charges, and fired back that men had been misinterpreting God's word to oppress women. Their real goal was to end slavery, and they were aware that their task was a difficult one because of their gender. It is often noted that the Grimke Sisters were the first women to make the connection between blacks' oppression and women's oppression; they saw a connection between women's right to vote and the liberation of black people. Because of this insight the Grimke sisters were part of the few that remained faithful to the liberation of black people during the suffrage movement (Brown & Seitz 1970).

Another extraordinary exception is Sojourner Truth, an ex-slave. She was a force to be reckoned with at rallies and conventions during the late 1800s. If black women were not permitted to speak, she would rise and begin to speak from the middle of the audience. There was no way that she could be ignored. She was so powerful and moving that people chronicled her speeches. This is amazing because the discourse of black women was rarely recorded or noted (Terborg-Penn 2000). At a convention in 1851 in Akron, Ohio, many pro-suffrage women tried to prevent her from speaking. They feared that an ex-slave would ruin the cause. Ignoring them, Truth delivered the most heart

rendering speech of the afternoon and the room reverberated with loud and long cheers (Terborg-Penn 2000). She was powerful and articulate and caught people's attention like no other female speaker of her time.

Not only were black women faced with racism within the struggle for suffrage, but they also had to face sexism from black men. Black men were also struggling for the right to vote at the same time women were. Most black men tended to focus their energies on themselves and saw their right to vote as more important to the race than black women's rights.

The "woman question" was but one area where differences surfaced. In general, men who attended the conventions held the same attitudes as did white males of that era regarding female involvement in 'serious' issues. In this instance treating Black females as equals was not a part of the group's consciousness. It became so only as women demanded full inclusion (Coleman 1982, p.19).

Two outstanding exceptions were Frederick Douglas and Martin Delaney. Douglas did not see the how a battle for the vote could be fought if women and men were not in the struggle. Douglas also often supported white women and spoke at their conventions; he was the first man of any color to publicly advocate woman suffrage (Terborg-Penn 2000). Also important to note is that black women dealt with sexism very differently in the black community than in the white. Black women became somewhat equal to black men, especially at political conventions. This could perhaps be because of the presence of Douglas and Delaney as Willie Mae Coleman explains:

The first sign of trouble surfaced in 1848 in Cleveland, Ohio at the National Convention of Colored Freedmen. Although women had been invited to the meeting it apparently never occurred to anyone that they might wish to participate. When the issue emerged the business committee refused to present the matter to the assembly. Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass and a lone black woman refused to allow the matter to be shelved. After considerable discussion, it was agreed that Black women could participate since they could be classified as 'persons.' A few months later, in preparation of another Black convention in

Philadelphia, Frederick Douglass announced that the meeting was open to women, both Black and white (1982, p.19).

Many black women developed a unique consciousness that has carried over to the present time because they were aware of their status as black women and they understood how sex and race played an important role in their oppression (Davis 1981). The debate raged over who would get the right to vote, women or black men. Where did that leave black women? Both black men and women would have to be awarded the vote in order for black women to have that right. Black women were unique in that they combined the argument for suffrage and for civil rights for all black people. Black women suffragists had a vision that was emancipatory for *all* people.

Black suffragist Anna Julia Cooper also urged suffragists to be loyal to the movement's broadest vision. She judged that the women's movement was of great moral significance because it was 'an embodiment, if its pioneers could only realize it, of universal good.' Cooper was convinced that when race, color, sex, and condition no longer nullified a person's inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, 'then woman's lesson is taught and woman's cause is won-not the white woman nor the black woman nor the red woman, but the cause of every man or woman who has writhed silently under a mighty wrong.' Cooper believed that white women's rights of all other human beings. Any tactic that obscured that link diminished the moral force of the woman suffrage movement (Andolsen 2000, p.130-131).

While black women were searching for a vision to free all people in the late 1800s, many white women were pushing an agenda that would benefit only them. Some white women began to side with white supremacist politicians out of political expediency (Smith 1998). The white women who sided with racist politicians appeared to no longer care about the people they fought for during abolition. They wanted the vote. White women became extremely classist and racist; one famous example is Susan B. Anthony (Davis 1981).

The number of women in the suffrage organizations increased toward the end of the century, but the movement continued to recruit only middle-class women who shared their husband's fears that huge numbers of poor immigrants-Irish, Italian, and Eastern European-would weaken the political power of established classes. The women turned to a narrow and vicious, but persuasive, argument of expedience: that it was insulting to them, educated and true Americans, that ignorant, low-born foreigners should be able to vote while they could not; that if they were given the vote, the number of true Americans would be doubled and the forces of law and order strengthened (Brown & Seitz 1970, p.17).

One suffrage advocate many white women and men sided with after the Civil War was Henry Blackwell. He tried to encourage men to pass the amendment for women suffrage. He had a very detailed logic that was often recited and circulated throughout the country: "He [Henry Blackwell] advised them [men of the North and South] to 'consider the result from the Southern standpoint. Your 4,000,000 of Southern white women will counterbalance your 4,000,000 of Negro men and women, and thus the political supremacy of your white race will remain unchanged.'" (Coleman 1982, p. 108).

There were some white politicians who did not follow Blackwell's prescription for white supremacy. The Republicans were largely in favor of the black man's right to vote. Having assisted in their liberation, Republicans were convinced that the black male vote was in the bag. Republicans assumed that if they assisted black men in gaining their voting rights that black men would be loyal and vote Republican. It was hard for women to sway any Republicans because woman suffrage would not benefit Republicans in the direct way that giving the vote to black men would (Andolsen 2000).

Black women were often viewed as proposing a particular threat to politicians and white supremacy. Whites could intimidate black men through terrorist tactics that were gruesomely violent such as arson, beating, maiming, castration, and lynching. "But 'chivalrous' white men sometimes drew the line at employing similar violence against

black women” (Andolsen 2000, p. 126). Stereotypes also contributed to the view of black women as a special threat. Black women were viewed as unusually aggressive and difficult. Black women posed a real threat to white supremacy, and white politicians would do what was necessary to ensure that they did not gain the power of the ballot (Andolsen 2000). It was believed that because of their “mannish” nature that large numbers of black women would vote while white women would remain at home in their proper place. It was feared that suffrage for all people would bring more blacks than whites to the polls.

Eventually in 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified and women were granted the right to vote. This struggle created a huge gap between black and white women that black women would soon not forget. Barbara Andolsen explains the shortcomings of white women during the suffrage struggle:

The moral irony of the American woman suffrage movement is that the suffragists committed the very sin for which they called others to task. They themselves lost sight of the vision of a society in which *all* adults have a voice in government. They insisted on the universality of human rights principles when they were the beneficiaries of a through going application of the principles; but, in their concern to defend their own rights, they gradually turned away from situations, in which they were called upon to demand unequivocally those same rights for black women and men... (2000, p.130).

This discussion of suffrage is best ended by a direct and brief comment by Willie Mae Coleman: “By the time that women acquired the vote in 1920, all pretense that Black and white women could work within the same organization to support a common cause had been dropped” (1982, p.104).

II. The Second Wave of Feminism

While feminism remained on some women’s minds through the 1920s, the situation changed significantly during the Great Depression. People became too

concerned with financial matters to worry about women's oppression. The only thing most people had on their minds during the 1930's was survival (Helmbold 1998). As the United States went into World War II a revival of the female spirit occurred. With a large number of men off to war, women were able to work and feel independent. The image of Rosie the Riveter encouraged women, "We Can Do It" (Tobias 1998). Women were even able to play professional baseball; Americans refused to give up their favorite pastime even if it meant watching "girls" play. The Midwest-based All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) made women wear uniforms that required the players to wear skirts, the players had to have fashionable hair-dos, and wear make-up (Cahn 1998).

After the war ended, the men returned home and the women were returned literally to the home. Rosie the Riveter propaganda ceased, and women were expected to leave the factories, quit the unions, and return to the home. Many women felt depressed and discontent because they lost their jobs. There was an attempt in American society to encourage women to believe that the wife/mother role was the ultimate path to fulfillment (Ryan 1992). Images such as Donna Reed and Mrs. June Cleaver graced the television screen, serving as instructional guides for how American women should live their lives. If women ever desired anything more, they often had to face maternal guilt and abandoned their dreams. In the 1950s, the cult of consumerism prevailed; a woman's happiness, it was insinuated, was obtained as easily as purchasing the latest home appliance to make her perfect life even easier. The nuclear family became isolated, and soon women were only communicating with their husband and children. Women were encouraged to make their families the center of existence. Interaction outside of her home

with other people was not encouraged because it could take away from a woman's duties to her family. Women read articles on decorating their homes and encouraging their husbands to build a family room. Home became the only important institution in a woman's life (Bray 1977).

Many women were not wholeheartedly buying into the myth of glorified womanhood. They began to feel restless and discontent. They developed "housewives syndrome"-physical illness, rashes, and tiredness. Doctors would often prescribe ceramic classes or Valium (Ryan 1992). Then entered Betty Friedan into American culture in the early 1960s. Betty Friedan is responsible for the resurgence of the women's movement and what led to the second wave, with the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963.

For some housewives, Friedan's revelations came not a minute too soon. Letters arrived by the hundreds, as housewives poured out their confusion, despair, self-contempt, or determination to change. Readers came from backgrounds that bore little resemblance to the college-educated housewives whose complaints filled the book. Written by hand, sometimes in crayon or pencil, some letters were barely literate, and not the products of college graduates, but these women, too knew that something was seriously wrong with their lives. They blessed Friedan, asked her for advice, described their despair, and begged advice about how to change their lives (Rosen 2000, p. 6).

The book was not perfect by any stretch of the imagination, and it received its fair share of criticism. Many critics felt the book was classist and did not speak to working women (Rosen 2000) Friedan ignored the different obstacles faced by poor women and women of color. She also made sweeping assertions that it was possible for *any* woman to find a meaningful career that paid well. Despite the book's shortcomings, it stirred things up in the minds of many women, and started making them question their prescribed roles and let them know they were not alone.

Friedan did not simply write an eye-opening book. She was also responsible for the formation of the group NOW (National Organization for Women), and is often credited for starting the second wave of feminism. She had established an underground women's movement in Washington, DC shortly after the publication of the *Feminine Mystique*. Women were risking their government jobs to improve the lives of women. Among these women were Catherine East (Women's Bureau of the Labor Department), Esther Peterson, Mary Eastwood (former member of the President's Commission), Richard Graham (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission commissioner), Sonia Pressman (an attorney in Equal Employment Opportunity Commission), Pauli Murray (legal scholar), and Martha Griffiths (congresswoman). All of them met in Friedan's hotel room during an EEOC conference in the 1960s shortly after the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*. It was hard coming to a consensus on what an organization for women would look like or if there should even be one. They knew they had to think fast because the following afternoon most of them had planes to catch, and it was not known when they would meet again together in a group. At the lunch they were very secretive and conversing on paper napkins so as not to draw attention to their table. Friedan scribbled on one of the napkins the first details of what would become NOW.

On one of those paper napkins, Friedan wrote down a name-the National Organization for Women. Its purpose, she scribbled, would be "to take the actions needed to bring women into the mainstream of American society, now" and to fight for "full equality for women, in full equal partnership with men." As they left to catch their planes, the conspirators agreed to call a formal meeting to create the new organization that fall (Rosen 2000, p.75).

NOW became official in October, 1966. The initial members were Betty Friedan and thirty-one other men and women. NOW is viewed as the forerunner of new feminism (Ware 1970). The younger generation of feminists (radical feminists are

included in this group) in the 1970s viewed NOW as militant blacks viewed the civil rights movement (Ware 1970). The typical NOW member was middle-class, employed full-time, and married. By July of 1967, there were one thousand members. Their main objective was to gain political, economic, and social equality with men. Rigidly organized like a business, NOW's main demands included the prohibition of sex discrimination, tax deductions for child care, the establishment of twenty-four hour child care centers, establishment of vocational centers for homemakers and more women in politics (Rosen 2000). Friedan formed NOW because she thought it was necessary to have an outside organization that could put pressure on the government.

By creating a feminist civil rights organization, NOW members did more than assert their independence from male-dominated liberal politics; they publicly acknowledged that liberal political culture was inadequate to address the reality of women's lives. By declaring their autonomy from a liberal government, they also freed themselves to consider the question of women's from a more radical perspective (Rosen 2000, p.75).

While Friedan was forming and organizing NOW, many people in the public and the academy were tackling the questions she raised in *The Feminine Mystique*.

Despite the fact that NOW was comprised of mostly white middle-class professionals, their work aimed to benefit poor and working class women. NOW demanded that the job listings in the classified advertisements not be segregated by sex. This was extremely helpful to those working class women who were trying to break into blue-collar work that paid far more than the jobs listed under female. NOW also waged a successful campaign against the airline companies for their discriminatory acts. As a result, women did not have to quit being stewardesses when they married or turned thirty-two. The EEOC was pushed to enforce Title VII, which guaranteed that impoverished women receive equal attention and that childcare would become tax deductible.

This organization would not remain the most powerful feminist force around. NOW would come to be viewed as oppressive, as Celenstine Ware states: "In effect, the directors of NOW had become the 'men' of the movement, acting as always to define, control and oppress those beneath them" (1970, p.24). The accounts of the different groups of feminists and their origins are as varied as the groups themselves. There were three major groups that made up the "second wave" of the women's movement: working class women, middle class married women, and students. Working class women were most concerned with economic issues, guaranteed employment, fair wages, elimination of job discrimination, and childcare. Married middle-class women were searching for ways to bring more variety to their limited lives. Psychological mutilation and inferiority complexes oppressed them. They desired careers; they were educated women and were sick of living vicariously through their husbands and children, their only contact with the outside world. The third group was the students. These women were unmarried, middle-class, and had a great fear of being like their mothers. They loathed the sexual exploitation of women and often did not desire marriage. They sought to rebel against society and refused to package and sell themselves to the male market (Ware 1970).

There were also different labels that women used to designate how radical or reformist they were. The distinction included a difference between rights and liberation. Jo Freeman explains: "Early descriptions of the movement called the two branches 'women's rights' and 'women's liberation.' The implication was that those espousing women's liberation was more radical than those seeking merely women's rights. However, the primary difference was structure and style" (1998, p.650). Often the older generation of feminists, like those who participated in NOW, were more interested in

rights where as the students were more interested in liberation. If you were young it was hip to be into liberation, not rights, as Ruth Rosen's quote from Meredith Fax illustrates:

My friends and I thought of NOW as an organization for people our mother's age. We were movement girls, not career women; NOW's demands and organizational style weren't radical enough for us. We wanted to build a just society, not get a bigger slice of the pie. Besides, we were generational secretaries; we didn't trust anybody over the age of thirty (2000, p.84).

Celenstine Ware has a different account of the divisions of the women's movement (1970). By 1968, the women's movement existed in three groups: NOW, women's liberation movement, and the radical feminists. This division was largely attributable to equality issues within the movement. NOW was viewed by many as copying the power structure that it sought to eradicate (Ware 1970).

Many younger women who were associated with NOW decided to branch off from the organization. The move away from NOW occurred in large numbers in New York City. It is important to note that the feminist activity in New York because the majority of the founding members and promoters of radical feminists were there (Ware 1970). For instance, radical feminist and former NOW New York president, Ti-Grace Atkinson, led many dissenters and formed the October 17th Movement in 1968. This group came to be known as the FEMINISTS. They had a different political analysis from NOW; they were radical feminists. Ware explains the difference: "NOW differs from radical feminism because it does not wish to abolish power. NOW's goals are in the classic tradition of political groups, it wishes to shift the power from those who have it to those who don't: from men to women. NOW "wants to get women into positions of power" (1970, p.121). To join the FEMINISTS, one had to read their packet that listed

their vision and goals. One could only join if they agreed with everything outlined in the packet.

Finding NOW oppressive, the FEMINISTS sought a totally different organizational style. They did not want one woman becoming too powerful or hegemonic, so they adopted a system of rotating officers and rotating all duties. There were two types of duties, creative and routine. Routine duties included things like typing, answering the phone, and stuffing envelopes. Creative duties included lectures, press conferences, writing position papers, and giving television and radio interviews. Ware explains the rationale behind the FEMINISTS' system: "The belief that the permanent concentration of power in any segment of a group leads to preponderant influence or authority of that segment and thus to the oppression of others is the basic tenet of their philosophy" (1970, p. 26). FEMINISTS wanted to throw out male models of organization and wanted to discourage the presence of "status" in the women's movement. Rotating leaders was viewed as a survival mechanism. Many women could do the job, and if individual women were arrested the FEMINISTS would not dissolve without their leader.

They did not, however, live up to their utopian dream of creating a non-hegemonic group; they in fact became a super structure. Members were disciplined if they did not agree with policies. Attending meetings and protest demonstrations were compulsory. Members could be expelled by a two-thirds vote. FEMINISTS came to be seen by their members and other feminists as another NOW; by the fall of 1969 the FEMINISTS were left with only five members (Ware 1970).

Another prominent group based in New York was NYRW (New York Radical Women). They became too large to be productive so they divided into groups One, Two,

and Three. This had to occur because NYRW's meetings were too large to be constructive and consciousness-raising sessions (the method preferred by most feminists at the time) were greatly hindered. Personality conflicts were exploding as well as political conflicts. There were also a few heads that were getting too big and they needed to be deflated before they took over the movement. While the split was necessary to ensure the survival of the group, there were some negative effects. There was a communication breakdown among the three groups, but even this could be viewed as positive in the long run. The groups became more focused and centralized. Group Two was the most cohesive and came to be known as the REDSTOCKINGS.

The REDSTOCKINGS was the most influential shaper of radical feminism (Ware 1970). Shulamith Firestone and Ellen Willis formed this group. The name was a play off the bluestockings of the 1920s. They were women who encroached on the male world of literature and knowledge; they were ridiculed for being unnatural for being interested in men's pursuits (Ware 1970).

The REDSTOCKINGS formed a strong separatist stance as a result of the sexist treatment they received from the New Left at the anti-inaugural demonstration. Their claim to feminist fame came in 1969 when they intruded on abortion reform hearings. They invaded the hearing. The REDSTOCKINGS followed the invasion by public testimonies of women who had had abortions. They developed a strong prowoman line and viewed sisterhood as the crux of the movement.

