Minstrel Blood
Passover Revisited
by Alix Dobkin

Challenges to women-only space are as old as women-only space itself. We've seen its many forms and heard its many tongues. Some people still wonder, "What's the big deal about a man going to a women's concert?" or, "What difference could one man make?" "Men need to learn about feminism," they insist, and, "Boys are not 'men' and should be freely allowed into women's space." For over 20 years now, men have declared themselves "women," manipulated their bodies via experimental surgery, and then demanded the feminist seal of approval from survivors of girlhood.

Passover is about liberation. It's about not being slaves. Slavery requires uninterrupted access. The Jews in ancient Egypt tried everything they (and God) could think of to be free, but were finally forced into the desert to get away from the Egyptians. But where can women go to escape men?

WHEREAS:

▼ When women figured out their personal and global relationship to man and then conferred value upon their own lives, it was called "feminism"

WHEREAS:

▼ When women focused their heart's desire upon women, it was called "Lesbianism"

WHEREAS:

▼ When Lesbians became political, and when feminists became personal, it was called "Lesbian-feminism" and came immediately under siege.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

▼ Lesbian-feminism, like freedom, must be constantly re-invoked, restored and defended!

If you think about it, patriarchs do not enjoy rebellion any more than Pharaoh did, and men will act exactly the way he acted. That is, they will do every possible thing to perpetuate their rule. Pharaoh dispatched recognizable armies to pursue the Jews who found refuge beyond Egypt's reach. But man's shadow extends everywhere, and we must abide always in the land of our master. A world in which even recognizing, let alone naming, his forces becomes half the battle, made particularly difficult by sisters and brothers mobilized and outfitted to fetch us back.

Memories of a millennium reeking with the most brutally effective penalties devised by man fester deep within women's bones to infect the very molecules of women's being. Logical and compelling as our analysis of patriarchy is, not one of us truly escapes.

Nor do we escape those centuries of training to nurture and put others before ourselves. Three decades of Lesbian-feminism cannot hope to dismantle the terrible, unrelenting lessons daily reinforced and re-programmed.

No wonder then, that few will go the theoretical distance, let alone follow through with perilous ethical choices. Especially when seduced by attractively less rigorous, more comfortable alternatives.

Those sly old fellas who wrote the book on punishment, intimidation and bribery did not log eons of dominion for nothing. The second wave of Lesbian-feminists momentarily took them by surprise by appropriating the age-old battering rams to use as props. Fresh scar tactics were essential to turn a generation of "Lesbians" and "Dykes" against each other, so the philosophical reference point, "Separatist," was at once targeted as the replacement of choice and issued to their special forces. So effective was it, that to this day, otherwise disobedient Lesbians fall all over each other distancing themselves from that paralyzing label. "Bra burning" and "Man-hating" were likewise invoked to terrorize would-be renegades (although the term "woman-hating" is rarely applied, even to known misogynists).

When that failed to wipe us out, they tried "racist," and when Separatists of color protested being made invisible, not to mention the racist assumption that only white women were able to live independent of men, our accusers reverted to "divisive" and "exclusionary." The very same Rich-White-Men-Who-Rule-the-World- Inc. know that subtle distortions designed to tickle our best instincts and trigger our sense of justice might inspire well-meaning folks to do their nasty job for them. It's the way skewed jargon like "equality" has been used by racists to de-
Minstrel Blood
IF WE ONLY HAD A BRAIN
by Alix Dobkin

Those of you who know me only through my columns might think I'm a bit of a crank. I mean, like every other week I'm complaining about something, right? But you must admit there are so many things to complain about!

Like the "gender" takeover of Women's Studies for example. Or "Queers" disappearing Lesbians, sexual-minority-victim-politics displacing feminism, not to mention backsliding, treachery, and sadomasochistic numbness everywhere all around us. The rotten apples do not fall far from the patriarchal tree and each bears gossiping about.

I'm in concert however, you should know that a discouraging word seldom escapes my lips. That's because I intend my shows to heighten joy, deepen self love and inspire appreciation for women who value women. My performance is designed to strengthen hearts and generate applause.

