AMONG AND BETWEEN WOMEN: CALIFIA COMMUNITY,
GRASSROOTS FEMINIST EDUCATION, AND THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE,
1975–1987

by

Catherine A. Pomerleau

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
In the Graduate College
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
2004
UMI Number: 3158140

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Feminist Education, and the Politics of Difference,
1975-1987

and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first made contact with former Califia Community participants through Yolanda G. Retter Vargas to preserve lesbian feminist history and the struggles women waged in the 1970s and 1980s to better society for themselves and future generations. This project depends on Califia narrators' memories and feminist passion. They gave their time and support generously. Five opened their homes to me when I made interview trips, and others made similar offers of a place to stay. Some have since chosen to remain in contact with me. Califia women whom I met combined graciousness with a sense of sisterhood and gave me a glimpse of the powerful open-hearted association writ large at Califia.

My loved ones have gracefully endured spontaneous talk about Califia. My mother, Martha Parrent Pomerleau, deserves more than I could ever pay her. She volunteered to transcribe most of the interviews. I am indebted to her for her perseverance and the conversations I was able to have with her and my father, Wayne Paul Pomerleau. Friends in Tucson have walked with me through this process. Merryl Sloane generously volunteered to copyedit, a real gift of time and attention. Thanks as well to Carrie Cooper, Michelle Martinie, Lori Mennella, Mike Petillo, Beth Petrucci, Kathleen Powers, Daniel Raven, Henry Sabia, Julia Camacho Schivone, Tori Stypula, and Diane Wiener for helping me to approximate a well-rounded life. Gail Skinner, Judith Robinson, and their aikido students have also helped me to balance the university with a bigger world.

Professors Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, Karen S. Anderson, Sarah (Sally) Deutsch, and J. Reeve Huston have provided invaluable assistance at every stage of this project. Liz suggested that I could work with her when I was still an unknown quantity. Karen, along with Professor Katherine Morrissey, helped me formally to enter the U.S. caucus from a background in early modern Europe. Teaching with Sally and Reeve, I have practiced integrating social justice into the history classroom. All of them have pushed me to achieve high standards and have shared their expertise, feedback, and warm personalities. They have given me superb guidance from forming the interview questions to looking at drafts and more drafts. Members of the gender in U.S. history dissertation writers' group at the University of Arizona have given wonderful feedback on conference papers and chapters. In addition to Karen, Sally, and Katherine, special thanks to Lydia Otero, Michelle Berry, Meghan Winchel, Mike Rembis, and Adam Geary.

Four groups have contributed funding toward this dissertation. The University of Arizona's Women's Studies Advisory Council and the Graduate and Professional Student Travel Grant Fund awarded me travel stipends. The Coalition for Western Women's History within the Western History Association awarded me the Irene Ledesma Prize in 2002 to cover equipment, an interview trip, and interview tape shipping. The University of Arizona's Department of History has been unflagging in its support. In addition to yearly teaching assistantships, Professor Richard Cosgrove allotted funds from the travel budget for a research and interview trip, and I received the department's Elizabeth Lantin Ramenofsky grant for a final research trip in the summer of 2003.
IN MEMORY OF

Marilyn Murphy (d. 2004), who helped to create space for the exhilaration of being among women and the struggle to repair divisions between women.

DEDICATED TO

Mary Williamson Parrent, my grandmother, whose forty years of commitment to family planning and women’s right to control their bodies earned her the nickname “Ms. Planned Parrent” among Nashville’s anti-abortion rights agitators. Her volunteer work, desire for social justice, simple living for individual giving, and creativity as an artist have inspired me. My Granny’s lifelong love and affirmation of my choices have been a support second only to my parents’.
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<td>ACLU</td>
<td>American Civil Liberties Union</td>
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<td>ASL</td>
<td>American Sign Language</td>
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<td>BAPAC</td>
<td>Black American Political Association of California</td>
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<td>CORE</td>
<td>Congress of Racial Equality</td>
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<td>CR</td>
<td>Consciousness-Raising</td>
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<td>CSULB</td>
<td>California State University at Long Beach</td>
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<td>CSUSD</td>
<td>California State University at San Diego</td>
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<td>DOB</td>
<td>Daughters of Bilitis</td>
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<td>ERA</td>
<td>Equal Rights Amendment</td>
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<td>FTM</td>
<td>Female-To-Male</td>
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<td>FU</td>
<td>Fat Underground</td>
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<td>GCSC</td>
<td>Gay Community Service Center</td>
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<td>GLF</td>
<td>Gay Liberation Front</td>
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<td>GLLU</td>
<td>Gay and Lesbian Latinos Unidos</td>
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<td>LACAAW</td>
<td>Los Angeles Coalition on Assaults Against Women</td>
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<td>LAWCC</td>
<td>Los Angeles Women's Community Chorus</td>
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<td>LLC</td>
<td>Lesbian Legacy Collection of ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives</td>
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<td>LOC</td>
<td>Lesbians of Color</td>
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<td>MEGLE</td>
<td>Multi-Ethnic Gay and Lesbian Exchange</td>
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<td>NAAFA</td>
<td>National Association to Aid Fat Americans; (later called) National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance</td>
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<td>NBFO</td>
<td>National Black Feminist Organization</td>
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<td>NCADV</td>
<td>National Coalition Against Domestic Violence</td>
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<td>NLFO</td>
<td>National Lesbian Feminist Organization</td>
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<td>NOW</td>
<td>National Organization for Women</td>
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<td>NWRO</td>
<td>National Welfare Rights Organization</td>
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<td>RTC</td>
<td>Radical Feminist Therapy Collective</td>
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<td>SCWU</td>
<td>Southern California Women for Understanding</td>
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<td>Support, Education, and Action groups</td>
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<td>SNCC</td>
<td>Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee</td>
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<td>WAVAW</td>
<td>Women Against Violence Against Women</td>
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<td>WCLC</td>
<td>West Coast Lesbian Conference</td>
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<td>White Women Against Racism</td>
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation assesses a Los Angeles–based feminist educational alternative called Califia Community in the context of a cultural war between Second Wave feminists and members of the New Right. Analysis of oral histories with thirty-two participants (narrators) is supported by archival sources and narrators’ personal files to historicize U.S. divisions over cultural mores and to shed light on the diversity and tactics among Second Wave feminists. In contrast to foundational scholarship, a reevaluation of National Organization for Women sources in association with California participants’ actions and writings clarifies that the lesbian-straight split continued to divide the movement well into the 1980s and that the role of eastern leadership in feminism has been overstated. Califia Community demonstrates that lesbian feminists engaged in a complex attempt to combat multiple oppressions and to address the whole person in relation to society. Califia’s diversity of attendees and education on sexism, homophobia, racism, and class bias reveals that a grassroots group could sustain heterogeneity but that identity-based politics exacerbated problems.
1. FROM NATIONAL OVERSIGHTS
TO CALIFORNIA'S LOCAL DIVERSITY

COUNTERCULTURAL RECRUITS

California was a staging ground for the cultural war over social mores waged in the United States after World War II. Paralleling the Cold War, cultural conflict within the U.S. involved opposing sides with deep personal investments in the direction politics took and a proliferating rhetoric of blame. On one side, tract-housing suburbs and freeway exchanges sprawled around military bases and their attendant industries. The New Right capitalized on southern Californians’ search for prosperity and safety to build a stronghold in Orange County. At the same time, if California did not birth the counterculture, it was certainly the wet nurse. Disaffected groups like Beats and Hell’s Angels congregated in the Los Angeles and San Francisco areas. Their combination of creativity and contempt for society’s rules rose amid concerted legal challenges to discrimination. By the Vietnam War, Port cities uneasily accommodated free-speech students, antiwar hippies, military personnel, commuters, Black Power adherents, and boycotting United Farm Workers. Second Wave feminists joined the fray by the 1960s in questioning societal norms and advancing ways to change the very fabric of the U.S. They, too, put forth a plan for a “free” and “responsible” culture. They also tried to figure out how simultaneously to revolutionize society and live in it. Unlike the Right and unlike other leftist movements, they analyzed their experience as women to promote egalitarian gender relations while trying to encompass other axes of identity.
Within this context, a Los Angeles–based feminist educational alternative formed in 1975 called Califia Community. Primarily Califia educated women about feminism outside of university settings. Founders combated sexism, homophobia, racism, and class bias as the forces that divided women from each other and prevented them from collective work for change. From a focus on life-changing instruction in feminism, Califia produced numerous effects. Participants in its week-long summer camps over the next decade were nurtured by women- and children-only space, explored political models against oppressions, transformed themselves, and initiated concrete projects to improve conditions in their cities. By the late 1970s, feminists across the country faced escalating challenges from a coalition of religious conservatives and state politicians. Califia Community was both a haven and a rallying point for the continuation of feminist work. This study’s analysis of their process answers what influenced the Second Wave women’s movement, who participated in feminism, and how effectively feminists addressed multiple oppressions through consciousness-raising in the 1970s and 1980s.

Countercultural Californians have shaped national culture while facing down political conservatism and materialism. By shifting focus from the nation’s eastern political capital (Washington, DC) and commercial center (New York City) to Los Angeles, this work historicizes the cultural war and Californians’ feminist impacts. Original research reevaluating the National Organization for Women (NOW) in association with California participants’ actions and writings situates developments like Califia and clarifies that the lesbian-straight split continued to divide the movement well

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1 That these separatist camps provided childcare was an important corrective to the young singles focus of gay liberation and its erasing of lesbian mothers’ multiple roles.
into the 1980s and that the role of eastern leadership in feminism has been overstated. In contrast to representations in foundational scholarship, Califia attendees’ diversity and their education against multiple oppressions reveal that a grassroots group could sustain heterogeneity even as identity-based politics exacerbated tensions. Former participants’ memories reveal the tensions between optimistic excitement and disillusionment. Califia Community demonstrates that lesbian feminists\(^2\) engaged in a complex attempt to combat multiple oppressions, to provide a useful separatist space, and to address the whole person in relation to society.

**CALIFORNIA CENTERED**

Explanations of how and how effectively women worked together across differences in race or ethnicity, class, sexuality, and age must consider regional variation. The reinsertion of varied bodies into the history of feminist work to address interconnected systems of oppression requires local studies that include groups in ethnically diverse regions from the late 1970s on.\(^3\) Currently the bulk of scholarship has centered on the East Coast with additional information from places authors lived while they participated in the movement.\(^4\) Local studies have tended to assess the early years of

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\(^2\) Verta Taylor and Leila Rupp define lesbian feminism as “a variety of beliefs and practices based on the core assumption that a connection exists between an erotic and/or emotional commitment to women and political resistance to patriarchal domination.” Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp, “Women’s Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism: A Reconsideration of Cultural Feminism,” *Signs* 19.1 (autumn 1993): 32-61, here 33.


\(^4\) As an activist in California, Ruth Rosen breaks from a New York–centered narrative and draws from events across the country.
women's liberation. More recently, authors have started to expand from the East Coast and to consider the continuation of feminism into the 1980s and beyond.\(^5\)

The extended analysis presented here of the little-known Los Angeles-based Califia Community tests classic portrayals of women's liberation by shifting focus from the East Coast to California, from national organizations to sustained local grassroots activism, and from the early years to the period 1975 through 1987.\(^6\) California has been a logical site for activism. After World War II, oppositional politics developed between conservative Republicans and the homophile movement, antecedents, respectively, of the New Right and other leftist programs. Californians' responses to sociopolitical change

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made southern California paradigmatic for American cultural shifts as the New Right gained nationally with Ronald Reagan’s presidency.

Conservatism gained territory in California in tandem with the development of Second World War military bases into the Cold War defense industry. The brand of conservatism that developed into the New Right benefited from corporate welfare while proposing anti-unionism, segregation, and the defunding of social services. Southern California became the largest urban military-industrial complex and the leading recipient of military contracts.7 Largely, the fortunes of southern Californians were dependent on government defense funds and the jobs they generated.8 Nonetheless, cries of western “rugged individualism” and denunciations of “totalitarian big government” rang through the sunny suburbs and Republican campaign speeches. In the late 1940s through the 1960s, California conservatives promoted a privatized and circumscribed sense of responsibility and decried liberalism as fostering an authoritarian state that quashed personal freedom. A former state senator and the failed gubernatorial candidate for 1958, Republican William Knowland split his party by running on an anti-union “right-to-work” platform. Conservative California Republicans supported Proposition 18 in 1958 in what historian Kurt Schuparra characterized as “the impetuous defense of unrestrained capitalism as a defining principle of ‘Americanism’ [against] their heightened sense of peril from ‘socialist’ labor leaders.”9 Likewise, conservatives championed Proposition 14

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9 Schuparra 33.
in 1964 to repeal the Rumford Fair Housing Act. The sacrosanct nature of property rights included individuals’ right to keep people with whom they did not want contact (i.e., African, Latino, or Jewish Americans) from buying homes in neighborhoods they chose. California Congressman James Utt, who was reelected from 1952 to his death in 1970, tried for years to end the income tax by reintroducing the Liberty Amendment. Rather than seeing a personal stake in tax-supported maintenance of public facilities or a responsibility to fellow members of society, Orange County’s Utt compared any government welfare programs to child molestation. As governor, Ronald Reagan advocated that businesses and industry take over functions of the state. These policies, like the more extreme views of the John Birch Society, the Minute Men, or San Diego County paramilitary groups, found a sympathetic hearing in southern Californian subdivisions as people removed themselves from those they perceived as different.

The same Cold War context that spurred California’s growth and conservatism initiated the homophile movement. A California-grown homophile movement struggled for respectability and job security against U.S. Senate allegations that immorality, sickness, immaturity, and criminality would leave homosexuals susceptible to the demands of Communist and Nazi espionage agents. Resisting McCarthy-era pressures, Los Angeles gay men formed the Mattachine Society in 1951 and launched ONE magazine in 1953 with national subscriptions. The San Francisco–founded lesbian group Daughters of Bilitis joined these male-majority endeavors for homosexual civil rights in

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10 Schuparra 28, 30, 41, 47. Excluding the wider influence of the John Birch Society’s American Opinion reading rooms and Poor Richard Bookshops, Gentry estimates active Orange County Bircher membership in the 1960s at 3,000 or a fifth of total state membership. He attributes flourishing paramilitary groups in San Diego County to the preponderance of retired servicemen (225).
1955. Chapters of these groups spread to the East Coast, forming a web of advocates who lobbied religious leaders, psychologists, and politicians. Legal victories and popular organization for full civil rights between 1959 and 1965 gained California queers\textsuperscript{11} the right to be served in bars, some protection from arbitrary arrest and bar raids, access to justice in court, and sympathetic allies among progressive ministers. As important as the legal freedoms—still denied to New York City queers before the 1969 Stonewall riots—was the formation of a sense of community. Especially in the Bay Area, queers began to form a voting block, to exert a right to queer public space, and to organize the first gay community center in the U.S. by 1966.\textsuperscript{12}

What Californians contributed to the flavor of conservatism and gay liberation is mirrored in the ways that Californians added complexity to civil rights, racial power, student participatory freedoms, and economic justice. Although the movement for racial civil rights was most notable in the Southeast, between the mid-1950s and the late 1960s the scene in California changed dramatically. Televised images of police brutality against respectably dressed civil rights protesters in Birmingham and other southeastern cities gave way to homegrown depictions of Black Panthers, the Watts riots, the United Farm Workers and their radical counterpart, the Brown Berets, and the American Indian Movement’s occupation of Alcatraz Island. On college campuses students sympathetic to

\textsuperscript{11} Queer is being used to refer to people of whatever gender who did political activism for free expression of their nonheterosexual sexual orientation or crossdressing.

racial nationalism demanded Black and Chicano Studies programs. Inserting ethnically relevant material into higher education curricula was an outgrowth of the Student Free Speech Movement’s call for student participation in university decisions and its members’ concerns with racial equality. While only 52 percent of high school graduates nationwide attended universities, 81 percent of Californians with high school diplomas went to college.\footnote{Gentry 11.} Many entered the tuition-free state system. As the early 1960s put Berkeley on the map as the crucible of a Free Speech Movement that spread across the country, Californians wondered whether they were handing high school students over to antiwar recruiters and other agitators.

California was also a testing ground for the development of the Welfare Rights Movement. The first welfare rights organization was founded in Alameda County in 1962 through grassroots action. Then in 1963, Johnnie Tillmon organized Aid to Needy Children-Mothers Anonymous in Watts, Los Angeles, which spread to Colorado, Ohio, Massachusetts, and New York. She became involved with the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO; founded 1967) and poignantly expressed the effects of multiple oppressions:

I’m a woman, I’m a black woman. I’m a poor woman. I’m a fat woman. I’m a middle-aged woman. And I’m on welfare. In this country, if you’re any one of those things—poor, black, fat, female, middle-aged, on welfare—you count less as a human being. If you’re all those things, you don’t count at all.\footnote{Quoted in Deborah Gray White, Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1999), 234.}

While vying for control of NWRO with Ivy League doctorate and former associate national director of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) George Wiley, Tillmon
connected welfare rights to feminism in one of Ms. magazine’s first articles.\(^5\) After Tillmon and other welfare recipients took control of NWRO, they formed an alliance with NOW until NWRO folded, in part, because private foundations and churches had been more comfortable with Wiley and therefore withdrew their aid.

Americans who were queer, racial minorities, young, or poor took seriously the democratic traditions propounded in Cold War America and balked at the ways that policymakers reproduced unethical sexual, racial, class, and age hierarchies that did not match the rhetoric of democracy nor enable the full expression of personal liberties.

**FOUNDATIONAL EXCLUSIONS**

When considering the place of feminists within this countercultural milieu, local studies and expanded definitions of whom to include within Second Wave feminism provide more nuance than national overviews. Early assessments by Judith Hole and Ellen Levine, Jo Freeman, and Sara Evans perpetuated a view of women’s liberation as fairly homogeneously white, middle-class, and heterosexual.\(^6\) Later authors have

\(^5\) Tillmon believed, “Welfare is a super-sexist marriage” in which “you trade in a man for the man.” “You can’t divorce him if he treats you bad. He can divorce you, of course, cut you off anytime he wants.” Considering the middle-class gendered norm that women should be supported by marriage instead of doing wage work, Tillmon argued that conventional standards damned unmarried women as having “failed” as women to attract and keep a man rather than focusing on the men’s lack of responsibility. She concluded that the stigma associated with welfare and the myth of immorality among welfare women was invented by men to punish women. White 223-227, 234, 240, 242.

reproduced this framework, repeatedly invoking the same relatively small number of East Coast leaders as representative of the movement and creating tidy national chronological trajectories without plumbing the depths of the ongoing debates over inclusion and tactics. In contrast, studies adjust this focus to the extent that they consider the ways in which women saw between gaining women’s rights within the system and seeking to overthrow society for women’s liberation. William Chafe divides early 1970s feminism into liberal, radical, and socialist feminism based on their differing analyses of the sources of women’s oppression, possibilities of coalition, and goals. Liberal feminists, such as NOW members, worked politically within existing structures to secure pragmatic reforms, which they hoped would gain women full equality and integration into society as individuals. They were open to coalition and, in the case of NOW, had male members. Radical feminists saw social structures as inherently patriarchal and needing to be overthrown. The experience of many early radical feminists with male chauvinism within New Left groups led them to form separatist groups and see no hope for alliances with males. Radical feminists spearheaded consciousness-raising (CR) and later formed women-run institutions. Often coming from New Left roots, socialist feminists’ emphasis on the links among race, class, and gender oppression led them to champion solidarity against capitalism among oppressed peoples, regardless of gender. See Zillah R. Eisenstein, ed., Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism (New York; London: Monthly Review Press, 1979). Although the tactics of these three forms of feminism were at odds, Chafe points out that both radical and socialist feminists joined liberal feminist groups. William H. Chafe, The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20th Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 203-208. Early lesbian feminists in NOW used radically inspired CR and advocated separatism through woman-identification (see chapter 2). Their emphasis on women’s superiority and their determination to create a women’s culture purged of male norms led to cultural feminism. 

which Second Wave feminism originally included diversity and struggled to maintain parity in various countercultural spaces.

Simultaneously with the rise of the Second Wave, antifeminists worked to paint the movement as populated by fringe radicals and lesbians in order to discredit it. Scholars agree that early feminists argued about what channels were appropriate for making change and whether lesbianism was a women’s issue, but the literature does not pay sufficient attention to the continuing tensions over women’s sexual orientations.

Alice Echols’ study of radical feminism has advanced the view that, initially revolutionary grassroots feminist gains were stalled by inward-looking, essentialist “cultural feminism”.\(^{18}\) Echols is in good company in narrowing in on the beginning of the movement and dismissing later developments by arguing that nonpolitical feminism supplanted revolutionary work or that conservative backlash cut it short by the 1980s. In contrast, Nancy Whittier characterizes feminism as remaining viable in the 1980s and calls for local studies. Heeding Whittier and paying attention to the role of feminists of and so uncovering its work depends on local studies. Whittier rejects characterizations of 1980s women as turning to traditional goals, younger women feeling alienated from older libbers, and cultural feminism replacing radical feminism. She also counters historian John D’Emilio’s assertion that economic depression in the late 1970s and early 1980s “pushed marginal institutions to the wall” and spelled the demise of volunteer-run feminist organizations. John D’Emilio, “After Stonewall,” in his Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University (New York: Routledge, 1992), 260. In contrast to Winifred Wandersee’s assertion that by the 1980s the feminist “cycle of reform had run its course,” Whittier sees the 1980s as a period of retrenchment after which radical feminism has remained viable. Winifred D. Wandersee, On the Move: American Women in the 1970s (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988), 197.


Kathleen Berkeley defines cultural feminisms as “based on two premises: first, that women’s values were essentially universal (class, color, and sexual orientation mattered little) and in opposition to those of men; and second, that these values were more pure, moral, peaceful, and democratic than men’s values. Cultural feminism encouraged women to separate themselves by creating alternative, female institutions. This retreat from male space worried many radical feminists who feared that cultural feminism was escapist and that it gave women permission to abandon political struggle because male institutions were inherently corrupt and therefore unsalvageable” (197).
color and lesbian feminists provide a more differentiated revision of Second Wave feminist history.

Revision builds on a strong foundation. The formative overview, Hole and Levine’s 1971 *The Rebirth of Feminism*, is still impressive in its breadth and detail of description. Successive major monographs focused on aspects of the Second Wave: policy process, the route from civil rights and the New Left\(^\text{19}\) to women’s liberation, or the subset of radical feminism. Hole and Levine set the terrain, dividing the first decade of the movement into moderates using legal channels to address sex discrimination and those whose prior involvement in civil rights and student protest led them to explore the nature of women’s oppression through consciousness-raising (CR). In their section on “women’s liberation,” they draw a path from women’s experience with sexism in the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and CORE of the early 1960s to SNCC’s expulsion of white members in the mid-1960s\(^\text{20}\) as well as the androcentric

\[\text{19}\] “New Left” became the collective term for organizations run by predominantly white, college-educated people, like Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and that challenged the American political and social structure. Such groups valued direct democratic participation and the kinds of economic stability associated with socialism. They perceived themselves as nondogmatic in contrast to their view of Marxists, socialists, and trade unionists from the 1930s through the 1950s, whom they labeled “Old Left.” See David Steigerwald, *The Sixties and the End of Modern America* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 121-122. Some SDS members participated in the Civil Rights Movement in the south and recruited at northern campuses. SDS members spearheaded the Berkeley Free Speech Movement against university administrators’ attempts to control the distribution of radical pamphlets, allow military recruitment on campus, and behave *in loco parentis* by imposing rules of conduct; the protests then spread to campuses across the country. See Jo Freeman, *At Berkeley in the Sixties: The Education of an Activist, 1961-1965* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004). In 1969, a small faction of the SDS, the Weather Underground, was influenced by Mao Zedong’s *The Little Red Book* and black militants to bring the Vietnam War home by initiating violent resistance through vandalism and bombings (Steigerwald 139-140, 146).

\[\text{20}\] The SNCC decision occurred over a year. The majority of the staff at a May 1966 meeting decided that white people should organize white communities because they could not have black consciousness. Mexican-American staffer Benita Martinez wrote that SNCC’s lack of commitment to organizing white communities signaled “get out.” Staffers moved to expel whites in December 1966, and the Central Committee asked for resignations in May 1967. See Kristin Anderson-Bricker, “‘Triple Jeopardy’: Black
politics of draft resistance among New Left groups. Enraged by New Left men's unwillingness to consider women's perspectives or issues, young women formed independent groups to understand women's oppression and act against it. Hole and Levine relate paradigmatic groups' actions and theories, which have become staples in monographs on women's liberation.

Freeman bears attention for her contributions and foreclosures. One of her strengths as a participant in the Student Free Speech Movement and then in feminism has been her ability to provide theoretical explanations for processes.\(^{21}\) In *The Politics of Women's Liberation*, however, she claims that white, middle-class, college-educated women acted for women's rights while women of color, represented by black women, and implicitly working-class women, did not. Rather than consider how some feminists alienated others by reproducing racism and class bias, Freeman's "relative deprivation" model contrasts expectations with gains to conclude that white "middle-class, college-educated women ... are subject to the greatest strain." According to this theory, because women of color and women from poor and laboring classes did not expect much, they did little to address sexism. Furthermore, homogeneity was required in the youth and student movement-inspired "small groups," so that tasks would not be thwarted by continual

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misunderstandings. Freeman forecloses the possibility of finding interracial, multiclass, and sexually varied local groups operating through consensus and CR principles.²²

Hole and Levine, Freeman, and Evans disclose that many white, middle-class, college-educated participants entered the early women’s movement. Their accounts do not explain the participation of others, such as feminists of color and women from more militant backgrounds.²³ A chronological shift from civil rights to antiwar work to feminism ignores the interplay among racial nationalist movements, feminism, and gay liberation. The ten-year existence of the Los Angeles–based grassroots feminist group Califia Community demonstrates that heterogeneous groups could and did function. It will take local studies to probe the depths of heterogeneity in groups marked by CR and radical experiments with democratic methods like consensus building.

**SUSTAINED DIVERSITY AND ACTIVISM**

Marking racial nationalism as unequivocally opposed to ideas of gender and sexuality liberation oversimplifies tensions in racial social justice movements among interracial cooperation, intraracial nationalist identification, and the challenges for women of color or gays and lesbians of color in simultaneously identifying with race, gender, and sexuality. While the postwar Civil Rights Movements were black-led,

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²³ Hole and Levine frequently leave out their subjects race and class but imply white, middle-class agents. Sara Evans makes the important insight that white leaders of women’s liberation learned activist commitment to equality from participating in the Civil Rights Movement and later in New Left, student, and antiwar work. They were then pushed out of the former by black nationalism and marginalized in the latter by emphases on traditional gender roles and American men dying in Vietnam. White women, alienated and exploited, simultaneously “sharpened the ideology women eventually would use to describe their own oppression.” Sara Evans, *Personal Politics*, 170.
African-American leaders drew auxiliary personnel, educators, and material resources
from antiracist whites, especially church members and students. In contrast, the Black
Power Movement and dominant strains of the Chicano and American Indian movements
constructed their identities through ethnic nationalism and a desire for autonomy from
white society. Frequently, feminism and gay liberation were painted as "white" issues or
as less immediate problems in order to render illegitimate questions of gender and
sexuality—a tactic also used by the white-dominated New Left and antiwar movements.
Women and queers of color struggled with sexism and homophobia within racial
nationalist groups. Feminists of color formed their own groups early on: for example,
Hijas de Cuauhtemoc at California State University at Long Beach (1968), North
American Indian Women's Association (1970), Asian Sisters (1972 in Los Angeles), and
National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO; 1973). As some queers of color became
disillusioned with white male-majority groups, they constituted racially based groups. In
California, these include, in the Bay Area, Gay American Indians and Gay Latino
Alliance (both 1975), Gay Asian Information Network, Gay Asian Association of UC
Berkeley, and Asian-American Alliance (late 1970s), and the Los Angeles–based
Lesbians of Color (LOC), Latinos Unidos (1978), Gay and Lesbian Latinos Unidos
(GLLU; 1981), and Lesbianas Unidos (1984).

While racial nationalist loyalties coupled with entrenched racism prevented many
marginalized people of color from associating with white feminists or queers, the Black

24 Sherna Gluck presents an engaging assessment of these groups' significance for understanding diversity
by race and region in the Women's Movement. Sherna Berger Gluck with Maylei Blackwell, Sharon
(the) U.S. Women's Movement(s)," in Nancy A. Naples, ed., Community Activism and Feminist Politics:
Organizing across Race, Class, and Gender (New York: Routledge, 1998), 31-56.
Power and Chicano movements could include coalition work across these minority groups. Angela Davis writes that not only did San Diego Black and Chicano Studies students ally to demand their own Lumumba-Zapata College, Bay Area Panther leader Huey Newton championed alliance with feminists and gay liberationists. Concerned at how such coalition overtures have been purged from the record, Davis concludes, “Young people with ‘nationalist’ proclivities ought, at least, to have the opportunity to choose which tradition of nationalism they will embrace. How will they position themselves en masse in defense of women’s rights, in defense of gay rights, if they are

not aware of the historical precedents for such positionings?" It is important to recognize that feminists and queers in racial nationalist groups frequently felt pressure to submerge those aspects of their identities, but continuing to ignore the presence of such internal minorities preserves false pictures of the feminist movement as well as gay liberation and racial nationalism.

Becky Thompson challenges scholars to reject hegemonic portrayals of the Second Wave and to recognize the centrality of feminists of color and antiracist white feminists, who began work in the 1960s. Scholars debate when black feminism became prevalent. Benita Roth argues that black and white feminist organizing began at the same time and cites Ruby Doris Smith Robinson’s participation in discussions about women’s status in SNCC, which led to the anonymous memo to SNCC members in November 1965 from white participants Casey Hayden and Mary King. Kristin Anderson-Bricker points out, however, that no black feminist responded positively to the memo, which compared the low-caste status of “Negroes” and women. Cynthia Washington recalls that only after 1968 did the Black Women’s Liberation Committee of SNCC push the black...

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community to deal with women’s inequality. Some reference the original 1962 copyright of Paule Marshall’s “Reena” in Toni Cade (Bambara)’s *The Black Woman* to make black feminism pre-date Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). This seems to conflate publication and impact. Intellectual and cultural historians who rely only on the presence of textual evidence without documenting the transmission of ideas sometimes assert influence without evidence. Wini Breines argues, in contrast, for the importance of a more than five-year gap between the radical white Women’s Liberation Movement and the political articulation of black feminism while agreeing that black feminism is not derivative and consistently shows awareness of the intersections among race, gender, and poverty.  

Instead of a simple picture of feminists working from the perspective of “sex class” rights for political, economic, and cultural change, multiracial feminists began with the goal of gaining justice around gender, sexuality, race, and class simultaneously. In the 1970s, women of color worked within already established mixed-gender

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27 Assertions of simultaneity with white feminism seek to avoid the implication that if African-American feminism formed or became entrenched later it was therefore derivative of Euro-American feminism. Roth asserts, “Black feminist organizing began roughly when white feminist organizing did; scholars have conflated the timing of Black feminist emergence with the separate analytical problem of the numbers of Black women involved in feminist groups [emphasis in original].” See Benita Roth, “The Making of the Vanguard Center: Black Feminist Emergence in the 1960s and 1970s,” in Springer 71. Numbers, however, are important to impact. See accompanying chapters by Kristin Anderson, Cynthia Washington, and Kathleen Cleaver in Springer, especially 55, 58-59. Breines argues, “In 1979 Barbara Smith stated that white women in general do not grasp that ‘the Black feminist movement is in a very different period historically than the white feminist movement, even though the participants in these movements are each other’s contemporaries. I have been constantly aware of this ‘time-lag’ during my seven years involvement in Black feminist politics. If measured by the closedness of the Black community to feminism, the still relatively small number of Black women who identify themselves as feminists, and the lack of Black feminist institutions Black women have, our movement is still in its early stages” (1113).

28 The addition of Title VII to the 1964 Civil Rights Act fostered the concept of women as a “class” deserving of equal rights (Berkeley 158).
organizations and white-dominated feminist groups, and they founded autonomous feminists of color groups.²⁹

The phenomenon of feminists of color integrating into groups that were previously formed by white women, like Califia Community, illustrates both the recurrence of struggles for racial equality throughout the history of the Second Wave and what white-founded groups had to offer. The assertion that multiracial feminism existed does not negate continuous problems with racism any more than diversity of class, sexuality, age, or physical ability meant that groups avoided classism, homophobia, proscriptions against some forms of sexual expression, ageism, or the lack of inclusiveness toward disabled feminists. Repeated grappling with homogeneity and heterogeneity bears closer examination and can build on Janet Jakobsen’s work. Jakobsen argues that contrary to triumphal narratives of moving from presumed similarity to diversity, feminists repeatedly have started with diverse groups, foreclosed that diversity, and had to seek to diversify again. Many feminists have followed mainstream society in relying on discrete, binary (sometimes essentialist) opposites instead of recognizing the kind of complexity embodied in simultaneous identities and in relationships among marginalized people. Such a reliance leaves feminists ill-equipped to deal with “relations of dominance ... produced through shifting, interlocking structures of difference ... at the margins as well as between center and margin, contributing to the production of hierarchies and dominations within and among marginalized groups.”³⁰ Jakobsen compares movement texts published between 1970 and 1974 to assertions in feminist

²⁹ Thompson, “Multiracial Feminism,” 337-339.
³⁰ Jakobsen 9.
academic texts of the 1980s that finally feminists were addressing diversity. Califia Community women’s experience fills the gap in time, space, and genre between Jakobsen’s “community” and “academic” texts due to some leaders’ experience in both during its 1975–1987 existence.

Rather than only a nationwide cycle from diversity to similarity to diversity, local studies like this one show that between the early 1970s and the 1980s epicycles connected the local with the national levels. Califia’s initial all-white founding reflects a stage in Jakobsen’s cycle, while their process for diversification constituted a local, situational, pragmatic response to charges of exclusivity. Simultaneously, the desire by some women of color to find a space at Califia that they had not found in racial nationalist groups underscores their willingness to endure feeling marginalized at Califia in exchange for what they gained. Precisely by looking at memories about how intersecting identities functioned for feminists of color who returned to Califia and addressed their feelings of being outsiders, one realizes that Second Wave feminism, for all of its limitations, did address needs of women coming from various marginalized backgrounds and promoted some communication across social and cultural divides.

An examination of Califia Community’s consistently majority-lesbian presence in its CR and actions revises truncated accounts of the tensions between heterosexual and lesbian feminists and redresses scholarly attacks on lesbian and cultural feminism. Alice Echols, in Daring to Be Bad, concentrates on the radical feminist organizations first

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31 Jakobsen 5, 15, 62-65.
documented by Hole and Levine. She concludes by lamenting the undercutting of radical feminism by the cultural feminist focus on countercultural space based on essentialist gender divisions. Verta Taylor and Leila Rupp, in response, have defended lesbian feminism’s cultural feminist elements. Four elements of lesbian feminist culture promoted survival of the women’s movement during periods of waning activity: female values, separatism, the primacy of women’s relationships, and feminist ritual. The culture of lesbian feminist communities both serves as a base of mobilization for women involved in a wide range of protest activities aimed at political and institutional change and provides continuity from earlier states of the women’s movement to the future flowering of feminism.

Although Echols frames potential tensions between radical and cultural feminism as absolutes, lesbian feminists developed their critiques of men and desire for separatism from radical feminist theory. Califia Community’s temporary separate space praised women’s culture but also sought to change society amid a rapid rise in conservatism.

Within that dual-purpose educational space, many women reassessed their sexual identities, participating in a process that moved them from heterosexual to lesbian. Shane Phelan opposes the lesbian feminist rhetoric that lesbianism is rebellion against patriarchal femininity, which began with the essay “The Woman-Identified Woman” in 1970. She argues that it positions lesbianism as something one has or does not have.

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32 Like Hole and Levine, Echols describes the schism among radical feminists, equal-rights feminists, and the larger New Left. Radical feminists rejected liberal feminist measures to gain equality within a racist, classist system as well as the assurances of leftists that a socialist revolution would solve gender relations. Echols showcases grassroots organizations such as Redstockings, Cell 16, The Feminists, and New York Radical Feminists and notes the radical feminist possibilities for variation in gender and sexual expression. She credits radical feminism with articulating critiques of family, marriage, love, normative heterosexuality, and rape and with developing CR groups.

33 Taylor and Rupp 34.

rather than as a process or continuing “gay trajectory.” Phelan warns that lesbianism as gender rebellion “replicates the binary opposition of “woman” (= heterosexual) versus “lesbian.” To Phelan, dividing lesbians from womanhood effectively discourages women who have sex with men from linking politically with lesbians and so limits the potential strength for feminist agendas. Key components here are the ideas of fixed identities, binary thinking, and womanhood. Califia narrators who became lesbian while attending camps illustrate how lesbian identity was a process toward what they regarded as feminist gains. Despite their change over time, however, many did represent their identities as ultimately achieving constancy in binary opposition to societal norms. Lesbian feminists who were formerly heterosexually married most loudly trumpeted the superiority of lesbianism, which Califia women recall the minority of heterosexual women at the camps as contesting. Their identity construction processes were crucial to

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35 Phelan appears to confuse motive and effect and seems to be part of an American trend to embrace the term “woman.” Although French feminist Monique Wittig articulated that lesbians were not women with a complexity that criticized heteropatriarchy, American lesbian feminists did not tend to take up Wittig’s banner. Wittig problematized “woman” as the definition for patriarchal social constructions of normative traits that feminists fought (femininity, passivity, serving, etc.). Monique Wittig’s “One Is Not Born a Woman” is a radical development from Simone de Beauvoir’s The Second Sex, H. M. Parshley, trans. and ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1989). De Beauvoir argues that “woman” is a socially created myth of a biological, psychological, economic fate. Wittig opposed U.S. feminists and lesbians who constructed women’s oppression as biological as well as historical (the gendered hunter-gatherer division) and then celebrated “female biological potential.” “For me this could never constitute a lesbian approach to women’s oppression, since it assumes that the basis of society or the beginning of society lies in heterosexuality.” Wittig concludes that a lesbian “is not a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically.” Although many Califia narrators stressed socially constructed oppression, when I met Califia leader Marilyn Murphy, she vehemently rejected Wittig’s view because she wanted to recuperate the term “woman.” Monique Wittig, The Straight Mind and Other Essays (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 10, 13, 20. “One Is Not Born a Woman” first appeared in Feminist Issues 1.2 (winter 1981). The widening of the lesbian-straight split was not based simply on lesbians’ disidentification with womanhood but rather a combination of homophobia and assertions of lesbians’ superior womanhood. See chapter 2.

36 Phelan 771, 774-775.

37 This work follows Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis in using the term “narrator” to refer to those whom I interviewed because it gives more agency and respect to the people who agreed to tell their stories and interpretations than do clinical terms like “subject.” Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 16.
their ability to interpret their grievances against the dominant society and develop as a politicized group, as Taylor and Whittier have argued.\textsuperscript{38} It is important to situate lesbian feminism’s embrace of woman-identification. Although woman-identified and clinging to a sense of themselves as types of women, exalting lesbianism simultaneously disidentified them from standard conceptions of “woman” and left unanswered the definition and scope of “woman.”

Califia was not solely a cultural feminist space, but rather, incorporated aspects of movements for racial equality and liberation, feminist politics, and the gay and lesbian movement. Each movement intersected with Califia by providing interpretive frameworks and challenges to address. For example, initial antiracism work at Califia responded to the Black Power Movement’s demand that white Americans do the work of teaching against whites’ racism, while continued calls for the inclusion in Califia of feminists of color expanded and dramatically changed the tenor of these presentations. Similarly, the Women’s Liberation Movement provided Califia collective members with a solid base in feminist theory and a broader network of political activists (e.g., by drawing participants from area feminist groups like NOW). Gay and lesbian liberation gave lesbian and bisexual women a budding history, arguments against heterosexism, and incipient political connections in a city with a well-entrenched separatist lesbian culture and the Los Angeles Gay Service Center. These nationwide movements objected to exclusion, politicizing people to see their exclusion within activist groups that too often

left out mothers, people of color, and the working class. Nationwide, lesbians articulated their marginalized status in both the women’s movement and gay liberation when Betty Friedan painted them as a “lavender menace” in the former and a male-dominated leadership often dismissed them in the latter (a cyclical problem at the LA Gay Service Center).

The Case for Califia Community

Califia Community began in this context, and participants integrated many of the most important developments of Second Wave feminism in their views and operation. In their temporary space, they blended feminist structures and methods: volunteer collective leadership, consensus operation, facilitators, and calls for all attendees to teach each other along CR lines. Califia’s volunteer collective used consensus, egalitarian participation, and CR effectively for ten years, long after Evans claims that reliance on CR waned.39

Studying a lesbian-majority collective formed to combat multiple oppressions in the multicultural West Coast expands knowledge about how Second Wave feminists connected race, class, and sexuality and ultimately explored other axes of difference. Califia participants developed feminist antiracism beyond a focus on black-white relations. They were part of a shift initiated by the Furies40 to discuss the effects of class

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39 Sara Evans claims CR was most powerful between 1968 and 1972 as a method for promoting individuals’ revelation of shared oppression and that CR frequently resulted in group actions to make change (Tidal Wave 44, passim, 160). Collectives that formed to make concrete change experimented with radically participatory and egalitarian democratic methods, such as operating by consensus and forbidding the ascent of specific leaders. Such groups often imploded due to informal and unexamined power dynamics. In contrast, national groups like NOW continued to use parliamentarian organization, which privileged majorities and stifled or alienated some working-class and racialized women unfamiliar with such procedures.

40 The Furies was an influential collective of lesbian feminists first formed as “Those Women” in Washington DC in 1971. The members, who had been part of the Left, were Ginny Berson, Joan E. Biren,
background on individuals rather than as a New Left class struggle. Finally, as a lesbian-dominated group, Califia further substantiates the disproportionately large involvement of lesbians in feminist work during the 1970s and 1980s while reassessing the degree to which lesbian feminism was simply identity-based and exclusionary.41

Califia women's ideas and actions illustrate lesbian feminists' commitment to prioritize inclusion. At the same time, Califia sheds light on how long-standing conflict between heterosexual and lesbian feminists followed by divisive debates over sexual expression broke down women's ability to work together across sexual differences. Califia attendees analyzed numerous perspectives and issues through experiential authority and took initial steps toward melding their views into what I term a "holistic feminist" approach to empowering women that demonstrated interconnections between political issues and sought to transform bodies, mental outlooks, and values.42 Their strategies for inclusiveness and success were challenged by the fact that their vocabulary

Rita Mae Brown, Charlotte Bunch, Sharon Deevey, Helaine Harris, Susan Hathaway, Tasha Peterson, Coletta Reid, and Lee Schwing. Echols 220-241.

41 One of the most useful aspects of Whittier's book is her assessment of why feminist groups from the late 1970s on were lesbian-dominated. She attributes the predominance of lesbians in the latter radical feminist movement to three factors. The "flourishing lesbian feminist culture helped bring in new recruits, lesbians were less able to assimilate outside the women's movement and so maintained feminist commitment even in a hostile period, and heterosexual women felt uncomfortable in a largely lesbian movement" (72).

Valuing various identity factors has been termed "difference-sensitive feminism." See Cheshire Calhoun, "The Gender Closet: Lesbian Disappearance under the Sign 'Woman,'" Feminist Studies 21.1 (spring 1995): 7-34, reprinted in Martha Vicinus, ed., Lesbian Subjects: A Feminist Studies Reader (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 209-232, here 215. "Difference feminism," however, does not necessarily address the concept of interrelations among identities or oppressions or a program for helping women in all aspects of their lives. Successful demonstration of others' stake in issues they did not hold dear was often crucial to gaining broad support for minority rights. "Multicultural feminism" became a preferred term in the 1980s and was used by women of color like those who organized Califia Community in its last years. I have created "holistic feminism" to use instead of multicultural feminism because, although both sought to effect personal, cultural, and political change, Califia women of color criticized the radical lesbian feminist perspective of Califia's original collective members as inherently white. Holistic feminism aimed to unify women with a common vocabulary and activities. The universal claims within radical lesbian feminism, however, could erase, exclude, or inadequately analyze the situations of women who held racism or heterosexual identity to be as important to their lives as sexism and homophobia.
and rules of etiquette were still being formed and by assumptions that speaking their experiences would change others because everyone would seek to share priorities.

THE POLITICS OF NAMING HISTORICAL AGENTS

As a local approach fills in lacunae and mitigates overgeneralizations, use of oral histories expands representation of community participants beyond national leaders, those whose existence is already preserved through their written documents, or sociological composites that present quotations separated from their narrators. At the beginning of her interview, Ariana Manov says that she has agreed to participate in order to document “in a serious way our herstorical process. ... I think a whole lot of our history has gotten lost. The old truism that anonymous was a woman—yes, anonymous probably was a woman.”

Many of the participants in this study have a dual sense that they were part of an important historical movement but that their place as individuals in history could easily be ignored and erased. Describing feminism as countless waves, Josy Catoggio asserts:

[We’ve always reinvented feminism. And it’s always been suppressed and erased and ignored. The books go out of print. The women die, you know. No one preserves the history. And so we have to start from scratch every single goddamn time. And that is patriarchy’s purpose. They do it on purpose. It’s not accidental.]

Suffragists and Second Wave feminists sought to dispel feelings of being targeted and isolated by documenting women’s history. Participants’ formal education and contemporary emphasis on male leadership in politics and the Civil Rights, Free Speech,  

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43 This work follows Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis in setting narratives from oral history interviews in the present tense in order “to remind the reader that the book is built from oral histories, that is, from narrators’ contemporary memories about the past” (25).
44 Ariana Manov transcript 1.
45 Josy Catoggio transcript 46.
racial power, and antiwar movements, however, left them without a history with which they connected. Consider Diane F. Germain's assessment early in her interview:

History was terribly devoid of what women were doing while all these wars were happening and all these male heroes were doing all their actions and everything. And I always make a joke, well the women were sitting by the bonfire eating bonbons, you know. And we didn’t do anything. But it’s because men looked at what we’ve been doing and didn’t think it was important. … So we needed to talk about that. History was empty for us.\(^4^6\)

At the suggestion of lesbian archivist and Califia participant, Yolanda Retter Vargas,\(^4^7\) I interviewed other attendees through snowball sampling, which relied on narrators’ recommendations of other people to interview. Enthusiasm for this project has been high, and only one woman contacted declined an interview. My status as a younger scholar in Tucson, Arizona, meant that I did not participate in southern California feminist and lesbian communities either while Califia camps were going on or later. Two narrators who lived in Tucson had become friends of mine before the project was conceived, but everyone else had to be introduced to me. This partially alleviated the pressures that participant-observers have of trying to separate their personal lives from their research. Most of these women allowed me, an unknown academic, into their homes based on a description of my project and their recognition of me as a queer feminist. This indicates a commitment to preserving their lesbian feminist history and an openness to

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\(^{4^6}\) Diane F. Germain transcript 1. See also Rose Greene, who believes that Califia deserves a place as part of a dynamic period of feminist and lesbian history. Kal Kalivoda remembers when she “didn’t know women had a history because the men wrote it.” Transcripts for Rose Greene 27 and Kal Kalivoda 6.

\(^{4^7}\) The women who staff the two lesbian archives in Los Angeles are continuing much-needed preservation work. I am grateful to Yolanda at the Lesbian Legacy Collection of ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives (hereafter LLC). Not only did Yolanda provide initial interview contacts, on many occasions she shared her expert knowledge and keen insights as an archivist, Ph.D., and activist about lesbian feminist and women of color activism. In addition to Yolanda at ONE, Jo Duffy has made tireless commutes to the June L. Mazer Lesbian Collection to keep it open for researchers. She shares her warm personality and serves as Mazer’s human database.
maintaining connections with those they recognize as related to them through identity and politics.

In contrast to their warm reception of me personally, these feminists who had fought authoritative impositions of norms and agitated against erasure turned a chilly gaze on the required dense, bureaucratic wording of the “subjects consent form” they had to sign before an interview could take place. They did not appreciate the legalese. Both I and the initial contacts I made opposed the attempt of the university’s Human Subjects Protection Program to protect them from claiming a place in history. Human Subjects officials considered lesbians to be a vulnerable group, and relying on medical science and psychology research models, these authorities initially forbade the use of real names, the preservation of interview tapes and transcripts in an archive, and making archived material open to public use after a date of the narrators’ choosing. Eventually they granted the addition of these options, which have narrators autonomy and the preservation of their history rather than protective silencing. Narrators assessed their personal risk and vulnerability based on their own situations and evaluated me from what their friends and acquaintances said about me and by explicitly asking how my identities and views overlapped with theirs.

Despite the option to remain anonymous, twenty-eight out of thirty-two narrators wanted to use their real names, while two asked that only their first names be used, and two chose to have full pseudonyms. The pseudonyms I selected conform to the ethnic backgrounds of those narrators’ names. All narrators chose to have their interviews archived; twenty-nine approved of making the archived materials available immediately
while three chose to delay opening theirs to the public until 2009 or 2010. Like the gay men and lesbians whom anthropologist Esther Newton interviewed, some participants felt that age and retirement protected them from homophobic attacks. When narrators mentioned other participants or feminists in southern California whom I did not interview, I used their names within this work only if they were already in the public record because they had published or held publicized positions, such as being on the Califia Community collective.

After the interviews were completed, the question became how to refer to those who participated in Califia Community, were part of the Los Angeles and San Diego feminist communities, or were influential national figures. The ways we name others reflect power and personal relationships. Historically, use of titles and last names has conferred respect and distance, and most Americans’ mutual use of first names denotes affectionate or in-group status. Relationships in which one person retains a title and last name while the other is known only by a first name indicates hierarchy (e.g., owners or bosses over slaves, servants, or employees). For generations within family systems, slaves, younger women, and children have been known by their first names while their last names were denied or subsumed under the identities of their male household head. First names have also conferred anonymity, and some oppressed lesbians and gay men from the 1940s through the 1960s related with each other and in print using only first names or pseudonyms for protection. In leftist, hippie, and feminist circles people purposefully eschewed hierarchies and asserted affinity with a common cause through

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first-name usage and, sometimes, the taking of new names. An offshoot of attempts to

dismantle hierarchy and to show disrespect for authority is the contemporary

phenomenon of political enemies showing contempt by avoiding designated titles and last

names (e.g., calling presidents or legislators by their first names).

Traditionally, historians, journalists, and political scientists have recorded the full
given names of leading participants in twentieth-century social justice movements and
subsequently identified them by their last names. Sociologists studying the dynamics of
social movements through interviews may compile information without naming
interviewed participants. Ethnographic narrative studies of lesbian communities have
protected narrators' from homophobic harassment or violence by using first names or
pseudonyms. More recently, gay, lesbian, and feminist authors have hybridized memoir
and history, using first names to replicate their intimate involvement in 1960s and 1970s
movements for liberation from oppressive hierarchies.49

49 Those documenting national Feminist and Gay Liberation movements have tended to retain the
convention of full name and subsequent last name usage found in other civil rights accounts. Sara Evans,
Communities. Winifred D. Wandersee, On the Move. Alice Echols, Daring to Be Bad. Flora Davis, Moving
the Mountain. Ruth Rosen, The World Split Open. Becki L. Ross’ work on the first lesbian feminist group
in Toronto repeats full names and, rarely, uses first names: The House that Jill Built. Sociologist Nancy
Whittier’s local study included interviews without naming those interviewed within the text: Feminist
Generations. In contrast, formative lesbian and gay community ethnographies have split on the issue of
using real or pseudonymous first names. Susan Krieger’s The Mirror Dance and Elizabeth Lapovsky
Kennedy and Madeleine D. Davis’s Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold protected narrators from continuing
homophobia by changing names and identifying characteristics. Esther Newton argued, “Using real names
and real details wherever possible is a must in gay historical work. This is not only because the whole
movement for gay liberation depends on gays coming out. Gay history in this century consists of hidden
networks and institutions which scholars are trying to reconstruct; every proper noun I omit diminishes the
store of information for those who will read my work and build on it” (304). Esther Newton’s Cherry
Grove and Martin Duberman’s Stonewall (New York: Dutton, 1993) are part of a turn toward hybridizing
memoir with historical conventions. Likewise, first name usage occurs in the political activist community
memoir/histories of Terry Wolverton, Insurgent Muse: Life and Art at the Women’s Building (San
Francisco: City Lights, 2002), and Jo Freeman, At Berkeley in the Sixties.
This work documents both feminist political activism and attempts at lesbian community building. As such, it combines participants’ names as they want them preserved (e.g., Betty rather than Elizabeth) with first-name usage, which reflects the emotional impact, cultural values, and sense of intimacy found in community studies. After giving their full names, I refer to participants and their close associates by their first names except when a last name is a necessary addition to differentiate between people with the same first name. I retain the distancing aspect implied by last-name usage when I refer to leading California or national figures and nonfeminists.50

DIVERSITY AND THE POLITICS OF SPEECH

Two amazing features of Califia Community were the degree to which it was a lesbian feminist space and the diversity of women it attracted. Participants estimate that at least eighty percent of attendees were lesbian, and all people with whom I could coordinate interviews were lesbian at some point during their Califia days. Snowball sampling seriously reduced the possibility of finding heterosexual participants and precluded interviewing lesbians who became straight because lesbians tended to remain friends and to know the whereabouts of those who continued to be lesbian. It is also possible that women now leading heterosexual lives would not have wanted to be interviewed and associated with a lesbian-dominated group in print, although the constraints of sampling and time leave that unclear.

50 In general, the first and last names are the same given names or nicknames that narrators used as participants at Califia. In a few cases, narrators have changed their names since they first attended Califia camps, and they prefer that I use their current names.
Variation within lesbianism reflected experimentation and changing roles for women. Only six narrators claimed long-term or lifelong self-identifications as lesbians without relationships with men. Most had dated and/or married men, and fifteen narrators had been married before associating with the Women’s Liberation Movement. Although ten had divorced before hearing about Califia, five were still married when they first attended Califia, and their Califia experience influenced four of them to embrace lesbian identities and divorce (one had already identified simultaneously as lesbian and married to a man). At least eight other women interviewed had been out less than three years. Not surprisingly, snowball sampling led to seven couples or former couples being interviewed, and many more had dated other Califia attendees whom I did not interview. Because so many women had been in relationships with men, close to half (thirteen) had young to adult children.

Unlike most volunteer-run groups, which are typically led by middle-class participants, there were many leaders at Califia from working-class backgrounds; they made teaching about class integral from the beginning. Among the narrators, thirteen positioned themselves as born into working-class families, while one claimed to be between the working and middle classes, ten identified as middle-class, and four indicated upper middle-class backgrounds.

Over time, Califia became noteworthy for its diversity in race and ethnicity. Interviews reflect both the challenges and successes of encouraging racial integration. There were no Asian-American or American Indian contacts for interviews, and only one narrator remembered a single Asian-American woman before camps were held near the
Bay Area, while nobody identified American Indian participants. In contrast, Latina and African-American women were represented at the camps and in interviews. Snowball sampling and my ability to travel led me to interview two African-American women and eight Latina women, three of whom claimed bicultural status. Two Latinas were born in Central or South America while one African-American woman was raised in Mexico. Among white participants, many were interested in stating their ethnic background. All were American born and raised: five were born into Jewish families, two defined themselves as Irish and Italian, two as Italian, one as Sicilian, and one as French Canadian.

Ages of narrators when they participated ranged much more widely than typical feminist groups or scholarship on Second Wave feminism would indicate. Califia held women- and children-only camps, which attracted middle-aged mothers with grown children, middle-aged women without children, young mothers of children, and young lesbians who chose not to bear children. At the time of interviews, narrators’ ages ranged from forty-four to eighty-one years old. Of thirty-two narrators, two started attending Califia in their late fifties, eight participated in their mid-forties to early fifties, six were mid-thirties, six were late twenties to early thirties, four were late twenties, and six were early to mid-twenties. Although some narrators suggested names of older participants, two women I attempted to contact had already died.

Finally, I strove to represent a range of degree of participation in Califia camp attendance and collective membership. Thirteen narrators were on the collective. Although their tenure ranged from one season to eight years, collectively they spanned
the course of Califia’s existence. They represented both die-hard supporters and malcontents. Of those not on the collective, many were regulars, while three only attended once, deciding it was not for them.

All initial interviews were face to face. This decision limited the geographic area I was able to cover to southern California, Arizona, and New Mexico and probably contributed to a Deaf participant declining an interview. The process of personal introduction, sharing the same space, and conversing introduced a personal dynamic. In most cases, interviews occurred at narrators’ homes. Two narrators held the interview at their offices, one preferred to talk at her neighborhood coffee shop, another at an apartment where a mutual friend was housesitting, another at the home of a friend I had already interviewed, and four women of color coordinated a group interview reunion at one’s ranch. These mostly private settings may have been more conducive to sharing personal feelings about what were at times emotionally wrenching experiences of extreme joy and pain. Many narrators brought out group pictures from the Califia Community camp(s) they attended, personal photographs, and memorabilia such as Califia T-shirts, feminist buttons, camp brochures, and readings or handouts used in conjunction with presentations or workshops. They also showed me the feminist art or books that they had collected while in the movement.

Interview questions combined requests for specific dates with many open-ended questions. Narrators could discuss anything they wanted. I followed up with a question based on the information they provided or, if relevant, a question from my prepared list. When there was a lull in discussion of a topic, I would return to an interview question.
This provided enough structure for comparison while allowing narrators to guide me to topics of importance that I had not anticipated. Initially I planned to give narrators and any participants I could track down a questionnaire asking how they identified themselves according to factors addressed at Califia (gender presentation, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, class and educational backgrounds, age, physical ability, spirituality, participation in feminist groups). Some narrators found the questionnaire intrusive and refused to fill it out. Usually they were forthcoming about such information in the context of the interview. I dispensed with the questionnaire as an inappropriate format, which could trigger distrust. Where my record of diversity does not total the thirty-two people interviewed, it is because I did not receive information from some.

Getting the interviews into an accessible form and deciding how to use them was a long and subjective process. Taped interviews needed to be transcribed. Because this study focuses on historical recollection rather than linguistic analysis, the transcription process did not emphasize dialects such as distinguishing among a Boston accent, a Louisiana accent, and less marked speech. Nonetheless, transcribing recorded speech into written form necessarily introduces subjective decisions. The original transcripts tend to include every word narrators said without altering their speech by correcting grammar or pronunciation. As the transcript was quoted, filler words and phrases, including "you know," "like," "um," and "ah," have been excised. These verbal patterns are common to most Americans but are frequently interpreted as inarticulate in print. I retain verbal emphases in italics to reflect the force of conviction in many narrators' speech and clarify aspects I use for analyzing their memories. My interjections of polite support or
assertions of comprehension are also absent because, in print, they break up the flow of the narrators’ thought. If the quotation edits out content, ellipses indicate where material has been left out whereas “[pause]” marks stops in narrators’ speech. Occasionally narrators made an oblique reference to something they said more fully previously or the tape recorder did not pick up words clearly. Interviews also include audibly rich laughter and sounds accompanied by shrugs, which do not verbalize well. On such occasions, quotations include the implied meaning in bracketed parentheses. For example, Carol Albright distinguishes her indifference in the moment from later appreciation that Califia participants tried to prepare each other for emotional let-downs as they left the camps and reentered society: “[I]t was really important. And at the time I was like, ‘Nyeah’ [i.e., so what?]”.

After looking through each transcript for topics for analysis and how the narrator’s point of view affected her presentation of memories, quotations that seemed the most telling were used while corroborating evidence got relegated to footnotes. I use extended quotations as well as pithy quoted phrases. I strive with this combination to allow narrators’ voices to be heard, to reveal common patterns in the construction of memories by other narrators, to replicate terms indicative of that movement, and to leave space for analysis. The interviews resulted in verbal on-the-spot replies rather than written memoirs and, as such, do not contain the kind of forethought and revision common to written documents. Patterns emerged in what narrators remember. Where

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51 Carol Albright transcript 5.
52 Extended quotations follow Kennedy and Davis, who used that format to “convey the courage, dignity, and pain of individuals’ lives, as well as the perspectives, concepts, language, and texture of lesbian community and culture, all of which have been rendered invisible in the historical record” (25).
narrators were at odds over issues they had publicly debated, they generated a wealth of interpretations on the reasons for their positions. Written documents provide ways that attendees viewed the camps and help to verify dates and places of big events, which, in turn, help to place narrators at specific camps when they could not remember exact dates.

The most dramatic intervention that authors have is how they organize oral history and archival sources. Given that Califia Community integrated crucial feminist developments, chapter two situates Califia Community by analyzing the national and regional feminist and lesbian feminist context to demonstrate recurring contestation over identity-based differences, which have frequently been purged from collective memory. These struggles influenced who Califia Community’s participants were, issues they addressed, and methods of education they used. Chapters three, four, and five cover the lifespan of Califia Community. Formative changes in 1978 and 1982 greatly altered their ability to unify women in a sense of “sisterhood” or as an “army of lovers,” and so those dates created logical chapter divisions. All Califia Community founding collective members were white, and most were lesbian or teetering on the brink of coming out. Chapter three assesses the impact of this original constellation, their use of a lesbian feminist analysis, and their development of feminist teaching methods for repairing splits among feminists and the effects of those methods. Chapter four explores the changes wrought by sustained efforts to attain leadership parity between white women and women of color and to move from CR to organizing in the larger Los Angeles area. Chapter five considers the human casualties of the rise of the Right and local feminists’ determination to maintain and extend the kinds of spaces, education, and understandings of themselves
that Califia Community provided. Chapter six concludes by considering how the polarizing effects of the New Right led gay and lesbian rights participants in the 1980s to attack lesbian feminism as supporting conservatism and by disrupting some of the assumptions, which limited lesbian feminist gains. Finally, the appendices provide the interview questions along with three documents influential to Califia camps.

This study of Califia Community illustrates how developing inclusive feminism was a continuous process of contestation during which feminists formed spaces, networks, and concrete programs for addressing aspects of society they critiqued. As a countercultural space, Califia also was subject to the devastation that people’s conservative social politics and adherence to divisive norms wrought in the lives of Americans who were initiating change. The findings give us a framework for understanding both the past and contemporary cultural politics.
2. DIVIDED WE FALL:

IMPEDIMENTS TO HOLISTIC FEMINISM, 1969–1980s

Not only did feminists have to struggle against the status quo, inclusive feminism required continual engagement among feminists. One of Califia Community’s most striking features, its commitment to have feminism fight multiple oppressions, informs ongoing social justice concerns. Where did these ideals come from? Turning to relations among feminists, why did lesbians so predominate at Califia when its founders defined it as a space open to all women? The answers lie in locating the founding of Califia in the issues and conflicts that the national Women’s Movement faced from without and within, salient feminist events that preceded Califia in Los Angeles, and influential feminist education attempts from which founding members learned.

General wisdom about the Second Wave feminist movement holds that a conflict between lesbians and heterosexual women in NOW began in 1969 but was resolved by a 1971 resolution.¹ Such an abridged account of the lesbian-straight split, like the

¹ Predominantly, scholars divide the lesbian-straight split from lesbian feminism and isolate both from the rest of their descriptions of feminism, arguing or implying that sexual orientation ceased to be an important source of tension among feminists. Hole and Levine on NOW-NY (93-94) and on the impact of lesbian-baiting (232, 239-242). Freeman on NOW (99-100) and on lesbian feminism (135-142). Wandersee on NOW’s 1971 resolution (44-45) and a separate chapter on woman-identified women (64-69). “Within a few years NOW had strengthened its positions on issues like abortion and lesbianism,” according to Evans, Personal Politics, 215; Evans on lesbian struggles in the movement (228-229). Evans’ Tidal Wave perpetuates the idea that after three years of conflict, the 1971 NOW resolution meant that “[a]t least within NOW, the issue ceased to be a source of extreme division from that point on” (51). Echols connects the perceived threat of a “lavender menace” with the 1971 resolution (212-220) but concentrates on lesbianism within discussions of New York Radical Feminists (64, 82), the Furies (228-240), and homophobia in Redstockings (155-156). Berkeley shortens the NOW debate to 1970-1971, mentions that a range of opinions about lesbianism existed in the face of New Right attacks in the mid-1970s, and characterizes lesbian feminist positions in the sex wars (50-54). Davis’ chronologically disjointed structure forces her to recapitulate the context for the 1960s twice to frame the founding of NOW and then northeastern radical feminism. Davis chooses to isolate lesbians for the most part within a chapter, which separates them from
assumption that feminism was white, middle class, heterosexual, and led by women on
the East Coast, defines minorities and westerners out of feminist influence. This needs
revision because it inadequately describes the impact of lesbian struggles within NOW,
which continued through Califia’s existence, and the work of California feminists toward
resolution. Some of the early participants in Califia were part of the struggle in NOW and
retained their memberships while participating in local feminist groups. Local groups
endured splits like NOW did but developed different tactics for fighting oppressions and
forming community. Commitments to repair divisions, fight oppressions, and form
community were central to the Califia mission.

NOW was a logical and influential port of entry for feminists because it had the
highest national visibility and membership across the nation and pursued legal reforms.
As the 1970s wore on, however, local feminist groups proliferated. The contours of the
Los Angeles Women’s Movement illustrate how unity and difference were vital issues.
Bold visions for social change and a belief that revolution would occur drew activists
together. Their unity was threatened by the realization that they held onto privileges that
came with living in an unequal society. With the formation of identity-based movements
nationally, this was a period of conflict around race, class, gender, and sexuality with
tensions over age and family status. How could women cast off their relationships to the
forces that they felt shackled them—men and heteropatriarchal institutions, including

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her main narrative of changes in politics, education, and women’s health, so there is no discussion of
lesbian issues and lesbian-straight interactions in her following portrayals of family issues and violence
against women (259-268). Whittier considers divisions briefly through the 1980s (107-108, 146, 249).
Rosen portrays the NOW struggle as part of a development from 1970 through 1975 of feminist theory and
practice against compulsory heterosexuality (164-175). She conveys some of the extended development of
lesbian-straight tensions among feminists and jumps into the early 1980s (193, 253, 259).
class structure and racial hierarchy—while surviving in an unreformed world? Califia developed what I call a concept of “holistic feminism,” which attempted transformation on personal, cultural, and political levels while continuing to struggle with race relations. Its collective members aimed to unite women across differences and to support each woman to develop strength and autonomy, so she could participate in local activism.

LESBIANISM IN NOW’S FEMINISM

The hostility toward lesbianism within the Women’s Movement has been considered a brief flurry and is usually addressed separately from other minority feminists’ struggles. It is, however, integral to questions of conflict that feminists had with each other and with traditional society. The truncated story of a lesbian-straight split runs from Rita Mae Brown’s coming out within the New York chapter of NOW (NOW-NY) in 1969 to the national NOW resolution of 1971, which promised to lay the issue to rest. Evidence shows, conversely, that feminist lesbians struggled with prejudice continuously into the 1980s and beyond the scope of this study. Lesbians already working hard in NOW wanted lesbianism included as a feminist issue. They considered prejudice against themselves to be comparable to racial and class biases and claimed solidarity with disenfranchised minorities. Lesbian feminists constructed lesbianism as the epitome of feminism, a definition that had nationwide influence on feminists and their opponents. Enduring tensions within feminism over lesbianism along with racial tensions and tactical disagreements over consolidation of power or grassroots influence interfered with the movement’s ability to attract members and achieve goals. Faced with the rise of

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2 See footnote 42 of chapter 1 for an explanation of holistic feminism compared to difference-sensitive feminism or multicultural feminism.
conservatism during the national NOW elections in 1979, NOW members reassessed their prospects. Could they effectively fight for many issues at once, or should they concentrate on getting the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) ratified? NOW made the fateful decisions to focus on the ERA and to elect a board that did not include any racial minorities or lesbians. Some disaffected feminists nationwide shifted their energies to other groups, including local work for women's liberation.

