Part IV:
APPLICATIONS

CHAPTER FIFTEEN:

FRIENDSHIP

Becky Jenkins

The following is a transcript of a conversation with Beth Roy, whose questions and comments are in italics below.

I think it's important to talk about friendship in some sort of larger social context and to see it as a changing phenomenon:that friendship in rural, pre-industrial society, and also subject to cultural traditions, is considerably different from what we face, those of us who live in the city, in an advanced industrialized culture. The structures of people's lives really preclude friendship, really are organized to prevent friendship: separate housing with no easy interconnections; people are transported, by and large, in vehicles that prevent contact with other people; in addition, people's lives are sufficiently pressured and stressed so that the time and leisure necessary for developing friendship is extremely difficult to come by. For example, if you live in New York City, by the time you get home after a horrendous subway ride or being stuck in the Holland Tunnel as you return to Hoboken, it's extremely unlikely that you will find the energy to come

back to the city to have a leisurely dinner with friends, or that you'll have the energy to take the subway to go back down to the Village and to hang out with friends. Once you're home, that's about all the energy that you've got.

I think it's true in cultures where people are more dependent on automobiles and travel huge distances between the places where they work and the places where they live. The way that life is physically organized, at least in the United States, makes it difficult for people to have easy access to friendship. Friendship is something that takes discipline, pre-planning; spontaneity is something that is practically eliminated in the friendship circles of people's lives.

Would this be a place to talk a little about competition and individualism, the reflection of this in people's heads?

I think that's the additional factor, which is that friendship is not a value in this society. What is really a value in this society is making it, getting ahead, being successful, and also just managing the economic and social pressures on people who are members of the working class, the lower middle class, which are so extreme now in the 1980s that friendship is not a value which is highly touted and promoted by the culture. The value that is promoted around people's personal needs is the value of being a couple, being in a nuclear family, and people expend an

enormous amount of energy to be coupled, to be in a couple, energy that is in no way matched by efforts to be in a large and secure friendship circle.

So it's important to see friendship as a changing phenomenon and to see the state of affairs now, in the United States especially, as a very particular phenomenon which will continue to change, hopefully. In direct ratio to the decrease in the emphasis on friendship is the increase in the emphasis on the need for being in a primary relationship, being in a couple. And it makes sense that with all of the social and economic pressures of life on people, and with the limited amount of energy and resources, that the one place that their need for intimacy and for emotional connection finds expression is in the modern couple, and the modern nuclear family. It's no longer a nuclear family that has extended members: the aunts and uncles, the cousins, often parents, are thousands of miles away. People are thrown back on the couple in a way that we see in Radical Psychiatry stresses the modern couple beyond endurance.

People turn to the couple for all of their needs: their sexual needs, their emotional needs, their intimacy needs, the feedback they need around their work, support, childcare needs—and the only relief that people find is if they happen to have money, and if they have money then they can buy services. But these services do not extend their

communities and their support system; they're simply products. People buy au pair girls or live-in maids or fancy childcare centers, but nothing that extends the community of the child or of the real support system of the parents.

Let's talk about the lack of other structural or organizational connections, churches and so forth in our community.

In the old days, when the community was easier for people to create, there were a number of forms that this community took. People belonged to churches. They might not have been deeply religious, but churches provided a focal point for a sense of extended community. People belonged to cultural organizations: the Basque Club or the Czechoslovakian Club, the Irish Club, the Italian Club, etc., etc. They belonged to social organizations: the Elks, the Shriners, or the Lions. And there are still many places in America where those social forms are active, more or less. Historically, American black people have had enormous comfort and solace in their churches, which have been a focal point not only for their social life but also political and social expression and advancement.

But this kind of disintegration of the social points of the community, again, seems to us to be a result of the intense stress people experience in an industrial, urban and suburban culture. Moreover, in our community of artists,

intellectuals, people on the left, people are critical of the culture and are alienated from what institutions do exist, so this phenomenon is even more intense. The ideology of churches and social clubs is often quite reactionary.

It seems to us that the resurgence of spirituality that is sweeping the Growth Movement and the left is a desperate cry for connection and for a universal vision of what the world should be.

DEFINING FRIENDSHIP

Defining friendship would be a ludicrous thing in some other cultures, like Japan for example, where people know who they are, what their social place is, and have very specific expectations about what a friend is. In the United States, we need to start again to define what a friend is because of the fragmenting of any shared social definitions.

We think that choosing a friend is not unlike choosing a lover. There are several things to consider. One is the level of attraction. How attracted are you to this person? Does she touch your heart, engage your brain, aesthetically please you in some way? These are almost the same criteria you would use to pick a lover.

In addition, it's important to determine mutuality: whether this person is in the market for a friend. Does she need a friend? Does she have more friends currently than she can handle? In other words, you need to find somebody who will share the responsibility and the commitment to the principle of having friends.

There's a good deal of confusion in our culture between a friend and an acquaintance. Most people in the world have many friendly, sweet acquaintances, people who you genuinely like, who you care about, and about whom you'd be extremely upset if something bad happened to them. However, I want to make the distinction between that kind of kindly, sweet feeling about a number of people, and a friendship — a serious, long-term, committed friendship.

A friend is somebody from whom you have no secrets. A friend is somebody who you can call in the middle of the night if you need somebody to take you to the hospital. A friend is somebody who you can count on, who is part of your extended family, part of the network of your social grouping. It's crucial, if you define friendship in this manner, that people approach it with some seriousness. It's not a casual commitment.

WOMEN, MEN AND FRIENDSHIP

It's interesting how the dissolution of friendship has been experienced in America differently by men and women. It seems to me that in more patriarchal cultures, men have more intimacy, that there's great connection and camaraderie between men. It's fascinating that in an industrial society, with the equality of women, that the friendship bonding of men has been virtually destroyed. It looks as if men have suffered the most, in some ways, from advanced monopoly capitalism, that their personal lives have been more decimated. Women in Western culture seem to have been able to maintain the knack of friendship, and even at that it's sorely lacking.

The Women's Movement gave a shot-in-the-arm to friendship between women. For the first time, competition between women was addressed: competition for men, and competition around work and moving up the socio-economic ladder. It was at least named and addressed as a problem.

But men have been isolated in the extreme. They are more dependent than ever before on their mates, on their wives, for intimate friendships. There are a number of men who have strong friendships with other men, but the expression of friendship is usually around some activity — fishing, going to a baseball game, playing golf. Given that men are

not trained or encouraged to be emotionally literate, or terribly interested in emotional connection, it's not surprising that with their friends they don't spend a lot of time talking intimately. It's not the expression of men's being in the society, and therefore it's also not expressed in friendship. It would be really surprising if men who are emotionally illiterate suddenly started talking about their feelings with men friends.

It's ironic. I remember in the '50s women saying, "I don't know why, I just like men better. I can't stand other women." I remember feeling incredibly offended by it, but it had to do with bright, ambitious women feeling they didn't have enough comradeship with other women. The complaint of the '60s, the '70s and '80s is from men, who say, "I don't know why, I really don't like other men." I think in some terrible way the tables are turned — not uniformly; obviously there are a number of exceptions. But I think there is a way that men are more oppressed now by the system than ever before.

FRIENDS AND COUPLES

The result of the isolation of men from other men, and the difficulty women have of maintaining their friendships when they are in relationships with lovers, impacts the couple, and the nuclear family in America, in ways that are

extreme and pernicious. Most couples in the Radical Psychiatry extended community experience problems around time and energy. Couples live in isolated homes and apartments. In addition to all the stresses we mentioned before, of life in the twentieth century, there is the additional work of maintaining a healthy, moving, growing relationship — particularly with the new values of working on relationships. It's a very big deal to have A Good Relationship, whereas in the old days people were satisfied not to have such a good relationship and get on with their lives. It's a healthy turn of events that people are committed to working on good relationships, but it does pose some new problems.

In addition, if a couple has children, they have small people to raise, school, house, feed, clothe and generally supervise. So here we have couples scurrying back and forth to their work, living in isolation, holding down jobs, working on a high quality relationship, and trying to raise their children in the best possible way. Given that agenda, it is miraculous if people have time for friendship. It is extremely difficult. All the centrifugal force of this kind of life draws off people's energy.

So here we have this struggling couple, working on their relationship in this milieu. It is excruciatingly difficult. People need much more than what a lover can provide, even the most attentive lover. They need intellectual input,

they need advice, they need support when they're upset, they need childcare, they need new ideas around childrearing, they need a myriad of things. It's been our experience around couples that one of the most important things a couple can do is for each person to have friends. Almost nothing is as important as that for the success of the couple. It means that trusted people can be turned to in hard times; it means practical help; it means some sort of emotional sustenance that is essential for the good working of the couple.

It's a perfect paradox: the one thing that the couple really needs to survive is friends, and the one thing that is very difficult to do when people are putting their energy into a couple is to maintain friendships. People need either to have an extraordinary amount of physical energy, or to be organizational geniuses.

Or, to live collectively. As an aside, it seems to us that in general it's not been easy or successful for couples to live collectively. The reasons why couples haven't flourished in collective households are interesting, and important to understand; here is a new frontier, especially since there are more and more compelling reasons for people to live with other people, both economic and ideological, and also people really want to be coupled. There is new work to be done.

FRIENDSHIPS AND FAMILY-OF-ORIGIN

One of the things that has happened in American life, because of the size of the United States and the cultural diversity and complexity of the American population, is the phenomenon of moving many miles from one's family of origin. For instance, San Francisco is filled with people from New York, Pennsylvania, Florida, Iowa and so on. People move for better jobs, to escape small towns; they move to the big city, exploring, seeking new adventures. This sort of break from family intensifies a couple's isolation.

Some couples are fortunate to have come from a nuclear family which is supportive and congenial. Then there is an additional problem: with the already existing scarcity of energy and time, the presence of extended family further limits resources available for friendships. It's difficult if you are without a family for help and backup and nurturing but it is also difficult if you *have* a family, because they demand time. Often families that have survived the migration to America and the integration into American life can be extremely possessive and jealous and competitive with friends. There is a deep injunction in American culture that the only people you can really trust is your family.

For example, in Jewish families there is a strong paranoia that nobody outside the family is of significance. This kind of paranoia and isolationism of the family are the result of years of racism and discrimination. The same thing is true in a number of cultural groups. The bottom line is that nobody will come through for you except the family. The problem with this ideology is that many people don't have such families. Families are so fragmented in America; either people have families from which they need disatnce for the sake of their mental health, or the family has disintegrated — people are divorced, or struggling without many resources, or are three thousand miles away from them. Even when families are available, their resources are not sufficient, there just isn't enough that any single nuclear family can supply to its children. People need more than the family can provide.

HOW TO BE A FRIEND

How to Make a Friend: Attraction and Mutuality

The old wisdom on how to find a friend is that it is connected with finding something in your life that you care deeply about. For example, if you are committed to the Jesse Jackson campaign, the likelihood is that you'll meet people you have something in common with if you work on that campaign. Among those people, there will be some

small percentage of folks who will appeal to you, who will "attract" you, or interest you in a more profound way. It's been our experience that the most lasting friendships often, though not always, come about out of some shared work.

The transition from some attraction and interest in another person in a shared context to friendship is a delicate one, and takes some practice. People need to be pursued and carefully checked out. Again, there are two criteria: First, is the attraction mutual? And second, does she have a sufficient amount of time and energy to bring a new friend into her life?

Chemistry between friends is in some ways as elusive as the chemistry between lovers. All of us have had the experience that of the people we were interested in as friends when young people, twenty years later there's a good percentage of them that don't survive. However, everybody has experienced the opposite phenomenon of making a friend in youth who, for some strange reason, survives all the transitions and changes. I don't believe in magic, but I do think there is some combination of luck and "magic" in the choice of friends. In the final analysis, chemistry may be beyond analysis. We need permission to pursue the people who attract us. To put it in the same category as choosing a lover is the right thing to do; it has the same combination of the concrete and the mysterious that is needed for good relationships.

But the other component — and I think it's the same component that's needed for a good love affair — is desire. People have to take friendship really seriously, and really desire it for it to have a chance. You can't just wish that a good friend will come along. Just as with a lover, fifty percent of success is desire, in the sense of : "I want to be married, I want to be in a couple, I believe in it." The other fifty percent is attraction. The same is true of friendship. You have to say to yourself, "I believe in friends, I want friends in my life, they're absolutely crucial to my mental health, and I'm going to find me some friends." That works in combination with attraction to another person.

How to Be a Friend: Cooperation and Emotional Literacy

The contract between friends is identical to the contract that we in Radical Psychiatry believe is necessary between family members and between lovers. It depends on equality, and on not being frightened to cross certain kinds of emotional frontiers. People have to be courageous about giving criticism, talking about competition and jealousy. People have to be willing to risk their pride and make themselves vulnerable to make a friendship work. They have to be open to criticism and willing to give criticism to keep the relationship from being static and dying on its feet.

In addition, people need to act with all the constraints that govern their behavior in the work world: they have to be kind, gentle and honest. Our theories of cooperation (see Chapter 4) and of emotional literacy (see Chapter 8) are helpful guides.

What does equality between friends look like? One of the arts of friendship is to know its limits. For example, I love to dance. My best friend doesn't like to dance particularly. But I get an enormous amount of pleasure out of talking with her about ideas, traveling to new and exotic places together, sharing values around childrearing. It isn't part of my definition of our friendship that she dance when I dance, even though I love dancing and can't imagine its not being a part of my life.

Equality is not a vulgar equality. It is an equality of those things that sustain interest.

When one person is in a couple and the other is not, the friendship may be stressed, but I don't think it's terminal. The person in the couple is under a lot of strain. She must fight against the centrifugal force, to lean out of the couple. It is artful to balance friends and lovers, and, as I've said, it is a necessity. There are certain things that need to be done. For example, the couple needs to be inclusive of the single person on occasions, and those occasions

need to be carefully thought out, to be premeditated. There are times when people sometimes need their relationship to be outside the context of the couple; good friends need to be able to see each other and not include the spouse for a relationship to be healthy.

When people have substantially different advantages or disadvantages in society, like interracial friendships, or friendships between a disabled person and an able-bodied one, or a gay and a straight person, or a rich and a poor person, other problems need to be confronted. Some of those are harder than others. The rules of emotional literacy provide the guidance: things must absolutely not be kept secret; no Rescues; people must talk honestly about what their differences are. They need to be defined and constantly on the agenda for discussion. I think some of the most binding and profound friendships happen between people who cross those lines. Those friendships are between people with considerable emotional and personal power. It takes strength, and a kind of self-knowledge and a kind of assurance as a person to be friends with somebody who is different. It's much easier to be friends with people who are similar. When it happens, those friendships can be unusually rich and interesting.