Members of FEMINISTS and REDSTOCKINGS united to form NEW YORK RADICAL FEMINISTS on December 5, 1969. They combined forces to meet the needs of women that were not being met by individual groups. They founded the Stanton-

Anthony Brigade that became loosely structured groups of fifteen, known as the Sister System. The Sister System kept them connected.

Those women, who were not as radical as the many New York groups, were simply known as women's libbers. Celenstine Ware explains this difference:

Women's liberation is a phrase used for myriad political positions short of radical feminism: Its members are women who have joined the movement for social, economic, and political equality for women but who do not envision revolutionary changes in society in order to gain these, not the annihilation of sex roles or of marriage as an institution" (1970, p.46).

Different from radical feminists but yet different from women libbers were women who belonged to a small group called WITCH (Women's International Conspiracy from Hell). These women were the politicos of NYRW who broke away to form their own group in the fall of 1968. They, too, were committed to radical change. Hippies were attracted to this group. They were dispersed in different cities across the United States. Each chapter of WITCH had its own coven but none of them were associated with one another (Ware 1970).

Women around the nation came to their feminist consciousness by traveling on different paths. The largest group of feminists came from the New Left, "movement girls." During the 1960s the New Left was also simply known as the Movement. Ruth Rosen explains what the Movement was and why women left:

"The movement," as it came to be called, not only included the civil rights, student, and antiwar movements, but also a network of friendships, sexual partners, spouses, and communal living arrangements in which the alienated daughters of the fifties had taken refuge. For many young women, it would be an agonizing decision to leave this political community. It meant rupturing years of personal ties to a subculture that, at its most idealistic moments, saw itself as the redeemer of a nation poisoned by racism, materialism, and imperialism. What fueled their exodus was the ridicule and humiliation they experienced from men in the civil rights movement and then in the New Left and antiwar movements who could not-or would not-understand the women's liberation movement would

expand the very definition of democracy. What made it possible was that many of these movements had already begun a downward spiral into self-destruction (2000, p.94-95).

Celestine Ware states, “Women activists came full circle in the shock of recognizing that they had been the ‘house niggers’ in the New Left” (1970, p.16). It was time for women of the Left to ask the “woman question.” The younger generation of women had found their *Feminine Mystique* with the writing of the SDS memo, entitled “A Kind of Memo.” The authors of “The Memo” were never made clear, it spoke for all movement women were tired of flagrant sexism in the New Left. “The Memo” “...captured the unarticulated simmering resentments of young activist women and sparked serious soul-searching among them” (Rosen 2000, p.115).

The New Left was less progressive on the woman question than the old Left. The woman question was often viewed as bourgeois by members of the old Left, many of whom thought that such a question should be handled after the revolution. But at least the old Left did address and discuss women’s issues. In contrast, the New Left was extremely patriarchal in nature and conduct. A woman’s power in the Left depended on her relationship with a man; a woman may receive special status but never credibility. Intellectual competition was fierce in the New Left, and women were often ignored as unworthy opponents. Ruth Rosen explains:

Nanci Hollander, a SDS activist then married to Todd Gitlin, president of SDS in 1963, noticed that whenever a woman began to speak, “the men suddenly stretched, and chattered among themselves.” Women got the message: what they had to say was, by definition, of *so* little importance that it could be ignored...It was the same wherever the New Left met. Anne Weills, then married to Robert Scheer, the editor of the leftist magazine *Ramparts*, also felt invisible at Bay Area movement meetings. “Even if you said it well,” she recalled, “half the time people would ignore you. I’d think, ‘I’m not saying it well. I’m not saying it loud enough.’ Finally, I’d get to say something. Complete Silence. A few

minutes later, a man would get up and say the same thing. Suddenly the room became electrified. Invisibility. That's what was so painful (2000, pp.117-118).

Ruth Rosen offers Todd Gitlin's acknowledgment of sexism in the New Left:

"The SDS Old Guard," Todd Gitlin later conceded, "was essentially a young boys' network...Men sought [women] out, recruited them, took them seriously, honored their intelligence-then subtly demoted them to girlfriends, wives, note-takers, coffee makers... Ambition, expected in a man, looked suspiciously like ball-busting to the male eye. An aggressive style, which pass so acceptably virile in a man, sounded 'bitchy in a woman'" (2000, p.118).

"The Memo" was in large part the spark that New Left women needed to recognize that sex discrimination was an issue that needed to be dealt with. Women of the Left were divided and some argued that perhaps sex roles did not need to be challenged because they were natural. Others felt themselves become feminists that day: "As her irritation grew, [Barbara] Haber found herself regretting that she had not joined the women's group. In front of approximately twenty or so men and remaining women, she heard herself defending women's rights to equality with men. 'At that moment,' she recalled, 'I knew I had become a feminist'" (Rosen 2000, p.122).

The great schism that existed between women on the Left was most apparent between who would become feminists and politicians. Both recognized women's oppression, but the two groups were working from two very different political ideological viewpoints. The feminists abandoned the New Left to form radical women's liberation groups, while many of politicians choose to remain in the New Left. Much of their disagreement arose out of whom they defined as the oppressor. The politicians viewed capitalism as the main oppressor. While the feminists viewed capitalism as part of the problem, the main hegemonic force holding women down was seen as male supremacy. Because men came to be seen as the main source of oppression, it was necessary for the

feminists to do work separate from men if they were to ever gain liberation. The politicians stayed because they felt that women would never be free if the system of capitalism was still in place; they had the “after the revolutionary” mentality of the old Left. Feminists were demanding liberation now; men would never free women.

An all-women’s group met in the late 1960s to discuss “The Memo” and denied men entrance into the group or discussion. These women began laying the foundation for radical feminism. Shortly after this meeting typewritten notes were sent out describing the women-only discussion.

The event was historic. It was the first time that women denied men entrance into their discussion in the Left, instead of vice-versa. Being alone together, women were able to explore their own dreams and aspirations that were independent of men. This moment of women rallying around shared oppression promoted the formation of a positive female identity. It was the beginning of women of the Left finding their agency. By the end of the night, “Nancy Hollander remembered thinking, ‘We’ve just started a women’s movement’” (Rosen 2000, p.124).

Men of the Left did not support the women’s movement or view the movement as necessary. Echols postulates why Movement men may have been resistant to women’s liberation:

Movement men were not anxious to divest themselves of male privilege. The fight against male supremacy was considerably less abstract than the struggles against racism, in which white radicals could win points by reciting Panther rhetoric. Fighting sexism required that men make tangible changes in their lives, such as sharing the housework (1989, p.135).

Movement men were often rude to feminists and showed absolutely no respect for women. One of the worst events was the anti-inaugural demonstration in Washington,

D.C., in January, 1969. At the event feminists were scheduled to talk about women's issues. During the rally men from Left in the audience began yelling, "Take it off" and "Take her off stage and fuck her!" (Gitlin 1993). At another rally in the late 1960s at the University of North Carolina, Movement men went so far as to urinate on feminists as they walked past them. Echols provides examples of the Movement's blatant sexism:

Most Movement men trivialized, patronized, or ridiculed women's liberation activists. Some men, like the Berkley leader who declared, "let them eat cock!" were actively hostile. As late as spring 1969 consciousness about sexism was still so low that one SDS chapter published a pamphlet which advised other activists, "the system is like a woman; you've got to fuck it to make it change" (1989, p.120).

Women also gained invaluable experience from working with civil rights activists. Young white women in the segregated South learned many ideals, values, and strategies from these black activists. The most valuable lessons were learned by being a member of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC); this organization taught other movements that you have to put bodies on the line to get results. SNCC promoted the ideals of democracy and exposed white women to participatory democracy. If it were necessary to hold a meeting all night then that is how long the meeting would last.

White women's experiences in the South were also very liberating because it allowed women to break the conventional roles of sex and race. Women were also provided unique job opportunities that other women of the 1960's would not have had access to. White women were also exposed to numerous examples of extraordinary black women:

In small communities across the South, white SNCC women observed the remarkable clout black women wielded in their churches and civic organizations. Dorothy Birlage was certain that these local black women who organized church

meetings for civil rights work, helped with voter registration, and risked their lives by housing SNCC workers “inspired me to think that women could do anything” (Rosen 2000, p. 101).

Some women that eventually became involved in the women’s movement were also Beats at one time. The Beats were greatly influenced by Alan Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac. These two men were the great shapers of Bohemian life. The culture was very appealing to many would-be feminists. It allowed them to escape the conventional roles for women. This subculture was not free of sexism, either, and as time passed women began to see it. Rosen cites Joyce Johnson (girlfriend of Kerouac): “[Beat men] tried to avoid actual employment for as long as possible and by whatever means. But it was all right for women to go out and earn wages, since they had no important creative endeavors to be distracted from. The women didn’t mind, or, if they did, they never said-not until years later” (2000, p.50).

Once women began organizing to end their oppression, they began making noise all around the United States. Even though there were different groups of feminism, women would usually still come together to stage a media campaign or participate in protests. An infamous protest during this period was the 1968 Miss America Pageant protest. It was led by NYRW and borrowed the language and tactics were borrowed from the Left. There were repressive measures taken, such as taunting the feminists, the issuing of “Dear Ugly” letters from the public, and even police surveillance of the meetings of NYRW that followed the protest. A 1969 convention entitled “Congress to Unite Women” also brought many feminist groups together. The generational differences proved to be too great at times between NOW and radical feminists. At the Congress to Unite Women, NOW tried to gather up all the groups from the women’s movement.

NOW members were horrified at younger women's behavior. They were cutting their hair, not shaving their legs, refusing to wear make-up and espousing man-hating rhetoric. NOW disagreed with these tactics because they sought to make legal changes, not personal ones. Young women saw NOW members as stuffy and conservative. Young women felt their acts of rebellion were very effective politically; they saw the personal as a site of political protest, hence the expression the personal is political (Ware 1970).

It was at events and demonstrations like these that the racism in the women's movement became apparent. For instance, at the Congress to Unite Women many black women were offended by white women's white naiveté. There was a debate over a tracking device that public school systems were thinking of using. This tracking device would channel students according to their abilities. White women heavily supported the tracking device, thinking that it would ensure that the "good" students would not be mixed up with the "bad" students. The division occurred when black women questioned the racial composition of the separate tracks and also demanded to know how "good" and "bad" students were defined (Ware 1970).

Another example of an event that had racist undertones was the Lake Villa Conference that occurred in 1968. Elizabeth Sutherland (NYRW member) wanted to contact Kathleen Cleaver (the Communications secretary for the Black Panthers) to attend to conference. Sutherland felt that the conference needed to include groups of radical women of color. She was met with much opposition from coordinators of the conference. Echols describes this resistance: "Interestingly, women from D.C. resisted making such overtures on the grounds that militant black women 'think [women's liberation] is a pile of shit'" (1989, p.105). Other women thought that black women's

presence would be counterproductive because black women would harass them for being white and middle class. Echols provides Ann Snitow's explanation:

Having experience with a black welfare group that had white women in it, I know that black militant women rule the day. They set the tone and they manage to completely cow white women in welfare organizations. I've seen it time and time again. I understand the problem. But they hold the cards on oppression...and they let white women know it. I don't want to go to a conference and hear a black militant woman tell me she is more oppressed and what I am going to do about it (1989, p.105).

Other women said black women could attend the conference only if their ideas were consistent with white feminists. No black women who supported Black Nationalism should be allowed because of the group's sexist undertones. The women planning the conference did manage to reach a consensus that the women's movement should not be all white. It was suggested that black radical women be contacted and then a conference could be held specifically pertaining to black women and women's liberation. No such conference ever materialized (Rosen 2000).

III. Emergence of Black Feminism

Black women would not remain silenced for long. Held down by white women's racism and black men's sexism, black women formed a separate feminist group in the mid-1970s, referred to simply as Black Feminism. Black women were aware of chauvinism in the black nationalistic movements. Shouts of "Black Power" too often meant claiming masculine privileges that had been denied to black men by white society. Angela Davis and Kathleen Cleaver were often cited as domineering black women who were out to castrate black men and steal their manhood (Echols 1989). Frances Beale "...pointed out that while the black militant male was quick to renounce many white cultural values, 'when it comes to women he seems to take his guidelines from the pages

of *Ladies Home Journal*”(Echols 1989, p.107). Black militants, men and women alike often viewed Black feminists as suspect.

Black women were expected to cater to black men’s every need in the Black Power movement. Michelle Wallace said, “...the ‘new Blackness’ was fast becoming the new slavery for sisters” (1982, p.5). Women in the Black Power movement was expected to serve men, look good, and produce children for the cause. Again Michelle Wallace describes the sexism of Black Power:

No I wasn’t to go to the beauty parlor but yes I was to spend hours controlling my hair. No I wasn’t to flirt with or take shit off white men but yes I was to sleep with and take unending shit off Black men. No I wasn’t to watch television or read Vogue or Ladies Home Journal but yes I should keep my mouth shut. I would still have to iron, sew, cook, and have babies (1982, p.6).

Black lesbians also felt afraid and shunned by the community and sought refuge with women like themselves. A flyer from a meeting of a Black liberation group in December of 1981 illustrates the horrific homophobia in the movement:

Revolutionary nationalists and genuine communists cannot uphold homosexuality in the leadership of the Black Liberation Movement nor uphold it as a correct practice. Homosexuality is a genocidal practice...Homosexuality does not produce children. Homosexuality does not birth new warriors for liberation...homosexuality cannot be upheld as correct or revolutionary practice...The practice of homosexuality is an accelerating threat to our survival as a people and as a nation (Clarke 1983, p.197-198).

Lesbians were viewed as race traitors and obstructions to the cause. Black lesbians would not build up a black man and worship him, nor would she bear his children. One was brave to admit she was a black lesbian in the presence of a member of the militant movement. Black feminism emerged as a space where black women could be comfortable with their sexuality and the politics of their choices and also with their race.

Black feminism allowed black lesbians a space where they could tackle all of their oppressions at once (Clarke 1983).

Despite blatant sexism and homophobia, many black women chose to remain in the black nationalistic movements. The reluctance of mainly black women to leave the black liberation movement or merely to remain and become feminists can be attributed to a combination of reasons. Often it was a combination a fear of being labeled a race traitor and black women's general animosity towards white women. Some black women did encourage each other to consider black feminism. Kay Lindsey even warned black women to investigate feminism:

As the movement toward the liberation of women grows, the Black woman will find herself, if she is at all sensitive to the issues of feminism, in a serious dilemma. For the Black movement is primarily concerned with the liberation of Blacks as a class and does not promote women's liberation as a priority. Indeed, the movement is for the most part spearheaded by males. The feminist movement, on the other hand is concerned with the oppression of women as a class, but is almost composed of white females. Thus the Black woman finds herself on the outside of both political entities, in spite of the fact that she is the object of both forms of oppression (1970, p.85).

Lindsey was aware of the need for black women in both the black liberation movement and the women's liberation movement. They offered unique perspectives as people who are fighting racism and sexism simultaneously. But as her account reveals, she believed it was beneficial and necessary for black women to organize independently.

There was often a clash between black and white women when trying to organize because their needs and agendas were often so different. While white feminists wanted equal jobs with men, black women would reply, "what good is job equity if you have no job?" Job equity is useless if one does not have a job. White feminists wanted to increase the number of police officers in neighborhoods to deter violence against women.

Black women would be opposed to this because police brutality was common in their communities and they would not want to be responsible for getting more black men beaten, unjustly arrested, or killed. White feminists demanded the right to affordable and safe abortions, while black women were concerned with gaining basic health care services. Also, many women were haunted by the history of being subjected to forced sterilization and being guinea pigs for questionable contraceptives. White women felt the need to take a separatist stance, while black women saw their alliance with black men as necessary to their survival and the survival of their community (Combahee River Collective 1974, quoted in 1995).

Considering all these differences and the prevalence of racism, many black women felt it was necessary to form their own separate feminist group. They focused on race *and* sex, providing for themselves the movement that the black liberation and women's movement could not provide. Barbara Smith explains the unique nature of black feminism: "What most clearly distinguishes Black feminism from the politics of mainstream European American feminism is its focus on the simultaneity of oppressions that affect Black and other women of color, especially racism, sexism, class oppression, and homophobia" (1998, p. 202). To organize and focus their energy most effectively, black feminists in New York founded the National Black Feminist Organization in 1973. This historic day in black feminism became the point of organization for a much larger movement. The only goal in NBFO's office was to bond and share histories with one another. It was the media that really encouraged black women to form the organization because they always saw white faces representing the movement. At the end of the meeting, the women came to the conclusion that a separate organization needed to be

formed that could deal with the special needs of black women, and that this organization should put pressure on both the women's and black liberation movement to reevaluate some of their attitudes and practices. Their first conference shortly after the meeting drew hundreds of women from all around the country. Black feminist writers and theorists Alice Walker, Ntozake Shange, and Michelle Wallace sparked awareness and debates about sexism and sexual politics in the black community.

The NFBO statement of purpose was powerful. Mark Hickman cites a section of the statement to illustrate how black feminists were able to articulate their oppression and devaluation so concisely and boldly:

Black women have suffered cruelly in this society from living the phenomenon of being black and female, in a country that is racist and sexist... We were seen as breeders by the master; despised and historically polarized from/by the master's wife; and looked upon as castrators by our lovers and husbands. The black woman had to be strong, yet we are prosecuted for having survived. We have been called 'matriarchs' by the white racists and black nationalists; we have had virtually no positive self-images to validate our existence... It has been hard for black women to emerge from the myriad of distorted images that have portrayed us as grinning Beulahs, castrating Sapphires, and pancake box Jemimas (1989, p.np)

In 1977, the monumental formation of the Combahee River Collective occurred. The members of the collective were grassroots feminists from Boston who were also affiliated with NBFO. They wrote a manifesto that stated the specifics of black feminism and cleared up any doubts about the legitimacy of black feminism. Their main focus was on the intersectionality of oppression. It was a call for sisterhood and for that to occur homophobia had to be eradicated. The eradication would hopefully lead to more black women becoming feminists. Often black women were reluctant to join women's movements or label themselves a feminist for fear of being called a lesbian (Clarke 1983).