On the other hand, I write columns to strengthen minds and generate thought. Feminist friends appreciate my sentiments, remarking that they have lamented the absence of rigorous community discussions for some time now. Non-feminist friends are notably put off by my strong views. "Why are you so angry?" they want to know. Not just angry, serious. And I wonder, aren't THEY angry about any of these things? Don't they read our publications and like me, recognize page upon page of wannabe self indulgence passing for culture, and pretentious drivel posing as scholarship?

Despite the appearance of a few thoughtful consciousness-raising articles, current slick Lesbian and gay magazines too often leave me frustrated and heartsick. Hey, I can read PEOPLE or FAMILY CIRCLE for my dose of empty irrelevance.

Two cases in point would be articles from a recent issue of a well-respected Lesbian periodical in which a prominent Lesbian psychiatrist-professor smugly congratulates herself in print as she describes handling two lovers at once, why more information than I ever wanted to know about anyone's private life. Some might find it instructive, but I was embarrassed for her and wonder what her patients must think.

"Men have always juggled wives and mistresses," noted my friend Boo after she read it. "She's a deep and creative thinker, but it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that this sort of relationship juggling is hardly innovative, as the author seems to believe. Remember Natalie, Dju, Renee and the widely published upper class Paris Lesbian community of the 1930s?"

Next up is a truly asinine piece about something called "luvbeams," meaning, explains the ex-Lesbian psychologist author, "...a darling (if she says so herself) play on the language, used to connote a sexual loving woman loving." Hah! Martha and Kathryn laughed hysterically. "Oh my god!" exclaimed Ginny. "First of all," said Retta, "it's nothing new, and second of all, it's nothing!" We want to know if anyone takes this seriously.

Lesbians used to be brainy and brave. Many still are, but articles like these make me worry that critical thinking has gone out with flannel shirts and Birkenstocks. Okay sure, one was written by a non-Lesbian. Reading further, I discover one of the editors astutely dissecting the patriarchal roots and rungs of social relationships. All right! I am happy to find that other pieces describe intriguing creative responses to a multitude of complex forces known as Lesbian love. Faith in my unique community is restored, and I envision feminism roaring back into Dyke consciousness to assume its rightful place in the forefront of our concerns.

But how many of us notice that you never hear words like "patriarchy" or male privilege nowadays? Although named and analyzed more than two decades ago, these institutions are more firmly entrenched than ever, but you wouldn't know it from our pop magazines or cultural mouthpieces.

Did someone say, short attention spans? Drugs and booze? Fear of Ageing?

Right about now comes the, "Oh yeah, thank goodness we are over 'politically correct.'" Well sistah, "political correctness" didn't turn our brains to mush. Au contraire! I've witnessed way too many colleagues so freaked by being thought "politically correct," and so worn down by ridicule, that they just eased away from their formerly brilliant feminism and settled into safe, trendy liberalism.

Remember when wearing skirts and high heels suddenly became "Bold" and "daring?" Pul-eez!

Do I sound cranky? Hey, there's plenty to be cranky about. And I'm not nearly finished, so please join me next time, because crankiness loves company.
Minstrel Blood

The Philadelphia Story

Part One, by Alix Dobkin

Judy Grahn, preeminent Lesbian poet, historian and seer recently asked me to describe, "the highest, lowest and most controversial adventure" of my Lesbian career. Twenty-five plus years as a loud-mouthed Lesbian Culture builder and trouble-maker have produced plenty, but my unsatisfying answer was, "A few weeks ago in Philadelphia."

In what can only be described as a bizarre example of late Twentieth Century surrealism I was, as many of you know, recently disinvited from appearing at a "Dyke" March rally because of, as one of the Committee put it, what I "might say."

Part one: Those of you familiar with Lesbian politics will easily be able to read between the lines and fill in the gaps. 1) In May 1998, I was invited to perform, on the day before my concert, at the rally of the Planning Committee advertised as the June 13 "First Annual Philadelphia Dyke March" for "...all Lesbians, bisexual women, transsexual, gender outlaws..." etc. etc.

2) I accepted the invitation ("delighted to accept") and stated that it would be the first "Dyke March" I knew of that included non Lesbians, and sent them my Passover Revisited (OUTLINES, April 15, 1999) column. (The column described the history of women-only space and historical efforts to destroy it, naming perpetrators, their allies, dupes and defenders. In it was the sentence: "For over twenty years now, men have declared themselves 'women,' manipulated their bodies via experimental surgery, and then demanded the feminist seal of approval from survivors of childhood.")