There's a very, very strong admonition against lending money to friends. It's interesting, from a Marxist point of view, that the material issues between people would evoke

the most controversy, the most fear. Lending money, buying property jointly, living collectively — all of those things have to do with crossing some border between socially accepted friendships and something more daring and risky. Generally, Radical Psychiatry promotes the view that those frontiers should be crossed, with care and a good deal of forethought and agreements and contracts and strategies for the worst so that people have protection. We have a very hard-headed, pragmatic view of what people need in order to insure equality. For instance, if people live collectively or own property collectively, they should have very detailed and clear agreements about who owns what, what would happen if somebody dies, or if there's a fight.

We promote these same kinds of agreements for couples. The mythology in our society is that, as difficult as it is for friends to do these things, it is just as natural and easy for couples to do them. In fact, both myths are equally untrue.

We have to move from the conception of all relationships — couples, friends, families — from the unconscious to the extremely carefully conscious and premeditated arena. People have to be aware of the meaning of friendship, the shape of friendship, and the need to protect it.

Love and Commitment

There are two kinds of commitments. One is the commitment that comes out of an agreement to take the relationship seriously and to struggle for its maintenance, even in bad times. That's the sort of commitment that's the definition of friendship, which is that people decide that they like each other, have time for each other, and want to take on the commitment of friendship to hang in there. It's the same kind of commitment people make when they get married — to hang in there, not to dismiss it lightly.

Because friends are less obligated to each other — there are less material things that bind them, like children and houses — there is more freedom for people who are friends to make changes in their life which make the friendship more difficult. For example: to move to Atlanta; to suddenly go to England on a scholarship; and so on. One of the most exciting and wonderful things about friendships when they're good ones is that they can sustain great distances and time apart. People often report on having the kind of friend who they haven't seen in years and when they get together, it feels as if they are beginning in mid-sentence. I think it is possible to feel committed, and to act on that commitment even over great distances and over long periods of time. Friendship has got the unique quality of being able to sustain itself if it's really on

the mark. It's hard on people who are close friends to be separated, but friendship can definitely survive.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN:

WOMEN PLANNING OUR OWN FUTURES

JoAnn Costello

This chapter is based on a workshop presentation.

The desire to do this workshop came very much from my own life — mostly from my professional life but from my personal life also. I want to talk about that for a minute before getting to the workshop.

My professional life has two parts. I'm a Radical Psychotherapist in private practice, and in that practice I see a lot of women — between the ages of 25 and 48, in the beginning to middle of their adult lives.

The second part of my professional life is working in the San Francisco Community Mental Health system doing therapy in a geriatric, out-patient setting. In that setting I see women (my case load is *all* women) between the ages of 58 and 88, and these women are at the later stage to the end of their lives.

Both groups of women have a lot of problems (that's the bad news), and many of these problems seem to me to be a result of their economic oppression as women and their women's scripting—in particular, the scripting to be fairly passive in making and planning for a good life without consideration of the men and children they have, used to have, or wish to have.

These women in my practice, and my desire to pass on to the younger ones what I've learned from working with the older ones, are my motivation, on a professional level, for doing this workshop. On a personal level my motivation is fear for myself. I do not want to end up like many of these older women I work with, and I think that it takes some serious thought and planning to avoid it.

The worst problem of the older women I see is isolation. They live alone and have all the attendant problems: terrible loneliness, fear for their physical well-being, the burden of chores, bills, etc., by themselves. Eighty percent of the elderly living alone are women.

Now, for all you women who aren't in relationships and want to be because you see it as the salvation for being alone, let me tell you quickly that most of these women were married women. *Married women end up alone* because their mates die younger, and they married men

older than they in any case, so they have before them 10 to 15 years without that mate who was supposed to mediate between them and loneliness. So if a mate isn't the answer to the perfect future, what is?

This brings me back to the younger women I work with. Many of them had the expectation, or at least the hope, of "having it all." These women had some experience of the two decades after World War II when the expansion of the American economy produced unprecedented prosperity: masses of people lived well on very little, had leisure time and the expectation of a similar future.

This prosperity, along with feminist hopes, dreams and demands, led young women to expect that they would have choices—careers in their chosen fields, romantic or sexual love with the man of their dreams, children or not as they chose, the freedom to live alone or in families or collective households.

But it's now the '80s. Loss of the Viet Nam War, the decline of American influence abroad, and a conservative trend in American capitalism have brought about a very serious reduction in social services such as MediCal and welfare. Prices have risen faster than wages. As usual, women have suffered.

Economic necessity along with a social backlash on so-called cultural issues has forced women back to seeing the family as the last refuge against loneliness, rootlessness and, in a worst-case scenario, the bag lady syndrome.The fact that women make only 68% of men's wages (the small increase from previous measures is accounted for by a decline in male incomes) and that they continue to take major responsibility for children, old people, and sick relations makes it easy to see why they would seek the "protection" of a socially-sanctioned institution like the family.

In the 19th century Jane Austen wrote in *Pride and Prejudice* a conversation between two young single women: "Marriage is the only honorable provision for a well-educated young women of small fortune, *however uncertain it may be of giving happiness*." What I like about this quote is that these young women were not hoodwinked into thinking that they were *unhappy* because they were unmarried.They knew they were *disadvantaged* because they were unmarried.

Today, the ideological hegemony is so strong that women believe that their happiness, their pleasure, their very sense of being worthwhile lies in a relationship with a man. They are tormented by ideas such as:

♦　　　Nobody loves me.

♦ I've done something wrong.

♦ I need a baby to be truly happy/ok.

♦ I'll never find someone to love.

♦ People in couples are truly happy/have love/have security/have someone to depend on.

♦ I feel jealous and hateful toward women friends who are in relationships.

♦ I feel competitive with other women about the scarcity of men.

♦ I measure/count/compare my stuff: men, career, looks, children, house.

It seems clear to me that in my lifetime women are not going to "have it all." The bottom lines—economic parity with men, a national health insurance (there are 37 million Americans with none), federally-funded childcare, adequate Social Security—are distant dreams. And these systemic changes are absolutely basic to women's sense of safety in the world.

So what are we going to do to maximize the probability of decent, loving, satisfying lives and pleasant days in our old-age rocking chairs? I think that the answer is found in the old Radical Psychiatry formula to gain power: Awareness + Contact + Action = Liberation.

Awareness: The first thing is to stop blaming yourself and thinking you're an anomaly. Women at this point in time (with the exceptions of women who are particularly advantaged by careers, youth or beauty, or the first flush of love) are having a very difficult time. So don't blame yourself, but understand that this is a historical phenomenon.

Do not allow yourself to imagine that you'd be fine if you just had a man/baby. This is a sexist lie. You would have some advantages, but you'd also have new or different problems and the underlying causes for your discomfort would be unchanged.

In addition to not blaming yourself, don't sit in the corner (or go out on a date) feeling victimized. Women often seem to vacillate between two states: self-blame and victimization. Though it's true you are a victim of sexism, one major part of it is being socialized to feel powerless, passive and victimized.

You are also enormously advantaged. You live in a historical time when there are choices: you can get birth control, you don't have to make your own candles, you can own property. You have power and a voice. Look at what women are doing alone and together.

Contact: The good news is that women in large part already have the skills to relate to others. We know how to talk, listen, ask for things, enjoy hanging out and being together.

Make contact and commitment now with the people you want in your life when you're 90. Talk with other women about their lives. Admit your competitiveness. Commiserate. Women have always gathered and gossiped, and done projects together such as quilting. Discover the Consciousness Raising Group. Meet in support groups. Use relationship skills for inter-generational contact. Have young friends. Be nice to old ladies. Relate!

Action: You have to act to make a good life for yourself, both individually and collectively. In the present you must put some *serious time and energy* into finding satisfaction and love in places other than mate/children.

♦ Figure out what you really like to do, both for work and pleasure, and do it regularly. Fantasize doing it in old age.

♦ Figure out who you like to be with (women and men) and spend time with them. See your future together.

♦ Confront coupled friends regarding the social prejudice against singles. Enlist their aid.

♦ Have physical contact with other women. Snuggle/sleep together. Go dancing, sauna, massage. Have a baby with the help and support of other women. Plan it.

♦ Plan the future. Go in together with two people and buy a house. What are you going to live in in old age?

♦ Is money a problem? Get a financial consultant.

♦ Do you have medical insurance? How are you going to get it? Plan to be in good health.

♦ Form a support group of women acting toward planning their futures. Pick one issue that you

care about which affects your life as a woman and do political work. Organize a women's strike.

Obviously you can't do everything at once. Pick your weak area and make a start. Or pick your strength and build on it.

With friends, good health, and a decent income we can have satisfying lives.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN:
COOPERATIVE CHILDREARING

Beth Roy

Radical Psychiatry theory has a bias: a strong conviction that personal relationships are happiest when people are most equal, and when they agree to behave cooperatively with each other. Most of what we've written about cooperative relationships (see Chapter 4) has been about adults: lovers, spouses, friends, roommates, and so on. Often, however, we are asked to help people work on problems with children, and they are surprised to learn that our tilt toward equality is as strong here as it is elsewhere.

EQUAL RIGHTS/UNEQUAL POWER

In fact, conducting a cooperative relationship with a child is more confusing and complex. Two adults may have pretty nearly equal power, but a child and an adult do not. When we teach the "rules of cooperation," we always begin by pointing out that they apply only in cases where people are equal. Don't try to be cooperative with your boss or landlord, we caution people. But between grown-ups and children, the power is not equal: adults are

physically larger and stronger; children cannot earn a living, wander safely anywhere they care to walk, transport themselves from place to place, and so on; adults know important things that kids do not.

How then can we advocate treating children as equals when they are not? And even if that were possible, isn't it too much trouble? Kids are rightfully self-centered, concentrated on their own worlds, not capable of making decisions for the good of the group. Isn't it courting disaster to give up parent-made rules and edicts?

First of all, we need to distinguish between equal rights and equal power. Children and adults are entitled, we believe, to equal rights. Children and adults do not, however, have equal power. When Simon, aged ten, wants to go to see a monster movie, and Gloria, aged forty, wants to see a thriller, Gloria would make a mistake, we believe, if she settled the conflict by citing her prior claim to decision-making rights, simply because she preceded Simon on this earth. Gloria might use her greater power: "We're going to the thriller, because I won't pay to go to the monster movie and I won't drive to the theater where the monster movie is playing." Simon might pull out some tricks of power he has. He might cry, pout, storm around, refuse to go at all. But his power is only to retreat or to harass; if he really wants to see a movie, Gloria has the ultimate power: money and mobility.

What we advocate, then, is equal rights for children and adults, combined with a clear and honest vision of how power is in fact unequal. If you know better than your one-year-old that speeding automobiles kill, you do not respect her equal right to cross a street whenever she pleases. You use your greater power to restrain her. But if you want your twelve-year-old son to do his homework every night and he wants to watch TV, and if you consider his rights to be equal to your own, then you reason with him. You may even reason super-persuasively. But you do not threaten to beat him, or even to withdraw his allowance, if he disobeys you.

Why not? you may ask. How wearing to "reason" with a headstrong twelve-year-old. John, papa to Jesse, a four-year-old who knows exactly what he wants and how to argue for it, asks to be persuaded why he should do the tiring work of negotiating with his son. Why not pick him up, put him in the car and say, "Too bad, Jesse, we're doing it my way!"

True, it is easier at the moment to throw the kid in the car. Here are three reasons to take the longer route:

1. Violence pervades our culture. It infests families. Its first and final bulwark is the belief that it is all right to strike children. Hitting children is a final abuse of power

that stands, however well concealed, directly behind the usurpation of decision-making power by adults. There is no way John could succeed in throwing Jesse in the car if they both didn't know he was able, and in the final analysis willing, to use his superior force against his son.

2. To pre-empt children's rights is to break their wills.
Kids are freedom-loving like the rest of us. From infancy, they will fight back against tyranny. But eventually they will lose that fight, for adults are indeed a superior force. When they do, they have learned an important lesson: that at root they are powerless to affect their own lives, not to mention the world around them. "Disciplined" children become socially-docile adults.

3. Finally, a more selfish and practical argument: obedience is very hard to obtain for all time. **Children who have been forced to submit today will fight back tomorrow.** Unless you are willing to use Dickensian tactics, to keep the rod always visible and often employed, your kids will get you back. It is no big surprise that teenagers rebel against everything; they've been waiting for years, until their bodies caught up with their souls and they could fight back. Unfortunately, by then the means they've learned (from master teacher-parents) are less than honest and kind: lying ("I'm spending the night at my friend's house" is a clear echo of "I'm taking away your allowance for your

own good”), bullying (“Just try to stop me” sounds suspiciously like “That's final and I won't discuss it any more”), etc.

So, if you aren't concerned about violence or convinced of its connection with childrearing; if you aren't persuaded by a need to produce a generation of adults who feel and act powerfully in the world; then spare the rod for your own sake. You will reap the rewards in the not-too-distant future, as your kids grow older and larger and treat you with the respect you've always shown them.

FASHIONS IN CHILDREARING

Theories of childrearing have been around for as long as Cain and Abel. They engender enormous storms of intensity. Many people keep quiet about politics, violence, their religious beliefs, almost anything and everything they believe — until it comes to childrearing.

Walk down the street with an infant, and some stranger may tell you the baby is dressed too warmly, or not warmly enough. Men who have never held a baby younger than twenty-five insist on the need for a firm and disciplined hand. Grey-haired women tell you Baby should be sleeping through the night by now, and imply that those 2 a.m. feedings are the fault of poor mothering.

Grandparents view your red-rimmed eyes unsympathetically, and insist you "simply have to let the child cry herself to sleep a few times."

Ways of childrearing engender such energetic conflict because they reflect our most heartfelt beliefs about life. How we treat our children grows from our axioms about people, whether they are good or bad, civilized or savage, in need of social molding or born with an instinct toward kindness and respect for others. Moreover, we feel deeply obligated to treat our children in ways we think will instill them with the beliefs and traits they need, in our opinions, to succeed in the world. No wonder then that discussions about children are rarely polite and intellectual. They touch the core of ourselves, our fears and convictions about our relationships to life and to others.

Childrearing fashions swing back and forth, tipping the scales to favor grown-up rights one decade, children's rights the next. The Victorians believed children were to be "seen and not heard." The rules of behavior set by adults were designed to keep kids from disrupting the lives of their elders. It was considered to be good training for children to learn to obey and to squelch any natural inclinations (toward joy, playfulness, sexuality, etc.) which might interfere with their good behavior in a restrictive culture later in life.

Permissiveness, the opposite of authoritarianism, tends to be a popular philosophy in times of economic boom. Unlike the Victorians, who lived in an age of industry-building and capital-accumulation, when thrift and austerity were a practical virtue, middle-class people in affluent times can afford to experiment. Post-World War II fashions, influenced by writers like Benjamin Spock, instructed parents to nurture the wild impulses of little folks. In a reaction against the body binding and emotion squelching of an earlier time, parents sought to free their children's spirits. My own parents still tell the story with glee of how I called my father a "big dope" when I was angry at him. Their parents would have been shocked and punitive at such a statement. Parents were influenced by the Freudian theory that the characters of youngsters are formed within the first few years of life, and frightened that they might make terrible and irreversible mistakes. Permissiveness was sometimes a euphemism for paralysis: better to do nothing than to risk fixing the little darling's psyche at some inappropriate stage of development.