By 1980, black feminists' autonomous organizing began to influence the women's movement. White women were urged to eradicate racism. Black feminism successfully changed white women's minds about what *women's* issues were. The integration of feminist organizations began to occur and more black women and women of color shared leadership positions with white women, especially in the academy with the development of black women's studies (Guy-Sheftall 2000).

As the second wave stretched into the early eighties, the feminist movement was greeted with a grim face. There were women who ever complained that the women's movement did more harm than good; now women were responsible for family and career. Many women were also left defeated and broken over the loss of the ERA. To the public eye it appeared as though there was no women's movement (Rosen 2000).

The women's movement was actually changed and grew through the eighties. The movement was broader and there were different subgroups emerging from the women's movement. There was shift in focus in many of the groups from the sixties and seventies. NOW was focused more on politics and less on demonstrations. Abortion replaced the ERA as the hot topic, and legislation was viewed as more important than ever. The women's movement also became more global and women began to focus on those outside of the United States' borders. Ecofeminism blossomed and fueled environmental interest (King 1998). Global feminism was in full swing as many women participated in the UN Decade for Women (Navarro 1998).

Black feminism continued to thrive in the eighties, along with other feminists of color. Groundbreaking books were published, such as *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, *All the women are white*, *All the blacks are men*,

but some of us are brave, and *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*. And finally there was the development of the Kitchen Table Women of Color Press founded by Audre Lorde, Cherrie Moraga, Hattie Gosset Myrna Bain and Barbara Smith in 1981.

What I have discussed above will be illustrated by the cluster analysis in Chapter Three. The terms “oppression,” “feminism,” and “sisterhood” are discussed in general and in a close analysis of the radical feminist document *Toward a Female Liberation Movement* and the black feminist document *A Black Feminist Statement*. The history provided in this chapter will be reflected in the analysis.

CHAPTER THREE

In this chapter I will discuss the results of the cluster criticism. The discourse used for this analysis dates from the late 1960's through the late 1980's; I am looking at a specific time frame of the second wave and not the evolution of feminism. First, the cluster analysis of the discourse is presented. And the end of the chapter is a detailed look at two representative documents from each group of feminists. The radical liberal feminist document is *Toward a Female Liberation Movement* (1968) authored by Judith Brown and Beverly Jones. The black feminist document is *A Black Feminist Statement* (1977) authored by a group of black feminists known as the Combahee River Collective.

When doing the cluster analysis, I was searching for key terms that appeared in both the radical feminists' and black feminists' discourse. Four terms emerged: *oppression*, *feminism*, *liberation*, and *sisterhood*. I will discuss them comparatively so the reader can more easily grasp the contradictions and differences in how these two groups of feminists defined key terms. The differences in definition clearly reflect how dissimilar the two groups of feminists' political agendas were. It is because of these different agendas that these two groups found it difficult, if not impossible to do political work together.

“OPPRESSION”

RADICAL FEMINISTS

- **SEXISM AND PATRIARCHAL OPPRESSION**

As discussed in Chapter Two, many white women experienced an awakening during the late 1960's. Involvement with male dominated social movement organizations led white women to disband from the New Left and form women-centered alliances that would seek women's liberation before pursuing any other political goals. Consciousness-

raising groups became very popular. Women found their participation in consciousness raising groups to be very cathartic and empowering. These groups consisted of several women who were preferably strangers. They would divulge stories of experienced sexism. Through these groups they would discuss what was going on in their lives, make connections, form bonds, and actively find ways to resist their own oppression (Bray 1977). The REDSTOCKING MANIFESTO (1969) expressed how women's lives were the product of sexism and how discussion made it possible for them to grasp and combat their oppression: "We regard our personal experience, and our feelings about that experience, as the basis for an analysis of our common situation. We cannot rely on existing ideologies, as they are products of male supremacist culture. We question every generalization and accept none that are not confirmed by our existence" (1969, quoted in 2000, p.224). The consciousness-raising groups had a limited time span and lasted mostly from the late 1960's through the early 1970's (Hogeland 1998).

Once aware of their oppression, life for many women was changed forever. Recall from Chapter Two, many women fled from the New Left to find sanctuary in feminist organizations. Even though the New Left had become like home to many of these women they felt compelled to end women's oppression and were clearly informed that this would not happen in the New Left. Consciousness-raising provided this awakening for them, but the reason it became obsolete was because many women began to feel as though they were not doing anything actively to end their oppression (Rosen 2000). There had to be more than just talk. The importance of the consciousness-raising groups should never be taken lightly because it is in these groups that women discovered that as individuals and as a minority they were indeed oppressed.

The majority of radical feminists that I reviewed saw sexism as the only form of oppression. Radical feminists viewed the abolishment of sexism as the main focus of feminist political work. The REDSTOCKING MANIFESTO illustrated this conviction:

Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination. All other forms of exploitation and oppression (racism, capitalism, imperialism ect.) are extensions of male supremacy: men dominate women, a few men dominate the rest. All power structures throughout history have been male-dominated and male-orientated. Men have controlled all political, economic and cultural institutions and back up this control with physical force. They have used their power to keep women in an inferior position. All *men* receive economic, sexual, and psychological benefits from male supremacy. All *men* have oppressed women (1969, quoted in 2000, p. 223).

REDSTOCKING MAINIFESTO also claimed that every relationship between a man and women would possess that power dynamic of oppressor and oppressed:

Because we have lived so intimately with our oppressors, in isolation from each other, we have been kept from seeing our personal suffering as a political condition. This creates the illusion that a woman's relationship with her man is a matter of interplay between two unique personalities, and can be worked out individually. In reality, every relationship is a *class* relationship, and the conflicts between individual men and women are *political* conflicts that can only be solved collectively (1969, quoted in 2000, p.223)

Vivian Gornik stated that in essence *all* men should be viewed as oppressors: "When the feminist comes to see her life in this light, it is inevitable that she should see men- all men, in remote places of power as well as the men in her immediate life- as agents of her victimization" (1978, p.40). Roxanne Dunbar also expressed the same sentiments of Gornik by suggesting all men enjoy and exercise patriarchy: "Further, we understand that all men are our policemen, and no organized police force is necessary at this time to keep us in our places. All men enjoy male supremacy and take advantage of it to a greater or lesser degree depending on their position in the masculine hierarchy of power" (1970, p.479).

Roxanne Dunbar stated, “We have all identified a system of oppression-Sexism” (1970, p.479). Joreen (also known as Jo Freeman) explained how radical feminists viewed sexism as the only form of oppression because women had no autonomy and were property of men: “In many states, a woman’s income and property are under the control of her husband. In most states she cannot use her maiden name if he should object or maintain a separate domicile for tax and voting purposes” (1970, p.43). Karen Sacks described women as wards of men: “But women are oppressed, treated as wards of men, in nonclass as well as class societies” (1970, p.455).

For radical feminists I reviewed everything revolved around sexism. With any area of their lives where they were limited in some way, radical feminists could construct logical arguments to illustrate how men and sexist oppression were at the source. Most radical feminists were educated white women and had the means to establish themselves independently of men and they were pushing to have those final barriers removed. If women were going to be happy and self-sufficient they had to gain equality with men as Joreen explains, “With increased prosperity, increased education, and increased freedom from unplanned pregnancies women have been moving out of the home and into the world in greater and greater numbers. Men have welcomed them, but only if they maintain their place as auxiliaries to men” (1970, p.42). REDSTOCKING MANIFESTO also expressed that women served as auxiliaries and as objects of enhancement: “We are exploited as sex objects, breeders, domestic servants, and cheap labor. We are considered inferior beings, whose only purpose is to enhance men’s lives” (1969, quoted in 2000, p.223).

- **BEAUTY STANDARDS**

Beauty standards were seen as a tool of oppression to keep women from gaining liberation and ensuring women maintain their prescribed societal roles. Beauty standards are ideals imposed on women and they mainly function through advertisements and popular culture. Beauty standards range from prescription for body type, hair and race, as well as the possessing the “tools” (such as make-up, fashion clothing, and hair products) to obtain and maintain beauty standards to the best of a woman’s capability (Kirk & Okazawa-Rey 1998). The stereotypes that fell into line with beauty standards during the second wave were that women should have had long hair, painted finger and toe nails, wear high heeled shoes and dresses, and always look presentable when leaving the home or while staying in the home for that matter, every day of her life.

From the late 1960s through the 1970s, radical feminists viewed the personal as political, meaning that what a woman did personally was a political action and her actions would reflect her political beliefs. Recall from Chapter Two the horror Betty Friedan felt at the sight of women in men shoes who cut each other’s hair to the scalp and refused to shave or pluck any of the hair on their bodies (Ware 1970). These refusals and unconventional acts were subversive and empowering to radical feminists.

There was a myth of what “true womanhood” looked like for women in American society. This myth prescribed that women have long hair, make-up, skirts, and shaved legs and underarms. Radical feminists no longer wanted to be dolls. Rosalyn Baxandall described bras, make-up, and eyelash and hair curlers as “torture devices” (1996). Radical feminists did not want to work so hard to just be presentable to society. They redefined how a woman should and could look and behave. Dana Densmore discussed

this resistance to beauty standards: “We insisted on rejecting every prescriptive description of how we must look, act speak, or think if we are to be ‘true women’” (1998, p. 86). Many radical feminists opted instead for the “natural” look. They refused to wear makeup and high heeled shoes. There was also a lot of discussion about why women were doing all of this work and who it benefited. Men did not have to go through the “torture” of cosmetics and uncomfortable shoes and neither should women. Radical feminists no longer wanted women to be viewed as “pretty packages” for men (Ware 1970).

• **STRUCTURE OF THE NUCLEAR FAMILY**

Radical feminists feared becoming like their mothers and being forced to live the same existence of the housewife (Rosen 2000). The thought of being a mother and wife was abhorred by many radical feminists. Life as a housewife was equated with a life of despair. Beverly Jones dissected the life of housewife and revealed her isolation and misery:

She confesses her loneliness, her dependence, her mental agony, and they discuss her problem. Her problem. Her problem, as though it were some genetic defect, some personal shortcoming, some inscrutable psychosis. Now he can comfort her, avowing how he understands how she must feel, he only wishes there was something he could do to help (1970, p. 51).

Radical feminists viewed the structure of the nuclear family as patriarchy’s great trick and secret to maintaining dominance and control over women’s lives. Celenstine Ware explained how there could be no nuclear family if there is to be female autonomy: “If women are to accomplish their self-development, all institutions that prevent this realization must be eliminated. Men define women as child-bearers. The maintenance of family life, with the wife-mother as all-loving, all giving minister to the needs of husband

and children, depends on women's identification of their desires and needs with the desires and needs of others (1970, p.28)."

Lucinda Cisler's theory of how women cannot be viewed as autonomous individuals only as entities that exist in relation to men and children, coincides with Ware's wishes to abolish the nuclear family: "Because women have wombs and bear children, and because technical control of the reproductive function has always been imperfect-as it still is today-society has ultimately defined woman as a childbearer-that is, as she relates to children and to men, rather than as an individual" (1970, p.246). Robin Morgan also felt that women were powerless in the nuclear structure because of their dependency on men: "One thing does seem clearer as time goes on: the nuclear family unit is oppressive to women. The woman is forced into a totally dependent position, paying for her keep with an enormous amount of emotional and physical labor which is not even considered work" (1970, p.xxxii).

Natalie Shainess asserted that women's childbearing capabilities has rendered her as separate from men in society's eyes: "Women have existed as a subgroup, a subculture since their dyadic mother-child family structure altered to include men as husband and father, in a social as well as biological sense" (1970, p.233). This separation of woman from man was a dangerous one for women. American society defined human as man; therefore to be truly human and to be capable of doing all that humans possess the intellect and ability to do, one must essentially be a man.

Gloria Steinem asserted that, "The truth is that most American children seem to be suffering from too much Mother, and too little Father" (1970, quoted in 1995, p. 820) and that women are made to feel that "...raising children is their only function..." (1972,

quoted in 1983, p.122). Because women were socialized to believe that being a mother and housewife is “natural,” desiring anything more was selfish and unnatural. Joreens explained how motherhood and career are pitted against one another: “A woman’s only important function, for which she is ‘naturally’ made, is held to be that of wife and mother. If she wants a career she is told to choose between that and motherhood, because she cannot do both well and society refuses to provide her with the structural means of handling both roles” (1970, p.45).

The Women’s Collective of the New York High School Student Union, a group of adolescents preparing to enter adulthood, also felt that motherhood and marriage was the future they were expected to seek: “Even for those of us who are born into middle-class backgrounds where you are expected to go to college, any interest toward entering a career is entirely secondary to getting married and raising a family. Girls who reject this traditional role are generally regarded as cold ad unfeeling” (1970, p.373)

Many radical feminists saw a need to do away with the institution of marriage all together and others felt that it was a temporary strategy until men would change and view women as equals. Brown and Seitz explained why women must refuse marriage: “Sex and love have been so contaminated for women by economic dependence that the package deal of love and marriage looks like a con and a shill. We will not be able to sort out what we do want from men and what we want to give them until we know that our own physical and psychological survival-at home and work-does not depend on men” (1970, p.28).

Celenstine Ware quoted the FEMINISTS’ orientation kit: “Women do you know the facts about marriage? Do you know that rape is legal in marriage? Do you know that

love and affection are not required in marriage? Do you know that you are your husband's prisoner?" (1970, p.31).

Radical feminists viewed beauty standards and ideals as a tool of patriarchy. These standards and ideals were seen as control mechanisms that kept women in line and instructed them on how to pursue and catch men. By discovering these stereotypes, radical feminists were able to turn them on their heads and their refusal to comply became subversive acts of protest. Something as simple as shaving one's head or not shaving one's legs and underarms challenged societal norms about women. If real women were supposed to dress a certain way and look a certain way, what happened if women refused to participate in these acts of submission any longer? Radical feminists challenged and re-defined standard definitions of womanhood.

BLACK FEMINISTS

- **INTERLOCKING AND SIMULTANEOUS OPPRESSION**

Most black feminists viewed themselves as being subjected to many forms of oppression: racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism. These conditions were viewed as interlocking and simultaneous, as Barbara Smith explained: "What most clearly distinguishes Black feminism from the politics of mainstream European American feminism is its focus upon the simultaneity of oppressions that affect Black and other women of color, especially racism, sexism, class oppression, and homophobia" (1998, p.202). The Combahee River Collective shared a similar concept of interlocking layers of black women's oppression: "The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see our particular task the development of

integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking” (1995, p.232). Prominent black feminist Barbara Smith said there was no need to rank oppression because of their interlocking relationship: “We examined our own lives and found that everything out there was kicking our behinds-race, class, sex and homophobia. We saw no reason to rank oppressions, or as many forces in the Black community would have us do to pretend that sexism, among all ‘isms,’ was not happening to us” (1983, p. xxxii). Barbara and her sister Beverly Smith urged black women not to think of themselves as just a race or just a gender, but to consider all aspects of their identity at once: “...for the purpose of analysis what we try to do is to break things down and try to separate and compare but in reality, the way women live their lives, those separations just don’t work. Women don’t live their lives like, ‘Well this part is race, and this is class, and this part has to do with women’s identities,’” (1981, p.116).

Audre Lorde, renowned black feminist and poet, described a mythical norm that exists in American society: “...white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure” (1984, quoted in 1995, p.285). Because the majority of black women seemed to be the farthest removed from this mythical norm, many black feminists came to the conclusion that they were the most oppressed group in society. Most black women had access to few if any of these privileges.

It was important to black feminists that black women be seen as black *and* as women; race and gender cannot be separated. Race and gender should be considered together and one should not assume the primary role over the other. Barbara Omolade described how race alone is not sufficient to adequately describe black women:

“...blackness seems too thin a term for describing women too profound or complex to be limited by the word ‘race’ or the color black” (1998, p.377). Black feminists stressed that liberation for black people was not sufficient for liberation of black women. Black men were oppressed, but that did not mean that they were not capable of being oppressors also. Sexism did exist in the black community, and black feminists demanded that sexism be addressed if black women are to be free. Babara Smith explained: “The notion that struggling against or eliminating racism will completely alleviate black women’s problems does not take into account the way that sexual oppression cut across racial barriers” (1981, quoted in 1995, p. 256).

Black feminists did not only address sexism in the black community, but also homophobia and heterosexism as well. Heterosexism can also be part of the myriad of oppressions experienced by black women. Many black lesbians chose a feminist identity because of their sexual orientation. Black lesbians often felt ostracized in the black community and black feminist organizations served as safe houses for black lesbians. Black lesbians must not just be seen as black, or as women, but also as lesbians. Audre Lorde eloquently stated how she did not want to be defined by just one aspect of her being:

As a black feminist comfortable with the many different ingredients of my identity, and a woman committed to racial and sexual freedom from oppression, I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other part of myself. But this is a destructive and fragmenting way to live. My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without restrictions of externally imposed definitions. Only then can I bring myself and my energies as a whole to the service of those struggles which I embrace as part of my living (1984, quoted in 1995, p.289).

- **BLACK MALE SEXISM**

Black feminists also stressed that black male chauvinism did exist and that it was a blemish on black society. In Chapter Two, I noted that black chauvinism was a catalyst for many black women to leave black nationalistic movements and form a feminist identity. Michelle Wallace explained how her involvement with black liberation movement often left her feeling enslaved by black men:

The message of the Black movement was that I was being watched, on probation as a Black woman, that any signs of aggressiveness, intelligence, or independence would mean I'd be denied even the role still left open to me as 'my man's woman,' keeper of the house, children, and incense burners. I grew increasingly desperate about slipping up-they, Black men, were threatening me with being deserted, with being alone. Like any 'normal' woman, I eagerly grabbed at my own enslavement (1982, p.7).

Feelings of entrapment and being constantly monitored began to be too much for many black women to handle. Black men refused to address issues of sexism within the black liberation movement. Barbara Omolade described how she saw the black liberation movement begin to crumble: "These organizations failed seriously to programmatically address the destructive impact of male chauvinism in the Black political world and its impact on personal relations. The rage and disaffection of Black women was ignored. Consequently, many Black progressive and nationalist organizations and groups fell apart over the 'woman question'" (1998, p.393). Audre Lorde felt that disregarding sexism put up serious road blocks, leaving black women feeling conflicted and prohibiting black solidarity: "The need for unity is often misnamed as the need for homogeneity, and black feminist vision mistaken for betrayal of our common interests as people" (1984, quoted in 1995, p.288).

