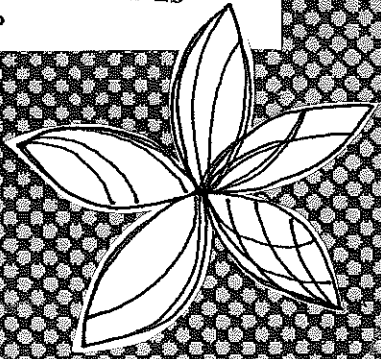



as i tap, tap, tap my way through the last year of my twenties, i am moved to reflect upon my experience of being a womyn in this patriarchal society. my stories are sifted through two themes that have come together for me during this process. one is that patriarchy distorts everything and the other is that feminism is for everyone.



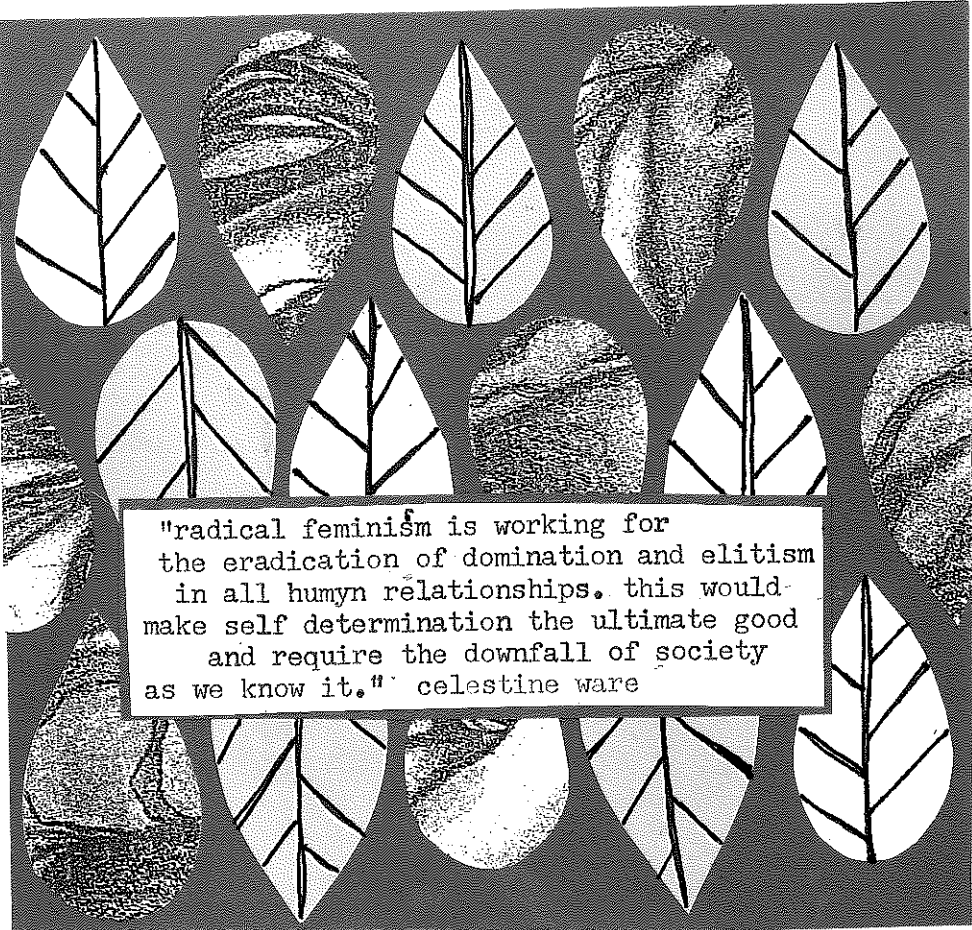
it can be difficult, in my experience, for womyn to initiate projects or events with other womyn.