The free-school movement of the '60s carried the notion of children's rights a step further, but also retarded adults' assertion of their own rights further. Adults came to mistrust their own ideas and inclinations, a corollary to the youth movements of the times. The concept of schools without structure and of children's own wants dictating the order of the day was stated with revolutionary fervor –

and it was, indeed, a progressive idea. But it placed all the rights in the hands of the children, and denied any to the adults. Tales of chaos and boredom began to characterize free-schools, and the stories contained some truth. Adults, in rebellion against authoritarianism, and unwilling to impose their preconceptions about what children need on their young charges, were afraid to speak up about their own needs. Grown-up needs were mistrusted as possibly polluted by authoritarianism. But children as a result were protected from realities. Other people do sometimes need quiet. Life may really be easier and richer if you know how to read. Teachers' good-will stretches further when there is some negotiated order to the way time is spent during the day.

The pendulum swung back. Its velocity was fueled by the exhaustion and bitterness of self-effacing adults. "Back to basics" became the slogan of the '70s. Not coincidently, the times were hard. Liberated childrearing had never gripped the imaginations of working class parents. Now it began to seem an unaffordable luxury to middle-class families as well. Alternative schools were transformed from multi-graded, open classrooms to high-achievement, academic learning centers where children were closely supervised while taught the three Rs. Once again, grown-ups knew what children needed to learn, and how to teach it. The natural impulses of little ones, it had turned out, were altogether too natural to be heeded.

Today, one of the favorite phrases of educators and therapists is that "we need to set limits." The concept suggests a softened approach to the idea that adults must exercise power over the lives of children. It replaces the philosophy of an earlier day that children are little beasts who need to be whipped into shape, but it is kissing cousin to that notion. For couched in dulcet phrases of psychology, the concept of "setting limits" still suggests that grownup knows best and small people must be tamed or they will overstep the limits of safe and sane behavior.

RULES OF COOPERATION

Elsewhere we have written about the rules of cooperation (see Chapter 4). Let us look here at how they apply between adults and children.

No Secrets or Lies: Often parents ask advice about how much to tell their kids about their own lives. In general, the answer is the same with kids as it is with adults: tell them everything that might be relevant to them. If you are considering moving to another city, if you are considering making a major change in your love relationship, tell them. They will intuit anyway that big stuff is afoot, and they are apt to imagine possibilities far worse than what is actually in the offing. Hiding feelings, such as anger, confusion,

fear or sadness, is another common way grownups lie to children. Kids can handle anything they know up front.

No Rescue: Rescue, or doing more than your share (see Chapter 7), is an epidemic condition in American families. Children are thought to be far less capable than they in fact are, both to handle feelings and to take care of themselves. The question of Rescue will come up often as we discuss common problems adults raise about children.

No Power Plays: A power play is any action intended to make another person do something against her will. Ways adults power-play kids are many. Kids retaliate in kind. A major power play by adults, however, which children cannot match, is punishment. Punishment, and power plays against children in general, reflect unhelpful beliefs about what kids need, what parents must do, as well as an attitude of hopelessness that anything less than force will resolve disagreements.

RESCUE AT THE DINNER TABLE

Part of what confuses us about giving up power to children is the question of what our responsibility is toward them. If I don't force my five-year-old to clean his room, will he grow up to be a disordered personality? It is commonly believed in our culture that children grow into the adults

we create. This view is furthered in several ways. Psychiatrists concentrate their analysis of grown-up behavior disproportionately on patients' relationships with their parents (see Chapter 14), implying that the off-spring's problems are the parents' fault. Parents expect to be judged by how their children behave. We are embarrassed if our kids don't "do it right:" speak politely, perform well in school, appear well-groomed and have conventional haircuts. When grown children live their lives in ways that confuse and dismay their parents, mothers and fathers wail, "Where did we go wrong?" They believe that they are responsible for what their kids do.

The question of parents' influence on their children is a confusing one. How the culture at large acts on our psychology is rarely discussed. Instead, each nuclear family appears to be a unit entirely unto itself, as immune from outside influence as it is isolated from outside help. No wonder that Mom and Dad feel they must do it all themselves, and conversely that it is all their fault.

What we fail to see is that influences beyond our control as parents are affecting our children all the time. We teach them values that are themselves culturally determined: be independent, save money, dress neatly, bathe daily, all are values specific to our place and time. In the far reaches of the Afghanistan mountains, only some of them would be highly regarded. Moreover, the very structure of our

family life, the isolation of Mom, Pop and kids in a single-family household, teaches values which we may not consciously share: the value, for instance, of privacy (which often is a cover for secrecy and shame). Privatized families fail to teach skills we need to make and keep friends, even though Mother may urge her children to be more sociable. We learn that the price of intimacy is the sort of dependency in which most families are trapped; no one will feed you, care for you in ill health, tolerate your worst qualities unless they are forced to by blood.

The notion that we are responsible for who our children become goes hand-in-hand with the fear that our children depend on us to do what is healthy and safe for them. Parents make rules about bedtime, eating habits, forays away from home, contact with friends, etc., because we believe that children, left to their own devices, would be subject to overwhelming dangers. As a result, we take more control than is good for our children or for ourselves, over the business of daily living. If we re-examine and scale down our fears, they may contain some useful kernel. Messy rooms, for instance, are unlikely to damage fragile psyches. But it is a reasonable desire that children, particularly boy children who tend to be exempted in our culture, learn the skills of housekeeping. A persuasive argument can be made to that effect, and the skills passed on in a couple of hours. Once learned, however, it is up to the child whether or not he or she does it.

Food is an arena in which power, control and responsibility are often intricately confused in American families, and so it is a good example to consider. Children are made to eat a predetermined amount of food at unvarying intervals. "Three meals a day are good for you." "Eat everything on your plate." "No dessert until you finish your vegetables." The tyranny of the dinner table is as much an American institution as apple pie and the Soaps. Not only are children tyrannized to eat those three well-balanced meals a day, but Mother is tyrannized by making them.

Eating injunctions rest on several assumptions: children's natural inclinations about food are untrustworthy. All people have the same nutritional needs. Appetite is constant; we all should be hungry for the same quantities of food at the same times every day. Without close supervision from parents, children will become ill, too fat, too thin, pimply, or something else too horrible to contemplate.

Parents therefore bear a heavy responsibility: to monitor their children's food intake in detail (be ever on guard against the demon sugar, for instance), and to provide proper meals in a proper sequence, whether their kids want them or not. Two things happen as a result. First, kids grow up ignorant of their own body's requirements,

alienated from their own biological rhythms. It is very often true that children, left to their own devices, eat irregularly. Often, a child will eat large quantities of food one day, and then eat lightly the next. Appetite is variable. Allowed to experience appetite, children use it as an accurate index of their own body's needs. Many children prefer six or eight small meals a day to three large ones. Faced with quantities of food at one sitting, their appetite is quickly satisfied, and then they are hungry again a few hours later. Since meals are not available at odd times, they turn to sweet snacks. Moreover, because what they hunger for is different from what they get, they learn to distrust their body's signals, to know what would really satisfy them. Parents are sure their kids would eat badly if left to their own devices, and eventually they are right. Mother knows best because she has unwittingly taught Baby how not to know at all.

Meanwhile, Mother has been doing a lot of cooking, and a lot of nagging. She becomes invested (I use the feminine pronoun here because this is traditionally a woman's assignment) in doing it her way, all the more so because she has cooked so many meals she didn't want to cook and nobody wanted to eat. She becomes all the more a tyrant, thereby guaranteeing the second consequence.

Kids rebel. To replace a natural system of eating with an arbitrary one takes some doing. Many small impulses must

be contradicted every day. "No, you may not have a snack now, dinner's in an hour." "Keep away from the cookies, first you have to eat everything on your plate." "Where did you get that candy bar? I thought I told you..." The emotional edge is sharpened by Mother's overwork. Little fights build into major battles. Kids refuse to eat at dinnertime, sneak cookies on the sly, feed the dog under the table. Temper tantrums accompany the dinner bell or, worse yet, there is sullen compliance. Parents fight back. Not only must Junior eat everything, he must be cheerful and sociable while doing it. Meanwhile, parents wonder why this is so hard. Visions of the happy American dinner table dance in their heads. Where did we go wrong? they wonder, and they feel guilty.

This sequence of transactions is described by the concept of the Rescue Triangle (see Chapter 7). Parents Rescue because they believe their children to be Victims (incapable of taking proper care of their bodies' food needs). Children do in fact become powerless because they lose track of what they really want. They rebel and Persecute. Parents meanwhile, exhausted and Victimized by the extra work, also Persecute, then feel guilty and decide that the problem is their own failure as parents. And what do good parents do? They cook more meals and watch over their children more closely; they Rescue, in short, all over again. Thus the Triangle becomes a pointed vicious circle.

The example of Rescue is duplicated in many other areas. Bedtime, safety, schoolwork, suitable friends, how to dress, drugs, all become battlegrounds where "Mother/Father knows best" and kids rebel.

Are we advocating, then, that children be given complete freedom to do whatever they want? If we argue against the concept that parents need to set limits on children's behavior, will it mean that there will be no limits at all?

What does in fact limit the behavior of children is exactly the same as what limits the behavior of adults: the material realities of life and the need to live with other people. Parents, you remember, have rights, too. Joshua, a musical twelve-year-old who "lives for his drums" and has a beat that may someday set the world to clapping, nonetheless may not practice his drums whenever he pleases. Neighbors complain. Problem-solving groups meet in the basement, and need relative quiet. Parents sometimes aren't into rock-'n'-roll. On the other hand, Joshua's right to practice his music is as high on the list as is our right not to hear him. We negotiate. We agree on certain times he can play, and others he cannot. Some of those times are set by material circumstances beyond the control of any of us: a neighbor works late and needs to sleep until ten in the morning. Other times are compromises. I would like quiet from five to six in the

evening, but will trade it some days of the week in return for quiet at noon when I've scheduled a special meeting. The art of making these compromises is demonstrated by the results. Joshua sometimes feels restricted, but not too often: we tinker with the schedule to accommodate. I still think his beat is terrific, a sure sign I'm not being oppressed.

WHY PARENTS "RESCUE"

Lest "Rescue" become another accusation to make hard-pressed parents more guilty, let me say a little about why parents Rescue their children. The first reason is a material one, and a paradox: given a scarcity of help in most households, it is often too much trouble to let kids figure things out themselves, or eat on their natural body schedules, or negotiate every task to be done. Even though Rescue leads to more work in the long run, because kids fail to learn helpful skills, in the short run it can be more efficient. Susan's body may call for eight small meals a day, but when Susan is eighteen months old and one parent is alone with her and a couple of other kids all day, who's to prepare those meals? If there were more adults around, the natural feeding schedule might be practical. It might be possible to set up the kitchen and food in such a way that even tiny Susan could help herself with a minimum of assistance. But without help, who's to blame a mother for

teaching her child to eat on a convenient rather than a power-respecting schedule?

The first reason for Rescue, then, is about the structure of childrearing institutions, their isolation and scarcity of labor. That problem leads naturally to the second reason. In the isolated family, parents with primary responsibility, most of whom continue to be women, suffer from a shortage of respect and affection, or what we call strokes (see Chapter 8). Women have long understood that being "good mothers," which means doing everything for your kids and making certain that they are well behaved and well groomed, will earn them strokes. If there is too little power for women in a discriminatory society, then we take power where we can, in the arena of our children. We do so, not because we are "power hungry, grasping super-moms" but because we are human and need respect for our capabilities.

Reason number three for Rescue, however, dictates what we do to win those strokes. Compelling myths mislead us to believe a false picture of what is good parenting. We have already discussed the confusion between responsibility and power. So long as we believe that our children are mirrors of our own failings, we worry too much and work too hard to make them perfect. When three-year-old Jesse spits cherry pits at the formal and austere mother of his friend, his own mother worries that

he is mimicking her own rebelliousness. She does not stop to consider that the friend's mother has been bossing Jesse around all day, and he is angry. She assumes responsibility, and feels guilty.

Too little help and too many expectations of ourselves as parents is a recipe for failure. To feel a failure after having devoted a superhuman amount of time and energy to a task does not make for good humor. Persecution results. Sometimes it is subtle: frequent nagging, being "on the kid's case," generalizing about the shortcomings of the younger generation, etc. But very often in our culture, Persecution takes the form of punishment, and punishment becomes violent.

NO PUNISHMENT/NO VIOLENCE

Punishment is a power play. It is a display of force designed to make a child not do something (or do something) that she would otherwise do (or not do). If we want to reconstruct our relationships with our kids to be cooperative, then the very first act must be to give up the notion of punishment.

There is no proposal I make to parents which is more shocking to more people than this one. Our culture's system of childrearing is so firmly anchored to the rock of

parental authority, that the idea of eliminating the ultimate tool for enforcing authority is mind-shattering. Parents feel panicked. "What do I do then, when the little stinker won't go to bed at eleven o'clock at night? Don't tell me to reason with her; I've lost the ability to think, much less reason, by that hour!"

I am sympathetic. If we lived in extended families, or well-peopled villages, another grown-up would probably be available to take over when you are exhausted. The problem, again, is structural. But given a lot of bad choices, I firmly believe that the worst is to resort to punishment. As soon as you say, "Go to bed or you may not play with Sammy tomorrow," you may have won the argument, but you've lost the battle. If you give up the power to punish, then you are much more likely to resort to honesty. "I'm exhausted. I've worked hard all day. You can go to sleep when you like, but you must leave me alone right now, or I'll cry." Try talking about real consequences: "If I can't get some time alone tonight, I may be too tired tomorrow to go to the playground with you." Be careful, though, that it's a real possibility, not a threat. If you find, tomorrow, that you're not too tired, will you still fail to go to make good on your threat? If so, it's punishment.

The tradition of punishing children by spanking them is old and engrained. Many consider it to be the moral duty

of adults to use corporal punishment for the "good" of the child. Sometimes, it is a premeditated act designed to produce a given result ("Clean your room, or I'll spank you"). Other times, spanking is an act of uncontrolled rage. In either case it is a brutalization of a weaker person by a stronger one.

Punishment very often turns violent. We live in a culture permeated by violence. There is violence in the media, fear in the streets. The ultimate violence of nuclear war lurks always at the back of our consciousness. When we feel angry at our kids because we've done too much, when we think we have a duty and a right to punish them, and when, most importantly, we have memories of having been physically punished ourselves, it is no wonder that we so often become violent. Child abuse is endemic in American life. In a famous study in the mid-1970s, it was found that 80% of Americans believed in hitting kids; meanwhile, the researchers found, some 46,000 children had been attacked with knives or guns in 1975 alone.[10]

Violence ends a cooperative relationship. As soon as physical force, or even its threat, is introduced into an interaction, equality is abandoned. Grown people are always stronger and more frightening than children.