The theme “there can’t be equality for half the race” became the agenda and message that black feminists tried to disseminate in their communities. This message urged black men to reevaluate their sexist behavior and also served to empower black women that were oppressed by black men. Black feminists tried to make the black community realize they were emulating and perpetuating the same “traditional Western view of women” that was produced by white culture (King 1998, p.302). Black feminists did not want to be auxiliaries to black men in the liberation movement. Black feminists had grown tired of only being valued and accepted only if they embraced their submissive, servile role. Michelle Wallace often felt confused by her role in the black liberation movement and questioned how in the end the movement would liberate the black woman: “And what it boiled down to was that now the brother could get more pussy. If that was his revolution, what was mine?” (1982, p.7). It could also be argued that black women were oppressed because they were the only people that typically possessed less privilege than black men. The Black Women’s Liberation Group explained how black women were made to feel like they were the lowest group in society by black men: “Black women have always been told by black men that we were black, ugly, evil bitches and whores-in other words we were the real niggers in this society-oppressed by whites, male and female, and the black man, too” (1970, p.360).

- **WHITE FEMINIST RACISM**

Just as black feminists tended to draw special attention to black male sexism, they also wanted to stress the prevalence of white feminist racism. White feminist racism was often referred to as *exclusionary racism*. “When the contemporary movement toward feminism began, white women organizers did not address the issue of conflict between

black and white women” (hooks 1981, p.36). Barbara Omolade recalled her first blatant encounter with exclusionary racism while working at a battered women’s shelter: “In spite of the desire to establish a feminist institution beneficial to battered women, a rather straightforward power struggle developed...with racial, class, and homophobic undertones” (1998, p.384). White women marginalized and subordinated black women in the women’s movement. Some black feminists have hypothesized that white women acted like white men once they were put in positions of power, replicating racist and classist behavior. For white women, power became about over-powering instead of empowering:

In other words, their elitism and narrow-minded rigidity are defense mechanisms and that, in part, is why they create ‘alternatives’ for themselves and put up psychological signs saying **white women only**. Part of the reason is fear, as a result of centuries of living with dogs and having no identities. Now they are threatened by anyone different from them in race, politics, mannerisms, or clothing. It’s partly a means of self-protection but that does not excuse it. Feminism either addresses itself to all wimmin, or it becomes even more so just another elitist, prurient white organization, defeating its own purposes (davenport 1981, p.89).

Black women also found it difficult to work with white women because white women would focus all of their political energies on issues that did not seem relevant to black women. Issues such as abortion and the nuclear family seemed frivolous and elitist to black women. Certain aspects of white women’s oppression were viewed as luxuries by black women: “...the luxury not to work outside of the home is a luxury historically denied most black women” (King 1988, quoted in 1995, p.311). White women who viewed working outside the home as liberation were viewed as dangerous by black women; if working outside of the home equaled liberation then that would mean that the black woman has historically always been more liberated than the white woman.

Michelle Wallace explained how black and white women viewed work differently and how these different views lead to black women viewing white feminists' political aspirations as suspect:

Before black women or white women said a word, there was a basic communication gap between them on this subject of work. When the middle-class white woman said, "I want to work," in her head was a desk in the executive suite, while the black woman saw a bin of dirty clothes, someone else's dirty clothes. Something similar probably happened with the poor and lower-middle-class white woman. Her personal nightmare may have been a secretarial job or the kind of sales clerk job she had before she was married. When the white woman said, "Don't you want to work?" the black woman said, "Work? No thanks, I've already got more of that than I can use" (1990, p.136).

TABLE 1. OPPRESSION

Radical Feminists	Black Feminists
Sexism	Interlocking and Simultaneous
Beauty Standards	Black Male Sexism
Nuclear Family	White Female Racism

Recall from Chapter Two that the media played a large role in constructing the women's movement as a white women's movement and led to black women forming separate political groups. Feminism needed to be restructured and redefined if its theories and political agendas were going to benefit and liberate black women. This focus on white feminist racism showed how black woman could not fit in the white women's movement, just as they could not fit in the black liberation movements, because of their interlocking and simultaneous oppression. Black women had escaped sexism only to be subjected to racism

There was obviously a prevalent conflict between black and white feminists over what constituted women's oppression. Audre Lorde stressed that individual differences must be recognized and taken into account: "The oppression of women knows no ethnic

nor racial boundaries true, but that does not mean it is identical within those boundaries” (1981, p.97). Radical feminists viewed sexism as the main source of oppression. If sexism was destroyed then all forms of oppression would follow, because of this belief radical feminists felt that sexism was the main and only source of oppression worth combating. Radical white feminists were often naïve of their power and white skin privilege. When men are viewed as the primary and only oppressor it is understandable that white radical feminist would not even consider that they were oppressing black women. Radical feminists had much to learn from black feminists, such as learning about white skin privilege and understanding how the hierarchy of power exists and functions in society. To just view men as sole oppressor is to ignore how systems of power work and to be ignorant of how the oppressed can assist in their own oppression. hooks explained how men and women are both capable of being oppressors:

Emphasizing paradigms of domination that call attention to woman’s capacity to dominate is one way to deconstruct and challenge the simplistic notion that man is the enemy, woman is the victim; the notion that men have always been the oppressors. Such thinking enables us to examine our role as women in the perpetuation and maintenance of systems of domination. To understand domination, we must understand that our capacity as women and men to be either dominated or dominating is a point of connection of commonality (1989, p.20)

Radical feminists put a great deal of focus on the structure of the nuclear family. Recall from Chapter Two that many radical feminists grew up in households where their mothers did not work and that they harbored a great fear of becoming a housewife. Black feminists, on the other hand, large in part did not grow up in such an environment. As many black feminists have stated in their discourse, historically black women have not been financially able to be “stay-at-home” moms and wives. Given that many black people have been put at an economic disadvantage because of racist conditions in the

United States, it has been necessary for black women to work outside of the home to provide the second or sole income to ensure the survival of her family.

For black feminists, being able to be housewives was a symbol of economic freedom and privilege. Many white women longed to pursue careers and establish an identity for themselves outside of the home. Radical feminists rarely paused to consider who would take care of their children and do their housework once they left the home. When white women returned to the workforce, it was black women who often cared for their white families (hooks 1984).

The insinuation that radical feminists discovered oppression was very insulting to many black feminists. Black feminists found this amusing and irritating because they felt that they had known oppression their whole lives. As a black person, one never needed to be told that they are oppressed; one was made aware of it at a very early age by the treatment they received. There will be a difference in how one formed her political identity based on what age she realized their oppression as Smith and Smith explained: "...the difference between women's politics, who come to a realization that oppression exists at age 22, 25 or even 18, versus Black women's and other women of color's perspective which is that your oppression is a life long thing. There is a political savyness, I don't know what word to use, canniness-some difference in attitude I think between Black and white feminists" (1981, p.114-115). The consciousness of oppressive conditions and ideologies is there at a much earlier age for black women and other women of color, and that is why it was insulting when radical feminist insinuated that they had discovered sexism so to speak and that they were developing the solution to end it. As Audre Lorde's letter to Mary Daly illustrates, the oppression experienced by black

women was very different from that of white women because black women face different obstacles and abuses in society:

But you fail to recognize that, as women, those differences expose all women to various forms and degrees of patriarchal oppression, some of which we share, and some of which we do not. For instance, surely you know that for non-white women in this country, there is an 80% fatality rate from breast cancer; three times the number of unnecessary eventurations, hysterectomies, and sterilization as for white women; three times as many chances of being raped, murdered, or assaulted as exist for white women. These are statistical facts, not coincidences or paranoid fantasies” (1981, p.97).

“FEMINISM”

RADICAL FEMINISTS

- **SEPARATISM**

As the oppression cluster demonstrated, radical feminists viewed men as their sole source of oppression. Many radical feminists felt that the only way to end oppression was by taking a separatist stance, personally and politically. As stated in Chapter Two, many radical feminists were once members of the New Left or SNCC, organizations dominated by men. It was through their membership in these organizations that radical feminists came to realize that they were victims of sexist oppression. It seemed logical to radical feminists that in order to end oppression that they would have to separate from men, as Joreen states, “Men will not liberate women; women must free themselves” (1970, p.45).

Radical feminists felt that this separatist stance would allow them to focus on their own liberation, not someone else’s, and would also force men to recognize that their sexist ideologies and actions were wrong. Radical feminists were accomplishing nothing by remaining in their current organizations, so it seemed essential to form women

centered groups were they could hold consciousness-raising groups and build bonds of sisterhood. Radical feminists also assumed that men would never attempt to correct their chauvinist behavior if they did not have to. In choosing to live a male-free life and encouraging others to do, radical feminists thought that men would eventually want women back in their lives and would change their ways and see how harmful their sexist behavior was to women. Celestine Ware cites Ellen Willis (member of New York Radical Women) when explaining the rationale behind radical feminists' separatist political stance:

How can it be good for women to join a movement whose ideology, history and practice have been created by their oppressors? We need, not only separate groups, but a separate movement, free of preconceptions, which will build an analysis of women's oppression that is rooted in our day-to-day experience and base on that analysis our own revolutionary program. Radical men will stop oppressing us and make our fight their own fight when they can't get us to join them on any other terms (1970, p.37).

- **EQUALITY WITH MEN**

The theme of women being equal with men also clustered around the term feminism. For many radical feminists this was the main goal of their struggle. After years of being subjected to men who did not take them seriously politically or intellectually, radical feminists were ready to be heard and taken as seriously. Radical feminists came to realize that to be seen as a fully capable, functioning human being one had to be male: therefore, the only way for women to become equal human beings was for them to obtain equality with men.

Radical feminists often focused on work and career as a starting point for equality. The inability for women to be promoted to credible positions in the workforce and the low pay women received enraged many radical feminists and served as a prime example

of how sexism was functioning to hold women down in American society as Roxanne Dunbar explained:

Faced with discrimination on the job-after being forced into the lower levels of occupational structure-millions of women are inescapably presented with the fundamental contradictions in their unequal treatment and their massive exploitation. The rapid growth of women's liberation as a movement is related in part to the exploitation of working women in all occupational categories (1970, p.23).

Joreen hinted at the connection between classism and sexism when she explained why women must be paid the same as men: "The general belief, used to justify the lower pay given to women, is that their's is a luxury income, which supplements that of their husband's. Yet 35 percent of all women of marriageable age are not married and study after study has shown that most women, married or not, work out of economic necessity" (1970, p.30). Joreen also stated that even though half of the states in America had equal pay laws, men were still finding ways to pay women less: "Only twenty-five states have equal pay for equal work laws, and these are not vigorously enforced. They are also frequently circumvented by giving the woman's job a lesser title than that of the man's" (1970, p.38).

Radical feminists believed that their demand of equal pay would ensure that women would no longer be dependent on men financially. Women could then escape situations of abuse, infidelity, and be free to form their own autonomous identities. Again the man was viewed as the sole oppressor. It is a man who would not pay a woman enough to support herself, resulting in her being forced to be another man's property (by having to become someone's wife or remain in her father's home to survive).

BLACK FEMINISTS

- **SEPARATE GROUP**

The theme of separateness clusters around the term feminism quite often in black feminist discourse. Black feminists saw this division partially from black men and strictly from white feminists as a necessity; they had to "...develop a politics that was antiracist, unlike those of white women, and antisexist, unlike those of black and white men" (Combahee River Collective 1977, quoted in 1995, p.233). Black feminists felt that there was no space for them to do political work in black liberation movements because of sexism and no room in the women's movement because of racism. A separate political entity was necessary for black women to organize and work productively as Hull and Smith explained:

Because of white women's racism and black men's sexism, there was no room in either area for a serious consideration of the lives of black women. And even when they have considered black women, white women usually have not had the capacity to analyze racial politics and black culture, and black men have remained blind or resistant to the implications of sexual politics in black women's lives (1982, p.xxi)

Black women felt excluded by white women and they often felt that their political and theoretical contributions were overlooked and marginalized. All of the energy that black feminists expended would often go unnoticed or white feminists would receive most of the praise and credit. Barbara Omolade described these feelings as a black feminist: "Black women like Susan and me were an integral part of the second wave of feminism but our roles were always being contained, discouraged, and limited by white women" (1998, p.388).

When black women began to form separate groups, their interests and needs were valued by a political group for the first time. It was empowering and encouraging for

black women to work closely together on issues they felt no one would ever put any effort into changing. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua explained that, “What began as a reaction to the racism of white feminists soon became a positive affirmation of the commitment of women of color to our own *feminism*” (1981, p.xxii). A separate black feminist movement had to be formed before a black feminist consciousness could be generated; once black women began to focus on their unique positions in society as being black and being a woman they could then understand how power structures in society perpetuated their oppression. The only way to combat the system that oppressed black women was to understand it, understand its complex layers and interconnections. Because black women were experiencing this unique oppression, as women and as people of color, they were the people who could generate theory and praxis to aid in their liberation. Barbara Smith explained how beneficial black feminism is to black women on many different levels: “Unlike any other movement, Black feminism provides the theory that clarifies the nature of Black women’s experience, makes possible positive support from other Black women, and encourages political action that will change the very system that had put us down” (Smith 1983, p.xxxv). Having been treated with disrespect by some black men and white feminists, black feminists wanted to create their own movement that focused on and embraced black women.

- **BLACK WOMEN ARE “BRIDGES”**

The feeling that black women are “bridges” clustered around the term feminism in black feminist discourse. Some black feminists felt that they had to serve as the bridge between white feminists and themselves and the majority of black feminists were not happy about this. Some times they were directly asked to serve as bridges and other

times it was implied. White feminists often left black feminists feeling as though black women had to put forth all the effort to be involved in feminist activities. This feeling was so prevalent among black women and other women of color it inspired the title of the revolutionary anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981).

Cultural differences naturally existed between black and white women, and both groups of women had something to learn about the other. Black feminists felt that the majority of white feminists had no interest in learning about black women, or that those who did would not want to expend any amount of energy to understand black women's lives. Black women had to be the teachers of what it means to be "black," as though there was some mystical essence of black women that only they could reveal. Black feminists felt this lack of effort on the part of white feminists was revealed a racist attitude. White feminists' lack of effort and dependency on black women was viewed as draining on black women, as Audre Lorde explained: "Now we hear that it is the task of black women and third world women to educate white women, in the face of tremendous resistance, as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival. This is a diversion of our energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought" (1981, p.100). Black feminists viewed this lack of effort on the part of white feminist as torpid and inconsiderate. Audre Lorde demanded to know why white women refused to take the initiative to educate themselves about black women and develop strategies for both black and white women's survival: "[W]hite feminists have educated themselves about such an enormous amount over the past ten years, how come you haven't also

educated yourselves about black women and the differences between us- white and black- when it is key to our survival as a movement” (1981, p.100).

Many white feminists fired back that they had no idea that black feminists felt this way and others responded with naïve guilt (hooks 1984). These excuses were not acceptable to black feminists; again, black feminists expressed their anger about being bridges. Many black feminists refused to serve as bridges and chose instead to focus their energies on themselves and their separate feminist groups. “I had decided never again to speak to with white women about racism. I felt it was wasted energy, because of their destructive guilt and defensiveness, and because whatever I had to say might better be said by white women to one another, at far less emotional cost to the speaker, and probably with a better hearing” (Lorde 1981, p.81).

- **WOMANISM**

The last cluster is consistent with black feminists breaking away from white feminists and forming separate groups. The term “womanism” can be viewed a synonym for black feminism. Not all, but many, black feminists chose this label rather than “feminist.” Many black women felt that it solidified their identification with other black women and also removed any negative connotations from their feminist identity. Black women did not feel like they were participating in a “white woman’s” cause when they used the label womanist as Barbara Chistian explained: “Some African-American women call themselves womanists, the word coined by Alice Walker to distinguish themselves and their specific perspective from white feminists” (1994, p.169).

The term “womanist” and “womanism” are rooted in black culture. Womanism can be viewed as a creation by black women for black women. Many black women were also

more willing to label themselves womanists because this identity represented the fight for black women's liberation rather than black women playing a subordinate role in a white women's movement that would ultimately result in benefiting white women. Mori Aoi explained how black feminist author Alice Walker used black culture to create a term that black women could use to define their identities as black feminists:

Her definitions of "womanist," supplanting "feminist," indicating that Walker celebrates diversity of individual experiences while she simultaneously preserves African-American folk culture and values. A womanist will saliently evade the authoritative domination associated with elite white feminists, about whom most women of color have expressed their distrust and dissatisfaction (1999, p.2).

Womanist theory is derived from the term *womanish*. Womanish is the opponent of girlish, frivolous, irresponsible, not serious (Aoi 1999). Womanish comes from an old black expression used among black women, "you're acting womanish." It is most often used between mother and child; when a mother tells her daughter that she is acting womanish, it means that she is trying to act too old for her age. It can also have positive connotations and can be used to refer to courageous and willful behavior. Someone who is a womanist loves herself and other women (it can mean love in a non-sexual or sexual way). Womanists stress that love is the most important thing and that the most important love is love of self. According to Alice Walker, womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender (Aoi 1999).

There are some black feminists that still chose to call themselves feminists. Some black women felt that the term "feminist" holds more political potency than "womanist" holds and is a more accurate reflection of their feminist identity. Some black feminists actually felt that the use of the term womanist the term can detract from black women's

dedication to their feminist commitments. bell hooks is one black feminist who has always called herself a feminist:

The word “feminism” is evoked in negative terms, even though sexism and gender issues are discussed. I hear black women academics laying claim to the term “womanist” while rejecting “feminist.” I do not think Alice Walker intended this term to deflect from feminist commitment, yet this is often how it is evoked. Walker defines womanist as black feminist or feminists of color. When I hear black women using the term womanist, it is in opposition to the term feminist; it is viewed as constituting something separate from feminist politics shaped by white women. For me the term womanist is not sufficiently linked to a tradition of radical political commitment to struggle and change. What would a womanist politic look like? If it is a term for black feminist, then why do those who embrace it reject the other? (1989, p. 182).