womyn who are used to primarily working with and/or being close with men in both their personal and political lives can tend to rely on men to plan outings or events. men enact their roles of masculinity as they are often much more comfortable wielding the power to initiate activities with the confidence that others will join them and appreciate their ideas. despite the fact that those men rarely wait for womyn's approval, we as womyn are dispersed among men and often more firmly attached to them than to other womyn, and so we look to males to initiate or validate rather than to one another.

this is a major roadblock to womyn banning together and supporting each other. this is part of the reason why i think finding structures like womyn-only spaces and womyn's gatherings to be so necessary (and why organizing one can be such a challenge). without these intentionally created spaces, male-power and womyn's constant deference to it, which results from our internalized oppression, will continue to insert itself into our efforts and connections with one another and limit our capacity to initiate and create both personally and politically.



i have strong desires to connect with other womyn. i also have a continually growing respect for all the different ways womyn experience being themselves in the world. i sometimes dont know if that is clear enough. i feel sad when i experience having my own thoughts and critiques about my experience of being a female is what separates me from womyn. my hope in sharing my experiences, in feeling vulnerable, is to be closer to people. thanks for reading.



"radical feminism is working for the eradication of domination and elitism in all humyn relationships. this would make self determination the ultimate good and require the downfall of society as we know it." celestine ware

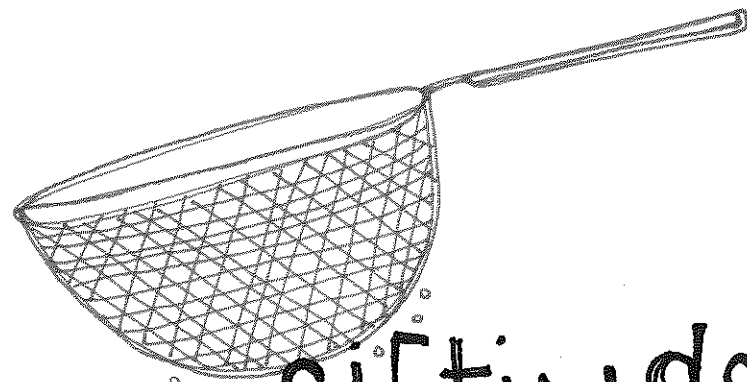
recommended readings
feminist theory - from margin to center by bell hooks
the politics of reality by marilyn faye
our blood by andrea dworkin
"one is not born a woman" by monique wittig

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SIFTINGS
a look at my life through
radical feminist eyes

i remember being looked at as the "bad guy" because i left my partner who everyone loved. he was able to withhold emotionally, and i was the one blamed for leaving.


Patriarchy distorts everything

many people thought i did not have the right to leave or do what i want and that it was more important that i remain committed. this opinion was very destructive to me and served to further uphold patriarchal thinking about relationships.

when i say feminism is for everyone, i mean that it is a form of resistance that is inclusive of and important for everybody to engage in. i identify as an anarchist because i want to build and be a part of a new culture - one that is nonhierarchical, nonsexist, noncoercive and nonexploitative. but i can often feel alienated in radical anarchist circles by class reductionist politics that can singly focus on the liberation from economic exploitation. as a womyn, the fight against the same system that is set up to maintain the subordination of womyn to men is at my core, is my struggle day in and day out. i need to hear and see the fight for womyn's liberation as equally important if men are interested in being my comrade and working together.

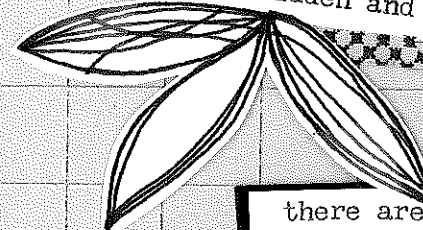
"trying to make sense of one's own feelings, motivations, desires and reactions without taking into account the forces which maintain the subordination of womyn to men is like trying to explain why a marble stops rolling without taking friction into account."