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[10] Murray Strauss and others, *Behind Closed Doors: Violence in the American Family* (Doubleday, 1980).

Temper tantrums may be threatening, but they do not equal the power brought to bear by spanking. To spank a child is to make the decision that "Father (or Mother) knows best." Even though most of us do not actually voice the thought, the organizing principle of the relationship in fact becomes: He who has greater physical strength has greater rights. Not surprisingly, children either become cowed and docile, or they battle back, often using guerrilla tactics known worldwide to those without power: passive resistance ("I'll say yes, but I won't take out the garbage"), deceit ("Who'll ever know if I smoke this joint behind that tree?"), strategic withdrawal ("They can make me come home to dinner, but they can't make me smile at them").

Arguments justifying violence against kids are sometimes heartbreakingly thoughtful. Some black adults, for instance, contend that children of color must learn early how to conduct themselves in order to avoid the more serious violence threatened in white racist society toward them. If a kid sasses his mother, better that she should whack him than that he should sass a white policeman and be beaten or jailed. "We'll stop striking our kids," say these parents, "when *They* stop beating and killing us." Zora Neale Hurston, a black anthropologist and writer, describes her father's fear that Zora would be hanged before she was grown, that her mother "was going to suck sorrow for not beating my temper out of me before it was too late." Ralph Ellison described home-punishment as a process of

homeopathic violence administered by parents who loved and wished to protect their children.

It is a painful debate. Implicit in the argument is resignation to the state of violence toward black people. Children are trained to watch their step, not to rebel against their victimization in ways that are effective and personally protective. Children of color may be less brutalized than if they were not beaten at home, but they are nonetheless brutalized, suffering an oppression which they do not deserve at home or outside.

Even in so dire and violent a dilemma as that facing black children, then, we would urge parents to break the cycle of brutality, to teach their children by example and language that they have rights to dignity, and to counsel them wisely about how to be safe, to band together with others to fight, rather than to rebel as individuals and be killed.

THE MANY ARENAS FOR STRUGGLE

The problems parents work on in problem-solving groups are many. How can I get the kids to do their chores? What about allowances; how much should they get and under what conditions? What should I do about getting my child to do her homework? As kids get older, problems become scarier. How can I prevent my teenager from abusing

drugs? What about sex, especially under the threat of AIDS? How can I stop the constant fights about curfews and friends?

While each of these questions deserves its own discussion (which, however, would require another book devoted to the subject), there is some general advice that applies to all of them: talk; negotiate; be honest; be open. Struggles are inevitable; children and parents often have different interests, each legitimate in its own terms, but in conflict. Neither kids nor parents are bad because they disagree. But nor is either side "right."

To tell your children what you think and feel about something is very different from telling them what to do. "I am terribly frightened about drugs, especially about (fill in the specifics, the more specific the better: driving while drinking, letting your life be dominated by the 'busy-ness' of marijuana, experimenting with hard drugs that might be unsafe on the street.)" "I'm scared about your flunking out of school, because I know how hard it is to get jobs that are tolerable without a high school diploma." "I'm not going to turn the TV set off, but I want you to know I think 'The A-Team' is incredibly sexist and racist for the following (detailed and elaborate) reasons."

Overall, what we urge is that parents stick up for their own rights, while giving children theirs. Nothing helps the

quality of parenting as much as support for parents. Find people to talk to who share your childrearing philosophy, and consult them about every detail, every self-doubt, every rageful impulse. Help in the home may be hard to come by; at the very least, be sure you have help in your heart.

Parenting is in a state of dramatic change. Today, more and more children are raised by single parents, mostly mothers. At the same time, more and more fathers are engaging as active parents in their children's upbringings. Ever larger proportions of Americans living in poverty are small children. All these facts alter the ways in which we relate to kids, and raise new questions and problems.

Our contribution as Radical Psychiatrists continues to be an advocacy for power and rights of children, as well as some experience about how to be cooperative. It is just a beginning. But what is surprising is how dramatic and helpful changes occur when children are treated with respect and parents are relieved from isolation and total responsibility.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN:

LOVE AND RESCUE IN LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS

Diana Rabenold

Over the past few years I have sensed a growing climate of disappointment and even cynicism in the Lesbian community regarding the viability of our sexual relationships. I have heard certain despairing comments more and more frequently—particularly from Lesbians in their late 30's or early 40's who have been through at least one and often several serious, long-term relationships — comments which run something like this: Lesbian relationships just don't work; they don't last; we're too emotional, too unstable; it's too painful to break up; it's just not worth all the trouble and grief; we "merge" together, sex dies out; we run off with our friends; etc. In short, some Lesbians seemed to have concluded, in their more bitter and self-deprecating moments, that Lesbians just can't have good relationships, and stop just short of expressing the underlying homophobic thought, "Maybe it's just not natural, and we're really all sick after all."

In the wake of this concern and disillusionment, many Lesbians have turned to therapy for help with their romantic partnerships. However, I am concerned that many therapists — even so-called "Lesbian-feminist" therapists — are continuing to emphasize family backgrounds and "damaged" personal histories as the major culprits in troubled Lesbian relationships, at the expense of examining the political nature of their clients' problems. In my experience, insights which are restricted to one's personal past are limited in their ability to help clients make major positive changes in their personal relationships. This is because psychodynamic therapy — the kind of therapy I am describing and which is still the prevailing therapy model taught in American universities — lacks a cohesive analysis of power, a theory of Internalized Oppression, or a set of concrete tools with which to fight internalized sexism and homophobia. In short, the revolutionary insight of the Women's Movement, "The personal is political," has been sorely neglected of late in psychotherapeutic circles, where the emphasis seems to have returned — even among Lesbian feminist counselors — to a largely "the personal is personal" approach, with but a few crumbs of the political realities of women's and gay oppression tossed out from time to time.

The cost of ignoring the deeper psychological implications of economic and political oppression is great. This approach not only deprives Lesbian clients of valuable

political insights into their behavior, but fails to develop useful tools for personal growth and change which emerge from such an understanding. Finally, an approach which over-emphasizes past and personal history often overlooks the ways in which a client's behavior patterns are being reinforced in the present by factors in her social and economic environment.

In this article I would like first to go over some of the general ways in which sexism and heterosexism affect Lesbian relationships, then illustrate how this external climate of oppression can appear within the personal dynamics of the Lesbian couple. In particular, I will discuss a concept known as *Rescue* and how it can be used as a tool to help lovers become aware of ways in which they may be contributing to unhealthy patterns within their relationship, as well as provide specific means of changing such dynamics.

Lesbians of course are not alone in questioning relationships and feeling discouraged about them: heterosexuals are in the same boat. Marriages are breaking up in greater and greater numbers, and women's magazines are filled with the despairing voices of straight women who have serious questions about the possibility of having good, long-term relationships with men. There are significant socio-economic reasons for this, having to do with the changing political and economic role of women

and the family in our society over the past few decades. The family in industrialized Western society has now shrunk to its smallest size in the history of that institution, and places an unrealistic burden on the sexual couple to fulfill all our human requirements for community in an increasingly alienated and individualistic culture.

Apart from general problems facing the sexual couple in society, women as a group are economically disadvantaged in relation to men, earning 63 cents to the dollar that men do. For the Lesbian couple, in which both partners are targets of sex and sexual preference discrimination, the economic burden is doubled. In short, Lesbians as a socio-economic group tend to be poor, struggling, or marginal. Lesbians share the same economic lot (and often the same run-down neighborhoods, low-paying jobs, and other poverty stresses) as other disadvantaged groups in our culture. These economic realities impact heavily on the majority of Lesbian couples. Most studies of sexual relationships show that economic stress is *the* major factor in couple instability.

Heterosexual couples (or at least those legally married) in similar struggling circumstances frequently receive economic support from their respective families: bridal showers, wedding gifts, "hope chests," family heirlooms passed down at the time of marriage, cash gifts, help with buying a first home, help with starting a business, and help

with the care and education of the couple's children. By contrast, most Lesbians couples are not helped economically by their families; indeed, many risk being completely cut off financially when their sexual orientation becomes known.

Every Lesbian couple, whether economically secure or not, faces stresses involving the families' attitude toward the relationship, which more often than not is one of rejection and disapproval. At best the relationship is tolerated but rendered invisible: the couple is treated as two "roommates" devoid of sexuality or long-term commitment. Few Lesbian couples receive the kind of emotional support which heterosexual couples can expect: the recognition and good wishes of their family, friends, and community; emotional counseling and support from older, wiser family members to get them over the "rough spots;" positive reinforcements from role models provided by art, literature and the public media; and an accessible historical tradition buttressed by ceremonies designed to strengthen relationship ties.

Finally, perhaps the most psychically damaging consequence of Lesbian oppression is the revulsion with which our love-life is greeted by mainstream society. It is particularly hurtful and damaging to women, conditioned as most of us are to seek and receive approval from others, to have the most intimate and generally most important

aspect of our lives treated with contempt, derision, or complete silence. It is nearly impossible not to internalize at least some portion of this climate of rejection and hatred into our psyches and self-images from time to time.

In sum, the Lesbian couple wends its way in the world without mainstream support or approval, validation, visibility, role models, or even a visible historical context. It is no wonder — as Marny Hall, a Bay Area Lesbian therapist — has pointed out, that Lesbian relationships often become "havens:" enclaves forming a protective barrier to shield the couple from a "hostile world." Just as there are forces in the culture constantly attempting to pull Lesbian relationships apart, there exists a counter-pressure within the Lesbian couple to maintain the relationship at all cost, as a crucial source of nurturance, self-definition, and mutual protection — even when threatened by internal conflict.

For most of us, our families served as the means through which we first learned about and acculturated ourselves to the dominant gender, class, race, and able-bodied culture in which we grew up. The attitudes and inequalities of the dominant culture therefore become internalized at a very early age, and continue to be taught and reinforced within us, both at home and in society at large, unless we make a concerted effort to counter these internal messages in an

on-going process of "consciousness-raising" and political action.

One of the results of male dominance is that the desires and needs of women are constantly being denied and discounted. In place of pursuing our own feelings and ambitions, we are taught to substitute the needs of others, most appropriately the men we are intended to marry and the children we are supposed to bear. Thus are set in motion attempts to disempower us from the moment we are born.

The *fact* of women's subordination as a group becomes internalized in individual women as a belief that their personal needs are not important; that to ask for what they we want or to get their needs met is selfish, that they are only good and OK if they always put the needs of others first. Indeed, the accusation of "selfishness" — however subtly communicated — has ironically been perhaps the greatest barrier to women's development of a strong sense of Self with which to *be* "Selfish"!

In Transactional Analysis, a school of psychology developed in the 1950s and '60s which focussed on the nature of interactions between people, a concept known as *Rescue* was developed.

"Rescue" can be defined in several different ways, none of them to be confused with the ordinary meaning of rescue — that is, coming to the aid of someone who genuinely needs our emergency intervention, such as a drowning child. The most common definition of Rescue as I will be using it (with a capital "R") is the act of doing something you really don't want to do, or of doing more than your share of something.

EXAMPLE: Joann asks me to type a letter for her as a favor. Although I don't want to do it, and don't really have time to do it, I agree. I have been caught off guard by her request and thought it would be rude to refuse. My typing the letter in spite of this is a Rescue.

Simply doing a favor or a service for someone is *not* necessarily a Rescue (after all, we all want to do good things for people, or need to perform services we don't like because they just have to be done) but my doing the typing for Joann when—without the internalized feelings of guilt and the need to please which the request aroused, I would have said no—constitutes a Rescue. Two other helpful ways of defining Rescues are: 1) doing more for someone than she is doing for herself (except in situations involving disabled persons, children, or others rendered exceptionally powerless by this culture); and 2) not asking for what you want.

The act of Rescuing is one of the behaviors which give rise to the dynamic of the Rescue Triangle. The "Triangle" consists of three positions one can "play" in an interaction with someone else. What follows is an example of the Rescue Triangle in action:

EXAMPLE: Rhonda doesn't really like to go out on Friday nights: she would prefer to stay home and relax after work and just watch TV. However, her lover Juanica loves to celebrate their first night of freedom at the end of a week by going out to the movies, or a party, or *anything* rather than stay home. But almost every Friday night, at the urging of Juanica, Rhonda accompanies her lover to some outside form of entertainment, often staying up till very late. Rhonda agrees to this, even against her own inclinations, because she wants to please her lover, and is afraid Juanica will think of her as a drab, unexciting person for not wanting to go. Each time Rhonda goes out on Friday night when she really doesn't want to, she is "Rescuing." After awhile, as the tiresome Friday nights pile up, Rhonda gets more irritated and uncomfortable about going out, and begins to feel more and more powerless by giving up what she wants. She begins to deeply resent these outings. In short, she will come to feel a *Victim* of her Rescues, and feel sorry for herself for having to be such a good and sacrificing person all the time. And in my experience, it pretty generally follows that anyone who has felt victimized by a situation long enough,

will begin to feel angry about it. At this point, the Victim will move into the role of *Persecutor*: the accumulated resentment builds to an extreme point, and then erupts. The persecution phase may take any number of forms: an aggressive one such as a big fight; or more passive and indirect forms, such as withdrawing emotionally, making sarcastic comments, or other behavior designed to hurt and get back at her lover. In Rhonda's case, she persecuted Juanica by finally picking a big fight with her over some minor point one Friday night and making sure they both had a miserable evening.

I have shown how Rhonda played out the Rescue Triangle, but when one person has Rescued, the other has also necessarily played a part as well. In this transaction, Juanica noticed that her lover was less than lively on their Friday nights out. She would have liked her to be as excited as she was, but, not knowing the true cause of Rhonda's lack of spirit, thought perhaps Rhonda didn't find *her* to be a particularly exciting or stimulating companion. Juanica would have liked to be able to go out with one of her other friends instead or at least ask one of them to join the couple, but didn't because she was afraid her lover might feel hurt or jealous. So Juanica's Rescue was to go out on Friday nights alone with Rhonda when she really wanted to go with another friend or have other friends join them. As time went on, she also grew resentful at the lackluster evenings she and Rhonda were having, and

when Rhonda picked a fight one evening, she used the occasion to get in some choice "digs" at her lover in the ensuing fray.

On the other hand, if both Rhonda and Juanica had talked honestly to one another about what they wanted to do on Friday nights, the transaction could have looked like this (assuming there are no other more complex issues lurking beneath the surface):

> JUANICA: It's Friday night, Rhonda! Let's go out and have some fun! I want to go see the movie down at the Roxie Theater.