Guy-Sheftall and Hammonds continued to use the term feminism because of its emancipatory and political potency, as they explained:

Feminist captures the emancipatory vision and acts of resistance among a diverse group of African-American women who attempt in their writings [and practices] to articulate their understanding of the complex nature of black womanhood, the interlocking nature of the oppressions black women suffer, and the necessity of sustained struggle in their quest for self-definition, the liberation of black people, and gender equality (Guy-Sheftall & Hammonds 1997, p. 97).

TABLE 2. FEMINISM

Radical Feminists	Black Feminists
Separatism	Separate Group
Equality with Men	Black Women are “Bridges”
	Womanism

“SISTERHOOD”

RADICAL FEMINISTS

- **VALIDATION AND COURAGE IN NUMBERS**

The theme that women found courage and validation being surrounded by other women and their experiences clustered around sisterhood. There were some radical feminists who did feel a true sense of sisterhood by being involved in women’s liberation

groups. Women discovered that they were oppressed and began to develop a subversive consciousness to counteract years of feminine socialization. Many women began to voice their opinions and change their beliefs in consciousness-raising groups.

Being a feminist was not always a popular political stance to have. Women were viewed as outcasts by society, their once beloved social movement organizations, and their families and loved ones. By being surrounded by other women who were taking the same risks and relinquishing the same privileges to achieve their political goals, radical feminists found solace and a sense of family in their feminist organizations. Vivian Gornik described an instance of sisterhood: "I had insight, and I had company. I stood in the middle of my own experience, turning and turning. In every direction I saw a roomful of women, also turning and turning...Not an I-love-you in the world could touch. There was no other place to be, except with each other. We lived then, all of us, inside the loose embrace of feminism" (1998, p.373). This sense of sisterhood reinforced many radical feminists' belief in the necessity of separatism. When removed from men these women were gaining new strengths, a new confidence, and most importantly a new consciousness. Many radical feminists did not see a need for men in their life.

- **SUPERFICIAL**

The second contradicting theme that clustered around sisterhood was that radical feminist sisterhood was superficial. Not all radical feminists shared this feeling of sisterhood. Many radical feminists were left searching for a sense of sisterhood. Priscilla Long explained that no matter how intimate women were with one another in consciousness-raising groups no sense of sisterhood was established:

Our association was intense and complex, but in many cases we did not become friends. Our self-reservations unfolded apart from intimacy in the ordinary sense

of the term. Many friendships did develop in the women's movement of course. But it was just as likely that the woman across the room revealing her most private feelings and experiences would become, not a friend, but an intimate sort of stranger (1998, p.326).

Joreen (also known as Jo Freeman) went as far as to compare woman's movement to sororities:

Although I never told this to anyone, I came to think of the women's liberation movement as a sorority, or more accurately a lot of sororities. Each group was very selective, pledging only those who would easily fit in. New recruits were 'rushed,' or better yet sponsored by an established member. If they didn't fit in, they were squeezed out through isolation, but never told why (1996, p.192).

Beverly Jones felt that perhaps this lack of sisterhood could be attributed to white women being socialized to not value or pursue female relationships and to always give primacy and worth to their male relationships:

Women before marriage have on the whole only superficial, competitive, and selfish relationships with one another. Should one of them have a genuine relationship, it is more likely with a male than a female. After marriage a woman stops courting her old unmarried or female sidekicks. They have served their purpose, to tide her over. And there is fear, often well founded, that these females will view her marriage less as a sacrament than a challenge, that they will stalk her husband as fair game, that they will outshine her, or in some other way lead to the disruption of her marriage (1970, p.49).

I believe that the contradictions are the result of some radical feminists becoming too much like a leader and less like a member. Recall from Chapter Two that radical feminists originally sought to create organizations that lacked a hierarchy. The women of the groups were supposed to change leadership roles and rotate the tasks that needed to be accomplished to keep the organization in existence. As Ware (1970) recounted, most organizations disbanded because some of the members in the group were becoming too much like leaders and setting too many rules. I believe these power struggles and

contradictory messages led some radical feminists to believe that their sisterhood was not authentic.

BLACK FEMINISTS

- **BLACK AND WHITE SISTERHOOD NOT ATTAINABLE**

Not surprisingly, the theme suggested that black and white sisterhood is impossible to attain clusters around sisterhood. White women were often viewed as oppressor not sisters. Black feminists often felt that their presence was nothing more than tokenism or that they were dismissed all together. The theme of superficial sisterhood in the radical feminist cluster is apparent also in black feminist discourse. Many black feminists insinuated that white feminists often acted as though it was going to be their way or no way. Audre Lorde voiced her feelings of frustration: "This dismissal stands as a real block to communication between us. This block makes it far easier to turn away from you completely than to attempt to understand the thinking behind your choices. Should the next step be war between us, or separation? Assimilation within a solely western-european herstory is not acceptable" (1981, p.96).

Barbara Omolade described that white feminists' exclusionary racism led to black feminists feeling separate while bringing some white feminists closer: "These white women grew closer together, bonding ostensibly around their femaleness, but ultimately also around their whiteness" (1998, p.378). White and black feminists were using shared experiences to create a sense of sisterhood and because of that it was hard to establish a sense of sisterhood between black and white women who both had such different shared lived experiences. Often black women felt that their presence made white women's

similarities more obvious to white women causing the white women to develop closer bonds than they would have in the absence of black women.

- **SOME HOPE FOR BLACK AND WHITE SISTERHOOD**

There was also a theme of black and white sisterhood being possible in this cluster. Many black women were resentful and hurt by the majority of white feminists, but there were some radical feminists who did exhibit a true commitment to the formation of sisterhood among women and with that a true commitment to ending racism as well. doris davenport, who often voiced her distrust and anger towards white feminists, even admitted that there are some white feminists who are working to build white and black sisterhood: "So sisters, we might as well give up on them, except in rare individual cases where the person or group is deliberately and obviously more evolved mentally and spiritually. That is, un-racist. We should stop wasting our time and energy, until these women evolve." (1981, p. 89).

Many radical feminists had spent some time in New Left and black liberation groups, and their involvement in these groups was the result of their commitment to ending racism, among other injustices. There were also some radical feminists who did truly exhibit a commitment to ending racism but they fell short when it came to organizing with black women. Barbara Smith was one black feminist who saw white women as a potential allies:

Most notably, there has been the commitment of some white feminists to make racism a priority issue within women's movement's, to take responsibility for their racism as individuals, and to do anti-racist organizing in coalition with other groups. Because I have written and spoken about racism during my entire involvement as a feminist and have also presented workshops on racism for white women's organizations for several years during the 1970's, I have not only seen that there are white women who are fully committed to eradicating racism but that

new understandings of racial politics have evolved from feminism, which other progressive people would do well to comprehend (1983, p.xxxiii).

There are some apparently contradicting themes between the first and second cluster. This clash of themes illustrates the complexity of black and white women's relations and also speaks to the hope for real relationships to occur between these two groups of women. Not all radical feminists had identical political ideals. There were some white radical feminists who were genuinely interested in including black women in the struggle. Just as the Grimke sisters were examples of white women dedicated to the liberation of black women there were also radical feminists who held the same convictions.

- **BLACK WOMEN ARE REJECTED BY THE BLACK COMMUNITY FOR BEING FEMINISTS**

Considering that black male sexism clustered in oppression, it is logical that the theme of black women being rejected by the black community would cluster around sisterhood. Black women felt shunned not only by their "sisters" but their "brothers" as well. Michelle Wallace expressed that a fear existed among some members of the black community, a fear of change (1982). Many black liberation movements possessed sexist ideologies and promoted certain social norms for black women to follow. Barbara Smith listed these myths: "In reaction to the 'threat' of such change, Black men, with the collaboration of some Black women, developed a set of myths to divert Black women from our own freedom" (1983, p.xxvi). Smith claims there are five major myths. Myth one is that Black women are already liberated. There are a large number of black women that work outside of the home, serve as head of the house and live independently from men. Myth two is that racism is the primary or only oppression that black women have to

confront. Myth three is that feminism is a man-hating thing and to be a feminist is to hate black men. Myth four is that women's issues are small and apolitical; black people and other people of color need to be dealing the larger issues, primarily racism. Myth five is that feminists are all lesbians; a black woman who calls herself a feminist is basically "outing" herself to the black community. Black feminists had to pay a price if they were open about their political orientation. Barbara Smith explained how having to explain themselves could leave black feminists feeling like they were excommunicated from the black race: "...so many Black people who are threatened by feminism have argued that by being a Black feminist (particularly a Lesbian) you have left the race, are no longer a part of the Black community, in short no longer have a home"(1983, p.xxii). Barbara Smith also explained the complex fear that surrounded feminism and feminist coalitions:

It's real connected. Feminists have been portrayed as nothing but 'lesbians' to the Black community as well. There was a considerable effort in the early seventies to turn the Black community off to feminism. You can look at publications making pronouncements about what the feminist movement was and who it reached that would trivialize it, that would say no Black women were involved, that did everything possible to prevent those coalitions between Black and white women from happening because there was a great deal of fear. Black men did not want to lose Black women as allies. And the white power structure did not want to see all women bond across racial lines because they knew that would be an unstoppable combination (1981, p.125).

These myths generated a great apprehensive if not plain fear in many black women. Many black women did not want to be ostracized by the black community, specifically black men. Bell hooks explained this fear in black women:

Recently I spoke with a number of black women about why they are not more involved in feminist thinking and feminist movement. Many of them talked about harsh treatment by other black women, about being socially ostracized or talked about in a negative and contemptuous ways at all female gatherings or at conferences on gender issues. A few people committed to feminist politics described times when they found support from white women and resistance from black women peers (1989, p.180).

Michelle Wallace described her own feelings of resentment when she declared she was a feminist: When I first became a feminist, my Black friends used to cast pitying eyes upon me and say ‘That’s whitey’s thing.’ I used to laugh it off, thinking, yes there are some slight problems, a few things white women won’t completely understand, but we can work them out” (1982, p.10). As Wallace stated above, black women did not want to be associated with a “white thing.” It was a widely held belief in the black community that feminism was a white woman’s movement (Recall that most of America’s general public also held this belief because of the how the media portrayed the women’s movement). Wallace explained black women’s rejection of the women’s movement because of its association with white women: “Women’s liberation, the black woman reasoned, would chain her to Ms. Anne’s stove forever. None of that for her. She wanted, she said, to stay at home and have her man take care of her. A movement offering her that would be the only one in which she could be interested” (1990, p.127).

Both women and men were seen as necessary for the survival and liberation of black people. Many black women were influenced by black liberation rhetoric that encouraged the black women to become and strive to become homemakers. Because of this the black man took on new importance to many black women. These women would often shun the women’s movement to please black men, as Wallace explains: “The most popular justification black women had for not becoming feminists was their hatred for white women. They often repeated this for approving black male ears. (Obviously the brother had an interest in keeping black and white women apart ‘Women will chatter’)” (1982, p.10).

This hatred that some black women felt towards white women was not entirely an invention to appease black men. White women have historically oppressed black women, and because of this historical scar it was difficult for many black women to trust white women much less do political work with them. bell hooks described this anger and its roots in the white woman–black woman, oppressor-oppressed relationship: “At times, the insistence that feminism is really ‘a white female thing that has nothing to do with black women’ masks black female rage towards white women, a rage rooted in the historical servant-served relationship where white women have used power to dominate, exploit, and oppress” (1989, p.179).

The last myth that Barbara Smith listed was that all feminists are lesbians. This myth served as a strong restraint for black women. Many black feminists discussed in their writing [Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, Barbara Smith to cite a few] the prevalence of homophobia in the black community. Homophobia did serve as a major dividing factor in the black community, and many black feminists feel that it was not properly addressed in the black liberation movements of the 1960’s and 1970’s. Black lesbians often felt that other black lesbians were their only allies, company and in some instances family.

Homophobia in the black community is in part a result of black people utilizing the only privilege they may be allotted in this society, heterosexual privilege. Cheryl Clarke argued that heterosexual privilege may be the only privilege a black man or woman may have and defending or accepting gays and lesbians could be a betrayal to that privilege: “Like her black male counterpart, the black woman intellectual is afraid to relinquish heterosexual privilege. So little else is guaranteed black people” (1983, p.205). The black community must learn to eliminate homophobia because it is destructive and

politically unwise as Clarke explained, “Homophobia divides black people as political allies, it cuts off political growth, stifles revolution, and perpetuates patriarchal domination” (1983, p.207).

TABLE 3. SISTERHOOD

Radical Feminists	Black Feminists
Validation and Courage in Numbers	Black and White Sisterhood not Attainable
Superficial	Some Hope for Black and White Feminism
	Black Women are Rejected by Black Community for Being Feminists

Sisterhood was not something that was easily attainable for white and black women. While there were white women who found it difficult to connect with other white women there were also black and white women who were striving for sincere connections between black and white women. Black feminists did mention and were encouraged by white women who were making an effort and also striving to make the communities they grew up in understand why they chose to be a feminist. I will now provide a close analysis of two manifesto statements, one from two radical feminists and one from a group of black feminists.

MANIFESTO ANALYSIS

The last section of Chapter Three contains an analysis of a specific example of both feminists’ discourse. I will discuss *Toward a Female Liberation Movement*, authored by Beverly Jones and Judith Brown (radical feminists) and *A Black Feminist Statement*, authored by the Combahee River Collective (black feminists). Both of these documents were composed to outline what each group envisioned as their political agendas and prescribed a model for how society should be constructed. The manifesto discourse clusters reflect most but not all of the themes that were discussed in the cluster analysis. I will discuss the radical feminists’ statement and then the black feminists’ statement.

RADICAL FEMINISTS: TOWARDS A FEMALE LIBERATION

MOVEMENT

OPPRESSION

- **Sexism and Patriarchal Oppression**

Jones and Brown clearly indicated in their writings that women should not be concerned with issues that are not directly effecting women's lives. Like many women departing from the New Left, Jones and Brown felt that their energies should not be expended on issues that effect mostly the lives of men lives any longer. Women needed to connect and organize to better their quality of life and increase their political power in American society. It is clear from the statement below that Jones and Brown identified sexism as the only injustice that women should be fighting to rectify: *sexism* is the *problem*. Jones and Brown were not concerned with the social issues that preoccupied the New Left. They were looking to make sexism the main issue of debate and they wanted women to ban together to bring the issue to the attention of the public:

What is central to our problem is our complete alienation from other women. We will have to get out of our houses and meet with them on serious issues. The most serious for the moment is not the war, the draft, the presidency, the racial problem, but our own problem. We will need time to read, to study, to write, to debate, among ourselves. And when we act politically, we will need time for organizing, etc. (Jones & Brown 1968, quoted in 2000, p.49).

In keeping with all other radical feminist discourse, men were identified as the sole oppressor in this manifesto as is Man throughout other radical feminist discourse. Brown and Jones painted a grim picture of men and eliminated the necessity of men from women's lives. Men serve only one function in women's lives and that is the role of oppressor: "In the life of each woman, the most immediate oppressor, however unwilling

he may be in theory to play that role, is ‘the man’” (Jones & Brown 1968, quoted in 2000, p.54).

- **BEAUTY STANDARDS**

Jones and Brown were also angry, as were many radical feminists, that society forced women to “look” a certain way. Jones and Brown pointed out that too much of a woman’s time and resources is connected to looking beautiful. Women put much effort into looking beautiful by society’s standards out of necessity because women were framed as being always in competition for the attention of a man.

The structure of American society in 1968, when these radical feminists drafted this document, forced women to rely on men. A woman had no way of supporting herself, Jones and Brown argued, unless they became slaves (also known as wives). They discussed how women had to attract men to make it through life and not live in poverty. To “catch” a man a woman had to spend hours making sure her make-up and hair were consistent with societal beauty standards. The following quote illustrated this argument:

So women must set traps and, depending upon their looks and brains, that can be terribly time-consuming, nerve-racking, and disappointing. Thus the great rash of nose jobs, the desperate dieting, the hours consumed in pursuit of the proper attire. There is skin care, putting up one’s hair each night, visits to the hairdressers, keeping up with, buying, applying, and taking off eye make-up, ect. The average woman spends two hours a day in personal grooming, not including shopping and sewing. That is one-twelfth of her whole life and one-eighth of the time she spends awake. If she lives to be eighty, a woman will have spent ten whole years of her time awake in this one facet of complex business of making herself attractive to men...Surely one forth of a woman’s waking time would be a conservative estimate here. Twenty years of wakeful life! (1968, quoted in 2000, p.26).

Jones and Brown’s commentary on beauty standards were consistent with other radical feminists’ feelings towards beauty standards. Beauty standards were viewed as

oppressive expectations that were demanded of women to gain male approval and ultimately financial security. Jones and Brown rejected the rigors of beauty standards and also pointed out how foolish and controlling they were.

- **STRUCTURE OF THE NUCLEAR FAMILY**

The most prevalent theme that emerges in *Toward a Female Liberation Movement* is the structure of the nuclear family as an oppressive agent. Jones and Brown spent a great portion of the essay explaining and critiquing the structure of the nuclear family. The discussion began with women believing they need men, because of historical tradition and American culture, for survival and that this sense of need led to marriage which led to imprisonment because women in effect become property of their husband once they marry. Jones and Brown explained how women experienced a brief moment of citizenship that was quickly stripped from her once she said, “I do”:

So that the female student feels like a citizen, like an individual among others in the body politic, in the civil society, in the world of the intellect. What she doesn't understand is that upon graduation she is stripped of her public life and relegated to the level of private property. Enslavement is her farewell present. As things stand now, she is doomed to become someone's secretary, or someone's nurse, or someone's wife, or someone's mistress. From now on if she has some contribution to make to society she is expected to make it privately through the man who owns some part of her (1968, quoted in 2000, p.22).

Jones and Brown made reference to Betty Friedan and her sociological theories presented in The Feminine Mystique. Jones and Brown commented on the mundane life that women who marry were forced to live day to day:

In any case, we began this diversion by saying that women who are not mothers can also suffer from the “Tired Mother Syndrome.” Once a mother, however, it takes on a new dimension. There is a difference of opinion in the medical and sociological literature with regard to the genesis of this ailment. Betty Friedan, in the sociological vein, argues that these symptoms are the natural outgrowth of restricting the mind and body of these women to the narrow confines of the home.