THE LESBIAN-STRAIGHT SPLIT, 1969–1971

By all accounts, leading Second Wave feminists in New York City were anxious about the vocal pride that gay liberation encouraged. Their fears may have been exacerbated by New York City and Washington, DC, being national power centers with limited gains in homosexual rights. Homophile movement work for gay and lesbian civil rights was concentrated on both coasts in the 1950s and 1960s. While California homosexuals had gained some legal rights by 1965, such liberties were still denied to New York City homosexuals in 1969, when angry queers rioted against a police raid on the Stonewall Inn. The Stonewall riot initiated the more radical Gay Liberation Front (GLF) in New York City. Chapters of GLF formed in major cities throughout the country, including Los Angeles in 1969. Liberationists encouraged people to “come out”

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4 Nan Boyd demonstrates that by 1965 increasing resistance to oppression in the form of legal challenges to police harassment and laws against serving alcohol to homosexuals, homosexual bids to influence politics, and homophile groups’ alliances with ministers had gained Bay Area queers the kinds of freedoms that Stonewall protesters sought. The police raid on the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village was standard fare. What was unusual was that when plainclothes officers targeted Stonewall on June 27, 1969, patrons fought back, rioting spread over three days, and some participants became gay activists. For a full account, see Duberman, *Stonewall*. 
publicly by stating their sexual orientation. When members of NOW-NY identified themselves as lesbians, NOW founder Betty Friedan feared that bad publicity could affect feminist gains legally and popularly. She warned in 1969 that lesbian issues were a "lavender herring" and lesbianism was a "lavender menace" that would discredit the Women’s Movement.

In essence, NOW was more or less responsive to issues of diversity in proportion to the attention those issues received in national politics and mainstream consciousness. The Civil Rights Movement, the War on Poverty, and a youth movement for a voice in politics blossomed by the 1960s. As women of color, poorer women, and young women joined recognized feminist groups like NOW, these members’ grievances gained rhetorical legitimacy within NOW regardless of whether NOW’s leadership truly integrated minorities’ views. In contrast, national approval for lesbian and gay rights was minimal, and NOW lesbians’ concerns did not receive comparable encouragement. Most Americans still perceived homosexuals as sinful, mentally ill, criminal, or subversive.

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5 Freeman 135.
6 Friedan later realized that many long-time feminists supporting the movement were lesbians. Evans, Tidal Wave, 248 note 94. Echols 212, 345 note 44. Rosen 83. Berkeley 123.
7 Constructions of homosexuality as mental illness, gender deviance, a propensity toward criminality, and subversiveness gained popular support in the 1940s and 1950s. World War II military exemption of homosexuals as mentally ill developed a federal apparatus for attempting to recognize and treat homosexuals. Recognition centered on gender stereotypes that gay men were effeminate while lesbians were masculine. Research from the 1930s and 1940s promoted “cures” that were used throughout the 1950s and 1960s, such as aversion therapy, electroshock, and lobotomy. When Senator Joseph McCarthy charged before the Senate that “205 red subversives” held State Department positions in 1950, he repeatedly claimed that known homosexuals who were security risks retained such jobs. His allegations paired homosexuals with Communists as threats to national security and were echoed by the Republican national chairman and a young southern California Republican named Richard Nixon. In response, the Senate and President Dwight Eisenhower banned federal employment of homosexuals, supporting the belief, despite no actual cases, that because U.S. law criminalized homosexual sex, homosexuals would be subject to blackmail and were security risks. Cold War media portrayed gay men and lesbians as predatory threats to children, impressionable adults, families, and the nation. See Alan Berube, Coming Out under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two (New York: The Free Press, 1990). Charles Kaiser, The History of Gay Men and Women in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
The spread of radical feminist discussion groups to NOW facilitated coming out and publicly addressing homophobia. Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love reported that in the late 1960s NOW did have lesbian members and even promoted them to top offices if they passed as heterosexual and kept lesbianism out of discussion. NOW leaders were initially hostile to the consciousness-raising (CR) tactics developed in 1968 by New York Radical Women because leaders worried that CR substituted talking about personal experience for action and would devolve into a “rap group” support and discussion format. Under pressure from younger members, however, NOW leaders did establish CR groups. In 1969, Rita Mae Brown expressed her frustration at a NOW-NY session that their discussions focused on relationships with men and never discussed lesbianism. Her critique exposed the importance of diverse experience for CR to produce inclusive analysis. Shortly afterward, a small number of out lesbians in NOW-NY pressed for a

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9 New York Radical Women (Anne Forer, Kathie Sarachild, Carol Hanisch, Elizabeth Sutherland Martínez, and Rosalyn Baxandall) drew on New Left “speaking bitterness” from the Chinese Revolution to propose raising women’s consciousness by meeting in small discussion groups to share thoughts, experiences, and views about male oppression. Evans, *Tidal Wave*, 30. CR group members rapped (talked) about lessons they learned from parents, religion, and other facets of society on their “proper” roles and other limiting mindsets. By understanding that personal problems originated in society and politics, women were encouraged to act collectively. Davis 87-88. Freeman has a section on the form and function of rap groups in which she notes the effectiveness of rap groups for decreasing the effects of psychological oppression, putting it into a feminist perspective, developing higher self-esteem and group solidarity, and serving as a necessary precursor to action (116-119). In November 1968, Kathie Sarachild validated women’s emotional reactions about oppression and outlined how CR could move women from “bitch session[s]” to expositions of resistance against consciousness to development of radical feminist theory to actions. Sarachild first printed her outline for the First National Women’s Liberation Conference and then in Redstockings, ed., *Feminist Revolution* (1975, 1978). See it reprinted as “A Program for Consciousness-Raising” in Barbara A. Crow, ed., *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader* (New York; London: New York University Press, 2000), 273-276.
statement on lesbian rights, and Friedan responded with her fear that opponents would
equate feminism with lesbianism to divide women and collapse tenuous support for
women’s rights.10

Fear of association may have led NOW leaders to slight lesbian leaders who were
also in NOW and to try to quell calls for recognition of lesbianism as an oppressed status
on a par with racial minorities and working-class women. Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon
had founded Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) with a multiracial group of six other San
Francisco lesbians in 1955. They joined NOW in 1967 and were influential in subsequent
debates. The 1969 California NOW Congress to Unite Women invited representatives
from DOB to attend but not to speak, while the Congress to Unite Women held in New
York accepted DOB as its first contributor but left the group’s name off the only press
release sent out after the congress. Brown was furious with a series of erasures of
lesbianism. When she threatened to raise the issue publicly, she got fired from the
editorship of NOW’s newsletter. She resigned her other NOW positions via a protest
letter in her last issue of the NOW-NY newsletter in January 1970, which accused “NOW
members of being middle-class club women not ready to think about issues of race,
sexual preference, or their own class privileges.” This was the first official linking of
lesbianism with racial and class biases, which would become a continuing trope as

10 Davis 262-263. Friedan’s fears were not groundless. Ti-Grace Atkinson spoke to an all-female audience
in 1970 about lesbian-baiting within the feminist movement. She recalled, “[M]en have been countering all
accusations of injustice toward women with the charge that these accusations were being made by ‘just a
bunch of lesbians.’” Ti-Grace Atkinson, Amazon Odyssey: The First Collection of Writings by the Political
could ruin individual careers and crush activist groups. Although feminists were reconceptualizing
previously private issues as political, many of them considered homosexual liberation to be a misguided
concentration on private sexuality rather than political issues.
lesbians vied for visibility. Brown then called a meeting attended by GLF and feminist movement women to discuss "sexism" within the Women's Movement. Meanwhile NOW-NY's president, Ivy Bottini, tried and failed to amend NOW's Bill of Rights to guarantee "sexual privacy." She was purged from office, relocated to Los Angeles, and would become a fixture in the lesbian feminist community and later the AIDS movement there. At the same board meeting, NOW's first national executive director, Dolores Alexander, was falsely accused of being a lesbian and fired. Later that year pressure mounted from the West Coast as NOW member and DOB founder Del Martin wrote to Friedan asking NOW to take a stand on lesbianism. She never received a reply. Official silence would not suffice.

To gain legitimacy and visibility, feminist lesbians drew on gay liberation pride and radical feminist tactics to revolutionize the meaning of lesbianism, challenge societal contempt, and make lesbianism accord with feminist ideals. Heterosexual feminists mirrored societal disparagement and discrimination. Sexologists since the nineteenth century had portrayed lesbians as "mannish women" or masculine "inverts." Feminists tended to concur by characterizing butch lesbians as imitation men. They opposed femme appearance as holding onto oppressive traditional roles. The rebuttal that Brown and nineteen other women delivered at the second Congress to Unite Women in New York on Friday, May 1, 1970, would drastically shift the definition and scope of lesbianism and have lasting significance for concepts of gender and sexuality. Wearing T-shirts stenciled "Lesbian Menace," they took the stage during a momentary blackout and read their

12 Abbott and Love 112. Davis 263.
position paper, “The Woman-Identified Woman.” They identified lesbianism as the choice of the highest political solidarity with women. Given radical feminism’s view that gender was the basis of oppression, lesbians would then be the vanguard feminists.

With “The Woman-Identified Woman,” these lesbians took the offensive. They characterized women in heterosexual couples as identifying with male power, ego, status, protection, and acceptance. Feminists considered women’s male-identification to be a form of false consciousness in which women internalized an enslaved role, self-hatred, and alienation from themselves and other women as they identified instead with the oppressor. In contrast, lesbian relationships exemplified personhood outside male role distinctions by valuing the primacy of women’s commitment to women for liberation and authenticity. The self-identified Lesbian Menaces implied that any woman-identified woman could achieve personhood. Because widespread woman-identification would cut off crucial resources from patriarchal institutions, lesbian “is a label invented by the man to throw at any woman who dares to be his equal, who dares to challenge his prerogatives (including that of all women as part of the exchange medium among men), who dares to assert the primacy of her own needs.” They concluded, “As long as the label ‘dyke’ can be used to frighten women into a less militant stand, keep her separate

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14 Radicalesbians 173. The persistence of woman-identification as a feminist goal is exemplified by Joanna Russ in What Are We Fighting For? Sex, Race, Class, and the Future of Feminism (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998). Russ reassesses the trivialization of women’s unpaid and underpaid labor and how it benefits male-dominated societies. She concludes that men in industrialized countries would have to cut their incomes by forty percent and add at least two hours to their workdays to make women and men in those countries equally rich and equally poor (176). For the entire world, based on United Nations calculations, men’s wages would need to be cut by two-fifths and their workload increased by one-third (184). “To put it bluntly, in the world as it’s run right now, they can’t afford us” (178, italics in original).
from her sisters, keep her from giving primacy to anything other than men and family—then to that extent she is controlled by the male culture.”¹⁵ The Lesbian Menaces asked for support from the other conference attendees. Professor Kate Millet came out there, and spontaneous workshops on lesbianism were packed the next day. Simultaneously, California’s second Congress to Unite Women officially included three lesbian groups, which held a panel on lesbianism, suggesting less hostility toward lesbianism among West Coast feminists.¹⁶ Nationally, feminists had to address lesbianism as a feminist issue.

Feminists lined up in support of and in opposition to lesbian issues and lesbian participation in the Women’s Movement. After questions as to whether feminists and lesbians could work together, NOW-NY member Caroline Bird validated lesbianism as a legitimate choice, Millet gave a personal testimony to DOB, and the NOW president scheduled a panel on November 24, 1970, whose members all supported lesbianism as a feminist issue. Time and Harper’s magazines fanned the flames with pieces against feminism and the gay movement, which publicized that Millet had announced her bisexuality. The authors hoped that would discredit the Women’s Movement.¹⁷ Yet, momentum within the Women’s Movement for the legitimacy of lesbianism grew, with Ti-Grace Atkinson, Susan Brownmiller, Gloria Steinem, Florynce Kennedy, Congresswoman Bella Abzug, and others supporting a protest organized against Time.

¹⁵ Radicalesbians 174.
¹⁶ Abbott and Love 114, 116.
¹⁷ Ti-Grace Atkinson distinguished between feminism and lesbianism to show that they were separate and potentially incompatible entities—“Feminism is a theory; but Lesbianism is a practice”—while Susan Brownmiller refused to speak because she claimed that lesbians made passes at her, were oversexed, and were oppressively masculine. Abbott and Love 117-118, 120-122.
Nevertheless, NOW’s official stand on lesbianism was unsupportive. Friedan reiterated her denunciation. NOW national president Aileen Hernandez hedged that NOW had no formal statement. Successive national and New York meetings reached no conclusion. Worse, NOW’s elections in January 1971 were rent by a lesbian litmus test that purged both lesbians and their supporters from office.¹⁸

The Los Angeles group Lesbian Feminists, Arlie Scott in NOW-LA, and DOB-LA members deserve credit for preparing a pro-lesbian resolution.¹⁹ The West Coast regional membership of NOW passed their resolution in the spring of 1971 and voted to present it at a workshop called “Lesbianism, Human Sexuality, and Feminism” at the national conference that would be held in Los Angeles that September. At the September NOW conference, Atlanta’s NOW representatives and other chapters also brought pro-lesbian proposals, and despite the fact that this was the first time NOW members

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¹⁸ Davis 268. Some NOW-NY leaders were at such pains to try to hush up this issue that one entered a narrowly defeated motion, the essence of which would “link Lesbianism insidiously with other negatively charged words like ‘communism,’ ‘infiltration,’ and ‘diversion,’ and ... propose[d] that anyone who spoke on the Lesbian issue could not identify herself as a member of N.O.W.” “One member present that night said it was like the old cries of ‘Commie-Pinko-Queer.’” Abbott and Love 123, 125-126.

¹⁹ Yolanda Retter Vargas remembers lesbian feminists’ leadership in “On the Side of Angels: Lesbian Activism in Los Angeles, 1970-1990,” Ph.D. diss., American Studies (University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, 1999), 95. Jeanne Córdova further substantiated that memory in her article “Radical Feminism? Dyke Separatism?” The Lesbian Tide 2.10/11 (May/June 1973): 20-21, 25, 27. She argued that lesbians rarely worked on feminist issues as lesbians. An exception was “the 1971 Los Angeles coalition efforts of the Daughters of Bilitis, the Lesbian Feminists, and the National Organization of [sic] Women to work toward the adoption of a Lesbian Resolution by N.O.W.’s National Convention” (20). Arlie Scott of NOW-LA wrote the position paper that was submitted by the workshop and adopted at the conference. Betty Jetter personal files. The files relating to NOW’s San Fernando Valley chapter, California state level, and national events between 1972 and 1978 were forwarded to the Bancroft Library at the University of California at Berkeley in July 2004. Among those presenting this first lesbian resolution was Eve Norman of NOW-LA. She would rise to national NOW prominence as national treasurer for NOW, state and federal political action committee treasurer, and chair of the Budget and Finance Committee. “Brief Background for Eve Norman” from the Committee to Reelect Eve in Lori Mennella’s personal papers. The three-page resolution adopted by NOW-LA and adopted by the national convention details the oppression that lesbians face and ends, “THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: That NOW recognizes the double oppression [of] women who are lesbians, and Be it further resolved: That a woman’s right to her own person includes the right to define and express her own sexuality and to choose her own lifestyle, and Be it further resolved: That NOW acknowledge the oppression of lesbians as a legitimate concern of feminism.”
formally discussed the issue, they approved the NOW-LA position paper and resolution.

Participants hoped they were writing the closing chapter on their history of lesbian-straight tensions:

[L]esbians discovered that NOW and other liberation groups reflected some of the same prejudices and policies of the sexist society they were striving to change.

Lesbians were never excluded from NOW, but we have been evasive or apologetic about their presence within the organization. Afraid of alienating public support, we have often treated lesbians as the step-sisters of the movement, allowed to work with us, but then expected to hide in the upstairs closet when company comes. Lesbians are now telling us that this attitude is no longer acceptable. Asking women to disguise their identities so they will not "embarrass" the group is an intolerable form of oppression, like asking black women to join us in white face. Furthermore, this discrimination is inconsistent with NOW’s stated goal to “recognize our sisterhood” and to help women “overcome self-denigration.” If this pledge is to be anything more than rhetoric, NOW must reassess the priorities that sacrifice principles to “image.”

There was near-unanimous support for the resolution. It assumed responsibility for NOW’s discrimination without acknowledging purging. It continued the association between homophobia and racism. Reiterating the “Woman-Identified Woman” argument that opponents sought to lesbian-bait feminists to discredit the movement, the resolution supported lesbianism “legally and morally” while stating that such a position did not mean that NOW would change its emphasis by concentrating on specific lesbian issues.

CONTINUED TENSIONS AND GROWTH

Far from the last word, however, the analogy between being lesbian and being a racial minority in NOW would resurface throughout the next decade as NOW minorities raised the dual charges of homophobia and racism. In 1972, a New Jersey statewide

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20 "‘NOW Position Paper and Resolution on Lesbianism’ (Adopted at the NOW national conference, Los Angeles, California, 1971)” from Betty Jetter’s personal files.
Woman Power Conference limited lesbian-themed workshops to two. Both were overcrowded. The conference publicity coordinator banned the press from both. In Los Angeles, *The Lesbian Tide* ran an article claiming that at the Woman Power Conference, NOW’s eastern regional director, Jacqueline Ceballos, had initiated plans for “an exclusive statewide NOW structure in N.J.,” which reportedly would exclude lesbians and racial minority women (presumably, in part, by pulling out of coalition work). Lesbian and minority women who felt they were getting nowhere arguing against exclusiveness tried to form a Mid-East Jersey chapter of NOW. They were denied a charter because the chapter was dedicated to minority women, and geographic areas were the only permissible way of determining NOW chapter membership. The Mid-East Jersey founders protested that dedication to issues was not synonymous with restricting membership, but they did not gain a charter. A follow-up article accused the statewide NOW leaders of handpicking a statewide coordinator in violation of Robert’s Rules of Order and national NOW bylaws. Interpreting this series of events as “undermining lesbian participation and/or leadership in NOW and in the feminist movement in general,” the New Jersey DOB withdrew from “the feminist movement in New Jersey.”

Toni Carabillo, the national NOW vice president for public relations, lived in Los Angeles. She denied accusations of any plan to undermine lesbian participation as

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21 *The Lesbian Tide: a Feminist Lesbian Publication, Written By and For the Rising Tide of Women* today had begun as DOB-LA’s newsletter in 1971 but became independently run by the Tide Collective in January 1972 (its constant editor was former DOB member Jeanne Córdova). See Retter 91-92 along with issues of *The Lesbian Tide* 1971-1980. The accent in Córdova’s name was a later addition and reflects lesbians and other women who had been raised white getting in touch with their ethnic heritages.


paranoia and excused NOW’s lack of implementation of the 1971 resolution by noting that NOW had not “moved on a number of other issues either. ... It has been officially passed that there will be a ‘Task Force on Sexuality and Lesbianism’ at our February Annual Convention. No division between lesbians and NOW exists.” Official attempts at reassurance contrasted with minority members’ perceptions that exclusion of lesbians, racial minorities, and (as Brown charged) working-class women were based on heterosexual, white, middle-class women seeking to succeed by conforming to the mainstream values that discriminated against women whose identities diverged from those ideals.

Still, NOW was a recognizable center for feminist activity, and it continued to draw women and to retain lesbians like Carabillo. Reactions to lesbianism varied by place, and the presence of lesbians in power within California NOW chapters indicates that California’s position on inclusion went beyond the resolution of 1971. Betty Jetter, who would attend Califia Community, joined the newly founded San Fernando Valley chapter of NOW in October 1972 after reading an article about Aileen Hernandez. Betty thought, “These women think exactly like I do.” Her husband supported her because the active NOW leadership role assumed by a friend’s wife had taken pressure off the friend’s marriage. Betty, however, had been kicked out of the Navy for being a lesbian.

She had told her husband before they married and had children. She was surprised to find

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25 Underlined names in this chapter signal women who would become involved with Califia Community either as founders, collective members, or attendees. Betty Jetter follow-up 1.
herself joining her first committee based on whom she found attractive. As her political involvement increased, Betty joined a CR group and was supported by the other women present when she revealed her discharge from the Navy. While she acknowledged that many NOW leaders wanted lesbians to be in the closet, she found a supportive environment in which to come out again and later to divorce.

RECRUITING WOMAN-IDENTIFIED WOMEN

Amid continued tensions, lesbian feminist theorists reassessed and extended the views laid out in "Woman-Identified Woman." They did so by building on critiques of heterosexuality put out between 1968 and 1972. Such political theorists promoted feminist transgression of traditional gender and gendered values. The process of extending woman-identification theory aimed to reform heterosexual women into lesbians or at least admirers, but, when that failed, it inadvertently furthered the split.

Lesbian feminists within the Gay Revolution Party’s Women’s Caucus, for example, opposed the implication that woman-identification alone could level differences between lesbians and heterosexual feminists. First the authors denounced feminists who continued to live with men as wasting their energy trying to “rehabilitate” men; the authors claimed that the straight women only succeeded in continuing to do the housework and teaching their men how to be more subtle in their sexism. In their

distinction between “realesbians” and “politicalesbians” the authors also chastised those whose separatism from men had led them to withhold sex from men, masturbate, and identify as politicalesbians but who would “not take the next step in relating to themselves—to lesbianism” due to guilt. On the other hand, these realesbians considered politicalesbians who sought out realesbians for a sexual experience “the most oppressive of all women’s movement routines to the gay feminist, who is personally diminished (to the state of ‘manhood’) and sexually objectified. In this process, the lesbian is required to function in a service role, that of the ‘butch.’” While ignorance and neglect of lesbianism was homophobic, a sexual interest that used the lesbian like a surrogate man instead of participating in what these authors considered to be a higher form of social-sexual-political woman-identification was an even more unacceptable way of integrating lesbians into feminism because it structured relations between women using a heterosexual, male-identified model.

So what was a straight feminist to do? According to the authors, “the real solution to this difficulty can come only through recognition of the sexual passivity of straight-identified women and their lack of political-emotional-sensual integration. They are still too straight and must become gay by confronting their passivity and bringing each other out.” If this sounded like recruitment, it was, but with the twist that formerly straight women were being told to recruit each other for a higher political good that would counter centuries of pressure to maintain male-female relationships. Unsurprisingly,
denial of heterosexual women’s affection for male partners and imputation of oppressive motives were hard for straight feminists to accept.\textsuperscript{27}

In contrast to this hard line, Ti-Grace Atkinson and Jill Johnston in 1973 coaxed heterosexual feminists and lesbians to see lesbianism as politically integral to feminism without coercing women into specific sexual practices. Atkinson also condemned as collaborators women who excused continued marriage to men as their right to private lives. She praised women who did not have sex with other women but were totally committed to the movement as lesbians in the political sense.\textsuperscript{28} Johnson advised lesbians not to take a superior attitude that condemned straight women for sleeping with men when so many lesbians had done so. While opposing the demeaning of lesbians, Johnson was

convinced we can’t very well demand what anybody isn’t ready to give who may in fact be ready to change tomorrow or next year who may know a lot more in advance of her current opportunities or her present practical situation or emotional readiness or who may be putting her life in order to make big changes.

Instead, she reminded lesbians “that in amerika we are a fugitive band who can’t afford to isolate ourselves from the woman in the middle who in any case remains a potential total ally.” In contrast to her 1970 \textit{Lesbian Nation}, Johnson here cast the widest net by

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\item[\textsuperscript{27}] Gay Revolution Party Women’s Caucus, “Realesbians and Politicalesbians,” in Jay and Young 177-181, first published as “Realesbians, Politicalesbians and the Women’s Liberation Movement,” \textit{Ecstasy} (June 1971). In a quasi-pro-butch move, after labeling the “realesbian’s” position “butch,” the authors distinguish butches from men, arguing, “Sexual initiative on the part of a woman does not result in direct physical gratification, as it does in a man. The equation, therefore, of ‘butch’ and male is false.” There is no comparable elaboration of how femme gender and sexual identity differed from heterosexual womanhood.\textsuperscript{28}Ti-Grace Atkinson, “Lesbianism and Feminism,” in Phyllis Birkby et al., eds., \textit{Amazon Expedition: A Lesbianfeminist Anthology} (Albion, CA: Times Change Press, 1973), 12.
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focusing on the changeability of sexual preference, respect for personal decision-making, and the hope for potential alliances. ²⁹

Lesbian superiority, however, was a continuing theme in theory based in earlier radical feminism. At mid-decade Nancy Myron and Charlotte Bunch’s *Lesbianism in the Women’s Movement* republished articles first written in 1972 by their DC-based feminist group, the Furies. They sought to educate lesbians who were ignorant of lesbian feminist politics and to unite pre- and post-Stonewall lesbians. Quickly moving from defensive to offensive, these articles rejected accusations against lesbian feminists and positioned them, instead, as the vanguard for the crucial destruction of heterosexuality and male supremacy. Addressing charges that lesbianism equated with oppressive sex role-playing, chauvinism, and divisiveness, Myron and Bunch praised butches for refusing to role-play female passivity, which they accused heterosexual women (and, by extension, femmes) of doing. It was necessary to analyze how integral to patriarchal domination heterosexuality, motherhood, and marriage were and then to destroy heterosexuality because of its crucial support of male supremacy. Indeed, Myron and Bunch concluded that it “is women’s ties to men, not lesbians’ ties to women, that divide women politically and personally.” ³⁰ Accompanying articles focused on sexism as the root of all oppressions, characterized lesbians as rebels against patriarchy because they stood outside of unredeemable heterosexuality, called on “old gays” to join lesbian feminists in a more revolutionary political stance, rejected the straight Women’s Movement, and

exhorted lesbians to divest themselves of divisive biases like racism, classism, and nationalism.\textsuperscript{31} These arguments were typical of lesbian feminism. They combined the belief that sexism was the basis of all forms of oppressions with a liberation program by which females should reject normative gender and sex roles. They also tried to address oppression based on other identity relationships.

\textit{Lesbianism and the Women’s Movement} is only one of many examples of published works that spread lesbian feminist political theory as part of the gay and lesbian liberation offensive against homophobia.\textsuperscript{32} Needless to say, the proliferation of

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\item[\textsuperscript{31}] It was possible—although unusual—to “recuperate” butch lesbians as women who broke with heteropatriarchal norms and showed potential for addressing all prejudices, but any gender or sexual behavior that could be categorized as feminine was thought to remain wedded to oppression. Ginny Berson, “The Furies,” in Myron and Bunch 18. In “Such a Nice Girl” Sharon Deevey made the claim that “\textit{every} fuck is a rape even if it feels nice because every man has power and privilege over women, whether he uses it blatantly or subtly. My ‘liberated’ husband kept me down not by violence but by making me feel guilty” (24). For an attack on the critique that lesbians were being elitist and arrogant and a call to reject working with straight feminists, see Barbara Solomon, “Taking the Bullshit by the Horns,” Myron and Bunch 39-47.
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tracts that condemned female heterosexuality and posited lesbianism as the only viable option led many straight feminists to feel denigrated and attacked. This theorizing also set a standard of perfection for lesbian feminists, and their straight sisters could revel in pointing out how far short lesbian feminists fell. When the first Califia Community camp kicked off—a year after the republishing of *Lesbianism in the Women's Movement*—the lesbian-majority collective thought they were serving all women, but most heterosexual women stayed away due to tensions that had developed over the previous seven years and a perception that Califia was “radical” compared to NOW.

DEMOGRATIZATION THROUGH DECENTRALIZATION AND LESBIAN INCLUSION

Although NOW is stereotyped as "reformist," NOW exhibited radical attempts at inclusive democracy in the midst of militant lesbian feminist theorizing. Officers took steps to validate lesbians and to educate about lesbianism. NOW formed the National Task Force on Sexuality and Lesbianism in 1973 to counter the persistent antifeminist conflation of feminism with lesbianism. This move was followed by a broader push with the reelection of Karen DeCrow as national NOW president and Ellie Smeal as board chairperson in 1974. Around them formed a seventeen thousand–member faction called the Majority Caucus whose goal was to democratize and decentralize NOW. The significance of both Majority Caucus actions and the trajectory of the National Task Force on Sexuality and Lesbianism was to open NOW to diversity of sexual orientation, race, and class, and, by extension, to keep issues of identity-based differences at the fore.

MAJORITY CAUCUS FUNDS GRASSROOTS POWER

The NOW campaign of 1974 portended a shift in priorities that alarmed some members. New York lawyer DeCrow ran the first contested NOW election with the slogan "out of the mainstream, into the revolution." The women's liberation–inspired slogan reflected her interest in NOW emphasizing rights for lesbians, racial minorities,

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33 DeCrow was from a white, "solid upper-middle-class" background. She joined NOW in 1967 and was a founder of NOW-Syracuse, president of that chapter 1967-1978, first eastern regional director 1969-1970, member of the national board beginning in 1968, and national politics task force coordinator 1971-1974. She made concrete gains, such as paid travel expenses, to make it possible for lower-income women to be board members and formed a board that was one-third minority women. Smeal hailed from the Pittsburgh-area NOW, in which she had leadership positions since 1970. "Candidates—Majority Caucus" (1975) from Betty Jetter’s personal files.
and working-class and union women. In contrast, her Chicago opponent, Mary Jen Collins-Robson, charged that “NOW is concentrating unduly on lesbians ... and that’s not where the mainstream is.” DeCrow’s win catalyzed dissent against the national board.

The Majority Caucus within NOW formed around DeCrow on December 7, 1974, against perceived internal injustice by the majority of the national board. Majority Caucus members proposed radical democratic methods for change, which collided with parliamentarian, centralized procedures. By agitating for an equal distribution of dues among the national, state, and chapter levels, they hoped to expand the grassroots levels of NOW to counteract the trends toward hierarchy. To effect this distribution, members of Majority Caucus around the country, including in California, withheld their national dues in escrow. The escrow led national NOW to threaten Majority Caucus members with lack of membership and, thus, ineligibility to vote as delegates at the next national conference. In response, Western Majority Caucus escrow committee member Del

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34 Hawkes 37-38.
35 Quoted in Evans, Tidal Wave, 110.
38 “California NOW” memo from Davlyn Jones, state coordinator (September 1975), recaps California NOW’s decision in January 1975 to hold national dues in trust to protest actions by the majority of the national board. Jones joined NOW in 1971 and ran as a Majority Caucus candidate in 1975. Letter from Bonnie Howard, national NOW treasurer to Betty Jetter, June 13, 1975. Howard explains, “Since to be a NOW member, one must be a paid-up member of National NOW, may I suggest you contact your Chapter/State and ask that they either transmit your dues to National or return your money so you can send the National dues directly to us.” In her reply of June 17, 1975, which Betty also sent to the national officers and board members, Betty corrected Howard, “I would like you to understand that they [the chapter/state] are not ‘withholding’ my dues, but instead are holding them in trust. These dues are officially National NOW dues and I indeed consider myself a paid up member of National NOW.” She went on to explain that the escrow persisted because national NOW continued not to be accountable to the general
Martin proposed and got unanimous support for a dramatic walk-out should the national conference fail to recognize the voting rights and candidacies of members whose dues had been in escrow.39

REVOLUTIONARY INCLUSION

In addition to the escrow, the Majority Caucus’s preparation for the next conference focused on revolutionary, inclusive methods. Members wanted to shift NOW’s tactics from legal work to street actions. These included proposals for

Unorthodox/mass action directed against anti-feminist fundamentalist religions, particularly where the ERA is not ratified.

... Increased emphasis on guerrilla, street, and mass actions since compliance emphasis is very time-consuming and often does not work in employment discrimination cases.

... Choice of issues and actions on the basis of feminist goals rather than on public appeal. Action to end discrimination against Lesbians and to end erosion of a woman’s right to choose whether she will have an abortion will not be subordinated to actions to accomplish other goals.40

Among their choice of issues, Majority Caucus members put affirmative action on lesbianism at the top of their list. They worked to attract working-class and poor women by demanding pay for officers’ work, sliding scales for members, and childcare reimbursement to expand the classes of women who could afford to be involved in membership. Betty was a past president of NOW-San Fernando Valley (1973-1974), on the issues committee, and then treasurer for the Western Majority Caucus. Betty Jetter’s personal files.

40 [Aileen Hernandez, Charlene Suneson, Eve Norman,] “Issues and Actions” (n.d., four-page typed photocopy). Hernandez was in San Francisco, while Suneson (member since 1967) and Norman were in Los Angeles. Lesbian feminists and their allies often capitalized “lesbian” and “lesbian feminist” during the 1970s and 1980s. Groups seeking inclusion and liberation from oppression highlighted their category in contrast to dominant groups (e.g., Black compared to white). Such distinctions remain in quotations for this text, but I follow current editing conventions in not capitalizing group identities. Betty Jetter’s personal files.
NOW. Although it did not achieve all of its goals, the Majority Caucus worked with DeCrow to broaden membership, tactics, and the issues that NOW addressed. Among the achievements at the 1975 national conference was approval to deem lesbian rights one of NOW's national priorities. At the Philadelphia conference the following year, Betty Jetter remembers workshops on lesbianism. She felt a lot of consternation, however, with some aspects of inclusiveness. The workshops had socialist men and women present, and Betty saw the men instructing the women on how to introduce a socialist agenda. Not only were there fights over whether male NOW members should go to workshops on lesbianism, but Betty considered men directing women a violation of the feminist organization.

PROLIFERATING RESPONSIVENESS TO LESBIANISM

Despite the volatility of the conference, it set the stage for prioritization of lesbian issues at the national, state, and local levels. The NOW National Task Force on Sexuality and Lesbianism disseminated “De-Mystifying ‘The Lavender Menace’: A N.O.W. Primer on Lesbian-Baiting” in 1977. It summarized 1969–1971 without naming names and concluded that “we have not overcome all the old hassles” because of fear of alienating heterosexual support. The pamphlet cited evidence of homophobia within NOW, including grievances coming from both the national and local levels. A storm of protest had followed DeCrow’s brief apology to lesbians and gay men (amid apologies to racial minorities, housewives, etc.). Members’ backlash was based on fear of siphoning energy from other vital issues, such as the ERA, and the justification that because lesbians were a minority, “their issues” should be set aside for the majority’s.

42 Betty Jetter follow-up 2.
Importantly, this pamphlet connected backlash within feminism to homophobic diatribes in Phyllis Schlafly’s Stop ERA campaign and Anita Bryant’s Save Our Children campaign in Dade County, Florida. Paraphrasing “Woman-Identified Woman,” the pamphlet’s authors argued that feminists must resist internal division precisely because lesbian-baiting was designed to increase divisions among feminists and to “enforce patriarchal mandates.” Instead, they must see lesbianism and (compulsory) heterosexuality’s political dimensions by understanding heterosexual privilege and by fighting heterosexism, which ranged from disparaging jokes to erasing lesbian presence. Official pamphlets like this one sought to raise consciousness about the connections between homophobia and antifeminism and the effects of both on all women.

In addition to the national task force, individual feminists in state and local NOW chapters put out articles and pamphlets to raise consciousness about lesbianism. Some of these combined prescriptive views with facilitated discussions to move women out of homophobic fears and toward acceptance and recognition of how lesbian issues were part of a feminist focus on autonomy, civil rights, and women’s oppression. California NOW’s Sexuality and Lesbianism Task Force began a newsletter in 1977. Editors focused on legal bias against homosexual rights. The newsletter explained lesbian mothers’ battles to retain custody of their children and the decision to set up a lesbian mothers’ custody defense fund. Martin and Lyon’s article argued that the Save Our

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45 See chapter five for a return to the issue of custody battles and lesbian motherhood.
Children campaign required that NOW develop a project like the National Gay Task Force’s million-dollar education program. They warned, “New Right politics is attacking the Women’s Movement at its weakest points—the poor and the Gays—the former by denying use of government funds for abortion and the latter by denying they are entitled to any civil rights. A movement is only as strong as its weakest links.”  

NOW-LA’s Sexuality and Lesbianism Task Force developed yearly Women and Alternative Life Styles conferences, which reflected the myriad projects that Los Angeles feminists created and which overlapped with the existence of Califia. One year, Ivy Bottini led a “gay/straight dialog” and Marilyn Murphy spoke on the lesbian issue within the movement among other workshops on stable relationships, mothering, custody, and lesbian feminist therapy. The Women and Alternative Life Styles conferences tackled a dizzying array of issues from sexuality (Marilyn’s “Is Intercourse Unnatural Sex?”) and women’s health to lesbianism within the law and business to Betty Brooks’ yearly self-defense training, and Zsuzsanna “Z” Budapest’s discourses on Dianic witchcraft. A number of Califia women introduced topics from Califia Community to a broader feminist audience through these conferences.

PURGE FOR THE ERA

A rising conservative movement brought reassessment of feminist priorities to a head. In the face of extensive discussion about lesbian feminism through resolutions, theory, task force newsletters, and conferences, New Right leaders pushed antigay local,

47 Two “Women and Alternative Life Styles” Conference workshop schedules (n.d. but Marilyn Murphy identified as connected to Califia Community and Josy Cattogio not affiliated with Califia indicates 1979-1982).
county, and state initiatives and sought to undermine feminist gains by targeting the ERA. The faction within NOW that sought to deprioritize lesbian issues in favor of single-minded pursuit of the ERA lobbied for their cause and found support from Ellie Smeal. After an ERA-focused slate of NOW officers won, lesbians and women of color felt more marginalized within NOW, which elicited heavy criticism around the country led by California NOW members. These developments highlight recurring identity-based tensions and Californians’ role in trying to achieve inclusion.

During the national NOW campaign of 1979, Ellie Smeal ran unopposed for a second term as president with a proposed slate. Their platform put NOW’s focus on the final push for ratification of the ERA before its 1982 extended deadline. Other candidates proposed spreading NOW’s energy and resources among many issues, including lesbian rights, which were being threatened by antigay ordinances in Minnesota, Kansas, Oregon, and California spawned by the Bryant drive. Smeal and her slate’s campaign tactics drew fire. Secretly playing a board meeting recording of incumbent Action Vice President Arlie Scott (California) questioning whether NOW should support the gay march on Washington was seen as an attempt to discredit her commitment to lesbian rights. Scott penned the 1971 resolution and reflected major gay groups in 1979, who were debating whether plans for the march should proceed. Eve Norman (California) sought reelection as national NOW treasurer and supported diversified lobbying efforts over sole concentration on the ERA.48 Lori Mennella worked with Norman as an accountant at

48 Norman had joined NOW-LA in 1970. She was a leader in the Majority Caucus Western Region and was Director of Western Region NOW in 1975. By 1979, as national treasurer, she held membership both in Washington DC-NOW and in Frances Perkins, CA NOW. Norman’s earlier work through California’s NOW chapter raised awareness about violence against women and “resulted in landmark legislation in
NOW Action Center and participated in NOW-DC as the fifty-first state coordinator.

There she witnessed an audit in 1978. She believed Smeal orchestrated it to make Norman look bad in the upcoming elections by questioning Norman’s bookkeeping. Mennella also became a delegate to the Los Angeles national conference and later told the national board that she was harassed in an attempt to discredit and discourage her participation. Like a number of dissenting lesbian and straight feminists, she was laid off after the election “in the interests of the incoming administration.”

At the October 1979 national NOW conference, held in a luxury hotel in Los Angeles, Smeal addressed the delegates. She cited “friction in the home office” as a reason to replace incumbents and defended her slate against NOW’s affirmative action commitment, saying, “I believe we must go for qualifications. For too long we’ve had token representation in this organization.” Asked whether she could work with whomever was elected, she dissembled. The NOW membership gave Smeal what she wanted by almost a two-thirds margin. Dissent was immediate. A contingent of lesbian and straight

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Californian, special training for law enforcement agency personnel and D.A.’s....” In 1973, Norman developed the first resolution on battered women. By 1979 she was a member of the NOW Minority Women’s leadership conference committee. “Brief Background for Eve Norman” from the Committee to Reelect Eve. In a handwritten account by Lori Mennella of the audit, she alleged that Smeal violated independent audit principles through numerous consultations with Clare Parson of Councilor, Buchanon, and Mitchell and use of Smeal’s staff in the accounting procedures. Mennella claimed that a letter from the firm to Smeal, which was not given to Norman but was circulated to the rest of the NOW Board mistakenly criticizes the accounting department for aspects handled by Smeal’s staff. Lori Mennella’s personal papers. 49 “To the National Board” charges interception of Mennella’s mail and of calls to the accounting department, repeated ransacking of her desk, unnecessary work interruptions and interference, and deliberate delay of her delegate status notification and room request. Lori Mennella’s personal papers. 50 “Memo from the National NOW Action Center” dated November 15, 1979 states Mennella’s “understanding, according to a meeting held on October 26 with Ms. Judy Goldsmith and Ms. Alice Chapman that my last day of work will be November 15, despite my offer to stay until the end of the month to close the books for the month.... At no time did I officially tender my resignation; I was told I was laid off in the interests of the incoming administration.” Goldsmith ran uncontested for a second term as Executive Vice President while Chapman was the incoming treasurer. Mennella wrote in her account that Goldsmith back-dated a memo to November 14 clarifying that her “effective date of termination with the NOW National Action Center is Friday, November 30, 1979.” Lori Mennella’s personal papers.
women formed Appalled Women. Martin denounced the election results: "NOW is no longer a feminist organization. NOW is trying to overpower its members rather than empower them." Marilyn drew a warning parallel to First Wave white suffragists' drive for voting rights at the expense of immigrant and black people, concluding, "What's happening now is—give us the ERA at any price. NOW is becoming respectable and paying the price of sisterhood."  

WITHDRAWAL OF SUPPORT

In the aftermath of the election, those who opposed the winning slate did not concede quietly because they believed the direction of NOW and their rights were at stake. Postconference letters to Smeal accused her of using the ERA to purge dissent during campaigning at regional chapters and at the national conference. Florida opponents cited verbal trashing of the California-based alternatives to Smeal's picks for action vice president and treasurer (Arlie Scott and Eve Norman), and charged Smeal with regional, racial, and class bias. The Smeal slate was characterized as "white, middle-class, northeastern women who share [Smeal's] perceptions, to the detriment of all of us who do not fit those categories."  

There was so much bitterness in the aftermath of the national conference that some lesbian and black leaders called on their constituents to renounce their membership. 

Martin and Lyon's letter to the *Gay Community News* of Boston claimed that Smeal

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52 Letter dated October 25, 1979 from Patricia A. Bramlette, Santa Anna Heights, CA NOW member, letter dated November 10, 1979 from Jacksonville, FL NOW chapter delegates, letter dated April 26, 1980 from Patricia A. Bramlette, letter of membership resignation dated June 16, 1980 from National and Southwest Region Board Member, Lea Goodman and sent to all local chapters. Lori Mennella's personal papers.
opposed Scott and Norman because they questioned her strategies. Martin and Lyon reminded readers that Scott was outspoken on gay rights and had been identified as a lesbian spokesperson. They dismissed the “Lesbian and Gay Rights Resolution” passed at the 1979 conference, which called for a full-time staffperson, a national campaign for lesbian rights, and $25,000. Martin and Lyon wrote, “[T]hose of us who have been members of NOW for any length of time (we have been members since 1967) know how easily resolutions are passed at a convention and how difficult it is to implement them in the interim between conventions.” Smeeł’s presidency allowed her to hand-pick the members on NOW’s National Lesbian Rights Committee. Martin and Lyon asserted that Kay Whitlock, author of the 1977 “De-Mystifying ‘The Lavender Menace,’” was hassled into resigning and replaced with a woman who told chapters they only had to refrain from speaking against lesbian rights. Like the Florida chapter, Martin and Lyon opposed the whiteness of Smeeł’s slate, highlighting Smeeł’s argument that delegates should not vote for the only woman of color, Sharon Parker, “because NOW is above tokenism.” Martin and Lyon echoed the advice of the Black American Political Association of California (BAPAC). The second national president of NOW, Aileen Hernandez, introduced a unanimously passed resolution to BAPAC that all black women and men in NOW should turn in their membership cards until NOW addressed racism. Instead, black women politicians and activists would work within BAPAC with black men against sexism and racism. Likewise, Martin and Lyon encouraged “[l]esbian feminists in NOW to drop their memberships and put their energies into more principled feminist endeavors.” The way
Martin and Lyon constructed their argument bound homophobia and racism to hierarchical, centralized tactics within NOW.\(^53\)

Smeal would continue to be charged with power-mongering and erasure of lesbians. A bylaws change in 1980 continued her presidential term until December 1982 in large part so that she would remain at the helm in the waning days of the ERA campaign.\(^54\) After the national NOW conference of 1981 passed a resolution that required that "persons speaking on behalf of National shall consistently include lesbian rights in their discussion of priority issues," Smeal signed a multi-issue fundraiser letter that did not mention lesbian rights.\(^55\) Every time national NOW leaders focused on the ERA to the exclusion of identity-based issues, seemed unresponsive to members, or increased bureaucracy, critics arose. Some sought refuge in local feminist groups like Califia, either shifting their energies or dividing their time between grassroots action and national NOW reform attempts.

LOYAL OPPOSITION

NOW members had to deal with internal division, so that NOW did not fragment in the face of conservative challenges. California NOW members Carol Schmidt, her

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\(^53\) Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, letter to the editor of *Gay Community News* (Boston: October 31, 1979). Parker wrote to supporters of the Minority Women’s Committee on November 5, 1979 chronicling the consolidation of leadership under Smeal in opposition to independent thought and to the exclusion of any minority women in the national NOW leadership roles. She concluded by calling on minority women to let NOW know that they would not be exploited in the name of feminism "and that as NOW members we are not single issue oriented. Without active leadership against racism as well as sexism, we may wake up one day to find that white women have achieved equality under law but minority women, still relegated to the bottom of the economic ladder, can only achieve equality in token numbers." Sharon Parker, letter to sisters, friends and supporters dated November 5, 1979. Lori Mennella’s personal papers. "Black Women Turn Down NOW," *The Lesbian Tide* (January/February 1980): 12-13.

\(^54\) "Bylaws: National Organization for Women: As Amended October, 1980," 2 from Betty Jetter’s personal files. Hawkes explains that the argument for changing the by-laws "was that since the ERA campaign was coming down to the wire, a change in leadership might mean loss of crucial ground." Hawkes 49.

\(^55\) New York State NOW letter of protest dated November 17, 1981. Lori Mennella’s personal papers.
partner Norma Hair, and Jeane Bendorf started an internal, members-only newsletter called *The Loyal Opposition* in July 1980 for the state board and dissident NOW members. The state already had the official *California NOW Times*, but *The Loyal Opposition* editors asserted that it had a long history of censorship.\(^6\) Part of their mission was to make a place for feminists to continue as NOW members despite differences of opinion. They supplemented NOW publications that they felt spoke “only for white, middle-class women.” *The Loyal Opposition* became one forum for dissenters like Kay Whitlock, who wrote about NOW’s early lesbian purges, continued homophobic foot-dragging, perennial resistance to criticism of racism, and refusal to acknowledge that the ERA would affect women of different classes differently.\(^7\)

Smeal has remembered California state and local NOW chapters as particularly quarrelsome since the Majority Caucus days. She believed the state had a disproportionately large NOW membership without enough leadership opportunities to dissipate active, informed people’s energy. Smeal asserted that although California had “about ten percent of the national population, … it had about twenty percent of the NOW membership. Yet there were times when California wasn’t even represented on the NOW

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\(^6\) *The Loyal Opposition* (July 1980): 1. Carol Schmidt, “The Loyal Opposition Staff Responds,” *The NOW Times: California’s Voice of Feminism* 4.4 (April 1981): 4, 8, here 4. Betty Jetter’s personal files. Carol had thirty years of civil rights, feminist, labor, antiwar, and civil liberties activism and was a long-time writer for *The NOW Times*. She had joined NOW-San Fernando Valley in 1977 after divorcing, seeking out any feminist group she could find, and moving toward lesbianism. Hawkes 38. She would go on to be at Califia Community and become a leader in White Women Against Racism. Norma headed Beach Cities NOW, coordinated the NOW-LA Lesbian Rights Task Force Alternative Lifestyles Conference, and produced the books for the 1979 national NOW conference in Los Angeles. Jeane was then California NOW Assistant Coordinator of Membership, having served as State Coordinator, Regional Director, and National NOW Board Member over ten years of membership. “The Loyal Opposition Staff Responds,” 8. *Quest* on the East Coast was a broader publication that included dissent among NOW feminists.

\(^7\) Carol Schmidt, “Kay Whitlock Article Sees NOW as ‘Moving Toward Autocracy,’” *The Loyal Opposition* (September 1980): 5-6.
Smeal’s campaign against two well-known California candidates certainly ruffled Californians’ feathers. California’s NOW chapters had a history of resistance to East Coast leadership as well as divisions between the state and local chapters. Alice Myers, who had joined NOW-LA around 1974, had enjoyed the exciting ferment of consciousness-raising, through which she realized she was lesbian. She attended conferences, worked on projects like the “Alice Doesn’t” one-day strike from work in 1975, and held local and state offices. By 1979, however, she was shaken by personal attacks on her and charges by NOW-LA members that her involvement with the state level of NOW impaired her ability to commit to the local level. She pulled out of leadership, markedly decreasing her involvement at the same time that she participated on the Califia collective. NOW’s internal national, regional, and local splits were wearing on members.  

The outrage apparent on the pages of The Loyal Opposition reflected these tensions by including voices and readership from across the U.S. Otherwise unknown members as well as national workers like Whitlock, Parker, Lea Goodman, and Mennella wrote in, and subscribers read the newsletter throughout the country. Carol Schmidt contrasted California NOW members’ interest in inclusion with other regions. Her report on the mandatory “lesbian/straight dialog” at the California conference raised concern that no speaker at a Chicago ERA march was lesbian and no mention of lesbians was made during the four hours of speakers. Successive issues of The Loyal Opposition

58 Hawkes 52. 
59 Alice J. Myers follow-up, 1. 
praised changes to the bylaws to add women of color to the national board and opposed bylaw changes to extend Smeal’s term. Reflecting the exodus of members devoted to lesbian issues, Madeline Holdorf gave a press release lamenting the loss of former NOW lesbian leaders Whitlock, Bunch, Martin, Lyon, O’Leary, and Love. She rejected as diversionary a National NOW Conference resolution in 1980 that clarified, “NOW does not support pederasty, pornography, sadomasochism, and public sex.” Carol saw the “clarifying resolution” as intended to forestall coalition with the lesbian and gay communities in the wake of their united front against California antigay legislation in 1977. Continued coalition work would force NOW to be more outspoken on lesbian rights. It is important to note, however, that the resolution reflects growing debate among heterosexual and lesbian feminists alike about sexual practices, which would come to be known as the “sex wars.”

The California base of operations for The Loyal Opposition made it one of a number of venues from which California NOW members expressed dissent within and without NOW. These loudly dissenting voices articulated a desire for feminism to be a multi-issue program that addressed sexism as it interlocked with sexuality, race, class, and regional affiliations. Ultimately Carol and Norma officially left California NOW after the 1981 bylaws ditched the word “feminism” and dismantled the Task Force on Racism. They viewed these moves as furthering the “centralization of power,

authoritarianism, and racism. While many women would continue to work for an inclusive NOW, others shifted their energies to local, grassroots efforts.

National NOW's decision to de-emphasize lesbian issues at the very moment that lesbians were under attack from the Right was an attempt to save the ERA from defeat at the hands of the same foes. Bureaucratization and lobbying with big-money political action committees were extensions of NOW's focus on effecting legal change but came at the cost of willingness to address dissent. Instead, NOW leaders employed suppression and purging as shown by National NOW Times editors refusing "to print letters to the editor or dissenting articles," a local NOW chapter's removal of an editor who printed the opinions of those disagreeing with chapter leadership, and harassment and purging of three NOW-San Francisco executive board members in 1982. Moving away from grassroots activism in favor of power-brokering paralleled a shift in gay and lesbian activism from grassroots to lobbying groups like the National Gay Task Force, which was geared toward preserving homosexuals' rights against legal assault. In both arenas, radical feminists and lesbian feminists criticized lobbying as reformism that took valuable resources away from more radical local efforts.

LA’S LESBIAN FEMINIST BRANCH: IN LOVE AND ANGER

In contrast to nationally based reform, radical feminists including lesbian feminists worked at the grassroots level to revolutionize society. Some participated in groups such as NOW, but many helped to create autonomous small groups. They worked locally to change fundamental attitudes about gender and sexuality, to provide women-focused service centers, and to form a sense of community. Like Betty Jetter or Alice Myers entering NOW, women felt euphoric at finding feminists like themselves and were swept up in the excitement of meetings and projects. The growth of women’s liberation seemed to hold unlimited potential, and groups proliferated. The sheer variety of visions within Los Angeles collided in disagreements over the place of competing identities, analyses, and ways of making change. The Los Angeles feminist scene repeated many of NOW’s struggles. It added ideological splits over what was politically radical and the relationships among lesbian, socialist, separatist, and cultural feminisms. The debates and cultural achievements of a selection of the conferences, groups, leaders, and temporary communities that existed between 1971 and 1977 show the salient issues and methods that would influence the formation of Califia Community.66

66 Yolanda Retter Vargas has amply documented the development and range of lesbian feminist groups in Los Angeles. Los Angeles feminists developed the Women’s Center at Crenshaw, Los Angeles Feminist Women’s Health Center, the Women’s Gynecological Clinic, the Feminist Women’s Therapy Center, and the Woman’s Building. Retter 142-143 and interview transcripts for Judy Freespirit and Betty Brooks. In 1971, there were two active lesbian groups—the Los Angeles chapter of Daughters of Bilitis and Lesbian Feminists. The specifically lesbian center was Gay Women’s Service Center while there was a longer-lasting lesbian-friendly Women’s Center on Crenshaw Boulevard and some lesbian presence at the Gay Community Services Center. Retter 89-96, 99 and booklet dated August 1971 called “How to Start Your Self-Help Clinic” c/o Women’s Center from Betty Jetter’s personal files. Crenshaw’s Women’s Center was important in catalyzing women’s activism and lesbianism. For example, Judy Freespirit went to the Women’s Center because she had been unable to find the NOW chapter office for which she was searching. She metamorphosized from a housewife mother who had never met an out lesbian to a lesbian activist. Judy contrasted the radical Crenshaw Women’s Center with NOW’s purges, saying it made total sense to
CONFERENCES EXPOSE LOCAL AND NATIONAL POLITICAL DIVISIONS

The earliest massive attempt at lesbian unity in Los Angeles was the Gay Women’s West Coast Conference of 1971. The presence of three hundred and fifty women from California, New Mexico, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and Massachusetts assured participants that they were part of a nationwide lesbian movement and facilitated a sense of “woman-energy” at the conference’s dance and the march with gay men along Christopher Street West.

Consciousness about women’s diversity, however, exposed fissures. “New gay” lesbian feminists decried the “role-playing” they saw among old gay butches and femmes and among themselves at the dance, reflecting the early labeling of such actions as imitative of heterosexuality. Lesbians acted on developing analogies among sexual orientation, race, and class by expressing concern that “third world women weren’t fully represented” and criticizing the dance’s one-dollar cover charge for nonconference attendees as “capitalistic and unfriendly.”\(^{67}\) The conference exposed what would be continuing disagreements about the appropriateness of gender roles and the inclusion of a diversity of women to back lesbian liberation although she did not feel sexual attraction for women at that time. Transcript of an interview from July 8, 1981, pages 5-6 and 18 found at Mazer in the Judy Freespirit box. Lesbian-friendly Sisterhood Bookstore became established as a safe women’s space in 1972 while the Westside Women’s Center opened in 1972 to provide self-help. Retter 149, 102. Self-help groups proliferated that year with the founding of the Radical Feminist Therapy Collective and Fat Underground. Retter 102-103. The Alcoholism Center for Women, the Woman’s Building, and the Los Angeles Women’s Union started in 1973. Retter 124-128. The Anti-Rape Chapter at the LA Women’s Union would spawn the Los Angeles Coalition Against Assaults Against Women. Retter 137-138. Califia was the next attempt at a politicized women’s community and vied with Southern California Women for Understanding as a social, networking, and education space. Retter 129, 133. The second half of the 1970s saw continued attempts at community centers with Womonspace community center in 1977 and a new trend, started by Lesbians of Color in 1978, of lesbians of color organizing themselves independently of civil rights, racial nationalist, or white lesbian groups. Retter 163, 199.

\(^{67}\) Retter 97-98. Retter notes that the conference stemmed from the Intergroup Council formed to unite Lesbian Feminists, DOB, and Gay Women’s Service Center (96).
of lesbians. They foreshadowed the sex wars by arguing over where to draw a line between woman-centered erotica and the pornography they considered to be degrading to women. Participants debated the relative merits of working with gay men, legal lobbying (e.g., for custody and to expand Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act to include sexual orientation), and radical zaps (unannounced speak-outs such as one against the American Psychiatric Association’s exhibit about aversion therapy to stop people from having gay desire). The Gay Women’s West Coast Conference did not manage to answer these questions. Instead, it reflected the participants’ joy at gathering as lesbians and identification of their early identity and tactical concerns.

Addressing racism and political divisions among lesbians became overriding concerns at the West Coast Lesbian Conference (WCLC) in 1973. Some of the thirteen hundred attendees lamented the polarization over race. Martin reflected that she had never seen a lesbian organization deal successfully with racism. Others saw in lesbians who angrily addressed racism the potential for revolutionary change against racist patriarchy. The Black Caucus of the Racism Workshop converted Martin’s statement into a rallying call. The position paper of the Black Caucus took a markedly conciliatory stance compared to the national Black Power position that whites needed to teach each other to unlearn their racism rather than relying on people of color:

It is now our aim to ask you sisters to have mercy on our needs, to do something for us. We want to take a stand as women ready for action and committed to the

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The Black Caucus took a nonconfrontational approach. Black Caucus members sought to prove their commitment as lesbians and to reassure white lesbians that dealing with racism would not weaken the lesbian movement. The Black Caucus assuaged their white sisters' guilt over racism and closed with the gentle request that white lesbians stand up verbally against any racism they saw. Conciliation may have stemmed from Black Caucus members' dual identities as lesbians and African Americans at a point in Los Angeles when there were no lesbians of color groups and few feminists of color groups. In 1973, Florynce Kennedy and Margaret “Marg” Sloan were just founding the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO).

Participants at the WCLC in 1973 heavily debated dependence on larger movements, coalition work, and separatism as strategies. Lesbians complained repeatedly that heterosexual women did not return the time and energy that lesbians gave them but, instead, spent their energy on men. Should they withdraw from the larger Women’s Movement and form their own autonomous movement? With whom should they work? Robin Morgan’s controversial keynote address reasserted the radical feminist position by making a strict division between all women (lesbians, housewives, bisexual women, butch bar dykes) against all men (leftist, heterosexual, gay, or—from her perspective—male-to-female transsexuals). She berated lesbian separatists for eschewing much-needed

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alliances with straight women. She decried working with leftist men and wrote off women in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) as “female collaborators.”

Socialist feminists seem to have had a minority voice within Los Angeles despite their interest in giving equal weight to gender, class, and race issues because other feminists conflated socialist feminism with women tied to male-dominated socialist groups. Between 1971 and 1975 socialist feminists enjoined readers of the California feminist periodicals *Everywoman, Sister, Country Women, and The Lesbian Tide* to understand and combat societal oppression by expanding their analysis from radical feminism’s “women as a class” to the interrelations among sexism, capitalism, and racism. Miriam (no last name given) argued that to “attack the problem at its basis, which is class society as a whole,” an “independent self-organization of lesbians” must work together with other oppressed groups against “male-white-straight domination” of all facets of society. Likewise, in a roundtable discussion of reconciling materialist with cultural feminism that *The Lesbian Tide* reported in 1974, Rita Mae Brown emphasized the importance of taking over state power against those who retreat “into the moonlight and think a kiss is a revolution.” She contrasted her circle with NOW, dismissing NOW as simply reacting against the system with reforms rather than providing a comprehensive program. Her vision entailed a party without class divisions, which would defeat the

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71 Judy Freespirit makes this energy circle argument in her interview of July 8, 1981 IIA page 26 at Mazer. In contrast to seeing lesbian energy flowing to men through straight women, she (and other lesbian separatists) conceived of their energy as being directly returned by lesbians or indirectly returned after benefiting other lesbians. Cordova, “Radical Feminism? Dyke Separatism?” 21.

multinational corporations. Although Miriam, especially, demonstrates opposition to male domination, autonomous socialist feminist groups like the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union did not seem to flourish in Los Angeles.

National and local feminists opposed to socialist feminists associated them with “men’s issues,” homophobia, and an agenda of taking over groups. Some socialist feminists remained in New Left groups like SWP and Prairie Fire Organizing Committee, a division of Weather Underground. In 1971, *The Lesbian Tide* reported that the SWP had voted down a motion to make a connection between abortion and sexual expression. Framing abortion as one example of sexual expression was seen as a prelude to introducing a “specific lesbian demand.” Members of SWP participated in other groups

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74 The Weather Underground was a militant splinter group of Students for a Democratic Society, which resorted to terrorist actions during the Vietnam War in order to “bring the war home.” In a tract supporting the Symbionese Liberation Army kidnapping of Patty Hearst, the Weather Underground in California made connections between racism and the ruling class: white police murdering young black men, Governor Reagan’s assault on welfare hurting Chicano families, prison abuses including the execution of Black Panther George Jackson. They demanded changes to provide food and advised the oppressed to determine when violence was necessary against the common enemy (the ruling elite). Letter dated February 20, 1974 in Mazer subject file, Weather Underground. By 1975, Prairie Fire Organizing Committee had formed from Weather Underground and was developing an analysis of women’s liberation. Their thirty-page pamphlet, *Women’s Liberation and Imperialism* from November 1977 melds aspects of radical feminism with an overtly Marxist framework focused on imperialism, white supremacy, and class oppression under capitalism. Clearly geared toward a general feminist audience, Prairie Fire Organizing Committee focused on “the double shift” of women’s family duties and women in the workforce, and argued in one page that lesbians and gay men were oppressed because they undercut the capitalist “imperialists’ need to control women’s role in reproducing and producing the labor force” (16).
in order to recruit and were charged with taking over organizations. Joan Robbins claimed that SWP had gained temporary control of the Los Angeles Women’s Center, which led NOW to distance itself from the “radicalness” of the Women’s Center. Sally Gearhart contributed to the roundtable in 1974 a wariness of socialist feminism as working for leftist groups that primarily fought “men’s battles.” Even when socialist feminists separated from male-run groups, their burgeoning analysis of class, imperialism, and race meant that lesbianism was only one facet of the overall picture. An apparently decreased emphasis on sexism and a history of trivializing lesbianism did not endear socialism to Los Angeles lesbian feminists. Nonetheless, at Califia, socialist feminists joined radical lesbian feminists and those who belonged to branches of feminism that were more circumspect.

The types of coalition work that socialist feminists advocated contrasted with the fragmentation at the WCLC of 1973, which reflected strains of separatism between lesbians and anyone deemed to be male-identified. Participants physically attacked a fundamentalist man who was heckling the opening address and waving a redundant

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75 Retter 110-111.
77 “Well, as I mentioned, a lot of women who came to Califia were socialist women. So there was a sort of blending of some Socialist theory with what went on at Califia [pause] even though that was not true for most of the Collective members. They had not identified themselves as socialists necessarily. And the women on the Collective, and quite a few of the women who attended the programs, were active in many other movements of the time. There [were] women who participated in Women’s Building, which had to do with art, as well as other things they did. But it was basically started by women artists. And a lot of women belonged to NOW and were part of that organization. Women were part of SCWU [Southern California Women for Understanding], National Women’s Studies Association, although that came a little later.” Irene Weiss transcript 5.
“Lesbian Dykes Repent” sign. As conference monitors formed a line to protect the man, the several dozen women screaming at him turned on the monitors.⁷⁸

In addition to opposing this disrespectful interloper, several hundred participants balked at including Beth Elliott, who was scheduled to sing on opening night. Elliott had been a local and state leader who cofounded the Alice B. Toklas Gay Democratic Club, was on the board of directors of the California Committee for Sexual Law Reform (against sodomy laws), and had been asked to stand for election as vice president of DOB-San Francisco when its membership was dipping. Late in her term as vice president, some lesbian feminists began to contest her membership because she was a preoperative male-to-female transsexual woman.⁷⁹ A report of the WCLC conference named debate over allowing Elliott to sing as the catalyst for factionalization, arguing:

What was at stake was not the role of transsexuals in the lesbian movement, but rather it was the presumption that the political beliefs of one segment of the movement (if you wish to categorize, the liberal/civil rights reformists) should take precedence over the beliefs of another (dyke separatists), ipso facto, without debate, consultation or consideration.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Cheryl 1. What Cheryl calls the dyke separatist faction disrupted the conference with their catcalls and claims that Elliott was an abusive man. They brought the conference to a standstill and forced a popular vote to determine whether Elliot would be allowed to continue singing. This marked the beginning of a rash of lesbian feminist attacks on transwomen who had worked for gay/lesbian and feminist rights. When lesbian feminist Jane O’Leary followed Silvia Rivera as a speaker at a “Gay is Good” rally in New York City in July 1973, O’Leary denounced transwomen as men who exploited women for profit by “impersonating women.” Rivera, a cross-desser, had touched off the Stonewall riots in 1969. In 1977, lesbian feminists attacked Sandy Stone, a recording engineer for Olivia Records (a founding women’s music company). Stone had trained women on record and mixing technique and was well integrated into Olivia. She had the knowledge she shared because she had learned mixing and recording before transitioning from male-bodied. When her transsexual status came to light, women who did not know her threatened a boycott, which would have destroyed Olivia Records, and Olivia staff eventually bowed to separatists’ demands for Stone’s resignation. Brown, “Gay, Lesbian, and Feminist Backlash.”
Nine months earlier, Beth Elliott was one of two transsexual women denied membership in DoB-San Francisco after much consideration. That debate sided with dyke separatists against evidence of work for the movement. Del Martin used societal norms as a basis for exclusion. She claimed that a “person before having the operation (to become a woman) is not legally a woman.” Others went further, labeling transsexual women “only synthetic women” and opposing their identification as lesbians. Although homophile and gay/lesbian liberation members had rejected mainstream homophobic designations of inherent sickness and abomination, people holding this position selectively accepted some dominant societal views about gender and sexuality. The losing opposition supported their position with science. They honored self-identification as a lesbian and gave a medical definition of transsexualism as “a woman who is born in a man’s body or a man who is born in a woman’s body, and who goes through reconstructive surgery to bring his or her body into harmony with her mind.”

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81 Retter 109. Jeanne Córdova identifies the lesbian feminist activist, singer, and vice-president as Joanne Darcy, but has an asterisk after the name that leads nowhere. One transsexual woman was applying for membership on November 17, 1972 [Darcy?] while Elliott was already recognized as a lesbian feminist activist, writer, and singer.


83 “D.O.B. Says No.” This definition shares a crucial problem with the term “woman-born-woman.” Both conflate sex designation, gender status at birth, and socialization into adult gender roles. Nobody is born a woman because “woman” describes socially-learned roles for an adult female. Radical feminism initially contested precisely those roles while cultural feminists developed an ideology that glorified them as positive qualities essential to females and lacking in males. At or before birth in western society infants are categorized as female or male, and in the event that it is difficult to label them, doctors have generally pressured parents to consent to surgeries and life-long hormone therapies that cut away ambiguity and mold intersex (previously called hermaphrodite) children into one category. Gender expectations are applied as soon as sex is determined through pink or blue blankets and clothing, bows for girls, gendered toys, and a barrage of prescriptive behaviors for the children to follow. Because gender expectations are inescapable, many transsexuals who have known that their core sense of gender did not fit the category imposed by their parents and others, have sought to change their outward appearance so that those around them would “see” them correctly and stop persecuting them. Voluntarily desired surgeries and hormone therapies have given transsexuals some respite. For more on how gender is constructed and the history of how it works in relation to other forms of oppression, see Kate Bornstein, Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of
backing self-identification as lesbian, this faction indirectly raised the question of what constitutes a woman and who decides that. Mostly, though, lesbians and feminists resolutely asserted the legitimacy of their definitions of womanhood without clearly establishing the definition.