3) A message on my answering machine the night before I left for the East Coast informed me that I had been disinvited because I "might make some transsexuals feel uncomfortable."

4) I informed friends and emailed from NY that I was willing to be "uncomfortable" and so what? and forwarded several outraged emails from Lesbians coast-to-coast regarding censorship, ignorance of the meaning of "coalition," and alienation from Lesbian Culture, history and Community. A number of these emails pointed out the insulting arrogance of their decision, the absurdity of their skewed priorities and advised a name change for what we now called "The Tyke March."

5) A Phila Dyke musician, scheduled to sing at the rally, patiently discussed it with the Committee to no avail and considered withdrawing, which I discouraged. In fruitless efforts, other Philadelphia Dykes tried to reason with them.

6) "The Tyke March" was both critcized ("it's racist...remember when we scorned "butch and femme" because we didn't understand our history?") and supported ("they act like babies, we'll call them babies!")

7) Yet again, I explained to them why they should reconsider what I now called, the "Sexual Minorities March."

8) They asked me to "apologize" for the "offensive" sentence in Passover Revisited.

9) I replied that there was nothing to apologize for, and asked for a written and signed statement explaining why I was banned from the rally. I also suggested a post-rally meeting with Community and Committee Dykes.

10) The rally's MC, a local Lesbian radio host, met with some of the Committee and tried in vain to convince them to re-invite me. She then questioned her participation in the March, but decided to hang in, which I supported.

11) The Committee ignored the request for a signed statement. But agreed to the meeting and proposed a series of forums.

12) I sent them a copy of a 1994 statement co-written by me and (M-to-F transsexual) Ricki Anne Wilchens, in which we found common ground subscribing to the concept of mutual respect between our respective communities because it contained a crucial point which the Committee had overlooked:

"... (When) we attack and try to control each other (this) helps neither Ricki nor Alix, who sometimes agree and sometimes disagree, but nevertheless recognize that we will each benefit by treating each other with respect and by cooperating to create mutually acceptable common ground... it is paramount that all parties be encouraged to express their views within an atmosphere of mutual respect for divergent beliefs and concern for each others' well-being..."

Which is, as Committee Members may now be willing to agree, harder than it sounds. The entire statement stands the test of time and I was delighted to be able to fully subscribe to it four years later.

I expect to feel the same way about the much-maligned Passover Revisited which I knew would challenge the Committee. I even imagined that it might even upset one or two of them. But never in a million years would I have predicted the reaction it generated.

Next time: The rally and still another look at "the sentence. Stay tuned."

This is Lesbian History.
Minstrel Blood
Banned and Unbanned in Philadelphia
Part Two, by Alix Dobkin

"For over twenty years now, men have declared themselves 'women,' manipulated their bodies via experimental surgery, and then demanded the feminist seal of approval from survivors of girlhood."

Strong stuff! But arguably correct. I worked hard on that sentence and the entire Passover Revisited (OUTLINES, April 15, 1998) column from which it came, and consider it all to be straightforward, well-considered political analysis. My nearest, dearest and smartest friends read and agreed with it, but realized at once that I would be punished. "This is trouble!" they warned. And trouble it was.

Being banned in Philadelphia was just the beginning, summarized in my last Minstrel Blood column, where 1-12 describes that and subsequent efforts to reason with the Philadelphia "Dyke" (also known as The so-called Dyke," "The not-so-Dyke," "Tyke," "Sexual Minorities," etc.) March Committee.

After voluminous e-mail questioning, clarifying and negotiating with the Committee, I calmed myself down and requested a written statement explaining why I had been EXCLUDED from their "inclusive" March. I also sent each one of them a 1994 statement co-written by (M-to-F transsexual) Rickie Ann Wilkens and me endorsing mutual respect. Both the statement and the request were ignored.

But they did agree to my suggestion of a meeting with concerned, long-time, community activists, and offered to "Sponsor a series of facilitated roundtables in the fall..." to continue discussing the issues. At the time I was in NYC where, as is my custom:

13) I met and exchanged gossip with my old friend (ACT UP and Lesbian Avengers co-founder) Sarah Schulman, who was, of course, dumbfounded by the story, and immediately got on the phone to Kate Bornstein and Urvashi Vaid, and spoke to Rickie Ann, who quickly agreed that I was being censored.