She discusses the destructive role of monotonous, repetitive work which never issues and lasting, let alone important, achievement (1968, quoted in 2000, p.33).

Jones and Brown also put forth that marriage worked to oppress women because it was a system that is connected to other larger systems. Marriage served as a powerful tool of oppression that taught and perpetuated society's roles for men and women:

The institution of marriage, given us in the United States, was the pawn of other, more powerful institutions. It is a potent instrument for maintaining the status quo in American Society. It is in the family that children learn so well the dominance-submission game, by observation and participation. Each family, reflecting the perversities of the larger order and split off from the others, is powerless to force change on other institutions, let alone attack to transform its own. And this serves the Savage Society well (1968, quoted in 2000, p.44-45).

Jones and Brown also alluded to the fact when talking about marriage, women are oppressed because of the inequalities that exist between men and women. Marriage became more about economic survival for the woman, rather than love:

Now, with birth control, higher education for women, and the movement itself, it is becoming clear to some women that the marriage institution, like so many others, is an anachronism. For unmarried women it offers only a sanctional security and the promise of love. The married woman knows that love is, at its best, an inadequate reward for her unnecessary and bizarre heritage of oppression. The marriage institution does not free women; it does not provide emotional support and intellectual growth; and it offers no political resources. Were in not for male-legislated discrimination in employment it would show little economic advantage (1968, quoted in 2000, p.45).

Children were often viewed by American society as the natural progression in woman's life after she marries. Jones and Brown viewed children as another source of oppression that enslaved women: "The big push to have children, whether we are married or not, should be viewed as one of the strong links in the chain which enslaves us" (1968, quoted in 2000, p.48). Children were seen as enslaving because they tied the woman to the home and to her husband. Also, once women had children they were all the more economically dependent on their husbands.

Jones and Brown did address economic concerns in a round-about way in their discussion of beauty standards. Jones and Brown basically asserted that beauty standards and a woman's ability to emulate and maintain them is essential for their economic survival. This ties in directly with the structure of the nuclear family as an oppressive agent in women's lives. Jones and Brown insinuated that women need men to survive and in order to "catch" a man a women had to use hair-rollers, make-up, and demonstrate the correct submission behavior essential for a women to be considered becoming. Jones and Brown did address the need for equality with men again, because if women were equal with men they would be able to hold a job that paid a living wage.

FEMINISM

- **SEPARATISM**

Recall from Chapter Two that many radical feminists were involved in the New Left and other male-headed social movement groups and organizations. Jones and Brown demonstrated much of the frustration that the other radical feminists in my analysis vented concerning "movement men." Jones and Brown prescribed the separatist stance because of radical men's indifference if not total abhorrence of the woman question. Jones and Brown explain their view on movement men: "Radical men are not fighting for female liberation, and in fact, become queasy when the topic is broached. Regrettably the best-radical men and their black counterparts-do not even have a political interest in female liberation" (1968, quoted in 2000, p.40).

Jones and Brown had been burned by men in general and felt that the only way to liberate women was to remove men from the equation. According to these radical feminists, women would have to separate from men if women were to even make any

political progress. Men would also continue on with the same behavior only if women allowed them, Jones and Brown reasoned. They even suggested that women construct female-only communes to escape oppression:

Some radical women, in deciding to live together, ought to fashion homes which have definite political goals. A woman, married or unmarried, could move into such a center for a period of time and be relieved of the terrible compulsion to one-up her sisters in dating, grooming, ect... The commune should be a center for women to live during decision periods in their lives... The commune would define itself as a female place. Innumerable experiments in living, political forays and serious and uninterrupted thinking could center in the commune (1968, quoted in 2000, p.46).

Jones and Brown went on to suggest that women organize only around issues that were directly effecting women's lives. This meant that women should only be organizing with other women. Jones and Brown defined feminism's main objective as working to end sexist oppression and for this to occur an enemy to combat needed to be identified. "Women should combine politically and define for themselves their enemy and describe the machinery of their oppression. We should not promise in advance that we will join any specific issue. We think that well organized women, supportive of each other, will carry their share" (Jones & Brown 2000, p.52).

Jones and Brown felt that a separatist stance was the only effective way to achieve their main political goals. The animosity that radical women felt towards men and societal institutions that perpetuated their power led to a desire to totally disassociate with men. The idea of an all woman commune was viewed as a very nurturing and safe space for women to begin thinking about women's liberation and to develop a plan to make liberation a reality.

- **EQUALITY WITH MEN**

I mentioned in my discussion of beauty standards that Jones and Brown sought to make women equal with men. One of the first and most simple steps many radical feminists prescribed to balance power between men and women was to require employers to pay women as much as men are paid and eliminate sexist job and education discrimination. Jones and Brown also agreed with this course of action:

Equal pay for equal work has been a project poo-pooed by the radicals but it should be because it is an instrument of bondage. If women, particularly women with children, cannot leave their husbands and support themselves decently, they are bound to remain under all sorts of degrading circumstances. In this same line, college entrance discrimination against females, and job discrimination in general, must be fought, no matter what we think about the striving to become professional. A guaranteed annual income would also be of direct relevance to women (1968, quoted in 2000, p.39).

Jones and Brown also sought equality for women in other ways. These radical feminists felt that if women were going to marry and have children that the work to care for children and home should not be solely a woman's function. If men were to contribute equal effort in running household women would be able to pursue careers and not suffer from "Tired Mother's Syndrome." Jones and Brown reasoned that perhaps if men took on some of the responsibilities of women that their dominance could in a way be neutralized:

Regardless who is working, going to school, etc., you should demand equal time for your own things. This requires your husband to assume half of the burden of maintaining a home: in terms of cooking, cleaning, laundering, entertaining, etc.... He will have to assume enough of the child-caring and housekeeping chores so that you each have equal time off during each day. His posture of dominance will be threatened, his time consumed, and his ability to live in "maleville" decimated by such a plan (1968, quoted in 2000, p.49).

Jones and Brown saw feminism's goal to provide equal treatment of the sexes and to make this happen women were going to have to separate from men. Jones and Brown

asserted that if women did not separate from men that men would continue to display sexist behavior. If women and men could be equal financially only then could they become equal in other ways, such as, household chores or child care responsibility. If women could obtain economic independence they would not have to remain in the control of men because their connection to men would not be necessary for their economic survival.

SISTERHOOD

- **VALIDATION AND COURAGE IN NUMBERS**

Throughout “Towards a Female Liberation Movement,” Jones and Brown attempted to motivate women to come together to make this movement happen and ensure its success. The radical feminist theme of courage and validation in numbers was prevalent in Jones and Brown’s discourse. The presence of this theme was necessary and vital for any type of feminist organizing to occur. Reluctant women had to be assured that if they were leaving the comfortable norms of society that there would be support and love in the movement. A beginning to building sisterhood and for women to understand that they are indeed oppressed is to talk about and share their instances of oppression. It was in consciousness-raising groups and late night chats that many women began to feel validated and then outraged by an oppressive society. Jones and Brown explained:

Women must share their experiences with each other until they understand, identify, and explicitly state the many psychological techniques of domination in and out of the home. These should be published and distributed widely until they are common knowledge. No woman should feel befuddled and helpless in an argument with her husband. She ought to be able to identify his stratagems and to protect herself against them, to say you’re using the two-cop routine, and premature apology, the purposeful misunderstanding, etc. (1968, quoted in 2000, p.38).

Once a woman realized her oppression would have been necessary for her to leave the situation if she were to free herself from oppression. This must have been a frightening endeavor for women. Jones and Brown recognized that this fear would be present and urged women to come together to provide the support that was necessary for their survival: "No woman can do this alone. The territory ahead is new, frightening, and appears lonely. We must begin by forming organizations which will provide emotional support and an intellectual base for framing action" (1968, quoted in 2000, p.49). Action, through organizing and support, was the method to suppress fear:

Being afraid has been a genuine response of oppressed people to their initial encounter with a vision of liberation. As is always the case, discipline and organization are the antidote, the means by which the exploited are drawn out of the routine of their ghettos. We cannot meet fear with rhetoric or statistics. We must become ready to organize, support, and act (1968, quoted in 2000, p.55).

A support system that encouraged women to face their fear was a necessary and effective organizing tool. Methods such as conscious-raising groups fostered nurturing relationships between some of the women who participated in them. Jones and Brown goes to explain in the next section why sisterhood was not obtainable for all of the women involved in feminist organizing.

- **SUPERFICIAL**

Jones and Brown did recognize that establishing links of sisterhood would be difficult. They recognized that white women of that era were often devalued their female relationships and this would make sisterhood difficult. Jones and Brown implied that women were taught to see their female-female relationships as having no value or that it would serve a purpose of companionship until the woman could build a romantic

relationship with a man. This socialization could serve as a roadblock to sisterhood.

Jones and Brown explained how women are taught to monitor their female friendships:

And that fear, initiated by men, is reinforced by both men and women. Perform a simple spontaneous act like lighting another woman's cigarette with the same match you've just lit your own and there is panic on all sides. Women have to learn to inhibit these natural, asexual gestures. And any close and prolonged friendship between women is suspect (1968, quoted in 2000, p.27)

Jones and Brown discussed how female relationships were perpetuated until they were no longer necessary because a man has entered the picture:

So women use each other as best they can under the circumstances, to keep out the cold. And the blood-pacts of childhood where one swore not to reveal a secret on penalty of death turn into bargains not leaving each other until both are lined up for marriage. Only these later pacts are never believed or fulfilled. No woman trusts another because she understands the desperation. The older a woman becomes the more oppressive the syndrome. As one by one her contemporaries marry she begins to feel the way old people must when one by one their friends and relatives die (1968, quoted in 2000, p.27).

Jones and Brown urged women to stop the superficial chitchat and begin to really connect:

Having accepted our common identity the next thing we must do is to get in touch with each other. I mean that absolutely literally. Women see each other all the time, open their mouths and make noises, but communicate only on the most superficial level. We don't talk to each other about what we consider our real problems because we are afraid to look insecure, because we don't trust or respect each other, and because we are afraid to look or be disloyal to our husbands and benefactors (1968, quoted in 2000, p.36).

These contradictory themes reveal women's dependency on men was so deeply ingrained in some women, they could not put any value on any relationships unless the relationship would result in male, heterosexual love. Jones and Brown discuss the rewards of relationships between women. They speak to the subversive power of women valuing other women. These bonds between women are necessary for consciousness-raising groups to be successful and for women to lead separatists lives from men.

BLACK FEMINISTS: A BLACK FEMINIST STATEMENT

OPPRESSION

- **INTERLOCKING AND SIMULTANEOUS**

As I stated above in the cluster analysis, black women are facing many different forms of oppression simultaneously. Because of this fact, black feminists saw it necessary to address all forms of oppression at once; they could not be separated out. The Combahee River Collective (hereafter referred to as CRC) proclaim within the first paragraph of their feminist statement that they sought to eradicate all forms of oppression:

The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives (1977, quoted in 1995, p.232).

CRC explained how their identity as black people and women put them at a unique disadvantage in society: “Black women’s extremely negative relationship to the American political system (a system of white male rule) has always been determined by our membership in two oppressed racial and sexual castes” (1977, quoted in 1995, p.232). CRC went on to explained how their exposure to racism and classism is as prevalent as their exposure to sexism:

We believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women’s lives as are the politics of class and race. We also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously. We know that there is such a thing as racial-sexual oppression which is neither solely racial nor solely sexual... (1977, quoted in 1995, p. 234).

As I mentioned in the section above, because of black women's unique conditions of oppression it was difficult for them to use the radical feminists' model for liberation.

Black women had different needs and demands for liberation and these unique needs led to the formation of such black feminist groups as the Combahee River Collective.

- **BLACK MALE SEXISM**

As I stated in Chapter Two and the section above, many black political women were exposed to black male sexism in black liberation movements. Many black women felt that it was difficult to feel liberated as a black person if they were still oppressed as women. Again it is necessary for black women to be liberated as black people and as people who are women. CRC explained how their involvement with different groups led them to feminist consciousness, one that is anti-sexist *and* anti-racist:

Black feminist politics also have an obvious connection to movements for Black liberation particularly those of the 1960's and 1970's. Many of us were active in those movements (civil rights, Black Nationalism, the Black Panthers), and all of our lives were greatly affected and changed by their ideology, their goals, and the tactics used to achieve their goals. It was our experience and disillusionment within these liberation movements, as well as experience on the periphery of the white male left, that led to the need to develop a politics that were anti-racist, unlike those of white women, and antisexist, unlike those of Black and white men (1977, quoted in 1995, p.233).

Feminism was challenging to black men because it threatened the one of the few instances of power they could experience in society. CRC explained: "Feminism is, nevertheless, very threatening to the majority of Black people because it calls into question some of the most basic assumptions about our existence, i.e., that sex should be determined by power" (1977, quoted in 1995, p.237). There was also the fear that black men could lose black women to feminism and this would divide the struggle for black liberation:

The reaction of Black men to feminism has been notoriously negative. They are, of course, even more threatened than Black women by the possibility that Black feminists might organize around our own needs. They realize that they might not only lose valuable and hard-working allies in their struggles but they might also be forced to change their habitually sexist ways of interacting with and oppressing Black women (Combahee River Collective 1977, quoted in 1995, p.237).

Black feminists focused on black male sexism in particular because of their political ties. In order for black women to be free black people would have to be free and black women and men would have to work together. Sexist remarks and behavior served as serious roadblock to black women and men doing political work together.

- **WHITE FEMALE RACISM**

Just as sexism served as a serious roadblock between black women and men, sexism served as one between black and white women, CRC explained:

A Black feminist presence has evolved most obviously in connection with the second wave of the American women's movement beginning in the late 1960's. Black, other Third World, and working women have been involved in the feminist movement from its start, but both outside reactionary forces and racism and elitism within the movement itself have served to obscure our participation (1977, quoted in 1995, p.233).

CRC directly charged the white women's movement as being a racist organization.

CRC saw it as white women's duty to eradicate racism from their feminist organization through education and accountability:

One issue that is of major concern to us and that we have begun to publicly address is racism in the white women's movement. As Black feminists we are made constantly and painfully aware of how little effort white women have made to understand and combat their racism, which requires among other things that they have a more than superficial comprehension of race, color, and Black history and culture. Eliminating racism in the white women's movement is by definition work for white women to do but we will continue to speak to and demand accountability on this issue (1977, quoted in 1995, p.239).

Black feminists felt it necessary to form separate political organizations because of white female racism and black male sexism. Black feminists felt they were the only ones

committed to an anti-racist and anti-sexist agenda. The Combahee River Collective felt as though only black women cared enough about black women to fight for their liberation.

FEMINISM

- **FORMATION OF A SEPARATE BLACK FEMINISM**

Recall from Chapter Two that black feminists did break away from white feminists to discuss their issues in New York and this fateful meeting led to the formation of the National Black Feminist Organization, as CRC recounted: “In 1973 Black feminists, primarily located in New York, felt the necessity of forming a separate Black feminist group. This became the Nation Black Feminist Organization” (1977, quoted in 1995, p.233). Racism and an exclusionary feminist agenda prompted black women to search out one another to generate a feminist theory that spoke to their needs and desires. The CRC suggested that the “genesis” of black feminist theory is something that is inherent in black women’s personal experiences: “There is also undeniably a personal genesis for Black feminism, that is, the political realization that comes from the seemingly personal experiences of individual Black women’s lives” (1977, quoted in 1995, p.233).

CRC felt that as black women they were the only ones who would examine black women’s lives and partially they were the only ones who could even understand black women’s lives: “We have spent a great deal of energy delving into the cultural and experimental nature of our oppression out of necessity because none of these matters have ever been looked at before. No one before has ever examined the multilayered texture of Black women’s lives” (1977, quoted in 1995, p.234). The separation of black women from white women’s feminists groups was one that was made out of political

necessity and what some black feminists viewed as personal survival. This separation did serve a purpose by encouraging the conception of black feminist theory.

SISTERHOOD

- **SOLIDARITY**

Sisterhood was viewed as natural and inevitable among black feminists for whom sisterhood was based on an identity that only women of color can share: “Black women activists...had a shared awareness of how their sexual identity combined with their racial identity to make their whole life situation and focus of their political struggles unique” (1977, quoted in 1995, p.232). These women depended on one another from generation to generation, as this statement illustrated: “Contemporary Black feminism is the outgrowth of countless generations of personal sacrifice, militancy, and work by our mothers and sisters” (CRC 1977, quoted in 1995, p.233). Black feminists found strength right in their own

female communities and the love that black feminists feel for black women served as a source endurance: “Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work” (CRC 1995, p.233).

Black feminists’ conception of sisterhood was different from radical feminists in that they felt there was something organic to their sisterhood. As the CRC explained, black communities have strong networks of women. Many black women naturally depended on another from one generation to the next. Some black women are taught from a young age to value their female relationships and to rely on them in a way that many white women did not.

- **BLACK COMMUNITY'S REJECTION**

Recall from Chapter Two that feminism separated black feminists from the black community. The reasons are varied but my research revealed several. I will recap: black men feared losing their power over the one group of people they could exert control, that black women were dividing the struggle, and that if black women did chose to get involved in feminist organizing they risked being labeled a lesbian. The CRC mentioned that rumors such as these did serve as a roadblock to organizing: "Accusations that Black feminism divides the Black struggle are powerful deterrents to the growth of an autonomous Black women's movement" (1977, quoted in 1995, p.237).

CRC did speak of the fear that existed among some black men. CRC still cared for the black community and were still very dedicated to liberating all black people. They did not find it productive or healthy to remain so closely connected to black men because they did not feel their need for liberation was taken seriously. CRC was also strongly opposed to homophobia that was prevalent in the black community and the Black Power movement in particular.

A close examination of these two documents reveals how the themes discussed in the cluster criticism were consistent with these two examples. Many of the issues I discussed earlier in the chapter resurface in this analysis. Again, the division between radical and black feminists and the way they shaped their political agendas are highlighted in these two pieces. Jones and Brown could be identified as racist because of the great importance they placed on ending sexism. By claiming that oppression is the main and only source of oppression worthy of combatting, Jones and Brown could have put-off many black women who were otherwise interested in feminist organizing. At the

very least, racism and sexism must be on the top of a feminist agenda if that group is seeking to attract black women to the group.