marilyn frye

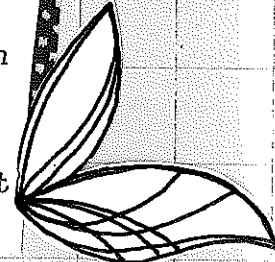


i remember being at an event with the male bodied person who had initially organized the group and just one other womyn. i had been involved with the group for over a year. i recall the dynamics feeling so good when the womyn continually chose to address her questions to me. i felt respected and a soothing sense of solidarity with her.

i remember being somewhere new for the first time and i was with a male lover. i recall feeling unseen with less important thoughts and ideas to contribute as the womyn in the room looked to and addressed the male i came with instead of me. the feeling of being beside someone, especially a male, when i wanted to stand alone and independent, whole and complete, not coupled and hidden and less than, was extremely painful.



there are times when i look back and without even noticing i let men thwart my quest for what i need, my understanding about what i know and my truth about my experience.



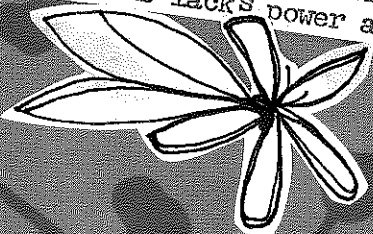
i didn't always enter a room looking for the womyn with whom i could connect and talk with. now gender is not neutral for me. it is hard when i feel excited to meet a new womyn in a group full of men (that maybe we know better than each other) and it appears like she doesn't necessarily care about meeting me. i wish i didn't feel intimidated in those moments and could just share my interest in her regardless.

womyn remain socially defined as womyn in relation to men. until the category 'men' is eliminated, i will not be free.

"our fight aims to supress men as a class, not through a genocidal, but a political struggle. once the class 'men' disappears, 'women' as a class will disappear as well, for there are no slaves without masters."
monique wittig

what does it look like to refuse to be a womyn? does merely writing our social class 'women' with a 'y' distinguish us as separate from men? is being separate the point? is every idea we have about being a womyn contaminated by misogyny and sexism? linda alcoff says that 'our very self-definition is grounded in a concept that we must deconstruct.' how do we do so in a revolutionary way and not just as a reaction? how can we create relationships and networks where gender loses its significance? is that possible? does radical feminism mean working towards the dissolution of gender roles, towards rejecting both the masculine and the feminine? i am in an ongoing pursuit of finding, if not concrete answers, then dialogue with other womyn or at least a resting place for my questions.

i do not inately lack confidence. it is because womyn's position within the social and political networks lacks power and mobility.



FEMINISM IS FOR EVERYONE

i can spend a lot of time both embodying and analyzing the ways in which sexism distorts and interrupts every social interaction. my goal is not to separate us from one another. the culture and our socialization already divides us. i don't want to just focus on the divisions but without them on the table, i do not feel as comfortable. through feminism we can build mutuality.

in this heteronormative culture we have been taught within, it feels so good when i am able to exchange emotional support with other womyn. i can slowly feel the tiny pieces of what has been stolen from me return.

the writing is based on my own experiences & observations and thus is within the limitations of being white, going to college and being raised middle-class under heteronormative ideas of sexuality. i welcome any feedback.

when social dynamics feel bad for me, i wonder what is in play. i wonder when it is that i feel bad because of the political context i am always living within where womyn are taught to compete with each other and men are looked to first or because of my own personal struggles with jealousy and feeling threatened as i grew up with monogamous examples of relationships and have difficulty untraining my comparative mind. or is it both?

it is liberating for me, as well as many of my relationships, to understand and be able to talk about the political context within which my being exists at every moment.

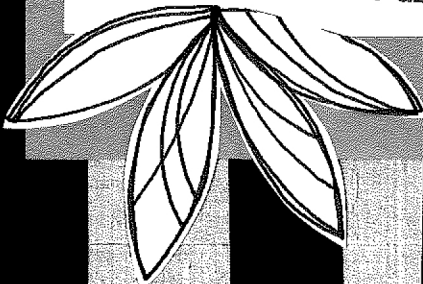
growing up in a middle-class family there was no question that i would go to college. my second year i lived in a large old house with seven other womyn. what was then named feminism was really the institutionalized internalization of patriarchy. i was turned off by the elitism and did not find it to be an experience of trust and solidarity among womyn. gossip and competition over men from womyn who boastfully called themselves feminists left a sour taste in my mouth. feminism then meant you had to read a copy of the feminine mystique, be able to debate about intellectual matters and know and talk a lot about films, all of which had to be proved and flaunted in front of men.

day in and day out as i continue to pursue radical feminism, i am learning more and more to see with my own eyes.