> RHONDA: I really don't feel like going out tonight, Juanica. I feel tired from work, and the traffic is always bad on Friday night. What I'd like to do is stay home and watch Miami Vice.

> JUANICA: Well, I'm feeling too restless to just stay home: I really want to go out. I'd like to call Louellen up and see if she'd like to do something together; but I'd like to save the movie for tomorrow night, if you'll go with me then.

> RHONDA: Sounds good to me.

In Radical Therapy, the concept of Rescue has been developed further and used in a more politically conscious way than simply as a description of role behavior conditioned by personal family history. For it is difficult not to draw a parallel between the role of Rescuer and the prevailing conditioning and expectations of women and other oppressed groups in our society. For women, the various internalized messages of sexist conditioning become the psychological motivations for Rescue, particularly within their love relationships, where such feelings become intensified. Many of these internalized messages consist of lies our society has told us concerning our own weakness, worthlessness, and powerlessness, or the powerlessness and weakness of others, who therefore need us to "save" them.

A number of therapists have written about many of the behavior patterns and attitudes I have discussed above, in terms other than that of "Rescue" or the "Rescue Triangle." And in the examples I have given in this article, I do not mean to imply that Rescue is all that is going on in the transactions I describe. There are many other behaviors and beliefs produced by Internalized Oppression which are beyond the scope of this paper. Indeed, the concept of Rescue as I have used it is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of tools and approaches developed by radical and politically-minded feminist therapists. However, I think that the simplicity of its language, the neatness of the

model, and its particular relevance to women's social conditioning, make the concept of Rescue especially useful in helping women with problems in relationships. I have yet to define these concepts to a woman client who has not immediately identified with the behavior they describe. This makes it an especially accessible tool with which clients can identify and solve relationship problems for themselves. In addition, identifying Rescues often helps to expose some of the more deeply-held negative beliefs which lie underneath. Given that women in general experience pressures to Rescue both from within and without, and that a Lesbian couple consists of two people with such conditioning, my experience has been that the Rescue model can be of particular help to the Lesbian couple.

For many women love and Rescue often become confused with one another. "Taking care of" someone else often becomes equated with "caring" and love itself. It is for this reason, as Lesbian therapist Barbara Sang has pointed out, that "one of the most salient issues that emerges in working with Lesbians in therapy is one's feelings that the other doesn't care enough." Both partners will have a tendency to feel under injunction to be "on call" for each other's needs, although often one will be the heavier Rescuer than the other.

EXAMPLE: Mary has to attend a conference downtown on Saturday. Afterwards, she and her lover have made plans to go out to dinner at their favorite restaurant and go to a movie. They arrange to meet at the restaurant Saturday night. Joan has a car, Mary does not. Mary actually would like Joan to pick her up at the conference and drive both of them to the restaurant. Mary knows she will be tired after a long day of workshops and doesn't want to be riding buses for an hour in order to get to the restaurant. She feels that it would be selfish of her to ask directly for a ride, so instead she drops hints of what she wants: she says they'll have to start dinner late because it will take her a long time to be there, she's going to feel pretty tired, etc. She feels sure her lover has heard and understood these clues. But Joan never does offer a ride, and all day at the conference, in the back of her mind, Mary's resentment grows. Her internal dialogue runs like this: "If Joan *really* cared about me, she would have offered me a ride; she would have *wanted* to do this for me... I would have done it for *her*," etc. By the time Mary reaches the restaurant, all the seeds for a miserable evening together have been planted.

In the above example, Mary's Rescue was not asking her lover for what she wanted. Her silence was prompted by having learned early on that good girls do not ask for what they want (this is known as "selfish" and "demanding"). This left Mary dependent on her lover's intuiting what she wanted and offering it without being asked outright.

The above examples of Rescue and the Rescue Triangle involve only single transactions between lovers. Let me now give an example of a Lesbian relationship as a whole, in which a Rescue *dynamic* has become the chief way of doing business:

EXAMPLE: Lenore is a very emotional, nurturing woman who really gives her all to a lover: as she likes to say, when she falls in love, she really falls in love. As the relationship develops beyond the first honeymoon period, it settles into a pattern in which Lenore loves doing everything with and for her lover, Jesse. She wanted them to live together right away which, in spite of her lover's initial doubts, they did. Lenore loves to take care of Jesse: she nurtures her through all her problems (which seem many), sides with her tiffs and arguments with others (which also seem many), does favors for Jesse whenever needed, gives Jesse money when she runs low, etc. In short, Lenore does a lot of nurturing and caretaking in the relationship.

Jesse was also passionate and romantic at the start of the relationship. Although she was worried about moving in with Lenore so quickly after they met, she agreed to do so, persuaded by Lenore's zeal and also out of practical, economic reasons of her own. In fact, over time, economic benefits which Jesse finds in her relationship with Lenore

— being "tided over" economic rough spots by small loans, the cheap rent of their apartment together, etc. — begins to form a background of dependency needs which Jesse never brings up because she is ashamed of these thoughts and feelings. In addition, Jesse really enjoys being the center of her lover's attention and caretaking, and occasionally assuages her guilt over what Lenore does for her by doing something special for her or being particularly affectionate.

Although both partners are Rescuing in this relationship, it is easy to see that Lenore is more comfortable in the role of Rescuer, and Jesse as the Victim; or we could say, Jesse plays Victim, and therefore Lenore Rescues her. When Lenore does more than her share of work in the relationship, and does things for Jesse without having been asked to do so, she is making the implicit assumption that Jesse can't do these things for herself. That is the way in which Rescue contributes to victimizing one's partner. In this relationship, Lenore does indeed feel that Jesse is not really able to take care of herself in many ways. Lenore feels badly about Jesse's background of poverty and alcoholism and believes that Jesse has been "damaged" irreparably as a result, while she, Lenore, being middle-class and from a more stable family, needs less. Jesse herself probably has encouraged Lenore's Rescues by playing up all the ways she feels Victimized by life and society. There are of course many ways in which people

are concretely exploited in our society, the most obvious being oppression by class, race, sex, sexual preference and disability. However, Rescue speaks to the way in which our behavior often unintentionally colludes with society's view of us as less-than-human, powerless Victims.

On the other hand, Jesse Rescues her lover by not speaking up for things that she wants — more time alone, separate dates with her friends, more concrete agreements about money — because she is afraid of Lenore's anger or hurt over these requests. At bottom, she has come to see Lenore as emotionally fragile, someone who could be shattered by her own moves toward independence.

Let's follow the relationship a little longer. After awhile:

Lenore feels super-invested in the relationship as a result of all her Rescues. She has consistently placed the needs of her lover and of the relationship above her own. Her formerly close relationships with her friends have begun to slide.

Jesse, on the other hand, has begun to feel increasingly angered and suffocated by the relationship. Although she is very demanding on her lover for love, attention and reassurance, she is also becoming more and more burdened by guilt and feelings of dependency which make her want to run away. Her shame about these feelings, her lack of

skill in bringing up emotional issues and her fear of Lenore's reaction keep her silent about what is going on for her.

It is at this juncture that we can see how the dynamics in a Lesbian couple can differ significantly from the heterosexual model. While most men are conditioned to *expect* to be the center of their lover's attention and nurturing, and to feel comfortable in the one-up power position in which that places them, women are not. In addition, most men have careers and work lives that are not only their central focus but which offer them real power and privilege in the world. Most women do not. So where a man in Jesse's position might feel fine about the Rescues Lenore is performing, Jesse feels increasingly guilty and uncomfortable. And where the economic arrangements and expectations between men and women are usually quite well understood (even if unequal), in Lesbian couples financial issues and responsibilities can become obscured. I suspect that many Lesbians have quite a few issues concerning money which they do not make explicit in the relationship, often because they have a "romantic" or "politically correct" bias against bringing up such mundane matters: namely, that women in love shouldn't have to make financial agreements — they should just be able to "trust" each other and "share and share alike." For many women the financial issues are not so much related to power and status as is often the case

with men, but instead involve their over-all sense of dependency or security within the relationship.

In the above example, if the dynamics described were to continue unchecked, one could expect a scenario in which one possible outcome would be that the person who most frequently plays Victim — in this case, Jesse — would eventually move into a role of Persecutor. She would then do something to hurt Lenore; subsequently, Jesse would feel guilty over her bad behavior ("How could I treat her so badly — she's so good to me") and would Rescue Lenore in turn: promise or do something she didn't really want to in order to make up. Guilt is the agent which propels players back into the Rescue Triangle game! One day, after repeated go-arounds of this kind by both parties, Jesse suddenly announces to Lenore that she wants to "take some space" in the relationship or "open the relationship up" to other lovers or — in the worst case scenario — Jesse conducts a secret love affair that eventually comes to Lenore's attention and ruptures the relationship.

As mentioned before, it makes sense that in a relationship between two women, the level of Rescue can be particularly high. In addition, the Rescue level can reach new heights because a woman lover often gives back more emotionally than men do. Indeed, the major complaint many heterosexual women have about men in relationship

is that they don't "open up," are "afraid of intimacy," and are emotionally illiterate. Between women lovers, however, there is frequently a very high intensity of emotional sharing, intimacy, and nurturance, which can feel wonderfully exciting and satisfying. However, the down side is that at times the emotional heights of the relationship are gained at the cost of completely abandoning the analytical and problem-solving abilities of the participants, who as women have often had this side of their development discounted or discouraged altogether. In this whirlwind of emotions, real issues and concrete problems are never directly and cooperatively addressed. It is a relationship "culture" which one Radical Therapist has described as "Rescue Run-Amok." The high level of Rescue eventually results in almost continuous and sometimes abusive fighting (the Persecution phase), followed by guilty, emotional "make-up" scenes (Rescue), and back to fighting again. The fighting often takes the form of a series of escalating power plays. A power play is something one does in order to get her partner to do something that her partner really doesn't want to do. One example of a power play is my leaving the room and slamming the door in the middle of an argument with my lover. This effectively forces a stop to the argument or discussion in progress, even if my lover wants it to continue. Another example is that of my lover screaming at me in a public place, knowing full well that I hate "public" scenes. This will force me to agree to whatever

she wants or to act complacently, in order to keep the scene from going on. In a bad fight, these power plays can escalate to a point of violence: either actual physical battering, or "psychological battering:" yelling loudly, screaming hateful things to one another, making threats, etc.

While occasional fights and power plays are common enough in any relationship, their habitual occurrence becomes exhausting, frightening, and symptomatic of problems in the relationship which are not being solved. As for actual violence, it has no place in a cooperative relationship. However, lovers resort to power plays for reasons which are important to understand and find solutions for: generally, because they feel desperate, and do not know how to be heard or get their needs met in any other way.

Another form of "Rescue-Run-Amok" encountered frequently in Lesbian relationships is one in which the identities of both partners have become so-called "merged" or "fused" with one another. In such a relationship, both partners are Rescuing in such a way as to suppress conflict over differences or individual needs they might have. Although they typically share a great deal of time together, are mutually supportive, and generally content in their domestic "nest," such couples have "sat on" a lot of their resentments and individual needs. They have done so for

all the reasons that women and Lesbians are propelled to Rescue in our society, as outlined above, and particularly out of a concern that they might hurt the other's feelings, or that what they want is "selfish."

In such couples, I have often observed an accompanying loss of sexual activity. Sexual expression begins to feels "incestuous" and inappropriate, and eventually dies out altogether. Keeping sex alive and well in a long-term monogamous relationship is a problem common to all couples, heterosexual and gay male as well. This type and degree of Rescue is sometimes encountered in heterosexual couples, with the same accompanying loss of sexual expression. In many cases, this falling off of sexual expression occurs remarkably early in the relationship—within the first year, and sometimes within the first few months. I believe that in Lesbian couples this is a phenomenon with complex roots (e.g., involving women's socialization around sex and internalized homophobia) and don't wish to overgeneralize as to its causes, but I believe its frequency in Lesbian couples lends yet more evidence to my thesis that the dynamics of Rescue — compounded in Lesbian relationships by the similar conditioning and cultural status of both partners — play a significant part.

The way to stop the Rescues and begin to equalize power in a relationship is to *ask for 100% of what we want 100% of the time*. As simple as this formula sounds, it can be an

extremely difficult task for most women. Indeed, often my work with a client begins with helping her to get in touch with what she feels and wants, so conditioned has she been to put that aside.

In asking for what we want, it is important to ask for the whole 100%, and not whittle it down in size before we even put it out there. We are often in the habit of editing down what we ask for according to what we think our lover will agree to, or what we think we "ought" to ask for. So we wind up asking for 75% or perhaps even half of what we want. The problem with this is that we thereby deprive our lovers of valuable information about ourselves and our needs, and second, it leaves us with a poor position from which to bargain in attempts to negotiate workable compromises.

EXAMPLE: My lover tells me she wants to have a big party to celebrate her new job on a particular weekend. In thinking about her request, I realize that I really don't feel up for *any* kind of a party or social gathering. But I don't want to displease her, and I don't think I have a "right" to say what I'm *really* thinking, so I tell her that several friends would be fine, but I don't want a whole houseful of guests. In other words, I'm putting out about 50% of what I want, but she doesn't know that. She says she is disappointed that I don't feel like having a big party, but she's willing to go halfway and invite about a dozen

people. Now if I really had had "several" friends in mind instead of zero, agreeing to a few more would not have been out of the question. But now I am trapped by the less than 100% I asked for, and agree to this "compromise." In reality, however, I have Rescued my lover, and will be all primed for some level of Persecution once I have endured the unwanted gathering. My lover will be left scratching her head in puzzlement as I take out my irritation on her.

On the other hand, if I had expressed my not wanting to have a party honestly, my lover and I might have been able to discuss my feelings and find a way to take care of them and her needs as well. In this particular case, we discovered that the weekend she mentioned was very close to a lot of other big social dates on my calendar, and I was getting burned out. We worked it out by agreeing on a later date for the party that felt right for both of us.

In the case of Jesse and Lenore's relationship — if addressed at a point in the relationship when both were still committed to working through their problems together — the task of unraveling the Rescues would involve examining typical transactions between them, identifying the Rescues each is performing, and exposing the fears and guilt which propel those Rescues. They would then be ready to make agreements about how they would do things differently in the relationship in the future. The agreements would be based upon each partner's saying 100% of what

she wants about any range of issues they are having problems with: household chores, initiation of sex, visits with parents, time alone, money, communication, etc.

The goal of cooperative negotiation is for each partner to get as much of what she wants as is possible, rather than for one to give up her needs for the other, or for each to argue over which is the "right" thing for them to be doing. It is in each partner's asking for what she wants that greater and greater equality is achieved in a relationship. Of course, by "equality" I do not mean "sameness" — most often each woman will bring very different qualities and areas of interests and skills to the relationship — but rather a balance of power, an alliance between two whole persons who are equally invested in and equally benefitted by the relationship.