Jones and Brown, like many other radical feminists, were also very critical of men and women doing political work together. Again, black women interested in feminist organizing could be put-off by this hard-line separatist stance. While many black women and the CRC specifically, had major disagreements with black men they never felt it was necessary to sever all ties with them merely because black men need to be part of black people's liberation. Jones and Brown's arguments possess exclusionary and racist undertones that limit their analysis. Their analysis is not one that can be applied to *all* women which is what they set out to do just by reading the title of the manifesto.

The CRC's "Black Feminist Statement" was also limited and exclusionary. In the statement they speak of an organic sisterhood that can only be experienced by black women. While there was a need to define black feminist politics and issues, the CRC was limited in their discussion of women. Although I do think they meant to be very specific, the document clearly communicates that black feminism is for black women only.

Both groups were limited by their inability to try and speak to all women and create a sense of hope for a movement that would work for all women and would welcome all women. In Chapter Four I will discuss some concepts that promotes a feminism where there is a space for all women and also serves as an alternative for radical and black feminism. These alternatives are a direct response to the limitations of radical and black feminism.

CHAPTER FOUR

In Chapter Four I will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of radical and black feminists. In doing this I will examine a weakness that both groups share, identity politics. I will first define identity politics, discuss why it is not a wise political strategy, and then discuss some alternatives to identity politics. In this discussion I explain the relationship between black and white women today and what some feminist scholars outline as solutions to ease tensions between black and white women. I end my thesis by offering a new rhetorical strategy for feminists to employ. Invitational rhetoric is different from most traditional rhetorical theories, and it may provide a space where women who are different from one another can meet and discuss their lives.

My research and analysis is significant because it reveals the differences that exist between two prominent schools of thought in feminist theory. These two schools were invaluable to the creation of the foundation for contemporary feminist theory and practice. Understanding the strengths and working to augment the weaknesses of these two groups of feminists will generate a more inclusive and revolutionary feminist space.

I. Radical Feminists: Contributions and Limitations

Radical feminists, although limited in their inclusion of certain groups of women, did make significant contributions to feminist theory and produced change in women's lives. Radical feminists tackled a specific form of oppression that affected a specific group of women. Barbara Ryan stated that radical feminism "...created a number of well-developed theories to account for women's secondary status" (1992, p.64). Radical feminists did incite certain changes that benefited the majority of women, such as increases in women's wages, promotion and legal protection of abortion rights, increased

awareness of women's second class citizen status, and promoted women's independence from men. The negative result of radical feminism was not merely the creation of an exclusionary political conception and agenda. By focusing on the issues of white middle-class women, radical feminists created and promoted a very narrow conception of a fictional, universal Woman.

The definition of Woman as being synonymous with white middle-class woman is a dangerous construction. Problems with this conception arise when one considers issues of universalism and essentialism (Barker 1997). Merele Woo warns against searching for or using a construction of a universal woman when developing feminist theory: "This is the same white voice that says, 'I am writing about and looking for themes that are 'universal.' Well most of the time when 'universal' is used, it is just a euphemism for 'white': white themes, white significance, white culture' (1981, p.144). Grant and Parker support Woo's warning by suggesting that white women at times do not look past their own white skin privilege:

As white women proposed to change their system to allow women the opportunity to reap the same benefits as men, they often failed to recognize the complex realities embedded in this simple statement...white women consistently have failed to acknowledge the widely different historical, material, and cultural realities between themselves and women of color; they have thus presented white women's experiences and agendas as representatives of all women (1998, p.499).

bell hooks argues that white feminists too often cite sexual oppression as the origin of all oppression. hooks points out that white feminists feel that sexism is present in every society globally that other forms of oppression are merely the outgrowth of patriarchy. By making these connections, radical feminists suggest that eliminating sexist oppression would eliminate all forms of domination. Such a view creates the assumption that the

only legitimate feminist agenda should be that of eliminating sexism, rather than putting any energy into eradicating other forms of domination (hooks 1989).

The idea of “all women being in the same boat” forwarded by radical feminists, along with the suggestion that all women should unite around their “shared” oppression, enraged many women of color. When radical and other white feminists suggested that women have a common shared oppression, they often ignore other forms of oppression that are specific to other women’s lives. White feminists can also be viewed as appropriating the right to speak for all women, a move that is racist, classist, and paternalistic in nature (YAWF 1970, quoted in 2000, p.428). The universal Woman vision is a narrow and immature political and theoretical construction. Black feminists did not allow this construction to go unchallenged for long and their retort was both powerful politically and theoretically.

II. Black Feminists: Contributions and Limitations

Black feminists’ most valuable contribution to creating a truly revolutionary and inclusive feminism was the concept of interlocking oppression; this concept states and illustrates that no oppression can be isolated and experienced independently. This is an invaluable theoretical and practical conception of oppression because sexism can never be successfully combated or abolished without tackling all issues of domination and oppression. Black feminism was revolutionary in its approach to feminist politics and theory and it is uncertain where feminism would be today without their contributions.

Black feminists, like their radical white counterparts, were not immune to theoretical and practical flaws. Both groups of feminists did practice identity politics as a political and recruitment strategy. Identity politics is a dangerous political strategy to adopt for

long because it stifles political growth and coalitions. An examination of this form of politics is necessary because it illustrates what should be avoided to create an inclusive feminist political foundation.

III. Identity Politics

Identity politics is a political strategy that was widely used by various social movements during the 1970s in the United States. After defining identity politics and I will then discuss what the implications it bares on political coalition building. Irshad Manja defines identity politics: “In contemporary parlance, reducing individuals to aspects of their portfolios is called ‘identity politics’” (1997, np). Identity politics is the belief that anyone of the same biographical dimensions, whether that be sex, color, ethnicity, sexual orientation, the list goes on, is enough of a shared identity to constitute a community. Identity politics not only seeks to foster a sense of community among individuals but to secure some political advantage for the biological or ideological trait that defines the group.

The history of identity politics begins in the early 1970s in the United States. People were disillusioned after the 1960s and various groups began to divide. Younger black activists went from being civil rights activists to being Black Power activists, women went from new Left auxiliaries to Women, and gay and lesbians began to develop very public identities, to cite a few examples. Elliot Tzedek explains, “As New Left reached its final days in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Identity Politics-that is, the direct association of one’s membership in certain categories with one’s political outlook and agenda-became the guiding philosophy of social change groups and communities” (2000, np).

Before delving into what is destructive about this political approach, I would like to interject that there are also some positive aspects of identity politics. Engaging in identity politics can foster healthy new attitudes in the group that is utilizing identity politics. It helps an individual focus on themselves, their history, their potential, and carve out a space where the individual can feel that she or he belongs perhaps for the first time in her or his life. Identity politics encourages individuals to focus on a shared identity of a group and promotes a new found or strengthened sense of pride about belonging to the group. A few examples of this are the Black Power mantra of “Black is beautiful” and the gay liberation cry of, “We’re here, we’re queer, get used to it.” Identity politics gives a group a sense of worth and significance, the shared identity that is based in social groups and categories then becomes inherently politicized by exercising identity politics. Elliot Tzedek comments on the positive outcome of identity politics:

I don’t think the questions identity politics asked, the positions it invented are at all silly or useless or wrong. I think they are limited by the nature of the political world around us, by their own nature. The strategies, the activists, and the demonstrations accomplished a lot of change. The emphasis on cultural pride reconnected people to their lives, and encouraged the construction of historical narratives of resistance that greatly strengthened ‘identities’ that have been devalued in the US... (2000, np).

At the same time, it is important to not depend on identity politics as a group’s main strategy because it then results in exclusionary, isolated groups that support biological constructions, making it a dangerous strategy. Rather than viewing identity as something that is socially constructed, groups who utilize identity politics tend to view their identity as something that is biologically determined. Such an assumption is dangerous because it can lead individuals to view their oppression as the result of something biological rather than social. It is similar to Eurocentric assumptions that

those who do not possess European heritage are somehow intellectually and physically inferior to white people. Elliot Tzedek explains the complications involved in using identities that are socially defined as biological:

We messed up, at the very beginning, first by choosing to reify identities as they were already defined in the world, and then by describing these identities as if they were inherent to us in some way instead of descriptions of positions within extremely hierarchical, pre-existing social structures of power...as if those categories were physical features and not a colonial classification system (2000, np).

Identity politics eventually will become non-productive because it can ignore differences within a group and force individuals to never stray from biological groups. By reinforcing categories, groups ignore that these categories are social constructions and expressions of social power. Race and gender, for example, are not pre-existing conditions, but rather social constructions that allow certain individuals to exercise domination over other individuals (Hill-Collins 1997, Tzedek 2000). While identity politics can reinforce group identification and pride, it is also limiting because it can prevent individuals to veer away from their own culture. Remaining entrenched in one's culture can result in reinscribing socially constructed categories that make one's existence appear to be a reality and something that should not be questioned (Hill-Collins 1997).

A group can achieve more of their political goals if they base political alliances on political affinities rather than identity. It benefits dominant groups when subordinate groups do not go beyond their own communities. There is a richness of connections to be made between groups and also there is strength in numbers. Audre Lorde urges women specifically to go beyond their own communities and forge new, larger ones with those different from oneself and to also never ignore, but celebrate difference:

As women, we have been taught to either ignore our differences or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change. Without community, there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist (1981, p.99).

Karen Kahn, former Combahee River Collective member, raises an interesting point when she questions what we are to do when we are confronted with the parts of ourselves that does not fit the group we “belong” to. It is consistent with many of the black lesbian complaints that were present in my cluster analysis. Black lesbians did not feel there was a place for them within the Black Power movement. There were aspects of black lesbians’ identities that did not conform to the Black Power vision and those aspects refused to conform because conforming would not have been healthy for black feminists who were lesbians. Karen Kahn suggests that more flexible identities must be allowed and encouraged if individuals are to be complete people (1995).

IV. Alternative to Identity Politics

Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill-Collins does an excellent job of explicating what is wrong with identity politics and why those who seek to do political work should avoid it. She begins by warning against defining *all* black women as black feminists:

From this perspective, living as Black women provides experiences to stimulate a Black feminist consciousness. Yet indiscriminately labeling all Black women in this way simultaneously conflates the terms *woman* and *feminist* and identities being of African descent- a questionable biological category-as being the sole determinant of a Black feminist consciousness (1997, p.241).

When black feminists limit black feminism to only black women they put a biological prerequisite on black feminism. Collins points this out when she criticizes the Combahee River Collective for using biological prerequisites:

The groundbreaking Combahee River Collective (1982) document, "A Black Feminist Statement," explicitly relies on this definition. The Collective claims that "as Black women we find any type of biological determinism a particularly dangerous and reactionary basis upon which to build a politic" (p.17). But in spite of this statement, by implying that only African-American women can be Black feminists, they require a biological prerequisite for race and gender consciousness (1997, p.242).

Collins also cites radical feminists as practicing identity politics by implying that only women can be feminists. Collins stresses that it is important to note that not *all* black women practice and participate in black feminism.

Collins discusses why it is important not to limit black feminism to black women or feminism in general to just women. Coalitions are possible when feminism in general is more open to everyone. Anyone who possesses the commitment and desire to espouse black feminist theory can become a critic, teacher, advocate or disseminator of black feminist theory or feminist theory in general, while still allowing black women to define themselves. Collins firmly believes that coalitions are necessary for others to contribute to black feminism: "While Black feminist thought may originate with Black feminist intellectuals, it cannot flourish isolated from the experiences of ideas of other groups" (1997, p.253). Collins favors this conception of black feminism because it restores and embraces black feminism's humanistic vision.

Identity politics and isolation in identity groups still persist today and contributes to what is arguably the largest problem hindering black and white feminist coalitions. Black and white women still have great difficulties communicating with one another beyond a superficial level. Black and white women need to learn to really talk about uncomfortable issues that cause division. Midge Wilson and Kathy Russell (1996) state that issues of racism are improving but they still continue to plague the women's

movement. Many of the issues visited in my cluster analysis continue to resurface. Lack of communication is a major barrier because without communication black and white women cannot effectively name their problems. Wilson and Russell discuss the need for genuine communication instead of just catchy slogans: "The issues are real and are not subject to quick fixes. Sprouting platitudes such as 'sisterhood is global' and issuing desperate pleas to 'just get along' do little to change Black and White women's realities. Real work must be done if progress is to be made in cross-race relations, and the process should begin with naming the problem..."(1996, p.272). Black and white women need to talk about their differences and realities without romanticizing the differences. Wilson and Russell suggest that a white woman volunteer in a black neighborhood's community project to show black women she cares about black women and black people in general. For this commitment to be real and viewed as sincere, the white woman would have to invest her time and not attend one neighborhood function and think that she has met some quota and no longer needs to give any more time to the neighborhood's cause.

Black women want white women to be able to talk about their own racism and not just racism as a social issue; white women have to own their racism. First, white women must recognize racism does exist and it is inescapable. Second, white women must know that recognizing their own racism is the only way they can confront and banish it (Wolf 1996). Wilson and Russell suggest two major courses of action for white women to take to combat racism and make real connections with black women: develop long-term relationships with black women and begin to let go of privilege. Wilson and Russell stated that to develop long-term relationships between black and white women, white women cannot perform one politic action and expect the connections to magically appear.

White women need to devote time to community groups and organizations that are committed to ending racism. By letting go of white skin or class privilege white women will begin to exercise their domination over black women less and less. bell hooks challenges white women to simply love one another: "Embedded in the commitment to feminist revolution is the challenge to love. Love can be and is an important source of empowerment when we struggle to confront issues of sex, race, and class"(1989, p.26).

Black feminist Retha Powers recalls feeling that her first *true* white friend was a woman by the name of Tara. Powers held these sentiments because of Tara's ability to discuss issues of race. Tara not only recognized racism but also tried to understand it. Powers admitted that race makes the maintenance of her friendship with Tara difficult and even uncomfortable at times, but the friendship is worth the uneasiness. Powers stresses that these relationships between black and white women are important but should not be allowed to become shallow by stepping around race, "Black and white women can be friends. However, it is difficult, and this friendship cannot allow the painful history of race in this country to force it toward dishonesty. In the words of Audre Lord, our silences will nor protect us" (1996, p.59).

Standpoint theory is a way to generate an understanding of difference and enable women to openly discuss their differences. Sandra Harding defines standpoint theory as, "Epistemologically, the standpoint theories argue that it is an advantage to base thought in the everyday lives of people in oppressed and excluded groups" (1991, p.142).

Standpoint theory can therefore empower those who are oppressed because "...marginalized groups develop political and knowledge-seeking projects that originate explicitly from their own socially devalued lives instead of from 'nowhere' or somebody

else's life" (Harding1991, p.p.144). When groups use standpoint theory it can add value to marginalized groups' lives and experiences.

Dominant groups have much to learn from a standpoint theory approach. The most obvious opportunity that standpoint theory can provide to dominant groups is a glance into another life quite different from their own. By reading an essay by a member of a marginalized group, the person in the position of privilege can begin to understand how less privilege can cause another to interpret a situation and reality quite differently than the person with privilege. The dominant group can begin to re-think reality as others know it and their own privilege by reading the standpoints of individuals in marginalized groups. Patricia Hill-Collins explained how black feminists created a standpoint specific to most black women's reality:

Yet African-American women have been neither passive victims of nor willing accomplices to their own domination. As a result, emerging work in black women's studies contends that black women have a self-defined standpoint on their own oppression...In brief, a subordinate group not only experiences a different reality than a group that rules, but a subordinate group may interpret that reality differently than a dominant group (1995, p.339).

The standpoint that black women have generated is different from identity politics because it is flexible and allows for differences to exist among black women. Standpoint theory points out that there are similarities that occur when black women discuss their own oppression but if a black woman feels as though she did not experience the same reality she remains a black woman and her experiences are still be valid and valued. Privilege can become glaringly obvious to those in a dominant group. Patricia Hill-Collins (1995) stated that it was necessary for all people to participate in black feminist theory. The reason for someone who is not a black woman to engage in black feminist

thought is that people who do not have marginalized identities can learn from and learn to use knowledge generated by marginalized people.

Standpoint theory allows an individual to begin to understand her own and others lives in relation to one another. It can allow an individual to ask and begin to answer, “How do others see me?” For anyone to perform analysis or critique of oppression, one must be aware of her social positionality. For those in the dominant group this is especially important and to realize that understanding privilege is not another luxury but a necessity. Sandra Harding explained how it was important for her as a white woman to be aware of what privilege she carries in society: “I am to take responsibility for my identity, my racial social location, by learning how I am connected to other whites and to people of color; by learning what the consequences of my beliefs and behaviors as a European woman will be” (1991, p.51). A privileged individual can use the viewpoint of another to inform her own world. This is the beginning of taking responsibility for one’s privileged racial location. bell hooks (1989) describes this as rebelling against privilege and this rebellion is proof of allegiance and a political commitment to ending domination.

Black feminism, as one example of standpoint theory, can be invaluable to one who possesses white skin privilege. There is a great deal to be learned from black feminism’s conception of the intersectionality of oppression. The concept that all forms of oppression are interconnecting and simultaneous can provide some insight into what marginalized group’s realities are like and in turn a privileged individual can begin to see how they participate and benefit from those oppressive relations daily. Patricia Hill-Collins advocates the use of standpoint theory because it enriches black feminist theory and also how privileged individuals view their own identity:

By advocating, refining, and disseminating Black feminist thought, other groups—such as Black men, white women, white men, and other people of color—further its development. Black women can produce an attenuated version of Black feminist thought separated from other groups. Other groups cannot produce Black feminist thought without African-American women. Such groups can, however, develop self-defined knowledge reflecting their own standpoints (1997, p.255)

A political strategy that moves away from narrow conceptions of identity politics and allows different groups to meet and interact is coalition politics. Coalition politics is a strategy that is based on affinity (Harding 1991). Standpoint theory encourages the cultivation of affinity because standpoint theory could allow two very seemingly different people to discover they perhaps share many of the same passions and goals. When adopting coalition politics one aligns her or himself with others not because of shared biological traits, but because of a shared political goal. Coalition politics allows individuals from various social positions to collaborate with one another. Many contemporary feminists are advocates for coalition politics and assert that it is a more radical and productive politically than identity politics. Barbara and Beverly Smith are two such contemporary feminists:

She claimed that separatists are more radical than other feminists. What *I* [Barbara Smith] really feel is radical is trying to make coalitions with people who are different from you. I feel it is radical to be dealing with race and sex and class and sexual identity all at one time. I think *that* is really radical because it has never been done before. *And it really pisses me off that they* [those using a separatist politic stance] *think of themselves as radical. I think there is a difference between being extreme and being radical* (1981, p.127).