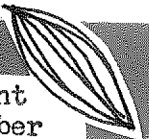
i grew up in a middle class white suburban family under the manipulations of evangelical fundamentalist christian beliefs. although i did not question this reality until my early twenties, i look back now to have experienced a dysfunctional family life. love and nurturance were often overshadowed by an angry and emotionally abusive father who was given authority by god to be the ruler of our household. my two sisters and i, along with my submissive mother, lived under patriarchal rule without real question. i was the oldest and the only one who would stand up to my father's rage at inconvenience. and for this i learned not to cry, to be strong and to defy. in turn i got spanked and soap in my mouth. i remember being in the bathroom upstairs with my dad, yelling and crying as the soap was shoved into my mouth while my mom held my youngest sister crying at the bottom of the steps.

we as womyn have an abundant capacity for physical courage. "female strength and courage have developed out of the very circumstances of our oppression, out of our lives as breeders and domestic chattel. we must use that force to repudiate the slave conditions from which it derived. what we must do now is to reclaim this capacity—take it out of service to men; make it visible to ourselves; and determine how to use it in service of feminist revolution." (parts i put together are taken from andrea dworkin.)

male-bodied people who resist masculinity make a real difference and make the load a little bit lighter. otherwise men can take up so much space, in a room and in society. we are taught to look to men, to follow their lead and to have them answer our questions. it feels so good when there is space for my voice and what i know. it feels so good when we as womyn look to one another. i want to build my trust in womyn and not just look to male lovers. sometimes creating space to commune with womyn feels impossible.



sexism is about me. it is about the minds and hearts and bodies and cunts of every person who identifies as a womyn. it is about my mother and your mother. it is not just a matter of intellectual study to be put on the shelf once one knows the definition. gender is relevant in any and every situation wherein a male person interacts with a womyn. there is no such thing as playing the gender card. that way of thinking only serves to further silence the lives of womyn. when i talk about the necessity of race awareness, for example, i am speaking as a member of the dominant group, with no actual understanding about the moment to moment impact racism has on a person's being. yet in every situation with a person of color, i know the reality of my being white is in play and i do my best to listen and learn and be anti-racist. sexism is about me. every 1.3 to 2 minutes someone who resembles me is raped somewhere in america (natl victims center & justice dept). i sometimes feel alone and often a lack of ease when i am mostly around people who do not take seriously the ways in which sexism is about me and is all around at all times.



i grew up in a repressive christian environment and after separating from my husband i remember my dad asking if he shouldn't have given ~~max~~ his permission to my former partner to marry me. patriarchy shone as clear as day in this hetero normative, sexist culture where fathers own their daughters and assume the right, ordained by god, to give them away only if to another man who will take on the ownership and care of their daughter. and then without a husband i am thought, even by my dear mother who is stuck in patriarchy, to be less than, to be lonely and wandering-~~not~~ not brave or strong or capable of making a good decision for myself.

i remember enjoying a political conversation with a womyn that ended abruptly when a male friend walked into the room and began sharing his opinion. when the womyn then began talking and directing her questions toward him, i felt like my voice was less important. i did not feel free in that space to take my time thinking and sharing aloud anymore. a few days later, the womyn and i talked about that specific interaction. i shared what felt bad for me and asked for some reassurance about whether or not she valued my political thoughts. i shared how i felt insecure about my responses not being as quick as the male in the room and so i shut down. talking bridged the way for us to understand how social and power dynamics affected us so we would be able to stand together and support each other within those dynamics next time.