Certainly some of the cynicism I have observed creeping into the community regarding Lesbian relationships has to do with a sense of let-down and disillusionment, now that a decade has gone by since the exuberant and idealistic 1970s. Those of us who were coming out in the Women's Movement at that time had some pretty rosy ideas and unrealistic expectations about the glories of women loving women. We thought that as liberated women, our newfound relationships with each other would *by definition* be equal and devoid of sexism. After a few hard knocks in the romantic department, we are coming to

realize the that as women and gays we are still the products and carriers of sexist and heterosexist conditioning. It took several thousand years for the institution of heterosexuality — epitomized by marriage and its associated meanings and rituals — to perfect itself. One of the reinforcing ideologies which this institution has developed over time is that of the myth of romantic love. Women in Western European culture have been conditioned to accept romantic mythology through countless novels, films, bedtime stories, television, family expectations, that have usually spared us the boring details of reality.

The components of the myth are as follows: Love Is All, True Love Is Constant Bliss, True Love Lasts Forever; don't look too closely at romance or the "magic" will disappear, the spell will be broken. In the Lesbian community romantic mythology has sometimes been elevated into a quasi-political position, in which the idea of applying one's mind to problems of the heart is viewed almost as counter-revolutionary. I have heard this position articulated somewhat like this: to "analyze" romance is cold, unfeeling, and "male." It includes the idea that feelings are of paramount importance, taking precedence over mind and experience. Yet it is essential to the health of our relationships that our minds and hearts work together, to develop "realistic romance" rather than the Hollywood script we've been handed. The uncritical acceptance of this romantic myth by heterosexual women

has been very convenient for men for a very long time: after all, if heterosexual women really looked that closely at the institution of marriage, they might perceive its institutionalized inequality. By the same token, if a Lesbian uncritically adheres to the kind of romantic ideology described above in the conduct of her relationships, she may be unwittingly perpetuating these same, internalized values and ideals. "Realistic romance," on the other hand, is one which draws upon a woman's deepest intuitions, life experiences, and mental abilities in deciding what kind of person she can entrust with her love and emotions. It is one which combines passion and excitement with an honest exchange of criticism, cooperative problem-solving and realistic expectations of what a relationship can or cannot be.

I began this article with a report on negative assessments about Lesbian relationships which I had been hearing from Lesbians themselves. While many of these comments obviously reflected internalized homophobia, I also felt they pointed to genuine areas of concerns for Lesbians in relationship. It has been my purpose in this article to address some of these concerns and to introduce some approaches and tools which I hope will prove useful. However, I want to underscore my belief that the single greatest obstacle to the health of Lesbian relationships is the societal oppression of gay women, and the ways in which that oppression becomes turned against ourselves.

How many heterosexuals, for example, are prompted to blame their problems or disappointments in relationships on their heterosexual orientation?

As Lesbian writer Jane Rule has observed, "[a]s Lesbians who have until recently had no community, whose relationships have been themselves considered immoral if not criminal, we are for the first time in a position of declared responsibility, able to join together, able to describe for ourselves what the nature and value of our relationships are. We should not be surprised at how raggedly we have begun that process."

The process of defining for ourselves the "nature and value of our relationships" is one not only of crucial importance for the Lesbian community, but also one with profound implications for all women and society as a whole. While our only guideposts in the past have been our own often limited and isolated experiences and a model of heterosexual coupling which is less than ideal for women loving women, we are now engaged in the great task of rediscovering the long history of Lesbian existence, rebuilding its rich traditions, and helping to restore the powerful community of women which became fragmented and suppressed so long ago. It is in such a community, and in such fertile ground, that the full flowering of women's love for each other can take place. During this time of great change and self-definition, it is my hope that we do

not succumb to ways of looking at ourselves that internalize those very attitudes of shame, disapproval, and self-negation which we have fought so long to leave behind. In sum, as we work on those intensely personal issues of love and relationship, we ought not lose sight of their profound connections with the politics of our culture and our times.

CHAPTER NINETEEN:

DISABILITY

Eleanor Smith

This chapter, originally drafted for inclusion in the current volume, was published in the March/April, 1987, edition of The Disability Rag, *with the title "Earning Power." What appears here is an updated version.*

When Baby Jane Doe, a disabled newborn, made headlines in l984, editorial writers across the country decided that, since her "quality of life" would surely be awful, her parents should be allowed to let her die.

When Elizabeth Bouvia, who has cerebral palsy, had earlier wanted hospital help in starving herself, she too gained headlines—and the sympathy of editorial writers who, again with "quality of life" comments, agreed she, too, should be allowed to die.

Almost no one asked the obvious question: "What is it that has been made so difficult about raising a disabled child in this society — about being a disabled adult in this society — that warrants death?"

In 1987, Nancy Jones, who had been brain damaged seven years before in a car wreck, starved to death because medical personnel removed her feeding tube at the request of her family. This occurred legally in spite of the testimony of two widely respected neurologists that she was able to understand and follow verbal requests and showed other signs of being mentally alive.

Now, as we move into the '90s, the pressure of disability issues is increasing and decisions are less and less escapable as to how the country, small communities, and individuals will respond to people's unequal amounts and kinds of physical and mental ability. The rising proportion of our population who are old, the still-increasing numbers of people with AIDS and ARC, disabled people's recent unprecedented political awareness and group actions demanding justice — these are among the forces pushing disability issues into the awareness of many people who did not feel directly affected before.

BAD LUCK?

The oppression of disabled people is brutal; the Pigs are vicious. Society demonstrates in many ways that it wants people with severe medical conditions at the very least out of sight, and preferably dead. ("I'd rather be dead than

crippled for life." "I want to die before I become a burden.") Yet, though evidence of oppression abounds, disability is not commonly thought of as "oppression."

Even politically progressive people, who accurately see many other inequalities as oppressions, persist in assuming that the lack of power disabled people face is somehow intrinsic to their medical condition — a personal, individual misfortune.

One way of beginning to see disability as a human-made oppression — rather than an unfortunate stroke of fate — is to ask oneself whether things aren't being made considerably more difficult for people with medical conditions than they need to be. And the answer is, "Yes."

One thing to notice is that disabled people are kept from earning money by arbitrary rules — rules made by non-disabled society. Because most disabled people are slowed down and have their energy drained in ways additional to the energy-drains on able-bodied people, most do not have energy remaining to accomplish the full-tilt, forty-hour week that our particular economic system generally demands.

Yet most jobs are set up to discourage part-time work. In many institutions part-time work does not exist, and when it does, it usually entails a loss of crucial benefits such as

insurance and sick leave. Often there's a reduction in hourly pay, as well.

As a reason for making part-time work unavailable or very unattractive, management cites the increased time and cost of managing more employees. But maybe an unspoken reason is that if part-time work were an attractive option, great numbers of unhappy workers with no health problems or relatively slight health problems would choose to work less than they do now, while people with severe medical conditions would work more than they do now. Then the crucial-to-exploitation lines between able-bodied (useful) people and disabled (useless) people would blur or disappear.

Besides economic barriers, one notices that barriers are literally built into the environment which cause people with disabilities to need more help than is intrinsically necessary; that cause them to waste enormous amounts of physical and emotional energy. And technology routinely applied to help non-disabled people overcome natural barriers like the telephone, is not widely applied for disabled people. Things like TTYs, open captions on television, computer-generated print into Braille and voice output are not routine in our society — though they could be.

Thus, extra help some people need — because of inabilities intrinsic to the specific medical condition rather than inabilities created by the environment — is far less than we have been made to assume. Even so, such help is not available to these people in forms which allow them to retain their power as respectable human beings.

In today's industrial, capitalistic economies, society is fragmented into individual families — often units of one person. In such an arrangement, people with medical conditions are cut off from the varied informal helpers available in a close extended community where many people come and go in a flowing pattern. In the United States today, a few isolated friends or relatives are frequently loaded with huge unbearable amounts of responsibility to sustain disabled persons. This often leads at best to chronically strained relationships, or worse, to the selective abortion of disabled fetuses, killing of disabled newborns, physical abuse of disabled children or adults, and profound anger, guilt and desperation of caretakers.

Help could be available from state-paid helpers, hired and dismissed by the disabled person, who are fairly paid and impersonal, whose help the disabled person therefore does not have to cajole or reward with gratitude, sex, personal interest, or entertainment. At present, state-paid help is very hard to come by. Only very severely disabled people

have hope of getting it, and then only in certain states. The money to make this happen could be freed up through a redistribution of resources; the economic, human and natural resources to make it possible are already available.

At the same time our society prevents disabled people from helping themselves economically and physically, and creates circumstances in which sufficient help is difficult to obtain for anybody (let alone someone with disabilities!). It promotes the attitude that to need major help is shameful. Competition and self-sufficiency are idealized; cooperation, though given lip service, is viewed with condescension or suspicion. In such an atmosphere, to need long-term or very intimate help — or to encounter someone who does — causes extreme emotional discomfort.

It rarely occurs to anyone that such an attitude toward giving and receiving help is nothing more than cultural convention.

WHAT WE ARE MEANT NOT TO SEE

If one begins to believe that our society is actively creating and perpetuating disablement for some of its citizens, the next question we must ask is: what might an economic system have to gain from such an arrangement?

Disability presents a unique problem to economic systems based on exploitation. Other groups of people can be exploited as workers — by their race, gender, or class; even non-disabled children are future workers. And an argument given in favor of treating old people well is that they have earned their reward through many years of work. But many people with severe disabilities cannot — and never will be able to, no matter what the accommodation — produce at the pace and in the form required by economic systems geared to generate large profits and privilege for a few gained through using other people. By and large, disabled people are not usable in that way.

What takes a non-disabled person only a short amount of time can take a person with a severe disability much longer — either to do more slowly for themselves, or to arrange for someone else to do because they themselves cannot do it. Far from producing a competitive amount of work, many disabled people require work on the part of other people to stay alive. And the work they require is in such a primal form that it can hardly be ignored the way dependence is ignored in the case of non-disabled people — who are asked in our society to operate under the fragile and anxious pretense that they are self-reliant.

In any economic system that depends on workers who at some level feel — and are — used, over-tired and under-

rewarded, those who don't work (unless they are super-rich) must be made to live visibly unenviable lives. People who cannot work "competitively" (full-tilt) must be kept impoverished, isolated, without power, their lives kept miserable enough to ensure they're pitied rather than envied by unhappy non-disabled working people.

If disabled people were commonly seen moving about easily on public transportation, getting in and out of houses and public buildings easily, having access to information, access to paid helpers when help is needed, the opportunity to work as they can, sufficient time to rest, access to money they have not earned to compensate for the limitations in earning power brought on by their loss of endurance; if such disabled people were seen contributing to community life, having friends and being sexy, then no one would pity them or feel guilty in their presence.

In fact, the degree to which non-disabled workers were oppressed would be the degree to which they envied and resented, rather than pitied and feared, disabled people.

Over-work, speeded-up work, unrewarded work, lack of control over how one spends one's work day: all these things would cease to be preferable to the alternative of having a "disability."

Whether specific medical conditions are "disabling" or not depends almost entirely upon circumstance. A quadriplegic with money, enough helpers, equipment such as vans and lifts, and a group of friends and lovers who are not very encumbered by ableist attitudes is not very disabled. On the other hand, an "able-bodied" worker who sprains her ankle but is without the amount of paid sick leave she needs to stay home and heal, and without the helpers she needs to do chores that have now become exhausting, is fairly "disabled." But this fluid continuum up and down which all people would normally slide according to their current medical condition and other circumstances is obliterated under a system in which "work," narrowly conceived, is the measure of worth of an individual.

It is not due to medical conditions, but through specific economic practices, physical barriers, and inculcated cultural attitudes that people are very materially separated into the two camps of "able-bodied" and "disabled." The first must be willing to do unfairly hard and/or meaningless work without much question or hope for change; the second must be kept powerless and pitiable and their situation feared.

LAYERS OF MYTH

Among the most powerful myths that sustain the powerlessness and low valuing of people with medical conditions is the belief that "nothing can be done" about disability. This myth deserves careful scrutiny because it is too central to the issue — and because it is on the verge of giving way.

On the one hand, everyone grants that "much can be done about disability." Billions of dollars are spent researching prevention and cure of undesirable medical conditions. Besides, disability is clearly and intensely related to class, race, gender, sexual orientation, degree of fatness, age, and other factors that are targets of oppression. These factors greatly influence who is more likely to get sick or injured in the first place; who gets better or worse medical care; who is more likely to be the victim of medical experimentation; whose diseases receive research money; and so on. So, to do something about these oppressions is to do something about disability.

But beyond that, who develops a medical condition is also a matter of chance — a fact disputed by those who believe that god punishes the wicked or that, invariably, we create our own reality. One child in a family is born with Down's Syndrome or with Sickle Cell; the rest are not. One teenager on a high school trip dives into the shallow part of the lake and becomes paralyzed. One middle-aged friend

develops Multiple Sclerosis. This element of chance has helped to obscure the political nature of *all* disability.

A further source of mystification is that, with most oppressions other than disability, most people see that the only problem is the oppression itself. The problem with being Jewish is not Jewishness, it is anti-Semitism. Being a woman in the world would not be a problem apart from sexism. But a severe medical condition appears to be in itself very bad luck. In the world as it is right now, any normally sensitive person realizes that the event of severe disability is catastrophic for the person involved and for those who love and must care for that person.

But the situation of disabled people can be vastly improved even when their medical conditions can't be. Often in fact nothing more can — or should — be done than has been done to cure a particular person's medical condition. That is the point when the status quo discourages our asking several large questions, specifically: How has the quality of life become worse? What systems and what individuals profit from this poor quality? What can be changed, and how? To raise these questions, answer them and take action attacks the core of a system geared to mega-profits.

Maybe this potential threat to exploitative economics explains why William F. Buckley spent an entire editorial reiterating the clearly apparent fact that crossing the ocean

in a computer-equipped sailboat would not make a blind sailor see (and was therefore by implication an absurd endeavor). Buckley didn't concede that a blind person with a cane is better off than one without any tool for mobility; that a blind person with a computer that generates print into voice is better off than one who has no way to read; nor the implications of this train of thought.

The system depends on our remaining with the view that nothing can be done about disability and that people who can't be cured must adjust to a life that is less free, less secure, less dignified, and less fun than an able-bodied life. This tradition has caused many disability rights activists to become angry at the concept of "cure" and at the same time at the concept of "accepting one's disability." Instead, they want solutions that enable life with medical conditions to be as good as life without these conditions — a radical concept on which an economy based on exploitation can't survive.

MOVING ON FROM HERE

For people with medical conditions to begin to see disability as a human-made construct, a manipulation on the part of an economic system, is a basis for new hope.

But it's a profound threat, too, because the fitting response to that understanding is a deep, strong anger — not at God, the cosmos or self, but at our physical and social environment and the people who perpetuate that environment through their attitudes and their policies.