14) Rickie Ann called Philadelphia and conducted a lengthy and difficult late-night conversation ("the good cop") with a key Committee Member, after which,

15) Sarah reported that they realized the error of their decision but did not know how to change it.

16) I suggested they say, "oops! We made a mistake" (it's not so hard; I've done it for years).

17) They asked Rickie Ann to travel to Phila for the rally, thereby obtaining permission to re-invite me from a sanctioned "transfolk" ("...is not a word," says linguist, Julia Penelope).

18) Two days before the rally, I was re-invited.

19) On the day of the rally, my place in the line-up was changed twice in order to accommodate Rickie Ann's schedule. I went along with each change and refrained from commenting.

20) A dozen of the 100 (or less) women on the March hid their faces with paper plates on sticks bearing my photo and reading, "We are ALL Alix Dobkin."

21) The Committee members repeatedly hugged and hovered around Rickie Ann and paid very close attention to that speech, but wandered around and conferred during mine, avoided me throughout, and would not have spoken to me at all except that I approached each one I knew to be on the Committee and introduced myself.

22) Rickie Ann talked about "free speech," personally having been the victim of censorship, and then pointedly defended the "right of separatists to dis me" without a word of explanation or background, then left before I spoke. The sideways snar was the single "dis" from any rally speaker.

23) I spoke about how wonderful lesbian privilege is, that everyone wants to be a lesbian but not everyone can be, and that we need to be positive and loving role models. I told the sparse and lackluster gathering about the importance of being comfortable in your body, true to your inner spirit and loyal to yourself no matter what peers, parents, teachers, government, doctors, drug companies or anyone else might think, say

or expect of you.

25) It rained and everyone dribbled away.

26) A dozen of us converged at a Chinese restaurant and enjoyed big laughs.

Without wanting to, this Committee made me the star of their rally. Everyone was talking. For weeks my name flew around the internet and more people were introduced to my politics than I could ever have hoped. Lesbians leapt to my defense. Best of all, these kids supplied me with enough fodder for months worth of columns and countless speeches, quips, jokes, stories and raps: buried treasure unearthed.

So thank you, Philadelphia Dyke March Committee. My next column will continue the saga, contain, yet again, the dread sentence, cover the concert and the meeting. But be warned: This material is considered offensive. That is, if I do my job right.
Minstrel Blood

Philadelphia Story

The (Post March) Meeting

by Alix Dobkin

"HEAD LESBIAN ALIX DOBKN SILENCE BY SISTERS IN CITY OF BROTHERLY LOVE," read the handbill distributed in Philadelphia during the week before the "Dyke" March. Here's why: For over 20 years now, men have declared themselves 'women,' manipulated their bodies via experimental surgery, and then demanded the feminist seal of approval from survivors of girlhood. (from Passover Revisited OUTLINES, April 15, 1998)

When my smartest friends read this they became worried for me. Each has endured every possible argument, justification, excuse and complaint against women-together-withoutmen. We have heard it all, yet remain loyal to sacred female space, despite the known danger of supporting any cause lacking male approval.

The Philadelphia Story, Parts 1 & 2 (OUTLINES, July 1998) detail highlights of the drama forseen by my friends. They describe my invitation and subsequent disinvitations to the "first (sic) Annual Philadelphia Dyke March." Far-reaching, fervent fallout from the Lesbian Community-at-large ultimately resulted in transsexual permission for the Committee to issue its graceless and grudging re-invitation to me. Surreal, no?

In sharp contrast to the sparse and lackluster rally the following night, my concert glowed with an energized full house of Lesbians and folkies, young and old, women and men. And, although I had invited them all, not a single Committee member showed there or at either of two workshops I held during the weekend. Too "exhausted," I was told. To which I replied truthfully, "At your age I enjoyed far greater vitality."

And now to resume The Philadelphia Story (continuing sections 1-29):

30) Most members (about 9) of the Committee did summon strength for the Monday post-rally meeting. A corresponding number of mostly local non- or ex-Committee Dykes was also present. We each identified ourselves. The rally emcee admirably facilitated the anxious, tense roomful of Dykes.

31) Repeatedly asked for a description of its decision-making process, The Committee responded with tight-lips or evasions.