The Tide Collective under Jeanne Córdova’s leadership supported self-definition for a pro-transsexual position that would receive almost no support in the 1970s and 1980s among lesbian feminists like those at Califia Community:

Our common oppression is based on society’s insistence that we perform certain roles: wife, husband, mother, father, masculine, feminine, etc. We cry out, “You cannot define us. WE DEFINE OURSELVES!” Those who vote no tonight vote with our oppressors. Those who vote yes recognize that none of us is free unless all of us are free.84

Although the collective welcomed transsexual sisters to Los Angeles and there were no opposing letters to the editor in subsequent issues, they clearly did not speak for the “several hundred women” who allegedly walked out of the conference after they lost the vote which allowed Elliott to continue singing. After fighting to identify themselves as woman-identified women rather than mannish women, most lesbian feminists rejected

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84 “A Collective Editorial,” The Lesbian Tide 2.5 (December 1972): 21, 29, here 29, capitalization in original. Copies of The Lesbian Tide are in LLC.
self-definition for others in their fear that males would self-define as women and lesbians to take over feminist spaces.

Both major reviews of the WCLC concluded that the political divisions exposed at the conference were likely to endure, but the question was how and whether to address them. Jeanne Córdova praised the political work, advising that the movement “will have to deal with our anger as we have had to deal with our loving. Most importantly, our movement challenges us to understand, in the personal and political way that is the unique contribution of feminist women, the real issues which must be uncovered and dealt with.”

Conferences uncovered already existing differences, but Cheryl (no last name given) rejected the structure of keynote speakers, workshops, and resolutions as dividing lesbians. She called for “a festival, a rite of love, a cultural celebration. ... A festival which will emphasize that which we have in common—our love for women.” Cheryl spoke for many in the community who thought, “Resolutions are for shit. Being together is everything.” But even she admitted that “the lesson of the WCLC should be quite clear: sexual preference alone is not a basis enough to build a unified political movement.” The question of whether cultural celebrations like women’s music, lesbian art, and feminist Wiccan rituals made significant political improvements in people’s lives and society’s structure was an ongoing debate.

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86 Cheryl l.
**Political Implications of Cultural Feminism**

Cultural feminism's focus on women's well-being and creative production contributed to a holistic feminism and had political implications. Consciousness-raising and reassessment of traditional ways of thinking and acting changed women's lives and challenged the very society lesbian feminists wished to change. A series of Los Angeles feminist endeavors in the early to mid-1970s filled niches within holistic feminism by helping to recuperate women's sense of worth and power through therapy, self-defense, spirituality, and music. Many of these leaders also became figures at Califia. They brought their methods for furthering the connection between personal and social transformation.

The Radical Feminist Therapy Collective (RFTC) originated at the Crenshaw Women's Center in 1972 as a way to "teach radical therapy tools, problem solving skills, and do political consciousness raising and community organizing in the context of lesbian feminist politics." A group of Los Angeles women had traveled to Claude Steiner's Berkeley-based Radical Psychiatry Center for training. Returning to form RFTC, they extended radical psychiatry's rejection of pathologizing trends in therapy, which pressured people to conform to society. Members taught women who had been labeled "sick" based on being lesbian, fat, frustrated, or uppity to define themselves and to oppose their persecution. The collective was committed to woman-identification regardless of women's sexual orientation. Unlike traditional therapy, RFTC defended its rejection of impartiality. The members argued that raising consciousness and advocating for women's interests required taking stands. Over the years, RFTC would be
instrumental in providing mediation within the Los Angeles feminist community and in raising women’s consciousness, especially about body image.87

Fat Underground developed from RFTC in its first year to demystify oppression against fat people, and it became the most significant force against looksism in Los Angeles. Radical therapy asserted that oppressors portrayed their control as benefiting the oppressed, thus mystifying oppression. Judy Freespirit and Aldebaran ran into the limits of that model when other founders of the collective balked at them speaking as a team at a local college because having two fat representatives could discredit the group. In search of a successful diet, Aldebaran ran across Llewellyn Louderback’s 1970 Fat Power. Louderback blamed the diet industry for fat discrimination. He found evidence in public health documents that fat was due to biology rather than overeating, that ninety-eight to ninety-nine percent of doctor-supervised diets failed long-term, and that health problems like heart attacks correlated with judgmental societies and dieting. Contrasting biological and environmental factors, he concluded that prejudice against fat people was one more example of a societal problem, not a personal failing.

Like Louderback, Judy and Aldebaran seem to have felt compelled to accept some premises of science in order to politicize fat oppression. They first joined the National Association to Aid Fat Americans (NAAFA) and created a Los Angeles chapter.

87 Aldebaran et al., “Statement from the Radical Feminist Therapy Collective,” Sister 5.6 (September 1974): 8 in LLC. Sara Golda Bracha Fishman, “Life in the Fat Underground,” Radiance: The Magazine for Large Women (Winter 1998), email version from Ariana Manov. Fishman took a number of names. She was known as Aldebaran in the early 1970s and also as Vivian F. Mayer. Yolanda’s interviews indicate an undercurrent of community concern about RFTC’s rejection of impartiality. There was a lot of pressure to conform to political ideals and how they translated into the ways women lived in the world. RFTC “knew everyone’s secrets” according to one member and assumed that when women’s eyes were opened to the oppressive origins of practices [including things like shaving legs] that nobody would choose to do those things. Retter 103.
Their group charged “doctors, psychologists, and public health officials … [with] concealing and distorting the facts about fat that were contained in their own professional research journals. In doing so, they betrayed [fat people] and played into the hands of the multibillion dollar weight-loss industry.” By 1973, they researched medical journals with the help of member Lynn Mabel-Lois (a.k.a. Lynn McAffee). Like homosexuals who challenged the American Psychiatric Association’s designation of homosexuality as a mental illness, NAAFA-LA combated the conflation of scientific and moralizing discourses, which asserted that fat people were blameworthy for a moral failing that would create health problems and that should be controlled through dieting. In doing so, fat liberation would arrive at a wholly positive position like gay liberation’s “gay is good” and discount all potential health problems associated with being fat.

The beginning of their slew of position papers and appearances on televised specials about fat people and weight loss prompted the main NAAFA office to order them to tone it down and disguise their feminism. Instead, the group quit NAAFA. Four of the women and one man (briefly) took the name Fat Underground (FU), whose initials expressed their attitude. Fat Underground—in its name (analogous to the Weather

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89 Fat Underground reclaimed the term “fat” and used it in lieu of the judgmental term “overweight” or euphemisms. Aldebaran remembered that Berkeley’s Radical Psychiatry Center taught that people were fat because they ate too much because they were oppressed. By disproving the middle factor, Fat Underground would directly attack the underlying factors oppressing fat women. Fishman. “When food intakes of obese individuals were accurately assessed and compared with people of normal weights, the intakes were identical.” A. M. Bryans, Canadian Journal of Public Health (November 1967): 487 cited by Aldebaran, “Fat: Let the Doctors Speak for Themselves” (1975). Concerning the failure of diets, reports such as the
Underground), its attack on a multibillion-dollar dieting industry, and its use of terms like “communiqué” for published articles—maintained an anticapitalist thread. Aldebaran a.k.a. Vivian Mayer made this connection clear: “Most of the popular knowledge about fatness is mystification. This mystification is backed up by the medical profession and capitalist interests. The anti-fat stance of capitalism—the interests of the fashion and diet-food industries, for example—would be easy for most radicals to accept as oppressive.”

From a foundation of internal support and CR, FU approached other fat women and the southern California feminist community. The RFTC, under Judy and Aldebaran’s guidance, advanced FU’s CR and medical research by starting a Fat Women’s Problem-Solving Group. Fat-positive CR discouraged dieting as ineffective and taught women to speak up for their right to health care without pressure from doctors to diet. Ariana Manov prompted discussion of why they did not talk about sex or relate to others or each

U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare’s in 1966 and Obesity in 1974 concluded that because the body reduces metabolic rate and the amount of energy intake to operate when given decreased calories, people on diets would have to further reduce caloric intake and accept hunger to maintain reduced weight. Also from Aldebaran “Fat.” Alvan Feinstein, M.D. wrote, “The few studies [of weight loss] containing long term results usually show a very low success rate—no more than about 1 or 2%.” Alvan Feinstein, “How Do We Measure Accomplishment in Weight Reduction?” Obesity: Causes, Consequences, and Treatment (Medcom Press, 1974), 86, cited in Aldebaran, “The No-Cure ‘Cure’” (1976). Fishman. The 1960s study of fat, blue-collar Italian-Americans in Roseto, Pennsylvania found them virtually free of the diseases supposedly correlated with fatness. Although these Rosetans ate high cholesterol foods and many were very fat, their subculture valued fatness, and they were “healthier than the average, average-sized American of the same age, sex and occupation.” A Mayo Clinic study in 1952 found that people who maintained a heavy weight became coronary patients at the same rate as slim people and dieter but survived better than thin and dieting people. Aldebaran cites a number of doctors who warned that dieting impaired the heart, nerves, protein tissue, and body chemistry. Aldebaran, “Health of Fat People: The Scare-Story Your Doctor Won’t Tell You” 7-page Fat Underground pamphlet of 1974.


For example, they circulated a generic letter for one’s doctor demanding adequate medical attention without the assumption that problems are based on weight, without lectures, and with allowances like large size (42 cm) blood pressure cuffs so that a falsely high reading did not result from an overly tight cuff. Letter in Judy Freespirit box at Mazer. Mayer, “Fat Liberation” recounts incidents of doctors refusing to examine fat women with fractured spines and instead telling them to exercise and of a doctor who would not believe a fat woman was pregnant (she almost died of toxemia) (5).
other sexually. Why did they fulfill the “sexless fat girl” stereotype in the midst of “the sex-drenched environment of the 1970s”? Over the course of 1974, the group took secluded retreats and worked to love their bodies by recuperating an aesthetic based on ancient earth mother goddess images like the Venus of Willendorf. This imagery would supplement the Amazon warrior motif within the feminist community.92

FU took its CR from feminist spaces to the mainstream in its attempts positively to alter women’s lives. The group appeared at a Women’s Equality Day and in the pages of Sister by the autumn of 1974.93 FU members harassed local weight-loss clinics by attending introductory lectures and using the question-and-answer portion to attack the programs’ medical theories and success rates. They also denounced weight-loss surgeries like intestinal bypass and jaw-wiring as barbaric, dangerous mutilations.94 By 1976, FU members spoke regularly at California State University at Long Beach (CSULB) Women’s Studies classes. Other women began picking up on fat liberation and writing articles to The Lesbian Tide.95 Former FU members directly influenced Califia camps and

92 Fishman.
94 Fishman. In Aldebaran’s “The No-Cure ‘Cure’,” FU focused on insufficient scientific evidence that fat is the cause of disease and thus of medical concern. Not only did they cite the U. S. Department of Health’s 1966 determination that weight fluctuation through dieting may decrease life expectancy, but they noted that there is no way of knowing whether fat is inherently unhealthy because all the fat people in studies had histories of dieting.
continued to write and speak out for fat liberation into the early 1980s from both coasts, serving as models for continued fat liberation work.\textsuperscript{96}

While FU sought to reconcile women to earth-mother bodies, Betty Brooks hoped to turn women into Amazons like Wonder Woman who could protect themselves from male violence.\textsuperscript{97} Betty dedicated herself to fighting rape and was virtually "a one-woman self-defense, consciousness-raising and training system, teaching hundreds of women how to protect themselves."\textsuperscript{98} As early as 1973, she taught "dirty street fighting" at the Los Angeles Westside Women's Center and elsewhere. A deep scream called "the

\textsuperscript{96} Vivian Mayer, "The Fat Illusion," \textit{Hagborn} (incomplete information for citation, but dated between late 1980 and January 1981), 3-4 from Betty Jetter's personal files. "The Fat Illusion," "Fat Liberation Manifesto" and other essays by FU members like Aldebaran (Vivian Mayer), Lynn Mabel-Lois, Sharon Bas Hannah, Judy Freespirit, and Elena Dykewomon are found in Lisa Schoenfielder and Barb Wieser, eds., \textit{Shadow on a Tightrope: Writings by Women on Fat Oppression} (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1983). Marilyn Wann's \textit{FAT!SO?: Because You Don't Have to Apologize for Your Size!} (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1998) continues fat liberation and shows how activist publication has expanded since Fat Underground. She cites a Hawaiian children's book called \textit{Aunt Pua's Dilemma}, a practical guide to airline seats and catalog of fat-related items (clothing, exercise equipment, children's goods, etc.), the San Francisco-based zines \textit{FATSO?} and \textit{Fat Girl: The Zine for Fat Dykes and the Women Who Want Them}, the Bay Area Fat Lip Readers Theatre, and other positive popular cultural portrayals of fat. Like Sara Golda Bracha Fishman (Aldebaran), I think it is not a coincidence that militant fat liberation arose alongside Hollywood and took root in California's progressive Bay Area.

\textsuperscript{97} Betty Brooks is a white, middle-class, Protestant-raised feminist who was a 1960s activist, wife and mother, physical education teacher, self-defense teacher, organizer of a rape crisis hotline, feminist bookstore co-owner and proponent of sexual liberation. During Califia she was an assistant professor of Women's Studies at California State University in Long Beach, CA. See Betty Willis Brooks, "All the Teachers are the Taught, and All the Taught are the Teachers: Califia Community" (unpublished manuscript, n.d. [post-1982?]), 1-2, from LLC. Betty's self-defense workshop flyers sometimes sported the slogan, "All women can be Wonder-Woman!" Flyer from 1980 in LLC subject file for Betty Willis Brooks.

ovarian yell” could draw help and give an assailant pause. Betty challenged women to “turn fear into anger into action.” Attack the vulnerable points along an assailant’s vertical centerline (eyes, nose, windpipe, groin, knees, shins, insteps), and use his strength and balance against him. In addition to advising surprise attacks and tapping into an attacker’s guilt, Betty asked women to examine why they would defend their children and not themselves. Passive sexist conditioning could be broken.99

Betty modeled her feminist mission of preparing women physically and mentally through her outspoken personality and high energy. As such, she seemed a beacon to some and a glaring problem to others. She started the first feminist bookstore in Orange County in 1974. Persephone’s Place was named after the Greco-Roman myth, in which Hades kidnapped and raped earth mother Demeter’s daughter. Betty wanted to end the rape myth by educating women, “so no woman would be pulled into Hades.” The bookstore served as a type of women’s center with lectures but folded after a year.100 Six months into its existence, Betty became embroiled in controversy when CSULB’s women’s Physical Education Department denied her a permanent teaching position. Sister reported this as a purge of feminists and detailed Betty’s university accomplishments. She had developed courses, and a large majority of colleagues had elected her to the Women’s Studies Steering Committee to agitate for parity in budgets for men and women’s athletics. The Committee Against Sexism in Employment backed Betty, and her case revealed inconsistencies in assessing qualifications for teaching and

100 Betty Willis Brooks follow-up, 1.
tenure. Betty retained her job after a fight. She continued to teach self-defense, developing an Association of Self-Defense Instructors and helping to form a growing antirape network in the wider Los Angeles area. She also initiated courses on women’s sexuality. In addition to weekend extension classes, Betty and sociology professor Linda Shaw developed a course called “Women and Their Bodies” in 1975. The course dealt with bodily oppression through the commercialization of women and emphasis on their appearance, women’s health, sexual lifestyles, and sexuality for pleasure. Like FU, whose representatives spoke to Betty’s Women’s Studies classes, Betty believed that understanding sexism strengthened women’s ability to interpret medical information and resist assimilation into oppressive norms.

Los Angeles feminists’ efforts to resist male domination extended to promoting alternative spiritualities. The growth of women’s spirituality in the Los Angeles area rejected patriarchal religious structures in favor of feminist spiritual lives that might connect with other feminist politics. “Z” Budapest encouraged women to link spiritual growth with feminist principles and politics. She had left a depressing marriage for lesbianism in 1970, had come out as a witch in 1971, and had started holding sabbats that

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102 Randi Firus, “Brooks—Profile in Unsubtle Persuasion,” Daily Forty-Niner (October 17, 1979): 12 in LLC subject files, Betty Willis Brooks. In 1973 the Los Angeles Women’s Union included an antirape chapter. There was an antirape squad at Westside Women’s Center, and the two programs coordinated a rape-crisis counseling service and tried to strengthen rape laws against the popular view that rape victims somehow asked for abuse. Retter 137. That year a city-wide conference established the Los Angeles Coalition on Assaults Against Women (LACAAW). Betty had all 200 conference participants up practicing “dirty street fighting.” She also organized the Downey-Whittier hotline for rape victims. Robins. By 1976, LACAAW had lobbied and gotten state funding for the Los Angeles Rape Crisis Center with a twenty-four-hour hotline, counseling, and community education. Joan Robins managed LACAAW’s first office with Valerie Nordstrom. Retter 138. LACAAW continues to operate.
saw exponential growth. She soon founded and became the high priestess of the Susan B. Anthony Coven number 1. By 1974, Z had opened the Feminist Wicca store where she sold supplies and read tarot cards. Many in the feminist community rallied to her support in April 1975 when an undercover policewoman arrested Z for fortune-telling based on a seldom-invoked old municipal ordinance. Some feminists felt the ordinance conflicted with a state law that only banned fortune-telling with an intent to defraud. The ensuing case raised the issue of the First Amendment right to religious practice and the role of payment for religious services. The judge argued that divining for profit did not fall under First Amendment protection. An exposé in The Lesbian Tide claimed the prosecutor was consistently sarcastic, derisive, and bent on discrediting Dianic witchcraft as a religion. Since "Wicca is an organized religion and has been recognized as such by the State of California" and tarot reading "plays an important part in the work and rituals of the Wiccan religion," The Lesbian Tide concluded, "Z's story is another incident illustrating increasing political harassment of feminist activists." Found guilty, she appealed without success three years later after realizing that Los Angeles sold licenses for fortune-telling in addition to upholding a law against it. The arrest of Z, like the firing of Betty, raises a theme of harassment against women who pushed the limits of norms that they considered patriarchal.

103 Z weighed in on the issue of transwomen in the movement when she kicked Sandy Stone out of the Susan B. Anthony coven in 1977. They were reconciled in 1986. Brown, "Class Presentation" in "TransHistory."
Feminist Wicca under Z’s leadership captured tensions between culture and politics. A Wiccan supporter argued that the Dianic tradition was “the ideal religion for feminist women actively seeking change.” She stressed Wicca’s validation of women’s power, intuition, self-confidence, and responsibility while also promoting sisterhood and sharing through rituals. Inseparable from sexuality, such spirituality would be “a great sustainer” and increase women’s power.106 A woman who had felt a lot of body hatred over having facial hair found Z’s “matriarchal herstory … of ancient wise wimmin who sported their beards proudly as symbols of their wisdom and veneration” to be an overwhelmingly validating introduction to understanding looksist oppression. Like fat liberationists, this woman started raising people’s consciousness by correcting those who called her “sir,” networking with other bearded women, and writing about her move from shame to activism in The Lesbian Tide.107 Proponents of feminist spirituality posed their beliefs as a necessary support to and integral part of political work.

Wicca, however, was also becoming a livelihood for Z. Her values and actions reflect tensions between spreading information to support revolution and gaining profits from one’s work.108 Z complained bitterly in an article that the southern California movement should support her presentation of her “Magical Goddess Slide Show” with

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108 In the January/February 1977 edition of The Lesbian Tide Z Budapest denounced Christmas as a patriarchal cooptation of the pagan winter solstice. Christmas promoted consumerism, “the birth of a male child,” and “a glorification of motherhood which is profitable to men.” Z recommended that women boycott male-owned stores and buy gifts from women-owned stores. “Symbolic gifts that further spiritual life and strengthen self-affirmation are appropriate for this time. Cards can be read for the coming year. Give witches magical supplies for their craft—a myrrh necklace, or spells for truth, strength and health in the new year.” All such presents could be found at Z’s Feminist Wicca store. Z Budapest, “How the Grinch Stole Winter Solstice,” The Lesbian Tide 5.4 (January/February 1976): 29.
speaking fees comparable to the $750 she said she got in Michigan. That would allow her "a reasonable living in exchange for [her] work" of reenergizing audiences and stimulating new thoughts. In an accompanying rebuttal, the Tide Collective vehemently disagreed with Z's focus on certain women as stars rather than on organizers. The feminist movement had lasted more than a decade by 1977 with little in the way of big-money contributions because of the dedication of thousands of volunteer organizers and workers. Califia would side with volunteerism. The camps supported feminist cultural production by encouraging women to sell their art, but the all-volunteer collective had a goal of spreading responsibility and authority instead of maintaining elitism.

Wicca was clearly a feminist cultural practice. Practitioners argued that it was also political. Likewise, women's music seemed primarily founded for cultural production, to create resonance with women's—especially lesbian feminists'—lives. Singers also saw themselves as spreading feminist messages in a way compatible with CR. Parallel to Califia, a collective started the Los Angeles Women's Community Chorus (LAWCC) between 1976 and 1977, and popular annual concerts added to a growing women's music scene that aroused women's indignation and bound them together with a sense of purpose. LAWCC performed a combination of new standards by Margie Adams, Meg Christian, Cris Williamson, and Bernice Johnson Reagon of Sweet

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Honey and the Rock,\textsuperscript{111} traditional tunes from various cultures,\textsuperscript{112} and other songs tailored to feminist concerns. Women involved in LAWCC composed Spanish-language songs for the chorus in order to appeal to and include the large Spanish-speaking minority within the Women’s Movement.\textsuperscript{113} In what must have been a charged atmosphere, the chorus sang of women’s fury over rape,\textsuperscript{114} economic misogyny and sexist gender norms,\textsuperscript{115} the outrage of psychiatric violence against women,\textsuperscript{116} and inadequate gains toward women’s liberation.\textsuperscript{117} Rousing, inspirational pieces heralded women’s rising expectations and camaraderie through the feminist movement.\textsuperscript{118} They educated the audience with songs that glorified women’s history, promoted feminist health consciousness, and described the work of Women Against Violence Against Women.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item Malvina Reynolds, “The Judge Said,” lyrics only. Betty Jetter’s personal files.
  \item “Sister-Woman-Sister,” lyrics without date. Betty Jetter’s personal files.
  \item Bonnie Lockhart, “Still Ain’t Satisfied,” lyrics without date. Betty Jetter’s personal files.
\end{itemize}
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Programs included sing-alongs of songs that were becoming well-known within the community to draw the audience into one unified voice. LAWCC provided women with a project, time, and space together. For the very committed, it was a type of community identification. Elsa Sue Fisher reveled in LAWCC as a collective member and in Califia as a yearly participant. She remembered applying some of the Califia workshop issues at LAWCC retreats: “Gazillions of women were in LAWCC and Califia.” The desire for the shared dynamic between LAWCC and Califia may have influenced women to try out and remain involved in both as sustained or recurring women’s spaces.

**FEMO AND SAGARIS: FEMINIST EDUCATIONAL MODELS**

Lesbian conferences, women’s centers, self-defense or Women’s Studies courses, Wiccan rituals, and women’s music concerts all promoted physical spaces electric with a sense of women’s energy and the chances for individual and social transformation. Some feminists wanted to create specifically female communities. At one end were proposals for permanent women’s land where women could live together. Northern California’s Mendocino County had a long-lived example, and initial Califia participants sought to

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121 Transcripts for Elsa Sue Fisher, 2-3, 8, Elsa Fisher follow-up 1, and Lydia Otero 6. Lydia Otero, who had no interest in joining LAWCC and only limited willingness to engage with Califia Community, also remembered a prevalent overlap between those groups, which she interpreted as “great because it certainly kept the Califia, they were able to bond outside the Califia camps through the Chorus.
create women’s land in southern California. Other women came together in temporary communities, which provided a safe, women-only space in which to grow strong, learn skills, and network for changes that women could make when they returned to the dominant society. The same divisive issues that plagued other feminist spaces often rent these communities, but they served as examples on which Califia founders built their temporary community camps.

In 1974, Sue Williams of Los Angeles attended a thirteen-day community in Copenhagen called Femo with 150–200 women from the United States and European countries. English was the official language although it was the first language of only thirty to forty of the women. Sue’s account in Sister portrayed Femo as a chaotic, high-energy affair that was low on accommodations and strong on creative tension. Women left their jobs and outside lives behind, only introducing themselves by their first names and the work they did for the Women’s Movement. Divided into tents of twenty-five women each, they rotated cooking and cleaning for the whole group. Each night, representatives from a different country gave a presentation. The evenings sparked controversy over the lesbian-straight divide, culturally based feelings of exclusion within the group, and discussions about separatism and the role of socialism in feminism. An American woman’s question, “What is all this socialism stuff anyway?” precipitated a wave of French discussion, which an Italian woman concluded with, “But all the Feminists always come from the middle class. You must have socialist economics first!” Amid the cacophony and debate, Sue saw a group of women who had forged themselves in a hostile world and were not going to compromise even with other feminists. At the
same time the relative safety of the all-women community allowed women to like, listen to, and respect each other. Sue returned to Los Angeles with experience in how a temporary women's community operated. Hearing about a public meeting in 1975 to form a southern California educational community, she became one of the founding collective members of Califia.

The provisional Califia collective (before the first public meeting) grew from southern California women's attendance at a Vermont-based, collective-run feminist institution called Sagaris, which used a college setting for extracurricular feminism. Betty Brooks and Marilyn Murphy had talked about starting some kind of feminist education program on the West Coast since they became friends in 1974 at Persephone's. Both of them were part of a postwar journey, the trails of which were blazed by Civil Rights workers and early Second Wave feminists. They heeded countercultural calls to explore the shifting terrain of political discourse by reconsidering gender relations, discussing race more openly, and systematically analyzing institutions.

Betty traces her starting point to the emancipatory possibility of religion. She was raised in a family that emphasized the importance of church life in segregated Louisiana. When she was a new mother in California, Betty recalls, "I was trying to figure out what I believed, what I was going to do with the rest of my life." She and other acquaintances

123 Bunch and Pollack 138. During the planning stages of Califia, Marilyn was an Irish and Italian-American, working-class, Catholic–raised, middle-aged feminist wife, mother, and student who had been an activist, organizer, community teacher and writer since 1969. See her self-description as a writer in The Lesbian News 9.5 (December 1983): 23 and The Lesbian News 12.3 (November 1986): 29. Betty Jetter remembered becoming involved in Califia through Marilyn, whom she met at the NOW California State Conferences. Betty J. was a long-term member of NOW-San Fernando Valley while Marilyn was in NOW-Orange County. Betty Jetter transcript, 1-2.
attended the Ecumenical Institute in Chicago in the late 1960s. Living and learning in that Christian space, she saw gender and racial parity in action. She returned to California to work for two years introducing inclusive language into her church, but realized that liberal Protestants “were still terribly male dominated, and [she] was moving in a very different direction.” From the institute Betty developed her feminist mission to fight rape. She returned to teaching at CSULB and thought about ways to expand feminist education beyond the academy. Marilyn was also active in and outside the university, but she was a “recovering Catholic.” Raised before the changes of Vatican II, she put her faith in feminism and rejected religion as a path to social justice. By the early 1970s, she had thrown herself into the Orange County Women’s Liberation Center, Orange County/Laguna Beach NOW, and California Women in Higher Education. As one of the first publicly feminist Ph.D. candidates in southern California, she participated in speakers’ bureaus, giving talks at least twice a week. Resistance to her feminist dissertation ultimately left her without a doctorate and with a fiery interest in preserving feminism outside of university constraints. When The Lesbian Tide announced in January 1975 that Sagaris would open that summer “to bring together the foremost

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124 The Ecumenical Institute was a live-in community started in Chicago by the World Council of Churches in the 1950s that combined equal task-sharing and teaching between men and women for societal change. Betty was affiliated first with the Methodist Church and then with the progressive denomination, United Church of Christ, but the Ecumenical Institute, with its connection to the World Council of Churches, would have been interdenominational. For her time at the Ecumenical Institute, mission to fight rape, teaching and family life see of Betty Brooks with Sylvia Russel transcript 2-3.
feminist thinkers so that they can communicate with and teach other women,” Betty and Marilyn decided to go.\(^{126}\)

Sagaris planners expressed the tensions Betty and Marilyn felt between the academy and community, creating an extracurricular space to give participants the exhilaration of intensive study with leading feminists. Dissatisfied with feminist studies at Goddard College in Lyndonville, Vermont, they started planning Sagaris in 1973 as a model of feminist education without institutional constraints and solicited funding from individuals and—eventually, after much debate—from foundations.\(^{127}\) Betty and Marilyn attended the first session of Sagaris together, along with Marilyn Pearsol from Los Angeles and Jodie Timms of San Diego. Sagaris held two five-week sessions on the

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\(^{126}\) Cheryl Gould, “New Institute Opens,” *The Lesbian Tide* 4.5 (January 1975): 11, 29. Sagaris, the term for the double-edged axe of the Amazons, had “two main thrusts...to begin the exploration of the philosophical and ideological foundations of feminism and to train women to think and organize themselves.” Gould defines a sagaris as a double-edged sword, but the term is found in ancient Greek historical descriptions and under the more recognized term, “labyris” (alternately labris, labrus, labrys). It became a lesbian symbol associated with powerful Greco-Roman goddesses like Artemis/Diana Gaea to represent matriarchy-based women’s power. See “The Labyris” webpage at http://www.glsenco.org/General%20resources/GLBT%20History/labyris.htm last checked 17 April 2003. In book 7, section 64 of *The History* Herodotus describes Scythians as carrying “axes, which they called ‘sagaris.’” Within Herodotus there is a connection between Scythians and Amazons, whom Scythians called “Otorpata,” which in Greek would signify ‘man-slayers.’” In 4.110-117 Herodotus recounts that Amazons drifted on a Greek ship to a coast free Scythians inhabited after killing the Greeks who had captured them. The free Scythians, surprised that women were ravaging their country, sent a detachment of young men in equal numbers to the Amazons in order to breed children. By following orders never to fight back, the men were successful, and this led to the Sauromatian people, and “from then on the women of the Sauromatians follow their old way of life; they go on horseback, hunting with their men and without them, and they go to the war, too, and wear the same dress as the men do. ...no maiden may marry until she has killed a man of the enemy....” Herodotus, *The History*, David Grene, trans. (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 320-323, 493. The most direct connection between Amazons and the sagaris comes from Strabo’s description in *Geography* 11.5.1: “that the right breasts of all are seared when they are infants, so that they can easily use their right arm for every needed purpose, and especially that of throwing the javelin; that they also use bow and sagaris and light shield....” Strabo, *Geography. English and Greek*. Horace Leonard Jones based on J. R. Sitlington Sterrett, trans., Loeb Classical Library (London: W. Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1933), 233.

college campus, which were open to 120 students each.\textsuperscript{128} The collective charged a sliding-scale tuition fee that topped off at $700 per session and gave scholarships and childcare duty work exchanges especially to recruit minority and working-class women. They offered living space in the dorms, childcare, and classes taught by such luminaries as Rita Mae Brown on leadership, Charlotte Bunch on organizing, Mary Daly on knowledge, Emily Medvec on economics, Candace Falk on socialism and feminism, Ti-Grace Atkinson on theoretical thinking, and Alix Kates Shulman on feminism and anarchy. During the first session, collective members and participants raised (without resolution) concerns about lack of support for lesbians by the collective, divisions between working-class and middle-class participants, tensions between mothers and those who resented added childcare duties, and individuals whose disruptions drained energy from the group.\textsuperscript{129} The women who would form the first Califia collective would take care to learn from these divisions by explicitly addressing class and keeping costs down, so that women could attend without work exchange.

The second session, which Sagaris planner, fundraiser, and future Califia collective member Josy Catoggio attended,\textsuperscript{130} degenerated into paranoia and opposing factions who debated over whether or not Sagaris collective members should have solicited and taken a $5,000 grant from the Ms. Foundation for the first session and

\textsuperscript{128} Gould 11.

\textsuperscript{129} Lesbians criticized the collective for minimizing lesbianism as individual sexuality to outside funding agents and evaluators. Although four of the seven collective members present were lesbian, the collective seemed to imply that dykes should be closeted at Sagaris. They deemed the rhetoric of personal sexuality necessary for funding. Lectures on class stressed examination of personal background. A vocal working-class caucus formed and demanded that feminists had to support their institutions and each other monetarily. Mothers called for extended childcare, while poorer women there through the work exchange program resented the amount of their work. St. Joan 117-125.

\textsuperscript{130} Josy Catoggio transcript 6.
another $10,000 for the second. On May 9, 1975, the radical feminist group Redstockings had issued a press release “accusing Ms. magazine editor Gloria Steinem of having once been involved with a CIA front,” which “insinuated that Ms. magazine was part of a CIA strategy to replace radical feminism with liberal feminism.” Because Steinem had not responded, some faculty members at Sagaris objected to the collective garnering more funding from Ms. During a six-hour debate between Ti-Grace Atkinson and Joan Peters, Atkinson argued, “You can’t take that money. The Redstockings have just accused Gloria Steinem of being a CIA agent. The money is tainted, that money is suspect, and you’re going to pollute Sagaris with it.” Josy explains why the majority of the Sagaris participants voted to retain financial support:

And, of course, we couldn’t have survived without that money. We’d already spent it. So it was never even an issue. And they ultimately decided that they shouldn’t even have opened that issue to debate because it wasn’t our decision to make as a community. ... And working-class women who were there, like Dorothy Allison ... would say, “Look!” you know, “It’s a question of survival, you know. If you want this to happen, the money has to come from somewhere.” Some feminist groups were taking money from the Playboy Foundation. Now I thought that was much more outrageous than the Ms. Foundation.

Josy highlights both the elements of authority and the classed nature of the debate over principles, which has not been apparent in published assessments. Although some women at the first session had found the Sagaris collective to be too controlling, the collective had felt a burden of responsibility. Members repeatedly begged feminist communities nationwide to donate funds for an educational experience they hoped would link theorists

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131 Echols 265-268.
132 Rosen 256 based on her interview of Atkinson.
133 Josy Catoggio transcript 7-8.
with grassroots activists and shape the course of feminism. With the second session upon them, there was no time for fundraising. Working-class feminists who had more experience with how distressing budget constraints could be may have been more pragmatic about making up for insufficient contributions by soliciting the funds from Ms.

Pragmatism did not reassure those whose principles were offended by possible connection with the CIA. “Ti-Grace Atkinson, Alix Kates Shulman, Susan Sherman, and Marilyn Webb—and about twenty students seceded from the school to form the August 7th Survival Community.” They held classes at a place they rented in town. Peters described complete polarization, hero worship by students, fist fights, and a sense that Sagaris had become “the establishment” to be fought. Josy, Peters, Falk, Webb, and many others at Sagaris came to believe that FBI infiltrators furthered the conflicts as they did in many movement groups. Josy explains how infiltration worked:

[T]hey support the person who has the most extreme point of view and encourage them to not work with the others because they won’t come around completely. ... It literally divided into the Ti-Grace Atkinson followers, who named themselves the August 7th Something ’cause that was the date that they actually walked out on the rest of us. ... There were two women that nobody knew. And they were from California, interestingly enough, but nobody from California knew them either. And they were pretty quiet except that they would really sort of encourage Ti-Grace to stick to her guns and don’t work with those other people, so that—the point of which—you couldn’t go to her classes unless you signed this sort of little loyalty oath.

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134 Gould 29: “The institute is trying desperately to be funded independently, without the aid of grants. The collective needs seed money to get the school started. I would like to urge all women to send money, even if it’s just a dollar, to help Sagaris get started.” On hopes for shaping feminism see St. Joan 116.

135 Echols 268.

136 Rosen 256-257.

137 Rosen 258.

138 Josy Catoggio transcript 6-7, 8, 9.
As it did with civil rights and leftist groups, the FBI did try to keep tabs on the Women's Liberation Movement and disrupt action that could threaten the status quo. Although it is unclear whether government agents targeted Sagaris, Josy's assessment of how infiltration worked explains the apparent irrationality or overblown consequences of secession. In a vicious cycle, societal oppression bred feminist distrust while goals of recruitment and radical democracy left feminist groups exposed to government counterintelligence programs, which further encouraged distrust.

**A UNITED FRONT OR INTERNAL DIVISION**

Lesbian feminists and their straight feminist allies celebrated the thrill of a sense of women's community even as they grappled with internal and external contradictions that produced divisions. All-women spaces generated supportive, engaging discussions that touched women's lives and yielded new analyses of the world in order to challenge patriarchy. Feminists trained women to fight for themselves physically and intellectually. Women's culture had its own lesbian feminist language, music, and events. There were avenues for political activism from legal reform to guerrilla speak-outs. The women who participated, however, brought differences in their backgrounds and lifestyles, which became the source of division as women politicized their lives. How could a theory of oppression that took sexism as paramount adequately cover diverse issues without becoming too diffuse to address everything? Feminists struggled to define the boundaries of their army to include as many potential fighters as possible without introducing

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diversions or provocateurs. Society, itself, introduced divisions because women held
different privileges from living in an unequal society. How could they survive in an
unreformed world and simultaneously disassociate themselves from the forces they felt
shackled them—men and heteropatriarchal institutions, including class structure and
racial hierarchy?

Califia Community participants tried to develop ways to share power and
responsibility so that all could contribute their best without feeling used or marginalized.
Its members experimented with forms of dissent that could strengthen the group rather
than tear it apart. Keeping frustration and rage focused against the dominant forces
instead of turning that anger against the sisters at hand was a continuing struggle.
Maintaining a sense of fun and nourishing cultural energy without losing political focus
was difficult amid the glitzy Hollywood entertainment industry and the live-for-the-now
counterculture.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ A subsidiary question would be, "Whose culture?" The women’s liberation and lesbian feminist
movements reclaimed many symbols from a western civilization mythical tradition. Bilitis [from Pierre
Louys’ 1894 faked reproduction of Greek poetry], the furies, amazons, earth mother goddesses like the
Venus of Willendorf, Persephone, witchcraft, and Sagaris were among these references. These images were
familiar to women because of an educational system, which taught dominant western civilization to the
exclusion of a multicultural curriculum. As feminists reevaluated their educations and feminists of color
embraced pre-colonial and hybrid cultural traditions, Greco-Roman influences would be inadequate to
encompass the diversity within the Women’s Movement. A related concern was what parts of male-
dominated culture to keep. Should women substitute women’s spirituality for male-dominated religions?
Should they jettison both in favor of a political focus and thus adopt a western masculine tradition of
rationality and science to the exclusion of mysticism? To what extent did women’s culture retain men’s
ideas as useful, substitute feminine versions of male-dominated beliefs, or make culture anew?
3. BUILDING (CALIFIA) COMMUNITY, 1975–1978

The initial collective members of Califia had impressive ambitions. They sought to build a sense of community while respecting differences in a society that largely split people by race, class, age, and family status. They would analyze power relations that Americans often ignored and unify women in activism that would enact a new form of influence and mutual responsibility. Before they could realize their ambitions, however, the founders had to build a collective and an educational plan. By looking at that process, it becomes clear that the context from which Califia arose influenced its initial methods. Lesbian feminist experience with consciousness-raising (CR) and consensus decision-making helped Califia founders to innovate participatory learning. Their focus on heteropatriarchy, however, constrained their ability to acknowledge diversity among women and relate to normative society. A highly personal approach to the analysis of social relations had repercussions for interpersonal relationships and their political project.

Although Califia women became ground-breaking educators among Los Angeles feminists on classism and racism, like many grassroots organizations, Califia had trouble balancing the interests of women from different classes and fully integrating women of color. Early collective members also were representatives of a trend of seeking a separatist space for women and their children. Away from men, adolescent male children, and anything considered irrevocably tainted by masculinity, women could feel safe and form women's culture while gaining the tools they needed to unite for social change. The ways that Califia blended cultural and activist objectives make it ideal for understanding
lesbian feminist debates over what weight should be given to political action, separatism, culture, and spirituality.

**BIRTHING THE DAUGHTER OF SAGARIS**

True to her expansive vision, Betty Brooks returned from Sagaris ready to pioneer a better educational model by drawing on her background with the Ecumenical Institute. The perspectives of those who made up the original collective would determine Califia’s direction. Betty got Marilyn Murphy, Marilyn Pearsol, and Jodie Timms to attend planning meetings with other feminists across California. The initial meeting places they chose were not feminist strongholds nor areas known for diversity. Instead, La Jolla (between Los Angeles and San Diego) and Morro Bay (between Los Angeles and the Bay Area) were geographically convenient to those who expressed interest and were pleasantly beachfront. Soon they recognized that, unlike the interstate Sagaris collective, California was too large even to combine its southern and northern feminists. Instead, these four solicited every feminist group they could think of in the Los Angeles to San Diego area and put a notice in the Los Angeles feminist newspaper *Sisters*, which led to a forty-four-woman meeting at the Women’s Building in LA. Six joined as collective members. Marilyn Murphy would come to describe their project thus: "Califia

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1 Brooks 2.
2 Betty Brooks follow-up 1. Nobody in the group was from Morro Bay, but a professor opened her home in La Jolla for their meeting.
3 Brooks 3.
4 The first large planning meeting on November 16, 1975 was advertised in *Sisters*, which was a feminist but not specifically lesbian publication. The meeting resulted in support from a number of women who did not want to be collective members in addition to the following new collective members: Margaret Barker, Mary Glavin, Donna Hill, Cecilia Lami, Janet Stambolian (a socialist feminist), and Sue Williams. Margaret, Donna, Cecilia, and Marilyn Pearsol resigned before the Califia Camp and, according to Betty, were replaced by “another Sagaris woman,” Sue Dunne, Ahshe Green, Gail Harris, Anne Perna, and Shirley Virgil. Brooks 4.
Community is the daughter of Sagaris and, like most daughters, is very like and very
unlike her mother." The southern California context would inevitably affect the course
of Califia’s education.

Like Sagaris, the collective agreed on a name linked to Amazons, but, unlike their
East Coast progenitor, the California experiment projected western inclusiveness.

Marilyn Pearsol thought up the name “Califia Community.” Marilyn Murphy explained
in 1983:

We call ourselves Califia because she is the legendary Black Amazon/Goddess
for whom California was originally named. We call our organization Community
to express our commitment to the development of an informed community spirit
among Califia women which recognizes and affirms our differences as we
celebrate our sisterhood. Califia Community is committed to the development of a
multicultural community of the spirit of women through feminist education.

The name reflects a number of emphases for this white-founded, radical feminist group.

Califia’s West Coast Spanish roots invoked cultural contact from the conquest.

5 Bunch and Pollack 139. Brooks 3. Founded in 1973, the Women’s Building was a white-dominated center
that housed art programs, dances, lectures, and businesses. Retter 124-127.
7 Choosing the name Califia shows both continuity and an extension of a trend within white- and lesbian-
dominated feminist groups and publications. By choosing references to Amazons, Sagaris/Labyris, Sappho,
Pandora, The Furies, Artemis/Diana, Sibyls, Themis, etc., feminists recuperated powerful female figures
and terms from ancient Greco-Roman mythology, seeing in them the matriarchal societies posited as
precursors to the more patriarchal societies from which most Greek authors hailed. Califia bridged
European and American traditions by using a reference from Garcia Ordonez de Montalvo’s 1510 Las
Sergas de Esplandian (the adventures of Espandian). Reportedly an extremely popular romance novel
during the Spanish conquest, the story is set on an island called California replete with pearls, gold, and
beautiful black Amazon women who are led by Queen Califia. Fortified by steep cliffs and rock shores,
Califia and her Amazons only allowed men on the island once per year as walking sperm donors, a concept
that repeats Strabo’s description of Amazons. Hernán Cortéz led about 650 Spaniards in 11 ships from
Cuba up the western coast of Mexico in 1519 and mentioned California as a “great island of fabulous
wealth” after his men met American Indians who had pearls. See Mark J. Denger, “Spanish and Mexican
California: Explorations and Conquest of California” for the California State Military Department’s “The
California Military Museum: Preserving California’s Military History” website, last checked 22 March
members connected with the Amazon tradition that stemmed from ancient Greek mythology. They
foreshadowed women of color cultural references, however, by choosing a name that combined Old and
New World references.
mythical Califia Amazons, who lived without men, mirrored a separatist aspect. Marilyn's statement honored women of color (mythically black or geographically American Indian) and lesbians (through the lesbian associations with "Amazon") as foundational contributors to society while recognizing that differences prevented women from uniting for positive change. The term "multicultural" is more reflective of the 1980s, but the commitment to lesbians was foundational and Betty credits Marilyn with injecting an early interest in class and race.⁸

To form an informed community, collective members fashioned feminist pedagogy that would circumscribe their degree of control and would promote shared responsibility. Unlike Sagaris, the Califia collective's temporary community sought to avoid a firm division between authoritative teachers and dependent students because "all the teachers are the taught and all the taught are the teachers."⁹ This motto expressed feminist CR-based education that valued every woman's personal experience and collectively analyzed that experience to reveal the bases of oppression, so that women could devise actions to oppose oppression. It was similar to what Paulo Freire termed conscientização, or "critical consciousness." Freire's program guided oppressed people from perceiving social, political, and economic contradictions that limited their freedom to realizing "the 'untested feasibility' which lies beyond the limit-situations" and taking "action against the oppressive elements of reality."¹⁰ Like Freire, Califia teachers sought more interactive forms of presentation that would allow a free exchange and "co-

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⁸ Betty Brooks follow-up 4.
⁹ This phrase was repeated at Califia camps and became the title for Betty Willis Brooks' unpublished article-length manuscript about Califia, found at LLC. Brooks 6.
investigation” of ideas and problems rather than a strict teacher-student hierarchy in which teachers authoritatively determined all curricula and bestowed the information that ignorant, passive students meekly memorized and repeated.\footnote{Freire 72-73, 81.}

To this end, collective members balanced their responsibility for providing structure against opportunities for others to contribute. The collective organized year-round, allotted the time available during the sessions, and taught major presentations. Jodie sought to promote wider participation by favoring small-group activities over lecture format. Mary Glavin integrated charts, drama, and language, including diagnostic tools that let women determine their class backgrounds as a precursor to speaking from their own experiences. Brochures and camp announcements encouraged women to sign up to teach their own workshops, bringing whatever expertise and skills they had to share. Califia would also hold a nightly community meeting where women could put anything on the agenda for discussion. Janet Stambolian coordinated a talent show and banquet to add participatory fun.\footnote{Brooks 5.} Through these activities, the collective created what schools of education would later called “learner-centered education” by gearing information and critical thinking to visual, kinesthetic, and auditory learners with a high level of involvement.

Striving to include as many participants as possible, the collective focused on how to reduce costs and open attendance to less-privileged feminists. Rather than coop up women for five-week blocks that were too expensive for most working women and wore
out patience, the collective members scheduled one-week sessions.\textsuperscript{13} This still provided an intensive environment where women could learn to live together and work out ways to fight against the normal societal pressures of family, work, and contact with men, all of which they escaped temporarily.\textsuperscript{14} By locating the educational sessions at area campsites instead of college campuses, hotels, or women’s centers, early Califia camps could isolate up to 150 women and 30 children from dominant society on the cheap.\textsuperscript{15} The camp setting cut the Sagaris fee (up to $700) to $75 or $50.\textsuperscript{16} Women who could not afford the low-income fee, whom Betty calculated were at least a quarter of attendees, paid only room and board and could work out a payment schedule. There were no scholarships because collective members felt that they implied that some women were more deserving than others, a process of discernment tainted by dominant-culture norms.\textsuperscript{17} Instead, they asked women who had more to pay for another woman to attend.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{13} Josy labels Sagaris’ five-week session “elitist” because working-class women would lose pay if gone from their jobs for so long. The only way she could go was because she was temporarily unemployed. She rode cross-country to see how well Califia’s proposal for a “leaderless,” cheaper, and more accessible educational experience would go with something like $75 for expenses and shared gas and expenses with a woman who drove. Josy Catoggio transcript 4-5.

\textsuperscript{14} “Come to Califia Community” brochures from LLC and June. L. Mazer Lesbian Collection (Mazer). Summer 1977 and 1978 brochure from LLC state that Camp de Benneville in the Angelus Forest held 150 women and 30 children. Some campsites used later held more people.

\textsuperscript{15} There was a $75 regular price, $50 low-income fee, and $25 for accompanying children plus a $10 deposit that defrayed initial costs. “Come to Califia Community” Summer 1977 brochure, LLC. Middle-class collective members I interviewed such as Betty Brooks considered the sliding-scale very successful. Alice Myers found costs too inexpensive to pass up. In contrast, classism presenters Ahshe Green and Josy Catoggio believed “[s]liding-scale privileged downwardly mobile middle-class women—cause they’re the people that feel comfortable asking for it. Working-class women—our reality is, ‘If I can’t afford it, I don’t get to have it.’ … But with sliding scales, what it would do is it would privilege the women who felt comfortable enough and entitled enough, who were downwardly mobile, to ask for the low end of the sliding scale, even though they could choose to make more money if they worked more hours or worked in a job they didn’t necessarily love as opposed to being voluntarily underemployed—which a lot of women were in those days.” Participant Jane Bernstein attended Califia from 1977 to 1982 although she was a new nurse and found it difficult to find the time and money. Transcripts for Betty Brooks 36, Alice Myers 1, Josy Catoggio 54, and Jane Deckert Bernstein 4. Also “Ahshe on Class” July 1976 tape deposited at Mazer.

\textsuperscript{17} Brooks 6.
Rejecting Sagaris's work-exchange system, Califia would require that all participants sign up for shifts that would cover the physical and emotional maintenance work of cooking, clean-up, childcare, and peer-counseling. The only paid staff consisted of a head cook, childcare coordinator and assistants, a female lifeguard to replace the male lifeguard that campsites provided, and later an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter.19 Sue Dunne and Shirley Virgil insisted on vegetarian menus that reflected healthy eating and a “commitment to the preservation of life,” which combined radical ecological feminist principles with another cost-cutting practicality.20 Every step the collective took combined feminist ideology, volunteerism, and financial accessibility to open Califia to as many women as possible.

Getting the word out to the feminist and lesbian communities was the next step for inclusion. In addition to advertising in The Lesbian News, collective members assembled mailing lists they got from other groups, and individuals told everyone they knew to come.21 Elsa called a contact number and talked directly to Marilyn, which led her to attend the first camp in July 1976, room with Josy, and begin a close friendship. She told Muriel Fisher, “Mother this is something you have to do,” and her lesbian mother loved it.22 Lois Bencangey remembers someone storming through a Southern California Women for Understanding (SCWU) meeting with flyers and deciding on the

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18 Introductory packets that gave directions to the camp and an overview of events included a section on money exhorting women, “If you can manage to send a little extra, we’ll use it to help women who want very much to attend Califia but can’t afford the whole fee.” “Califia Community at de Benneville” (n.d.), 2 from the personal files of Wanda Jewell and Diane F. Germain. This packet must have been issued in 1978 because Diane’s version has a dated cover letter, and the camps were only held at de Benneville between 1976 and 1978.
19 Bunch and Pollack 140, 142.
20 Brooks 5.
21 Transcripts for Irene Weiss follow-up 1 and Women of Color (WOC) group 56.
22 Transcripts for Elsa Sue Fisher 2, Josy Catoggio 5, and Muriel Fisher 1.
spot with her companion at the time, María Dolores Díaz, to go to a Califia camp in 1978. Many others learned about Califia from the rave reviews of women who attended the year before. Like so many grassroots feminist organizations, Califia operated extensively through personal contacts, interaction with other feminist spaces, and the advertising opportunities that lesbian publications provided.

Planners anticipated uniting attendees through feminist education on the differences and privileges that divided women and prevented them from working together for social change. The specific educational content coalesced over time. Initially the collective billed itself as giving daily presentations on “history, sexuality, spirituality, class, ethics, race, political and economic systems, organizing skill[s] and strategies—specifically as they relate to the social and political struggles throughout the world.” Both Betty and Marilyn wrote around 1982 that the original collective finally decided to focus on sexism, racism, and classism, with the term “sexism” representing interrelated points of sexual preference, homophobia, heterosexism, and misogynist appropriation of women’s bodies. Almost all narrators independently volunteer this triad. Betty credited Marilyn for helping the original collective “understand that we must always deal with

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23 Lois Bencangey transcript 1. Yolanda Retter Vargas traces SCWU to 1976, saying that it emerged as a women-only group when it split from the co-gender Whitman-Radclyffe Foundation that had formed in the early 1970s. The split came about after gay men at the foundation refused to recognize a women’s caucus. SCWU would become important as a fund-raising group for the "No on 6" coalition against California’s 1977 antigay teacher initiative. See Retter 135-136. Lois remembered it primarily as a social organization for white, middle-class professionals.

24 Marilyn told other NOW members like Betty Jetter, other women at a lesbian rap group she and Jane Bernstein attended in 1977 at the LA Gay Community Services Center, and all the women who went to CR sessions she held at her home. Wanda Jewell learned from a friend who had attended in 1976. Diane Germain entered in 1978 through her friend, Yvonne King, who was the lifeguard. Transcripts for Betty Jetter 2, Jane Bernstein 3, Wanda Jewell 1-2, and Diane Germain 3.


race and class as central issues that divide women as we look at sexism." By 1979, their memories were reproduced in their brochure: "sessions will be organized to provide time for in depth discussions of essential feminist issues: sexism, racism, class, sexual preference, colonization of our bodies." Califia reflected feminist attempts to understand identities and sites of oppression as interrelated. Understandably, the group picked fault-lines that were divisive throughout U.S. society and thus, not surprisingly, within social movements. Like Second Wave feminism more broadly, they also grappled with whether identities were static or malleable and the relationship between experience and expertise.

**SEXISM: BODILY UNIFYING WOMEN**

Because many feminists in the 1970s replicated dominant society in considering gender to be a fixed binary, Califia education on sexism assumed a shared impact on women. Early discussion of sexism illustrates how collective members and participants made resistance to patriarchy corporeal to great effect. Presentations alternately titled "Misogyny and the Oppression of Women" and "Overview: From Oppression to Power: ♀'s History" served to unify women around a shared oppression. The oppression stemmed from gender expectations that accompanied doctors’ sexing bodies as female at birth. The content of these presentations highlighted the radical feminist view that sexism is the root of all oppressions and encouraged work against male violence. Presenters’ attempts to promote lesbian feminism while trying to address the lesbian-straight split

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27 Brooks 6.
28 Brochure 1979 from LLC.
had differential consequences for participants’ personal lives and political unity. Finally, the corporeal focus on sexism dovetailed with liberating lessons for gaining comfort with female sexuality and variety in body size. New consciousness profoundly contrasted with societal imperatives to hide and constrain the female body but was influenced by other identity factors.

RECRUITING AGAINST MALE VIOLENCE

Memories of Califia’s impact concerning sexism divide between some narrators’ inability to recall the content of the education and firm commitments to fight sexism. Perhaps because many women came to Califia with some knowledge of feminist issues or had developed deep feminist consciousnesses by the time of their interviews, a preponderance of narrators do not remember specifics about what they learned about sexism during the first three camps. Irene Weiss recalls that the presentation “was really Feminism 101” and that her companion lover, Marilyn, talked about how women are oppressed and how they have been oppressed institutionally and personally. And she spoke a great deal from personal experience.” With an accessible style, Marilyn and other presenters pointed out ways in which male superiority and sexism stunted women’s lives and asked women to envision what they wanted to be.

Despite overwhelming assent to such principles among narrators, they note resistance to the presentations. Talking about ways that men hurt and oppressed women frequently led women to criticize the presentation as “man-hating” and to give anecdotal

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29 Bunch and Pollack 146 and Camp schedules (Mazer, I.LC.).
30 Where women define their relationship with another woman, I use their term (“lover, “companion lover”) rather than trying to standardize with a term that does not reflect theirs.
31 Irene Weiss transcript 14.
counterexamples of the wonderful men in their lives. Collective members, armed with statistics on violence and discrimination against women as well as participants’ testimony, would “explore with the community what it means that a program on the woman-hating behavior of men becomes a program on man-hating in the minds of some women.”\footnote{32 Bunch and Pollack 146.} Their stance threatened to sensitize women to irritating, undermining, and violent behavior by some men and by status quo–defending women. Slide presentations by Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) or Women Against Violence and Media (WAVAM) supplemented the collective’s talk early on to raise women’s consciousness with powerful images of gendered violence.\footnote{33 Transcripts for Ariana Manov 23 and Betty Brooks 22. WAVAW had first formed in protest over the release of a movie called *Snuff’m* in 1976 that purported to show actual killings of women. The Lesbian Tide featured the protests that took place in both coasts. 5.4 corrected to 5.5 (March/April 1976): 10 and 5.6 (May/June 1976): 4-5. WAVAW in Los Angels next attacked a billboard on Sunset Boulevard for Rolling Stones’ record album, “Black & Blue” that showed a battered and chained woman proclaiming that she enjoyed being black and blue. See Retter 139-140. In the face of society’s privatization of abuse, statistical silence, and legal failures, grassroots radical feminists and NOW members spoke out, compiled evidence of abuse against women, and set up social services for battered, molested and raped women throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In doing so, they critiqued dominant attitudes about violence as a solution to conflict. Del Martin, of DOB fame became one of a small but growing number of U.S. citizens fighting battering. She published *Battered Wives* in 1976 to expose the personal dynamics and institutional support of battering, to provide hope through survival tactics and proposed legislation, and to publicize incipient refuges. Del Martin, *Battered Wives* (San Francisco: Glide Publications, 1976), 19. Martin’s introduction to violence in the home cites examples of the prevalence of violence and violent images in American society—the sharpest rise in violent crimes since 1930, increasing rates of rape, gun use in murders, scenes of aggression every three and one-half minutes on children’s Saturday morning shows. Martin 9-10. Feminists argued that male supremacy sustained abuse by promoting power imbalances within monogamous married relations and trivializing or ignoring the battering of women. NOW unanimously proclaimed marital violence a major feminist issue and established a National Task Force on Battered Women/Household Violence in 1975. Martin 6-7.} Supplementing personal experience with statistics and examples from the media to argue that sexism was deleterious seems to have been convincing. Muriel recalls that many women from Califia got involved with WAVAW and other groups that were founded to protect women and
children against violence. In this way Califia was part of a tidal wave of CR and coordinated with area feminist groups to enlist newly politicized women for societal change.

Joining WAVAW also reflected feminists’ personal stake in politicizing violence against women. Narrators mentioned how violence against women and children had affected them politically and personally. Betty Brooks entered the feminist community based on her commitment to fight rape. A number of women remembered how poignant the stories of other Califia women’s abuse were. Some told about violence that affected them personally; their own experiences generated commitments to avoid violence in their own lives and to protect other women. Although interviews did not seek information on violence against women, twelve out of thirty-two narrators volunteered that they and/or other Califia women experienced childhood emotional, verbal, physical abuse or molestation and/or adult abuse from a husband, boyfriend, or lesbian partner. Califia continued the tradition of feminists speaking about intimate violence, which New York Radical Feminists began in 1971 with the first public speak-out on rape.

Over the years, Diane F. Germain developed and presented a riveting slide show on the commercialization of bodies, which could have been part of a presentation by

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34 Muriel Fisher transcript 10. Later, Diane ran a group for women-born-women survivors of incest and childhood molest. She was emphatic that the women had experienced abuse as girls rather than as children perceived to be boys because she felt the specifics of the experience could differ and the setting would feel safer for nontranssexual females without transsexual women there. The group packed up to 38 women at meetings and reflected a period when women could organize their own psychological support without demands for professional credentials and with affordable rental space. Diane Germain transcript 10.


36 Rosen 182.
WAVAM. She showed how camera angles could eroticize or deprecate women and how advertisers positioned their products in front of women's crotches. She also showed children used as sexual objects, women used as objects, like furniture or decoration on a man's arm, ... fat women looked down upon and ridiculed and humiliated, not even with words, but also with their position—male dominating doctors sitting on a desk talking to a fat woman on a little tiny chair, and she's looking up at him like she's a little girl, which she isn't.  

Diane remembers most women responding that in the future they would be better able to see the manipulations in advertising that often went unrecognized. If they wanted to crusade against such imagery, they could work for WAVAM once they left camp.

PRIMING THE LESBIAN FEMINIST PUMP

An introduction to feminism helped women without feminist experience to understand feminist terms and behavior. Simultaneously, decisions about what to include shaped women's views on what constituted feminism and feminism's demands on them. In addition to reading lists about radical feminism, lesbianism, and black women, which were included in pre-camp information packets, attendees had access to Marilyn's Feminist Primer at breakfast. Alice remembers that the primer "let people who were first-timers explore ideas, explore reactions, let them talk out whatever situations they were undergoing, and let them know about what it means to be a feminist." They learned jargon like "patriarchy," "privilege," and "process" as well as etiquette such as

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37 Diane Germain transcript 6.
39 Alice Myers transcript 7.
“speaking one at a time and not interrupting with comments of sympathy, support, or disagreement.” Betty Jetter remembers the Feminist Primer as wildly popular both at Califia and at discussion groups Marilyn and Irene held at their home with twenty to thirty women in attendance. Although Karen Merry had called herself a feminist since she started reading the first issues of Ms. magazine in 1972, the give and take over breakfast helped her to integrate into the lesbian community and led her to see Marilyn as the primary force at Califia.

From its first year, Califia helped women to integrate into the lesbian community because Marilyn promoted lesbian feminism as “the real feminism.” Marilyn’s mimeographed “Lesbianism as a Special Issue” not only linked lesbianism to civil rights and female autonomy, but positioned lesbian feminism as “the ultimate solution.” Using principles from the body of lesbian feminist theory, Marilyn proclaimed:

Women loving women is the ultimate solution to living in the patriarchy. As long as women continue to give their sexual and emotional energy to men, men will continue to have power over us. ... Only by most women withdrawing from the society built on the bodies, brains and blood of women can that society be brought down. Only without us, too, will men be able to recognize the personal limitations of their lives and have the will to change them. By continuing to live with, to love, and to support men, women collaborate with the enemy and contribute to the strength of the patriarchy which oppresses us all.

From within a temporary camp away from male influence, Marilyn sought to induce change in the wider world. She characterized a feminist revolution as beneficial to men in the long run by making them less limited and less dependent on women.

40 Bunch and Pollack 145.
41 Betty Jetter transcript 37.
42 Karen Merry transcript 1, 6.
43 Marilyn Murphy, “Lesbianism as a Special Issue” (1976), 2 [with “First Califia” handwritten on the mimeograph] in Mazer.
The charge that straight women collaborated with patriarchy led Marilyn to conclude that although not all lesbians were feminists, lesbians were more likely to develop political consciousness based on independence from men. Barring complete revolution, she elicited support for lesbians as a way to expand opportunities for women in general. Marilyn argued, “[T]he same securing of rights for heterosexual women is likely to follow if lesbians are protected in their jobs, housing, financial transactions, the military.” Protecting lesbians would advance women’s autonomy and provide a model of “non-sexist, equal relationships.” Because there was no concrete program for change promoted at Califia, audience members swayed by Marilyn’s assessment could link up with various feminist programs. They could seek legal protection through NOW. They could withdraw to women’s land. Like Marilyn, they could renounce marriage and homemaking in favor of lesbian relationships and careers. Some eventually followed Marilyn in this direction after more discussion of lesbianism as feminist.

Collective members’ radical and lesbian feminist critiques against heterosexuality packaged lesbian identification as a choice for self-exploration and solidarity against patriarchal norms. They called lesbianism a “sexual preference” rather than a fixed “sexual orientation.” This ideology held that adults with female bodies irrevocably were women, but they could choose lesbianism as part of their feminism. Divided into small

44 “Lesbianism as a Special Issue” 6.
45 “Lesbianism as a Special Issue” 8.
46 Collective memory of lesbianism as a superior choice has dimmed since the advent of the AIDS pandemic, suggesting a repercussion of co-gender work for gay rights and against AIDS as well as a rightward shift in the center of cultural politics. Gay and lesbian rights spokespeople at the turn of the millennium have championed homosexuality as a fixed identity based on much-sought after biological determinates. Many gay men and lesbians argue that they would never have chosen a condition that brings such discrimination down on them. This is in stark contrast to lesbian feminists who championed taking on
groups based on whether they currently identified as "lesbian" or "nonlesbian,"
participants discussed "What was your reaction when you first realized that lesbianism 
had some relationship to your life?" and "What myths and stereotypes about lesbians do 
you know, and what effect did they have upon that realization?" After asking women to 
be conscious of the problems that societal sexism and heterosexism caused, a Lavender 
Horizons slide show reinterpreted received wisdom. "Women Loving Women" gave a 
humorou...readi...in which "Eve and Lilith [walk] hand in hand in the Garden of Eden while an apprehensive god and Adam 
watch." Betty Brooks expressed this solidarity as "the necessity for SISTERHOOD." 
She invoked a term espoused by Robin Morgan’s Sisterhood Is Powerful, which stemmed 
from the CR goal of constituting women as feminist agents able to oppose patriarchal 
oppression. Sisterhood and the hand-holding of Eve and Lilith also hinted at woman-

an oppositional identity while seeking the destruction of the dominant structures buttressing 
heterosexuality. The contemporary belief in sexual orientation as genetic destiny correlates with a marked 
lack of critique of dominant structures and, instead, a desire for inclusion within them. Constructing 
homosexuality as biologically beyond the realm of choice seeks to thwart religious conservatives who 
claim homosexuality is simply a dissolute “lifestyle” from which gays and lesbians should repent or be 
punished with exclusions from the body politic. Simultaneously, however, studies correlating 
hypothalamus size or other bodily variation with homosexuality provoke questions from prospective 
parents as to whether they can screen against homosexuality in a fetus.

47 The Lesbian Tide ran articles condemning NBC movies like “Flowers of Evil” and “Born Innocent” for 
perpetuating stereotypes that lesbians murdered vulnerable old people, engaged in sadomasochism, and 
Mows Under ‘Flowers of Evil,’” Gudrun Fonfa and Janie Elven, “Community Mows Under ‘Flowers of 
Lesbian Tide 5.3 corrected to 5.4 (January/February 1976): 17.

48 Bunch and Pollack 147.

49 Brooks 6, capitalization in the original. See Ellen Messer-Davidow, “Acting Otherwise” in Judith Kegan 
Gardiner, Provoking Agents: Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice (Urbana: University of Illinois 
identified lesbianism as a subversive alternative to Judeo-Christian–backed heterosexual, male-dominant/female-submissive relationships.\(^{50}\)

Like the Lavender Menaces before them, attention to Califia participants’ sexual preference downgraded heterosexual feminists’ status while calling on them for understanding and support. The difference was that after seven years of discussion, feminists were already polarized, so advertising and personal networks inadvertently marked Califia as a lesbian space. Marilyn recorded that about twenty percent of the attendees at the camps were heterosexual and that usually one or two were so uncomfortable that they left by the afternoon of the first day. To convert discomfort into CR, heterosexual collective members at the first evening’s “getting acquainted exercises” came out as straight. They reassured heterosexual participants at the Late Night Conversation that they were not alone, redefined their discomfort as “a temporary loss of heterosexual privilege,” and encouraged identification with lesbians through the temporary feeling of minority-group status.\(^{51}\) Throughout the week, as straight women struggled to deal with feeling like their voices were not being heard, Marilyn tried to forge ties between straight and lesbian women. Invoking the lesbian feminist theory that had furthered the lesbian-straight split while reaching out to heterosexual women was a real balancing act.

Lesbian feminists at Califia needed alliance with heterosexual feminists against homophobic attacks. Unlike the expansion and success of the Women’s Movement in the

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\(^{50}\) Feminists like Califia women countered the command attributed to God in Genesis 3:16—“To the woman he said... Your yearning will be for your husband, and he will dominate you.” The New Jerusalem Bible of 1985.

\(^{51}\) Bunch and Pollack 146-147 and Irene Weiss transcript 15. Narrators recall that straight women quickly realized that they were a minority at Califia.
early 1970s, liberationists in the late 1970s encountered an increasingly hostile environment. A rising conservative Religious Right Movement in the late 1970s assailed homosexuals with California’s Proposition 6. Also known as the Briggs Initiative after its ultraconservative sponsor, state Senator John Briggs of the Los Angeles area, this initiative defined homosexuality as antithetical to the preservation of the family unit and the family unit as vital to state interests. On that basis, the proposition prohibited the employment of schoolteachers, teacher’s aides, administrators, or counselors engaged in homosexual activity or encouraging it. Work to unite straight Californians with gay and lesbian activists against Proposition 6 included a presentation at Califia, which reflects the permeability and cite-specificity of Califia’s separatist space. Whereas usually Califia did not bring in guest speakers, during the 1978 voting season, someone working against Proposition 6 came to enjoin Califia women to get involved with a group that included queer men and free speech–advocating straight men to defeat the initiative.