And people who are disabled often cannot afford to express anger. Their lack of power makes them dependent moment-to-moment for their most basic needs: getting food from the refrigerator into their mouths, going to the bathroom, having access to essential information that is at any given moment being written or spoken.

To express anger toward someone who in ten minutes is going to be needed to help you use the bathroom is dangerous, emotionally and physically.

The stakes are, in fact, very high. A person repeatedly prevented from expressing anger learns over time to stop even feeling the anger — or any strong emotion. At some point, the views which perpetuate the oppressive situation take up firm residence in the oppressed person's own head in order to complete the task.

To fight against ableism involves very real dangers to people with disabilities. And for both disabled and non-disabled people it requires a new and very different way of

seeing, thinking, feeling, and talking about disability, acting in new ways, and making new structures.

For non-disabled people, a political view of disability can begin to remove a burden of guilt or helpless sadness as they confront disabled people. The panic, revulsion, nervousness or embarrassment that many non-disabled people feel when confronting disability are not character flaws — they are socialized feelings nurtured by systems that would stand to lose if people with medical conditions were considered as valuable as anyone else.

It is to our advantage to build an environment where the economic structures, the physical structures, the technology, the vocabulary for giving, receiving and negotiating major help create an environment where people with medical conditions can be happy and powerful, and no one needs to be afraid of illness, accident or aging.

The implications for Radical Psychiatry are deep and wide. First, Radical Psychiatry theory has provided an impetus for tracking down political roots of disability oppression: the very simple formulation that almost all bad feelings result from internalized or external oppression motivates a search from confused pain to clear reasons.

Disability issues permeate the work of healing souls:

♦ A person in group is doing body work. How does a psychiatrist heal the Pig damage not only of how bodies are "supposed to" look, but how bodies are "supposed to" function?

♦ A woman in group is discussing her upcoming amniocentesis, with the plan of keeping a medically "normal" fetus and aborting a medically different one. How is the group's response to this similar to or different from a plan to keep a male fetus and abort a female one?

♦ A household comes for a Mediation, and one of the members has a chronic debilitating illness. What are the things the Mediator needs to listen for and the questions s/he needs to ask?

The concepts and tools Radical Psychiatry already uses are well-suited to fight disability oppression. For instance, facing disability issues nationally and interpersonally calls for the most focused attention to distinctions between real scarcity and perceived or manipulated scarcity. Disability issues call for great amount of permission and protection as people express feelings and identify Pigs; they often call for a wider and deeper analysis of the Rescue Triangle

than is commonly conceived; and they provide an opportunity for highly creative and meaningful approaches to cooperation.

CHAPTER TWENTY:

COMBATING RACISM

Beth Roy

Racism will not be cured by Radical Psychiatry. Its roots lie in the structure of our society. Its face is reflected in a thousand ways in the course of daily life in America.

Radical Psychiatry can, however, make a contribution to the efforts of people of conscience to recognize our own racism and to do something about it. The ideas and methods we propose here are tools for working together to overcome the attitudes and habits which divide, and thereby weaken, us.

RACISM AS PIG

Racism is a structure of inequality which acts to deny certain groups of people their rights and access to opportunity. As a political institution, racism relies on the internalization of certain attitudes. In other words, people must believe that the members of the group which is discriminated against share certain characteristics, simply by virtue of their identity in that group. Black people are

lazy, women are weak, Asians work unthinkingly and obediently, Latinos are shifty, Jews are greedy: all are generalizations, or stereotypes, based on little or no data. As a result of these stereotypes, individual members of the group become invisible; on first meeting, they are viewed through the prism of these internalized generalizations, rather than on their own merits.

Racist attitudes, then, are Pig (see Chapter 5), according to Radical Psychiatry's definition (Pig = Internalized Oppression). Let me quickly make the distinction between racist *attitudes* and racial *oppression*. The latter is a set of actions taken on the basis of racist attitudes to deny power to the discriminated-against group. Such actions often occur, despite the good, non-racist intentions of the person taking them.

Bob Blauner,[11] for example, has detailed the ways in which people of color are disadvantaged at the University, despite the expressed (and sincere) intention of progressive faculty members to challenge racism. The underlying assumptions of the University (that scholarly work is constituted in a particular way, that academic standards must be maintained, that those standards rest on a particular culturally-determined set of beliefs, etc.) work against the

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[11] Robert Blauner, *Racial Oppression in America* (Harper & Row, New York, 1971).

success of people who hold different cultural values, and who have been traditionally excluded from the institutions which promote those of the University. This form of institutional racism (that which operates independently of the attitudes of the perpetrators, and so would have a strong tendency to continue even if prejudice were to disappear) is common among progressive groups.

In another example, a progressive theater company may wish to include more actors of color, but cannot find good scripts with parts for them and cannot bring themselves to consider radically unconventional casting (women in men's roles, people of color in roles which are clearly intended for white people, and so on.)

In Radical Psychiatry, we have long grappled with the contradictions of our position, because it tends to exclude many people with whom we would wish to be allied. For instance, we have resisted becoming credentialed, for theoretical and political reasons (credentialling standards select for a kind of therapy to which we are explicitly opposed). Yet to be uncredentialled means that we cannot work in agencies which pay (relatively) decent salaries. We are therefore dependent on private practices, and must charge fees. We try to keep those fees low and flexible, but nonetheless they exclude many people — many people of color, for example — who cannot afford them. Moreover, potential Radical Psychiatrists must be willing to take a

very large risk, to work extra hard against substantial odds to support themselves during the slow years of building a practice. The success of that endeavor is even more problematic when practitioners seek to work with communities (such as working class people and people of color) who do not tend to seek out private therapy. Over the years, more and more Radical Psychiatrists have opted to get degrees and licenses, and to work inside mainstream institutions, bringing with them their radical predispositions. The effect has been productive, but has raised new problems. There are no perfect solutions to these contradictions. But if we decide that we are truly intent on working together in interracial groups, we must be willing to make institutional changes that may challenge us deeply.

We are still, however, left with the problem of our internalized oppression. Once we think of racist attitudes as the Pig, we can begin to say some things about how it works, and how to fight it. First of all, racist attitudes are always wrong. It may be true that the Pig attaches to some grain of truth. It may, for instance, be true that a given black teenager is less motivated to work for good grades in school than is his white, affluent classmate. The black youth may have figured out that his chances of getting a job are so small, even if he excels in school, that they are not worth taking. He may be resentful and rebellious as a result. None of this behavior, however, proves the racist

Pig about him, that he is lazy and shiftless. That is a generalization. It stands outside of time and place (When and where is he lazy? Is he lazy when repairing his motorcycle? Is he shiftless when writing and performing popular music?)

The second characteristic of the Pig which is useful in the fight against racist attitudes is that the Pig can be changed. The Pig is an idea which has been learned. Consequently, it can be unlearned and replaced with ideas that are more accurate and truthful. Some ways of changing Pig ideas in a problem-solving setting are outlined in Chapter 5. I suggest below some strategies specific to a discussion of racism in other contexts.

Finally, to say that racist attitudes are Pig is to say that they come from a social milieu by which we all are influenced. Racist notions surround us: We see mostly white actors on television, unless we are watching a "Black piece." White is "normal," Black is "exceptional." Asian women models are very often dressed in lacy underwear or girlish dresses. Many citizens of big American cities never see a person of Chinese origins outside a laundry or a restaurant.

To recognize our own racist Pig, then, is not to confess original sin. It is very important to be able to be self-critical without self-blame. The majority of people in our

society are immune neither from being stereotyped, nor from stereotyping others. I am a middle-aged woman. Sometimes, when I meet a person for the first time, I can read in his eyes his preconceptions about me: square, comfortable but not sexy, sweet but not interesting. On the other hand, I was recently part of a group that was challenged by a Japanese-American woman: Did we not assume she was shy and withdrawn? I found, to my consternation, that I did indeed. It was an assumption that proved entirely wrong, and that I have not since repeated.

Guilt and shame about racist ideas are not helpful. They lead to silence, and from there to an impregnable stronghold of secrecy. When unheard and unchallenged, the Pig festers. Only when it is out in the open can it be examined and undone.

Guilt and shame, however, are closely associated with pain and dismay about the racist state of our world. To combat the former is a step toward healing the latter. It is in the interest of all of us to do this work, for we all are affected in some way by a divided society, riven by racial (as well as other) injustices.

FIGHTING RACIST ATTITUDES

The fight against racist Pig can most sincerely be undertaken in the context of racially mixed groups. That does not mean that we cannot (or should not) work on our racism, or other -isms, at other times and places. But nothing motivates like necessity, and it becomes essential to fight stereotypes when working cooperatively with people affected by them.

People who have been oppressed by stereotypes, however, are frequently unwilling to struggle very hard with those who hold them. People of color, women, older people, gays, lesbians, and disabled people are often weary of warding off others' prejudices. Too often, particularly in groups of progressive people, criticism about racism is met with well-meaning discounts: "No, no, I didn't mean that; some of my best friends..." Or criticism is seen as accusation: "How can you think that about *me*? Others, maybe, but not me!" Not surprisingly, people who have been wounded by discount may eventually resort to attack. Criticism may turn ugly, for on its back are riding huge monsters of resentment and frustration.

Here, then, are four suggestions of ways to fight racist notions:

1. Listen very carefully to criticism from a discriminated-against person.

Even if it is badly delivered, it always contains some grain of truth. It may be mistaken in detail or in its speculation about intent, but the complaint is at its core useful and correct.

Think of criticism of this nature as paranoia, in the Radical Psychiatry sense (see Chapter 8). Like paranoia, such criticism always has a kernel of truth. Be sure you have understood that kernel before you act on any impulse to excuse or defend yourself. It will be much easier to take this unguarded posture in the face of criticisms if you remember that you are not a bad person for holding some mistaken belief. Such attitudes are inevitable, given the racism in our culture, and you are to be commended for working hard to discover them and to change.

2. The person giving criticism also shares some responsibility.

People who have suffered racism, sexism, or any other -ism, are not under any theoretical obligation to struggle with such attitudes when confronted by them. However, when people have come together in a cooperative group for some shared purpose, the affected person stands to gain

direct and personal advantages by giving criticism. It may be wise for her to do a minimum of work. If others in the group are not willing to work hard, harder than she does, to challenge stereotypes, then she should complain only about that. Criticism is gold, and the giver should be sure she is getting back equal coin.

But given a decision that the people on the receiving end are well-intentioned, open to dialogue and willing to work hard, the affected person will get better results if she gives her criticism skillfully. For example, to say that someone is racist (sexist, homophobic, etc.) is to invite discount. Generalizations are not sufficiently helpful, and they invite guilt and defensiveness. Look instead for the concrete: what did the person say or do that made you think she was racist? It is very different to say, "I became worried about racism when you kept interrupting to provide me with the next word while I was speaking just now. My paranoia is that you think I am not sufficiently articulate to say what I mean because I am Black."

In most settings where people share a progressive social agenda, racism may take forms that are subtle and hard to identify, making the task of both the giver and receiver of criticism hard. People will already have worked to overcome more overt forms, because they sincerely desire to be non-racist. But racism can be involved in more complex transactions. Rescue, for instance, can be a carrier

of unhelpful attitudes (see Chapter 7), as the example above suggests. We once realized after the fact that we had urged a lesbian trainee to start leading groups too quickly, and too alone, making an exception to our usual practice in an effort to promote her career. It was a Rescue, and she suffered for it, because she was left out on a limb with insufficient back-up.

3. Once the issue of racism has arisen in a group, it is a very useful technique for those of the dominant group to meet without the affected person(s) present to work on the Pig.

In our Collective, for instance, a long-time colleague who was a gay man insisted we meet without him to fight our homophobia. We protested that, after so many years of working together and sharing frank dialogue, we didn't need to. We knew from old experience, however, that our colleague deserved to be taken seriously, and that in fact we were very likely to benefit from doing so. We met, and for some time made little progress. Then someone asked how we would feel if our sons were gay. The question would probably not have been raised if our gay colleague had been present; it certainly would not have been answered so fully and, as it turned out, usefully. Here was a place we did indeed need to confront our homophobia, and did through heartfelt and honest discussion.

4. When conflicts arise, any person in a minority should have sufficient support.

In the ideal, nobody would ever be a minority of one, or even a minority at all, in a group. But it does commonly happen that people of color, or gay people, or disabled people, or so on, find themselves in the position of being outnumbered by people from a category who are dominant in the culture. Conflicts are bound to arise, just as they might for any other member of the group. When they do, the minority person should have easy access to an advocate: someone to stand by her side, help to support and communicate her position to the group at large, give her encouragement and backing when she feels outnumbered, and so on. Sometimes, an ongoing member of the group can be asked to take the advocacy role by the person affected. He can rise out of his position as a "player" and look at the situation from the point of view of his comrade. Sometimes, however, there is nobody in the group sufficiently trusted by the person in a minority. In that case, she should be encouraged to bring an advocate from outside, a person she trusts and who, at the same time, will be careful to avoid further polarizing the conflict.

To have a method for working on racism can be an enormous relief. None of us wants to be thinking unfair and prejudicial thoughts about our comrades, nor to be acting unwittingly in ways which are oppressive. Most of us do not wish to benefit from racism, and we feel deep pain about the ways in which most of us do. That contradiction, that we do in fact gain from the deprivation of others, whether we be white, male, straight, upper class or able-bodied, while at the same time we deplore these inequalities, is one we must confront whenever possible. We cannot singlehandedly eliminate -isms, but we can expose and correct stereotypic attitudes wherever we find them among ourselves. And in the process we can treat each other with the respect and kindness that is deserved when people of good conscience undertake hard and pioneering work, both in the world and on our attitudes, together.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE:
PUBLIC AGENCIES, MINORITY CLIENTS

Shelby Morgan

For the past seven years, my experience as a Radical Psychiatrist has been working primarily with minority clients through public agencies. My employment has included a half-way house in San Francisco; a Community Mental Health Center in Richmond, California; and a Youth Services Agency in Baltimore, Maryland. In the latter two locations, my "referred clients" have been children and adolescents, but the focus of therapy was with the entire family.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the ways in which the theory and practice of Radical Psychiatry have been applicable to my work setting and client population.

In thinking about the differences in working in the Public Sector with minority clients, I realize that many of the same issues emerge as do in any therapist/client relationship: for example, trust, motivation, and communication. However, due to some of the specific characteristics and circumstances of work within agency settings, these issues become intensified.

Frequently, my clients are referred by another party such as a spouse, parent, school, or other agency like Juvenile Services. As a result, they are often ambivalent (at best) about their involvement in counseling. In addition, they may see the agency as part of an oppressive system at large, based on a history of poor treatment at other "helping" agencies such as hospitals or Social Services. Furthermore, poor communities frequently view mental health agencies as a coercive institution. Indeed, the ability of psychiatrists to either drug or incarcerate individuals who are seen as "acting out" lends a great deal of reality to this perspective.