32) In addition to characterizing my sentence (see above) as "disrepectful" and "dehumanizing" to transsexuals, Committee members said that they had heard I was "transphobic." One read aloud a tormented transsexual account of "girlhood." (This had been excerpted from one of several insulting e-mails from transsexuals who routinely call non-compliance "oppressive" or worse. In this particular round I was compared to the KKK. Interestingly, this offensive strategy historically wielded against women-only advocates seems not to bother either transsexuals or their champions.

33) No mention was made about the statement I had co-authored with a transsexual (1994) and sent the Committee (see Part 1)—nor did they acknowledge any of my work or thinking around this (or any) issue.

34) Committee members claimed that they had tried to make "everyone" feel "comfortable" and "welcome." I did not point out how unwelcome I had felt by attempts of Committee members to ignore and distance themselves from me at the rally, not to mention their disinvitation in the first place. One Committee member admitted that "everyone" really meant "the people I feel close to...my family."

35) One Committee member said their mistake was inviting me in the first place.

36) Several complained that no one understood how hard they had worked on this March or how "agonizing" their process had been. Eyes rolled and looks were exchanged among a half dozen long-time activists who then took turns clarifying some basic "been there, done that" history, patiently explaining how long and hard we had fought to define and establish the word, "Dyke," which has a positive meaning ONLY because of that work which the Committee then appropriated and misused.

Weeks later, via email, a young Philadelphia Dyke told me that she had not returned to participate in the planning of the March because "... the whole first meeting was dominated by a man."

Aha! So you see it's all about male approval, which explains why, contrary to the spirit and spontaneity Dyke Marches are famous for, this Committee applied for (and received) a permit. No wonder their parade was so utterly inconsequential.

By their actions, the Committee dramatically proved Passover Revisited's truth in a stunning demonstration of how radical and threatening women-only space still is. By following the same old script of men (of every gender) trying yet again to take over what we have so painstakingly created, a group of young women with no sense of their history, no clear identity or boundaries, and no mission, once again stampeded over Lesbians to "take care" of those "more in need," "more marginalized," "more vulnerable" (as one put it), than themselves. So who gets excluded? So what else is new?

(Next time: The Meeting - part 2)
Minstrel Blood
The Philadelphia Story, Pt. 4
by Alix Dobkin

Then, to add insult to injury, their e-mail went on to explain that they did not want me at their rally: "... regardless of how much we like your music and appreciate your valuable contributions to dykes' lives and culture over the last 25 years. We'd love to have you perform, if you can somehow apologize for/clarify/restate..." Say what?!!

Via the miracle of e-mail, the story of the Committee's objection and my consequent banning ("... because your presence might make some transsexuals feel uncomfortable," went the answering machine message) spread like fire in Florida. I had voiced no objection to their array of sexual minorities, but had relayed my article because clearly, "Dyke," meant something quite different to the Committee than it does to me. Or my contemporaries. Or any woman who has participated in Lesbian-feminist Community for more than, say, five years. Or who understands history. Or Lesbian-feminism. Or who knows more than the standard “Gender/Queer Studies” Postmodern, deconstructionist version of "women."

So I extended to the Committee the benefit of my experience and thinking. They didn't have to agree. Just read it, and maybe even think about it. Then the incredible happened, as my previous columns relate. Following their cool, grudging re-invitation, I suggested a post-March meeting to sift through the multi-layered, public controversy.

Attended by most of the Committee, an equal number of Local Lesbian activists and four out-of-towners (including me) the meeting was efficiently facilitated by the rally's emcee, a Philadelphia Women's radio show host.

Several Lesbians described alienation from the Committee at its initial meeting. An experienced organizer, for example, related that she had been excited about younger Lesbians taking charge, but could not bring herself to remain involved after the shock of finding the first meeting "dominated by a man." This complaint was later echoed in a conversation with a young Dyke activist. She described how disgusted she was that the Committee had allowed him to control the meeting. "They were," she said, "afraid of women-only."

Reflected in the March/rally's poor attendance and dismal spirit was the Committee's isolation from Lesbian community. Experienced community activists pointed out that this was not the "first" Philadelphia Dyke March as had been advertised. They asked to hear what made this March different from Sunday's "Diversity of Pride" March. Why not, they asked, call it the "Queer" March or "Affinity" March? No answer. The question was repeated. Still no answer.