Lesbian feminists attempted to promote unity through their characterizations of gender and sexual identity. Lesbians were more likely than nonlesbians to cling to and thus sustain radical feminism as their only refuge and position from which to fight, but

52 Whittier 63-4, 71.
53 Proposition 6 claimed that “the most fundamental interests of the State is the establishment and preservation of the family unit” and protection of “youth from influences which are antithetical to this vital interest.” “For these reasons, the State finds a compelling interest in refusing to employ and in terminating the employment of a schoolteacher, a teacher’s aide, a school administrator, or a counselor...who engages in public homosexual activity and/or public homosexual conduct directed at, or likely to come to the attention of, school children or other school employees.” Quoted from Amber L. Hollibaugh, *My Dangerous Desires: A Queer Girl Dreaming He Way Home* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2000), 44. Hollibaugh gives a thorough discussion of the grassroots, gay and lesbian-dominated opposition to the Briggs Initiative that secured its defeat.
54 Muriel Fisher transcript 6-7.
they needed help. Diane recalls that she questioned the wisdom of attending to women who would go home and give their energy to their husbands. She tired of hearing straight women at Califia discuss their male partners and claim a victimized minority status at camp. Marilyn would explain the shared oppressions women suffer and stress the importance of straight women seeing “that lesbians were OK and that lesbians can pay attention to the essential woman.” Irene points out that Marilyn “got a lot of the straight women there because Marilyn had straight credentials.” As a long-time wife and mother before coming out, Marilyn could relate to problems in married women’s lives. She was “particularly effective with women who were teetering on the edge of are they a lesbian, are they not.” These memories highlight the shifts between inherent and adopted identities and the role of experience for expertise. The sexism presentation positioned woman as an essential category and lesbian as a type of woman, which feminists could become. Marilyn gained legitimacy as a teacher from her personal transformation from a straight-identified wife and mother to a lesbian feminist.

The presentation, Marilyn’s views, and the percentages of lesbian and straight women at the camps also indicate that Califia was an unofficial lesbian space open to or recruiting of straight women. Califia could serve as a place to experiment with lesbian feminist ideology and sexuality. The running joke was that “when the campouts began, eighty percent of the women were lesbians, and when they ended, ninety-five percent...”

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55 The “flourishing lesbian feminist culture helped bring in new recruits, lesbians were less able to assimilate outside the Women’s Movement and so maintained feminist commitment even in a hostile period, and heterosexual women felt uncomfortable in a largely lesbian movement.” Whittier 72.
56 Diane Germain transcript 34.
57 Irene Weiss transcript 16.
were.\textsuperscript{58} Women who professed long-term lesbian identities told this joke, which speaks to their belief that one could adopt lesbianism as a better political-sexual choice.

Narrators generally agree that numerous women enjoyed exploring lesbian sexuality at Califia.\textsuperscript{59} In fact, a number of narrators were in the process of coming out when they first attended Califia.\textsuperscript{60} "Brought out" was the term used when an established lesbian had sex with a hitherto heterosexual woman who was in the process of recognizing that she wanted to be lesbian. Betty Jetter describes how unstable this sexual labeling was:

[T]his woman from England came over here. I brought her out. But she went to [the West Coast Women’s Music and Comedy Festival beforehand], and she joined the lesbian group. And they didn’t want her to be in that lesbian group because she was heterosexual. She says, “Now wait a second!” She said, “I plan on never having sex with a man again in my life. Just ’cause I haven’t had sex with a woman doesn’t mean I don’t belong here.” And she says, “How come you lesbians here, who call yourselves lesbians, say ‘Oh, yes, and I had sex with men too?’”

Betty Jetter concluded that sexuality is not “cut and dried.”\textsuperscript{61} Betty Brooks corroborates, placing Califia within the broader culture and her views on sexual liberation:

Everybody was screwing their heads off. Everybody was sleeping with whoever they could sleep with. … Well, I mean if you get liberated with your sexuality, then you

\textsuperscript{58} There has been no discussion of whether heterosexual feminists found this offensive. Transcripts for Diane Germain 34, Yolanda G. Retter Vargas 1, and Ariana Manov 18.

\textsuperscript{59} Lois Bencangey said generally that women could explore lesbian sexuality and their sexuality as women. Transcript 5. Jane did not recall sexual preference being discussed much, but she hastened to add that some straight women “were brought out” at Califia. Transcript 17. See also transcripts for Ariana Manov 25 on the pulsing erotic current and Karen Merry 17.

\textsuperscript{60} Of those attending the 1976-1978 camps, Jane had found the Gay Community Service Center in 1976 in her process of coming out. Betty Jetter and Marilyn were both married at first contact with Califia but divorced within a year. Jeanne Murphy also came out in mid-life and has joked that she knew she would become a lesbian when her sister, Marilym came out to her. Lois had been out for two years. Alice came out in the late 1970s after a life of not having much interest in men. Elsa Fisher felt she chose to be lesbian rather than bisexual while her mother, Muriel, became strictly lesbian after divorcing her husband. Wanda Jewell entered the collective using her married name and completed her coming out at and after her first two years (brochure 1978) of what Ariana referred to as “Amazon summer camp.” Transcripts for Jane Bernstein 2, Betty Jetter 2, 19, Jeanne Murphy 13, Lois Bencangey 8, Alice Myers follow-up 1, Elsa Fisher 10, 19, and Ariana Manov 2.

\textsuperscript{61} Betty Jetter transcript 17-18.
might ... be sleeping with men; you might be sleeping with women; you might be doing all kinds of things. It was not a rigidity. It was much, a much more fluid nature of it. Now many women who were there [at Califia]—that was not true [pause] because suddenly they said, "Oh, my goodness. Maybe I'm a lesbian." I mean that was a big deal.62

In one sense, sexual experimentation was indicative of the 1970s, but lesbian experimentation seemed both taboo and politicized as opposed to "anything goes."

Lesbian feminist theory condemned bisexuality as a transitional stage that retained heterosexual privilege.63 By assuming a lesbian feminist sexuality, women could give up "doing all kinds of things" in favor of relationships they believed to be divorced from patriarchal mores.64

DECOLONIZING FAT BODIES

Presenters linked opposition to sexism with the preservation of one's body from being "colonized" as a patriarchal resource. Mirroring the relationship between Califia and WAWA, participants from Fat Underground (FU) used Califia as a site to further connections between sexism and fat oppression. Compared to the sexism presentations,

62 Betty Brooks transcript 7.
63 Jay and Young 177-181. Marilyn spoke and later wrote against bisexuality, condemning bisexual women as the only true heterosexual women because, rather than abiding by compulsory heterosexuality, they had experienced sexual relations with both genders and chose to continue having sex with men. Marilyn Murphy, "Thinking About Bisexuality," "Lesbianic Logic" column, The Lesbian New 9.7 (February 1984): 26-27 and reprinted in April 1989. Diane conceived of women as being lesbian, becoming lesbian, wanting to be lesbian and finding out how, or just trying it out. Transcript 34. Elsa was typical of the times in considering sexuality a preference and lesbianism a better political and personal choice than acting on her bisexuality feelings. Transcript 19.
64 Jane is one of the few narrators to modify the homo-hetero divide by including a neutral discussion of bisexuality. She claims there were bisexual workshops, while "as for lesbians having a workshop, they didn't need one. Califia was a workshop." She remembers that women who came to Califia straight frequently got into lesbian relationships but also notes some of these women returned to relationships with men or had both a husband and a girlfriend, concluding that they must have been bisexual. Transcript 17. Certainly there are multiple possibilities for women's assumption of lesbian behavior including external pressures to conform to heterosexual appearances for closeted lesbians or the type of experimenting by straight women criticized by Gay Revolutionary Party Women's Caucus in 1971.
FU used similar educational techniques, also met resistance, and transformed the lives of some women.

Whereas the sexism presentation was always an integral part of Califia, fat CR arose in response to expressions of fatphobia. Judy Freespirit saw women at the first camp supporting the diet industry by buying diet soda pop and encouraging each other in weight loss. According to Ariana Manov, “[S]he got so pissed off that she drove off the mountain and came back to Los Angeles and got the Fat Underground … videotape that was made, and took it back up to Califia Community.”65 It would have taken about two hours to drive the sixty-plus miles round-trip. The video proclaimed the fat liberation manifesto: fatphobic ridicule is used to support the false claims of the diet industry in the face of evidence “that over 95% of all weight-loss programs, when evaluated over a five-year period, fail utterly [italics in original],” “fat people are entitled to human respect and recognition,” and discrimination must end.66 After a visual presentation, FU members led discussions.

Ariana facilitated discussions during the first three or four years of Califia to disassociate women from participation in fat oppression. As did Marilyn in her presentation, Ariana combined evidence of prejudice with theory and personal experience to promote an oppositional stance. She decried discrimination in jobs, by doctors, and within the movement, including the stereotype that fat dykes “were fat-sloppy-lazy-bull-dyke-man-hating-women libbers.” FU posited that genetics and dieting caused fat bodies,

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65 Ariana Manov transcript 26.
which removed fault from women for being fat. Ariana remembers women angrily resisting her information that the vast majority of diets fail over a five-year period. Some attendees retain strong negative assessments of fat people, which were influenced by medical training and the counterpressures and embarrassment they felt within the camps not to consume diet foods or drink. Ariana’s point, however, was that feminists should not add to societal prejudices that coerce women into trying to adjust their bodies. FU members supported healthy lives with good relationships to food regardless of weight gain or loss.

In addition to the causes of fatness, FU theorized that “disability” was a social construction, which formed oppressed minority groups. If society constructed wider furniture (especially airline and theater seats) or turnstiles, “being a super-size fat woman” in and of itself would not disadvantage or disable one in relation to society. FU gave women permission to control their environment by buying clothing that fit and

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67 Many fat liberations found that doctors attributed any medical problem a fat woman suffered to her weight. FU taught women to confront this literal “malpractice” by asking, “If I were a thin woman coming to you with this knee problem, what treatment would you give me? What would you suggest because even if I could lose weight, I’m not going to lose 100 pounds by tomorrow. So what can you tell me that will be in my best interest and serve me well medically right now?” Ariana Manov transcript 12-14.

68 Jane Bernstein transcript 3.

69 Ariana Manov transcript 12-13. In light of the decision to structure food around “healthy” vegetarian meals, it is interesting to note both the tolerance of diet soda pop and the unexamined relationship between the organic/vegetarian movement and fat liberation. Promoters of vegetarianism in the 1970s relied on normative views about weight in their appeals to health. Frances Lappe not only based her protein calculations on the average U.S. woman weighing 128 pounds, but provided a narrow range for calculation if one fell outside the norm: 108-148 pounds. She structured her analysis on the assumption that one would not want to gain weight and cited standard medical and insurance sources as her justification: “You are all aware of the fact that being overweight is in some way associated with higher risks of dying (Or, if you’re not, you might ask a life insurance salesman. I’m sure he would know!) What might be less familiar to you is the fact that American men who are only 10 percent overweight eventually exhibit a 20 percent greater risk of dying before their time than do men of normal weight. Thus, even a modest increase in body weight involves much more than a question of looking good. It is a question of good health [italics in original].” Frances Moore Lappe, *Diet for a Small Planet* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971), 43, 59-60, 63, 100. The success of the nondieting wing of the Fat Liberation Movement has led some weight-loss advocates to change the term for their diets to “healthy eating plans” while retaining the weight-control goals. See Charlotte Cooper, *Fat and Proud: The Politics of Size* (London: The Women’s Press, 1998), 98, 156.
screwing up their courage to eat in public despite jeers. They cited the American Medical Association’s statistics to argue that fat people died of diseases of oppression, which also affected people of color disproportionately. Arteriosclerosis, heart attacks, strokes, and diabetes “are the same diseases that people who are under stress through being oppressed, whether they’re Native American or African American or Hispanic or whatever die of. In societies where fat people are treated with respect, and they are not socially stigmatized and treated in fatphobic ways, they do not die of those diseases.” All of this pushed women to distance themselves from normative values and pathology models and, instead, form a group consciousness as fat women who could accept themselves as they were.

FU gained recruits as well as resistance. Its message “completely changed [Elsa’s] life.” She had dieted since at least age twelve and internalized the message that it “was good to be a skinny person, and it wasn’t OK to be a fat person.” Elsa found the FU views “very profoundly liberating” and “a revelation.” She can still remember the details of FU’s information because she joined the Fat Liberation Movement and was part of the founding of Fat Sisters Organizing in Los Angeles to advance education. Betty Jetter took FU to heart but now thinks that she should have tried harder not to gain weight because she believes extra weight exacerbates her diabetes. Nonetheless, FU helped her to retain self-esteem regardless of her size. Both lament that a looksist U.S. society continues to support discrimination and jokes against fat people.

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70 Ariana Manov transcript 15-16. The Rosetto study is the basis of her claim about societies without fat oppression.
71 Elsa Fisher transcript 35-38.
72 Betty Jetter transcript 32-33.
REVEALING SEXUAL AWARENESS

Just as women had not received alternative messages about fat, lack of sexual knowledge and norms of comportment constrained many who came of age in time to attend early Califia camps. Feminist-produced visual media revealed diversity and supported sexual education without the resistance that lesbian feminist and fat depictions generated. Betty Brooks’ crusade for women’s defense and sexual autonomy led her to put together a slide show to illustrate how varied women’s genitalia were. Diane deems the closely cropped “cunt slides” to have been a tool against internalized repression. Their very name reclaimed a derogatory word hurled at women. The first viewing at Califia elicited initial titters and then suffocating silence and tension. So on the fourth slide, French-Canadian Diane called out, “Oh my God! My French teacher!” Everyone burst into laughter, breaking the tension and promoting discussion about women’s bodily variety. Narrators remember the cunt slides fondly. A spontaneous guessing game became a raucous part of the viewing at the Women’s Building, better known for exhibits of Judy Chicago’s art. Women asserted to whom vulvas belonged based on the presence of fingers with nail polish, band-aids, or dirty nails. Women’s laughter, assertions of intimate knowledge, and joy at release from hushed privacy made the cunt slides comparable to speculum demonstrations performed throughout the Women’s Movement. Both broke through imposed ignorance and shame about women’s sexualized bodies.

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73 Jane Bernstein reports that Betty Brooks and a group of women outside the Califia setting sat in a circle with mirrors and a camera taking pictures of each other’s genitalia. Transcript 5.
74 Diane Germain, follow-up transcript 5. The cunt slides were one of the most memorable sexuality presentations. See Betty Jetter transcript 33-34.
75 Transcripts of Betty Jetter 33-34 and Lydia Otero 30-31.
Other sexuality workshops also celebrated a combination of diversity and empowerment. In one, women brainstormed a list of pressures that “all women” felt about their sexuality compared to pressures that lesbians and straight women felt in the movement because of their sexuality. They then contemplated revolutionary changes that could be made in sexuality, current tools for realizing them, and possible future control of technology and their bodies. A questionnaire elicited discussion on a variety of sexual attitudes and practices. Other workshops featured the G-spot, female ejaculation, masturbation techniques, and ben-wah balls. Jane Bernstein laughs at her ignorance about the vagina as she learned about the G-spot and female ejaculation at Califia instead of during her years of nursing school. These workshops produced sexual knowledge for and by women to overturn societally mandated reticence.

Bodily inhibitions broke down as white women gained safety from the male gaze and masculinist criticism of female bodies in the all-women and -children space. Repeatedly, narrators connected the camp setting with safety, positive natural energy, and shrugging off unnecessary hang-ups. This was the first time that—after initial shyness—many women felt they could go topless or run through the woods naked. Some women found the concept of going without clothes strangely refreshing while others had

76 “Califia Sexuality Workshop” from Wanda Jewell’s personal files. Because this typed version is identical to hand-written notes she made, she probably typed up her notes.
77 Betty Jetter transcript 32.
78 Karen Merry transcript 18-19.
79 Jane Bernstein transcript 18.
80 Transcripts for Lois Bencangey 5, 7, Jane Bernstein 5, Betty Brooks 26-27, 18, 55, Josy Catoggio 1-2, Elsa Fisher 31, Wanda Jewell 2, 9, 17, Ariana Manov 25-26, Karen Merry 2, 17-19, 27, Carla Seco (pseudonym) 4, 26, 28, Diane Germain 3, 26, 36. In a follow-up discussion, Diane remarked that the continual presence of an older woman who cooked topless gave her hope that she could age well. Follow-up transcript 5.
already seen nudity at the West Coast Women’s Music Festival. Tying together nakedness, freedom, and isolation from patriarchy, Karen reminisces about a space with “no men”:

You didn’t have to wear clothes. ... That alone was a very freeing experience. I mean, it sounds silly, but it was really a terrific freedom for women to be able to run around with no clothes on and no shirt on or something like that and be comfortable.

In the early years of camps, it was not yet clear that comfort with nudity was marked by other identity factors. Lydia Otero remembers at Califia in 1980 or 1981:

[T]here were women walking around with their tops off, which I’d never seen before. At that time, I remember feeling uncomfortable. ... I guess a lot of people had gone to those women’s music things and they were used to seeing women topless and stuff like that. I sure wasn’t going to go topless, and nobody that I went with ever took off their clothes. We were all actually saying, “These white women are crazy!” ... So it might be a cultural thing in terms [of] having that freedom to take off your top, and ... it’s certainly more prevalent amongst white women, I think.

Irene guesses that white participants embraced nudity more warmly than did women of color because “that was too intimate for some of them, too close to the non–women of color.” California culture was revealing, not only with a warm climate and beaches but also with nude beaches and nudist camps that led the way for expressions of nudity at concerts and on campuses. Granting space to nudity, however, hinted at sexuality in popular culture, and women of color burdened by sexualizing stereotypes and unseen power dynamics seem to have resisted exposing themselves to white women’s gazes.

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81 Transcripts for Karen Merry 2, 27, Irene Weiss 32, Carla Seco 4, Elsa Fisher 31, and Ariana Manov 25.
82 Karen Merry transcript 27.
83 Lydia Otero transcript 7-8.
84 Irene Weiss transcript 32.
CLASSISM: THE PERSONAL OVER THE POLITICAL

Califia analyses of institutional oppression informed by personal experience regarding sexism, fat, and women's sexuality combined essentialist gender identity, mostly determined body shape, and chosen sexual identification. Likewise, the classism presentation combined a static view of origins with malleable responses. Unlike the sustained comparison of personal trauma with institutionalized sexism, the classism presentation shied away from steadily connecting people's experience to a critique of capitalism and American political structures. By distancing themselves from anticapitalist theory, Califia teachers could avoid the persistent mainstream label "un-American," a New Left history of factionalization, and feminist concerns about socialist infiltration of other movement groups. A consequence of avoiding broader efforts at redressing class hierarchy was that attendees lacked organizations to join for labor reform or class revolution. Instead, they addressed working-class feminist pain and irritation at downward mobility while they called for middle-class women to reform their practices.85

RELIANCE ON WORKING-CLASS EXPERIENCE

The introduction to the presentation carefully denied anticapitalism while conforming to countercultural glorification of the underprivileged. A collective member

85 Working-class feminists balked at the downward mobility made chic by the 1960s and 1970s youth culture, perceiving it as middle-class boys and girls playing at poverty and embracing what, to the working class, had been marks of deprivation and shame. The class tensions exposed during the 1960s generated new feminist theory, which argued that class awareness and a commitment to purging classist behavior from oneself precedes class struggle. Significant analysis comes from essays in Charlotte Bunch and Nancy Myron, eds., Class and Feminism: A Collection of Essays from The Furies (Baltimore: Diana Press, Inc., 1974). Rita Mae Brown and Tasha Petersen especially decry the classist assertions that downward mobility will remove class differences as making a mockery of working-class lives by temporarily adopting a lifestyle while retaining middle-class attitudes and behavior 19-20, 24. Recall that Rita Mae Brown and Charlotte Bunch both participated as lecturers at Sagaris. See also Rita Mae Brown, "The Last Straw," A Plain Brown Rapper (Oakland: Diana Press, 1976), 97-106.
touted those with working-class backgrounds as “the backbone not only of [the] human race, but America.” Noting that a myth of class equality prevented people from knowing “where they fit in a class spectrum,” the introducer concluded, “And so, usually when you mention class, people think, ‘Now we’re going to have a discussion on Communism.’ Well, this is not going to be a discussion on Communism, Marxism, or Socialism at all.” Instead, the group would get the experience of Ahshe Green and the collective members from working-class backgrounds: Mary, Sue, Marilyn, and Jodie. At Sagaris and then during the first two years of Califia, Ahshe used personal stories to construct a riveting account of how women could examine the values, attitudes, and behaviors they learned as children in order to retain useful ones and reject those that offended others or were no longer appropriate. Women who knew or newly discovered that they came from working-class or poor backgrounds found the experience life changing. They grew up when U.S. culture was increasingly silent about class hierarchy and promoted widespread identification with the middle class based on consumption. Many middle-class participants reflected that they obtained heightened awareness, but they often felt defensive and marginalized.

Although Ahshe used class divisions that reflected Marxism, she prioritized attitudinal similarities and differences in keeping with the radical feminist goal of changing perceptions. She split society into a minuscule percentage who owned and

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86 "Ahshe Green on Class" cassette tape deposited at Mazer. Because Ahshe had given this talk at Sagaris, Betty, Marilyn, Jodie, and Josy were already aware of how powerful her presentation was. Ahshe relocated to San Diego and presented at the first two years of Califia. Betty Jetter helped to tape her presentation and distribute copies for the price of the cassette.

87 Narrators generally agree that scant attention was given to leftist class theory. Ariana Manov remembers no formal ties being made between personal experience and institutional class hierarchy or structural
controlled the majority of property, middle-class people who organized things, and working-class people who did the labor. Because the middle-class people were put in charge of hostile workers and looked down on by the elite, to whose position they aspired, the middle class found it important to “be nice” in order to play down hostility. This set the tone of her talk, which used personal anecdotes to construct a set of classed generalities that resonated with her audience. While upper-class and working-class people believed they got ahead through luck, middle-class people touted “hard work.” Neither elites nor the poor needed to be liked as much as did middle-class managers, and so both displayed higher degrees of eccentricity compared to middle-class norms of behavior. The rich could marry for money, and laborers in perilous economic situations depended on spouses for survival, but the middle class developed a romantic ideal. Similarly, working-class people valued material support over verbal support because survival depended on concrete aid. Thus, Ahshe argued that for diametrically opposite reasons commonalities between the upper class and working class distinguished them from the middle class and heightened class conflict.

By fleshing out points with personal anecdotes, Ahshe paralleled other feminist efforts to analyze the personal as politically instructive. Illustrating class-differential support, Ahshe related a story about having an unwanted pregnancy. She first disarmed reproduction of class. She claims as someone who came out of the New Left that she and others did not represent their groups or talk about class analysis in the larger sense at Califia. Jettisoning that rhetoric minimized or bypassed sectarian politics and validated individuals’ experiential contributions. Ariana Manov transcript 8-9.

88 "Ahshe Green on Class."
89 Ahshe divided her presentation into eleven topics for class comparison: luck/hard work, eccentricity/conformity, material bonding/romance and common interests, material(verbal support, spending against emergencies/successful saving, extended family/nuclear family, the myth of perpetual happiness, physical violence/verbal manipulation, upward/downward mobility, guilt as middle class, and sliding-scale as benefiting downwardly-mobile middle-class women.
her audience by noting, “This is all tricky 'cause I was a lesbian for a few years before I
had gotten pregnant, and this was a few years ago. And it’s always tricky when lesbians
get pregnant [laugh]. Raises a lot of issues in the community [audience laughs].” She
recalled how close she and her middle-class roommate were, how the woman worked in a
lab and could have tested a urine sample for pregnancy, but, instead, gave copious verbal
support about “what a drag” it must be to be pregnant. After numerous days in bed with
nausea, a working-class acquaintance dropped by, surveyed the situation, and reminded
Ahshe that she could get a urine test from a feminist clinic. Ahshe concluded:

It’s a funny thing about working-class women and health, you know. We don’t
know a whole lot about our own health. Like if you’re sufferin’... I’ll find out
about health. But if I’m sick, you just, you go to the doctor when you’re really
really sick, you don’t go for yearly checkups or something. So if you’re sick you
just try to ignore it, and if nothin’ happens when you ignore it, then you try to
play it down, but you don’t think about goin’ to the doctor. And even if [I] get it
together to know that I’m pregnant and I needed a test ... I didn’t know what to
do. And I knew what to do kind of because I was middle class by then, or
upwardly mobile, but I forgot. ... I go into my old ways when I’m in a crisis. And
I just didn’t remember that you can just look in a newspaper and get a clinic. But
the working-class woman that walked in the house wasn’t even a close friend, and
she thought of it for me. And it wasn’t no trouble, I mean it only took her five
minutes. And, then I got fixed up, got an abortion, I was all set.

Ahshe’s interpretation of her inability to act constructed class background as having
lasting effects that overrode class mobility. She concluded from many of the cross-class
conflicts she related that women from different classes simply needed the awareness to
make allowances for what women around them needed or to ask directly for what they
wanted.

In a story about her upward mobility and her roommate’s downward mobility,
Ahshe pointed out that cross-class desire could provide both parties with skills but could
also cause tensions over conflicting goals. Her roommate’s disparagement of formal education as “whitey’s game” clashed with Ahshe’s struggle to attain higher education and her drive to master words, argumentation, and abstract concepts. Similarly, the passion, expressiveness, and disregard for others’ opinions that her roommate sought were aspects Ahshe no longer fully valued. The key was to be conscious of class attributes, so that one could choose what was appropriate to the situation.

Some distinctions, however, seemed to favor working-class values and paralleled leftist and feminist critiques of U.S. society. Ahshe contrasted support from working-class neighbors or extended family with the insular and unsupportive dynamics of nuclear families and criticized the middle-class myth that one would always be happy as preventing women from seeking support and, by extension, CR. She mirrored a trend that glorified immigrant communities, attributed the source of middle-class neuroses to postwar suburbanization, and, among feminist activists, privileged support for activism over navel-gazing therapy. Ahshe inadvertently defended the directness of physical violence in comparison to middle-class verbal manipulation and covert power plays. While she had rejected physical violence, she felt that characteristically middle-class

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90 As part of a *Lesbian Ethics* issue devoted to class, Lee Evans cited Irene Weiss as pointing out that “poor and working class Dykes often think of a college degree as a kind of union card. We think it means that we will always be able to find work (above minimum wage) and therefore it is our ticket out of poverty.” Although this conversation could have been in the late 1980s, it reflects Ahshe’s experience and the ways in which the class presentation slowly reached a national audience. Lee Evans, “Dykes of Poverty: Coming Home,” *Lesbian Ethics* 4.2 (spring 1991): 7-18, here 17.

91 The value CR put on showing that women’s problems were based on institutional oppression rather than personal failing led some feminists to be highly critical of normalizing therapeutic techniques. Marilyn Murphy told Diane Germain that she opposed therapy because its attempts to focus on individual responsibility took the edge off of women’s anger and did not facilitate collective action. Diane Germain follow-up transcript 1. Likewise, Irene Weiss feels that 12-step programs can become a way of life for women and divert them from the types of consciousness-raising and coalition work for activism that Califia sought. Transcript 9.
back-stabbing was equally violent. In this, she was perhaps ahead of her time. When Phyllis Chesler published *Woman’s Inhumanity to Woman* in 2001, many feminists decried her critique of gendered patterns of violence, not ready to acknowledge that women could rival men in abusiveness.

The classism presentation pressed women from middle-class families to change in order to relate better to women from poorer backgrounds and to intervene on their behalf within larger society. Those who had middle-class familiarity with money management, negotiating verbal manipulation, and formal education could help working-class sisters who lacked those skills. Exhorting women to save money would be ineffective when their experience was that the next crisis would always eat up the savings, so why postpone joy? Instead, middle-class women could be allies by sticking up for working-class women when other middle-class authorities tried to oppress them, by saying that middle-class women needed to pay the high end of sliding scales, and by thinking through programming so that it did not have a white, middle-class bias.\(^\text{92}\)

After the formal presentation, a two-part interactive session demarked the lines between Califia women. Collective members from working-class families created questions over the first few years of Califia to help women determine their own class backgrounds. Women considered the class implications of questions like “Who did the housework in your family—Your mother? You and siblings? A maid? What is your educational level? Who paid for your education? When you were a child, did you have enough underwear and socks? Did you get a regular allowance? Who paid for your first

\(^{92}\)“Ahshe Green on Class.”
Situating themselves got them ready for Mary’s “The Passing Game.” Those who came from working-class backgrounds or poverty were asked, “How did you pass as middle class?” and “What price did you pay for passing?” A collective member would start by sharing a personal story. Meanwhile, women from more-privileged backgrounds could only say “pass” because they were to remain silent, listen to the others’ experiences, and learn something about the personal effects of institutionalized classism in America.

The way that the presentation and subsequent discussion interwove personal experience with consciousness-raising conclusions and discussion of systematic classism had a profound impact on women who had never realized before that they came from the working class. Karen remembers that initially people tittered at the questions and were nervous about the grave pronouncements that people had to stay for the whole discussion. By the end, she was in tears because she finally realized that her years of trying to fit into lesbian clothing norms by buying Birkenstocks and “the right shorts” hid a working-class struggle to survive emotionally and materially. The opportunity to process this flood of information in a break-out session without the middle-class women present helped her to make sense of her past and gave her the feeling that she was strong. She came to pity middle-class people because they had not had the same struggles to get where they were. Karen’s conclusion indicates the propensity at Califia for women to divide

93 Mary Glavin, “The Passing Game,” Diane Germain’s personal files. See appendix B.
94 Murphy, “Califia Community” 148-149.
95 Barbara Forrest transcript 19.
96 Karen Merry transcript 3.
97 Karen Merry transcript 4.
identities into opposites and to invert inequalities, so that women gained from identifying with less-privileged identities.

Collective members’ experience with working-class backgrounds gave them both the expertise and the responsibility to lead the classism presentation. By Josy’s memory, Ahshe abruptly left California to join the Rajneesh, and a collective member dropped the classism presentation in Josy’s lap. Josy, an articulate Sagaris planner from the working class, seemed the logical choice in a set-up where the speaker had to have working-class credentials. For the camps in 1978 and 1979, Josy repeated Ahshe’s examples and structure based on the audiotape of Ahshe’s presentation. Eventually she adapted it with her own life experience. To this day, Josy can recall the details of the presentation.

CLASSES OF IMPACT

The responses from women who never knew Ahshe but who discovered their backgrounds through Josy’s vicarious renditions remain emotionally powerful, indicating the power of CR for personal understanding. Kal Kalivoda recalls:

Califia hit me in the gut like a boulder most particularly in the classism issues. … I was under the impression that I came from a middle-class family. I mean everybody came from a middle-class family. That was a given until I went to Califia. And when they started talking about working class and middle class, it

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98 It is unclear whether Ahshe joined Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh in 1978 or later, but no narrator knew her whereabouts after the first two years of Califia. Rajneesh was a guru from India who advanced a mix of Hinduism, Jainism, Zen Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, ancient Greek philosophy and other religions and philosophies along with forms of therapy and meditation. An attractive aspect of his thought was his advice to be totally free in sex. Although he had followers in the U.S. by the early 1970s, he did not move from India to the U.S. until 1981, when a disciple bought a 64,299-acre ranch in Eastern Oregon to set up Rajneeshpuram. The center closed in 1985 amid serious criminal charges—infesting salad bars in The Dalles with salmonella in preparation for decreasing voter turn-out at a contested county election, other poisonings, electronic eavesdropping conspiracy, immigration fraud, lying to federal officials, harboring fugitives, criminal conspiracy, burglary, racketeering, arson, assault, murder. Lewis F. Carter, Charisma and Control in Rajneeshpuram: The Role of Shared Values in the Creation of a Community (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 224-5, 236-237.
99 Josy Catoggio transcript 15, 10-17.
was like being shocked. I had no idea that there were differences. I had no idea that I was considered working class—lower working class quite frankly. When I was a little kid if we couldn’t scrounge enough meat, my dad went out and shot a couple robins and sparrows, and we always had meat on the table. See that was a criterion. You have meat on the table, you’ve got a meal every day, you’re middle class.100

Analogies such as “hit me in the gut like a boulder” reveal the intensity of the realization that the dominant world view with which these women were raised was false. Families like Kal’s met middle-class norms, such as making meat the center of the meal, but hunting and dressing the kill instead of buying it prepackaged from a butcher shop or supermarket and the frequency of meals often diverged from middle-class expectations.

The discussions about personal experiences resonated with women in a way that reading abstract class theory did not and allowed them to link their family experiences to a broader history of class struggle. Diane remembers:

> [W]hen I heard what we were talking about and I realized what it was to be working class, come from working-class people, come from poor people, come from grandparents who worked in a woolen mill and that part of American history where these workers were so pushed around and oppressed. ... I mean, it wasn’t like I needed to read a book about how my grandmother was abused ... coming from a people who spoke another language.

Speaking French. ... People who speak another language are mistreated ... and certain attributes are given to French-Canadians that are really mean-hearted and, and insulting. So, I mean, I could relate to all of that. And I could relate to being ashamed of things in my household—clothes that weren’t good enough, of going to social events and not knowing how to behave and being really embarrassed about that, you know, about things that happened in our family. ... Sometimes it was global about the oppression of workers; but sometimes it was very particular, about uncles that had bad cheap haircuts, and somehow growing up to a point where you realized that and were ashamed of it. Ah, relatives with bad teeth. They might have ... cavities that were not taken care of and actually showed, you know. Some of that humiliation, some of that not wanting certain friends to come to your house. Some of the other poor ones could come to your house because they wouldn’t remark about some of the things that

100 Kal Kalivoda transcript 1.
were going on there. But growing up to a point where you knew that this one and this one—you didn’t want those nicer, upper-class people coming to your house because they would notice right away that there were little rickety-rackety things happening [laugh]—furniture or ways of doing things.  

Likewise, recognizing that formative experiences continued to influence or disrupt relationships was eye-opening. Lois summarized the class presentation’s effect:

> When I got there, the classism presentation that I went to blew me away in that I had never thought of myself as working class or that what class I had come from would still be influencing the way that I thought.  

In an attempt to guide middle-class women toward an equitable use of their energy and resources, Califia asked women with disposable income to consider sharing their prosperity by donating money for organizing the camps and by subsidizing the fees of currently poor women so that they could attend the camps. Irene, who had risen to a nursing position, recalls that when Marilyn told her about Califia early in their friendship, Irene said, “I’d like to go, but I was working and I could only go for half a week. Was there a half-week rate? And [Marilyn] said, ‘You can afford to pay for the whole week whether you come or not, and some other woman can benefit by your extra money.’” Irene counts that as the beginning of her true feminist education: “the statement just resonated with” her. Usually ten to twelve women would donate money to cover the fee for women too poor to pay the low end of Califia’s sliding scale. In this way, Califia continued its mission to make feminism accessible to as many women as possible.

While Irene had risen from a background with deprivation, acknowledging class divisions was harder for many from middle-class families. During the first year of

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101 Diane Germain transcript 5.
102 Lois Bencagey transcript 3.
103 “Califia Community at de Benneville” (n.d.), 2 from Wanda Jewell’s personal papers.
104 Irene Weiss transcript 1.
Califia, the classism presentation created a rift that took the rest of the week at camp to heal. Women wondered why they had to spend so much time on what divided them and why the working-class women got to have a caucus by themselves. Feminists who had divorced themselves from their families of origin and embraced class analysis felt identified with the working class and were brought up short by the focus on class background forming one’s views because that excluded them from the working-class caucus while currently middle-class participants could join it. “But my class allegiance and loyalty is with the workers” did not budge women who disdained downward mobility. What began with laughs and receptivity turned to resistance, but a number of middle-class narrators believe that despite the emotion and sense of exclusion, it was imperative to recognize that they were not all the same.

These narrators represent those who found the class workshop freeing because it explained and helped to avoid conflicts. Elsa repeats three times that nothing changed her life like the class presentation. She went from believing that there was “no such thing as classism” and that everybody could do whatever they pleased to recognizing that her judgmental certainty of what was right and her money-management skills were products of an upper middle-class upbringing. She felt freed to let go of her judgments.

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105 The Furies warned about middle-class reactions—denial of class privilege and power from supporting an oppressive system, downward mobility and romanticizing or patronizing the poor, paralysis from guilt and fear, retreat in confusion, labeling the issue divisive to prevent discussion, or a red herring dismissal of some working-class women as class opportunists using issues for personal gain (Bunch and Myron 10). The Furies, however, suppressed middle-class women like Joan E. Biren, by pressuring her not to use the verbal articulateness others associated with the middle class. She turned to photography as an outlet for expressing herself. Diane remembers women continued to try to derail the passing game by objecting that the poverty of others was not their fault and that they had important things to say, and other working-class narrators complained that middle-class women had trouble holding their tongues.

106 Ariana Manov transcript 6-7.

praises the presentation and "fishbowl" observation of working-class experience as "brilliant" and says it made a "tremendous impact" on her. She remembers specific Passing Game questions and how validating it was for working-class women, who sometimes burst into tears at finding others who shared their experience. She also recalls, however, that middle-class women chafed at remaining quiet because they had suffered alienation and isolation as middle-class people, which did not get addressed.¹⁰⁸

The presentation carried over into heightened awareness about scarcity when unexamined behavior patterns continued class-based behaviors that were not necessarily appropriate to new conditions. Examples of middle-class women casually neglecting to return borrowed items struck a nerve. Food and money were constant sources of anxiety for many participants who had grown up with scarcity. When Marilyn objected to Betty Brooks taking some of her piece of cake, her friend's assurance that "there's plenty more cake in the kitchen" did not mesh with the childhood experience of other women at the table. Some women at the campgrounds were so anxious that the food would run out that they would cut in line. When middle-class participants complained about their rudeness, Diane argued that their behavior could be an inappropriate holdover from childhoods of actually not having enough food and battling with siblings to get more.¹⁰⁹ While middle-class collective members were confident that Califia would always stay in the black, their

¹⁰⁸ Ariana Manov transcript 4-6.
¹⁰⁹ Diane Germain transcript 18.
working-class sisters fretted partly because they knew the shame of having to borrow money.\textsuperscript{110}

Unfortunately, a focus on class background privileged those from working-class backgrounds against women from more wealth without considering how upwardly mobile women benefited within the heterosexist class system of the U.S. Lois could tell her companion to shut up during the Passing Game because women from less-affluent backgrounds reaped authority within that space. Lydia dismisses the importance of the class presentation, substituting heterosexual privilege. She notes that a number of white women she met may have come from poorer backgrounds like her Mexican-American family, but they married, gained divorce settlements, sent children to private school, lived in Michael Jackson’s neighborhood, and bought expensive recreational vehicles. When she was “barely making it,” literally living in servants’ quarters or a studio apartment that rattled whenever a train went by, she had little patience for protestations from currently middle-class women that they had suffered.\textsuperscript{111} Betty Brooks, a target based on her continuous middle-class status, notes wryly that volunteer-run groups on shoestring budgets “need middle-class women who will give of their lives.”\textsuperscript{112} Although Marilyn wrote that middle-class women tended to channel their energies into volunteer work, Califia incorporated the labor of many formerly working-class women, and there were attendant disputes over who was or was not pulling her weight.

\textsuperscript{110} Irene Weiss was able to recall most of the class behavior divisions based on scarcity including forms of support. She also readily assessed personal repercussions of childhood deprivation for her like needing lots of light, lots of matching towels, and abundant food despite decades of middle-class life. Transcript 3.

\textsuperscript{111} Lydia Otero transcript 20, 4-5.

\textsuperscript{112} Betty Brooks follow-up 4.
One narrator criticizes the presentation as ethnocentric although some working-class Latinas found it powerful. María Dolores grew up in an upwardly mobile Honduran family. She found the classism presentations and discussion too centered on life in the United States. Grouped for discussion with a white upper-class woman who refused to talk to her, María Dolores was struck by the American assumptions that women of color would be working class or receiving welfare. Class privilege did not necessarily translate well from one country to another. Because speakers used a personal framework to understand American life, they were careful to point out that they only represented urban working-class experience or that their understanding of extended family connections was filtered through Sicilian immigrant experience. This model fit many people well in the beginning but would be stretched to its limits in the 1980s to accommodate growing numbers of women from dire poverty and women whose experience of poverty was indistinguishable from growing up black or Latina in the United States.

"WHITE RACISM"

Plans to address differences between women initially fell short on the issue of race because of the unmarked whiteness of the group. Initial work spoke to white women while later efforts to raise attendance by women of color provided more complexity, force, and broader antiracist focus. Califia’s second-year brochure (1977) buries race within ten issues in Califia’s attempt to address a breadth of feminist issues. The next year’s brochure lists among seven goals, “1. To make Califia Community a forum for

113 “Ahshe on Class.”

114 The brochure notes that the collective will give presentations on issues that “will include history, sexuality, spirituality, class, ethics, race, political and economic systems, organizing skill and strategies—specifically as they relate to the social and political struggles throughout the world.” summer 1977 brochure from LLC.
examining the issues which divide women in hopes that understanding and appreciation will develop, enabling us to work together on the common problems which oppress us"; and "5. To provide an environment in which women of color can dialogue and possibly form coalitions with white women to help strengthen each others' struggles against racism and sexism." To interest more women of color in the camps, point five offered hope for coalition work in which white women would join the fight against racism while all women struggled against sexism, but did not yet draw connections between issues of race and gender. Not until its fifth year of operation would Califia distill the defining impediments to women's unified work for progress down to gender and sexual orientation, class, and race.

**RACISM IN BLACK AND WHITE**

Before 1978, the all-white collective members presented antiracism for whites by whites in keeping with demands from the Black Power Movement. Stokely Carmichael, Eldridge Cleaver, and Malcolm X had called for aware whites to educate other whites, and this was the most widely supported strategy proposed in antiracist handbooks in the late 1960s through the 1970s. Califia presentations called on whites to take control of

115 Summer 1978 brochure from Diane Germain's personal files and from LLC.
116 While "each others'" does not preclude recognition that racism affects white feminists, my interpretation is substantiated by Yolanda G. Retter Vargas' assessment in her interview that Califia feminists (regardless of race) did not understand connections between oppressions as readily as they conceived of a "litany" of identity factors that experienced oppression. "I don't think they understood connections. They only understood the litany. We all knew the litany, well, no we didn't all know it, but enough of us knew the litany. We didn't always know or understand the connections. We often did not take the time to get the connections, so they weren't, not only in our minds, but there in our practice." Transcript 4.
their own racism because "the interracial encounter group may often serve as simply another form of exploitation of minorities for White people's purposes. The benefit seems to be greater for Whites than for Third World People." The idea was that "white women had to take the responsibility of helping other white women who made racist comments" because women of color should not be continuously put in the position of helping white women out of racism.

Although Califia was based in Los Angeles, which had a high concentration of Latinas, American Indians, and Asian Americans, manuals of the day presented American racism as the oppression of African Americans. Representative of the pre-presentation reading packet was Sara Winter's "Rooting Out Racism." Winter addressed white guilt and the avoidance of race issues through segregation, emotional detachment, and simply not seeing. Assuring her audience that their internalization of racism as children was not their fault, Winter argued that whites, nonetheless, reaped benefits and had a responsibility to work against racism. She recommended analysis of the stereotypes and fears that whites experienced in racially mixed situations, listening to "black friends, Malcolm X in 1970 concluded, "whites who are sincere should organize themselves and figure out some strategies to break down the prejudice that exists in white communities. This is where they can function more intelligently and more effectively, in the white community itself, and this has never been done." G. Breitman, ed., By Any Means Necessary: Speeches, Interviews, and a Letter by Malcolm X (New York: Pathfinder, 1970), 164. The Katz handbook stands in a line of antiracist training manuals that supported the Black Power position: Owen Blank, Louis L. Knowles and Kenneth Prewitt, eds., Institutional Racism in America (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), L. C. Coppard and B. J. Steinwachs, "Guidelines for community Action," in E. L. Perry, ed., The White Problem (Philadelphia: United Presbyterian Church, 1970), P. Bidol, Reflections of Whiteness in a White Racist Society (Detroit: P.A.C.T., 1971 pamphlet), and J. Edler, "White on White: An Anti-Racism Manual for White Educators in the Process of Becoming," Ed.D. dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 1974.

118 Katz 17.
119 Diane Germain transcript 17.
120 Sara Winter, "Rooting Out Racism" (unpublished manuscript, n.d.) 7 pages, here pages 1-2, from Mazer. The Winter piece was handed out to be read before the racism presentation and also came in a photocopied version that appeared to be published but contained no citation.
associates and acquaintances about what they’ve experienced,” “searching out valid information on race and racism,” “interrupting other whites’ racist remarks or actions,” and larger direct actions, such as influencing hiring and housing practices or curricula. Winter’s program was a template, which profoundly affected one narrator whose main cross-racial experience was with Latinas. The presumed whiteness of the audience reflected early Califia presentations. Until 1979, the collective was completely white, and the women attending were overwhelmingly white as well, so not only were the presentations on race geared for them, but the attendance of women of color was often due to white women’s suggestions that they come.

The permutations of Califia’s early racism presentations situate Califia within changes in the feminist movement through which white feminists increasingly recognized the importance of racism and its negative consequences for all people regardless of race. At a time without widespread racism education projects, Califia was like NOW and grassroots groups in which white women practiced CR and formed study groups and workshops to tackle racism before 1978, but it would take women of color to prod Califia participants into more intensive antiracism work.

FATEFUL RECRUITMENT

As with the change in classism presentation leaders, what precipitated massive changes in the methods used in the racism presentations and the racial composition of attendees started when the woman who usually gave the racism presentation did not show up. In 1978, feminists María Dolores Díaz (Honduran) and Gloria Rodríguez (Chicana)
were among those who attended Califia. Lois, who was María Dolores’ lover at the time, relates that the night before the racism presentation, Marilyn and Irene approached María Dolores because they needed substitutes for the racism presentation. Breaking with the strategy of whites teaching whites about racism, they wondered whether “because she was a woman of color, couldn’t she do something.” María Dolores says that they asked her to read a poem by a woman of color—a simple task for a woman who had earned a doctorate and was then a university professor. María Dolores demurred that she would like to look over the presentation notes until the next day. She approached the other two identifiable women of color and got their support for her plan. The next morning, instead of the planned presentation, María Dolores told the story of her involvement to the hundred or so attendees and asked, “Will my sisters of color please come up and be with me?” With a total of five women holding hands, she said, “This is your racism presentation,” bowed, and left them to discuss how unspoken racism led to such a white-dominated camp.

In keeping with Califia’s goals of self-empowerment and practicing the skills needed to direct that power toward changing themselves and the world, María Dolores did not simply fill in at the last minute or leave white Califians to contemplate the paucity of women of color attendees. Instead, she organized women of color and some white women into a caucus and demanded that Califia develop a recruiting task force by

123 The women of color who attended Califia during its first four years tended to find out about it through white friends or recruiters. María Dolores heard about Califia through a white-dominated group when a Califia woman distributed brochures and talked up the camp during a Southern California Women for Understanding meeting. Lois Bencangey transcript 1. See also Bunch and Pollack 161.
124 Lois Bencangey transcript 6.
125 María Dolores Díaz transcript 1-2.
126 This is a consistent goal stated in introductory blurb to the “Come to Califia Community” brochures.
September 1978 and have three women of color on the collective by July 1979. María Dolores and Gloria were willing to put in the labor to encourage women of color to respond to Califia’s call for task force members, to inform area women about Califia, and to raise money to help women of color come to Califia. The inclusion of more women of color would alter dramatically the strategies used in antiracism work.

Such demands for inclusion and leadership corresponded with trends in the wider lesbian feminist movement, which would, in turn, have further implications for Califia. In 1978, the short-lived National Lesbian Feminist Organization (NLFO) held a founding conference in nearby Santa Monica. The organizers were Jeanne Córdova (an Irish and Mexican American who did not identify as a woman of color at the time) and a number of her white friends. All but one delegate was white, while the few other women of color were present as observers and staff. Yolanda Retter Vargas, who was doing security, relates:

So, a white woman from Colorado, I believe, stood up and said, “Where are the women of color delegates?” and all hell broke loose. So what wound up happening is any woman of color that was present and wanted to serve in that capacity was recruited as a delegate. And what came out of that that’s important is that it was decided that all decision-making committees had to be made up of fifty percent women of color. And even though that organization didn’t live long enough to carry it out, word got out this has been implemented. And as Mina Robinson, also known as Mina Meyer, who attended that conference, said in an article in *Sister* newspaper, this was the first time that white women had to really deal with the issue of color. So, at any rate, there was a thread there that

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127 The Califia Outreach Task Force solicited women of color in 1979 with a letter that promised, “Califia, a women’s community and collective, is attempting to deal meaningfully with racism in the women’s community. We need you! Come and get the high that comes from doing something that makes a difference [bold in original].” They planned to make the collective at least one-third women of color and had committed $1000 to pay fees for women of color to attend the camps. “Women of Color” flyer/letter (1979) LLC Califia Community file, bold in original. Corroborated in Bunch and Pollack 150.
connected up to awareness. ... some of the women who were at that conference, who were women of color, helped found the LOC, the Lesbians of Color group.\textsuperscript{128}

It is telling that almost all the women of color at the NLFO meeting were present as spectators or staff rather than as leaders. Women of color were coming to feminism and looking for spaces in which to do political work. NLFO was part of a platform from which lesbians of color founded groups to deal with issues that concerned them.

The presence of María Dolores and Gloria in Califia and Lesbians of Color (LOC) precipitated the formation of tentative connections between these two groups. Califia and LOC cosponsored a racism/sexism conference at the Women’s Building, and throughout 1978 and 1979, area women’s organizations asked the Califia collective to do racism workshops, placing Califia on the map of Los Angeles feminist race work. Through these efforts, white collective members became more skilled at presenting antiracist workshops, and racial diversity at Califia grew.\textsuperscript{129} Overlap in membership between Califia and LOC, however small, in addition to recruitment from broader communities of color had concrete effects. Not only did the number of women of color attending Califia increase, more women of color took leadership positions on the collective and in the antiracism presentations. Consciousness and tensions about race and ethnicity issues increased and, ultimately, Califia’s geographically and racially based Support, Education,

\textsuperscript{128} Yolanda Retter Vargas transcript 2. The original woman of color delegate was Margaret Sloan, formerly of NBFO. Hole and Levine put the first call for 50% representation on all committees at the National Conference for a New Politics in September 1967 in Chicago. A women’s group at the conference, which included Jo Freeman, Shulamith Firestone, Naomi Weissstein and Heather Booth, put forth a resolution that all committees of the conference have 51% female representation, but a “women for peace plank was substituted. Hole and Levine 112-113.

\textsuperscript{129} Bunch and Pollack 150.
and Action (SEA) groups would expand political spaces for women of color and antiracist work.

TRANSFORMATIVE FUN

The three major presentations were central to the Califia experience and distinguished it from more social or single-issue feminist spaces. Califia camps were also a vacation with plenty of fun, entertainment, and inspiration. Narrators lightheartedly describe Califia’s draw as an “Amazon summer camp” or “lesbian summer camp.” Of twenty-one women interviewed who attended camps between 1976 and 1978, more than half remark about the importance of having an all-women’s space where they felt free from confining mainstream norms and/or where they formed lasting friendships. Their freedom and friendships developed within a cultural feminist atmosphere, which both glorified women’s abilities and tried to equip them to change the world.

Women found relief from the hard work of presentations in recreation and creation. They enjoyed the outdoors, hiking, swimming, and sitting around a campfire singing songs to guitar accompaniment. Attendees listened to Alix Dobkin’s Lavender Jane Loves Women while working together in the kitchen, a bonding experience that

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130 Transcripts for Ariana Manov 2 and Vicki Leon 2. Karen Merry’s response to my initial question, “What do you think are the most important things to focus on if someone’s going to assess Califia Community?” shows this balance. “Well, I know that we had a lot of fun up there. We had, you know, no clothes, playing volley ball [laugh], a lot of silly talent shows and all those things. Those were a lot of fun and community things, but the really important things that I think most people came away with from Califia was the class, race, and sexism. … [T]he interpersonal things that happened in individual people.” Karen Merry transcript 2.

131 Twelve emphasized how crucial having all-women’s space was for safety, trust, and freedom, while eight reflected that they formed some of their most important and sustained friendships at Califia: Lois Bencangey, Jane Bernstein, Betty Brooks, Josy Catoggio, Elsa Fisher, Muriel Fisher, Diane Germain, Betty Jetter, Wanda Jewell, Ariana Manov, Karen Merry, Jeanne Murphy, and Marilyn Murphy (see her chapter), Kathy Sabry, and Irene Weiss.

132 Transcripts for Bonnie Kaufmann and Kathy Sabry.
participant Joy Fisher deemed “the revolution.” Inspired by the first camp and wanting to commemorate Califia’s goals, Betty Jetter created a melody to which others wrote lyrics. “The Song of Unity (A Woman’s Anthem)” recalled the turmoil, joy, sisterhood, pride, and hope for changing the world that Califia contained:

Woman loving tough and caring, sister pain and triumph sharing Proud our woman’s bodies bearing, sisters dream and do and dare We will grow and we will build tomorrow, People whole and space that’s free And together raise our separate voices, in a Song of Unity

When the darkness seems to fill the hour Woman Power will prevail Neither class nor age shall make a difference Sisterhood will never fail

Like the mission of Califia, “The Song of Unity” displayed the struggle to overcome mainstream derogation of women by taking pride in their bodies and supporting each other through pain. The authors of the song listed class and age as salient identity factors that divided women and concluded, “Sisterhood will never fail.” The juxtaposition of sexism unifying women while class and age divided them only partially covered what would crystallize into the three major presentations. The focus on age reflected the reality of Califia as a space that attracted women in their early twenties through sixties, with middle-aged mothers like Betty Brooks, Marilyn, and Betty Jetter employing their years of experience with feminism to teach neophytes:

All our children will embrace the truth And their paths will be revealed And the visions that we’ve all been seeing Will become alive and real

We will take our power and we’ll live it

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Find our strength and freely give
To the sisters yet to be awakened
To the dream they might all live¹³⁴

The lyrics reflect Califia’s interest in accommodating mothers with small children by sharing childcare duties. Not only were the camp’s informative CR sessions supposed to generate a shared vision from personal experience, but the physical presence and participation of children and their interaction with feminists besides their mothers held out the possibility of creating an intergenerational community of shared responsibility and mission. This focus on group assistance appeared in the final verse, as the authors promised to share their message with women who had not yet had exposure to feminism. Breaking out of individualizing models of personal pain to participate in collective action was a common theme in women’s music and central to Califia’s mission.

In addition to spontaneous composition, retrospectives on workshops illustrate the topics that participants considered to be fun and important. In a Lesbian Tide review, Joy characterized the Califia camp of 1976 as perhaps “typical of the West Coast” in its “proliferation of workshops on relationships—how to have them, how to avoid them, how to mediate them, how to recover from them. (As the week wore on, women began to leave the cabins, two-by-two, bedrools [sic] under their arms, undoubtedly for a little field study.).”¹³⁵ Wanda Jewell remembers a lot of workshops on self-care such as massage, women’s health, and spirituality. Themes of relationship, self-care, and

¹³⁴ “Song of Unity (A Woman’s Anthem)” with lyrics by Ann Denham with the assistance of Audry Sheats, Billie Hamilton, and Charlotte Clarke. Betty Jetter’s personal files.
¹³⁵ Fisher 4.
spirituality fit squarely into cultural feminist goals of nurturing women and personal transformation.

During a camp in 1977, Z Budapest gave a packed workshop on women’s spirituality, which exposed tensions over the proper expression of feminism. For Wanda, a feminist take on spirituality constituted “very exciting times because instead of having a patriarchal structure of men’s religions and politics, we could go to a place that was completely about women. So it was incredibly refreshing and life-changing.” Wanda and other women at Califia integrated aspects of feminist Wiccan spirituality, astrology, goddess worship, and Native American spirituality into their lives and, so, joined a vibrant spiritual community. Z, an engaging speaker, encouraged women to link spiritual growth with feminist principles and politics.

With the controversial nature of Z and Wicca as a type of organized religion, not all welcomed the presence of witches at Califia. Joy described a banquet that women organized midweek, “complete with a receiving line of witches. ... By the end of the week, I was weary of witchcraft—not one more witches’ circle would I snail in.” Betty Jetter, an avowed atheist who prides herself on rational thought, had never known witches really existed. More than twenty-five years later, she wants to go on record about Wiccans:

And every time all the community was there at the same time, somehow I found myself in a ritual I didn’t know I was going to be in. Form a circle. Hold hands. Do this, that, and the other thing. You know, five or ten minutes all of a sudden you’re doing something you don’t know what you’re doing it for. And about the third time I was starting to get the idea that I didn’t really want to be doing this,

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136 Wanda Jewell transcript 9, 1.
137 Fisher 5.
that they were doing this to me without my permission. I saw a woman standing on the sidelines for the third time with this. And finally after that third time I went over to her, and I said, "How come you never participate in that?" And she said, "I'm not going to be involved in anything as stupid as that." But the fourth time was really what blew me away. There was a woman there who was a tiny woman, maybe ninety pounds dripping wet, and all of a sudden there were two rows of women serpentining around the room, and they lifted this woman over [their] head[s] and everybody was passing her down this, this serpentine line. And at the end she comes off the line. And this ritual was a woman giving birth to herself.

Betty did some canvassing of women there about their reactions to the Wiccan rituals and found others were also confused and irked. Betty then complained publicly that these ceremonies were done without the participants' permission and without enough justification. She stresses that witches should "at least say you're going to do these rituals and do you want to participate." Eventually, over the years, she found that the presence of witches subsided and speculates that they may not have found Califia to be a good place for them until the very last years of Califia. It is not surprising that lesbian feminist Wiccan practitioners "came out of the woodwork" to attend Califia camps. The second-year brochure claimed that spirituality would be part of Califia, and its natural setting was conducive to nature-based religions.

Contrary to Wanda's enthusiasm and Betty's disgust, Irene and Betty Brooks acknowledge but play down the presence of witches at Califia as part of the larger feminist debate over what counted as political and what place cultural feminists had in a movement for social justice. Irene remembers that some women loved the rituals Z did in the couple of years she attended Califia and that on evaluation forms some women

\[138\] Betty Jetter transcript 4-5.
\[139\] Betty Jetter transcript 3.
wanted more spirituality presentations although that was not an activist focus to her.\textsuperscript{140}

Interviewing Betty Brooks with her partner, Silvia Russell, Silvia’s interest in spirituality prodded Betty to discuss Wicca. After initially saying there was no spirituality, Betty suggests that some people did things in the woods but avowed that Califia was “very very secular.” Silvia prods, “Any witches at that time?” and Betty recalls that many women were witches doing rituals. Although Betty initially forgot and then deemphasizes witchcraft, she does feel that cultural feminism contributes to nurturing women:

And they need to have a place where they’re nurtured, and then they need to be given the tools to then move out and do other things. So often, groups just become nurturing places and nothing is really ever demanded or nothing ever comes of it. And that may be good in its own self. Psychologists say that’s good in and of its own self, but I’ve always wanted to make something happen.\textsuperscript{141}

The trajectory that Betty plots with personal well-being as a stage before action indicates her prioritization of action. Josy and Ariana eventually have come to view emotional support, well-rounded lives, and activism as mutually necessary:

You had no right to more than the bare minimum as long as there were people who didn’t have the bare minimum. And so a lot of us were living in this intense, passionate, political space where we didn’t take the time to rest or to have relationships or to feed or nurture ourselves. And a lot of us were acting in ways that Ariana now describes as an awful lot like using activism as your sort of drug of choice to avoid dealing with whatever in your life you don’t want to deal with.\textsuperscript{142}

These avowed activists support cultural feminism as having positive effects with their assessment that a single-minded focus on political or social causes is detrimental to individuals.

\textsuperscript{140} Irene Weiss transcript 24, 28.
\textsuperscript{141} Betty Brooks transcript 18, 55.
\textsuperscript{142} Josy Catoggio transcript 50.
When individuals burnt out, their withdrawal could destroy the group effort. How much energy to spend on oneself and on the betterment of one’s world was impossible to resolve, but it related to the place of spirituality as part of cultural and/or political feminism. The public avowal of matriarchal religions and nondominant spiritual practices promoted the formation of collective identity and pitted spiritualists against their opponents in a political contestation of dominant categories. Despite the apparent decline in witches attending Califia camps, the debate over whether spirituality was a distraction or made a significant contribution to women’s well-being and political activism would continue.

FALSE STARTS AND FRICITION

Spirituality was hardly the only bone of contention during the initial Califia years. Although Califia tried to operate through consensus, conflicts erupted in the first three years over how decisions were made and over the unexamined power dynamics at work. A lofty plan for sustained community demonstrated some of the practical limits of cultural feminism. Turmoil followed discussions about the role of the community in caring for itself and for individuals as well as the authority of the collective vis-à-vis participants. These areas of friction underscore the idealism and diversity of programs for positioning feminism within the U.S.

WOMEN’S LAND

A group of Califia women at the first camp spearheaded a promising project for permanent women’s land, which pledged to prevent class problems and incorporate environmentalism. Their plan advanced the possibilities of withdrawing support from the
dominant society or regenerating women's feminist energies and equipping them to continue the struggle. Over the next months, the *Lesbian Tide* reported on the development of the Califia land project, which was slated to buy eighteen acres in Sonoma County.\(^{143}\) Judy was part of this Malibu/Califia Land Management Collective, which purchased land in Malibu for "an educational conference and healing center for women."\(^{144}\) Within a month, several of these Califia women closed on twelve and a half acres and planned to use it "for only one retreat for Califia members before [reselling it] to purchase a communal living area here in Los Angeles for the larger membership of Califia Community" because the land they had gotten had insufficient buildings. One of the investors related that they had developed a model of collective living that would eliminate tenant/owner situations and would realize "alternative ways to utilize 'our green energy.'" This plan, however, was left completely unclear as the article went on to explain that $3,000 to $5,000 partial interests in the proposed land would be sold to women in the larger community.\(^{145}\) Soon afterward, the plans for permanent communal living dissipated. Although no narrator remembers exactly what happened, Betty Brooks believes that they could not keep up with the payments. After weathering being fired and the closure of Persephone's, she remembers she "wasn't going to touch it."\(^{146}\) Califia participants were divided, anyway, over the value in withdrawing from society instead of continuing to engage for change.\(^{147}\)

\(^{143}\) Joy Fisher 5.
\(^{146}\) Betty Brooks follow-up 2.
\(^{147}\) Wanda Jewell personal conversation on July 10, 2002.
TOUCHED AND DISTURBED

At the second camp session of 1977, tensions erupted over how to balance the needs of a mentally ill participant remembered as “Sappha” with the requirements of the other participants. Six narrators who were at that camp recall the struggle as an example of disability issues, allegiance to western medicine or alternative medicine, group responsibility, and the authority of the collective. Jane and Betty Jetter label Sappha “schizophrenic” and blame herbalists for convincing her to stop her medication cold-turkey and switch to herbs during the June session. The implication was that green tea could cure schizophrenia. Sappha went off her drugs, went home, and came back two weeks later for the second (July) Califia, which Betty attended. Narrators describe Sappha as roaming, babbling, and screaming all night and exhibiting lowered inhibitions. Betty remembers that the green tea proponents tried to care for her but were asking for volunteers by the third night. At every night’s community meeting, participants spent hours debating what to do about Sappha.

At stake was fear of complicity with a mental health profession that popular culture increasingly problematized and that leading feminists condemned. Jack

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148 Jane Bernstein transcript 6-7.
149 Japanese researchers continue to publish the medicinal benefits of green tea. Green tea is thought to serve as an antioxidant, block destructive effects of free radicals (instable molecules with unpaired electrons), lower lipids and blood pressure, aid against bacteria, viruses, toxins and cancer, hinder tooth decay, deodorize the body, and help intestinal balance and remedy diarrhea in farm-raised calves. The benefits of green tea are also touted in women’s health books, especially those on aging. I have not found research that proclaims green tea can treat mental illness. The ways green tea has been characterized as purifying and balancing could have been metaphorically transferred to conceptions of mental illness as caused by impurity and imbalance. Yukihiko Hara, *Green Tea: Health Benefits and Applications*, Owen R. Fennema et al, eds., Food Science and Technology series (New York; Basel: Marcel Dekker, Inc., 2001). Takehiko Yamamoto et al, eds., *Chemistry and Applications of Green Tea* (Boca Raton; New York: CRC Press, 1997).
150 Betty Jetter transcript 13-14.
151 Transcripts for Elsa Fisher 22 and Betty Brooks 12.
Nicholson’s recent performance in *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1975) plumbed the depths of unchecked repression in mental institutions. Participants had just heard Ahshe’s convincing class analysis of mental illness, in which she stressed that the middle class defined appropriate behavior and health, leaving all working-class people susceptible to the charge that they were crazy and the fear of being “locked up [to] just die rotting in a mental institution.” Her examples of violent outbursts born of frustration and her continuous return to the theme of power differentials must have resonated with some who continually felt out of place. Women invoked personal experience and “there were women who had been screwed over by the patriarchy and been locked up in mental wards who were bound and determined to keep this woman from having that happen at Califia of all places.” They found authoritative support in *Women and Madness* (1972) where feminist Phyllis Chesler indicted psychiatric theory and practice as brutally sexist.

When middle-class men defined norms of appropriate behavior, did their mental illness labels even correspond to real phenomena or did they simply constrain women and other men whose unruliness otherwise threatened to upset polite society? What were the implications for everyone when people learned about comfort and dis-ease within a hierarchical societal construction? At the time, Ariana was in good company in asserting that mental illness did not exist. Others, like Jane and Elsa, wanted to get Sappha

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152 “Ahshe Green on Class” July 1976 tape.
153 Ariana Manov transcript 19-20.
154 Gay and lesbian historians have produced growing evidence that homosexuals have been susceptible to imprisonment in mental wards and debilitating torture through nonconsensual drug therapy, electro-shock, and lobotomies solely for being part of a sexual minority. See, for example, Gary Atkins on Fanny Farmer in *Gay Seattle: Stories of Exile and Belonging* (Seattle; London, University of Washington Press, 2003).
155 See Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness* (New York: Avon, 1972). Esther Newton supported Chesler’s critique with a mostly personal account that linked designations of mental illness to frustration over
hospitalized and back on her medication because they felt ill-equipped to help her and recognized that she was in distress. Both they and Sappha seemed ill at ease with the situation. Karen has the unique perspective that women at Califia also feared involving authorities because it could have imperiled the camp and jeopardized the safety of the other women there. As a social worker, she advised people on their options for getting Sappha help. For about four days the debate and care shifts continued as Sappha disrupted this temporary community.

Califia, as a feminist community that reassessed norms and created new standards of behavior, echoed events happening throughout the wider feminist movement. The collective members finally asked Sappha to leave because they could not do any of the educational work, and a couple of women drove her down the mountain. Ariana believes that those women continued to nurse Sappha rather than risk care from the dominant society. Because she now assesses the story through the lens of believing mental illness is a biochemical reality, Ariana worries that ultimately the women’s community may have blamed the victim for not improving. She recalls some rumors that Sappha floated around the women’s community and that without the intervention she

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156 Elsa Fisher transcript 21.  
157 Karen Merry transcript 15.  
158 Betty Jetter remembers that Joy volunteered out of feminist duty and pressured Betty to sign up for a shift. When Joy dumped the care on Betty, Betty spent the next two hours nearby as Sappha masturbated. Upset and miffed, Betty became another voice saying they really could not handle this caretaker role. Betty Jetter transcript 14.  
159 Betty Brooks transcript 13.
needed "she wreaked havoc on a lot of women" who did not know how to care for her. The tragic story of Sappha is one example of the unintended effects of throwing everything into question and trying to reform the world while living in an unreformed society. Stasis was unthinkable. Complicity was unacceptable. In the long run, compassionate views toward those who most visibly could not fit comfortably fed a whole field of feminist social work and therapy. In the short run, it was simply impossible to accommodate learned discomfort and lack of experience with mentally ill people with the needs of women like Sappha.