Another key factor affecting treatment is the client's poverty and class status. This has many repercussions and implications. The client will often be focused on survival issues like employment, housing, and transportation. Not only the content of therapy but also the client's ability to keep appointments, to follow through on assignments such as meetings with teachers, etc., will be affected. In other words, the client's involvement in counseling may suffer. Another result of poverty is the feeling of powerlessness regarding one's ability to change either oneself, the family system, or other relevant institutions. For example, a single mother may have difficulty in spending more time with her children because she has to work two jobs. Similarly, she may have problems being involved in the school, or in having a say about how her child is being treated at school.

Further, many possible issues emerge in a biracial client/therapist relationship. Although these vary depending on the individuals and their background, three common problems are *language*, *class*, and *style of communicating* (i.e., verbal vs. non-verbal communication). In my own experience, these issues arise in interactions between a professional, white woman and a largely Afro-American clientele.

Since race and class are so intimately connected in this society, many of the aforementioned remarks about class are relevant also to race. For example, there is a lack of resources within the Black community due to systematic institutionalized racism. In addition, the Afro-American client has been a victim of individualized racism and chauvinism, the latter being the more subtle differentiated treatment that comes from well-intentioned white people most often in the form of patronizing and/or Rescue. To quote a Black female therapist friend: "The problem with most white therapists is either assuming you know everything or assuming the client can do very little, thus having lowered expectations." Other assumptions and generalizations are made due to the therapist's lack of exposure to the Afro-American culture.

The purpose of this paper is not to address each of these problems specifically — which would be an immense and complex task — but rather to show how Radical Psychiatry has helped me deal with some of the consequences of these contradictions, which, I repeat, surface in the age-old therapeutic issues of trust, motivation, and content of "treatment."

TWO HISTORIES

Larry, a thirteen-year-old black male, was brought to the clinic by his mother due to school failure. He had a long history of school problems, barely passing each year, due to being "playful and unproductive" in class. According to his mother, Larry tested well above average. He had been in therapy four years ago but with little progress. His father was reportedly too disgusted to come to sessions. His younger sister was doing well in school.

It became clear from this first session that the mother, Lena, and reportedly the father, James, were very angry and judgmental towards Larry. She repeatedly called him lazy and ornery, while maintaining her demand that he "just be successful." Larry was very quiet and made no effort to defend himself. He did communicate clearly that he had no desire to be in counseling, but felt coerced by his mother to attend.

I saw the mother's rigid expectations and her lack of nurturing as a significant part of the problem made more severe by the apparently withdrawn attitude of the father. My guess was that Larry's school failure was his end of the power struggle — while overtly being a "good boy" at home, he played his script of being a "bad boy" in the area in which his parents were most invested — his being "successful". At the same time, his behavior could be seen as a reflection of the extent to which he believed or colluded with his parent's Pigs about him. That he felt bad about himself could be surmised from his isolation from his peers, his body posture, and his overall depressed demeanor.

Because Larry seemed in many ways overpowered by his parents' negativity and because the school year was coming to an end, I decided to meet with Larry individually to determine his goals around school. I first attempted to empower Larry by asking him what he wanted for himself. In an effort to separate myself from the power struggle between him and his parents, I was clear about being non-critical and nonjudgmental about his attitude towards school. He then admitted that he wanted to pass. We had thereby made a contract.

Larry's first work on his contract was to blame his teachers for the problem. I validated his perceptions and feelings by saying that teachers can over-generalize and pick on one person. However, I did not want to Rescue him by seeing him totally as a Victim. His Pigs told him that he was powerless to do anything about his situation, and that he was a bad kid anyway. Furthermore, some part of him was Persecuting his parents. My job was not to collude with his Pigs but rather to show him some other choices. I thereby told him that he could choose to fail, choose to ignore that there was a problem and thereby indirectly choose to fail, or choose to pass. He took responsibility for his behavior by admitting that he had been indirectly deciding to fail. I then gave him the task of finding out what specifically he need to do in order to pass. He then reaffirmed his commitment to his contract based on complete information about the situation. He was thereby learning the problem-solving skills of defining the problem and a course of action to solve it. In the following session, he developed a specific plan around homework, tutoring, etc. The final two sessions simply concerned follow-through. He did pass the year.

In the meantime, sessions with his parents revealed a general lack of nurturing in the family as evidenced by James and Lena's critical stance towards one another as well as towards Larry. In order to break this pattern, I sent them to a parents' group at the Center which focused on the difference between criticism and nurturing support. At the same time, I had to remain sensitive to the class issue: that their lack of educational advantages and their successful yet difficult effort to rise above the poverty level gave intensity to their desire for Larry to be more, to do better. I was aware that many Black families stress education for just these reasons. Therefore, I did much validation of their needs and desires while suggesting that Larry perceived their support as pressure. Furthermore, I emphasized their

right to have demands by helping them negotiate contracts with Larry around household chores. Larry, in the meantime, enrolled in our summer camp program which increased his involvement with his peers.

As James's involvement in counseling waxed and waned, Lena attended some individual sessions where she vented intense anger towards both her husband and her son. While validating her feelings, I also noted that she did not express feelings of being hurt. She then talked about an early decision to be invulnerable to men in reaction to her mother's constant humiliation by her father. As we discussed the differences in their situations, she was able to express other feelings and needs of her husband. He responded by admitting his competitive struggle with her. The last few sessions focused on expressing strokes, resentments, and paranoias.

Angela, a sixteen year old Black female was brought to the clinic by her mother, Mary, for truancy. Although Angela had various physical complaints, her doctor could not substantiate them. Mary, who did all the talking during the session, admitted that she enjoyed Angela's company during the day. Mary also stated that she, Mary, had left her husband soon after Angela's birth: "It was like she was all I really wanted."

My assessment was that Mary's needs were being partially met by Angela's school problem. I therefore met with them individually, and helped Mary develop outside interests and other support systems. She was quick to admit her role in the family process and to take my "permission" to have wants and needs beyond Angela. She took a part-time job and began going back to church.

Not being nearly as open and verbal as Mary, Angela was more difficult. My questions regarding her needs and desires were met with repeated "I don't know(s)." On a hunch, I took her to the library to introduce her to Judith Blume novels. She became very involved in them, and willing and able to communicate her reactions to the novels' characters. I then gave her "homework" to daydream about a perfect school setting. This not only engaged her, and moved her to a more active role, but also dealt with her needs and desires. She was able to say that she wanted to finish school; she was making a contract to do her 50%.

In the following sessions, she revealed her real problem with school; she was terrified when people stared at her, which she claimed happened frequently. I validated her perception, noting that she was extremely pretty which was probably the cause of the attention. This validation increased her trust in me. She was then able to reveal the extent of her fear of crowds, of people. As she responded specifically to my questions, she acknowledged her belief that she was crazy, that her mother had been hospitalized for a nervous breakdown, and that she had "inherited" this tendency. As a result, she constantly watched her shadow to monitor her movements and behavior. I explained the concept of Pigs. She began to understand that she had internalized a fear rather than a disease. We met together with her mother who explained the circumstances of her "nervous breakdown" which I reframed as an understandable reaction to a stressful time in her life.

Individual sessions with Angela continued, and we obtained more information on how and when her Pig worked. She learned to talk to her Pig, to make it go away. Simultaneously, we found a different school for her to attend on a half day schedule. We also built her confidence in her own movements through dance therapy. Her school attendance and her grades remained good. Our sessions ended after a month or so of additional counseling, at her request, about boys and sex.

RADICAL PSYCHIATRY IN THE CONTEXT OF PUBLIC AGENCIES

I have obviously chosen success stories. What about the times when counseling was to no avail? And to what extent were any successes based on Radical Psychiatry?

In his book about cross-cultural counseling, Derrall Sue discusses several common barriers to effective counseling in a biracial context: a belief in the value of insight, the desirability of self-disclosure, the ambiguous and unstructured aspect of counseling, the definition of mental health, and the rational verbal model of counseling. The latter aspect, the rational verbal mode, calls for creativity on the part of the Radical Psychiatrist, it being a common

criticism that we are in fact too cerebral. More will be said about this later. The other potential problems listed I believe are support and explanation for the applicability of Radical Psychiatry theory and techniques in a cross-cultural setting. Its use of contracts as well as its problem-solving orientation provide definition and structure. Its behavioral aspect with its focus on action, on making concrete changes, de-emphasizes the value of insight. Our analysis of power which includes a critique of traditional therapeutic theory and practice, particularly that of the definition of mental illness, speaks to the restricting labels and ideas about mental health. Our analysis of power also provides for the potential for self-disclosure when the client so desires or when the therapist deems it relevant to the session. Furthermore, our analysis and awareness of class issues are an important and necessary tool for decreasing the potential distance that may occur when such a difference exists between the therapist and client. As important as these qualities may be, I have found in my experience that the three principles or tools of Radical Psychiatry that have been most useful are those of *validation* (which is rooted in our analysis of power) *Rescue Triangle*, and *Pig*.

When Larry came unwillingly to therapy, he had very good reasons for his "resistance." His parents and his school had decided that he was ornery. He had learned that those who had power over him were apt to be critical or, even worse, to try to force him into behavior that was not compatible with his perspective. So here he was at the hands of yet another adult in another institution who would be blaming him for his predicament. Similarly his father was not interested in another woman who didn't understand his needs telling him how to raise his son. And most likely my being white lent grounds to his suspicion that he would not be properly heard. While there was no overt indication from Lena that she was not open to counseling, chances are that she would not have discussed her own history or revealed the depth of her anger had she not already experienced empathy from me. Even more dramatically, in the case of Angela, her openness about her own "crazy Pigs" came with the certainty that I could and would understand. But are we not discussing the issue of trust and empathy? If so, what claim does Radical Psychiatry have to these ideas? I believe its claim is profound. Radical Psychiatry politicizes the concept of trust through its analysis of power. And validation is the concrete practice which grew out of that analysis. It makes explicit the belief that the client knows what she is perceiving. It is taking the client at her word. It is saying to the client in its most profound sense that she is OK. All of which flies in the face of the traditional one-up view that the therapist knows better than the client what she is about and what is good for her. And I maintain that this is particularly important for minorities and the poor who are daily having their needs discounted, their abilities undermined, their power robbed from them.

But there is a necessary dialectic to this concept of validation which lies in the use of the Rescue Triangle. When I gave a presentation on Radical Psychiatry to my fellow staff members at Youth Services, all of whom are Afro-American, I was struck by their extremely enthusiastic response to it. Their explanation: the Rescue Triangle enables a therapist to take seriously the reality of the clients without seeing them as helpless Victims. Going back to my friend's complaint about white therapists having lowered expectations, the Rescue Triangle is a way of understanding oppression without the frequent, accompanying, patronizing behavior. To summarize my coworkers' attitude towards their clients; "Yes, you have had a rotten time, things are not fair, and what are we going to do about it?" When Angela was unable (whether out of lack of skill or trust) to articulate her own needs and fears, I could have felt bad for her, and then Rescued her (done more than 50% of the work) by continuing to ask probing questions in order to get her to feel comfortable. Even more likely, I could have Persecuted her by deciding she was yet another rebellious teenager, or perhaps even a little crazy. Instead, I attempted a new approach to involve her.

The last principle or tool I want to discuss is that of Pig. These learned internalized negative messages play a critical role in influencing our thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Because these messages are an incomplete, distorted, or generalized interpretation of reality, yet at the same time, often a reflection of the dominant society's values, they can be devastating, even deadly, to individuals and groups, especially when that group is exploited and therefore the target of racial and class stereotypes. Thus, the common image of urban black youth as drug-ridden and criminal becomes internalized as "I am bad, that's just how it is, there's nothing to be done about it." The consequent behavior fulfills this script. By the time a teen is referred to counseling, there is ample evidence to support the view of the parents, teachers, and society. An analysis of Pig prevents the therapist from sharing this opinion. That is, we can understand that his learned negative self messages are affecting his behavior. And after learning the content of those messages, we can help the client develop strategies to defeat the negative messages and replace them with positive

messages and behavior. This is of course a simplified version of that process. It is explained in detail in the chapter on Pig. Suffice it to say here that having an analysis of Pig enables one to see one's negative self-defeating behavior as only part of one's repertoire of behavior (coming from the parent ego state). More importantly, it can be changed, relearned. Thus I can feel hopeful. Furthermore I can give the client direct, honest feedback in the knowledge that his behavior is a reflection of distorted views rather than innate enduring qualities. So that even when counseling doesn't last long enough to include the teaching of this concept, as in the case of Larry, I can steer him in the direction of alternative choices of behavior. My confidence in his ability and my nonjudgmental non-Piggy assessment of his current behavior increases the chances of his considering these alternatives. However, the actual incorporation of this concept enables a client to develop ongoing strategies for defeating its occurrence in different situations and forms. Thus Angela was able to recognize her Pig as the source of her fear. She came to understand how and when it worked. She was therefore able to develop direct techniques for fighting it.

LIMITATIONS OF THE APPROACH

Unfortunately, the limitations of doing Radical Psychiatry in a Public Agency are fairly profound. At the core of our theory and practice is group therapy. Within this mode, it becomes possible to have a support system to overcome isolation which we believe is a critical factor in feeling bad. Furthermore, group is usually necessary in order to be able to change one's Pig messages. Many supportive choices, analyses, and strategies are qualitatively more effective than a single voice (that of the therapist). Especially when the therapist comes from such a different background, the presence of a group of peers can make a critical difference. However, due to the same survival issues mentioned previously, the maintenance of a group in a Public Agency is very difficult. In addition, there is often a reluctance to be open in a group which may likely consist of one's neighbors and friends-of-friends.

Another frequent problem of Radical Psychiatry (at least in my practice of it) is a tendency to be overly structured and didactic. Due to the immediacy of their problems, people are sometimes reluctant to "be taught" ideas and tools. Furthermore, many poor and minorities are not as comfortable with a teaching mode having had less experience in a classroom. However, these are definitely problems which can be overcome, given a little creativity on the part of the therapist. It is true, however, that certain tools such as the regular or even semi-regular exchange of resentments and paranoias among family members require a certain amount of stability within the family, such as a scheduled time when all members are present. Similarly, I have not had a stable group for a sufficient time for members to trust enough to exchange resentment or, for that matter, to do very personal problem solving. My groups within agencies and within a public school setting in Baltimore have remained more issue- or topic- or situation-oriented, such as: "What do you do when a guy wants to have sex on a first date; how would you deal with that situation?" However, it's not that I believe a personal problem-solving group is impossible. Rather, it is rendered more difficult by factors previously mentioned, and by the politics and practicalities of an agency setting.

Considering the above, it is obvious, I think, that the recruitment and training of Third World Radical Psychiatrists is critical to the development of our theory and practice. In light of this well- known fact we should examine the reasons for our current scarcity and develop a program to remedy the situation.