Committee members were firmly and clearly encouraged not to let this excellent opportunity pass without processing and expanding their knowledge. They were advised that the disrespect shown me, a Lesbian "with international status," could not be expected to go unnoticed by a global Lesbian Community well aware of my 25 years of work and commitment. No recognition was given the strong suggestion that an apology to me was in order. Reprimanded by the voice of unmistakable authority, they stared, embarrassed and resentful, at the floor, at the table, at each other, but not at me or the speaker, a visitor from another continent with 30 years of Lesbian organizing experience.

Mention was made that this is merely a "new" version of the "old abuses" of Lesbians, feminism and women-only space, but overly aware of the Committee's evident discomfort, the veterans among us did not belabor the obvious: that their indifference to our concerns and their unexamined knee-jerk loyalty to transsexuals over Lesbians is just another replay of women's loyalty to men over women/ Lesbians in the past/present.

How in the world, I wondered, how could we get through to this bunch? Find out in the next Minstrel Blood.
Minstrel Blood
Big Al from Philly
by Alix Dobkin

Because most of my youth was spent in Philadelphia, I consider it my home town. With my schooling completed and a budding folk-singing career underway, I hot-footed it to NYC's Greenwich Village coffeehouse scene along with Bill Cosby, who graduated from Temple University as I did in the spring of '62.

We had worked together in Philadelphia and successfully auditioned at The Gaslight Cafe which became home base. We later branched out to hotspots like Gerde's Folk City and The Bitter End. Our distinguished crowd boasted many Twentieth Century musical greats such as Tom Paxton, Len Chandler, Duffy St Marie, Dave Van Ronk, Phil Ochs, Bob Dylan, Carolyn Hester and John Sebastian. Occasionally they addressed me as "Big Al from Philly."

That nickname came to mind when I returned to my teen stomping ground for Pride Weekend '98. A crowd made up of Dykes and folkies of all ages filled the church for my Sunday evening concert. Among the enthusiastic audience was Eliot, the guy who first showed me how to play guitar, along with some ex-comrades and an old boyfriend from my Party, and I don't mean "party-party-party," days.

Which just goes to show how much has changed in 40 years. "Dyke," for example, has graduated from hideous insult to super cool, sexy word of power. Now it gets girls (see Jorjet Harper's Lesbomania column, OUTLINES June 17, 1998) and lately it seems like everyone wants to be a Lesbian. Who can blame them? Not everyone though, CAN actually BE a Lesbian.

Those of you familiar with Parts 1-4 of The Philadelphia Story (Minstrel Blood, OUTLINES July & Aug 1998) will recall that I had been invited to appear at the "first(sic)" annual Philadelphia 'Dyke' March rally for "all lesbians, bisexual women and transfolks...." To this laundry list I replied that it would be the first Dyke March I knew of which was not exclusively Dykes. But OK, I could do this in the spirit of "coalition." However when I forwarded Passover Revisited (Minstrel Blood, OUTLINES, April 15) Big Al became persona non grata. Censored. Not by Jesse, Pat or Newt, but by Dykes.

Until this happened I actually thought nothing could top the slapstick Lesbian saga described in Throw Out the Pricks (Minstrel Blood, OUTLINES, June 17) occurring 22 years ago to the month. Passover Revisited unapologetically detailed attempts by men of all genders to invade women-only space. It identified historical perpetrators, their allies, dupes and defenders and outlined some of their strategies. I worked hard on that piece and consider it to be straightforward, well-considered political analysis.

In the end, the March's poor attendance and dismal spirit had a lot to do with an odd combination of arrogance and timidity compounded by the Committee's inexperience and indifference to Lesbian-feminist history. Also at fault was the vacuum left behind by the fragmentation of what was once a reasonably coherent Lesbian community. A transit strike may have affected attendance but did not account for the rally's bleak, unfocused energy.

The Philadelphia Story, Parts 3 & 4 concerned the post March/rally community meeting, during which I told the handfull of Committee members in attendance that decades of working with and for Lesbian Community had taught me that even if we don't respect each other, we must treat each other with respect. I had treated them respectfully but felt disrespected by them.

Repeated questioning eventually extracted from Committee members their process and values, which came down to protecting the feelings of those they considered "most vulnerable." When I got it that not hurting feelings was their priority, I said that they had hurt mine. Although extremely incidental to me, the point was made. I finally became human in the eyes of at least two Committee members, eyes that looked into mine for the very first time. These were rice girls, and I returned their gaze with affection. Maybe now they would be able to understand the deeper political consequences of their action.