**STRUCTURELESSNESS AND CONSENSUS**

In the wake of the tiring second session with Sappha, some leaders proposed that the collective divest itself of power over what programs to organize or present so as not to be "elitist." The collective was still firmly divided after ten hours of argument and, resorting to a vote, the no-structure side won. Making a clear argument for structure, Marilyn recounted, "The following morning, two hundred women, new to Califia, were met by exhausted collective members and a schedule consisting only of meals for the week. From the chaos of the next few days, after which the original schedule was followed, several Califia policies were determined." Not only did structure during the first two days allow participants to become acclimated and to start thinking about how they wanted Califia to develop, structure also met the collective members' political needs. The inauspicious night-before vote reaffirmed collective members' insistence on reaching all decisions by consensus and began a commitment to finishing structure and

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160 Ariana Manov transcript 20.
content changes before the last meeting and to ending meetings on time. Later collective members joked that meetings continued to privilege those with the most stamina.\(^{161}\)

Califia’s aborted attempt at operating without structure reflected and refined Jo Freeman’s evaluation in “The Tyranny of Structurelessness.” Freeman appraised rap groups’ time-intensive participatory process as incompatible with organizing concrete projects that require specific tasks. In addition, feminists’ resistance to choosing representatives or leaders led reporters to choose “stars,” whom feminists then condemned as “elitists.” Freeman argued that feminist groups structured themselves according to friendship networks with exclusive informal communication networks. Such a structure required a narrow function, a small and homogeneous group, high communication, and low skill specialization.\(^{162}\) Although the Califia collective reproduced concerns about taking too much power, they developed a system, which challenged many of Freeman’s conclusions. They tried to ensure inclusion in decision-making by using consensus and setting up various sites for discussion about policy at the camps and between camps. In ensuing years, they would expand Califia from an education project to other projects and increase the diversity of the collective.

Collective meetings and camp community meetings were the primary sites for decision-making. Numerous narrators saw the community meetings as exciting examples of taking one’s power. Looking back, most narrators see consensus as a humane and community-building alternative to oppressive hierarchy, a tool that was applicable some of the time but that needed to be used in conjunction with making power and

\(^{161}\) Bunch and Pollack 141.

responsibility commensurate. For Wanda and Carla Seco (pseudonym), process and consensus were the most important things to consider in assessing Califia. Community meetings were one of Wanda’s “favorite things because anybody could put up an agenda item.” A pad of butcher paper, a facilitator, and a process person guided the discussions after women wrote down the topics and the number of minutes they wanted to allot for each discussion. Community meetings galvanized women, and Wanda saw the meetings shift from passive and benign to passionate discussions over the course of the week.

The importance of consensus to Carla was the development of trust and communication that it necessitated. Rather than strategizing and lobbying for votes, even the potentially negative consensus aspect of talking each other to death shared more of people’s underlying rationales.

Consensus required that women exhibit convincing articulation, and in an unequal society, there were limits to its democratizing effects although it exceeded current political norms. Josy defends consensus against executive decisions and voting, which leave the many losers subject to a tyranny of the appointed or the majority. In the long run “you end up with a lot of people feeling oppressed and sort of doing various kinds of sabotage—whether consciously or unconsciously.” From discussion with Ariana, Josy concludes that the major drawback to consensus is that it privileges persuasive speakers, so that people may still feel “run over.” If they cannot articulate their positions, “then eventually they turn on you and say that you’re oppressing them because you’re articulate

163 Ariana Manov transcript 28.
164 Wanda Jewell transcript 13-14.
165 Carla Seco (pseudonym) transcript 1-2.
and strong and sway people to your side.” Irene agrees that, in practice, “there are always some people who carry more weight and whose word carried more weight. And sometimes that was Marilyn. Sometimes it was Betty Brooks, who were the two founding members … and who had big voices [chuckle].” Unlike majority-rule models, feminists hoped to train women to “take their power” by practicing the skills they needed. Betty Jetter recognizes that women really needed to discuss the issues they felt were pressing. She did not look forward to the tedium and, with years of experience, “always felt like, ‘Well, here we go again.’ And yet I knew [laugh] we had to do it.” Majority rule would have been “bullying.”

Collective members were not pushovers, and Irene notes that there were always “nay-sayers, obstacle-growers.” Asked, “So how would that work in the long run with a consensus model?” she quips, “That’s what it did—a long run.” Collective meetings simply ran on and on because achieving consensus to empower women rather than outvoting them took time. Scoffing at the idea that they ended meetings “on time,” she recalls long discussions until the opposition was worn down. Carla qualifies such complaints, saying that everyone knew before they joined the collective that they were committing to all-day meetings.

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166 Josy Catoggio transcript 55-56.
167 Betty Jetter transcript 38-39. One occasion of consensus breaking down on the collective stuck in her mind (which would have occurred after 1984). A black woman who “absolutely would not give an inch on something” relented after a long time, but Betty expects that “she felt very coerced.” Most of the time Betty thought consensus worked.
168 Carla Seco (pseudonym) transcript 2.
UNPALATABLE VEGETARIANISM

Rather than time constraints causing problems, repeated conflicts erupted from unexamined power dynamics combined with an inability to demonstrate important connections between political issues convincingly enough to move people beyond their comfort zones. Consensus broke down occasionally in irreconcilable ways, most dramatically over vegetarian food. Sue and Shirley had convinced the initial collective to provide vegetarian meals. They were part of a broader political movement that opposed the postwar meat industry as cruel to animals and ecologically unsound. Their reasoning, however, failed to articulate with powerful leaders’ priorities.

Significantly, zero narrators could recap with any conviction the details of the rationales for vegetarianism. The Califia collective mailed a vegetarian heads-up to attendees in the packets containing directions to the camp and an overview of events:

In keeping with the presentation of alternatives to present systems, Califia offers a primarily vegetarian menu for the week. Delicious, balanced seasonal and varied meals will be served, so that you will likely discover that vegetarianism is not only a viable but also a palatable choice of eating habits. There will be a presentation explaining in more detail the various rationales for vegetarianism.169

Jane, who attended for six years, could reiterate that the camps were vegetarian because it was cheaper and healthy, but she thinks it was “funny” and “really insane” that women believed that eating meat contributed to patriarchy.170 Betty Jetter sequentially links strict vegetarian ideology with witchcraft as novel views: they “would complain that everybody’s behavior changed the minute they had their once-a-week meat meal and that

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169 "Califia Community at de Benneville" (n.d.), 2 from Wanda Jewell’s personal files.
170 Jane Bernstein transcript 3.
they had gotten crazy, and see what meat does to you and that kind of thing.” Clearly, the rap advocating vegetarianism did not sway the majority of narrators or, probably, participants in general.

Given the times, Frances Moore Lappé’s Diet for a Small Planet (1971) would have provided the most widely read argument and could have sated a desire for personal actions to influence the world. Lappé condemned inefficient protein production. In the late 1960s, livestock ate more than three-quarters of the grain produced in the U.S. in a process by which twenty-one pounds of protein fed to cattle became one pound of meat. Both in the U.S. and in Central American markets bound to U.S. consumption demands, massive land and water resources that could have grown cereals, legumes, and leafy vegetables were diverted to meat and cash crops while millions starved. Lappé estimated:

[T]he average ratio for protein conversion by livestock in North America is 10 to 1. Applying this ratio to the 20 million tons of protein fed to livestock in 1968 in the U.S., we realize that only 10 percent (or 2 million tons) was retrieved as protein for human consumption [as meat]. Thus, in a single year through this consumption pattern, 18 million tons of protein becomes inaccessible to man. This amount is equivalent to 90 percent of the yearly world protein deficit.

Factory farming hurt the earth through topsoil erosion from overgrazing or excessive plowing and threatened the health of people and other life forms through the concentration of chlorinated pesticides (e.g., DDT and Dieldrin), antibiotics, growth hormones (DES), and mercury up the food chain. Alongside factory farming grew an

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171 Betty Jetter transcript 51-52.
172 Lappé 5-9, 18-24, italics in original. Rising mercury levels in fish could be toxic, but mercury was also sprayed on grain to prevent fungus growth (24). Ecological disasters and health scares from 1969 through the 1980s accentuated tensions between progressives and conservatives. An oil spill off Santa Barbara in 1969 killed birds, and a smog alert paralyzed Los Angeles. Meanwhile Governor Reagan called out the National Guard to clear Berkeley radicals out of an empty lot they had commandeered, planted with vegetables, trees, and grass, and named “People’s Park.” In 1971 scattered articles appeared about
organic health food movement and a surge in vegetarianism that blended with progressive politics to encourage people to think in terms of whole systems instead of isolated issues (e.g., combining ecological, political, and human suffering models to decry the history of U.S. sugar refineries in Cuba). Ecologically motivated practices like vegetarianism could feel like more immediate political action than voting or planning a Marxist revolution, and it connected with nonwestern, non-Anglo, non-urban models of voluntary simplicity and scaled-back technology.

Simplicity, however, ran counter to southern California life. Los Angeles in the 1940s and 1950s had spawned fast food restaurants such as McDonald’s, the predecessors of Carl’s Jr. and Taco Bell, and then Jack in the Box. In 1975, farm activist Jim Hightower had warned about giant corporate homogenization, terming it the “McDonaldization of America.” Mirroring Hollywood and all it represented, McDonald’s symbolized unhealthy, plastic, homogenized, speeded-up culture to many vegetarians and cultural dissidents.

Contaminants such as “arsenic in chicken feed, mercury in fish, DDT in animal fat, and the use of hormones and antibiotics to promote animal growth.” Through the 1980s the mainstream press picked up a rash of disasters—“dead fish washing up poisoned by DDT, infants grossly deformed by DES, pedestrians in Los Angeles wearing surgical masks to counteract smog...” and fears about the health effects of “red dye no. 2, mercury, sugared cereal, advertising, saccharin, nitrates, cholesterol, sodium and so on and so on.” But between 1970 and 1973 the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) championed a chemical and capital-intensive agribusiness as the way to “feed a hungry world” while U.S. grain exports increased by 70%. As grain production abroad recovered and demand decreased while energy and credit costs rose, overextended U.S. farming collapsed into a crisis by 1983. See Warren J. Belasco, Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry 1966-1988 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 19-20, 259 footnote 26, 172, 133.

Belasco 16.
Belasco 26.

Feminist Carol Adams drew parallels between meat production and sexism, and her work is indicative of the argumentation that Jane and Betty remember. Like ecologists and goddess worshippers who saw the earth as a mother, Adams claimed that the “rape of the land by meat-eaters (it requires 6 to 10 times as much land to feed meat-eaters) is taken for granted just as the rape of women is condoned.” Taking a global view, she compared the colonization of Central and South American countries for meat production to “the colonization of women’s energies by American men: neither are allowed self-determination, for that would be injurious to the oppressor’s interests.” Likewise, Adams connected historically gender-divided hunting and gathering and the western phenomenon of men eating more meat than women to explain male aggression and women’s affinity with animals. In a reversal of sociobiology, she posited that rather than a desire to hunt and kill being innate, perhaps “it is meat-eating that causes the violence and aggression exhibited in hunting, sports and wars characteristic of patriarchal society.” At Califia, the imposition of vegetarian meals seem like a needless attack on women because planners did not succeed in articulating these arguments against the products of factory farming and the history of equating meat-eating with manhood, which furthered male supremacy and nutritional deficits for women.

Unaccustomed cuisine pushed some participants too far outside their comfort range when they were already struggling with the emotional intensity of camp life. Meat has been the center of American meals since colonial times and is linked to status; plus

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176 Carol Adams, “The Oedible Complex: Feminism and Vegetarianism” in Gina Covina and Laurel Galana, eds., The Lesbian Reader: An Amazon Quarterly Anthology (Berkeley: Amazon Press, 1975), 147, 150.
turn-of-the-century beef industry advertising claimed that meat was the key to good health. By 1970, the average American ate 160 pounds of red meat per year; seven percent of the global population consumed thirty percent of the world’s animal food, eating ten to twelve percent more protein than necessary even by conservative USDA estimates. When vegetarianism first became a feminist issue Marilyn derided it as another “middle-class affectation.” Like considering downward mobility to be chic, middle-class feminists were rejecting norms that working-class families had struggled to attain or mimic. As with Kal’s hunter father, the issue of food and the equation of meat on the table with middle-class norms in the minds of working-class women was a recurring theme in interviews. Over the years Marilyn, Irene, Betty Jetter, and Kal came to see some virtue in vegetarianism, but they personally, along with most middle-class narrators, have continued to want to eat meat. Alice, by contrast, became vegetarian as a direct result of serving as Califia’s cook and as one of the presenters on why vegetarianism was the feminist food choice.178

The presence of meat at meals was as much an affront to vegetarian feminists as diet sodas were to fat liberationists. “Vegefems” protested the food at a collective meeting, which was always open to all participants, held at Marilyn’s house. Wanda remembers that there was no accommodation, and the vegefems never returned to Califia. She feels that when something did not suit Marilyn and Betty Brooks’ vision, “they were the ones who held the power really in the collective.” As a new collective member,

177 Belasco 54. Lappé 28-29. The National Academy of Science concluded that Americans exceeded protein recommendations by 45%.
178 Alice Myers transcript 4.
Wanda wanted to continue striving for middle ground, but the vegefems were walking out, and “Marilyn’s attitude was, ‘Well, we’re done.’” Wanda was horribly disappointed at the discrepancy between their talk and their practice.

It is worth noting that the initial collective members had power not only because of their position as founders who contributed their labor year after year but because they had experience with feminism, were older than newer members, were articulate and self-assured, and had achieved enough material success to own homes in which they could host collective meetings. At this point, the collective was all-white, and founders came from both middle- and working-class backgrounds. During Wanda’s stint on the collective between 1977 and 1978, she experienced such personal conflicts that she left the leadership. Twenty-five years later, the events were so painful to two collective members who felt pushed out that they could not give full accounts, but others supported their interpretations. For Wanda, the vegefem incident was one of the last straws that influenced her to quit. Throughout her interview, amid the life-changing joy she got from Califia, Wanda refers to her disappointment with other collective members and the fact that she was not alone.179

(UTOPIAN?) SEARCH FOR FEMINIST COMMUNITY

The contrast between the ideals of an egalitarian, all-sustaining space and feminists exhibiting limitations they criticized in the dominant world was particularly hard for new feminists like Wanda. She came out of a marriage into lesbianism, attained

179 Wanda noted that if I could track down collective members who left in the first few years I would get a different view than those who continued would have and suggested that considering how people dealt with being the out-group would be a good question to carry through the study. For her part, she gave up on trying to shape Califia and felt that when she returned as a participant in 1981 and 1984 the collective was more exclusive than ever. Wanda Jewell transcript 3, 4-5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 16, 17.
a new world view, and anticipated having found a nurturing feminist community after feeling lost. When she encountered trashing and put-downs, the rosy glow dissipated, and there seemed to be no substance. Josy regrets that Califia may have created an illusion that there was this women’s community to come out into because Califia was it. But Califia was temporary. ... it was so traumatic for people to come out of that and back into their lives, which now looked like shit to them 'cause they could see all the ways in which they were oppressed and had made compromises. They’d been to utopia and they wanted—and they thought utopia still existed somewhere here in Los Angeles, and if they left their husbands and kids and whatever, that there would be this women’s community to join. ... And women would sort of dismantle their middle-class lives, even if they’d worked for years to achieve that, 'cause they suddenly couldn’t stand being with their husbands, and they wanted to come out as a lesbian, and they thought there was this mythical feminist lesbian community that would embrace them with open arms and help them find a job and get settled and live in their house.  

Josy gives a class analysis and adds that she was able to move to Los Angeles because she had a friend who could house her and use her help with childcare. She feels that middle-class women were not used to taking in women until they could get on their feet. Betty Friedan had described the individualized suburban nuclear family structures that had isolated and infantilized white middle-class wives in The Feminine Mystique, but despite the rise of a Women’s Movement that included cultural spaces and social groups, individualism in America was still the norm.

Califia Community’s educational plan pointed to new forms of self-conception and interaction to overhaul society both individually and collectively. Second Wave feminists were willing to reassess almost everything in order to live deliberately. In doing so, Califia women created new norms of behavior founded on their personal experiential knowledge and identity formation. Their countercultural values provided safety, freedom,

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180 Transcripts for Wanda Jewell 1, 2, 11 and Josy Catoggio 29.
and empowerment for lesbian, fat, poorer, and racialized women whom society usually disparaged. Narrators with such identities frequently remember Califia as life-changing and affirming. The collectively examined life also subjected attendees to feminist judgments in addition to dominant-cultural policing. Presentations denigrated heterosexuals and women from middle-class backgrounds while expecting them to support the people who criticized them. Califia women were still working out their analyses and choosing which countercultural theories to utilize. Taking opposition to heteropatriarchy as their starting point had positive implications for connecting sexism to body politics, including disability. The lesbian feminist lens was less useful for articulating other connections convincingly, which weakened their initial perspectives on class, race, and vegetarianism because their theories did not hook into collective work. Simultaneously, a cultural focus on relationships and self-care provided group support, which sustained energy for political activism.

Women came to camps and were challenged by all the innovative ideas. The CR that put forward a combination of essential and constructed identities could be personally transforming and help to form groups interested in collective action for a cause. Within one week, women were bombarded with all sorts of programs for personal liberation, including lesbianism, fat pride, sexual education and exploration, nudity, understanding and support for working-class women, alternative takes on mental illness, Wicca, and consensus alternatives to representative democracy. There seemed like a plethora of options for participation. They could work on their bodies and spirits through morning yoga, meditation, and self-defense, get schooled in feminist basics, dedicate themselves
to stopping violence against women, join FU, settle down with a newfound love, commit themselves to unlearning their racism, become a witch, or at least roll up their sleeves and work together to keep the camp running. Califia, like feminist spaces across the nation, forged a new vocabulary and alternative ways of conceiving the world. It was either completely alienating, devastating when Califia could not live up to expectations, or provided such a high at finding what they were searching for that women came back session after session to get away from a world that paled by comparison. After its initial years, such returnees began to focus on incorporating more diversity and taking local action.
4. DIVERSIFICATION AND STRUGGLE, 1978–1982

As Califia became established, collective members continued outreach and added camps at new locations to enlarge their audience. Raising consciousnesses had funneled women into existing organizations. Betty Brooks wanted women to start their own local activist groups. Camps between 1978 and 1982 increased the diversity of attendees’ race, ethnicity, class, sexual expression, and ability status with important consequences. As Califians gained a wider range of experiences, differing priorities taxed individuals’ abilities to formulate an inclusive feminism. Califia’s camps continued to provide a space to explore the constraints of patriarchy, which was a respite for returning participants and a shock for new ones. Participants faltered in inclusiveness and political work when they relied on personal experience even though a range of perspectives was not represented among their ranks or when they could not reconcile an early feminist goal of sexual autonomy with a conflation of violence, masculinity, and some forms of sexuality. In contrast, they were part of creating culturally sensitive education about race, ethnicity, and class. Their struggles and the support services that Califians set up from incipient Support, Education, and Action (SEA) groups detail processes for feminism nationally.

INTEGRATING DIFFERENCE

The collective in 1978 was white and predominantly lesbian, but its members increasingly prioritized race at the insistence of María Dolores, Gloria, and their supporters. As Califia changed from recruiting individuals to investing groups of women of color with power on the collective, Califia women showed that radical lesbian feminism fulfilled a need and could accommodate difference but had to expand from
challenging heteropatriarchy to a model that better integrated diverse experience on all levels.

Participants' comfort with a lesbian majority led to resignation over the dwindling numbers of straight feminists who attended and indicated an unexamined whiteness, which influenced their ability to attract women of color. Narrators generally believed that fewer heterosexual feminists attended after the beginning years, a trend which coincided with fewer established promoters being or remaining married to men. Long-term participants like Diane sought to carve out a space where “lesbians come first.” She laments that discussion of sexism, racism, and classism prevented

talk about pure lesbianism and pure lesbians and just us. And it was difficult because people who were in the antiracism workshop said, “That’s racist,” because I said, “Lesbians ought to come first.”

Although Diane sometimes fell silent when accused of racism, she still maintains that Califia should have done more on “a hundred percent pure lesbianism.” Multicultural feminists would write that a theory that assumes one can isolate sexual preference from race, class, and other identities exhibits grave limits. Cherrie Moraga considered how race, ethnicity, and class influence sexuality in a “simultaneity of oppression” and concluded:

For if race and class suffer the woman of color as much as her sexual identity, then the Radical Feminist must extend her own “identity” politics to include her

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1 Betty Brooks was resigned that lesbian feminists were Califia’s community because “[w]hoever came was our community.” Follow-up transcript 3. In their interviews, Betty Jetter (presenter from ca. 1978 on and collective member ca. 1984-1985), Alice Myers (collective 1978-1981), Carol Albright (collective 1980-1981), and Lillian West (collective 1982-end) all dated their coming out as overlapping with participation in Califia. Betty and Carol began attending Califia while each was married. Califia was part of the coming out process of other narrators as well (Pam Hutson, Wanda Jewell, Vicki Leon, Joan McNeil, Karen Merry, Jeanne Murphy, Marilyn Murphy).

2 Diane Germain transcript 9.
“identity” as oppressor as well. (To say nothing of having to acknowledge the fact that there are men who may suffer more than she.)

Gloria Anzaldúa went further, proposing that working out a synthesis of identities through mestiza consciousness was “greater than the sum of its severed parts.” With white experience such an unacknowledged filter for their ideology, collective members took flak from the larger Los Angeles feminist community over being an all-white collective doing antiracism consciousness-raising (CR) in the community. The stark contrast that María Dolores drew between five women of color on stage in 1978 and the more than one hundred women in the audience initiated change. She and others successfully pushed for an integrated collective and recruitment of women of color to the camps. It seems that both lesbian and straight women of color had some interest in attending Califia as a space separate from men if they prioritized being with women over separation from whites.

Changing the composition of the collective was facilitated by its high turnover rate, but retaining women of color required a combination of heightened sensitivity and expansion of the collective, so that women of color did not feel isolated. Wanda was only one of five women to leave the collective after the 1978 camps. As the five remaining collective members looked for replacements, they reached consensus to include four new

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3 Cherrie Moraga, Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios (Boston: South End Press, 1983), 128-129.
6 Lois' interview corroborated María Dolores' actions and the sense that little care had been put into integrating women of color. Lois would go on to be part of White Women Against Racism. Lois Bencangey transcript 6-7.
women, three of whom were women of color.\textsuperscript{7} When two of the new collective members left or went on leave for the 1980 season, the collective grew to fourteen but was again overwhelmingly white.\textsuperscript{8} In 1981, five women of color replaced five outgoing members, making the seventeen-member collective thirty percent women of color.\textsuperscript{9} By 1982, Califia’s sixteen-member collective had reached the National Lesbian Feminist Organization’s (NLFO) requirement to be fifty percent women of color.\textsuperscript{10}

Select women of color agitated to gain full involvement in leadership, not to be merely tokens. Small numbers of women of color could shrink further with the day-to-day realities of meetings. Diane recalls the impediments raised by consensus-driven meetings in the midst of Los Angeles’s sprawl and the shift in tactics used to recruit women of color:

The collective was pretty much a whole bunch of white women in the beginning. And what happened is … people kept talking more and more and saying, “Well,

\textsuperscript{7} Of the 1978 collective, Liz Bernstein, Anne Perna, Kathy Proud, Wanda Jewell, and Shari Schulz did not return for the 1979 season. Betty Brooks, Marilyn Murphy, Alice Myers, Janet Stambolian, and Irene Weiss remained active members. Josy Catoggio took a leave of absence after a personal conflict with Marilyn and did not return. Transcripts for Josy Catoggio 32, Betty Brooks follow-up 3, personal conversation with Elsa Fisher. The 1979 collective added three black women—Kwambe Omdahda, Glenda J. Osborne, and Denise A. Woods—along with Carol R. Rabaut (white). Brochures for 1978 and 1979 from LLC in conjunction with interviews and a Women of Color Califia address list for Camp JCA, Malibu, CA. Betty Brooks credits Marilyn with a lot of the integration of the collective and pointed to Marilyn’s closer ties to women of color (her first female lover was a black woman) and work giving lectures from Gerda Lerner’s \textit{Black Women in White American: A Documentary History} (New York: Pantheon, 1972). Betty Brooks follow-up 4.

\textsuperscript{8} The 1980 collective retained Betty Brooks, Marilyn Murphy, Alice Myers, Glenda Osborne, Carol Rabaut, Janet Stambolian, and Irene Weiss. Karen Williams and Denise Woods took leaves of absence. The collective added Dani Adams (white), Rose Greene (white Jewish), Kari Hildebrand (white), Carol Albright (white), and Lois Nevius (white). 1980 brochure in LLC.

\textsuperscript{9} Determination of the 1981 collective’s racial composition is facilitated by terms in Bunch and Pollack 160: Christina M. Alvarez (bicultural), Betty W. Brooks, Dawn Darington (bicultural), Barbara E. Forrest (bicultural white/Latina), Diane Germain (white), Kari Hildebrand, Jan Hines (white), Yvonne King (white), Marilyn Murphy, Alice Myers, Carol Albright, Lois Nevius, Glenda Osborne, Carla Seco (pseudonym, Chicana), Anna Maria Soto (Chicana), Janet Stambolian, and Irene Weiss.

\textsuperscript{10} The 1982 collective added Ann Carriño (black), Mary Louise Lorang (white), Marj Suárez (Chicana), and Lillian West (black), while no longer listing Dawn Darington, Kari Hildebrand, Alice Myers, Carol Albright, and Glenda Osborne. 1982 brochure in LLC. See chapter 3 for NLFO.
look, how can you do all this antiracism work, and you don’t even have any women of color on your collective?” And so little, pitiful little steps were taken. And then there would be a woman of color for a while, and then there would be another woman of color for another while, and they would come and go, and I’m sure they found it difficult because we had meetings that went on for hours and hours and hours. And you had to drive a great distance even to get to these meetings and go for hours and hours and hours, and then for no money, and who had time, and blah, blah. A lot of reasons why women of color had some difficulties getting there. It might have been money, or transportation, or it might have been childcare, a lot of things. So, what eventually happened, there were lots of struggles and little tiny movements. And what conclusions we came to finally was, if you want to have women of color on your collective, and you want them to stay for long periods of time, you can’t just bring one or two at a time. What you need to do is get like five women of color and bring them on all at once, and now they feel like they’ve got a caucus. They’ve got other people who understand what’s going on rather than one lone black woman or one lone Latina or one lone Asian woman saying, “I think we shouldn’t do that because it insults people,” and we all look and say, “What?” You know, even if we didn’t say that, it might be in our face or on our body. And so we got some women of color in a little bunch, and they all came on at the same time.11

Diane’s verbal emphases highlight the criticism Califia faced, while her repetition of “little” focuses attention on how incremental change was. She punctuates external pressures that prevented many woman from devoting themselves to the collective year after year and projects a sense of the isolation women of color could feel. The “we” and “them” hints at the impediment that women of color could also see themselves as entering a collective that belonged to the white women. This is a triumphal narrative in the end because Diane argues that white awareness of problems faced by women of color grew. Women of color who “came and went” helped to heighten white collective members’ sensitivity and commitment to outreach.

Visible racial parity in leadership was not reflected in the camp populations, but friendship networks led some women of color to the camps looking for radical politics

11 Diane Germain transcript 26-27.
and community. Although the majority of women in the U.S. population and in identified feminist groups remained white, the small degree of women of color participation in Califia's early years adversely affected women of color's experience. Two Chicana collective members felt a sense of estrangement during their initial Califia experiences while also recognizing its importance:

When Anna Maria and I first went to Califia, it was on the advice of a white woman we know. This woman was a friend for many years, and we trusted her perspective in the matter. Both of us were ready to do some political work, yet we knew nothing about organizations or groups for women of color who happened to be radical.

Califia did indeed have an impact. However for us, as for many women of color before us, the impact was not as profound or transforming as the impact it had on white women. We went to all of the presentations, stayed up late, did all the readings and still did not get the point. White women were crying and arguing, and we were left with a sense of observing it all rather than experiencing it. We knew that something was happening and we knew that we had to have it. We had to have it for ourselves as well as for other women of color who would never touch the Califia experience.12

Their sense of need indicates the uniqueness of what Califia had to offer. Radical political organizations for lesbians of color were just barely forming. As these Chicanas found Califia, Las Lesbianes Latinamericaunas and Black Women of Color tentatively emerged from the NLFO conference of 1978 and coalesced into the locally based Lesbians of Color (LOC). In the late 1970s and early 1980s the issues facing lesbians of color had been generally ignored in Los Angeles, and most feminist political work was done in white-dominated groups.13 Friendship networks also influenced involvement.

Anna Maria Soto and Carla Seco were part of the Los Angeles Women’s Community

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12 Bunch and Pollack 161.
Chorus (LAWCC) and were turned on to Califia by a white friend whereas some women of color rejected association with white women. These Chicana lesbians recognized Califia as a space they “had to have,” but initial assumptions that geared it to white women played a part in lessening the impact for women of color.

Women of color collective members and white participants whose lovers were women of color were instrumental in making Califia a more hospitable space for women of color. Four women of color who asked to be interviewed as a group discussed why women of color were brought onto the collective and the repercussions. Lillian West (African American) joined the collective in 1982 and believes that she was recruited “really to bring in other women of color,” although Anna María denies that racial quotas were part of the consensus to admit Lillian to the collective. Lillian took up her perceived calling enthusiastically. She joined the entertainment committee and “had a mission from God, from the goddess, to recruit women to different camps … going out schmoozing with women, and having a legitimate … cause behind me—Califia. Like a pick-up line.” Anna María does corroborate that as the collective shifted to having more women of color on it, women “started seeing more of us at parties and dances and things promoting, and there was a safety to come. It was safe to come to the camps.”

In retrospect, Anna María also credits white women’s work to include women of color:

[T]he white women were very very cool because most of the women of color back in those years were turned on to Califia by a white woman who they were either very very close friends with or in a relationship with. And the white women who would bring her lover would bring them right up. … And we would make contact that way right away.

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14 Lydia Otero transcript 6.
15 Women of color (WOC) transcript 21, 17-18, 23.
Stressing that there was no agreement to connect women of color with each other, Anna María assumes that white women in cross-racial relationships initiated introducing their lovers to other women of color to provide a safe, comfortable space for them.\(^\text{16}\)

Califia increased the racial diversity of the collective over a seven-year period to that required by the NLFO conference through a combination of factors. Collective members expanded their numbers and replaced departing white leaders with women of color. If white leaders and participants had latent proprietary feelings about the space, women of color joined and spoke out anyway. Outspoken women of color helped make Califia more sensitive to them. Recruitment remained largely word-of-mouth through personal connections. Women targeted lovers of current Califia participants and those who seemed active in their communities.\(^\text{17}\) Even coming from the same community, consensus-based collective meetings, whose goal was to prevent a majority from tyrannizing a minority, took longer when the feelings of difference among members was greater.\(^\text{18}\) Interracial work involved prioritizing multiple and potentially dissenting voices over efficiency and taking the time to consider the work of local groups occurring in tandem with Califia. It was a long process, but Califia stood as one of very few U.S. groups where people of color made up fifty percent of the leadership.

**WHO SHOULD TEACH AND LEARN ABOUT RACISM?**

Interracial antiracism CR was an unintended consequence of recruitment, and the repercussions carried through to Califia’s end. Formally, Irene, a white Jewish woman,

\(^{16}\) WOC transcript 40.
\(^{17}\) Diane Germain transcript 27.
\(^{18}\) Betty Jetter transcript 38.
was in charge of the antiracism presentation, but María Dolores and two other women of color became spokeswomen and punched up the message. Women of color who did not attend the presentation and white women who went remember the new antiracism leadership as generally effective if tough, while these three were frustrated by responses to their labor. Escalating tensions over expectations for interracial work began in these middle years.

After the no-show incident at the 1978 antiracism presentation, collective member Irene became the coordinator of the antiracism presentation, so that women of color would not have to do white women’s work in educating against racism. Despite recognition that white people needed to take charge of their education on race, María Dolores and two women she recruited to Califia chose to become spokeswomen: Yolanda Retter Vargas (Peruvian and German American) and Doris Davenport (African American). Yolanda recalls her own introduction to Califia:

Maria said at some point, “Califia is starting a woman of color workshop, and we need you and some other women, like Doris Davenport, to come and help organize it.” The subtext there was “and kick butt.” [laughs] So, I said, “OK” partly because it is conceivable that I knew Califia was there, but nobody had said, “Come and join us” or “Come and help,” partly because they were afraid of me. So when María said, “Come and help,” I said, “OK, I will.”

Yolanda’s memory reflects the ways in which women of color could feel unwelcome at Califia before María Dolores’ outreach and indicates her perception of her role.

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19 Irene Weiss introduced foundational concepts: “that all white people are racist; that we have white privilege and the responsibility to use our privilege against racism; that the good intentions of white people often result in unintentional racism, and so on. She talk[ed] about the difference between racism and prejudice and presents the statistics of the physical, economic, and social costs of racism for people of color.” Bunch and Pollack 150-1.

20 Yolanda Retter Vargas transcript 2.
All three were highly articulate and could explain racism with power and directness, but their demeanors evoked contrasting reactions from the white women. The interplay between their antiracism labor and responses to them was emotionally charged precisely because of societal race relations and the fishbowl format in which white women were silently to watch and listen to the speakers. María Dolores lamented in 1993 that white feminists only heard her message because she “was presenting it in ways that were softer.” In contrast to the “good cop” María Dolores played, Yolanda sees herself as the “bad cop,” someone women disliked or feared because of her direct style. She characterizes Doris’ message as affected by white women’s perception of her as attractive: “a lot of women exoticized her because of how they perceived she looked. And so, she would stand there and, with a certain dignity, deliver the blows.” Yolanda concluded, “In other words, people might listen to Doris for the wrong reasons. They couldn’t hear me because they were frightened. María, they liked her, but they weren’t hearing.” White narrators across the board remember Yolanda vividly but recall Doris and María Dolores to a much lesser extent. One of the white collective members was struck by the antiracism presentations but remembered details of Yolanda and Doris’ opposition to racism much better than she recalled María Dolores:

We had fabulous presentations, and we sat there, and we were mesmerized, and we heard them from different points of view. Doris Davenport had a lot of things to say about black women, and she was a very educated person, and she was tall and willowy, and she had an aloof air about her. And she walked through the camps with skirts that flowed and moved, and she was pretty in that way. She

\[\text{\textsuperscript{21}}\text{Quoted in Retter 131-2.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{22}}\text{Yolanda Retter Vargas transcript 15-16.}\]
struck quite a figure. And she had poetry and things like that that were really impactful. And that was different than Yolanda.\textsuperscript{23}

The memory of who led antiracism presentations quickly collapses into Doris and Yolanda here. Doris becomes a signifier for black women and for positive qualities of beauty, dignity, and intellect. Is this exoticizing, as Yolanda claims? The fact that the presenters and most of the audience members were lesbians in a women’s camp where a number of women have mentioned exploring sexual possibilities and that views on nudity differed by race and ethnicity attests to the potential for a sexually charged atmosphere. Heterosexual women sometimes objectify other women as role models with whom to identify and internalize that objectification, often reinscribing dominant values.\textsuperscript{24} This possibility would be open to lesbians along with a more sexualized gaze. Doris herself and Lydia support Yolanda’s interpretation of sexualized othering, indicating the possibility of a broader fear of women of color participants’ exoticization.\textsuperscript{25}

Doris commented on white feminists’ perceptions of women of color as sensual and/or menial in her essay for *This Bridge Called My Back*.\textsuperscript{26} The article supported Yolanda’s memory of Doris delivering the blows and white Californians’ recollections while it represented a shift in Doris’ alliances. She related experiences of continuing racism in feminist circles on both coasts, and then asserted that black women find white women

\textsuperscript{23} Diane Germain transcript 24. In a personal conversation Diane amended this recollection by characterizing her description of Doris Davenport’s beauty as artistic rather than sexual. Ability to remember Yolanda better than or to the exclusion of Marla Dolores and Doris Davenport was true of Betty Brooks, Daniel Raven, and Betty Jetter among others.


\textsuperscript{25} “[T]he worst, the terror I would have is to take off my clothes and be around white women—that just sounded horrible—and be objectified in that way.” Lydia Otero transcript 8.

\textsuperscript{26} Doris Davenport, “The Pathology of Racism: A Conversation with Third World Wimmin,” *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), 85-90, here 86. This essay will be hereafter cited as Davenport.
aesthetically, culturally, and sociopolitically disgusting. The disgust was based on seeing through the myth that white women were “the most envied, most desired (and beautiful), most powerful (controlling white boys) wimmin in existence.” Within a scathing catalogue of white women’s ugliness and failings, Doris mentioned, “Their hair, stringy and straight, is unattractive.” Two white narrators remember a black woman degrading whites’ hair as smelly. Karen vividly recounts the experience as painful, evoking tears and anger among white women. Alice, in contrast, laughs and says, “[I]t was very revealing to get into open and honest discussion.” For Doris, this myth of desirability was the root of white feminists’ racism. They pulled rank against women of color because it was the only misplaced sense of power they had. Doris attributed white women’s racism to overcompensation for oppression as a colonized group in a misogynist culture. Recent scholarship continues to point out the importance of recognizing that different groups oppressed by a system (e.g., patriarchy, capitalism, imperialism) will not necessarily unite but may turn on each other to ally with those in charge.

Shared oppression under patriarchy, however, could be a basis for pan-racial feminist work if people overcame differences through CR. By 1981, Doris rejected an early black civil rights model of working together as “the old, outdated philosophy of integration and assimilation.” This indicates that she believed that joining with whites would only expand a white model rather than alter that model to be inclusive or require

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27 Davenport 87.
28 Transcripts for Karen Merry 9 and Alice Myers 2.
adaptation on all sides. Like the Black Power leaders who prescribed separation in which whites would teach whites while blacks focused on their own culture, she advocated self-segregation and self-determination through “a third world wimmin” feminist movement. Doris’ derogatory application of the term “boys” for men hints at separatism from men, which would have initially made Califia’s retreat setting appealing. As she became disenchanted with the realities of a racially integrated lesbian feminist community, however, she withdrew to an ideal that racial minority women could find the commonality to work together.

This was actually more complicated than she suggested because of class differences, separatist choices, and cultural tensions. Lydia sharply distinguishes the majority of LOC members, who she says were working class and dated among themselves, from Doris, María Dolores, and Yolanda, who, Lydia asserts, did not hang out with them at the Catch One African-American bar on Peco and did date whites. Her perception gets to the more generalized point that there were axes of difference among women of color that hindered their feminist work as was true in white-majority groups. Likewise, Anna María remembers that at later Califia camps for women of color, Pacific Islanders refused to speak with Japanese Americans because of long-standing national conflicts over racial superiority and imperialism.

Yolanda’s approach made more of an impact, in part, because she was more theatrically confrontational. Yolanda circulated in print and performance her views on

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30 Davenport 88-90.
31 Barbara Forrest corroborates that some middle-class women of color were not dealing with class issues separating them from other women of color. Transcripts for Lydia Otero 10 and Barbara Forrest 8.
32 WOC transcript 60.
racism, and her style is instructive for the pros and cons of marshalling humor, identification, anger, and pressure. Diane remembers:

*One* time she was walking around Califia camp with a big white bandage over her eye. ... And everyone was going up to her and saying, "*Yolanda, oh my God!* What happened to your eye? How come you've got that *bandage* on your eye?" And she says, "I'm *wearing* this bandage so that I only have to see half of the bullshit that's going on around here!" [laugh] Well it was *those* kind of things, you see, that were *creative* and that had some kind of *humor* to them I really loved.33

The visual impact, feelings of concern for Yolanda’s physical well-being, and possibility of linking that concern to a—for many white women, more theoretical—concept of racism, made Yolanda’s bandage wearing a memorable performance. On the other hand, by feigning injury, she manipulated her audience’s concern. Using humor was a more acceptable way of raising consciousness about oppression than were verbal attacks because it released tensions while maintaining challenge on a symbolic level.34 White women’s contact with women of color and gradual identification with their concerns at least through comparison (e.g., for Diane, the heightened awareness of homophobia she has as a lesbian) complemented pointed discussions of racism in ways that the white-only antiracism training had not achieved.

White Califia participants recall specific components of the antiracism presentations, such as guided fantasies and Yolanda’s handouts at presentations as both transforming and intensely uncomfortable. Guided fantasies sought to point out that white women already had information to relate to racial oppression and further exposed the

33 Diane Germain transcript 24.
extent to which they needed to overcome racism. Asked to imagine they were another race, participants visualized what their homes, work, and clothes would look like. They were then taken through situations such as the theft of a coworker’s money and trying to exchange a defective item at a department store and asked how coworkers or the sales clerk responded to them. Diane remembers that during discussion afterward, almost everyone had chosen to be black and felt fear and disrespect. In a similar exercise, white women were asked to imagine themselves as white minorities in a women of color land. Through these kinds of self-teaching, participants could raise their awareness and empathy without necessarily being accused of racism. The fact that most women still thought in terms of black as the symbol for people of color despite the relatively large presence ofLatinas at Califia and the number of Asian Americans and American Indians in Los Angeles indicates the extent to which it was difficult to move white Americans from a binary picture of race relations. The mythical “Califia” who inspired both the state and the group’s names was characterized as a black Amazon/goddess even though a Spaniard applied the story to a land of American Indians. Imagining someone else’s situation as one’s own while retaining dominant-identity values can lead to dread and pity that impedes communication, but participants were so infused with experiential information about racial discrimination that they could conjure up feelings of being belittled and scared. Empathy alone would not shift values, but it would generate

35 Diane Germain transcript 20.
36 Yolanda Retter Vargas transcript 8.
recognition of oppression. Since Califia women already had a desire to oppose dominant values, the exercise held potential for initiating individual antiracism actions.

Yolanda’s presentation handouts took a more confrontational approach to push women beyond the plateaus they had hit and into action. Yolanda developed an assessment of where participants were coming from called “First Things First”[^38] and a list of common excuses for not doing antiracist work called “The Excuse Closet.”[^39] Both contained elements of Winter’s concentration on discomfort with race (see chapter three). “First Things First” was a survey that one facilitator administered. It delved into racial stereotypes, asked about non–Euro-American geographic knowledge, and assessed white women’s opinions about the roles that whites and people of color should play in antiracist work. Like the guided fantasy, one of the questions was “If I were not white, my next choice would be ________.” Asked about reactions to this question and whether they gave reasons for their choices, Yolanda believes that white women would draw on their fantasy, say it, and maybe get slammed or that they hedged their answers depending on whether white women or women of color conducted the survey.[^40] Yolanda still exhibits deep concern that white women eroticize race. It is impossible to find out twenty-five years after the fact how much attention was paid to the reasons behind such hypothetical choices. Was the choice of an alternate racial identity based on exoticizing fantasy, a desire to experience more or less discrimination that one assumed different groups suffered, an attempt to match one’s values to the perception of those values in other

[^38]: Yolanda Retter, “First Things First” (unpublished, 1979) from Mazer.
[^40]: Yolanda Retter Vargas transcript 9.
groups, or would such selection be constrained by the racism one saw in one’s associates?

“The Excuse Closet” sought to short-circuit platitudes that would undermine serious antiracist work. For example, when tensions rose, some would plead, “Why can’t we all get along? Aren’t we all people under the skin?” Yolanda would respond:

Yes, we are on Thursday. But today is Tuesday. And we have two long days of work, and if you don’t do the work between now and then, we’re not going to get there. I agree with you, we are. But most of you use “We’re all people under the skin” as an escape clause to not work on all the shit that’s between Tuesday and Thursday.

The splitting of “we” into an “I” and “you” with a burden of responsibility on the white “you” before returning to a reunited “we” highlights the tenuous nature of interracial antiracist work while reasserting that whites must take responsibility rather than retreating behind utopian visions of sameness that do not reflect real racist conditions. Yolanda explained that the process of ferreting out ingrained racism was very painful and took courage that would not be possible until white women cared as much about racism as they did about feminism or lesbianism. The antiracism presentations followed those on sexism and classism in targeting members of dominant groups as culpable, frequently denigrating them while expecting them to be supportive.

The split that white narrators express on the effectiveness of the antiracism presentations points to impediments to unlearning racism and a long-term trajectory for change. Frequently white lesbians new to the presentation did not understand why they were being separated from the women of color when everyone was together for the

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41 Yolanda Retter Vargas transcript 16.
42 “Excuse Closet.”
sexism and classism presentations. Once a presenter told them that white people were raised to be racist and confronted them with their unconsciously racist behavior, there was a lot of unresponsiveness, denial, or redirection of emphasis to the anger of the women of color presenters. Rose Green recounts:

I'm sitting on a couch listening to that and I thought, “Well, I'm sure as heck am not going to open up my mouth.” And then why would I do that? To be confronted and attacked like that? So I knew enough, in a sense, to protect myself and shut down 'cause it didn’t feel safe.

Memories toggle between recounting the incomprehension and defensiveness that participants felt and assessing the enduring benefits. Daniel Raven is especially cogent on this point. He was a militant separatist lesbian when he attended one Califia camp around 1980. Feeling attacked in the antiracism presentation, he also “shut down.” He regrets that white attendees focused on Yolanda rather than on the feelings that came up and needed to be worked through. In retrospect, he explains that there was a level of denial that lesbianism did not produce instant sisterhood. Whites like him had trouble reconciling themselves to Yolanda’s point that even if a white lesbian encountered homophobic discrimination, “I’m still and will always have more privilege than a woman of color.” For years Daniel has considered questions he learned there about racialized space and friendships: “When you go back to your community ... who do you hang out with regularly? How many women of color do you have as friends? How many white events do you go to?” These questions and further unlearning-racism training lead him to be critical of all-white spaces, but at the time as a “baby dyke,” he thought, “Why are

43 Transcripts for Carol Albright 17-18 and Vicki Leon 24.
44 Rose Green transcript 20.
45 Eighteen years after trying out Califia, Daniel had gender confirmation surgery to live as a man.
they **yelling** at us? [laugh] We’re all having a good **time** here. Why are you **yelling** at us?

Why are you getting so **pissed**?™ Narrators were brought up short by the concept that they inhabited a privileged position and contributed to other lesbians’ oppression. Vicki emphasizes the emotional stakes of working through denial:

> **Whoa! As the oppressor,** we didn’t **know.** ... **[T]he oppressed** people knew how the **oppressor** thought and **knew how** they thought, but the **oppressor** group only **knew how** we thought. And **all** of a sudden it was kind of **scary** to **realize** that—that there was an **unknown area.** And we were **challenged** to take it on to find **out,** to **become** more **interested,** to participate more in maybe a **less** comfortable situation. **But** we weren’t made more **comfortable** in order to participate. And so, in **some** ways, I think that **backfired.** ... The **separation** was being made really, really **extreme,** and, it was almost like a **longer bridge to cross.**™

**Initial racism presentations split women between oppressor and oppressed in theory,** but Vicki entered Califia when women of color were sharpening a message that has since further permeated feminist circles. Although she attributes the longer bridge to separation, narrators’ accounts indicate that they were startled to realize “how **much** the women of color **hated** the white women.”™ The combination of naïve assumptions of unity, resistance to being part of an oppressor category, and dismay at the level of hostility exhibited at the presentations slowed change. Nonetheless, narrators remember what they were called upon to do: initiate an internal system for catching their own racist impulses, learn about and value other cultures, and take the lead in confronting other white people’s racist jokes and discrimination.™

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66 Daniel Raven transcript 3-6, 25.
67 Vicki Leon transcript 25.
68 Jeanne Murphy transcript 5, corroborated by Rose Green, Karen Merry, Alice Myers, Daniel Raven.
69 Transcripts for Carol Albright 18, Lois Bencangey 7, Josy Catoggio 34, Diane Germain 17, Elsa Fisher 17, Vicki Leon 25, Karen Merry 4-5, 12, Jeanne Murphy 5-6, Daniel Raven 4, 6.
Yolanda’s work extended beyond the presentation time to personal altercations and had unintended positive consequences. Diane remembered:

We don’t call her “Yolanda the Terrible” for nothing. And she would kick a lot of ass up there. Boy, I remember a time when she was talking with Betty Brooks. Betty Brooks is the quintessential middle-class woman. You were always saying, “Jeez Betty! Christ, will you stop!” ... And I heard Yolanda SCREAMING and yelling and cursing out Betty up one side and down the other outdoors. And I was way far away. And I said, “Oh my God! What is this horrible thing that I’m hearing?” And I was very curious about it, which is kind of funny. Why would I be so curious about that? But I was, and I needed to know what was happening, and who was talking. And I came out, and I kept going closer and closer, and I saw who it was and what was going on. And I don’t remember exactly what all the words were, but Betty was really getting her butt kicked. ... And everything she said was being turned around you see.

And I said to myself, “You know, I finally found a woman that’s angrier than I am. And still she’s not a maniac, and still she’s not killing anybody. So maybe my anger is not what I thought was endless. It does come to a kind of a [laugh] a boundary, and it’s just a little bit shy of this woman’s boundary.” And I said, “Terrific! Great!” To tell you the truth, I felt a whole lot better.

By Diane’s account, her need to know what was happening stemmed from a grave concern to hide how angry she was all the time. She tried to hold herself back for fear her rage would explode into violence. Yolanda’s ability to articulate anger and pain resonated with Diane’s own feelings and provided assurance that anger could be directed constructively without devolving into physical violence. It was Yolanda’s productive closing, which impressed Diane most:

And after all of this the most remarkable thing happened in my estimation, which was after Yolanda had stopped telling Betty everything that was on her mind, she said, “You know, Betty,” she says, “I’m telling you this because it hurts me. I’m hurt by this. I want to tell you about my hurt.” And I thought, “Wow!” Now this is something! And this is real, and this is smart and clever because it isn’t ‘Betty, I want to tell you that I’ve been screaming at you because I love you.’” That would be such terrible bullshit, I would have puked right there. But what’s real, and what’s clear and what’s good is that she said, “What’s behind all this, Betty, is that you’re hurting me. And you’re hurting other people, and this is how you’re doing it.” And I was going, man, wow, that’s some pretty terrific,
powerful stuff! And I loved it. You see why I love Califia because there was no namby-pamby kind of bullshit.\textsuperscript{50}

The presence of women of color at Califia heightened accusations of racism (including some directed at a founder of the group). As Califia collective members shifted from a policy of whites teaching whites to women of color contributing to such leadership, their perspectives helped to advance antiracist work, which could be eye-opening to white participants. The women of color spokeswomen, however, felt that they were living the racism that was the impetus for their antiracist interventions.

Yolanda was representative of María Dolores and Doris in believing that “the racism workshop didn’t do any good, didn’t do enough good. … the emotional price was too high.” Women of color who did not attend the antiracism presentations, in contrast, thought the time was constructive.\textsuperscript{51} The four women of color who gave a group interview agree that women of color were expressly given the option not to attend. The women of color network set up a separate meeting during the antiracism presentation to provide time together away from the racist stereotypes and ignorance that arose during the presentations. Anna María and others who had attended the presentation before would tell newcomers, “You know what, I would recommend that you don’t go. But if you want to, go check it out.”\textsuperscript{52} Having space to meet with each other away from white women left them feeling “connected” and “flying high.” To them, after the presentation, the dynamics of the camp changed. Not only did women of color feel bonded, but Donna Gómez (pseudonym) and Lillian credit white women for trying to implement what they

\textsuperscript{50} Diane Germain transcript 20-21. Yolanda amended this story in a personal conversation by clarifying that she had given herself the name “Yolanda the Terrible” rather than getting it from other feminists.

\textsuperscript{51} Yolanda Retter Vargas transcript 25.

\textsuperscript{52} WOC transcript 24-27.
had learned by showing extra courtesy. Anna María agrees that “sitting next to a white woman you’d never talked to before,” there would be breakthroughs after the presentations. In retrospect, Anna María, Donna, and Lillian recognize that Yolanda, María Dolores, and Doris were angry and burnt-out from their antiracism work. They did what other women of color would not do while women like Lillian, Donna, and Anna María benefited, looked forward to the workshop, and welcomed the dialogue that ensued.

ANTI-SEMITISM

An assumption of monolithic white experience surfaces in the writings and memories about race relations and the antiracism presentations at Califia. Jewish women there complicated white-skinned privilege by addressing their ethnicity. Their organizing reflected ways in which work on racism in lesbian communities nationwide sparked discussion about anti-Semitism. By 1979, Betty Brooks introduced Support, Education, and Action (SEA) groups to organize women based on geography or special interests, so they could make concrete plans for implementing the feminist training they developed at Califia. In 1981, a Jewish women’s SEA started to present workshops at Califia. They planned to debunk myths of Jewish control over money and power and dissect the anti-

53 WOC transcript 40-41.
54 WOC transcript 47-49.
55 Elly Bulkin, “Hard Ground: Jewish Identity, Racism, and Anti-Semitism,” in Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Barbara Smith, 94.
56 Interestingly both Lillian West and Anna María remembered consistent organizing by Jewish women while neither Lois Bencangey nor Jane Bernstein did. Although Lois and Jane identify as Jewish, they married into Judaism from Christian backgrounds. It is unclear how the Jewish women’s group constituted itself, but there seems to have been some criterion that prioritized women who grew up Jewish and held strong Jewish identification over converts despite their adoption of Jewish symbols like the Star of David and mezuzah. Transcripts for WOC 37, Lois Bencangey 8, and Jane Bernstein 9.
Semitism in remarks like “Gee, you don’t look Jewish.” Considering what it means to “look” Jewish has implications similar to race-passing. Jews of Eastern European descent vary in the degree to which they display a cluster of phenotypic traits associated with Ashkenazi Jews. This variation in combination with the degree to which others in a given community are aware of stereotypical markers makes it more or less difficult to pass as non-Jewish and more or less frustrating for Jews who do not want to pass. Members concluded, “In trying to define ‘anti-Semitism’ and ‘Jew,’ we began to question the validity of the ‘concept of race.’” They rejected the other extreme that Jewish identity is religious adherence to Judaism and stressed that Jewish identity is ethnicity because members of the group all identified as Jewish despite adhering to a spectrum of beliefs from atheism to paganism, Christian Science, or Zen Buddhism. Opposition to identifying as a race is consistent with post-Holocaust thought while Jewish ethnicity follows the propensity of many white Califians to play up their ethnic identity alongside or instead of their whiteness.

Jewish participants’ memories of women of color denying that Jewish ethnicity counted in the racism equation are fraught with resentment and indicate the perilous

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57 “Notes from Califia Jewish Women’s Group Meeting on November 11, 1984” from Diane Germain’s personal files because she was there representing the collective.
58 Joan E. Biren explains the complex pulls between wanting to assimilate and hating to pass for a Gentile in “That’s Funny, You Don’t Look Like a Jewish Lesbian” in Nice Jewish Girls. As someone who “did not need a nose job,” had no New York accent, had an “Americanized” last name (Biren from Birnholz), and had been raised to assimilate, it took Biren a decade after coming out as a lesbian to affirm her Jewish identity (122-3). The photographs she includes of Jewish women purposefully wearing Jewish symbols such as the Star of David, a chai, or a yamika or symbols that combine Jewish and lesbian identity such as a labrys with a Star of David or buttons with puns like “Ciitzpah” are tactics used by some Califia women. During interviews in the homes of the lesbians who identified with Judaism, I found their space adorned with Jewish art. Irene had an artistic plate that integrated the Star of David with the chai while Muriel (who was born Jewish), Jane and Lois (who had married Jewish men) had menorahs. Additionally, Lois had a mezuzah on her doorway and wore a Star of David necklace.
position Jewish Americans held in antiracism discussions. Women of color may have been wary of the limits of comparisons between Jewish identity and racial minority status. Minutes from a Jewish SEA include brainstorming to this effect.59 Inadvertently agreeing with Doris’ critique of civil rights as assimilation, SEA members related assimilation to internalized anti-Semitism and lauded their “unwillingness to convert to Christianity or to assimilate totally into any given culture” as separatism. They touched on the history and psychological dynamics of black-Jewish relations in the U.S., citing common oppressions, positive aspects such as Jewish participation in passing Civil Rights legislation, and their assertion that “Jewish and Black women are alike in that we are strong and matriarchal.” The shift in topics from Jewish history, anti-Zionism, and anti-Semitism to race marks a slippery turn for these women. Since these minutes reflect a brainstorming stage, it is not possible to know which ideas the Jewish group presented, but if they trotted these achievements out, it is almost certain that Yolanda would have dismissed resting on past accomplishments as an excuse for not doing continued antiracist work.60 There is a tension between constructing similarities without assessing important contextual differences (e.g., “Black and Jewish women ... are strong and matriarchal”) and the way in which eschewing race left Jewish women in an unmarked white category vis-à-vis “racialized” women of color.

Califia reflects the ways in which the stakes could be higher for Jewish lesbians.

The history of the Civil Rights Movement involved close work between Jewish

59 "Notes from Califia Jewish Women’s Group Meeting on November 11, 1984."
60 I.e. "I have worked in the Civil Rights Movement and need that to be taken into account" from the "Excuse Closet."
Americans and African Americans. Ambivalence and distrust, however, arose from other aspects of black-Jewish relations—anti-Semitic comments by black Christian and Muslim leaders, the use of racism by Jews to assert their white privilege, and research on Jewish-American participation in the slave trade. Simultaneously, writers like Cherríe Moraga felt positively linked to Jews while comparing Jewish and black genocide. Barbara Smith agreed and characterized black-Jewish relations as expecting more from each other than either group expected from non-Jewish whites or gentiles generally. Jewish Califia attendees were part of a nationwide feminist push to expose anti-Semitism and complicate racial identity with ethnicity.

BICULTURAL AWARENESS

White Jewish women's arguments of analogous oppression rang hollow to women of color in the context of presentations about white-skin privilege. Those who could not pass as white were also frequently uninterested in the predicament of very light-skinned Latinas who were frustrated at being read as white. Barbara, a blonde-haired, blue-eyed Mexican American, strove to heighten awareness of mixed heritage and the "colorist" privileging of dark complexions among women of color. Because the women of color networking time was mostly social, Barbara laments that "we [women of color] didn't deal with a lot of the internal -isms, you know, colorism, racism, whatever, among ourselves." Yolanda and María Dolores supported Barbara about biculturalism, but

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61 Barbara Smith, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place" in Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Barbara Smith, 71-3.
62 Barbara Forrest transcript 8.
other women of color continued to interpret Barbara’s insistence on inclusion as a digression when racial lines were drawn based on ability to pass as white.\textsuperscript{63}

Bicultural ties help to explain tensions between women of color antiracism presenters at Califia and their racialized communities. There was a significant degree of racial segregation in Los Angeles at large and in the lesbian scene during the 1970s and 1980s.\textsuperscript{64} Aside from very limited connections between Califia and LOC, most white-majority groups and women of color groups lacked coalition or sustained communication, and many radical women of color agreed that educating white women on racism distracted from their energies. The same strategies propounded by antiracism training guides led radical women of color who valued separatism not to appreciate the labor that women like María Dolores, Yolanda, Doris, and the women of color collective members expended for Califia. The presenters had personal interests in forming a racially inclusive feminist community. Yolanda’s biracial identity, the upper middle-class backgrounds of two presenters, gender separatist politics, cross-racial relationships, and the status they gained as spokeswomen may have facilitated their interest in trying to forge a cross-

\textsuperscript{63} In addition to Barbara and Pam, the women of color group interviewed remembered other women of Latina descent whom they identified as having “lived white.” Transcript WOC 14.

\textsuperscript{64} In 1979 LOC members picketed West Hollywood’s Palms lesbian bar because they claimed employees asked them, unlike whites, for three pieces of identification and denied them nonalcoholic drinks. When a black woman accused Palms employees of hassling her two year later and kicking her out in a letter to the editor, The Lesbian News editors and readers (some identifying as white and others as women of color) rejected her account, defended the bar, and one letter attacked her as an example of black obsession with being among whites and of “too many blacks coming in.” The exchange reflects a combination of ingrained racism and dismissal of racially-motivated bias. The Lesbian News 6.1 (June 1981): 15. The Lesbian News 6.12 (July 1981): 15-16. The Lesbian News 7.1 (August 1981): 23. Retter 268-269. Another event in 1981 kept racial division in the spotlight. Women of color criticized the West Coast Women’s Comedy and Music Festival, organized by a Jewish comic, for excluding them and not having a sliding scale. While some white women opposed these accusations as divisive, the non-Califia group, Jewish Feminists, evenhandedly supported women of color critique against classism while noting that the organizer had been stereotyped as money-grubbing, power-hunger and aggressive. Yolanda concluded that divisiveness was inevitable because no space was free from the accumulated mistrust, denial and power differentials within the Los Angeles lesbian community. Retter 268-271.
cultural Women’s Movement by attacking racism. These factors differentiated them and
some of the leading women of color at Califia from their racially segregationist sisters,
leading to criticism that they were not representative of women of color who focused on
empowering other lesbians of color.  

FROM CR TOWWAR

Committed white Califia women rose to the challenge to address racism in the
Los Angeles and San Francisco areas. They turned a SEA group into White Women
Against Racism (WWAR) in the fall of 1979 and then reestablished that Los Angeles
branch along with a northern one at Califia’s first Bay Area camp in August 1980.  
Their
CR support meetings and initial antiracism workshop in the fall of 1979 occurred
alongside others’ antiracism workshops (e.g., the Lesbian Task Force of NOW in 1980)
and individually led CR groups. María Dolores and Yolanda credit LOC for persuasively
pressuring white women to organize. Califia’s climate and Yolanda’s challenges to
“wishy-washy white women” directly led to WWAR’s formation.  
Los Angeles–area
WWAR members gained recruits through advertising and the weekly column they wrote
in *The Lesbian News*. They divided their time between providing a space for their
members to get support about racism and doing presentations at schools, community

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65 Personal conversation with Lydia Otero.
66 The camp was Camp Los Posadas, one half hour north of San Francisco. Tracy Robb, “Interview with
Carol [Schmidt]” as part of a masters thesis in Human Development with specializations in Multicultural
Studies, Women’s Studies, and Administration at Pacific Oaks College, stored at Mazer. Carol joined
WWAR in 1980 and “heard that a group of that name had sort of organized in the fall of 1979 but fell apart.
Some of those people—Linda Barone, Lois Bencangey and Norma Esfeld—had put on a four-Saturday
workshop at the Center for Feminist Therapy around November, 1979, which [she] attended...” (4). In
contrast, Yolanda Retter’s dissertation dates the group to July 1980 (264), and the Bunch and Pollack
chapter puts the formation between 1980 and 1981 (152).
68 Tracy Robb, “Interview with Shirl [Buss],” 3 and Tracy Robb, “Interview with Robin [Podolsky]” 4 at
Mazer.
colleges, and feminist sites, making them one of few active grassroots forces educating
the public about racism.

Some white women derided WWAR as ineffectual or mired in internal politics.\(^6^9\)
Lydia remembers the crowd at the Los Angeles gay and lesbian parade mocking a small
WWAR contingent around 1984. She remembers thinking:

'[T]hese women were truly undervalued in the gay and lesbian community and just seemed like outcasts because they were trying to raise an issue that nobody wanted to listen to. ... They weren't just concentrating on the gay community; they were doing it in the straight community, and I think that was really important work.'\(^7^0\)

While Lydia, who had no interest in educating white women, approved of their work,
criticism of WWAR came from those who did not want to read WWAR's moralizing
tone and those with a stake in antiracist education at a time when not much work was
being done. A positive portrayal of WWAR spread beyond California in antiracism
circles. After moving from Los Angeles in 1986, Lois attended an antiracism workshop
in Atlanta that mainly drew East Coast and southeastern participants. An Atlanta man not
only knew of WWAR, he caught her up on the organization's activities.\(^7^1\) WWAR had
been joined by a much wider circle of writings and presentations trying to interrupt
racism in order to create a more harmonious society.\(^7^2\)

\(^6^9\) Joan (claiming to represent Committee Against Ineffectiveness), letter to the editor, LN 8.12 (July 1983): 35. Kathy Sabry (pseudonym) transcript 11. Carol and Lydia provide examples of internal divisions. In Tracy Robb's interview with Carol, Carol remembers a disastrous workshop on leadership with women of color where "all whites ended up being put down in a set-up situation." After Carol wrote a furious letter to María Dolores and Yolanda, Carol claims María Dolores stopped speaking to her and "began to tear down WWAR to Lois." Lydia remembers Yolanda "would make fun of them constantly too." Lydia Otero transcript 17.

\(^7^0\) Lydia Otero transcript 17.

\(^7^1\) Lois Bencangey transcript 5.

\(^7^2\) Over the years, Kathy Wolfe collected a smattering of materials on racism that extended beyond Califia and were available in Los Angeles. A "Statement to a Racism Workshop" explored stereotypes and the
CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AMID THE FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY

Unlike the antiracism presentations, which led to WWAR, classism education diversified without creating an external site of activism. Instead, leaders built on discussions of class-passing to hone participants' understanding and to continue calls to reform interpersonal relations. Like the presentations on sexism and racism, the classism presentation incorporated new attendees into a common Califia value system but also needed to change in order to hold the interest of long-time participants and to continue to reflect current societal conditions. In the 1980s, poverty was slowly rising across the U.S. and constituted eleven to fifteen percent of the population. Increasing numbers of women from or in poverty attended Califia at a moment when feminists were just beginning to uncover the “feminization of poverty.” In the U.S. Census, statistics for poverty among African Americans, Latinos, and female-headed households were more than double the national average, ranging from twenty-five to forty percent. Through their description of classes, collective members combated internalized views that poor people deserved


73 Diana Pearce, “The Feminization of Poverty: Women, Work, and Welfare,” Urban and Social Change Review (February, 1978). Pearce argued that poverty among women increased between the 1950s and 1970s despite more women entering the workforce. Female-headed families tended to be poor because the War on Poverty served men better than women. Divorce and nonmarriage exposed women’s vulnerability. Neglecting to provide childcare put women at a disadvantage as did the wage gap between men and women that was based on a combination of discrimination and gender-segregated jobs. Providing women with child care and nontraditional training in high tech programs could alleviate the feminization of poverty.

74 “Poverty Status of People by Family Relationship, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1959-2000,” http://www.census.gov/income/histpov/histpov02.txt last accessed 7 July 2002. These statistics underrepresent by maintaining the formula that providing for basic needs requires three times the cost of food.
poverty due to personal failings. After Califia's initial years, class presenters tailored CR to women from the working and middle classes, reflecting the majorities at the camps.

Dissections of how opposing survival values between the middle and working classes could adversely affect feminist activism furthered participants' resources for dealing with class differences before many arenas addressed cultural sensitivity. Is honesty about truthfulness or trustworthiness? When survival depends on lying to outsiders who can deprive one of resources, deciding whether to give truthful information requires assessing the recipients' good intentions. Marilyn related this observation to feminist procedure. She noted that when middle-class feminists insisted on parliamentary rules or consensus methods, working-class feminists with backgrounds of simultaneous conversations and passionate outbursts could have felt squelched. They regarded the middle-class idea of rotating speakers as a tactic to delay or suppress dissent while some middle-class feminists saw their working-class sisters who spoke out of turn as disorderly. In such a climate of middle-class rule enforcement, working-class feminists might not trust middle-class feminists enough to give them information and work with them. Such an analysis did not privilege one way of operating. Despite being generalizations that would not always hold true, participants already familiar with the class presentation could appreciate these nuances. Such a focus on cultural sensitivity has since partially entered classroom teaching and popular culture although classed interpersonal relations remain undertheorized.

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75 Volunteer 4-5.
Middle-class leaders countered the danger that attendees with middle-class backgrounds would feel shut down and demonized by the Passing Game’s sole reliance on underprivileged experience. Simultaneously, however, working-class organizers evaluate middle-class participants as not doing enough. In 1982, Jan Hines and Suzanne Beford started a break-out session for middle-class women. They assured their group members that they did not need to feel guilty about being born into the middle class but that there was work to be done. At the camps themselves, everyone was supposed to do two hours of kitchen work and two hours of childcare. As someone focused on organizing the children’s camp, Barbara stresses, “None of the middle-class white women ever worked in childcare on a volunteer basis.” She revises that to say that, unless the women were mothers or in education, their class values precluded taking on childcare themselves. Participants could double up on some forms of work to the exclusion of others. In contrast to the stereotypical view of middle-class volunteerism, Barbara sees Califia’s organizers as dominated by working-class women and criticizes the high-paid therapists and lawyers who were reluctant to donate time. Tensions continued over how much those from oppressive privilege should do.