Coalition politics also forces groups to examine its own oppressive behavior as Barbara Smith concurs, “The necessity for coalitions has pushed many groups to rigorously examine the attitudes and ignorance within themselves which prevent coalitions from succeeding” (1983, p.xxxiii). Coalition politics can also teach solidarity. Solidarity is

generated when a group has a shared political goal and they can identify with one another because of that goal, as hooks explains:

We want to begin as women seriously addressing ourselves, not solely in relation to men, but in relation to an entire structure of domination of which patriarchy is one part. While the struggle to eradicate sexism and sexist oppression is and should be the primary thrust of feminist movement, to prepare ourselves politically for this effort we must first learn how to be in solidarity, how to struggle with one another (1989, p.25).

By adopting coalition politics one's identity can become less fixed and more fluid (Harraway 1991). When one's identity is less fixed there is room to see similarities between oneself and others. Standpoint can reveal what those similarities may be. Instead of narrowly defining Woman or Black Woman, Linda Alcoff suggests using the label "woman" as a political position. Alcoff speaks of the benefits of the post-structural critique of Woman. Women can escape predetermined gender identities but at the same time women do not want to deconstruct the term so much that the term "woman" becomes politically impotent. Feminism is for all women so there needs to be some definition of "woman" and an identity for women to organize around. By doing this, feminists can begin to get away from the essentialism that I discussed earlier when explaining the definition of Woman. Alcoff incorporates standpoint theory into her suggestions for defining woman

This new alternative might share the post-structuralist insight that the category "Woman" needs to be theorized through an exploration of the experience of subjectivity, as opposed to a description of current attributes, but it need not concede that such an exploration will necessarily result in a nominalist position on gender, or an erase of it. Feminists need to explore the possibility of a theory of the gendered subject that does not slide into essentialism (1997, p.341).

If "Woman" is used as a political position instead of a descriptive label, being a woman could mean one thing at one time and something quite different at another. It would also

give feminists more political freedom to define their agendas and to form alliances with groups different from themselves but who still share some political goals with them. An example of this would be a feminist group who is concerned about women's health. An area of the United States could be sprayed with a certain pesticide that seems to be causing miscarriages and birth defects. This pesticide could also be killing the wildlife in the area. The feminist group concerned with women's health issues could align themselves with an environmental group. Both groups have something to gain politically by joining forces and sharing resources. When the two groups' hard work pays off and the pesticide is banned from being used the two groups can dissolve their alliance.

Alcoff goes on to argue that feminists should move away from identity politics because there is nothing inherently politic about identity. There are no prepackaged sets of political agendas that naturally occur with biological traits or superficial traits of identity. For example, merely having a woman president of the United States would not necessarily lead to women's issue being at the top of the president's list of priorities. One cannot just assume that a president who is a woman would automatically be concerned with women's issues merely because she herself is a woman, just as not all women are feminists. Alcoff suggests that by moving away from identity politics and moving towards viewing identity as a position feminists can "...say at one and the same time that gender is not natural, biological, universal, ahistorical, or essential and yet still claim that gender is relevant because we are taking gender as a position from which to act politically" (1997, p.349).

Therefore, when using the positional definition of woman, identity becomes less fixed and is free to shift context depending on the situation at hand. Identity is open to

change then depending on what the political objective is on the coalition's agenda that the woman is *currently* engaged in. Alcoff explains how this fluidity of identity is pertinent to avoiding essentialism: "In this analysis, then, the concept of positionality allows for a determinate though fluid identity of woman that does not fall into essentialism: woman is a position from which a feminist politics can emerge rather than a set of attributes that are 'objectively identifiable'" (1997, p.350). When the identity of woman is more fluid the identity woman is then more inclusive. Each woman is free to decide what constitutes her identity without preconceived notions of womanhood to limit her from living her life as she wishes to live it. There are no dangers of her being told that she is not a "real" woman. What using "woman" as a political position boils down to is that it is more productive to advocate feminism rather than view it as an identity. hooks explains, "I believe that women should think less in terms of feminism as an identity and more in terms of 'advocating feminism'; to move from emphasis on personal lifestyle issues towards creating political paradigms and radical models of social change that emphasize collective as well as individual change" (1989, p.182).

Coalition politics raises the issues of whether or not it is politically advantageous for women to strive for sisterhood. Sisterhood (hooks 1984) is a utopian vision and I am not saying that it never happens and that it is impossible. But one has to ask how necessary sisterhood is for women to do political work together. As coalition politics states, people can do political work with those with whom they share an affinity with and when the relationship is no longer viable it can be dissolved. I am not saying that feminists should cease striving for sisterhood, but I think that sisterhood is not necessary for political alliances between women to occur. Also, sisterhood is not always possible

and saying it exists could be viewed as offensive to some women. Consider the white, educated, middle-class, academic feminist who claims to possess a sense of sisterhood with a poor, uneducated Filipina who is a sweatshop worker who is also a labor union organizer. It is not impossible for these two women to ever feel a sense of sisterhood, but that would take some time on both parts of the women. And time may not be what the Filipina has a lot of. The western academic who steps in to help the workers organize could be welcomed but should not boast of global sisterhood. Her privilege makes it difficult for the Filipina to believe that they share some common oppression. Rather than the western academic framing her work as occurring because she is subjected to sexism just as this woman is, she could simply let the Filipina know that she too cares about women's rights and workers' rights and that is why she is offering her time and aid.

As a young feminist I made the mistake of longing for *sisterhood*. I came to discover that there were some women that I would never feel a sense of sisterhood with. Does that mean that I disassociate with them just because their politics or identities are quite different from my own? I have realized that the answer to that is a resounding no. I have even accepted that it is necessary to do political work with people who are not feminists. I am at peace with all of this because I now understand that doing political work with people does not mean that I have to be associated with them for the rest of my life. Political coalitions should be fluid and can be temporary. They should be formed when necessary and disbanded when they no longer serve a purpose. The focus of political work needs to be centered on issues, not identities or some false conception of sisterhood.

Donna Haraway describes exciting new political standpoints that are inclusive and promote the forming of political coalitions. Haraway urges people to get away from identities that are fixed and based on old societal prescriptions for groups. "Gender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, racism, and capitalism" (Haraway 1991, p.197). Haraway points out that there are those who benefit from people only employing identity politics and resisting coalitions. She refers to the collective use of the word "us" is often a political myth.

An alternative to having biological identities is having political identities. These identities are less fixed and created by the group. This would eliminate the old arguments of one feminist telling the other that she is not a "real" feminist because she is not x or she does z. To illustrate this point Haraway cites Chela Sandoval's concept of "oppositional consciousness." Those with an oppositional consciousness will "...refuse stable membership in social categories of sex, race, or class." When people construct an oppositional consciousness they will then form alliances based on "...conscious coalition, of affinity, of political kinship" (Haraway 1990, pp.197-198). When one rallies around issues instead of fixed identities, identity politics become obsolete and coalitions are seen as more progressive and productive.

I would like to reiterate that affinity or coalition politics could be coupled with Linda Alcoff's notion of strategic essentialism through positionality; to create a feminist political foundation *all* women can use. Alcoff speaks of the benefits of post-structural critique to feminist theory. By disrupting binary opposites and viewing the world as constructed by discourse, women can then escape predetermined gender identities and

other identities as well. Alcoff warns against deconstructing the term “woman” so much that the term is politically impotent. Feminism is for women, so there needs to be some identity or notion of ‘woman’ that women can organize around. The goal is to get away from essentialism and avoid nominalism. Alcoff proposes that feminist find a way to construct this new “woman.”

Alcoff also criticizes the use of identity politics and why identity politics does not work for women: “...the concept of identity politics does not presuppose a prepackaged set of objective needs or political implications but problematizes and introduces identity as a factor in any political analysis” (1997, p.348). Alcoff does not toss to the side all uses of identity politics, it is just that identity needs to become something that is flexible and is determined more by political needs and ideologies than biological traits or socially ascribed traits. So when gender is seen as a position from which to act politically instead of a biological identity one’s identity is constantly shifting and relative. Women can define what a woman is from one day to the next and also what feminist’s issues will arise out of that definition.

Drucilla Cornell feels that strategic essentialism should be a legal right: “The law should take a woman’s experience into account by giving her the freedom to define what her experiences mean” (2000, p.115). Cornell stresses the importance of being able to name and define oneself. She recognizes the importance of feminist work to be done in the realm of discourse. When you have the power to name something or someone you have all the power. Moving “naming” to the top of their agenda would give feminists a powerful strategy because when you can change the language you can change the world. Cornell stresses the importance of a feminist agenda that addresses language: “The

symbolic aspect of feminism implicates renaming and reshaping our form of life. A symbolic project is inseparable from any materialist feminism because how the world comes to be materialized is in language” (2000, p.123).

Coalition building also means taking other people’s positions and feelings into consideration. Patricia Hill-Collins cites transversal politics as a politics that does this. One has to be aware of their own mission and the other participants as well and then a compromise can be made. Collins cites Nira Yuval-Davis, “Transversal dialogue should be based on the principles of rooting and shifting-that is, being centered in one’s own experience while being empathetic to the differential positioning of the partners in dialogue...the boundaries of the dialogue would be determined by the message rather than the messageners” (2000, p.245). People involved in coalition politics can remain rooted in their own history or position while being flexible enough to consider the concerns of others who are different from themselves.

Collins (2000) describes how transversal politics can eliminate some of the hurdles common among different groups. First when using transversal politics people would have to have a new viewpoint for how they can change the world and also how they understand the world. One way of changing commonly held perceptions is to eliminate dichotomous thinking patterns that has been the underpinning of racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism for years. Seeing others as different does not mean that one should see them as the opposite from themselves; this means using both/and thinking instead of either/or thinking. When one lets go of seeing the world in binary relationships then similarities are easier to see and perhaps rally around.

As stated earlier all you need is love according to the bell hooks but the question remains whether love and a sense of friendship based on mutual respect and care enough for coalitions? Chela Sandoval agrees with hooks that love is a good place to start. According to Sandoval, if one can love enough they can let go and form a differential consciousness (2000). Differential consciousness is a place where you can experience the “zero degree of power.” The “zero degree of power” is when the love between people can alleviate the stress of the presence of privilege. It is when two very different people can love. I can say that I have loved black women enough and Latinas enough that we reached the zero degree of power together. I feel that we created a space where differences could be comfortably discussed, confronted, and we generated ideas together on how to change the world.

I believe in the power of coalition politics because I have felt both the magic and frustration of interacting with others different from myself. Some of them I have loved and others I was reluctant to listen to. Coalition building for me has meant talking to a middle-aged white man with views very different from myself about labor laws and finding that in some aspects we were not as different as we thought. It has meant talking to a woman from India about women’s rights and discovering we are more alike than the women we know that we share biological and national identities with. Coalitions are powerful because coalitions mean increasing numbers and being able to move on to new people and ideas when it is necessary for you as an individual. Coalitions are about doing the work that needs to be done and finding the people to do it with.

An examination of radical and black feminist discourse in this thesis revealed that tension did exist between black and white feminists during the second wave of feminism

(although primarily black women highlighted this tension). The cluster analysis revealed that these two groups of women, who both labeled themselves feminists and claimed that they sought the liberation of women, were very different. Both groups fell victim to identity politics and it is reasonable to deduce that identity politics was an answer to frustrated women who were “burned,” so to speak, by the groups and organizations they once sought freedom and refuge in. Radical feminists fled from the New Left and chose to focus on *their* issues and what they did not realize initially was that *their* issues became issues of white, middle-class, educated women. Black feminists, finding little encouragement from either the black liberation movement or the women’s movement, also began to practice identity politics. Black women began to shut themselves off and were only organizing with black women and some other women of color. As my discussion above illustrates for women to be able to do real political work with one another they must learn to form coalitions and to form coalitions they must communicate. Coupling standpoint theory with a rhetorical approach that would allow for open and honest communication with would be a good way to start forming coalitions.

Communication could begin with the rhetorical strategy of invitational rhetoric. Invitational rhetoric is an alternative rhetorical approach developed by Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin. Foss and Griffin found it necessary to create this alternative approach because, as the two theorists state, “Most traditional rhetorical theories reflect a patriarchal bias in the positive value they accord to changing and thus dominating others” (1995, p.2). By moving away from the patriarchal bias found in traditional rhetorical theories and using non-traditional methodological approaches, a new form of communication is possible. A new rhetorical approach is necessary for honest and

constructive communication to occur between people who belong to different social groups, especially when one group may possess more privilege than the other may. As Foss and Griffin assert, the old rhetorical style is counterproductive because the style implies that the group being communicated to is less intelligent if they do not agree with the rhetor. The audience can then perceive the rhetor as infringing on their right to choose to believe what they wish to believe.

Identity politics is well suited to employ a more traditional form of rhetoric. Those practicing identity politics would be seeking to persuade their audience and set guidelines for what it meant to be black or gay or a woman. Groups who used identity politics often shoved those out of their groups who did not prescribe to their definition of the group. Those who did not agree with the group were “wrong” and could be viewed as a traitor. Groups who employed identity politics communicated to others that you are either with us or against us. Lets turn to invitational rhetoric and explore how different this style is from traditional rhetoric and what political possibilities it holds.

By using the three guiding principles of equality, immanent value, and self-determination, Foss and Griffin created the new rhetorical style they call invitational. This rhetorical approach not only allows the speaker to create reality but it also engages the audience and encourages the audience to help shape and inform the communicative interaction. By encouraging all to speak and by valuing all perspectives the “zero degree of power” can begin to take shape. Foss and Griffin explain how this approach is quite different and more productive than the more traditional, patriarchal styles:

Invitational rhetoric constitutes an invitation to the audience to enter the rhetor’s world and to see it as the rhetor does. In presenting a particular perspective, the invitational rhetor does not judge or denigrate others’ perspectives but is open to and tries to appreciate and validate those perspectives, even if they differ

dramatically from the rhetor's own. Ideally, audience members accept the invitation offered by the rhetor by listening to and trying to understand the rhetor's perspective and then presenting their own (1996, p.5).

Ideally invitational rhetoric does not merely generate an understanding of an issue, but creates an understanding of the speaker and the audience. It is through this non-hierarchical and non-judgmental approach that open and honest communication can occur and the speaker and audience can feel safe enough to allow themselves to be vulnerable.

There is an exciting communicative option that Foss and Griffin explain that is available in invitational rhetoric. This valuable option Foss and Griffin have coined offering. Rather than forcing a position or perspective on the audience through persuasion, offering involves presenting a certain perspective or position to the audience while explaining how the world looks to the speaker and explaining how the speaker sees the world working. The speaker does not seek to persuade but to share and hopefully the audience will offer their perspectives in return. When using the approach of offering persuasion may occur, but it is never the desired outcome and the audience is never degraded or robbed of their right to believe what they wish to believe.

One can imagine what difference this rhetorical approach could have made during debates that have occurred between black and white feminists. Rather than attempting to persuade or use privilege to convince black women that white women's needs and interests should be the focus of the women's movement, white women could have understood black women and more easily aligned themselves with black women. If offering had been present a white radical feminist could have, for example, shared that she felt that the protection of reproductive rights should be at the top of the feminist agenda. In the atmosphere of equality, immanent value, and self-determination the black

women in the audience would have felt safe enough to point out that many black women have never witnessed reproductive rights because they and other women of color were victims of sterilization abuse or the black woman may point out that she was more concerned about just acquiring adequate, accessible health care before delving into issues of accessible abortions and birth control methods. If this conversation had occurred perhaps the white and black women would have been changed through their offering experience and they would have better understood one another and recognized that the feminist agenda need not be rigid and limited but flexible and open to serving *all* women's needs.

It is feasible to assert that the use of invitational rhetoric could create a space for *all* women. In this space women would be able to communicate, address issues of privilege and domination, and begin to tear down barriers that exist to prevent women from communicating with and doing political work with one another. Approaches such as invitational rhetoric and standpoint theory speak to the power of language and its transformative powers. Communication and the creation of an oppositional discourse can allow those in positions of domination and subordination to unite and disrupt existing power structures in society. Using methods such as invitational rhetoric and standpoint theory is necessary for white feminists to create an inclusive feminist theory, as bell hooks explains: "White women who dominate feminist discourse, who for the most part make and articulate feminist theory, have little or no understanding of white supremacy as a racial politic, of the psychological impact of class, of their political status within a racist, sexist, capitalist state" (1995, p.72). hooks also speaks to the power of language and how it is a site of contestation, struggle, and change:

We are rooted in language, wedded, have our being in words. Language is also a place of struggle. The oppressed struggle in language to recover ourselves-to rewrite, to reconcile, to renew. Our words are not without meaning. They are an action-a resistance. Language is also a place of struggle...The most important of our work-the work of liberation-demands of us that we make a new language, that we create the oppositional discourse, the liberatory voice (1989, p.28-29).

This chapter has revealed the power of communication and has touched on what political roadblocks can occur if communication is not present. Standpoint theory and invitational rhetoric are nice complements to one another. If someone engages in offering by sharing their standpoint the whole group stands to be changed and understanding can be generated. If you think back to my account of Retha Powers and her friend Tara the power of invitational rhetoric is obvious. Retha and Tara were able to share their life experiences and talk openly about what it was like for them to be black and a woman and white and a woman and over time they were even able to share a sense of sisterhood.

I believe it is possible for two, three, or hundreds of people to form coalitions and perhaps achieve what Retha and Tara have achieved. What is important is to respect one another and look for the similarities while not ignoring or romanticizing the differences. The one thing a person must have in common with another to form coalitions is that they must share one desire to right a wrong and feel passionately about an issue. I believe when women and humanity begin to let the issues bring them together, rather than race, class, gender, sexuality, age, or ability, it will then be that true revolutionary change has the fighting chance of happening.

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