In contrast to the working- and middle-class focus, women who grew up extremely poor or were currently poor seem not to have benefited as much from the Califia presentations, but their presence forced presenters to include assessments of systemic poverty. Late in Califia, after the recession and simultaneous welfare cuts had

77 Bunch and Pollack 149.
78 Barbara Forrest transcript 30. Likewise, Lydia Otero remembers wealthier Latinas not showing up for shifts at Lesbianas Unidas camps in the 1980s, which were modeled on Califia. She characterized the class split between Latinas as “higher class Latinas...who felt like...they should be serviced. Whereas the working class women said, ‘Yes, we’re willing to be part of this and work.” Lydia Otero transcript 24.
thrown more Americans into poverty, one attendee laid out the experience of growing up
dirt poor living in a car or trailer because her father abandoned her mother. Although
attendees listened and tried to draw broader conclusions, Diane says they did not attain
the in-depth understanding that came from years of discussion about the working class. 79
Instead, Califia introduced a few written sources such as the Southern California
Interfaith Hunger Coalition’s “Welfare—Myths & Facts” to counter Reagan-era
scapegoating of welfare recipients as the cause of national economic recession. 80 The
working-class focus also presented problems for women who started out middle class but
fell into poverty. Working-class women would not allow downwardly mobile women to
be in their break-out group. Barbara considered women who were downwardly mobile
due to economic recession or other unchosen circumstances to be “totally in denial” but
also “really pissed off” about their exclusion. 81 They simultaneously wanted to join the
working-class group because of their current situation and hoped that their reliance on
welfare would be brief.

While the classism presentation could not create a systematic challenge to U.S.
class hierarchy, it was never geared to such a task. Instead, Califia provided training on
class-based values and patterns of relating, which participants could not find elsewhere.
Collective members also responded to changing conditions in such a way that women
could gain respect for people in poverty and working-class positions and address unstated
class biases within feminist process. Narrators widely reflect that they have carried their

79 Diane Germain transcript 19.
80 “Welfare—Myths and Facts” from Betty Jetter’s personal files.
81 Barbara Forrest transcript 22.
changed consciousnesses into their work and personal lives and are more willing to point out unconscious classism.

RESPONDING TO SEX AND SEXISM

Influxes of women new to Califia and feminism resulted in an abiding need to instruct women on many fundamentals in relation to changing times. Founders and early participants joined to promote a lesbian feminist analysis for resisting heteropatriarchal oppression. Newcomers, however, did not always come for that fight. Some came with alternative views on sexuality, which generated conflict that threatened to derail important work and exposed inconsistencies in lesbian feminist priorities and methods.

Joan McNeil was a case in point. Her path to Califia wound through lesbian feminist spaces in search of lesbian sex rather than social justice work. A depression-era baby, her married, middle-class, white background only diverged from the mainstream through divorce in 1970. Over the next decade, rather than date men, Joan focused on raising her daughter, working at the University of California at Los Angeles, and attending self-help and spiritual meetings such as Alcoholics Anonymous and a Catholic charismatic prayer group. As her daughter finished high school, Joan began to explore sexuality. At a peer sexuality seminar advertised in UCLA’s paper, she first learned about vibrators and took to heart recommendations to explore her body. A nearby bookstore had the vibrator and The Lesbian News. Through these first forays, Joan began to recall her girlhood erotic attraction toward women. It had never occurred to her that a relationship with a woman was an option. She relates, “I felt like what I really needed to
do was to have a sexual experience with a woman, so I could be sure that I knew what I was, that I was on the right track with myself."^82

After a few rebuffs from women she met at lesbian meetings, Joan confided to a married acquaintance who was “interested in the lesbian world too”: “You know, one of the problems that I have is that I don’t know how I’m going to meet somebody to go to bed with.” The woman called Joan at work some days later with “just the answer for you.”^83 A friend of hers had gone to a group and “within four hours of being at Califia she was already in bed with somebody [laugh].” That was the reason Joan drove to Camp Cielo in 1981 knowing only vaguely that it was a feminist education organization. Since she was trying out other gay groups, she arrived three days late after attending an Episcopal gay meeting. Driving in, she saw eight to ten topless women arm-in-arm walking toward her singing. She almost hit a tree. After finding sleeping quarters and dinner, Joan attended a get-acquainted session. When a woman sat next to her and asked why she had come, Joan told her the truth, “I wanted to find somebody to go to bed with.” The woman, who was vacationing with her teenage daughter while her husband stayed home, replied, “That’s the same reason that I came here.” The next morning, with her first lesbian experience behind her, Joan was convinced that she was “on the right path.” Up to that point, Joan’s single-minded pursuit served her well.

Ahead, however, lay a gauntlet of feminist education where women responded negatively to Joan’s bluntness and complete unfamiliarity with feminist language and perspective. “And I was getting chewed up and down and [laugh] spit out just all over the

^82 Joan McNeil transcript 1-4.
^83 Joan McNeil transcript 4.
place because I was so incorrect in everything I did and said.” She thought so highly of Marilyn and Irene that she screwed up her courage to approach the collective to ask whether she should remain when she was so unknowledgeable, had not come for the education, and felt like she could not absorb it all at once. She was amazed and “eternally grateful to them for their understanding.”

Looking back, Joan believes that Califia’s work was important but that she was too far out of the loop to do anything right. “The only thing that I did that wasn’t wrong in that one instance was just to come out and say what I thought to that one woman [laugh].” She never went back. Although Joan’s interview was the most candid example of sexual motivation, unfamiliarity with feminist principles, and acute discomfort at the educational program, her search for time with lesbians was widely shared, and she was simply an extreme example of the limits of absorbing feminist politics along with lesbian culture.

MAN-HATING AS TABOO

Given that women continued to come to Califia with no knowledge of feminism, some continued to scorn the analysis that patriarchy oppressed women as “man-hating.” Betty Jetter tackled this problem head-on by developing a rap called “Man-Hating as Taboo” after the first couple of years of Califia. During her years of experience leading CR groups for NOW, Betty had encountered many women who had been abused or neglected by their fathers or both parents but consistently blamed their mothers. She evaluates the stories, “These men don’t have to take responsibility for any of this kind of
thing. ... And always the anger was directed at mothers and that men did not have to take responsibility.” She concludes that a strong imperative in American society against man-hating contributed to women’s oppression. All but one person seemed excited about Betty’s initial presentation, but she remembers a middle-aged French-Canadian woman was very upset, sure that Betty was a man-hater. Exasperated with the woman’s harangue against hating anyone, Betty remembers that she replied, “Well, sometimes I hate women who don’t hate men more than I hate men.” The woman nodded and walked away apparently satisfied while her adult daughter “flashed at [Betty] and said, ‘But didn’t you just say that’s what you shouldn’t do?’” Betty agreed, and the French-Canadian woman’s need to hear Betty transfer blame and animosity from men’s actions to women further strengthened in Betty’s mind that the powerful taboo against calling men on bad behavior redirected hostility toward women. From then on Betty asked to have the “Man-Hating as Taboo” spiel as part of the collective presentation and presented it at NOW, colleges, seminars, and in people’s homes.

“Man-Hating as Taboo” encapsulated attacks on Second Wave feminism and feminist counterattacks. The taboo was revealed when antifeminists and those unschooled in feminism slung the label “man-hating” at women who criticized men’s bad behavior. On the other hand, feminist rage at the prevalence of sexism often blurred the distinction between loathing actions and hating persons or categories of people. Leaders like Betty addressed resistance because the man-hating charge had to be countered for feminism to be viable in a world with men. Simultaneously, presenters asserted authority as someone

86 Betty Jetter transcript 12.
with the knowledge to present the material. Her authority was probably facilitated not only by her years in NOW, but her position as a formerly married mother and middle-aged woman in contrast to long-term lesbians, younger women, and women new to feminism.

**Misogyny and the Status of Children**

Calafia's education about sexism remained vital by serving as a place where women offered and gained support to explore the constraints of patriarchy. Diane faithfully attended Califia camps from 1978 on, and it nurtured her art and ability to speak out, in contrast to mainstream society. In 1978, Diane entered a concept piece in a noncensored women's art show displayed for four weeks at California State University at San Diego's (CSUSD) library. The triptych she made about the medical, humorous, and derogatory names for women's genitals consisted of large words accompanying identical two-by-two-inch photographs of a triangle of women's pubic hair without any hint of hips or navel. One woman referred to the images as looking like “fuzzy wine glasses.”

Diane expected some strong reactions, but nothing like what happened:

People started to write all over them, and they wrote rotten things about women and rotten things about women's genitals. And sometimes they made little poems about stick a piece of dynamite there and find pieces of this woman all over. You know, when it would explode. Really ugly shit! And I kind of thought that might happen, but I never thought it would get as awful as this. Somebody took all of the pubic hairs and like soap scum and things like from out of their drain in the bathtub and, I mean like if you don't clean it for a hundred years, and took it with a bobby pin and stuck it on my art piece. I mean it was really ugly shit going up on that art piece.  

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87 Bunch and Pollack 157.  
88 Diane Germain transcript 35-36.
Diane found “much of the graffiti revealed misogyny around fatness, too much hair, and non-blondness [sic] of the model. Other remarks were racist and anti-semitic [sic]. The worst were references to violence against women and destruction of female bodies.”

Vandals included a man who identified himself as an English professor. He complained and ripped the panels off the wall, indicating the pervasiveness of misogyny.

Diane decided to present the experience to Califia in 1979 as an example of the intensity of misogyny in society. When she announced her intention, an enormous controversy erupted that underscored the difference between Califia and the university setting. She had received a letter speaking for the acting president of CSUSD that, without “wish[ing] to censor or inhibit creativity,” had disapproved of providing “an outlet for statements that may be political rather than artistic in nature” at an uncensored women’s art show. Califia women saw consistency and significance in Diane’s piece being feminist (i.e., political) art. A number of mothers felt the outcry raised such important topics that, far from shielding adults from Diane’s art, they wanted to bring their children to the presentation. Diane opposed exposing children to traumatizing new concepts during the graphic discussion.

Support that Diane got for excluding children dramatically revealed sources of oppression. Women, both fat and thin, got Fat Underground’s (FU) message of acceptance, and it unexpectedly catalyzed some to assert their rights over the children brought to the camps. Several fat women and women who chose not to have children

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89 Bunch and Pollack 157.
90 Bunch and Pollack 157.
resisted childcare shifts or having children present during intensely emotional discussions about the body because children had been the source of cruel teasing. Kal admits:

I always had trouble dealing with the children there. I was one of those you read about [in Learning Our Way]. I was not comfortable around children because I was one of those who was really tormented in childhood and young adulthood by kids; so that was a real Califia battle. Wow! It almost tore up the community. But, see, Califia was known for its internal battles in that way. I mean they used to go full circle for the most part. We all came out of it with something. It was a place to exercise.91

Women were under extreme pressure in U.S. society not to speak against children. The Califia women who “hated or feared children after years of their own teasing and ridicule” came to the Late Night Conversations to break their silence.92 Diane can still paraphrase how illuminating their concerns were for her:

“I’ve been fat all my life and I’ve been ridiculed, not only by adults but lots of children. And I don’t even go to the swimming pool because I know there’s going to be kids there. There is never a time where there are no children at the pool when I can go there and feel safe, that I can put my very large body in the water or in the sun and not have little kids ridiculing me. I don’t like little children, and I don’t want them around, and they’re just everywhere.” And then we [would] talk about that. How horrible! Not just one woman but several women upset about this. So we said, “Oh, we’re not serving these women,” you know, to give them a safe space. We never thought of that.93

This was one of the strongest assertions that children not only absorbed oppressive values but learned ways to hurt and enacted them to abuse verbally other children and adults. After years of concerns that Califia Community did not do enough children’s programming, participants had to choose between attention and privileges that mothers advocated for their children and the needs of adult women present. A protracted

91 Kal Kalivoda transcript 2.
92 Bunch and Pollack 145.
93 Diane Germain transcript 36.
debate that continued after the camp led Califia leaders to conclude that although they would seek a coordinator of educational programs for the children, “the children’s community existed for the convenience of the mothers, not for its own sake. ... At Califia, women should not have to sacrifice their needs for privacy and comfort to further the education of children, no matter how worthy the cause of children’s education is.” Because they could not arrive at consensus, this became one of the collective’s few policy decisions.\footnote{Bunch and Pollack 143-144.}

For the camp, Diane gave the presentation twice so that those women who preferred a child-free space would have an opportunity to speak freely without kids around, and those who wanted to participate along with children could. Almost every child attended. Even though Diane tried to tone down the presentation at which children were present, the effect on the children and adults was startling. Diane remembers:

And little \textit{kids} said, “I heard about a time when there were Jews in concentration camps and they … this and this and this happened to women’s bodies. That they did torture on them and that they did experiments on them.” And I said, “Oh, my \textit{God}. This little \textit{kid} has been \textit{carrying around} those horrible thoughts all by \textit{herself} all this time.” And we thought, “Well, she doesn’t know. They don’t know.” They \textit{do} know. Other little kids said things about genitals and attacking and, geez, so they knew about torture and everything.\footnote{Diane Germain transcript 37.}

One of the most horrifying and reassuring aspects of the discussion was adults’ realization that they were not able to shelter children from such terror. What they could do was provide a supportive environment in which the children could unburden themselves and discuss the violence against women that they knew about with adults who tried to comfort them and help them feel safe. It was a draining but powerful experience.
Diane radically altered her views on appropriate discussion with children given the external information they received. In the same session that prioritized women over children, Califia tied together three levels of helping children. They had funneled women into groups dedicated to combating violence, were educating children in feminism, and created a space to address children’s fears.

**IN DEFENSE OF WOMEN AND/OR THEIR PLEASURE?**

Califia camps served women as places for sexual intimacy, ideological consensus-building, and spaces safe from male violence. Lesbian feminist ideology linked views of sex and violence with the belief that certain forms of intimacy and ideology were ethically superior to others because they jettisoned heteropatriarchal coercion. Califia women continued to rally around their concern with violence against women and joined feminist efforts to address rape. The level of emotion about sexualized violence, however, did not necessarily leave room for complexity. Califia preceded and became representative of feminist spaces nationwide in its limited ability to address lesbian battering and consensual sadomasochism.

In 1980, feminists were still pushing dominant society to come to grips with the prevalence of male abuse of women and children. Opinion polls in the 1970s found that twenty-five percent of American adults who were sampled approved of husband-wife battles and that high formal education correlated with ready acceptance of marital violence. Such fights were considered private matters with which people outside the couple should not interfere. _Ladies’ Home Journal_ ran articles in 1980 that claimed, “all

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96 Martin, _Battered Wives_, 19.
good relationships would be punctuated by 'rip-roaring fights'” and praised a husband for
shoving his irate wife outside and locking the door. Narrators agree that Califia
radicalized women, making them acutely aware of misogyny, the importance of
discussing homophobia as part of sexism, and alternative ways of organizing society to
value women and a larger range of sexual orientations. A product of a lesbian feminist
time, Califia was a woman-centered space, and the issues it tackled were conditioned by
the experiences of its participants.

The San Fernando Valley Rape Crisis Service in 1980 represented feminists
channeling their emotions to address a need that professionals had not adequately
managed. Carol Albright remembers that a devastating French-Canadian dramatic film
about rape screened at camp sparked discussion among her SEA. She recalls:

"Our group was [composed of] women of the San Fernando Valley, and we
started talking about it. I mean, there was a lot of anger and ... I mean anger is a
great motivator. And there was also a lot of sadness. And there were women
obviously who had been assaulted and abused as children in that group. And so
we talked about [creating a rape crisis center] as a possibility."  

Kal was very involved and recounts that the purpose was to create a safe space
supportively to listen to women as they talked, raged, cried, or otherwise dealt with
trauma. The center hand-picked forty women to staff it at the end of eight or nine weeks
of weekly meetings that combined group therapy about past experiences with molestation
and other hardships with training sessions. Kal explains why they did not necessarily
choose women with experience in therapy:

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99 Carol Albright transcript 12.
You'd be surprised that the women who chose the stuff as a profession were also excluded because of their narrow-mindedness or their inflexibility. They were going to do it as a therapist! And that wasn't what the women wanted when they were victimized. They could buy therapy. And it was a crushing blow to be excluded from the group or not picked to go on to be members of the Rape Crisis Service because they were too stuck in their own stuff to listen to anybody.\footnote{Kal Kalivoda transcript 14.}

True to the commitment to expressing personal experience and support over expert advice, the rape crisis center integrated concepts that women had learned at Califia and from the Radical Feminist Therapy Collective. The San Fernando Valley Rape Crisis Service ultimately had forty to fifty volunteers staffing a twenty-four-hour hotline. They challenged established authorities by running training sessions for police officers, hospital staff, and community members, so that they would be better able to serve rape victims.

At least a small part of the lesbian feminist goal of choosing woman-identification as a sexual preference was to pull women out of harm's way by decreasing contact with men. Lesbian feminists like Adrienne Rich in the 1980s saw the social construction of sexual orientation as heavily determined by societal heterosexism, which forced women into unexamined heterosexual compliance.\footnote{Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," \textit{Signs} 5.4 (1980) reprinted by Antelope Publications' feminist pamphlet series (Denver, CO: Antelope Publications, 1982). In her new forward, Rich wrote of intensifying pressures to conform to being the "emotional and sexual property of men." "The institutions by which women have traditionally been controlled—patriarchal motherhood, economic exploitation, the nuclear family, compulsory heterosexuality—are being strengthened by legislation, religious fiat, media imagery and support censorship." At the same time, documentation of male violence against women within the home has expanded (1).} At Califia, demonstrating lesbian feminist options led some women to reject the sexism and violence in heterosexual society in favor of political and romantic lives with other women. Why, then, were Califia women silent about abuse between women?
Daniel, who volunteered at the Gay Community Service Center, remembered that at that time they had no workshops about domestic violence because there was widespread denial that lesbians could batter. Walking away from patriarchal life meant that

we were all sisters and loved and respected each other. … We certainly didn’t want them having been revealed to the straight people that we had these issues. Also at that time … when they [heterosexuals] saw two dykes going at it, they just blew it off anyway.\textsuperscript{102}

Since his sex-change transition, Daniel has retained his sympathy about violence against women but also recognizes that battering crosses genders and other identity factors.

Betty Jetter said in her interview that she was in a three-year relationship with another Califia participant during which she experienced relationship violence. Several times Betty left the woman, who went to “all her [the woman’s] friends” out of emotional distress and loneliness. Betty, in contrast, did not talk about their problems until much later, at which point friends were supportive. During the intermittent break-ups, however, she “felt guilty having to have the community take care of this woman.” Still perplexed at why she did not leave permanently sooner in the relationship, Betty related that the end of their relationship did not come until her partner left her.\textsuperscript{103} Although she asserted that “there certainly were a lot of women who were violent with other women,” and she remembered hearing discussions about lesbian battering at the West Coast Women’s Music and Comedy Festival, she did not remember the issue coming up at Califia.\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{102} Daniel Raven transcript 17.
\textsuperscript{103} Betty Jetter transcript 42.
\textsuperscript{104} Betty Jetter transcript 41.
Daniel’s insistence that discussion was taboo and Betty’s brief reflection on her relationship fit a pattern of silence and lack of accountability for battering among lesbians. A combination of essentialist glorification of woman-identification, lesbian couples sharing friends and limited social circles, and justified fear that homophobic people would use the revelation of same-gender violence against lesbians and against feminist calls for societal reform contributed to silence about women’s capacity to abuse other women. The first discussions of violence in same-gender relationships grew out of the mid-1970s movement opposed to violence against women. Lesbians were disproportionately active in providing services to heterosexual battered women by forming and staffing rape crisis hotlines and domestic violence shelters. Ironically, homophobia and heterosexism within shelters and from funders increasingly kept staffers closeted and made it difficult for battered lesbians to feel safe using these services.

California sources illustrate the conceptual steps that lesbian feminists took to recognize lesbian battering. Their first discussions frequently promoted the stereotype that the phenomenon was isolated to working-class “old gays.” It was not until the

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105 Nancy Hammond and Suzanne Pfarr identified as impediments to lesbian victims seeking help the typicality of lesbian couples sharing close friends and sub-cultures of limited size. Shame, fear that friends will side with the lover, fear of coming out, or lack of knowledge about how to find lesbian circles beyond her partner can leave victims with the sense that they must choose between lesbian community and continued battering. Realities of homophobia can jeopardize women’s custody of their children, positions at work, and membership in churches. These factors give lesbian’s fears beyond the financial and emotional constraints heterosexual women face along with shared concerns about physical safety and custody. Kerry Lobel, ed., Naming the Violence: Speaking Out About Lesbian Battering (Seattle: Seal Press, 1986), 2, 194, 219.


107 For examples see Carol Seajay, “Violence Between Women,” Country Women 26 (September 1977): 16-18. Seajay’s article stressed her isolation surrounded by lesbian feminists who did not want to acknowledge violence between women. She interpreted a three-year relationship where her female partner hit her as horizontal hostility before gay liberation, which she feared might still occur if the community did not discuss such hostility and ways of relieving anger (16-17). Seajay used an increasingly popular class
early 1980s that lesbian feminists started to discuss the reality of battering within their local communities and at women’s events. As executive director of the Southern California Coalition on Battered Women, Kerry Lobel wrote an article in 1982 in The Lesbian News concerning silence about lesbian battering in relationships. She reprinted four myths and realities about lesbian battering written by Barbara Hart, vice president for communications with the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) and a founder of its Lesbian Task Force. These points concluded that battering cut across feminist and nonfeminist lesbian relationships and that denial of reality would not achieve “dreams of a peaceful, loving women’s community.” Hart posited reasons that lesbians would be more likely than heterosexual women not to recognize themselves as victims and reasons that lesbian victims could fear seeking help more than did heterosexual women. From this introduction, Lobel decried governmental funding cutbacks and publicized a community fundraising event. This cover story both introduced the issue and chronicled the rise of conservative fiscal policies that undercut a growing battered-women’s movement.

Despite decreases in funding, a few shelters nationwide expanded their outreach to lesbians. They gave presentations and left flyers in lesbian-identified and feminist spaces specifically to inform lesbians that they could find crisis hotline operators, safe homes, transportation, legal help, and support groups. Discussions did not really move

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background theory to explain her working-class lover’s recourse to hitting while she used “middle class ways—sniping and pot-shotting at her ego. Did pot-shotting do her less harm than her hitting me? I don’t think so” (17).

108 Lobel 152.


110 Lobel, Naming the Violence, 106.
from isolated local areas to the national level until after 1983 as the Lesbian Task Force of NCADV raised awareness. Lesbian feminists, whose members found it relatively easy to understand and condemn men’s violence against women and children, were reluctant to believe that women could be violent toward lesbian partners in part because they attributed male violence to essential biology and forms of socializing they held were unique to males. During the early 1980s, battered lesbians and sympathetic shelter staff began to compare heterosexual male violence against women to lesbian battering and to consider factors that differentiated lesbian domestic violence. They demanded that lesbians hold batterers accountable rather than shun or isolate the victims of abuse.

Although lesbian feminists in general, including Califia women, were slow to recognize battering within their ranks, they were quick to identify consensual sex that played with power roles as abusively “male-identified.” Many feminists, including

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111 Lobel 1.
112 Lobel 2, 95-97, 152-153. Mindy Benowitz compared internalized oppression to the dangers inherent in lesbian assertions of superiority: “We are reluctant to acknowledge that our relationships may not be so much better than heterosexual relationships. In reality, we too have learned about violence and power struggles growing up in this world (199).” At the same time, she recognized that lesbians may “fear fueling society’s hatred and myths by speaking openly about lesbian battering. We fear hostile responses from police, courts, shelter, or therapists (200).”
113 Same-sexed abusers share the goal of controlling their partners to serve their own needs. Lobel 173-174. Both use tactics to gain compliance such as physical violence, sexual control, threats of violence or sexual control, economic control, and emotional abuse. Same-sexed abusers, however, can also use homophobia by threatening to out the victim or by telling her “the homophobic world will not help her.” Lobel 188-189. Hart addressed the stereotype that lesbian couples could only mutually fight rather than have a batterer and a victim, pointing out that physical strength, personal power, childhood abuse and victimization, internalized homophobia or misogyny, predisposition to anger or low communication skills are not good indicators for figuring out which partner is the abuser. The batterer profile is belief in entitlement to control one’s partner, that violence is an acceptable and effective tool of control, and that one can get away with committing violence. Lobel 176-183. Lydia Walker and Suzanne Pharr concurred (76, 203). Generally, political and cultural feminists valued equalizing power relationships to obliterate oppression, so it was difficult for feminists to admit their use of power over others.
114 During the 1970s, the terms “sadomasochism” or “SM” covered the spectrum of kinky sex. By 1984, power-exchange proponents like the Los Angeles group, Leather and Lace, were developing the more complete acronym BDSM for bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, and sadism-masochism. Announcement in The Lesbian News 9.10 (May 1984): 10.
some domestic violence workers, condemned “sadomasochism” (SM) based on
judgments of what constitutes healthy sexual relationships, the limits of consent while
U.S. culture was rent by institutionally sanctioned power imbalances, whether SM was a
therapeutic way to deal with power issues or just “sanctioned battering,” and ultimately
whether SM was compatible with feminism.\footnote{Los Angeles Coalition Against Assaults Against Women and WAVA W organized resistance to SM in Los Angeles (Retter 293). Examples of authors conflating lesbian battering with BDSM appear in Lobel 2, 93, 104. As early as 1975 Ti-Grace Atkinson talked to an offshoot of the New York-based Masochists’ Liberation Front about “Why I’m Against S/M Liberation.” Atkinson agreed with the BDSM liberation group’s analysis that sadomasochism pervaded society while society discriminated against BDSM practitioners. She interpreted the simultaneous pervasiveness and rejection as proof that “the Establishment” does not want to identify with BDSM because embracing BDSM would help “women to understand in such overt and brutal terms the very nature of the power relationship.” BDSM liberationists’ interest in recognition from dominant society signaled the antithesis of feminist goals. Atkinson asserted that any feminist, if forced to choose between freedom and sex, would choose freedom and took that as the crucial division between feminism and such sexual liberationists. Reprinted in Robin Ruth Linden et al., eds., Against Sadomasochism: A Radical Feminist Analysis (East Palo Alto, CA: Frog In the Well, 1982), 91.}

Postwar gay culture included a strain of SM and pornography.\footnote{By 1954 the first gay motorcycle club, the Satyrs, had formed in southern California, and within a decade gay leatherman motorcycle clubs had spread from Los Angeles and San Francisco across the country. They embraced intense masculine sexuality while creating space for sexual taboos like sadomasochism. Mark Thompson, ed. Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics, and Practice (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2001 [1991]), xviii-xix. See also “1950s...One Among Many: The Seduction and Training of a Leatherman by Thom Magister” 91-105. Leatherfolk combines “historical memoir, social commentary, and personal testimony” (xv). During the 1970s, in addition to pornographic movies hitting mainstream theatres, images of gay male SM increased with Tom of Finland’s hyper-masculine gay depictions of anonymous gay male sex with deep throat fellatio, heavy nipple play, and explicit sadomasochism, pictures which circulated without fanfare until his first U.S. exhibits in Los Angeles and San Francisco in 1978. Mica Ramakers, Dirty Pictures: Tom of Finland, Masculinity, and Homosexuality (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 106-107. In 1977, Robin Morgan’s “The Politics of Sadomasochistic Fantasies” attacked sexual liberationist “experts”’ stereotypes that innate feminine masochism should be expressed in contrast to feminist self-examination. Connecting SM to male practices, Morgan posited that the new debates among lesbian feminists over BDSM may have reflected “a possible by-product of the new ‘bonding’ within the ‘gay community’, a way of gaining male approval from many homosexual ‘brothers.’ In other words, no one appeared to wonder whether this S-M proliferation was a lesbian copy of a faggot imitation of patriarchal backlash against feminism.” Against Sadomasochism 122 note 8.} By the mid-1970s the presence of a growing minority of self-described lesbian feminists engaging in SM elicited the first debates in the Lesbian Tide over sadomasochism, opening the way
for leather dykes to claim space at Califia amid strong condemnation. Jeanne Córdova kicked off discussion by publishing a transcription of a twelve-women workshop called “Healthy Questions About Sado-Masochism” at the end of 1976. Jeanne set up the Lesbian Tide as a sex-positive conduit for information on the formation of rap groups and new literature about SM.

An immediate denunciation followed by women associated with Olivia Records, producers and distributors of women’s music. They contended that feminism’s focus on “changing behaviors that were oppressive, and ultimately breaking down power imbalances” was incompatible with sadomasochism and that feminism was not simply a catch-all term for freedom. Proclaiming that “Lesbians must not perpetuate the idea (or the practice) that Sado-masochism is a part of women’s sexuality,” these women used a problematic analogy:

[T]he male concept of women’s “rape fantasies” has provided them with further justification for rape. We also know that, although most women do not fantasize being raped, we encounter women who do and we must analyze that phenomenon. In our analysis, we realized that there is an extreme disparity between the fantasy and the actuality of rape. … While we know that women who who [sic] are into S&M are not necessarily into rape, we see that there are too many parallels in the

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117 Jeanne Cordova, “Towards a Feminist Expression of Sado-Masochism,” The Lesbian Tide 6.3 (November/December 1976): 14-17. The workshop took place at the Women’s Health & Healing Conference in October 1976. Although the public debate in the Los Angeles lesbian feminist community seems to have begun with this article, other forums had discussed BDSM (e.g. Oregon’s WomanShare, and San Francisco’s Janus society mentioned in the transcript 14). The Tide affirmed SM and featured a sex-positive revision of prostitution in the same issue titled “Lesbian Brothel: Something for Everyone?,” which Marilyn P. and Ahshe helped write. Their advocacy of a lesbian brothel rejected sex within a long-term relationship as the only acceptable model in favor of collectivized sexuality, which could meet women’s needs for affection and sex directly. Simultaneously identifying and disidentifying with prostitution, they considered the socialist feminist objection that paying at a brothel commodified sex. They agreed that in such a scenario barter would be better but claimed female sexuality would be reciprocal unlike sexual relations between paying Johns and sex workers. There was no attempt to defend the position that sex between women would necessarily be reciprocally appreciated; presumably it was self-evident that women would fulfill each others’ desires instead of being “do-me queens.” Marilyn P. and Sandy H. with help from Ahshe G. and Ellen G., “Lesbian Brothel: Something for Everyone?,” The Lesbian Tide 6.3 (November/December 1976): 4-5, 37.
actualization of it, such as infliction and acceptance of pain, dominance, and “buying” of powerlessness.  

The letter writers blamed women who fantasized about rape for male rape instead of keeping responsibility on the rapists. They recognized a difference between fantasies and realities but then elided the distinction between temporarily giving over control and sexual assault. Further, they defined SM as a male definition of female sexuality. The Tide collective and an anonymous letter in support of the article disputed labeling SM as male-defined.

Feminist proponents of SM related their practices to the recent phenomenon of women taking control and knowledge of their bodies and expressing their sexuality.  

Daniel reflects back that it was ironic that the lesbian community, including Califia, encouraged women to own their sexuality rather than be defined by patriarchal norms but “on the other hand, there was this, ‘We’ll define it for you in the lesbian community’ in terms of the kind of sexuality you can have. And it basically was very much a woman-on-woman-type thing—gentle, loving, all of that.”  

Whereas participants loved initial sexuality education at Califia, the emergence of SM marked a limit for some women of what was appropriate women’s sexuality.

Within the Lesbian Tide, writers linked sexual exploration to women’s spirituality. They furthered incipient conflict over where SM fit in debates over how to create new feminist norms of behavior and values. Radical therapist Barbara Ruth claimed that “sadomasochism as a liberating practice is only possible for women within a

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120 Daniel Raven transcript 22.
lesbian-feminist context.” She defended SM as making manifest the hidden agendas that occur in all relationships and proposed forming a coven or support group to explore the dimensions of ecstasy. In the same issue’s letters to the editor, Z Budapest and Cerridwen Fallingstar debated whether SM was compatible with feminist spirituality. Z affirmed that witchcraft worshiped “the capacity in wimmin for pleasure. Any form of pleasure is condoned that harms none and is mutual.” She immediately foreclosed the possibility of SM pleasure, however: “Pain is not considered a form of pleasure.”

Claiming that, historically, women did not engage in bondage with each other, she concluded that SM was “bad magic,” whereby the thoughts of fantasy are energized to become fact. Although Z spoke confidently for the entire spiritual community, Priestess Cerridwen dissented using the same Wiccan principle “an it harm none, do what thou will.” In stark contrast to Z, Cerridwen stressed the freedom of those involved to define pleasure for themselves and relayed that “according to lesbians who practice S&M, pain and bondage are a means to an end, and that end is transcendence. It may not be the way I choose to worship Aphrodite, but I do not find it necessary to judge my sisters’ sexuality as either ‘good’ (spiritual) or ‘bad’ (sinful).”

These debates illustrate the interrelations between political feminism and cultural women’s spaces and practices. Cerridwen’s comment also raises the question of how far feminist spirituality had actually diverged from patriarchal Christian dichotomies of good and evil. Proponents of expanding female sexuality to include SM not only gave as political motives

demystifying sexuality and detaching female sexuality from male definitions, but they sought to expand concrete women’s spaces like support groups and Wiccan covens to include literal practice of sexual expression.

As a space for political CR, sexual exploration, and alternative culture formation, it may have been inevitable that SM would come to Califia. Encountering resistance from other feminists, SM lesbians sought spaces to defend their practices. True to Califia’s emphases on open discussion and women teaching what they knew, a few participants at camps, including a collective member, led mini-presentations and workshops to educate on SM and wanted to practice related sexual activities unimpeded by feminist disapproval. By 1980, pro-SM dykes ran up against the formidable opposition of collective members and other Califia leaders. Betty Brooks and Diane remember that at first SM practitioners confined themselves to secluded areas and encountered little verbal opposition despite some women being “violently opposed to sadomasochism.” Recognizing that resistance and revulsion existed among some Califia attendees, a couple of women from San Diego held an explanatory workshop. Afterward, Marilyn, Irene, 

124 SAMOIS, the San Francisco-based lesbian-feminist-identified sadomasochism support group first published What Color Is Your Hankerchief? A Lesbian SM Sexuality Reader in 1979, which reprinted previously published articles with short essays, safety information, a glossary, and a bibliography. Based on Diane’s follow-up information that safety information or some variation of it was probably being read and negatively responded to at Califia. SAMOIS then published Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M (Boston: Alyson Publications, Inc., 1981). Conscious irreverence, such as calling their publications and information committee the “Ministry of Truth” after the fascist distopian government office in George Orwell’s 1984 incited anti-SM feminists who responded a year later with Against Sadomasochism. It is worth noting that publication came the same year that anti-SM feminists prevented discussion of diverse sexual practices at the Barnard College Conference on Sexuality. From this Dorothy Allison concluded that in terms of sex “none of us is safe, because we have never made each other safe.” See Carole S. Vance, “Epilogue” in Pleasure and Danger 431-437, here 436. The debate has mostly subsided after a deluge of pro-SM books.

125 Transcripts for Betty Brooks 38 and Diane Germain 13.
126 Betty Jetter transcript 34.
and Betty Jetter were vocal in their assessment that SM subjugated women and was unfeminist. In 1981, Diane united with Marilyn and Irene as collective members opposed to “kink” and became more resolute after attending a meeting where she ascertained that white and middle-class women were dominating partners of color or women from working-class backgrounds. She concluded that kinky sexual practices echoed racism (“master,” “slave,” use of chains for bondage) and anti-Semitism (theoretical use of uniforms and Nazi play) and reinforced views that women were “natural masochists” in the face of real sadistic violence from men. As a survivor of an abusive home herself, Diane vehemently rejects the idea of using SM therapeutically to work through past abuse because she sees such sex play as not addressing real power dynamics. Her subsequent contact with other women who had survived extreme abuse from husbands and boyfriends, such as being (nonconsensually) burnt, cut, tied, or beaten, led her to condemn consensual SM as playing with, and so trivializing, women’s real torture. She prioritizes feminist redress of injustice over sexual liberationist expressions of personal power. On a personal level, she grieves that Califia could not provide the safety such women needed when SM lesbians were so public in their displays.

Those who supported open discussion could not stem the tide of opposition that conflated SM with abuse and that sought to circumscribe women’s sexual practices. According to Irene, power-exchange sex was a “very dominant theme” of some Califia

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127 The recurring charge against BDSM that it shored up sexist role assignments of “natural masochism” to females and “natural sadism” to males reflects essentialist feminism and completely ignores the substantial phenomenon of women dominants with male submissives both within couples and in the sex worker industry as well as Dominant-submissive role playing among gay men and lesbians where one man in the couple would be submissive and one woman of the pair would be dominant.

128 Diane Germain transcript 12, 13 and follow-up 2, 4, 6.
camps. She attended some of the workshops that explained SM and believes the opposition and discouragement from most of the collective prevented kink from becoming an established part of Califia as it eventually did at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. Daniel distinctly remembers feeling that Califia was not a place to talk about fantasies or explore sexuality in ways that he felt the lesbian community had clearly condemned as "perpetrating more abuse, or allowing it to be perpetrated upon you." Califia was not permanently torn apart by the sex wars in the early 1980s because determined opposition by collective members and vocal leaders like Betty Jetter quashed discussion and isolated SM proponents in contradiction to their policy of free discussion. By 1983 an advertisement for Califia in the Gayzette clarified, "The group is not affiliated with any person using the name Califia as her personal name [referring to famous SM writer Pat Califia], nor is the organization a sadomasochism support group as has been occasionally rumored." Throughout the 1980s, debates over SM exploded around Califia throughout Los Angeles, the state of California, and national feminist communities.

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129 Irene Weiss transcript 17-18.
130 Daniel Raven transcript 22-23.
131 "Califia Announces '83 Gatherings," Gayzette (April 21, 1983) n.p., Mazer. Pam Hutson also recalled hours of discussion within Califia about the problem of feminists associating their group with Pat Califia. WOC transcript 28.
132 Although the memory of Carla Seco disagrees with Irene's view that collective members ended the debate, Carla does remember the general arguments and believes that Marilyn and Irene's thought-out positions and established leadership led most women to listen to them seriously. She recalls Marilyn arguing that SM enactment of patriarchal power plays was not feminist while SM dykes defended it as a feminist choice. Vicki Leon gives the conflict over SM as an example of how seriously discussions were taken with faith that agreement over the right way could be achieved. She sees the several workshops SM proponents' held as their attempt to get out "some real information" as a basis for dialogue. Transcripts for Carla Seco 22, 23 and Vicki Leon 37-38, 42.
In hindsight, Betty Brooks puts these debates in a broader feminist perspective and believes that the sex wars divided feminists’ attention from the real issue of male sexual violence. As a sex educator, Betty has distinguished sadomasochism from battery and says she was never bothered by kink although she dismisses it as silly and a luxury that, if noticeable on a daily basis, is incompatible with practical business such as getting hired. She saw people like Marilyn continually arguing against SM and the issue was never resolved, but Betty did not get involved because she wanted to focus on fighting rape. Her sexuality workshops, although unrelated to SM, were sometimes criticized as inappropriate for a space that included children even though Califia’s collective prioritized the needs of women over children. Thus, opposition to SM not only contributed to limiting women’s sexual education, but distracted energy from fighting actual violence.

Three narrators include changing perspectives in their discussion of SM that reflect their tentative truce in the sex wars. Ariana describes the divisive trajectory of debates over SM:

And there was a tremendous division in the L.A. Women’s Movement at that time between women, on one hand, who believe that all pornography and all bondage/dominance, SM sexuality was anti-feminist, anti-woman, completely taboo, and not even fit for discussion. ... And then there was another group of women who felt like maybe we should at least be discussing this. And [then there were] some women from Leather and Lace, another organization that was saying, “Not only do we want to discuss this, it’s part of my sexuality. It’s part of my personal practice.”

133 Betty Brooks transcript 38-40. Marilyn published an article that lumped together lesbian battering, parental corporal punishment of their children (“a swat on the bottom”) and lesbian BDSM as violence against females: Marilyn Murphy, “Do We ‘Only Hurt the Ones We Love?,’” LN 8.12 (July 1983): 24.
134 Barbara Forrest transcript 6.
135 Ariana Manov transcript 29-30.
In the late 1980s, Ariana used her radical feminist therapy training to facilitate a mediation session at her home. After seeing SM as akin to the objectification and violence involved in pornography, Josy listened for the first time to "women speak from their own experience about what they did sexually and what it meant to them. And I got it." Instead of analyzing power-exchange sex as replicating patriarchal scenes in a safer space and so continuing a pattern of abuse or humiliation, Josy heard SM lesbians saying, "What you’re asking us to do is to give up the only way that we can get off." In a "click" moment when she finally got it, Josy concluded that she had "no right to tell a woman that the only sex that satisfies her is politically incorrect and she should stop doing it." To make that decision for another would demonstrate an inability to trust women to conclude from their own experience what they need. Betty Jetter has also come to this position despite her continued dislike for SM.\textsuperscript{136} Rather than a full valuation of women choosing SM as part of their feminist sexuality or at least sexuality separate from and compatible with being feminist, Josy and Betty now take the position of pitying SM dykes. Their shift is not representative, and other Califia women like Diane remain fervently opposed without concession because their feminism encompasses or trumps sexuality.

In 1984, Gayle Rubin delineated the limits of feminism for a theory of sex and the necessity of recognizing that sexuality is as important a category of analysis and politics as gender.\textsuperscript{137} She noted that dominant society only gave moral complexity and the ability to consent to sexual activities already deemed “good.” There could be complexity about

\textsuperscript{136} Transcripts for Josy Catoggio 42-45 and Betty Jetter 36.  
people's views on married heterosexual sex, but the societal condemnation of sodomy, incest between adults, and sadomasochism enacted through prosecution of these forms of sex as crimes negated the possibility of consent by taking these actions as so disgusting that nobody would willingly perform them. Rubin concluded that gender and sexuality experiences did not exist on fully overlapping planes, and so feminist analysis designed for gender hierarchies could not completely account for the complexities of sexuality. Feminist theory had some power to explain sex, but "as issues become less those of gender and more those of sexuality, feminist analysis becomes misleading and often irrelevant. Feminist thought simply lacks angles of vision, which can fully encompass the social organization of sexuality." Some of the hallmarks of a radical theory of sex geared toward critiquing sexual oppression would reject essentialism, sex negativism, Christian and normalizing psychological categorization of rewarded prescribed sex acts and punished proscribed acts, and the view that only "good" acts have moral complexity. Instead, benign variation would be essential for pluralistic sexual ethics. While Califia was able to expand feminism to include antiracism and opposition to classism, the very emotional closeness of sex prevented reassessment that would recognize sex as a category that is separate but related to gender.

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138 Rubin 304-306.
139 Rubin 309.
140 Rubin described prescribed acts as falling within marital reproductive monogamous same-generation heterosex free of power exchange, pornography, or public view. Prescribed acts included unmarried heterosex, nonprocreative sex, nonmonogamy, cross-generational sex, homosex, sex work, masturbation, fetishism, sadism, masochism, sex using manufactured objects or pornography, transvestism, exhibitionism, voyeurism, and public sex. Rubin 275-283.
The debates at Califia, at the West Coast Women’s Music Festival, and on
women’s land\textsuperscript{141} over power-exchange sex were intense because they combined a head-
on collision between feminist ideals for sexual liberation and visual markers of
dominance or hitting that reminded some women of abuse they or their loved ones
suffered. Narrators who most opposed SM told of seeing women leading their partners on
leashes or walking around with bruises. The women who designed and experienced the
scenes professed joy and liberation, but these narrators did not consent to be a party to
seeing the scenes or their after-effects. The 1980s were a time when kink practitioners
were codifying etiquette, and by the 1990s a dominant rule was that everyone involved
should be consenting. At Califia and other sites that Califia narrators attended, those rules
were not yet established or followed. Anti-SM Califia women were taken aback that SM
dykes came to camp or that a well-liked collective member came out as kinky. SM
supporters at Califia, however, may well have concluded from the widespread tolerance
of nudity, some strong advocacy of nonmonogamy, and open discussions and workshops
on sexuality that their brand of sexual expression could be freely expressed and validated
there. Feminist analysis that prioritized protecting women from perceived violence over
women’s erotic desires could not comfortably encompass this form of sexuality.

\textsuperscript{141}In addition to Diane, Ariana, and Karen’s memories of discussion at WCWMF, Irene and María Dolores
talked to me and to each other about their revulsion at seeing a woman poolside with a leashed lover when
they lived at Pagoda lesbian community in St. Augustine, Florida. By 1993, Pagoda’s brochure specifically
forbade sadomasochism to preserve women’s emotional safety. “The Pagoda is a community that has
conscientiously made rules that make our space as available and as safe as possible for all wimmin who
desire to be here. … To sadomasochists it means that their ritual displays and practices must be done
elsewhere.” Admonitions like these at women’s communities across the country privileged women’s sense
of safety over sexual expression but also conformed to developed ideas of full consent by all parties
involved. See “Pagoda temple of Love: A Lesbian Spiritual and Cultural Community” in Julia Penelope
and Susan J. Wolfe, eds., \textit{Lesbian Culture: An Anthology: The Lives, Work, Ideas, Art and Visions of
ENABLING ART AND DISABILITY ACTIVISM

As some women received support for voicing their position on sexuality while others drew criticism, so too artists found both feminist support and situations where their creativity collided with other aspects of inclusion. Vicki Leon considers Califia women’s feedback about her stained-glass art critical to her development after she completed art school under the direction of all male professors. Not only did women direct her to the art of Judy Chicago and Georgia O’Keefe, they questioned assumptions of male universality. When Vicki showed a piece with a sunset and mountain reflections on water, somebody asked, “Why is there a man in the boat?” Vicki was struck silent with the realization that the fact that “it’s always a man” representing a person was not enough of a reason.

“[T]hat was probably the single most [important] incident that affected my commitment to my artwork to try to create imagery that validated women.” Also striking was artist Tee Corinne’s slide-show workshop on lesbian images in art history. Vicki realized her training had not named any form of woman-to-woman sensuality in art and had deliberately titled pieces to obscure it. She recalls a sculpture of two women kissing entitled Ladies Gossiping. The ways in which Tee Corinne’s show linked the erasure of affection between women with misogynist derogation was simultaneously enraging and validating. Realizing that Romaine Brooks’ portraits could be interpreted using contemporary lesbian themes made sense of Vicki’s reaction to the images: “[W]hen I saw … Romaine Brooks’ work, I wanted to go to Paris. Well, I didn’t find out ’til later that I wanted to come out.”¹⁴² Unlike traditional education’s teacher-student hierarchy,

¹⁴² Vicki Leon transcript 37-38, 47-48.
disciplinary compartmentalization of knowledge, and support of patriarchal norms, the Califia emphasis on sharing talents allowed artists to show, discuss, and receive feedback on their art in a way that integrated feminist values and shored up a transhistorical sense of lesbian sensibility in the face of arguments favoring timeless male-dominated heterosexuality.

CONTESTED SPACE

Vicki and Diane experienced support for their respective glass and mixed-media art, while Muriel’s interactive art projects both unified and divided the community. In addition to giving workshops on how to make art, Muriel, a textile artist, created large “sky weavings” composed of yarn woven between trees and decorated with found natural objects and craft supplies. After picking a group of trees and completing a weaving, someone questioned her authority to create the piece and reminded Muriel that blind and wheelchair-using women might have trouble reaching the restrooms because the art could present a physical barrier. Shocked to be told to take down her newly finished weaving, Muriel pouted, fumed, and then found another level spot with the children. She involved them in weaving between two cabins using the trees as part of the framework. The children filled it with arts and crafts projects they had made; adults were also invited to add art to it; and, according to Diane, everyone loved getting involved. At the nightly community meeting, however, a blind woman and her companion expressed concern that this new work was also a hazard. A heated debate ensued over whether the principle of disabled rights necessitated taking down the sky weaving and whether the artists’

143 Diane Germain transcript 29.
144 Muriel Fisher transcript 3.
expression in one corner of the camp was a realistic threat. That evening a group made a ceremony of taking down the weaving. The conflict between space for artists and for differently abled women reflected a rising awareness of accessibility needs and the, albeit grudging, willingness of able-bodied women to curtail their expression for the sake of sensitivity and accessibility for all.

Rising awareness about disability issues began in 1978 and was detailed by 1980. Whereas the brochure for 1977 made no mention of accommodations, the 1978 brochure included space for women to describe their “special needs.” Elsa remembered Camp de Benneville Pines, used between 1976 and 1978, as not wheelchair accessible. After that, collective members sought camps—in part—with wheelchair accessibility in mind. The 1980 brochure included expanded descriptions of each campsite, delineating which camp experience was wheelchair accessible and which was rustic, promising an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter for Deaf people at all three sessions, and asking whether attendees had special dietary instructions or other needs. After 1980, the collective also specified that there would be no fee for women who came to the camp as attendants with disabled women. In a final expansion, the brochure for 1982 welcomed children with special needs.

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145 Diane Germain transcript 44.
146 Elsa Fisher transcript 29.
147 Capitalization of Deaf refers to people who have been members of a Deaf community. In contrast to the isolation and feelings of disabling loss that hearing people who become hard-of-hearing or deaf later in life experience, many who grew up Deaf before the 1970s were educated with other Deaf children in residential schools. There, children initiated life-long group bonds and taught each other manual language even when their hearing teachers sought to educate exclusively through an “oral” system of lip-reading and vocalization. In the face of seventy-five years of oral education, Deaf people retained their manual language and used it as a basis for claiming linguistic minority status beginning in the 1970s. As with “Deaf,” I use “differently-abled” to emphasize different ways of living in the world that are disadvantaged by normative practices rather than focusing solely on lack or disability.
WHO MUST MAKE THE EFFORT

The changes in the brochures reflected participants’ increased contact with differently abled women and their needs while maintaining able-bodied characteristics as the norm. Collective members learned to see accessibility in campsites and how to make temporary wheelchair paths from plywood and snow fencing to cover bumpy dirt paths. As collective membership changed yearly, new inductees were schooled in shifting from incredulous “why is everybody thinking about making camping wheelchair accessible for godsakes?” to getting with the program. They learned through observation and conversation how tiring it was for simultaneous interpreters to sign, necessitating hiring more than one ASL interpreter. As more differently abled women attended these political gatherings, some became radicalized to assert themselves. Workshops addressed ability issues as women spoke from their personal experiences. In community meetings a Deaf woman named Sheryl Kaplan stressed the importance of speaking conventions that facilitated Deaf people’s understanding of conversations, such as identifying oneself by name before speaking, not having multiple people talking simultaneously, and keeping sightlines clear for ASL interpreters. Through Kal’s friendship with Sheryl, she learned more about cadence, phrasing, and pausing in order to make lip-reading easier than she had during thirty-two years of working for an organization that dealt with “hearing and balance disorders.”

148 Transcripts for Barbara Forrest 27, Diane Germain 44, and Betty Jetter 55.
149 WOC transcript 16.
150 Transcripts for Betty Jetter 55 and Diane Germain 43.
151 Kal Kalivoda transcript 13.
Sheryl wrote a number of short pieces for Califia camps in 1982 and 1983, in which she laid out practical reforms based on appeals that the burden for understanding and including Deaf women lay with hearing women. The title of the first extant sheet, “A Deaf Lesbian Speaks Out,” which was also published in *The Lesbian News*, seems to have been inspired by Leo M. Jacobs’ book, *A Deaf Adult Speaks Out* (1974). Interestingly, Sheryl did not make use of the minority-group argument that Jacobs developed. Using social justice ideas that compared Deaf individuals to members of racial minority groups through arguments about economic inequality and colonialism, Jacobs defined Deaf people as a minority group facing communication barriers and societal paternalism. Society pressured minorities to conform to stereotypes about them, which, in turn, “created a continuing justification for the economic inequities experienced by the deaf.”

Hearing educators who have capitalized on their verbal strengths by focusing on getting Deaf children to read lips and speak (orality) have acted like “colonials in white suits, [who] gain ‘respect’ from the natives through a distancing, ritualistic one-upmanship.” Like other minority groups, Deaf people have faced “the demand that the minority people come up to the expectations of the majority, and the majority’s utter disregard for the real needs of the minority group.” Simultaneously “the very nature of the handicap” has forced Deaf people “to live in isolation unless the others make a determined effort to establish substitute forms of communication.”

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153 Jacobs 26.
154 Jacobs 61.
In “A Deaf Lesbian Speaks Out,” Sheryl, instead, concentrated on practical ways that hearing people could break down that isolation. She rejected the single-minded focus on signing concerts as “exploitation of the beauty of American Sign Language, for the benefit of hearing women.” Instead, the costs of ASL interpreters should be factored into planning rap sessions, meetings, and other events, and seating with unobstructed sight of interpreters should be set aside. Urging hearing women to reach out and try to communicate with Deaf women, Sheryl concluded, “[T]ake the trouble to communicate with us, learn about us, include us in your activities and lives. In this way, you can benefit from our participation and we can learn from each other as we all work together on our common struggles.” By keeping a disability model rather than the linguistic minority model being developed within Deaf activism, the tenor of Sheryl’s published article and circulated tract sought help to achieve integration for a common cause rather than stressing different values or cultural allegiances.¹⁵⁵

In contrast, Sheryl’s “Fact Sheet on Deafness” of August 1983 played up language acquisition and Deaf community. Like Jacobs, Sheryl characterized deafness as impairing (English) language acquisition and communication while reminding readers that there is no correlation between English skills or speech abilities and intelligence. She moved toward a linguistic minority model:

Deaf people have their own community, with strong in-group feelings and group loyalty. However, unlike some ethnic groups, they do not live, work, and go to school together, which makes social contact difficult.

ASL, or American Sign Language, is the native language of many deaf people, and fosters social and cultural identification with the deaf community. It is not a translation of English, nor is it a written language.

Returning to the question of who should work to achieve communication, Sheryl noted the limits of communication when only “roughly 30% of words in the English language are visible on the lips,” only “4% of deaf people are skilled at lip-reading,” and some hearing parents refuse “to learn to communicate with their deaf child(ren).” Because this work was designed as a fact sheet, any program for change must be read between the lines of the factual information. By October 1983, her piece “Creating Access: A Beginning” called for temporarily able-bodied people to cease “oppressive behavior, which includes either staring at, or on the other hand, ignoring disabled people.” The reference to nondisabled people as “TAB’s” without defining the acronym reflected a move in disability activism toward stressing how fleeting able-bodied status is. Arguing, “[I]imited access is not access,” Sheryl challenged women to spend the necessary money for mobility assistance, interpreters, telecommunications devices for the deaf (TDD) phone numbers, and Braille/taped/large-print materials. Outreach and sensitivity included not making assumptions and engaging in behaviors that feminists had been advocating against sexism and racism, such as interrupting offensive language and jokes, listening nondefensively to charges of oppressiveness, and taking concrete action to help spread resources. By maintaining a focus on Deafness as a disability rather than on Deaf

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156 Sheryl Kaplan, “Fact Sheet on Deafness” (August 1983) from Betty Jetter’s personal files and Jacobs 62-64.

people as solely a linguistic minority, Sheryl more easily argued for inclusion that encompassed issues of blindness and wheelchair access, which were all issues at Califia. Narrators disagree about whether there were enough concrete efforts to ensure accessibility and vary in their views of what constituted disability.\textsuperscript{158} Barbara Forrest felt that she and other collective members sought accommodations that would encourage disabled women to attend without doing much concerted outreach or reaching certain forms of disabilities, such as developmentally delayed women.\textsuperscript{159} When asked about accessibility, Rose recalls the presence of fat women. Mainstream society could consider fat a disability through linking it to mobility and health issues presumed to be caused by heavy weight, such as weakened joints, heart trouble, or diabetes. FU, however, rejected this direct causality and stressed that mobility and comfort issues based on attempting to fit into a society created for thin people put fat people at a disadvantage. Labeled “socially constructed confinements,” such norms could be eased or erased by changes in the environment (e.g., wider aircraft seats and turnstiles). In contrast to the ridicule and stereotypes that women involved in FU had experienced from nonfat people, they created a supportive, like-minded group, in which their self-esteem and sense of entitlement to equal treatment grew. Likewise, Deaf communities had grown in the U.S. through shared manual languages such as American Sign Language. Community-building to support a sense of shared identity and to promote changing minds and policies became foundational to 1970s activism. Deaf women like Sheryl interfaced successfully with hearing society

\textsuperscript{158} Transcripts for Josy Catoggio 50, Bonnie Kaufman (pseudonym) 12-13, Jane Bernstein 7, and Daniel Raven 29.

\textsuperscript{159} Barbara Forrest transcript 27.
by becoming part of the small minority of excellent lip-readers. While her tracts preserved the language of disability, they also reflected a dual argument of Deaf people as a linguistic minority and as at a disadvantage for English language acquisition.

If Califia were serious about honoring every woman’s ability to share her experience and teach others something valuable, then a common language and an expanded mindset were necessary for that sharing. Demands that hearing feminists make an effort at inclusion reflected the politics of signing as opposed to a purely oral training in which Deaf people must wholly accommodate themselves to hearing people by struggling to learn to understand people’s spoken words.¹⁶⁰

Differently abled women, FU members, and women of color who returned to Califia all demanded concerted efforts toward respectful inclusion on an equal footing from TAB, thin, and white women. Differently abled women who experienced reduced inclusion in camp affairs, fat women who risked negative expressions about their bodies and tiresome discussions of the latest diets, and women of color who braved white-dominated camps attended Califia because it embodied something positive they wanted to have. For an inclusive Women’s Movement to arise, women who embodied the dominant identity factors had to realize that these women had something valuable to offer to them personally and politically.

COMPROMISING BREAD-AND-BUTTER ISSUES

Among these groups, women of color, by far, had the greatest voice in calling for change. Given how large a focus were race relations in Califia’s middle years, it is not

surprising that continuing differences over food became framed as a racial issue, and women of color similarly contested white assumptions behind entertainment choices. As new women sat down at the table with other Califia participants, the vegetarian fare continued to generate dissent. The presentation defending vegetarianism as feminist remained unintelligible despite the possibilities for posing vegetarianism as a way to address world malnutrition and American health concerns, global environmental problems, U.S. politically subsidized corporate greed, homogenizing, speeded up culture, and imperialism. The inability to articulate and grasp connections may represent a stage of feminism or may have been more pronounced among those who were not already used to socialist feminists’ joining of issues or those who did not concentrate on a global picture. The solution that Califia meal planners found is a telling example of what was and was not too essential to compromise.

"DON’T EAT WHITE” AND DANCE RIGHT

Nationally, the vegetarian counterculture linked to racial politics, but at Califia, women of color contested the menu as all “white people’s food” while omnivores across race rejected vegetarianism. The debates over food at the camps illustrate the breadth of behavioral changes that holistic feminism would need to encompass. Counterculture vegetarians captured the allure of good racial politics in the phrase “Don’t eat white; eat right; and fight.” Warren J. Belasco explained:

Whiteness meant Wonder Bread, White Tower, Cool Whip, Minute Rice, instant mashed potatoes, peeled apples, ... white collar, whitewash, White House, white racism. Brown meant whole wheat bread, unhulled rice, turbinado sugar, wildflower honey, unsulfured molasses, soy sauce, peasant yams, “black is beautiful.”
In Los Angeles, brown extended to the Chicano Brown Berets. Contemporary cookbooks were an eclectic mixture of ethnic immigrant dishes from Asia (China, Japan, Vietnam, India), the Middle East, the Mediterranean, Eastern Europe, Mexico, Brazil, etc. African-American “soul food,” however, was vastly underrepresented. Despite multiculturalism in the vegetarian movement nationally, Califia collective members around 1980 seem not to have been experienced with these recipes, which generated resistance. “The bland food of white folks,” complained Doris, “is legendary.” When collective members suggested adding “some tortillas ... salsa and a little of this and a little of that,” representatives advocating for different menus balked at the tokenism, demanding serious changes. This led to something of an impasse because the white cooks did not know how to cook inclusively, and the women of color were divided as to whether taking on further kitchen duties would empower them or relegate them to the kitchen as servants. To this day, a white collective member laughs that the whole episode was an example of women of color feeling free to push boundaries and get away with bad behavior that could have elicited violence in the larger society. While vegetarians at Califia equated difference from meat-based diets with feminist opposition to dominant society, some women of color elevated their ethnic cuisines above what Yolanda labeled “Wonderbread women.” In both cases, dominant societal attitudes toward food, buttressed by the turn-of-the-century meat industry and assimilation campaigns against

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161 Belasco 48, 61-62. 
162 Davenport 87. 
163 Diane Germain transcript 25-26. She remembers the collective changing the food in response to Doris' complaints.
Mexican and Asian immigrants, which substituted white bread and meat for traditional, more nutritious foods, governed the norms against which minority women fought. Resistance eventually beat back ideals. Disgruntled carnivores across racial backgrounds snuck in meat and lobbied for at least some poultry meals on their evaluation forms. Lillian, Pam, Daniel, and Jane laughingly recount women making car runs down from camp by the fourth or fifth day in search of hamburgers. Vicki relates:

I do remember the cook coming out with a McDonald’s wrapper in her hand FURIOUS, just furious, and throwing the wrapper down on the ground and being SO highly insulted that anybody would go out of the camp and bring meat in [laugh]. And that, that was kind of a … fun one for me ‘cause … my father’s been vegetarian all his life, and the whole vegetarian issue is such a scene. … And somehow that was obvious at that time that that was the feminist thing to do. … It was obvious, but it wasn’t obvious [pause] to some people. So I think, maybe there were some meat dishes served. … [T]he cook with the McDonald’s wrapper did not want to make any. … She was strongly vegetarian, and it was part of the way she was changing the world. And there was no way they were going to get her to make a meatloaf for meat-eaters.

While Vicki may have understood the philosophy behind vegetarianism and its connection to progressive political movements, Daniel remembers the same incident but still has no idea why eating meat would support patriarchy.

Receptivity to participant feedback accidentally began an interesting tradition. As the week progressed, tensions heightened among women immersed in discussions of racism, classism, and sexism, and emotions began to explode. Collective members one year planned a chicken dinner at midweek with ice cream for dessert and a big dance. The effect was dramatically to reduce conflicts. Irene laughs but swears that although it started by chance, the combination of comfort food, including meat, and letting loose to

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164 Transcripts for WOC 30, Daniel Raven 15, and Jane Bernstein 3.
165 Vicki Leon transcript 34-35.
music soothed people and paved the way for healing rifts that had formed so that women could go on to work together. \(^{166}\) Betty Jeter remembers continuous complaints but a relative lull when meat was presented as a side dish. \(^{167}\) Betty Brooks agrees that taking on “food habits” led to big fights:

[A]nd so I’m telling you the people who were not vegetarian were having fits until we got that chicken in. ... But people even wanted to make it have a little more meat there rather than just complete vegetarian, [laugh] and ... at the meetings at night [laugh], these things were always brought up. And, of course, our answer ... is so funny. I mean, you know, it’s like you can say to the kids, “OK, you can’t make it, so we’ll let you cheat on it. You just bring your own stuff and keep it in your cabin,” you know. I mean [laugh], it’s just horrible. And that’s ... the gift of Califia. We tried to take on all these wonderful ideas about how to change the world. \(^{168}\)

A combination of majority pressure and lack of resolve that vegetarianism held political importance overrode the objections of purist vegetarians. Raising “all these wonderful ideas” could generate a climate of optimistic empowerment and a snowball effect of adding more ideas for change, but women hit a breaking point for understanding and integrating change into their lives within greater society.

Although a couple of narrators remember high-energy dances dissipating hostilities, \(^{169}\) tensions over the kind of music played for dances at Califia included trivializing assessments. According to Doris, white women cannot dance, and white music is unpleasant, essentially undanceable, and fosters lackluster parties that rival wakes. \(^{170}\) Jane relates that African-American women and Chicanas criticized a camp in the 1980s for excluding music from their cultures. Because of her interest in Spanish-

\(^{166}\) Irene Weiss transcript 23-24.  
\(^{167}\) Betty Jeter transcript 52.  
\(^{168}\) Betty Brooks transcript 14-15.  
\(^{169}\) Jeanne Murphy transcript 6.  
\(^{170}\) Davenport 87.
language music. Jane had brought tapes with Latino music, but she was the only white woman who had multicultural music. Unlike the food issue, where a paid cook and women on kitchen duty made the meals, an Asian-American woman had volunteered to bring her sound equipment and records to the camp. In the midst of the uproar over representation, she packed up and left. Jane finds most fascinating the way in which this D.J. had not been exposed to nor thought to bring any other kind of music, with its implications for how the music industry and women's music replicated dominant forces. This sole mention in interviews of an Asian-American woman during the first seven years of Califia and her hasty disappearance from a scene of contestation among black, Chicana, and white women is also a telling reminder of ways in which racial composition retained a majoritizing element.

CONFLICT AS CONCERTED EFFORT

For all that the middle period of Califia was fraught with conflict, women were still willing to struggle with complexities in order to attain their ideal of an integrated feminist community. Escalating tensions over expectations for interracial work began in this stage of Califia. Women of color and antiracist white women (especially in interracial relationships) who participated in Califia strove to prepare the way for others to attend without encountering racism. Presentation leaders fought resistance and gained allies among a few white women who advanced antiracism education to the broader

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171 Jane Bernstein transcript 6. If Lydia's description of this Asian American woman as a "tenant landlord" who advertised as a D.J. in the Lesbian News during the 1980s is accurate, assimilation to white class norms might be at work in her lack of musical exposure. Lydia Otero feedback on chapter 4.
172 Anna Maria mentioned that it was not until women of color took control of Califia that Asian American women came. As mentioned, this presented a whole new set of problems because Pacific Islander women did not want to talk to Japanese-American women, etc. WOC transcript 60.
society. The presentations unintentionally raised the issue of the diversity in experience of white-skin privilege for Jewish and bicultural minorities. Experience also helped Califia women to learn about (dis)ability issues, which continued the demand that women in dominant positions make the compromises and overtures to reach inclusiveness. Contact with SM dykes led to conflict over who was the oppressed minority. As SM proponents shook an idealized view of women, leading Califians extended rigid disapproval because intense emotions about sexualized violence prevented them from recognizing sex as not fully subsumed under their gender analysis. In contrast, Califia women’s view of children achieved more complexity than the surrounding conservative idealization of innocence. They recognized that kids learned to oppress other people. In addition to continuing activism to protect against male violence, they worked concurrently to shield women from harmful childish taunts, to reassure children, and to educate youths out of prejudice. Continued refinements for teaching about class bias promoted a cultural sensitivity that is still almost unknown in society. While educational developments on class had begun to touch on the structural upheavals of Reaganomics, participants did not yet know how big a shake-up rising conservatism would inflict on Califia.
The rise of the New Right cast a pall over social justice work by intensifying hegemonic discourse, siphoning resources from social services, and ignoring the AIDS epidemic. Califia camps continued as the Reagan administration cut welfare programs during a recession, financed the military through deficit spending, and shifted the burden of taxation from the wealthiest to the struggling. In the 1980s, many gays and lesbians expended inordinate energy and money against AIDS, inadvertently siphoning resources from lesbian feminist activity, because the executive branch did almost nothing to address the communicable disease for five years. New Right control over institutional practices partly conditioned the politics of resistance while binary thinking led opposing sides to seek “freedom” through forms of homogenization. Califia leaders encouraged

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1 Ronald Reagan’s first presidential term effectively sabotaged what remained of Lyndon Johnson’s war on poverty. The Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981 dropped the top tax rate from 70 to 50 percent and reduced taxation on estates, unearned income, and capital gains. The wealthiest 0.2 percent increased their disposable income by 21 to 26 percent in 1984 while those at the median gained only 3.5 percent. American families earning under $10,000 lost more than 15 percent due to tax and budget changes. For example, welfare programs like food stamps and Aid for Dependent Children were drastically cut for those holding jobs and earning just over the poverty line. William C. Berman, *America’s Right Turn: From Nixon to Bush* (Baltimore; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 92-93, 95.

2 Reagan opposed devoting sufficient federal money to advance AIDS research and preventive education during his first term. When a reporter asked his spokesman about the administration’s position on this “gay disease” in 1982, the spokesman literally laughed it away as not affecting the president or anyone in the administration. The religious right considered AIDS punishment for homosexuality. Not until Reagan’s friend and fellow actor, Rock Hudson, died in October 1985 did Reagan appoint a commission that recommended much higher government funding and private research. He did not mention AIDS in a public policy speech until October 1987. Major advances in funding and pressure to find medical ways to manage the effects of the assault on the immune system came from gay-based activist groups. Gay men and lesbians started hospices and political action groups. During Reagan’s two terms, nearly 30,000 Americans died prematurely of AIDS and another 170,000 died by 1993. Andrew Miller, “It’s Mourning in America,” *Gay City News* (New York City), 3.324 (June 10-16, 2004). Michael Bronski, “Why Reagan Ignored AIDS,” *The Advocate: Online Exclusives* posted 9 June 2004 and last checked 27, August 2004 at http://www.advocate.com/html/stories/917/917_reagan_bronski.asp. Michael Schaller et al., *Present Tense: The United States Since 1945*, 3rd ed., (Boston; New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2004), 452. Executive quiescence catalyzed protest groups in New York City such as AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP: March 1987), Queer Nation (March 1990), and Lesbian Avengers (June 1992), which spread to California and across the nation, reinterpreting demonstrations and street theater for the 1990s.
women to exorcise dominant-group mentalities and align their consciousnesses with views on sex, race, and class that they professed were politically superior. A number of narrators argue that attacks from the Right and a broader cultural turn toward assimilation and individual gain presaged the end of Califia Community camps. External threats certainly hampered Califia women’s work. Internally, established leaders at Califia promoting radical lesbian feminism collided with some women of color at and outside Califia who championed multicultural feminism and lesbians in a broader Los Angeles scene who shied away from feminism’s political edge in favor of recreation.

Califia participants continued to enjoy their camping experiences, unaware that differing forms of feminism and the economic ramifications of conservative cultural politics would finally end the educational experiment. Their refinements to teaching about patriarchy demonstrate their continued commitment to lesbian feminism. An analysis of talent-show entertainment, which women created at each camp, provides a window on Califia women’s sense of humor and ability to utilize fun to respond to the feminist messages that Califia taught. Ultimately, Califia served as a model to other groups, and memories of its demise illustrate lasting tensions within Second Wave feminist practice.

CONSERVATIVE PRESSURE AND CHANGING OF THE GUARD

The last years of Califia Community began and ended with shake-ups in leadership, reflecting challenges that feminists faced from the dominant society and trends within feminism nationally. By 1982, only three original collective members continued to organize Califia. Betty Brooks, Marilyn Murphy, and Janet Stambolian had
seven years of continuous experience while Irene Weiss was the next senior with four. The other eleven members were in their first or second years of organizing the camps. A controversy that pulled Betty away from Califia was a seismic shock illustrating the ruinous effects of New Right conservatism on countercultural individuals’ lives.\(^3\)

**Betty Brooks Besieged**

In 1982, Betty Brooks was again fighting to maintain her career as a university professor. Her struggle symbolized the conservative backlash engulfing progressive social justice campaigns nationwide and necessitated her withdrawal from the collective. Conservative Christian Republicans extended their purview from John Briggs’ Proposition 6 focus on lower education in 1978 to the university system in 1982 and set Betty in their sights. New Right supporters appealed to “traditional family values,” denied any continued need to redress sexism in society, and cited accountability to taxpayers or academic rigor in their attempts to destroy discussions of lesbianism and feminism in Women’s Studies programs and campus women’s centers. The attacks highlighted the need to support feminism within the university system, the usefulness of feminist alternative educational sites outside the financial and hierarchical constraints of mainstream society, and the dual position many feminists held within the academy and the community.

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During the spring term in 1982 at California State University at Long Beach (CSULB), a small group of born-again Christian women pushed to reverse feminist influences on higher education. Differing with Betty over the role of religion and feminism, they targeted her and her introductory-level course “Women and Their Bodies.” Betty had witnessed members of Grace Brethren Church’s student group, Zeta Chi, labeling pro-choice advocates as “sinners” and gays and lesbians as “sick” at their meetings. With her history of commitment to Christianity as emancipatory and to fighting male bias, she spoke out. Her subsequent public arguments with the group’s campus preacher further riled Grace Brethren parishioners. Part-time student Jessica Reynolds Shaver, her friend JoEllen Allen, and others objected to the “lesbian emphasis” in courses, a lack of courses espousing “traditional American values,” and a women’s center director (Denise Wheeler) who refused to display anti-ERA literature in the waning days of the ERA campaign. These women first complained to the dean for educational policy and the program director. Shaver proposed to Women’s Studies Director Dr. Sondra Hale that Allen be a “traditionalist” candidate for instructor and that the program include courses on marriage and the family. The program had already offered home economics and a course called “Mothers and Daughters,” but the curriculum reflected Hale’s view of the program as the “academic arm of the feminist movement.” In an interview with the student newspaper, Shaver argued in favor of traditional courses:

I’d just like to see a lot of enthusiasm for the traditional family. …

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4 Betty Brooks had brought her “Community Organizing” class to meetings of Grace Brethren Church’s student group, Zeta Chi. See her “A New Kind of Harrassment [sic]” 5.
It didn’t come naturally for me to be a homemaker. But instead of becoming a feminist, I became a Christian.

The extreme feminist viewpoint which I see reflected in the textbooks used in Women’s Studies is against male leadership in society and in the home and that male leadership was given by God.

Asked whether she would like to see the Women’s Studies Program closed down, Shaver preferred to introduce a “balanced” discussion of all sides but would “like to see it eliminated if it’s going to continue as it is.”^ Initially, Shaver’s fundamentalist-minority activism went through university channels arguing for inclusion of her perspective.

Tapping into the swelling New Right movement provided the power to influence administrators. The initial protesting group wrote to conservative organizations and legislators, and by spring break, their ranks expanded to include the state chair of Phyllis Schlafly’s Eagle Forum and aides to Republican Senators Ollie Speraw and Bill Richardson and Assemblyman Dennis Brown. Attorney Thomas Burton, who defended the Eagle Forum, would add this case to his record of attacks on sex education in the public schools and against the California Commission on the Status of Women.7

According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Women’s Rights Project, this coalition pressured university administrators with threats of budgetary cuts.8

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6 William Orton and Vicky Hendley, “A Voice from the ‘Right,’” The Summer Union: The Student’s Newspaper Cal State University Long Beach, 2.2 (July 6, 1982): 1, 7, 8 from LLC Betty Brooks file.
7 Burton claimed that it was illegal to force taxpayers “to support feminist indoctrination and propaganda” because the program “constitutes political and sectarian influence from which the law requires the university to be free.” The alleged influence was that “lesbianism naturally follows from feminist demands. ... It is a repudiation of the traditional and natural partnership of the sexes and a perverse deflection of the natural law for political ... ends. It is a flouting of the moral order and a challenge to the very heart of society: the biological family unit.” By naturalizing traditional social interactions, Burton conveniently elided social construction and the concept of change or plurality in American society. Presumably the naturalness of his Christian values did not make foisting a New Right agenda on the California public school system an illegal “political and sectarian influence.” Hale, 40.
8 ACLU Women’s Rights Project, “Cal State Long Beach Women’s Studies Program vs. Cal State University Administration” LLC Betty Brooks file.
President Steven Horn, Academic Affairs Vice President Glendon Drake, Associate Vice President John Haller, and Social and Behavioral Sciences Dean Simeon Crowther met with them and agreed to a curriculum review for “Women and Their Bodies.” The review was favorable. Undaunted, Shaver pursued matters with the support of Senator Speraw’s office. Over the next months Betty’s well-enrolled summer classes were cancelled; she was notified that her fall courses were being withdrawn; and the dean of continuing education, Donna George, removed Betty’s name from catalogue listings for four courses she had regularly taught during her seven years there. Citing “substantial pressure at every level above [himself],” Crowther usurped the established authority of the Women’s Studies Advisory Committee to hire teachers and determine qualifications. He suspended the only full-time position in Women’s Studies, held by Sondra Hale, which left him in a position to appoint a new director.9

Accusations capitalized on definitions of professionalism that were not designed for academic discussions of sexuality and were too traditional to encompass a field born from a transformative political movement. A female student who retained anonymity claimed that Betty had shown the class “six close-up slides of male and female genitalia, one of which she (Brooks) said was of herself” and “[s]he showed films of people masturbating. There were films of couples having sex, including one of group sex, one of

9 Orton and Hendley 1. Vicky Hendley, “Crowther Cuts Women’s Studies,” The Summer Union: The Student’s Newspaper Cal State University Long Beach, 2.2 (July 6, 1982): 1, 8 from LLC Betty Brooks file. Hale had been hired as an outsider instead of a founding faculty member, but her support of the program’s feminist teaching methods made her a liability to the administration and prevented restructuring of the department that would divorce it from community activism. See Sherna Berger Gluck, “Reflections on Linking the Academy and the Community,” Frontiers, 48.
male homosexuals, and two of lesbian couples having sex.” Another charged that a guest lecturer “partially stripped in class to demonstrate a pelvic examination.” Such visuals, like the “cunt slides,” stood in for professionally produced sex education materials, which were in the embryonic stage of development and distribution.

A male administrator whose work exposed gender and racial inequality, nevertheless reacted against Betty and the Women’s Studies Program with an argument that valued “toughness” as the binary opposite of politically influenced course content and methods. Haller, who had published in the 1970s on scientific racism and on misogynist Victorian-era physicians, attacked two of Betty’s one-unit weekend extension courses (on basic self-defense and on women’s sexuality) among programs, which he asserted, “weakened [Women’s Studies] by personal awareness classes that are throwbacks to the early 1970s.” Claiming a need for academic rigor, he imagined a change in climate:

For years these programs had this siege mentality ... having to justify themselves to people and also trying to sensitize people to a need for such a program. I suppose that was all well and good because it served a function. But they need to go beyond that sensitizing and awareness approach to tough academic programs. Haller’s interpretation made two assumptions: sensitizing people to societal problems was not compatible with academic discourse, and all courses should conform to an

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10 Hendley 8.
11 Betty Brooks listed her course materials in “A New Kind of Harrassment” as Our Bodies Our Selves, Women, Health and Choice, Women and the Crisis in Sex Hormones, How to Stay Out of the Gynecologist’s Office and audio-visuals “showing the sexual anatomy, home and hospital births, early abortions and some sexually explicit material,” 6.
13 Carvajal.
unspecified “tough” standard regardless of department or number of credits. A self-defense course that would be appropriate for Betty’s initial department (physical education) could not conform to Haller’s perspective, which came from his background as a historian. Likewise, sexuality studies was generally too cutting-edge for history departments in the early 1980s.

A statement from core faculty member Sherna Gluck maintained that antifeminism and male-centrism remained immediate problems within academia:

The attack on feminists and on women’s studies comes as no surprise in the current political climate. We are witnessing the systematic dismantling of all efforts that have been developed over the past decade-and-a-half to remedy social, economic, and political injustice: the ERA has been defeated, desegregation of schools halted, and reproductive rights attacked. What is a surprise is that a small group of religious bigots have met so little resistance from the University Administration. They seem to have easily succeeded in undermining our right to teach Women’s Studies; our right to challenge the basically misogynistic perspective of all disciplines.”

Following an implicit belief that feminism had outlived its usefulness, the vice president and associate vice president announced plans to “restructure” the Women’s Studies Program and alter the women’s center, reducing basic services such as rape victim and sexual harassment counseling and dividing the center’s services among other groups. In fact, the women’s center was closed and replaced with a center for the continuing education of women, which was merged with an adult reentry program, moving it far from harassment and rape issues.

Beyond the need for women’s services was the question of academic freedom. Faced with an unsympathetic administration, the ACLU filed a lawsuit on behalf of the

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14 Hendley 8.
Women’s Studies Advisory Committee, core faculty, and students on August 4, 1982, charging the CSULB administration with violations of First and Fourteenth Amendment rights respecting academic freedom, due process, equal protection, and sex discrimination. University officials responded by reappointing Dr. Sondra Hale, and rehiring Betty for the fall semester after she underwent “sensitivity” training. The vaginal exam was permitted to remain part of the course, undermining assertions that academic subjects precluded live demonstrations. The dean, however, retained control of the program. Shaver vowed to gather more complaints against Betty. Senator Speraw pushed further than Shaver’s asserted desire for “balance” through multiple perspectives. He appealed to a normatively constructed myth of “objectivity,” arguing, “I think that when she’s an avowed homosexual she loses her objectivity about the subject matter and then in theory she’s an unfit teacher.” The ACLU pursued the case and amended it to include Betty as a plaintiff alleging sex discrimination, which set a precedent that influenced responses to attacks on academic feminists also occurring at Stanford, Berkeley, and UC Santa Cruz.

16 “Chronology of the Attack on CSULB Women’s Studies Program” Mazer. The chronology was probably authored by Betty Brooks, as many of its sentences and paragraphs appear in her “A New Kind of Harrassment,” found at LLC in the Better Brooks file. Betty Brook’s partial reinstatement was contingent on “counseling by school administrators that her classes would be under surveillance for ‘improper use of language’, ‘questionable teaching style’, and lack of proper ‘political perspective’.” ACLU Women’s Rights Project. Ironically, rather than focusing the counseling on academic rigor, Betty told ACLU attorney Susan McGrievy that the campus dean lectured her on “sensitivity.” Doreen Carvajal, “L.B. Women’s Studies Instructor to Resume Teaching Duties in Fall,” Press Telegram (August 21, 1982), n.p. in LLC Betty Brooks file.

17 Carajal, “L.B.”

18 Those attacked were Professors Estelle Freeman at Stanford, Merle Woo at Berkeley, and Nancy Shaw at Santa Cruz. ACLU Women’s Rights Project. “Long Beach Instructor Joins ACLU Suit” L.A. Herald Examiner (Sept. 14, 1982), n.p. in LLC Betty Brooks file.
While ACLU attorney Susan McGrievy constructed a case for individuals' legally guaranteed freedoms, Schlafly and other evangelicals portrayed Betty's work and feminism generally as state-supported perversions that should be purged to better society. An *Oklahoma City Times* editorial by Schlafly appeared under the dual headlines “It's Time Taxpayers Find Out What Universities Are Doing” and “ACLU Leaps to the Defense of Lesbianism Course.” Schlafly first addressed the problem of using “women” as a euphemism for “feminist”:

The women's studies program ... was pawned off on an unsuspecting university as something to benefit all women. The female faculty, however, converted it to a program to promote radical feminist-lesbian women's goals and values to the exclusion of traditional women's goals and values.

Feminists believed that feminism would benefit all women, and founding faculty in 1973—rather than later members—took feminism as their interpretive lens. Like incipient ethnic studies programs, which were born of racial power movements and so incorporated those politics for analysis instead of relying on perspectives that assumed whiteness, the academic study of women—initiated by feminists during the growth of the Women's Liberation Movement—rejected previous methods, which were skewed by sexism, in favor of creating feminist analyses. A CSULB Women's Studies faculty member wrote the founding preamble to the National Women's Studies Association Constitution of 1977, tightly linking her academic field with feminism:

Women's Studies owes its existence to the movement for the liberation of women; the feminist movement exists because women are oppressed. ... The uniqueness

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20 Phyllis Schlafly, “ACLU leaps to the defense of lesbianism course,” *Oklahoma City Times* (October 15, 1982): 42.
of Women's Studies has been and remains its refusal to accept sterile divisions between academy and community, between the growth of the mind and the health of the body, between intellect and passion, between the individual and society. ...Women's Studies ... is equipping women not only to enter society as whole, as productive human beings, but to transform the world to one that will be free of all oppression. 21

Feminists tried to connect numerous issues, issues often seen as separate, and responded to hostility against feminism by adopting the more neutral term Women's Studies.

In a move that continuously haunted the Women's Movement, Schlafly wedded feminism to pornography and to sexual acts she deemed to be perverse. She interpreted feminist books about sexuality, relationships, and lesbianism as pornographic, claiming that like a domino effect “they advise women how to become lesbians and to engage in every type of perverted sex, including group sex, orgies, bestiality, sadomasochism and bondage.” Betty’s experience as a target of the Right led her to recognize that because members of the right labeled sexuality as “pornography,” “feminists cannot be on the side of the anti-pornographers. To be on that side is to put us with the right.” 22 In the 1980s, feminists like Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin and groups like Women Against Pornography or Women Against Violence in Pornography and the Media sought legal channels to curtail the distribution of pornography. Most famously, MacKinnon drafted an ordinance for Indianapolis, which Stop-ERA, anti-abortion rights activists backed. Going against this current of antipornography feminism, Betty headed the Feminists Against Censorship Taskforce and fought against a similar Los Angeles

County ordinance, which had been drafted with MacKinnon’s help by the County Commission on the Status of Women.23

Schlafly concluded that taxpayers should inform themselves about how state funds were used, lest they support extremism and perversion.24 Echoing the entwining of conservative morality with money, local evangelicals tried to rally Californians with a petition against Women’s Studies titled “Taxpayers for Academic Responsibility Petition.”

The CSULB case was one example of conservative troops in an ongoing cultural war seeking an academic podium. National media attention, pressure from state legislators, and local activism based at Grace Brethren Church probably influenced CSULB’s dean to prolong conflict by changing the hiring criteria to deny Betty’s rehiring in 1984. These forces wanted to see universities espouse conservative values through traditional education. Betty’s unabashed commitment to radical lesbian feminism and community ties brought change to academic programs, change that was grating to less radical people.

Feminists like Betty promoted experiential learning in the academy and in non-university feminist groups like Califia. Feminist techniques filtered into universities as nonhierarchical, student-focused learning with consciousness-raising (CR). Califia participants remember that throughout Betty’s trials, they wrote letters of support, listened to Betty interviewed regularly on KPFK Pacifica radio, and talked about the

24 Schlafly 42.
threat of the Right at camps. They and other area feminists represented the dual strategy of providing feminist education within mainstream university structures and through alternative community channels. Part-time faculty frequently bridged the academy and the community. Within three years after the initial attack, “all part-time faculty associated with teaching women’s sexuality, health issues, self-examination, or the course on the lesbian were pushed out … by the dean.” The protracted ACLU struggle emphasized the injustice that all of the teachers fired from Women’s Studies were lesbians, framing the suit as “a classic case of the right’s confrontation with radical lesbian feminism.” Betty successfully won back pay and reinstatement but continued to receive harassment and threats to her job. Conservative politicians, administrators, students, and parents have continued to the present to threaten feminist academic programs that are based on unconventional pedagogy and discussions of sexuality and autonomy.

PERSONAL AND POLITICAL FALLOUT OVER CUSTODY

The clash between radical lesbian feminist ideals and traditional societal mores affected the lives of Marilyn and Irene when Marilyn’s white sibling, Sharon, alleging that her ex-husband was terrorizing her, fled from the Bay Area to keep their son. Sharon’s struggles involved Marilyn, Irene, and Califia Community. The search that her ex-husband and former mother-in-law led brought to the fore fissures within feminism around race, sexual orientation, and disbelief when women identify as battered. The case also revealed the negative attitudes that courts and law enforcement held toward poor lesbian mothers and radical feminism.

25 Transcripts for WOC 29, Carla Seco 25, and Alice Myers 7.
26 Sharon L. Sievers, “What Have We Won, What Have We Lost?,” Frontiers 44.
Sharon Murphy's version of her ordeal emphasized a court system that was wholly unresponsive to wife-beating, permitted costly nuisance lawsuits, and then penalized her for her poverty. Around 1975 she and Guy Johnson, the son of African-American feminist Maya Angelou, had married. They divorced after a year, when their son was nine months old. Marilyn alleged in her column in the Lesbian News that the divorce followed "a particularly severe beating that left Sharon with a permanent injury to her neck." Sharon corroborated that to a reporter for the feminist newspaper Off Our Backs. She reported that she got a restraining order from the courts but that Johnson "beat her up when she returned to their former home to pick up some belongings." Sharon described the next three years as "daily verbal, emotional, and legal terrorism." "He dragged me into court just about every three months, charging me with being unfit to raise a child properly. He challenged my standard of living, my friends, my attitudes toward child discipline, my approach to health." After Johnson filed for full custody, the courts saw no damage to her son and found Sharon to be a fit mother. The judge awarded custody to Johnson, nonetheless, based on his superior finances and "stable household situation." He was living with a woman who had two children whereas Sharon was a single lesbian. Subsequently, she tried never to be alone when picking up or delivering the boy every other weekend. Marilyn's account elaborated on the one in Off Our Backs: "Sharon had no companion when she picked up Luke [also called Colin] for their 1981 Easter visit and Guy took the opportunity to beat her up as she stood on his front porch in full view of her child." According to these written accounts, Sharon documented the

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beating with photographs, and when court officials told her the next day that violent
behavior toward her did not bear on custody, she fled California with Luke/Colin. They
lived the next four years in Austin, Texas, where she was a counselor at the Center for
Battered Women.28

Written articles and narrators contend that Guy Johnson and Maya Angelou used
legal, media, and private channels to find Colin/Luke and expressed fears for his safety,
characterizing radical feminism as racist and violent while seeking to undermine
Sharon's identification as a battered woman. They filed felony papers for child stealing,
false imprisonment, and contempt of court and initiated a private investigation. Angelou
gave an interview to People Weekly a year after Sharon took Colin/Luke into hiding. The
reporter paraphrased Angelou as claiming, "Sharon has gone underground with the help
of a radical feminist group [then quoted her:] 'All we know about this group is that they
hate men and blacks, and they have my black male grandchild.'"29 According to Marilyn,
Angelou paid private detective Laura Kaufman to attend the July 1982 Califia
Community under an alias to elicit Sharon's whereabouts through conversations and
bribes. Sharon had friends in San Diego and could have been there. Retrospectively,

28 Murphy, "A Small Injustice," 52. Marilyn Murphy, "It Could Have Been Worse," The Lesbian News
29 Cheryl McCall, "Maya Angelou: The writer-poet continues to find art in her life as she makes an
emotional return to her native South," People Weekly 17.9 (March 8, 1982): 92, 95-96, 99, here 95-96. This
quotation demonstrates a mischaracterization of Califia work on race relations and falsely implies that
critique of male behavior would create a climate that endangered boys. The separatist strain in Califia with
age-limit for boys were partially based on women's discomfort at adolescent boys looking at women, but
the separatist strain in Califia stood in marked contrast to black feminist lesbian groups like Combahee
River Collective and did generate some concern among Califia participants. Negative attitudes toward male
behavior led one narrator of color, Donna Gómez, to contrast her love for male relatives with being "in a
community that truly, truly hates men! That doesn't want them anywhere near. And maybe it was that
particular space, maybe they didn't feel that way in their, normal living space. I don't know. But ... it
presents a problem sometimes. What do I do with that?" WOC transcript 55.
Marilyn seems to have traced the detective agency’s actions and wrote that they used San Diego FBI connections and legal council to obtain welfare, food stamp, and school district records and to look at local, state, and police intelligence files. Marilyn related that the police intelligence file on Califia described Califia as a “railroad,” perhaps supporting the detectives’ hopes that Califia women would have transported Sharon to safety like abolitionists helped slaves to escape the violence of slavery. In 1983, the detectives subpoenaed the telephone records of Marilyn and a number of San Diego friends, such as Diane. They delivered threatening letters to Murphy relatives, Califia women, and other friends in California; Austin, Texas; and Tulsa, Oklahoma, which accused them of withholding information. Diane remembers that Angelou called her directly asking for any lead and reminding her that it would be a federal offense to withhold information. Ultimately, their connections failed to find Sharon. Marilyn reported that, inspired by est training, Sharon’s ex-lover Susan Orliss gave Angelou Sharon’s contact information in early June 1985.

30 Murphy, “It Could Have Been Worse,” 53-54.
31 Diane Germain follow-up 8.
32 Murphy, “A Small Injustice,” 52. In October 1971, Werner Erhard started est, Erhard Seminars Training, in San Francisco as part of the “human potential movement.” About 250 people participated at a time in two weekend sessions, in a process that tore them down emotionally in order to build them back up. Participants paid around $250 and agreed to remain in a room for about fifteen to eighteen hours listening to insults that they were worthless and lectures on improving their lives. The sessions were deliberately controlled, so that participants’ access to the bathroom was circumscribed, they got one meal during the day, and they were put in situations to induce terror and confusion. Trainers taught them that each person creates and is responsible for everything that happens in his/her life (diseases, crimes or abuse against one, Jews responsible for what happened to them in the Holocaust, etc.). Only by accepting their nature and realizing that they freely chose everything that happened to them, could participants become content with the way they were. Although est claimed to further freedom and responsibility, its process involved an authoritarian attention to every participant behaving exactly the same way. Mark Brewer, “We’re Gonna Tear You Down and Put You Back Together,” Psychology Today (August 1975) at http://www.rickross.com/reference/est/estpt8.html and Robert Todd Carroll, “est and Werner Erhard,” on The Skeptic’s Dictionary at http://skeptidic.com/est.html and Stephen Pressman, “Enlightenment in Two
Angelou defended her actions to a skeptical national feminist community. She denied that her son could brutalize anyone. In an *Off Our Backs* interview after she had taken Colin/Luke from Austin and given him to his father, Angelou praised her son’s work setting up halfway houses for mothers in prison and strongly implied that Sharon falsely claimed that Johnson had abused her in order to gain help within the battered women’s movement. Angelou stressed the bicultural boy’s need to learn about black life from black relatives. She claimed that when she served Sharon with legal papers to take Colin/Luke, “all the people I met in Austin … were white women,” implying that the small circle of shelter workers she saw reflected all of Sharon’s acquaintances. Sharon told Marilyn that during her first telephone conversation with her son, “he laughed while telling her that his father asked him if he had ever seen Lesbians with guns.” In contrast to the nonviolent Califia atmosphere, which shunned toy guns as part of its opposition to violence, Johnson seemed to have conceived of radical lesbian feminists as a paramilitary group. It is more surprising, however, that Angelou might conclude from her knowledge of feminism and limited contact with Califia that either posed a threat to her grandson.

The prosecution capitalized on portrayals of lesbians as violent. Rejecting the photographic record of medical treatment following Sharon’s beating(s) and expert testimony and affidavits supporting Sharon’s depiction of herself as a battered woman,
District Attorney Sam McKee claimed that, instead, she forced her way into Johnson's home the day she picked up Colin/Luke in 1981 and caused Johnson injury. Not surprisingly, after she had fled with her son, legal custody remained with Johnson. Sharon had to pay a detective to be present whenever she saw the boy to ensure that she would not flee with him again.

The conflict between Sharon, Johnson, and Angelou over custody and charges of battering or racism touched Califia women's lives personally and siphoned energy from feminist efforts. As such, it stands as an example of disagreement, which polarized feminists across the country and contributed to wearing down Califia leaders. Like Betty, Marilyn and Irene worked on the collective through the 1982 camps and then left Califia. Marilyn and Irene continued feminist work through other venues while also taking a break. They advertised a feminist education program from their home in 1983 and then turned to traveling for their retirement. Marilyn wrote a column in the *Lesbian News* called "Lesbianic Logic" from August 1982 through June 1991, which was her forum for continuing radical lesbian feminist education. At subsequent Califia camps, they attended as paying registrants but did not return to the collective, which left the group in the hands of long-time attendees and new recruits.

**"PATRIARCHY MADE SIMPLE" AND U.S. TERRORISM**

While Marilyn wrote for the broader Los Angeles lesbian community, Betty Jetter filled an important role in conveying antisexist, prolesbian teaching at Califia that

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36 Murphy, “It Could Have Been Worse,” 53.
37 Marilyn and Irene advertised their Southern California Center for Women’s Education by February 1983 in the *Lesbian News* 8.7 (Feb 1983): 19. From July 1983 through June 1984, their SCCWE advertisement indicates that they were traveling, as do some of Marilyn’s columns about their travels.
stressed social construction and political choice as means for feminist empowerment. Although Betty Jetter was a constant attendee from Califia’s beginning, she did not officially join the collective until 1984, after Betty Brooks, Marilyn, and Irene had left. That is when Betty Jetter’s participation in NOW waned, including her leadership there in CR about sexism. Shifting her attention to CR at Califia, she developed a participation session analyzing gendered language and a presentation called “Patriarchy Made Simple,” both of which continued binary oppositions and appeals to align one’s identity with defined feminist politics.⁸

Seven narrators vividly remember CR discussion sessions that Betty led about misogyny and volunteer her name as someone who was versed in feminist politics and worked hard to promote a lesbian feminist space.³⁹ She would get attendees to shout out stereotypically masculine and feminine characteristics while she wrote them on a big chalkboard. Diane explains:

[W]e looked at the big lists, of course, all the good things were on the masculine side, like strength and leadership and courage; and on our side were all these little weak, little wobbly things, niceness [in a high-pitched voice] and kindness [laugh] and like that, and cuteness.⁴⁰

The whole group would then deconstruct the lists by considering examples that proved that they already had the positive traits. In another list exercise, Betty solicited all of the

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³⁸ Betty Jetter transcript 7-10.
³⁹ Transcripts for Jane Bernstein 24, Betty Brooks 10 (on Betty Jetter’s fit over her son attending), Josy Catoggio 39 (on Betty asserting one must be lesbian or celibate to be feminist) and 56 (on working hard), Diane Germain 13-14 (on how great Betty’s interactive “Patriarchy Made Simple” presentation was), Kal Kalivoda 7 (on “Patriarchy Made Simple”), Bonnie Kaufman (pseudonym) 1, 14 (on experience) and 4 (presentation on language), Ariana Manov 22 (presentation), and Caria Seco 5 (NOW CR).
⁴⁰ Diane F. Germain transcript 14.
derogatory names that women and men are called. Kal remembers the impact of this exercise:

It was kinda like, yeah sure, yeah we’ll do this. And this is a big blackboard; she wrote small. Men, women, or the other way around. And the women’s list would get longer and longer until there was no black space on the board when the men’s list kinda stopped. Talk about impact. … because you don’t even realize. And you have to take it in from the time you walked across the ash you know. You don’t realize. And that’s the kind of impact that the sexism stuff had. And yeah women knew some of this stuff, but as far as what was infiltrating their lives from the time they could talk or the blue and the pink bonnets and all that crap. … But a lot of these women that attend[ed], you know, they had ten percent awareness up here, but the rest they accepted as a natural part of life until we started talking about this stuff. And with that many women in the groups all kinds of stuff came up, you know.41

Central to Kal’s and Diane’s memories was Betty’s assessment that language shapes norms of thinking and behavior. Since patriarchal power perpetuates dualistic language, feminists needed to empower themselves by creating language to change reality and to counter social conditioning.

Betty led women to deconstruct how meanings were socially formed through language, then enforced and accepted. She engaged in a practical application of poststructuralist cultural studies and literary criticism with prescriptive logic toward a political goal. Kathy Wolfe videotaped one of these presentations at a Califia “Autumn Celebration of Women’s Culture” held Thanksgiving weekend 1985. Using national and personal examples of leaders’ power, Betty argued that “reality” is a community consensus based on “the people who actually have power to make things happen.” Reagan’s use of the word “peace” to mean sending the U.S. military into Lebanon redefined the word to include violence, and Americans who repeated his interpretation of

41 Kal Kalivoda transcript 7-8.
military action in Lebanon as "defending the peace" complied in enforcing a new meaning for the word. Betty worked at the Jet Propulsion Lab, and she related that her boss came down ... to check some things out that weren’t working right, and he started using the word "sucker." And nobody in our group had used this word "sucker." He said, "OK, run this sucker up, and let’s see what we get out of it. I don’t believe that sucker is really doing that. Um, God, we’ve got to get this sucker fixed." ... So about two days later, one of the guys in the group said, "I can’t get this sucker to work." And for the next two weeks, everybody in the lab was using the word "sucker," and I was very much aware of how their language had changed. And the worst part of it, being aware myself, I found myself after two weeks, I had said something like, "Oh God, I guess I’ll get this sucker written down." [laugh] And I looked [at] myself and said, “I did it too.” [hands on the sides of her head] What we had done was acknowledge that this person had the power to change our language. And that’s how language is created. One of the things that women have to do, feminist women in particular, in order to empower ourselves, is to start to create language that is empowering to us. I could do a talk on sexist language as well and show where our language is especially degrading to women or making women invisible or that sort of thing. Our language also creates our reality for us as well.\(^42\)

The concept of power maintained through language was not new even before the entrance of Foucault’s work into the United States. Suffragists like Lucy Stone and historians like Mary Beard preceded widespread concern among civil rights workers and Second Wave feminists about how naming and linguistic racism or sexism contributed to oppression.\(^43\) Derided as “politically correct” by conservatives and as no longer necessary by some male administrators, the power in the association between language and a host of hierarchical meanings were a starting point for Betty.


\(^{43}\) Betty utilized Casey Miller and Kate Swift’s *Words and Women* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976) and Dale Spender’s *Man Mae Language* (London; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980). Miller and Swift introduced the idea of polarization, 64. These authors, like feminists Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde, focused on sexist language and the creation of more egalitarian expression that valued oppressed people.
To connect language with struggles against patriarchal misogyny, Betty focused on “polarities,” or dualistic concepts that place positive value on one word and negative weight on its opposite. The polarities exercise exemplifies a radical feminist basis for asserting mutually constituted oppressions, with the strengths and weaknesses that entails. Starting with the opposites “male” and “female,” audience members and Betty added antonym pairs according to the positive or negative value they thought the words had in the U.S. Under the “male” column, they put “strong,” “heterosexual,” “smart,” “master,” “boss,” “good,” “white,” etc., while the “female” column got “weak,” “homosexual,” “stupid,” “slave,” “worker,” “bad,” “black,” etc. Betty then associated maleness with the other words in that column and femaleness with the words under it. This generated an ideological basis for coalition work among women, homosexuals, working-class people, and people of color based on a superstructure of shared oppression.

By asserting that axes of oppression are generated together and interconnected, the exercise implied that one could substitute one oppression for another and discouraged conceiving of the ways in which oppressions have also developed differently. In the early 1980s, women of color were objecting to this form of feminist analysis as inherently white.\(^4^4\)

The way that Betty explained opposition to social justice work as based on dualistic thinking set up a program for reform:

So that people who don’t want to be in this category [places hand on negative side], say, “Hey, there’s something wrong with this because I know that this category is not [one of the] negative aspects.” Some of these, for instance, if you’re homosexual and female, and you say to yourself—or male for that

\(^4^4\) Jakobsen in Kennedy and Beins.
Betty's talk fit with and extended Marilyn's sexism presentation. Betty introduced three concepts. She tried to raise women's consciousness of why they would encounter resistance from people who want to maintain the status quo. She considered men's perspectives and the strains and limitations that patriarchal enforcement places on them. Like Gramsci's concept of hegemony, her later elaboration asserted that men participated in enforcement that actually opposed their own interests. By using "homosexual and female" as the example, she continued Marilyn's content of making homophobia an integral part of the sexism presentation.

Explaining the maintenance of socially constructed meanings both institutionally and individually gave Betty's presentation a model that maintained agency for each woman (and man) to agitate for change. Betty divorced masculinity and femininity from biological determinism by defining them as stereotypes and claiming that reproductive variations were circumscribed differences. "Masculinity," by her definition, is "an artificial concept in which men try to appear to be more than they are" while "femininity" is "an artificial concept in which women try to make themselves less, so that he can appear to be more." Turning to social enforcement, she described male bonding at length as a regulatory device to which men and women acquiesce that keeps them in their roles

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Kathy Wolfe, Califia Community master videotape 6 "Betty Jetter."
through fear of ridicule, ostracism, or violence. This universal model led Betty and her audience to discuss gang rape, incest, battery, objectification of women through pornography, sexual harassment, control of women’s reproduction, and economic deprivation. Betty labeled crimes against women “terrorist activities,” tightly linking “male bonding” to a term that was loaded with political connotations stemming from the Iran hostage crisis in 1979 and considerable anti-American terrorism during Reagan’s presidency.

Having produced feminist definitions of terms and issues, Betty denounced all men as active participants in terrorist activities or passive collaborators who did not marshal the courage to stop male terrorists. Men benefited by getting access to money, freedom of movement, and leadership even though their behavior was constrained by pressure to purge anything feminine from themselves. Many women assisted terrorism by bolstering men and excusing their bad behavior instead of holding them responsible for male-perpetrated atrocities. After years of Betty’s “Man-Hating as Taboo” workshop, her analysis of gender terrorism met a receptive audience.

Dissent from audience members occurred when Betty made the final links to body presentation and sexual preference. The ensuing dialogue considered motive and audience. Betty’s condemnation of make-up and fashion as passive acquiescence promoted debate over how to determine whether one’s actions conformed to patriarchal,

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46 “So I call woman-hating, then, which is the male-bonding, a universal group activity that all males participate in to some degree or another in order to assure them their selves within the male hierarchy. The need for that is that if they don’t bond together to do it, they can be trashed by their own group. Look at what’s going to happen then is that they will be excluded from this group—excluded from male privilege and excluded from being able to think of themselves with some esteem because they will be thought of as women then. They will have to join the group of as women. That’s one of the reasons that men are not loyal to women.” Kathy Wolfe, Califia Community master videotape 7 “Betty Jetter.”
demeaning norms or stemmed from personal desire and—in the case of “dyke fashion”—promoted group solidarity and a sense of community. By appealing to motive, Betty suggested that make-up and fashion could depend on the context and be transgressive.

Betty concluded the sexism presentation with the assertion that institutional change was better than personal solutions, but becoming lesbian was a personal solution with profound political value because woman-identification undermined misogyny:

See now, being lesbian is a real political thing in that we have learned to love women. I mean imagine that! ... But some personal solutions, like they call the personal is political, like being lesbian is a personal thing that we’re doing, and it’s very political. I really believe that heterosexual women have got to choose between sex and feminism. Are they really going to go to bed with men and give their energy to men, or are they going to choose feminism?

Immediately in this videotaped version of the presentation, someone questioned whether women could not enjoy the feelings that heterosexual relationships generated while still being feminists. For Betty, no motive could rehabilitate heterosexual relationships in the current context. Betty’s emphasis on social construction and her assertion that (at that time) all men participated in misogyny reached its radical conclusions in the Second Wave definition of lesbianism as a sexual choice:

See, I think that what we are is culturally induced, and being lesbian is a political decision, and that your feelings can be changed. You could be a heterosexual [directed toward a lesbian audience member] woman if you want to. ... Just change the way you feel. There’s some assumption that we can’t change the way we feel. Of course we can change the way we feel.

Although Betty condemned feminists who engaged in heterosexuality, it is worth noting that earlier in the presentation, she had already conceded that she bowed to pressure to

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47 Kathy Wolfe, Califia Community master videotape 8 “Betty Letter.”
48 Josy Catoggio also remembers Betty propounding that feminists must be lesbian or celibate. Transcript 39.
wear a bra because if she did not, the staring got “to be really terrible.”

Betty’s prescriptive conclusion was her ideal, which temporarily reversed the value placed on heterosexuality compared to homosexuality in order, ultimately, to disrupt oppressive dualistic conditions. She associated changeable feelings about sexual desire with resistance to monogamy and jealousy as analogous places in which women should recondition themselves. There was no discussion of the difficulty women could face disassociating themselves from linguistic, cultural, and affective forces that promoted heterosexuality as satisfying. The lines were drawn along mutually opposed identities, and there was no place for fluidity. Betty’s presentation reflected a desire among many feminists for a homogeneous political community at least until axes of oppression ceased to exist. In a mirror image of the New Right’s morally dichotomous assertion of compulsory heterosexuality, they advocated exclusive lesbianism as the good.

This view of people’s capacity to control their sexual feelings underlines a form of lesbian feminist emphasis on sexual “preference” rather than a fixed “orientation” and disagreement over the importance of sexual expression in people’s lives. Critics of lesbian feminism have claimed that defining lesbianism as a political “woman-identification” stripped it of sexuality. A strain of lesbian feminism was antisex or willing to dismiss sexuality for “higher” goals. Rather than be celibate, however, many lesbian feminists advocated sexual expressions within the confines of their perception of political

49 Kathy Wolfe, Califia Community master videotape 8 “Betty Jetter.”
resistance to patriarchy. Betty Brooks' offhand remark—"Everybody was screwing their heads off. Everybody was sleeping with whoever they could sleep with"—has been corroborated by participants who came to Califia to "get laid," memories of women "bringing out" other women, and participants who felt threatened by women hitting on their girlfriends.\(^50\) While people like Betty Brooks encouraged women to take control of their sexuality, others asked them to cede control by conforming to a narrow view of lesbian feminism. Betty Jetter's presentation was in keeping with lesbian feminist theory that characterized sex acts like penetration or sadomasochistic sex as oppressive in and of themselves because of their association with female-male social relations.\(^51\) In addition to the sexism presentation rallying women to fight misogyny, the lesbian feminism at Califia combined a call for women to take control of their sexual expression—\textit{and express it}—for a political ideal.

**ENTERTAINING FEMINIST IDEOLOGIES**

The political uses of sexual expression appeared in a range of Califia activities—from serious presentations on sexism and homophobia to the simultaneous education and merriment while viewing Betty Brooks' cunt slides to aspects of each camp's entertainment. Since its inception, every Califia camp included a talent show on the last night to relax and entertain, to unite women, and to display their abilities.\(^52\) Skits, songs, poetry, and short stories were tinged with ideological utility by invoking and/or poking fun at stereotypes or individuals' quirks and by asserting the rights of beleaguered

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\(^{50}\) Betty Brooks transcript 7.

\(^{51}\) See, for example, Sharon Deevey, "Such a Nice Girl," Nancy Myron and Charlotte Bunch, eds., \textit{Lesbianism and the Women's Movement}, 24.

\(^{52}\) "Janet Stambolian's socialist feminism together with her ability to put ideas into action, resulted in the Talent Show and Banquet" Brooks 5.
groups. Lesbian feminism came to the fore, while issues of Deafness and ethnicity arose as part of reaching out or asserting identity.

**GENDERED SEXUALITY**

A skit that parodied the Palmolive dishwashing liquid commercials of the 1980s reflected Betty Jetter's view of the malleability of sexual identity while raising fissures within lesbian feminism over butch/femme and penetration. Two women appeared in dresses and medium-length wigs, mimicking the normative femininity of the commercial. As the character "Donna Reed" soaked her fingers in "Madge's" dishwashing liquid, she told her friend about preparing for her third Califia camp and characterized Califia as "very political ... they talk about all the -isms ... and it's all women." Madge asked, "All women?" then "Only women?" leaned forward incredulously, sighed, and filed her nails double-time. Donna showed Madge her shopping finds for camp. The "process primer ... tells you how to do everything, and it basically tells you what not to do." And "the most important" was her "Diane Germain underwear." Madge grimaced at the unadorned white cotton underpants amid gales of laughter from the audience, and asked, "Oh God, honey, does everybody have to wear those?" Donna replied, "Only if you're politically correct," and Madge shook her head. Donna confided that she did not know whether to be butch or femme at Califia. Madge decided that since Donna was really femme the last two times, she should be butch this time, and Donna gushed in a high voice, waving her hand, "Oh, I've *always* wanted to be a butch." Switching to a straighter posture, she reflected that she would call herself "Don" and would have to learn to walk like a butch. "See, I gotta take my space when I walk. I've got to walk like I'm going somewhere."
Strutting in her black high heels, Donna determined, “I’ve got to walk like a, like Betty Brooks.” The audience howled as Donna returned to soak her fingers. Continuing her “butch” frame of mind, Donna asked Madge to go to Califia with her. When Madge agreed to be the femme, Donna stamped her feet, waved her hands, and squealed, “Oh, I’m so excited!” Turning to the task of doing Donna’s nails, Donna instructed Madge to leave the first two fingernails “real short.” The performers had to wait as audience members shrieked with laughter for eighteen seconds. Although Madge prolonged the laughter by asking, “I wonder why?” it was clear that Donna was echoing jokes about “lesbian manicures” in order to make reference to a penetration technique.\(^53\)

The skit illustrates lesbian feminists’ ambivalence about butch. When Califia women addressed butch and femme identities at all, they tended to dismiss or joke about it as roles from which the feminist movement had freed women. Assertiveness within a feminist context could be acceptable, although narrators widely remarked that they found Yolanda and Betty Brooks to be intimidating.\(^54\) A narrow line separated forms of assertiveness and capability long associated with masculinity and behavior which irritated or frightened women into labeling it “male-identified.” Butch and femme were problematic, not only because those forms of lesbianism included overtly sexualized interactions, but because they were infused with class, race, and age-based experiences.

\(^{53}\) Kathy Wolfe, “Califia Community 10th Year Anniversary Retreat, November 1985” highlights videotape.
\(^{54}\) For Yolanda’s assertiveness see transcripts for Carol Albright 16, Diane Germain 20, Rose Greene 14, Betty Jetter 31, Lhyv Oakwomon 22, Daniel Raven 4-5, 7, Irene Weiss 11, WOC 47. For Betty Brooks’ assertiveness see transcripts for Josy Catoggio 56, Vicki Leon 46-47, WOC 31, 47. For Betty Brooks and Betty Jetter as jocks see Josy Catoggio transcript 56. For joking about butch behavior see transcripts for Jane Bernstein 9, Karen Merry 22, and Muriel Fisher 12. Muriel Fisher believes that as feminist consciousness dissipated after Califia, more butch-femme has resurfaced in a jocular way. On butch-femme as the only alternative historically: transcripts for Maria Dolores Díaz 24-25, Vicki Leon 15, and Carla Seco 23-24. On rules against being very butch or femme see Daniel Raven transcript 7-8.
At Califia, however, these layers do not seem to have been addressed. Lesbian feminist groups continued to discuss butch and femme despite their belief that such roles were no longer necessary or desirable. Lesbian feminists interacted with butch lesbians to some extent and could become "afire" and "utterly infatuated" with butches. For example, both of Marilyn's lesbian partners were old gay butches. Persistent references to butches likely reflect the problem that lesbian feminists never resolved when one crossed the line between women taking their power and being seen as "acting like men." Likewise, penetration when linked to heterosexual intercourse was deemed to be negative, but leaders like Betty Brooks promoted women's exploration of their vaginas for erotic pleasure and their viewing of their cervixes for education. The skit just described was compatible with narrators' memories of discussion in that it stereotyped butches for laughs that contrasted with normative feminine appearance, a supposedly femme performance also done for humor. Raising the topics of butch and penetration within the skit presented unthreatening ways to laugh at such behavior while keeping it at bay because the characters were new to lesbianism, uninformed, and still in need of a process primer to teach them correct ideology and behavior.

Like the medium of the advertising commercial, popular songs took on feminist subtexts within the context of the Califia talent show. One of the children's performances consisted of singing, air guitar, tambourine and rattle shaking, and drumming to the

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56 Daniel characterizes penetration with dildos as taboo in lesbian feminist sexuality. "Again, there was a hard party line that anything that embodied a patriarchal form of sexuality is bad; so dildos were definitely out. ... I was being told that to have a truly equal sexual relationship, that was a no-no." Daniel Raven transcript 18.
1980s pop song “Man Eater.” Its refrain was “Oh, oh, here she comes / Watch out boy, she’ll chew you up / Oh, oh, here she comes / She’s a man eater.” Barbara remembers it as “funny” and “hilarious” that this song was picked and mentioned it as an example of the ways that feminist teachings, like strong women sticking up for themselves, indirectly filtered down to the boys and girls in the children’s community. Similarly, when a blind woman sang the Beatles’ “She’s Got a Ticket to Ride” to piano accompaniment, the lines took on a double meaning. If the singer was the protagonist, it sounded like a dysfunctional lesbian relationship—“She said that living with me was bringing her down / She would never be free while I was around / … Don’t know why she’s riding so high / She’s gotta do right, she’s gotta do right by me.” If, instead, the singer characterized a male narrator, she opened the song up to a description of women leaving patriarchy to a degree that the Beatles never intended.

In addition to singing mainstream music, Califia participants performed their own compositions. Amid original feminist musical compositions and poetry about love and Wiccan spirituality, Marilyn read a short story she had written. It shows the level of enforced ignorance about sexuality that Betty Brooks was trying to counter. Dressed in an “I Survived Catholic school” T-shirt, Marilyn explained finally learning how babies came out when she was fourteen. The funny, poignant tale addressed the impediments of growing up in a gender-segregated Catholic environment that disparaged sex while

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57 Kathy Wolfe, Califia Community master videotape 12 “Indoor Games, Talent Show with Children part 1.”
58 Barbara Forrest transcript 28.
59 Kathy Wolfe, Califia Community master videotape 13 “Talent Show part 2.”
glorifying procreation. Marilyn had “always” known that babies started as seeds in the mother’s belly, like adult teeth were present as seeds waiting for the mouth to mature, but she wondered for years how the baby got out. The impediment to her puzzling this out was that although her mother insisted that she and her four sisters use “proper language” like “urinate,” “bowel movement,” and “buttocks,” she never named the parts of their genitals. “That part of our body was called … [Marilyn pauses for the audience to supply the term, and they chime in unison] ‘down there.’” Before she started to menstruate, Marilyn’s mother explained in “baby-making” terms that “the womb was preparing for the time that I would marry and have children, and that the unneeded blood came out through a small opening near the one that I urinated from.”

Marilyn looked forward to learning the answer in her Catholic high school biology class. Her teacher, Sister Leo Marie, announced:

Girls, the staff of St. Agnes high school thinks that the subject of human reproduction is best taught by parents. … therefore all of you, especially those of you who do not know what happens [pause] on the wedding night, have a homework assignment [audience laughter]. You are to tell your mothers when you get home from school that Sister said that you were to be told about human reproduction. And please girls, tell this to her privately. Don’t shout it out the minute you get home.

Humiliated that she was ignorant of something her less-intelligent, less-mature, and less-sophisticated classmates knew, she arranged the discussion with her mother. Marilyn recalled that her mother

blushed and stammered through the whole thing. As for me, I was shocked! Boys stuck that thing—that ugly little thing—[pause] down there [audience is in stitches] to make babies? It was impossible. It absolutely could not be true. It couldn’t be true. Well, Mother insisted it was true, but my mother lied to me a lot. … But she said no, it was true, that girls carried half the seed that grows into a baby. Boys carried the other half [pause] in that thing. She neglected to mention
the phenomenon of penile erection, which was just as well given my state of mind [audience roars]. ... I didn’t find out about that until after I was married. She kept insisting that the activity wasn’t that bad if you were married and loved each other. I was unconvinced. ... [B]eing poked by a penis would make me sick to my stomach. I knew it. She said that if you kissed and hugged enough, it would make a penis poke feel OK and that’s why I shouldn’t do much of it before I got married [audience bursts into gales of laughter, and someone asks, “Do much of it?”].

Marilyn related it as a terrible truth to learn that women did not have babies by themselves but were dependent on men. Her “shattered female pride” was little assuaged by learning about “the birth canal” that allowed the baby to leave the womb. She did not learn the term “vagina” until she had her first child. Marilyn highlighted the selective use of “baby-making” terms instead of potentially more neutral scientific names. Like Betty’s presentation, the language of her childhood influenced Marilyn’s perception of human relations. Not only did the story expose the psychological burden resulting from adults keeping her ignorant of procreation, she illustrated how Catholic hostility toward sex predisposed girls to disgust that could interfere with their “proper” maternal role. Marilyn’s sense of extreme repulsion about male genitalia expressed well the lesbian feminist antipathy to any sexual expression that appeared to replicate heterosexual procreative sex.

LINGUISTIC DELINEATIONS

While Marilyn’s use of language promoted the retention of a traditional sex negativity to support lesbian feminism, multilingual usage advanced other interest groups. Linguistic complexity had unintended consequences in singing performances that included sign language. Videotaped sung and signed performances record that Califia

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61 Kathy Wolfe, Califia Community master videotape 15 “Talent Show part 4.”
developed Deaf awareness over time, a phenomenon representative of feminist endeavors nationwide. At the same time, the effect was to increase the visual performance while providing inconsistent language assistance, indicating limits to inclusion.

Two Califia women had taken the time to learn the refrain to Holly Near’s “Something About the Women” from the two interpreters at the camp in 1985 and pressed audience members to sign along. Near’s album liner sets up the song by referring to her introduction “to the idea of signing music for the deaf.” The song begins:

One woman weaves a message
Singing the sounds of silence
Another wheels her chair to the center of the stage
Changing minds and attitudes
With eyes that hear and hands that see
These women working, living independently

and it became a favorite in women’s music about Deaf, blind, and accessibility issues. Much of the presentation involved listening to the recorded music while watching the interpreters’ signs flow into each other, using word-for-word signing rather than ASL. Small decisions altered the uplifting message of the song to include the audience, such as using both hands and sweeping the sign #LOOK or #SEE across the audience to mean, “I see you all-ll-ll” for the chorus beginning: “I look to you.” Literal English also affected the refrain that the two Califia women had learned. “There’s something about the women in my life” became #SOMETHING #ABOUT #WOMEN #IN #MY #LIFE repeated without the #SOMETHING. Using #ABOUT (the adverb meaning “all around”) instead of a prepositional form of #REFER could translate as “some substance is all around the women in my life,” but it flowed well visually.

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In a much more choreographed Diana Ross medley, Diane introduced the African-American ASL interpreter flanked by two white Califia women in wigs, short dresses, and heels as the Triplets. “Love Is Like an Itching in My Heart” started them off with a fourth white woman pretending to bite each of them, to which they exclaimed in sign, along with the lyrics, “the love bug done bit me” and followed much of the song with synchronized signs. The song choices advanced a plot of falling in love, asking the beloved to reciprocate, feeling wronged and heartbroken (“Stop in the Name of Love”), and nonmonogamy (“Falling In and Out of Love”), before concluding with the love bug refrain. The women simultaneously did do-wap dancing during musical interludes, transitions between songs, when one was signing while the other two served as back-up, and sometimes while all signed. Back-up signing, such as an extended #O to mean “ooh, ooh, ooh” in “Falling In and Out of Love,” sought to reproduce the Supremes’ sounds. Overall, the Motown dancing while signing was highly entertaining visually and elicited laughs but rendered the signs less effective as language. If accuracy were not the goal, however, it might be funny in both a hearing and Deaf context when a signer got totally lost or signs slipped. The sign corresponding to “think it over,” for example, morphed into the colloquial hearing sign for “crazy” with the index finger twirling by the temple.

Both the Holly Near signing and the signing for the Diana Ross medley required serious effort on the part of hearing women to sign. They held a lot of visual appeal but far less informational content as Deaf language, simultaneously showing interest in Deaf culture.

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63 Kathy Wolfe, Califia Community master videotape 14 “Talent Show part 3.”
and substantiating Sheryl’s accusation that signing at concerts mainly contributed to hearing women’s entertainment.

Simultaneity in inclusion and exclusion along with lesbian undertones arose in two performances asserting white ethnicity. Both of these shows made it into the highlights section of the “Califia Community 10th Year Anniversary Retreat,” probably because they were memorable repetitions from previous camps. Narrators remember that every year a woman yodeled for the talent show. She was videotaped wearing a full Lederhosen outfit with an Alpine hat as she sang about a woman who could only yodel and was told by her family, “You must go far, far away” because she sang “in the very worst way.” At the first yodeling, children in the audience laughed and the crowd clapped. For the yodeling that concluded the second and third stanzas, she signaled the audience to join in. Finally, she concluded with a fourth stanza devoted entirely to extended yodeling, including triple-time and a wider range. The crowd went wild. The song’s plot of a young woman expelled from her family for asserting her way could have resonated with coming-out stories. Just as important, white ethnicity gained tolerance and even unexpected approbation, which “whiteness” lacked. The yodeling performance was not simply an interesting sound. Rather, it included the effort of bringing and wearing an Alpine costume, which visually asserted the singer’s ethnicity. White women could show ethnic pride as a counterweight to the guilt they expressed in antiracism presentations and in interactions with feminists of color. “White” simply reflected oppressive race relations, whereas having Swiss or other European backgrounds could yield cultural content that the audience considered positive.
The yodeling involved the audience in a silly story and unique sounds. Diane and another woman of French-Canadian descent used humor to spread the lingua franca for even more hilarity. They taught the audience a feminist rendition of “Alouette.” The pair started with a slapstick attempt to find the lyrics they had written somewhere on a butcher paper pad, Diane tearing through the sheets and trying to sing to “antiracism ...” before discarding that page as not her lyrics. An audience member shouted, “Laurel and Hardy move over,” and two women jumped on stage to hold up the lyrics. Swearing that wasn’t part of the act, Diane’s friend, in a “Whoopie I’m a Lesbian” T-shirt, proclaimed, “As long as there are French Canadians at Califia, we will continue this tradition” and called another French Canadian on stage. “So anyway,” she continued, “in the great tradition of the past few years, Diane wants to say something.” Diane waited at attention in her Navy uniform top and white slacks as people chuckled that, of course, she would have something to say. She explained how their version diverged from the theme of plucking a lark’s feathers to learn the names for body parts. They rejected the verb form “I will pluck you [je te plumerai]” because “we don’t pluck birds here [shaking her finger at the audience members as they laugh],” Her friend chimed in, “It’s too nasty. ... It’s not nice and feminine.” Diane agreed, “No, it like gets you dirty, and the birds don’t like it. What we decided to do is we’re going to flatterai, which means to pet.” The friend patted the head of one woman holding the lyrics while Diane stroked the shoulder of the woman holding the other side of the lyrics, who moved loosely as if enjoying the sensation. As they began singing and pointing to the parts of their bodies, the double entendres emerged more clearly. The original lyrics mix up body parts that are only for animals,
like wings and birds' feet (ailes, pattes), with words that also refer to parts of people, such as head, nose, and mouth instead of beak, eyes, neck, and back (tête, nez, and bouche instead of bec, yeux, cou, dos). Substituting words that translate as “caress,” “stroke,” “delight,” or “charm” for “pluck” added a subtext of a woman erotically touching another woman, especially if one likened “bird” to the British slang for woman. Diane further substantiated this interpretation as they moved down the bird by singing cul. The friend broke in, “Cul is ass and queue is tail. Which one do you want?” upon which Diane pivoted to stick her buttocks out at her friend and then at the audience. Everyone sang, “flatterai le cul.”64 The overall effect was cheery and interactive. The French, once an imperial language, was recuperated by Diane, who grew up in Vermont hearing French Canadians disparaged but was far enough removed from that linguistic heritage that she had to depend on her friend to check the vocabulary changes.

FROM WOMEN OF COLOR CAMPS TO CALIFIA WOMEN OF COLOR

THE SPREAD OF LESBIAN OF COLOR SPACES

Interestingly, video recordings of African American women or Chicanas performing at Califia did not parallel the yodeling or the French with traditional ethnic displays, Spanish language, or anything that diverged from general feminist culture. Feminists of color narrators generally appreciated participating in this unmarked cultural expression. They knew, however, that some radical feminists of color scorned Califia as hopelessly white. Califia feminists of color sought a part of the culture and activism going on at Califia for themselves and “for other women of color who would never touch

64 Kathy Wolfe, “Califia Community 10th Year Anniversary Retreat” (November 1985).
the Califia experience.” These women’s work to achieve a space for women of color in Los Angeles’ feminist community pulled them among white leadership in Califia, women of color in Califia, and non-Califia racialized communities, which developed their own lesbian groups. Ultimately, Califia camps became a model for lesbians of color who were organizing in the 1980s.

In 1981, a feminist of color Support, Education, and Action (SEA) group formed the Women of Color Network independently of the collective to plan an annual Califia Women of Color camp. Their biggest challenges were coordinating with the collective and encouraging women of color resistant to Califia to come to one exclusively for women of color. The twenty members of the Network who worked over the next year represented Latina, black, Chinese, and Japanese women and included six members of the 1982 Califia collective. Some Network women participated in Lesbians of Color (LOC, founded in 1978 and holding its own retreats through 1983) and Gay and Lesbian Latinos Unidos (GLLU, formed in 1981), so they recruited there. Attempts to contact American Indian women and lesbians continued without notable success until they received a Native American women’s mailing list and had northern California

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63 Anna María clarifies that by saving mailing addresses of women of color who had attended over the years, they formed “a particular mailing that we’d mail these to those women to just to encourage them to keep coming, but also we started meeting with them. And ... the women of color on the Collective, we traveled up and down the state because we had had Califias in northern California, and we had Califias in San Diego area. ... And we started traveling around meeting with the women of color. And that was the Women of Color Network.” WOC transcript 56. Donna Gómez and Anna María agree that Califia donated money for organizing the first camp for women of color. WOC transcript 57.

64 Based on a comparison of the “Califia Community Women of Color Network—1982” at Mazer and Califia brochures, six Califia WOC Network members were also collective members in 1982, including Ann Carino (1982), Barbara Forrest (1981-2), Anna Maria Soto (1981-2), Marj Suárez (1982), Lillian West (1982).
participants raising consciousness about native rights.\textsuperscript{67} Network women faced resistance from members of their women of color communities who saw Califia as white, liberal, and overall ineffective in attempts at dealing with racism.\textsuperscript{68} Some of these women had attended a past Califia and vowed never to return. "Was the Network a front? Were the collective members sellouts? There were deep wounds in the women's movement—wounds that had opened and not been allowed to heal."\textsuperscript{69} While trying to encourage women of color to participate in a Califia without whites (but tacitly including bicultural women), Network members also had to deal with the Califia collective. Women of color collective members were especially torn, having to negotiate a consensus among "obstructionist" white collective members who wanted a collective member present at Network meetings like they were at Jewish SEA group meetings, Califia women of color who split over whether to accept Califia money, and non-Califia women hostile to Califia sponsorship.\textsuperscript{70} Despite these problems, Network members put together a Califia camp to try to better meet the needs of feminists of color.

When the first camp for women of color kicked off the season on May 28, 1982, the more than eighty women\textsuperscript{71} and their children followed a basic Califia event schedule but allowed flexibility in participation, which was both appreciated and criticized. There were presentations on feminism and class, as well as a political workshop led by María Dolores and Yolanda "to identify, discuss and work in-depth on issues that separate us

\textsuperscript{67} Letter from Eagle Weyant to the Women of Color Network (n.d.), Yolanda Retter Vargas' personal files.
\textsuperscript{68} "Califia Community Women of Color Network—1982" at Mazer. Bunch and Pollack 162.
\textsuperscript{69} Bunch and Pollack 166. Anna María Soto and Lillian West recall that other women of color considered them suspect because of they worked with white women on the Califia collective. WOC transcript 22, 49.
\textsuperscript{70} Bunch and Pollack 162-163.
\textsuperscript{71} "Women of Color Califia, Camp JCA Malibu, CA" at Mazer.
from one another.” Yolanda and María Dolores may have discussed horizontal prejudice among the different women of color groups, but one of the criticisms in the evaluations was that the camps needed “to have a workshop on racism (in-group & intergroup) and not tie it to classism.” Other workshops tackled sterilization abuse and mothering, and films identified some issues and contributions of women of color to American society. Anna María and Donna reminisce that “when the women of color met, you know, we’d meet, and it was wonderful for us too. We had the best time. It was wonderful for us. Our food was better. [laughter] Our music was better. Our dancing was better.” Adapting the Califia format to a setting exclusively for women of color increased their enjoyment by feeding and entertaining women in ways that were already culturally comfortable.

Written evaluations praised the opportunity to network and socialize with a large group of women of color. As usual, there were complaints about the quality of the food and lack of meat, and some women suggested that not hiring kitchen staff would increase the quality and a sense of community (as was done in the Califia camps). Califia Women of Color also received the recurring criticism that the space was not disabled accessible and not secure from men, who in this case were introduced into the setting as kitchen staff. While some evaluators supported the organization of the camp, others felt that there was a lack of responsibility among participants and a lack of leadership from the

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72 “Women of Color Califia Community brochure 1982” from LLC.
73 “Evaluations from the Women of Color Califia” at Mazer.
74 Films were: “La Chicana” by Silvia Morales, “Mitsuye & Nellie” by Mitsuye Yamada and Nellie Wong, “Huelga,” “The Emerging Woman,” “Jade Snow,” “Salt of the Earth,” “Mother is on Strike,” and “The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter.”
75 WOC transcript 57.
collective. Collective members of color were in a tenuous position because they could not count on the support that returning participants to the original Califia camps gave and, instead, had a higher percentage of attendees without respect for the way Califia camps operated.

This first camp generated both hopes for networking and criticism of assimilation to values that had been coded as "white." Some felt secure and anticipated improved conditions because of the way collective members planned time and promoted change and responsibility. One evaluator, however, decried this style as Anglo. As part of a protracted denunciation, she claimed:

Everyone has the white man’s mentality. There is aggression [sic] I sense flowing in the air. There is an imbalance of operating in the state of being & state of doing. I sense everyone is in the state of doing which calls for change & action. This is anglo style of behavior. The western notion of solving a problem is action & change. This is not so in every case, in every issue—it will only lead to more chaos etc. This is the message I keep hearing—CHANGE. I feel so sad, very sad, because all of you—Latinas, Blacks, Asians—your original culture you belong to where I belong. Our culture is far finer & superior—we share same thinking style but you have lost it. I want to do something … how? It was a privilege to be able to spend this weekend here. I made some friendship connections.76

This evaluator separated out certain ways of doing things as “white” or “Anglo” despite the actors being women of color. Like Betty Jetter’s cultural argument for feminist change, this critique also alleged internalized complicity with oppression and posited an alternate racialized culture as superior. Both assumed that fixed, stable, mutually exclusive identities carried opposing political consciousnesses. The underlying excitement at the opportunities that the Califia Women of Color camp presented should not be missed in her closing recognition that she made connections at the camp. Despite

76 “Evaluations from the Women of Color Califia” at Mazer.
both harsh critique and constructive criticism, camps continued yearly with advertising that highlighted politics, networking, and cultural feminist “woman to woman space” for two hundred “sisters of color.”

Feminist lesbian of color groups proliferated in Los Angeles in the 1980s, and despite strained relations with Califia due to perceptions of its whiteness, Califia provided a model for retreats that combined education, political organization, and community formation. The Califia model did reach women who resisted coming to the original Califia camps. Lydia Otero went to one original Califia camp in 1980 or 1981 after she was recruited at an LOC meeting. She attended a National Lesbians of Color retreat conference in 1983 at the same campsite. She considered the LOC conference to be structured after the Califia model, but she felt much more at home there than at the white-majority Califia camp. Lydia Oakwomon, an African-American radical lesbian feminist, was recruited to a Califia Women of Color camp through LOC because she “refused to have anything to do with Califia before then. And the reason why I had refused was because I felt at that time that they were waffling around the issue of racism.” She says, “[S]exist self-betrayal … got to me so deeply I couldn’t think about race.” In retrospect, Lhyv applauds Califia women for having the courage to discuss forms of privilege. She thinks that a woman’s consciousness about racism, classism, and economic status is a barometer for “the degree to which her feminism has affected her

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77 “Women of Color Networking” flyer at LLC.
78 By Lydia’s recollection Lesbians of Color did a lot of social events such as camping trips and parties. She remembers the conference as having a preponderance of drug dealing and use, which she sees as in keeping with the party-atmosphere of the times. Transcript 3, 4.
79 Lydia Otero transcript 1, 9. The National Lesbians of Color Conference was held September 8-11, 1983 in Malibu for 220 women.
life” because “those investments that you have in the male-dominated society or the
privileges that you have” are “your wake-up call.” What she took from Califia was that
its educational style was ideal for creating a model that addressed principles.80

The National Lesbians of Color conference tested that model with its “sisters
bonding” theme in 1983, and leadership included women who had attended Califia
camps. Lhyv and Barbara Forrest corresponded with potential participants, announcing
the conference, soliciting input for topics and presenters, and trying to smooth over
conflict about whether straight women should be presenters.81 Despite the bonding
theme, debate seems to have raged over lesbian separatism and the inclusion of lesbians
of color who could pass as white (like Barbara). Lhyv defended separatism and woman-
space as “political and social tools” with which women could “let off steam about our
experiences of external oppression, confront our internalised oppressions, liberate and
heal ourselves of the de-humanising effects of divide and conquer politics.” She
condemned the exclusion of women of color who appeared white as “vigorous exercises
in futility” attributable to “internalised racism.”82 In a closing address, Kwambe
Omdahda (who was briefly a Califia collective member) met “uproaring cheers of unified
approval” when she pronounced:

We as womyn have come to realize that when we choose to identify as lesbians of
color we are making a choice that is synonymous with power. In order to generate
that power into more effective force we must stop and take a long look at the
ways in which we communicate ... to confront some of the learned ways in which

80 Lhyv Oakwomon transcript 17, 6, 10, 14.
81 Lhyv Oakwomon and Barbara Forrest, letter (April 10, 1983) in Mazer subject file Lesbians of Color
Conference 1983, part 1. Lydia identified María Dolores Díaz and Yolanda Retter Vargas as helping to
organize the conference as well. Transcript 11.
we hurt each other that are handed down to us through the society. ... We take responsibility to create or join groups dedicated to issues unique to us as people of color, as womyn and as lesbians. It is important to acknowledge who we are, our culture, our roots, our community, our unique [sic] selves [underlining in original].

This address dipped from a common feminist pool, from which Betty’s sexism presentation drew. Themes included conceiving of a group identity based on shared culture and community, forming resistive and nonoppressive ways of communicating, and rejecting oppressive learned behavior. Mirroring the struggle of antiracist white feminists to honor diversity, Kwambe devoted a sentence each to distinctive cultural contributions of Latin, native, Asian, and black sisters. Ironically, this crescendo was soon followed by the dissolution of the LOC, generally attributed to burn-out.

From the LOC Conference, Lydia, other Chicanas, and a Peruvian lesbian formed Lesbianas Unidas. Lydia sees Lesbianas Unidas as having been cohesive in contrast to the demise of LOC because the Lesbianas Unidas members got along, had the same goals, did not have sex with each other, and did not contest the organization’s finances. Their retreats echoed the LOC conference in being isolated from mainstream society and lasting for only a weekend rather than for a week. Lydia remembers that participants confided “that they lived the whole year just to go to this one weekend in the mountains, so they could … be themselves and embrace every part of themselves at these retreats.”

The importance of the Califia model for Lydia was that “it made a statement … ‘We’re a collective, and we’re going to talk about deeper issues than just get together and just

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83 Kwambe Omdahda and Rha Medeen statement for final gathering of the Lesbians of Color Conference. Yolanda Retter Vargas personal files.
84 Barbara and Yolanda attribute the group’s decline to burn-out, whereas Lydia believes secretiveness about finances generated divisions. Transcripts for Barbara Forrest 7 and Lydia Otero 11-12. Retter 276.
85 Lydia Otero transcript 2.
Like Califia, they too had talent shows where children and women performed songs and danced. Spanish served as a cultural bond. They generated money through dances and other fundraisers. With U.S. government-sponsored military campaigns in Central America in the news, Lesbianas Unidas sent proceeds from their fundraisers to hospitals in Central America in addition to funding a lesbian conference in Mexico City. As more Latinas moved to the Los Angeles area from Central America in the late 1980s, Lesbianas Unidas shifted from being Chicana focused to more broadly Latina.87

The Califia model collided with ethnic nationalism on the issue of biracialism, which included European ancestry. Latinas came in all colors, and Lydia recalls that Barbara and her sister wanted acknowledgment within LOC and Lesbianas Unidas and that Barbara confronted Chicanas' lack of acceptance of her. Lydia now sees colorism as a salient issue. At the time, however, she says that Chicanas wanted to address "large agendas" and did not want to take time to deal with someone who at "every opportunity ... became like Llorona [the Mexican mythical crying woman] at these different groups where she would want the attention." Lydia coded the Forrest sisters' behavior as "white" and disrupting of the group's focus on collective issues by "demanding attention on [their] specific individual issue."88 The definitions of individual and collective seem based on the Forrest sisters being the only women present or the only ones willing to keep trying to engage with a group that predominantly could not pass as white. Lhyv, 86 Lydia Otero transcript 3. 87 Lydia Otero transcript 11, 12, 22, 25. 88 Lydia Otero transcript 22-23.
who was partially raised in Mexico, witnessed her friend Barbara’s distress in LOC. She continues to condemn colorism and accusations that Barbara “acts white”:

I had been raised in a country where ... blancas with blonde hair, blue eyes, and white skin were mestizas in Mexico City. They were people of color. What my objection to ... those women is, “You must not know what women of color look like.” And you haven’t been around enough if you think that she is particularly unique. ... So I look at the Forrest women and I see Copper Canyon. They look at the Forrest women and they see blonde hair, blue eyes, white skin and project all the rest of the problems associated with—it’s almost like one word, whiteskinblueeyesblondehair—you know, just one word. There are other ways, behavioral ways, to very clearly identify Barbara Forrest as Hispanic in origin. She is culturally Hispanic. 89

Rather than see Barbara as an isolated case causing distraction, Lhyv characterizes “endless arguing over whether Barbara Forrest was a woman of color” as irrelevant and preventing better things from getting done. 90

In addition to providing a model, Califia represented the continuation of a form of grassroots feminism and produced a network of women who supported feminist events. The beginning of a new women’s center called Connexxus Women’s Center/Centro de Mujeres demonstrated the struggle between grassroots and more bureaucratized forms of feminism, the gaining voice of feminists of color, and the continued effects of Califia’s contacts.

Connexxus signified a shift from the shoestring idealism of LA feminists who started a series of lesbian or women’s centers in the early 1970s. Lauren Jardine gained experience as the director of Lesbian Central at the Gay Community Service Center between 1980 and 1984. Her departure from GCSC coincided with a narrator’s memory

89 Lhyv Oakwomon transcript 11.
90 Lhyv Oakwoman transcript 33-34.
of yet another rift between lesbians and the male-dominated GCSC.\(^91\) Jardine and Adel Martinez cofounded Connexxus as “a woman-oriented space, a different way of providing services … to be done by women.” Rather than simply strike out with the enthusiasm of grassroots activists, they first met with businesswomen in May 1984 to ensure that both energy and finances were available for another attempt at an autonomous women’s service and cultural center.\(^92\) This exploratory meeting occurred in the wake of bureaucratizing within NOW to ratify the ERA and the establishment of lobbying groups like the National Gay Task Force to fight legal attacks on gays and lesbians. By the mid-1980s, the national climate privileged business and financial gain over a counterculture, and increasingly social justice workers waged their battles in courtrooms and legislatures rather than in the streets.

The drawback of a focus on fiscal stability was that there was no guarantee that diverse women would have a say in planning and running the agency. To members of the Lesbian Task Force of GLLU, Multi-Ethnic Gay and Lesbian Exchange (MEGLE), and LOC, Jardine and Martinez’s attempt to break with grassroots beginnings in exchange for solvency replicated the exclusion of women of color and grassroots groups elsewhere. Not only did the initial meeting occur without the attendance of anyone invited from LOC, other organizations, including GLLU and MEGLE, were not invited. The protest letter that GLLU, MEGLE, and LOC sent argued that input “from these underrepresented, underserved and underestimated constituencies ought to be an

\(^{91}\) Carla Seco transcript 37.

important part of any agency which purports, by virtue of its name, to represent an entire community. There is no excuse for these continued ‘oversights.’” Although a relatively large number of attending businesswomen were women of color, the protesters asserted that “these women do not necessarily share the needs and concerns of groups of women which have not been included.”

Martinez and Jardine drafted a conciliatory response six days later requesting a meeting at a time convenient to their memberships “to ensure the total participation and representation you rightfully desire.”

Narrators disagree about how lesbians of color became aware of the meeting, and the diverging accounts seem to mirror a transition from a small minority of self-appointed liaisons to larger group agitation for redress. Yolanda recalls that she went to Jeanne Córdova’s house on the day of the meeting. She got mad at seeing only one black and one brown face and called Latina lesbians about drafting a protest letter, and Lydia got other groups on board. This would be in keeping with Yolanda’s friendship ties at the time and her role as a link between white women and women of color. By Lydia’s account, Yolanda was “involved to a degree [with Connexxus] but didn’t think of including us either.” When Yolanda offered to speak to the Connexxus women on behalf of Lesbianas Unidas, Lydia and other lesbian of color leaders decided what “was best was to draw up the letter and have the organization sign it and send it instead of having Yolanda be our messenger.” Rather than attribute knowledge of the meeting to Yolanda, Lydia thinks that

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94 Letter from Adel Martinez and Lauren Jardine sent to Gay and Lesbian Latinos Unidos (Lesbian Task Force), Multi-Ethnic Gay and Lesbian Exchange, and Lesbians of Color, June 17, 1984, in Lesbianes Unidas and Connexxus file at LLC.
95 Yolanda Retter Vargas follow-up, 2.
she and other leaders saw something in the *Lesbian News*. This memory corresponds with her perception that Connexxus was further underway than Jardine and Martinez claimed in their response. The protest letter, itself, implies that Jardine and Martinez contacted LOC, which could have been a network through which Latina lesbians heard about it. Regardless, by 1984, autonomous lesbians of color groups and factions of larger groups were supplanting individual liaison work and balking at participation in white-founded or white-majority groups. María Dolores and Doris were no longer involved in Califia, for example, and Yolanda later worked with women of color who had not been active in the antiracism presentation to change the focus of Califia. During the first years of Connexxus, women of color associated with it pressed for increased visibility, rectification of racist incidents, and expanded access through clear statements that no one would be turned away for lack of funds and by setting up satellite sites such as Connexxus East.

Organizing and fundraising were crucial to Connexxus’s continued existence, and Califia women supported Connexxus from the beginning. Not only were some Califia women part of organizing the center, more attended fundraising as well as nonfundraiser dances, mixers, bingo, and talent shows. Lydia believes that Connexxus was able to tap into Califia’s already established avenues for reaching and organizing women.

Califia was significant to other lesbian groups because it served as a model for providing education, political organizing, community formation, and creating separate

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96 Lydia Otero transcript 29.
98 Transcripts for Kai Kalivoda 2, Rose Greene 29, Carla Seco 37, and Lydia Otero 28.
space for women. The principles of basing group identity on shared culture, forming resistive language, and rejecting oppressive learned behavior were ones that other area lesbian groups utilized, and all were goals indicative of Second Wave feminism. Finally, Califia’s long existence had created a network of supporters of which successive groups made use.

BEYOND THE ORIGINAL CALIFIA

Lesbians of color demanded ground-level entrance into the planning of Connexxus to prevent continued marginalization of people of color. Likewise, a group of women of color pushed to run Califia Community in order to move it away from its white-marked roots to a more inclusive feminism. The proliferation of lesbian of color groups in Los Angeles, continued work from the Women of Color Network, and the exodus of old guard collective members from Califia combined to shape the final stage of Califia Community’s existence. By far the most rancor in the oral history interviews concerns the transfer of Califia leadership. Although all agree that Califia feminists of color asked to assume leadership of Califia and use its feminist education particularly for women of color, disagreement arises over what led to the demise of Califia Community.

The tenth anniversary camp in 1985, which Kathy Wolfe videotaped, was the final regular Califia session. Narrators confirm that attendees knew the collective would not organize another camp. They discussed what should happen to the nonprofit status and remaining funds. On February 1, 1986, a group of Califia women of color wrote a statement to the Califia Community “to ask that the leadership of CALIFIA Community

100 Transcripts for Carla Seco 33, Diane Germain 47, Elsa Fisher 5, Muriel Fisher 2.
be turned over to the women of color. Our white sisters have an opportunity to bond with us in recognition that feminist women of color leadership is a valid and necessary political stand for all women now.\textsuperscript{101} The “Statement from Women of Color to the Califia Community” was indicative of the rise of multicultural feminism, which feminists of color expressed in \textit{This Bridge Called My Back} and successive works and for which lesbians of color in Los Angeles campaigned by seeking inclusion in Connexxus.\textsuperscript{102} Framing acceptance of their plan as solidarity with Califia, the statement praised Califia as having “created a powerful model for feminist education and provided us with woman-space.” These women of color embraced feminism but objected:

The women’s movement can no longer be dominated by white women’s analysis of oppression and theories of liberation. Because of institutional racism white women oppress women of color. Even when anti-racist feminists work with women of color racist incidents occur and consciousness raising is done at the expense of women of color, for example racism is denied, ignored or justified.

Our women of color experience demands the comprehension of and resistance to all forms of oppression and exploitation. White women have been unwilling to translate their experience of oppression in ways that validate or include women of color. The articulation of our struggle is the leading edge of radical feminism. CALIFIA as a feminist institution is an ideal vehicle for that expression.

In our community women of color perspectives are not represented. CALIFIA is an established women’s cultural institution and expresses women’s culture signifigantly [sic]. Multicultural feminism defines and validates the conditions of all women’s lives and struggles, creating the possibility of sisterhood and bonding.

We offer our model of leadership, feminist process and education to the community. Now is the time for CALIFIA Community to evolve towards it’s [sic] ideals.

These Califia women echoed close to two decades of work by feminists of color by objecting to dominant (white) feminists’ analysis. In the early 1970s, lesbian feminists

\textsuperscript{101} “Statement from Women of Color to the Califia Community,” February 1, 1986, see appendix D.

\textsuperscript{102} The trend for services and inclusion would continue in 1989 with a Latino AIDS project called Bien Estar and GLLU members speaking at straight Latino places and at white gay places for inclusion. Lydia Otero transcript 14-15.
had rejected the inability of heterosexual feminists to discuss gender and sexuality outside of a heterosexual paradigm and had claimed superior, further-reaching analysis based on their lesbian experience. Califia women represented a broader lesbian feminist attempt fully to develop a vocabulary of dissent, which drew connections between oppressions. Over the organization’s decade of existence, it especially struggled with race relations. Like the lesbian feminist denunciation of an inherently straight feminism, Califia women of color were part of a trend. They rejected white-majority feminism as insufficient and proposed to lead feminists past racism to a fully integrated analysis of oppressions.

Women of color involved in the transfer of leadership and white participants connected transfer of responsibility for Califia to women of color with the departure of founding collective members and burn-out. Representing the spectrum of ages, equal percentages of white narrators (55 percent) and narrators of color (55.6 percent) believe that the energy to keep organizing Califia ran out.\footnote{Twenty-seven narrators gave opinions as to why Califia ended when it did. Of these, 19 were white women and 8 were women of color. Based on references to age in their interviews, in 1986, 2 white narrators were in their 60s, 6 were in their 50s, 3 were in their 40s, and 4 were in their 30s, 3 were in their 20s. Although 2 women of color were in the 40s, 5 were in their 30s, and 2 were in their 20s. On burn-out or lack of central energy, see transcripts for Carol Albright 36-37, Lois Bencangey 8, Jane Bernstein 23, Muriel Fisher 2, Diane Germain 46, Rose Greene 29, Wanda Jewell 17, Vicki Leon 46-47, Karen Merry 31, Jeanne Murphy 27, Alice Myers 13. Transcripts for Barbara Forrest 31, Donna Gómez, Anna María Soto, and Lillian West in WOC interview 20, 50, and Carla Seco 30.} Seven specify that Marilyn and Irene were linchpins and that others could not devote the time to organizing that their retirement and political commitment gave them.\footnote{Transcripts of Carol Albright 36-37, Lois Bencangey 8, Donna Gómez in WOC 40, Rose Greene 29, Carla Seco 30, Anna María Soto in WOC 20 pair Marilyn and Irene as guiding forces. Wanda Jewell connected Marilyn and Betty Brooks as key leaders. Transcript 17.} Wanda adds Betty Brooks as an
example of needed strong leadership, and Vicki asserts that the CSULB firing of Betty was an attack on Califia:

She had a really lot to offer and was offering it, like, every hour. And so when she was [under] personal attack like that, then the Collective was under personal attack because she was such a big contributor. And I think that had a lot to do with the older women being tired is that they weren’t just tired of producing Califia. I suspect if that hadn’t happened, the Women’s Studies program at Long Beach, that Califia may have weathered out several more years until the young people were ready to take it over.105

Linking Califia’s end to leaders’ departures, demoralization of established leaders, and burn-out assigns the least blame and connects to overarching economic trends and changing times. Most who date Califia’s demise to the departure of Betty, Marilyn, and Irene by 1983 involuntarily move the end as much as three years sooner in privileging these women’s leadership. Marilyn’s labor bears an especially heavy representational burden. She embodied feminism to many participants while Califia was the major site of their feminist CR and activity, so, conceptually, Califia could not survive without Marilyn’s efforts. Although the original Califia continued for three years past the 1982 season and Califia Women of Color carried on for two more years, the memories linking Califia to Marilyn, Betty, or Irene are representative of the predisposition in both Second Wave feminism and American society to personalize a movement through designated leaders who rise as public figures.

The burn-out thesis connects with assertions that the times changed and became unfavorable to Califia’s work. Four narrators note that women had to prioritize career-building because it became difficult to survive economically under a conservative

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105 Vicki Leon transcript 47.
Like other Americans, Califia women struggled through the Reagan-era recession, which saw unemployment rates soar from 5.8 percent in 1979 to 7.1 percent in 1980, a high of 9.7 percent in 1982, and 7.2 percent in 1985. Additionally, six narrators think the political edge of Califia's feminism outlived its historical moment. While its long-term participants had moved beyond introductory material, most lesbians in Los Angeles were turning to less-political venues, flocking to social and professional groups.

Despite some recognition of larger economic and political changes, the Califia emphasis on personal experience colors narrators' interpretations. Continuous struggles over race relations throughout Califia's existence and participants' deep emotional attachments to its original methods influence some narrators to attribute the dissolution of the group within two years of the transfer in leadership to women of color's decisions or to racism. Seven narrators stress the arrogance of women of color advancing their model of leadership as superior or frame the transfer as white women being uncomfortable with the women of color. This occurs even though collective members decided to stop holding camps before the women of color contingent volunteered to continue and to transform Califia. Three long-term white participants who maintained close ties with each other

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106 Transcripts for Betty Brooks follow-up 4, Barbara Forrest 31, Diane Germain 46, and Anna María Soto in WOC 19.
assert that Califia women of color prioritized spirituality at the expense of CR, ripping Califia from its political roots.109

Discussion of Califia’s ending was generally the last interview topic. A striking component of this interpretation is that only the narrators who themselves brought up why Califia ended (as opposed to those who responded to my questions) showed an eagerness to cast blame on the women of color. Terms of thick condemnation pepper these interviews—“polarizing,” lack of “ethical behavior,” “irresponsible,” “divisive,” “didn’t follow through on their commitments,” had not “taken care of Califia.” Emotions remain high twenty-five years later with feelings of disappointment and distress bubbling to the surface.

In contrast, near the end of their interviews, Josy and Arianna, who were not participating in Califia by then but have remained friends, constructed defenses of women of color. Josy claims from talking to those who were still active that rather than dealing with the women of color by working together, “it was easier to just say, ‘OK, you take it.’” Ariana cites divisiveness in Califia and then parallels Califia’s end with the National Lesbian Feminist Organization to add the possibility that white women tacitly gave women of color “permission to sort of try but without a lot of support for their efforts so they could try and fail.” A nonprofit status without resources would not be enough for the group to continue.

The narratives of women of color stress their desire for and struggle with complex structural differences from the original Califia. Califia feminists of color faced animosity from other women of color who opposed Califia as a white lesbian feminist group and considered women of color to be sell-outs for participating in Califia. As organizers of the camp, Califia feminists of color did not have the established authority among these women to demand the same type of mandatory participation that the original camps had. Spiritual practices became a method to start connections for basic networking. Unlike some white lesbian feminists who had rejected spirituality along with organized religion and were able to live that philosophy among their associates, religious structure and spirituality have been useful tools in people of color communities to fight racism. A few organizers, like Lhyv and Barbara’s partner of the time, championed women’s spirituality’s non-European aspects such as sweatlodges and meditation. Cultural differences and racial tensions meant that the Califia Women of Color camps were like starting over. The women of color arriving at the camps did not possess the type of knowledge that Califia’s CR work had been developing for a decade and were not necessarily comfortable identifying themselves as feminists because they saw that as a white word. Leaders, however, were impatient to move to a higher level of analysis to maintain their own interest and to demonstrate the success of multicultural feminism. On top of that, women of color narrators cite financial and leadership problems. They were always in the hole and placed in the difficult position of having attendees who owed

110 Transcripts for Carla Seco transcript 33, 35 and Anna María Soto and Lillian West in WOC 22, 49.
111 Pam Hutson, Anna María Soto and Lillian West in WOC transcript 50-51.
112 Transcripts for Lhyv Oakwomon 18-19, Carla Seco 29-30, and Donna Gómez and Anna María Soto in WOC transcript 50.
them money. Nobody could devote sustained energy to planning the camps when they too were women of color from lower economic backgrounds struggling to get ahead.¹¹³

This is not what white narrators were hearing. Califia’s focus on personal experience as the interpretive lens and the intense guilt evoked over racism frequently inclined narrators to explanations that placed blame on individuals. In their interviews, white narrators occasionally express dismay that women of color held them accountable for racism but did not help them to understand how to change. Personalizing racism joined with expectations that white women would teach themselves to understand, accommodate, ask the right questions, and transform themselves into antiracist activists. Some narrators express defeat and resentment that nothing they did would ever have been enough. This resentment intensified with the assumption that they would commit energy to the Califia Women of Color camps when the camps were changing in a way with which they did not identify. After putting so much of their hopes and effort into Califia and gaining such benefits from participation, they felt simultaneously shut out and put upon to support its transformation into something else. Their subjective experiences and explanations are congruent with patterns of interaction that had continuously been present.

Califia’s existence and demise illustrate important Second Wave practices in relation to the rise of the Right. As conservative backlash assailed progressives, Second Wave feminists continued to mirror societal binary thinking in an attempt to purge women of dominant-group ways of thinking. Such frameworks constituted lesbianism as

¹¹³ Transcripts for Anna María Soto WOC 58, Carla Seco 32, and Yolanda Retter Vargas follow-up 1.
the only politically proper option even as lesbian feminist teachings such as Betty Jetter's reached a pinnacle of complexity by addressing the power of language, hegemony, and expanding the definition of terrorism. Unintended consequences to inverting societal divisions were a reliance on homogenizing strategies (such as promoting exclusive lesbianism), internal dissent over how best to theorize change, and the alienation of both lesbian and straight women who increasingly shied away from countercultural political lives in favor of fitting into society. The language-driven entertainment at Califia demonstrates muted challenges as hearing women struggled to prove their inclusiveness of Deaf women and white ethnic women took pride in their heritage in contrast to the guilt evoked at antiracism presentations. Ultimately, Califia influenced other groups by providing a model, a valuation of identity-based community, and a network of supporters for successive causes. Its demise, however, illustrates not only the complex relations between personal and structural factors but the severe divisions that Califia participants and Second Wave feminists more broadly inherited from the dominant society.
6. TO FIGHT FOR WOMEN BY EXPLODING BINARIES

Califia, like many feminist groups since the late 1960s, included participation of women from diverse backgrounds whose feminism gave them a sense of urgency and heightened expectations about revolutionizing their world. The end of Califia pained narrators because they lost a countercultural community where they felt they could be free among a safe circle of females who shared responsibilities, supported each other, and encouraged political activism. No narrator portrayed Califia as a trouble-free utopia, but many gained a far less restricted sense of possibility through forming a temporary space preserved from male violence and the purview of dominant society, which up-ended axes of power. The development of Califia Community illustrates strengths and weaknesses of Second Wave feminism and lesbian feminism as well as how feminist work carried over into larger society.

From the outset, Califia participants succeeded in creating a relatively accessible, nonhierarchal, interactive, and woman-focused space. An experiential model led to powerful "click" moments for scores of individual women and was a gateway to holistic feminism. Appealing to corporeal, lived experience about gender, Califia funneled women into already established radical feminist groups like Women Against Violence Against Women and Fat Underground and later formed the San Fernando Valley Rape Crisis Service, which made Califia representative of feminist struggles against violence and for bodily autonomy. More generally, the camps sustained space for variations in bodily appearance, affirming those who did not conform to normative femininity. Women encouraged each other to devote themselves politically, emotionally, and
sexually to other women. This strategy for change was a double-edge sword. It was designed to promote work for collective advancement. Amid homophobia and years of lesbian feminist theory denigrating straight feminists, however, Califia's perspective probably alienated many heterosexual women by marking it as lesbian feminist.

Califia supported women where society dismissed them while exposing where they gained privilege from their structural position or chosen actions in the world. Although they began with a limited ability to teach against racism, Califia women ultimately grappled with the relationships among white-skin privilege, ethnicity, and biculturalism and produced White Women Against Racism as part of a forefront in making race education more inclusive than a black-white model. In addition to making change in the LA area, the Women of Color Network and committed white Califia participants attained an unprecedented parity on the collective between white women and women of color. At the same time that Califia emphasized anti-racism work, women of color presenters felt burdened and white participants frequently felt attacked.

There was a tension between individual and collective change in much of Califia. Working-class participants made connections between class background and culturally varied responses that are still little acknowledged by a society where working-class people are disadvantaged by a middle-class monopoly on standards. The reliance of their class model on a static class background and interpersonal dynamics, however, constrained their ability to explain the effects of class mobility and to implement reforms in society. Likewise, the presence of differently abled women led to debate over collective responsibility for creating accessible environments a decade before
government mandates. Califia retained able-bodied status as the norm, though, and could not accommodate women deemed severely mentally ill.

The educational work at Califia transformed individuals by altering their views, supporting them in a network of like-minded women who valued women’s talents, and challenging them to join or create activist and service groups. Sometimes the feminist values formed at Califia contributed nuance, while other times their reliance on stereotypes impaired discussion. Califia women’s distinctions about children’s relationship to oppressive behavior stood in marked contrast to prevailing romanticization of childhood. By stereotyping dominance and violence as male, in contrast, Califia was similar to other feminist spaces in its hostility toward consensual SM and silence about lesbian battering. The power of language to shape values was well-addressed by Califia, but glorification of those whose identities aligned with oppressed statuses and denigration of those with privileged identities perpetuated divisions among feminists. Nonetheless, Califia was a model for education, community formation, separate space, and political organizing at lesbian of color groups’ retreats and provided a funding network for Connexxus Women’s Center/Centro de Mujeres.

By considering which identities Second Wave feminists believed were stable and which they thought were malleable, this study of Califia exposes a period of ideological formation. A minority of feminists represented by the Tide collective even took gender to be malleable or easily mistakable. Most lesbian feminists, in contrast, considered gender to be the stable bottom-line while arguing forcefully that sexual orientation was changeable for the sake of feminism. Although Califia women posed racial and class
backgrounds as fixed, their CR challenged women’s stereotypes and bias-influenced actions, especially calling on white and economically privileged women to be accommodating and supportive.

Alone, CR failed to illuminate how prevalent it was for people to make compromises and how the methods and results of survival in an unreformed world varied for different people. Feminists operated under direct attack from numerous directions with a legitimate siege mentality of “us” against “them.” It was difficult to admit the compromises everyone made, compromises that feminists interpreted as acquiescence or complicity. An individualizing assumption of CR was that once one knew her behavior was “wrong,” she would change. Disappointment at those who seemed to exhibit complacency or advocated behavior that conflicted with feminist tenets led feminists to debate whether heterosexual women, kinky dykes, middle-class feminists, and a host of others were really on the righteous side. Participants contested who and what should be included as feminist. Additionally, there was a strong impetus to posit the existence of a position of political innocence based on a wholly oppressed status. Compromises and successful maneuvering within the system belied the myth of political innocence, but it was easier to focus on other people’s foibles.

This tendency stood alongside the acknowledged need for alliances. Coalition building was crucial to making change against proponents of stasis. Feminists developed competing models based on what they prioritized about their identities and approaches to making change—liberal feminist legal actions; radical feminist street tactics; lesbian feminist decentering of heteropatriarchy; socialist feminist attack on imperialist
capitalism's entwined sexism, homophobia, and racism; cultural feminist construction of alternative space; multicultural feminism's racial starting point. Each focus led to the objection that advocates diminished someone else's priority. The unfolding of Second Wave feminism, however, was not a futile string of conflicts or exclusions. Adding different constituents' grievances and analyses to an amorphous feminist agenda widened women's perspectives. Feminists have made gains based on fragile, imperfect, but sustained attempts to work through issues and find solutions collectively—to act with collective power. Multicultural feminism furthered the necessity of looking at differences as interconnected but simultaneously operating in distinct ways for different people.

What Califia sustained for more than ten years and, more extensively, what Second Wave feminism achieved nationally, was a powerful sense of exhilaration at being among women and struggling to repair divisions between women, so that coalition work could remain viable.

Ironically, the polarizing climate of contestation between members of the Right and the counterculture decreased avenues for internal constructive criticism. In the 1980s, as members of the Gay and Lesbian Rights Movement retrenched, they attacked lesbian feminist perspectives as supporting conservatism. The following reactions against lesbian feminist views that Califia participants propounded illustrates limitations among potential allies for human rights, limits conditioned by the pervasiveness of the New Right rhetoric of good/evil dualism and societal binary thinking.
LESBIAN FEMINISTS ATTACKED AS PART OF THE RIGHT

The demise of Califia foreshadowed the decline of lesbian feminist activity in Los Angeles and reflected its struggle nationally. Through the 1980s, Califia women like Yolanda and Marilyn continued to endorse lesbian feminist separatism while others shifted their views in tandem with the developing gay and lesbian movement and multicultural feminism. As part of internal lesbian and gay disputes, activists relied on polarizing terms to characterize each other as being in league with conservative forces. Defense and defection from lesbian feminism contested how to live free and responsible lives, how to fight reactionary forces, where to find compatriots, and the very definition of woman.

In 1988, Yolanda gained national attention, which embroiled her in controversy over the place of lesbian feminist separatism in a gay and lesbian movement. The way that the parties worded their positions illustrates persistent miscommunication. The mainstream mischaracterized separatists while liberal gays painted lesbian feminists as a flank of the Right. A reporter for the national gay periodical The Advocate interviewed Yolanda after she and two other lesbian separatists were sensationaly introduced as "women who hate men" on the Oprah Winfrey television show. Yolanda amended:

I repeatedly say to people, it's not the boys that I hate—it is the expression of bad male behavior. Some of us as women model that behavior too, sometimes, that negative, yang behavior. ... This is what separatists do: They hold the line for women's energy on the planet.¹

She distinguished actions from identity but claimed the ability to attribute positive behavior to "women’s energy" and negative actions to "male energy" regardless of the gender of the person exhibiting the activities.

Further into the article, Yolanda’s views on prioritizing women transgressed a taboo within gay and lesbian AIDS work. She avowed that there were multiple ways to live a separatist life, from no contact with any male human or animal to her work heading Lesbian Central within the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Community Service Center.\(^2\)

Asked about working with gay men, she argued that gay men who considered themselves feminists should work to educate other men instead of barging in on lesbian spaces. Her sense that gay men had more in common with straight men than with lesbians extended to her views on the AIDS epidemic and lesbians’ participation in fighting the disease:

And AIDS, once again, is asking women to take care of boys because they weren’t able to control themselves. The boys are still asking for Mommy to come help them, and when lesbians want to play Mommy, I really despair. ... One thing that made me very angry was when someone told me that 48,000 women per year die of breast cancer—that’s more per year than have died of AIDS. And who’s mobilizing for them? Nobody. I wanted to cry.\(^3\)

The center devoted more than forty percent of its budget to fighting AIDS but only had sporadic lesbian health programs, indicating that lesbians had been unsuccessful in negotiating terms of coalition that also directly benefited them at that time. Despite this disparity, her comments drew fire.

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\(^2\) After years of dissent that the Gay Community Service Center was male-dominated, the center finally added “and Lesbian” to its name in 1980. Retter 213.

\(^3\) Limmer verified that the latest figures from the 1988 Statistical Abstract of the United States recorded that 40,400 women died of breast cancer in 1985 and between 12,450 and 13,830 people died of AIDS in 1987 according to the National Center for Health Statistics (27). By the end of Reagan’s second term, nearly 30,000 people had died of AIDS. Fundraising for breast cancer research has since become public among women and their partners, but both diseases continue.
Director of Education Jeff Campbell sent an irate memo to Yolanda and Deputy Director Torie Osbom demanding that Yolanda resign. He compared her to anti-gay rights U.S. Representative William Dannemeyer of California (R., served 1979–1992), dismissing her views as “sexist, prejudiced, and based upon hatred and misinformation.”

Campbell was most offended, understandably, by Yolanda’s unwavering view that “gay men brought AIDS upon themselves” through their behavior. Claiming that her presence on the payroll was “offensive [sic] to the vast majority of staff, volunteers and clients … [and] a source of contempt and ridicule of the entire Center by the community at large,” he urged her “to take [her] abhorrent views elsewhere and resign immediately.” Yolanda was successfully pushed out; Lesbian Central ceased to exist in 1989. With it went any lesbian health programming at the center, underscoring Yolanda’s central critique that gay and lesbian coalition tended to prioritize fighting a disease that was then most affecting males while ignoring a disease overwhelming females. At a time when gay men were under attack from the Right, however, there was no space for critiques of funding priorities that implicated gay men in their plight.

Campbell’s defense of gay men was shared by many who have lost loved ones to AIDS while New Right politicians and pastors since the 1980s have claimed that AIDS represents God’s wrath against homosexuals. What got erased amid sensationalist...
soundbites was the possibility for internal dissent while gays and lesbians fought the
Right, a space where critique did not necessarily come from the Right. Yolanda reflected
a wider concern among lesbian feminists that fundraising to combat the AIDS epidemic
inadvertently hurt women and devastated lesbian projects. For example, in 1986, Ivy
Bottini of NOW fame joined Eric Rofes as cochairs of the No on La Rouche campaign.
They and others rallied California gays and lesbians to oppose Proposition 64, which
would have empowered state officials to mandate AIDS testing for individuals and
segregate HIV-positive people from schools and travel routes, possibly isolating them in
camps. The Right did not distinguish queers by their gender. The campaign raised $2.3
million, and the measure was defeated seventy-two percent to twenty-eight percent. Jinx
Beers, owner of The Lesbian News, pointed out that during the campaign “donations to
lesbian projects and other groups ‘virtually dried up for several months.’” Connexxus
was devastated and finally closed in 1990. The Woman’s Building shut its doors in
1991. After Beers sold The Lesbian News in 1989, its new owners toned down the
political content over the next few years in favor of glossy, consumer, fashion, and
socializing-oriented content, which garnered more paid advertisements. Jane lamented
that of the original feminist periodicals The Lesbian News was the only one that survived
in name but it now targeted women with money for charity events and leisure activities
like the Dinah Shore Golf Tournament while “some very good writers have gone by the

FAGS,” “AIDS CURES FAGS,” “THANK GOD FOR AIDS,” and “FAGS DOOM NATIONS.”
8 Rettet 225-226.
9 Rettet 227, 312, 323.
By the early 1990s, there were very few places either in Los Angeles or across the nation that were marked as lesbian feminist social, teaching, or activist spaces.

Until 1991, however, Marilyn carved out a space for a Califia mindset within the pages of *The Lesbian News* through her “Lesbianic Logic” columns. Her writings represent the limits of a “personal is political” method of CR for a diverse audience of lesbians. Within her column were injunctions against racism and anti-Semitism, education about disability and age, glorification of lesbian separatism, and warnings about heteropatriarchy. Marilyn received no negative responses to her CR on race, Judaism, disability, and age. In contrast, reactions to Marilyn’s lesbian separatist positions from 1985 on illustrate attention within the Gay and Lesbian Movement to attaining equal protections under the law and the increasing gulf in theoretical starting points between lesbian feminist separatists and other lesbians.

Marilyn strongly censured heterosexual marriage along with lesbian behaviors that she believed imitated heterosexuality. In “Mother of the Groom,” she explained why

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10 Jane Bernstein transcript 8.
she did not attend her eldest child’s wedding. For three years, she was proud of her son. He lived with his girlfriend without the benefits of marriage—including shared health insurance, tax returns, and credit record—because they disapproved of how marriage institutionalized the inequality of women, extended state power, and gave a federal imprimatur to religious intolerance for same-sex couples. Then, tired of the financial and familial hassles of being unmarried and confident they could escape sexism, they decided to wed. Marilyn argued to *The Lesbian News* readers that she could not attend a “ceremony which is the cornerstone of her past oppression as a married woman and her present oppression as a Lesbian.” By analogy, she asserted:

> Men who abhor sexism do not join organization[s] which deny membership to women. White people who abhor racism do not join organizations which deny membership to people of color. Christians, believers and non-believers, who abhor anti-semitism [sic] do not join organizations which deny membership to Jews. Able bodied people do not join organizations which deny membership to disabled people. The refusal to join an organization which publicly and blatantly denies membership, and the benefits accruing to members, to persons different from themselves, is the very least that can be expected of those who profess belief in equality and civil rights for all.

Pointedly condemning the marrying heterosexual relatives of lesbians and gay men, Marilyn said that she refused to collude with her own oppression and called on readers “to begin disturbing the consciences of our families and friends.” One ensuing letter to the editor thanked Marilyn for helping the writer to clarify her own ambivalence and anger about attending heterosexual weddings. In another, a mother related her extreme grief at losing her son to his homophobia after she came out and divorced his father and concluded that being his mother was more important to her than working against

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15 Murphy, “Mother of the Groom” 31.
relatives’ homophobia. The third dismissed Marilyn’s column as “extremist,” “self-righteous,” and containing “ongoing-hate filled, self-pitying invective” “that appears to border on Neo-Nazi attitudes [sic].” The letters represent a range of positions within the lesbian community from the application of radical feminist critiques of heterosexual marriage to a willingness to retreat from political ideology and overlook homophobia in favor of what is “more familiar” to a lesbian predecessor of conservative talk show hosts. Casually slinging the term “Neo-Nazi” resonates with ultraconservative commentators like Rush Limbaugh, who later coined the term “feminazi” as an attack against women dedicated to fighting sexism, homophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism.\(^\text{16}\)

While Marilyn supported some of the legal options available to lesbian couples, such as wills,\(^\text{17}\) she would not condone assimilation to heteropatriarchal values. Her denunciation of those who chose to be “lipstick lesbians” or lesbian mothers riled lesbians of color who were making such choices. In “Pretty in Pink,” Marilyn argued:

“[W]oman” is a role all female human beings are required to perform regardless of our age, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, class, caste, degree of servitude or sexual preference. The role is to be the second, the subordinate sex, defined in our person and our attributes and our activities. ... This includes ... looking the way [men] think their women should look.

\(^\text{16}\)Letters to the editor, *The Lesbian News* 10.8 (March 1985): 34 and 10.9 (April 1985). Ironically, since the 1980s members of the gay and lesbian movement have transformed their demands but receive a similarly aghast and vitriolic response from those on the Right. Instead of lesbian feminist condemnations of marriage and motherhood amid leftist denunciations of status quo participation in institutions like the military and business, many lesbians and gay men have focused on inclusion into mainstream society. Legalized gay marriage, the gay-by boom, full and equal participation in the military, and the exultation of gay urban professionals as the model image for the “community” have provided the same sense of consternation to traditionalists that revolutionary stances did. Focusing on these rights has practical consequences including opening up avenues for advancement. Like many reform methods for inclusion, these issues have the potential to revolutionize discursive meaning by attacking heterosexual and gender assumptions, but in effect, they also allow those who are comfortable with societal norms to buy into a system that still excludes nonconformists.

Marilyn claimed that the purposes of normative womanly appearance, including make-up and high heels, were to please men, to portray women as frivolous sex objects, and to fund misogynist fashion and diet industries. Marilyn admitted that transgressing gender norms was not easy; she had trouble giving up make-up and razors. Nonetheless, lesbians who conformed "pass as heterosexual." She did "not believe that feeling free to wear the visible shackles of our oppression has anything to do with our liberation, as long as most of our sisters do not feel free to wear anything else." Like Betty Jetter's presentation at Califia camps, Marilyn invoked a radical lesbian feminist "uniform" behavior, justifying constraints as a necessary counter to societal repression. She dismissed "personal freedom" as a myth "that has co-opted and diluted every movement for social change in this country including ours." In a binary world of progressive and conservative, one's actions allied one with or against patriarchy.

At Califia, women who saw themselves as redeploying make-up and fashion in relations to love of women or who did not want to alienate heterosexual feminists with a lesbian litmus test had dissented from enforcing lesbian feminist uniformity. From The Lesbian News readership, Latina lesbian Marilynn Cruz Rodriguez rose to challenge Marilyn in a letter to the editor. True to the dualism strategy, Cruz Rodriguez compared Marilyn's dress-code demands to those of nuns and linked her own use of make-up to a precolonization tradition of Native Americans painting themselves. Insulted that Marilyn was teaching or preaching about the links to patriarchy as if readers would not know them, Cruz Rodriguez drew out the cultural implications of Latina femme appearance.

When she cut her hair and conformed to white lesbian feminist dress, she lost “a warm cultural friend,” “exchanged [her] high heels for tennis shoes and lost [her] zapatiado which gave [her] the rhythm for [her] navigation through this world.” Cruz Rodriguez sided with multicultural feminism and admonished Marilyn to ask and listen rather than judge out of hand.¹⁹

The standard personal-is-political method that Marilyn used in her column led to criticism that she was condescending and prejudicially judgmental. Marilyn frequently used some recent occurrence such as seeing two women in T-shirts that read “Lesbians for Lipstick” and “Dykes for Spikes” or the phenomenon of lesbians choosing artificial insemination as a lead-in to expounding lesbian feminist theory. Cruz Rodriguez claimed to be one of the T-shirt–wearing women and was indicative of readers who took Marilyn’s personalized introductions personally, felt attacked, and counterattacked. After such a lead-in, Marilyn would assert her authority. On lesbian motherhood, she said:

My credentials as an expert on motherhood include thirty-five years of mothering my four children. ... I’ve also been intimately involved with my four sisters as they raised my twelve nieces and nephews, and with numerous friends, both Lesbian and non-Lesbians, who are mothers. And of course, I am a daughter, the eldest child of a mother whose behavior I have been scrutinizing for fifty-four years.

A Latina Califia woman who responded to that column pointed out that Marilyn “never was, and is not now, a Lesbian choosing Motherhood. She establishes [later in her article] that her own Childbearing/rearing years were served wholly for the patriarchy.”²⁰ The personalized nature of the column made for engaging storytelling, but in the end it

replicated the dynamics of contestation at Califia, which reshaped differences of opinion as personal affronts.

On close inspection, Marilyn’s take on lesbians choosing motherhood through artificial insemination was complicated. She believed that every woman should have the right to choose pregnancy and approved of separating reproduction from sexual activity both to dismantle compulsory heterosexuality and to prevent men from claiming paternal rights. As long as male violence persisted, and as long as society taught everyone that women were born to serve men and children, she saw no need for a male role model for children. Despite this reasoning, Marilyn opposed lesbians having babies as delusional. What followed was actually a critique of stereotypes that dominant society perpetuated about mothering and children for heteropatriarchal purposes. Parents could not ultimately control their children’s beliefs and behaviors, so lesbians could not claim that they would “produce the next generation’s liberated children.” The desire to create someone who would always love one was also self-deception and was belied by therapists making a living on complaints about mothers and by nursing homes that warehoused elders. Finally, Marilyn criticized would-be mothers whose love of children in the abstract signaled stereotypes about children, which could smother children’s individuality. In part two, Marilyn further tried to disabuse would-be mothers of idealized visions of motherhood.

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Both Yolanda and Marilyn had years of experience as lesbian feminist separatists. They could not, however, successfully parlay their experiences into recognized expertise as their audience’s priorities shifted away from separatism to cogeneder work and political efforts to share in privileges that straight people had. The climate of the 1980s did not support examining all aspects of one’s life and did renew debate over what constituted oppositional politics. Lesbian feminists could not gain a positive reception of positions that promoted abstaining from pleasure and enfranchisement for a potential political good.

DEFINING WOMAN, DISRUPTING ASSUMPTIONS

Yolanda’s and Marilyn’s views on women continued an undercurrent of debate over women’s qualities among lesbians. A Califia childcare provider’s letter to the editor about Marilyn’s demythologizing of motherhood also illustrates fundamental assumptions about the definition and parameters of “woman.” These takes are part of a wider lesbian feminist view, which prevented its adherents from allying with gay men or people who transgressed gender beyond the consideration of lesbian feminism:

Women are now and have always been inextricably linked to all that is life producing and option expanding, i.e. agriculture, healing arts, peacemaking, and, yes, Childbearing/rearing. By virtue of being women, Lesbians are linked to this reality. ...

... Lesbians/feminists work to re-claim all that was lost to patriarchy: a social system that values life. ... Motherhood is one more way to address this work and our commitment to it.23

This mythohistorical view of woman, like Yolanda’s juxtaposition of positive women’s energy and negative male energy or Marilyn’s glorification of living among women, implies that some sort of essential traits are inherent to adult females.

Lesbian feminists assumed that they knew what women were—whether they stressed positive qualities or the negative social conditioning they hoped to transgress—and who qualified as a woman. Both aspects appear within Califia narrators’ interviews. Josy and Lhyv paraphrased the social conditioning that feminists transgressed. When Josy grew up, “women just cooked and fed. ... It was awful. And I didn’t want to be like that. ... to be a female human being, you had to put others’ needs in front of your own.”

Lhyv portrays feminism as a revelation because “[m]y focus had always been on my husband and children.” Wanda, Carla, and Carol capture the essence of the program for transforming Califia lesbians into gender-transgressing women. Wanda cites the radical notion that women should shift from taking care of others to putting themselves first.

Real empowerment starts with a positive self-centering for self-sufficiency. Carla reflects that Califia took “the personal is the political” to an instructive extreme by creating awareness of how all actions affected becoming

what you wanted to strive for in being a woman and being a feminist. Everything—from what you chose to wear, what you chose to eat, who you chose to love, who you chose to make friends with, the car you decided to buy, the job that you wanted to have—all of that was on the table.

Women assumed their identities through changes in their appearance, actions, and interactions, which denoted feminist politics. A result for Carol was that she has “never

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24 Josy Catoggio transcript 14.
25 Lhyv Oakwomon transcript 10.
26 Wanda Jewell transcript 10.
27 Carla Seco transcript 5.
seen so many wonderful examples of womanhood as I did at Califia in terms of the number of really strong and powerful and loving lesbians.” She reflects that becoming a transgressive woman was a process. She started at thirty-three, but lesbians who knew their sexual identities early on had decades of practice beyond her:

If you’re a lesbian, you know that you’re not going to have a husband take care of you. So then we’re talking about generational stuff too. So many more lifelong lesbians had clear careers, the skills, knew how to take care of themselves, never had an expectation that they were going to have a partner involved in that. And it made a difference. And I still think it’s like there’s something about the way one carries oneself, the way one speaks, tone of voice. All those things that come from, “I am who I am. And I know who I am.”

Carol illustrates the recognition that identity formation is a process of change over time. Even she, though, implies that one reaches a finished identity beyond which there is no need for change.

Califia women tended to posit that fixed identities correlated with certain behaviors, which clearly showed political allegiance. This led to disregard for, extreme discomfort with, or condemnation of fluctuations in identity. Age and disability escaped scorn because they were possible trajectories for anyone. Applying binary inversion to stable identities barred Califia women from considering the assimilationist drawbacks of upward mobility and the possibilities that political allegiance could partially be expressed through downward mobility. Emphasis on backgrounds restricted inclusion for women who converted to Judaism and took on Jewish identities. The assumption that recruits should have the same identities led to exultation when women came out as lesbians and

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28 Carol Albright transcript 31.
29 Some socialist feminists have spent a disproportionate amount of their time and money supporting causes instead of investing in more expensive clothing, expensive goods, etc. This is not to say that they should claim superiority; simply that it is one method of contributing to activism.
disapproval if they shifted to bisexual or heterosexual. Narrators expressed especially intense feelings about changes in gender identity. There were men, normative women, and well-delineated transgressive lesbian feminist women. The latter were the only fully trustworthy troops to fight for the cause.

Although lesbian feminists pushed against normative roles and presentation for women, most could not embrace a more complicated view of gender transgression. Not only were many Califia women dismissive of butches and condemning of femmes, but Josy, Diane, and Betty Jetter relate the hostility—and incomprehension—they felt about transgender in the 1970s. Lesbian feminist beliefs crystallized from community hostility toward an Olivia Records music engineer and from Janice Raymond’s *The Transsexual Empire*. Lesbians in the women’s music scene balked at Olivia Records hiring a music engineer named Sandy (who was labeled male at birth and raised a boy) because one of the purposes of women’s music was to train women in skills. Sandy trained other women but had been able to get experience when she had been perceived to be male. Josy links this brouhaha directly to Janice Raymond’s and Mary Daly’s pronouncements that male-to-female transsexuals are “fake women.” Diane paraphrases Raymond’s concern when she asks:

> [W]hat is a woman? ... Can surgeons create a woman now? They can take a man and surgically alter him and say, “Here, America, here’s a woman.” And whatever that person does is womanly? And it’s problematic because there were men who dressed up like women and came to some of our [San Diego lesbian] events, and the way we found out who they were was because they didn’t ask

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31 Josy Catoggio transcript 62.
questions; they told everybody what to do, and they pushed. And they inserted themselves into things and directed things.32

For Diane, biology and socialization are tightly interwoven. Technology cannot create a woman because there is something inherently correct about the gendering of newborns based on genitalia and something irreversible about gender socialization of those sexed male. This is a limited position on two counts. Men under this ideology can never overcome their socialization to be patriarchal. Also excluded are intersexed and transgendered people who from birth or early childhood recognizably do not fit the male-female binary.

Janice Raymond claimed that there were scant female-to-male (FTM) transsexuals compared to male-to-female transsexuals because FTMs were “the token that saves the face for the male ‘transsexual empire.’”33 Diane, in contrast, is alarmed at the number of FTMs and feels she

saw a kind of a danger happening before it happened. And now it’s messier than ever before because we have women who say they’re lesbians who then become men. They have their bodies surgically altered. And this is becoming really, I think, very gruesome, and unfortunate. And it has implications for lesbians, and for women.34

Indeed, transgender living and politics does have implications for those who have identified as or been labeled “women” and “lesbians.” To some feminists, transmen represent a gender defection—a renunciation of female oppression and feminism though the assumption of male privilege. A large proportion of transmen have gone through a stage of identifying as lesbians or lesbian feminists, perhaps because lesbianism and

32 Diane Germain transcript 10.
33 Raymond 27.
34 Diane Germain transcript 10.
feminism have sought to make a space for gender transgression beyond normative womanhood. Typically, the decision to change sex designation is a confirmation of gender and a confrontation of assumptions in labeling rather than a feeling of “switching” to attain privileges. In a 1973 letter to *The Lesbian Tide*, Rene (no last name given) balked at what was then a new lesbian feminist trend:

I thought I was a lesbian because I loved women and I did not fit the picture of the feminine personality society constantly forces us to measure up against. I attended your meetings, felt the anger and fear you did about sexual roles yet when the speaker came to the part where she said something like “we are all proud to be women, we don’t have to be butch anymore, or play at being men, we don’t have to imitate their roles but love women as women,” I was confused. Women as women? The meaning of woman and perhaps the search for a pat definition of different, unique experiences is as senseless and futile as peeling off an onion skin looking for an onion. … Perhaps years from now, in your grandchildren’s children’s lifetime there will be a state of consciousness in gay and straight society that will breed freedom of personalities. Transsexual changes are expensive and painful in all ways but very necessary right now for some.

Rene pointed out the problem of constructing essential and universally applicable woman-identified womanhood as the only space from which to support feminism.

There was a large disconnect between lesbian feminism and transgender beyond the purview of what lesbian feminists considered to be politically right. After Betty Jetter trained to be a counselor at the GCSC in the late 1970s, a “woman” came to Betty wanting to be recognized as a man. Betty realizes, “Of course, I was nowhere near fit to

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35 Henry Rubin argues that the spread of “woman-identified woman” as the definition of lesbian catalyzed a rise in female-to-male transsexuals structuring their body choices through medically-supervised gender reassignment and so becoming visible. Before this gulf was erected between Second Wave lesbian feminists and old gay butches, a range of lesbian identities were possible. Those stone butches who believed that they should have been born male and felt alienated from their female bodies shared traits with female-to-male transsexuals. With “woman-identified woman,” a criterion of lesbianism became identifying oneself with one’s womanhood as well as identifying a sexual interest in other women. Henry Rubin, “Border Wars: Lesbian and Transsexual Identity” in his *Self-Made Men: Identity and Embodiment among Transsexual Men* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University, 2003), esp. 84-85.

36 Rubin 88.
counsel her. So I did give her to a woman who had done a lot of that kind of counseling.”

Josy notes that she didn’t really get it until I met transgendered people and talked with them. [laugh] Again, like every other issue, if it wasn’t part of my experience, I was ignorant and loud about it like I am about everything. [laugh] And people would tell me, “You’re wrong, girl! You don’t know what you’re talking about. Listen to my experience and then you decide.”

There is humility in Betty and Josy recognizing the limits of their experience based on their expertise in a form of feminism founded on a gender binary.

Feminism has informed transgender theory and practice, and transgender politics can continue to add to feminism. Like white privilege or middle-class privilege, a transformative politics could call on those who reap male privilege through transition to use it to speak out against oppression. Then again, feminists could embrace transwomen who want to be a part of feminism because they are working through the transgressive definitions of woman that feminists have sought to create. Because lesbian feminists have accorded so much weight to doctors’ assignments of infants’ “gender” and have assumed essential qualities, however, many have been unable to deal with those who reevaluate gender to the point of using technology to blur or revise it bodily. Jettisoning binaries complicates the picture because, as Cruz Rodriguez noted, suddenly one has to ask and listen rather than take on faith that a person’s identity, behavior, and politics completely aligns as one assumes they do. Transpeople span a spectrum from reactionary to radical. Some simply seek recognition that they are the normative woman or man they

37 Josy Catoggio transcript 62.
always knew themselves to be. For others, choices about their bodies and the way they live in the world reflect lifelong resistance to patriarchal gender division and carry on early Second Wave feminism's reevaluation of traditional gender roles.

SAFETY AND POLITICAL LIMITS TO CULTURAL FEMINISM

Calafia women represented widespread lesbian feminist beliefs in forming safe space through a degree of sameness. This likeness was possible if women conformed to gender and sexuality expectations that were defined as politically transformative, but the focus excluded people who could have otherwise been potential allies. Moving beyond a disproven belief that lesbians are automatically sisters could short-circuit the hostility some lesbian feminists have expressed toward feminists who are gender-deviant queers, heterosexual or bisexual women, gay men, or straight men. There is something to be learned from the Lesbian Menaces and RFTC. Both advocated self-definition over

Narrators were thrilled to meet me as a queer feminist who wanted to document and assess Califia Community. In the course of conversations outside the interview session, five narrators in their fifties through seventies expressed dismay that younger feminists who came of age in the 1990s do not wholly share their separatist lesbian feminist perspective. Differences in the political context in which feminists came of age are bitterly salient to them. The apparent victories of the co-gender queer movement, the transgender movement, and people promoting BDSM in gaining tolerance or outright allegiance from some younger feminists undermines the purity of separatist lesbian feminism. Diane, Betty Jetter, Marilyn, Yolanda, and Irene expressed unwillingness to do political work with feminists who espouse those sympathies. Younger feminists are building on the legacy of achievements radical lesbian feminists racked up in the 1970s and 1980s. Simultaneously they continue to struggle with the divisions Second Wave feminists faced. I hope this work can assist in creating liaisons by building understanding about the gains and limitations of Second Wave feminism, lest we idolize or dismiss Califia Community's period without learning from it.

Admonitions to end identity-based politics go unheeded because people still move through a society identified by their bodies and actions according to gender, race, age, sexual orientation, ablebodied-status, and other factors. Califia was part of a process of exposing the influence of different identities on each other, a process upon which multicultural feminists like Moraga and Anzaldúa have improved. Rather than expect to condense diverse identities into a limited ideology, the application of ideals theoretically heralded in U.S. political culture—freedom, participation, and responsibility—could shore up action-based activism geared toward the widest possible gains. For example, instead of garnering rights for the most conforming homosexuals by putting huge amounts of energy into integration into the institution of marriage, applying those activist resources to universal healthcare and other social services while working to dismantle privileges reliant on association would positively affect many more people.

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conformity to oppressive labels. Instead of judging the ability of people to conform to the womanly gender norms that feminists were originally trying to overcome, one could posit that a feminist is one who promotes equality and liberation. Cultural feminism has provided politically useful space for self-development and planning. Its essentialist gender traits, however, need reevaluation because they limit appropriate “gendered” expression in a way that is similar to dominant societal demands that women solely be nurturing, life-giving, and tender. Judging actions will more accurately provide safety, but feminists could also learn from Gayle Rubin’s argument that a theory of gender does not completely work as a theory of sexuality. Given that everyone is making compromises, more separation between consensual private acts and political work would further coalitions. Ultimately, one simply cannot manufacture safety through assertions of sameness and get enough work done for continuing societal transformation.
APPENDICES

A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Each interview began with question one and followed up or proceeded based on a narrator’s answer. After a narrator finished a topic, we continued with the next question or a question connected to the answer. If a set of questions were inapplicable (e.g., because the narrator was not involved in some aspect), that line of questioning ceased. Frequently, interviews ended with an opportunity for narrators to add anything else they felt they had not gotten to address.

1. What do you think are the most important things to focus on when assessing Califa Community (CC)?
2. How did you become involved with CC?
   How heard—Date joined—Reasons
3. How would you characterize the mission and work of CC?
   What needs did CC fill?
   How did it compare to other feminist spaces (Women's Studies programs, NOW, local feminist support/reading/activist groups)?
   Did goals change over time?
   To what extent were goals achieved?
4. Why did CC tackle multiple societal oppressions instead of focusing on one?
   How did CC determine upon which issues to concentrate?
   How did CC members understand the idea of multiple oppressions or connections between oppressions?
5. How long were you part of CC? Time span
   What sustained your involvement?
   Were all times equally meaningful?
   Number of week or long-weekend sessions and other events.
6. How did you decide which role(s) to take in CC?
   How did your role(s) change and why?
   Were there roles you wished you had but couldn’t?
   How was responsibility allocated?
7. What kind of presentations was there on sexual preference, class, and white racism?
   Informational content—Responses—Movement from discomfort about privilege of oppressor groups to political awareness
   What did you teach or learn about lesbianism, heterosexuality, bisexuality, sexual expression, gender presentation?
   Did you view sexual preference/orientation as a fixed identity for a certain percentage of women or something women can move in and out of?
Memory of twenty-three questions on growing up working class and Passing Game
(by Mary Glavin): "How did you pass as middle class? What price did you pay for passing?"

How were potential differences between background and current class handled?
What did you teach or learn about racism?
How were minority ethnic statuses (e.g., Jewish identity) addressed in relation to
racism?
Where did the theories and methods for teaching come from? Change over time?
What was the balance between use of personal experience and structural analysis of
oppression?
How did your identity influence your responses to presentations, discussions of
sexual expression, and/or camp life?

8. How did the structure of CC's sessions change?
   Teaching workshops
   Feminist Primer breakfasts
   Small groups before dinner and assignment to SEA groups
   Community meetings
   Woman Care peer counseling
   Late Night Conversations
   Meditating, exercise, defense
   Kitchen
   Entertainment/talent show
   Children's community

9. (For collective members) What did you gain from being part of a collective?
(For all) Could you explain the importance of the different kinds of meetings you
participated in for planning, teaching, and relations between the collective and
community?

   Collective meetings:
   CC sessions
   Formal collective/community meetings
   Community evaluations
   Integration of women of color
   Women of Color Network meetings: significance, aspirations, changes over time
   Programs on racism and class for women's organizations
   Informal exchanges

10. What effects did CC have on you, the group, larger society?
    How was it relevant and to whom?
    To what extent did the Califia experience change your mindset, sense of place in
        the world, or commitment to activism? Others?
    What work or projects did you and other Califia women do? Change over time?

11. What kind of women attended?
    Why do you think Califia attracted such women? Change over time? Why?
    How did this alternative community affect people’s growth?
    How did individuals’ political involvement shape CC?
12. How did CC determine who would lead sessions?
13. How did using a rented camp setting in California forest affect participation and atmosphere?
   Disability access, children's community
   Do you think it mattered that Califia Community arose in LA? Why/why not?
14. How did CC cover costs of operation?
15. What was your position in relation to feminism? to lesbianism?
16. To what, if any, other feminist groups did you belong, and how did CC compare?
17. What constitutes activism?
18. What are your views on the use of consensus politics instead of voting or other models?
19. How well did CC deal with divisions within membership?
20. What led to the demise of CC?
B. QUESTIONS ON CLASS BACKGROUND AND THE PASSING GAME
QUESTIONS (CA. 1976-1978)

1. Who did the housework in your family—Your mother? You and siblings? A maid?
2. What were your parents’ highest hopes for you? Career? Job? Marriage?
3. What is your educational level? Who paid for your education?
4. Who paid for your first car?
5. Were you ever ashamed of your parents’ grammar? Their social skills? Their manners? Did you ever make believe they weren’t your parents?
6. Did your family plan vacations every year? Did the family actually get to go on them? Did you go by car, train, bus, plane? Did you go on passes?
7. How many jobs did your parents have at the same time?
8. Did your family usually have salad at meals? Did you get seconds of desert?
9. Did your mother do volunteer work?
10. Did you ever get an allowance?
11. If you worked for pay before you left home, did you get to keep all the money you earned?
12. What is bad taste?
13. Did you eat in the dining room, the living room, or the kitchen?
14. Did you expect life to be easy?
15. What was your high school graduation present? Your college graduation present?
16. What magazines did your parents subscribe to?
17. Did you go to summer camp?
18. What books did you have in your home?
19. Did you have nice and/or enough underwear and socks?
20. What kinds of games did your parents play?
21. Did you take music, dancing, or other lessons?
22. Did you have regular medical and dental checkups? Eye checkups
23. How many bathrooms were in your house?

Passing Game for women from working-class or poverty backgrounds:
How did you pass as middle class?
What price did you pay for passing?
(Women from other backgrounds simply say, “I pass.”)
C. YOLANDA RETTER, “SOME MYTHS ABOUT RACISM OR THE WONDERBREAD WOMAN’S EXCUSE CLOSET (1980) [reproduced verbatim]

1. Women of color have to make it safe for me to change.
2. White women are assertive, women of color are hostile.
3. Fighting for justice on a societal level will clear me on a personal level.
4. I can’t do it without women of color.
5. Two positions on our board and one scholarship will get us by.
6. I should get credit for marching in Selma in the 60s.
7. I should get credit for marching now.
8. I’m damned if I do, I’m damned if I don’t.
9. The process doesn’t have to be so painful.
10. I can probably change my racism without feeling as strongly about it as I do about feminism.
11. Women of color sabotage their efforts by being so radical.
12. I’m not so racist, I am/was lovers with woman of color.
13. It’s better to think of ourselves as all the same under the skin.
14. What can you expect from me, I was brought up in a racist society.
15. If women of color would only be more moderate I could work on my racism more easily.
16. I have so many issues to work on.
17. I’m not a racist, some of my best friends are, though.
18. I don’t have to be accountable for my racism, I will not be intimidated.
19. Women of color are themselves racist.
20. Women of color have choices about whether or not to deal with racism, whether or not they have to be so angry and whether or not they have to be so blatant.
21. It’s not that I am afraid, it’s not that I would cop out if push came to shove, it’s just that I can’t handle anger and intimidation.
22. I’ve been to racism workshops, I’ve worked on my racism for two years, what more do they want?
23. The reason I don’t confront my friends on their racism is because they don’t care.
24. The reason we don’t have any women of color on the upcoming program is because we couldn’t find any. I’m really sorry I’d like to own my responsibility in that...
25. I will jeopardize my job or my position with groups I belong to by coming on strong about racism or anything.
26. I am not hypocritical and I am not spineless, I am practical and moderate and how else can I get along in this world?
27. There is no love in the energy the women of color put out on this issue.

Above is a sample list of myths and excuses that white women are using to avoid the realities of their racism and the realities of the process of change. What they avoid behind the guise of being offended by our “anger” is the fact that racism is ingrained and difficult to ferret out, that the process is very painful when it is most authentic, and that it
takes a courage and commitment presently beyond the ability and interest of most white women.

If a white woman is going to succeed at dealing with her racism, she must learn to look into a sister of color and see some of the personal realities of that woman of color and what being a woman of color has brought down on that woman personally and collectively and what in her place a white woman would do. A white woman must also look inside herself and determine how many lies she is telling herself and women of color about her fears, fantasies and frustrations regarding racism and eventually she will stop using “anger” as the excuse for not dealing.

A white woman must care about this issue as she does about feminism and/or lesbianism because without that caring she cannot develop the conviction that will carry her beyond intellectualizing.

Intellectualizing and avoidance drives feminists mad when it is done by boys about sexism—so, how is it that so very different from inauthentic dealing about racism? Some women privately own their racism with a defiance that declares: “What are you gonna do about it, at least I’m honest about it.” Whose job is it to reach those women? Whose job is it to each the sisters who work very hard for issues like the ERA and lesbian rights but who think that a new women’s order can come into existence without women of color? And whose job is it to approach or reproach feminist, lesbian, and lesbian/gay organizations who are reluctant to deal with racism or who give lip service to the importance of the issue and then continue to ignore racism in their workspaces, conferences, directional boards and personal consciousness? Women of color seldom have a day off from the wars because the racism around us seldom takes a day off and I for one expect some help.
D. “STATEMENT FROM WOMEN OF COLOR TO THE CALIFIA COMMUNITY”
(1986) [reproduced verbatim]

We are feminist women of color who are acting out of our love for women and our commitment to the women’s liberation movement. We are here today to ask that the leadership of CALIFIA Community be turned over to the women of color. Our white sisters have an opportunity to bond with us in recognition that feminist women of color leadership is a valid and necessary political stand for all women now.

CALIFIA created a powerful model for feminist education and provided us with woman-space. Women participated out of love for women and political commitment and not for personal gain or opportunism. The CALIFIA model emphasized C-R in the personal and political and tried over the years to educate women about feminism, anti-racism and class consciousness. White leadership on the collective and resistance in the community limited the transformation of feminist goals into action.

Feminism is the recognition of who we really are. It’s natural expression is the movement of women towards liberation. The women’s movement can no longer be dominated by white women’s analysis of oppression and theories of liberation. Because of institutional racism white women oppress women of color. Even when anti-racist feminists work with women of color racist incidents occur and consciousness raising is done at the expense of women of color, for example racism is denied, ignored or justified.

Our women of color experience demands the comprehension of and resistance to all forms of oppression and exploitation. White women have been unwilling to translate their experience of oppression in ways that validate or include women of color. The articulation of our struggle is the leading edge of radical feminism. CALIFIA as a feminist institution is an ideal vehicle for that expression.

In our community women of color perspectives are not represented. CALIFIA is an established women’s cultural institution and expresses women’s culture significantly. Multicultural feminism defines and validates the conditions of all women’s lives and struggles, creating the possibility of sisterhood and bonding.

We offer our model of leadership, feminist process and education to the community. Now is the time for CALIFIA Community to evolve towards it’s ideals.

In sisterhood,
Women of Color

Feb. 1, 1986

PROPOSAL

CALIFIA will remain a feminist educational institution dedicated to the idea of providing programs and services to the community at large and to women of color in particular.
The leadership of the organization will be determined by feminist women of color and reflect the perspectives and priorities of women of color.

Multicultural camps and programs will be open to participation of all women. Some programs and camps will be reserved for women of color only.

Advisory and task groups will be open to all community women who are interested and want to contribute to the CALIFIA process.

CALIFIA will support groups of women organizing events or gatherings. This can include the loan of the CALIFIA mailing list, literature, non-profit bulk mailing permit and expertise.

The following list of programs will be considered to expand the impact of CALIFIA in the community.

OUTREACH
OLDER WOMEN'S NETWORK
COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS
SPEAKERS BUREAU
CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS
WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY AND HEALING NETWORKING
CULTURAL EVENTS
FUNDRAISING EVENTS
WOMEN'S COFFEEHOUSE
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