Others, however, still refused even eye contact, their mouths zipped tight, their resentment contained, their "victim" politics intact, comfortable in the assumption that I and older "Lesbian-feminists" could be taken for granted, that we "didn't need to be taken care of" like those "more marginalized" "outsiders," who outranked us on the oppress-o-meter.

Fortunately, there are plenty of other young Dykes I've met who know better, who are brave and smart enough to recognize Patriarchy when they see it. And they don't like it any more than we do.
Minstrel Blood
The Verb of Gender and Other Three Dollar Bills
by Alix Dobkin

Ghandi is supposed to have said, “First they ignore us, then they ridicule us, then they attack us, then we win.” If Ghandi had lived long enough he might have added “then they confuse us” to his list of oppressive tactics.

Tyrants know and fear the power of speaking the truth, and Ghandi might have noticed that shortly after Feminism began speaking Truth to Patriarchal Power, “Truth” became unintelligible, and “Power” became unrecognizable. For as “Gender” crowds and disables “Women” in the Academy, so does “Queer” virtually erase “Lesbian” in the streets. Together they have distracted, diverted and muddied their way through Patriarchy’s worst enemy, Lesbian Feminism.

What really irritates me is that sorority of fifty-plus-year-old tenured academics leading the forced march away from Feminist analysis which they dismiss with intimidating jargon like “cultural feminism” and “identity politics.” These people actually think “gender” is a verb. They “do” gender, “perform” gender, and make much out of the genuine life-changing, radical Feminism of yesteryear, which is how some of us still recognize sex-roles and power-over systems of male dominance.

Instead of obliterating women, the proper study of gender would lay bare how men do what, and to whom, confront men’s institutional bad behavior and help them become less self-referential, obnoxious and destructive.

The good news is that some men are actually beginning to see through and discard toxic “manliness” to become human. The bad news is that pathetically little of this takes place in the Academy.

In addition to exposing male dominance, educating students about gender would reveal that decorative display represented as “feminine” is, in fact, rip-roaringly “masculine.” For evidence we have only to refer to the animal or bird “kingdom,” where males are normally far more beautifully turned out than females.

Restricting “dressing up” to females contradicts mother nature. Who, after all, invented and administers it? I have often remarked that any second-rate drag queen can easily outdress Elizabeth Taylor. (They’d have a harder time outdoing Dolly Parton to whom drag is a disguise and a meal ticket rather than an inner imperative.) “So why,” you might ask, “are women exclusively assigned the duties and image so naturally suited to men?”

Aha! Now we’re getting into DOMINANCE and SUBMISSION, the heart and soul of Patriarchy, where “masculinity” denotes dominance and “femininity” signals submission. It’s as simple as that. And as complicated. For in a world run by bullies, true individual human natures must be wrenched into distorted roles demanding falsified appearances, behaviors, expectations, etc. ad nauseam.

Because men are removed from the creation of life in the terrifying real world, they construct a fake world where men MUST dominate and women MUST submit. But since this is so UNNATURAL, deviations pop up like pimples on a teen. Therefore, Patriarchy needs monitoring the way teenagers need pimple cream.

Male display in the natural world serves to attract the indifferent female of the species. In the unnatural world of Patriarchy, men dress mainly to better position themselves in hierarchies which are easily read, conform to and enforced. In this way men distinguish who they boss and who bosses them. Reliable, familiar pecking orders, like the military, help them feel comfortably secure and push fear away.

And when it comes to dressed coded sex-roles, men are likely to become extremely touchy. After all, they murdered Joan of Arc not for hearing voices but for wearing men’s clothing. Furthermore, although actively heterosexual, most cross dressers must dress up in secret so as not to get beaten up by men too fearful to wear dresses themselves.

Many women appear to like male drag too, but in Patriarchy it’s impossible to know what’s authentic. Would women choose to wear men’s dresses, their lipstick, their high heels and their clevage outside Patriarchy? Or are they merely trying to avoid disapproval? No one living in the unnatural world knows.

The recent popularity of “Drag King” events for women speak more about superficial efforts to resolve power imbalances than it does about female display. It also demonstrates who young Dykes have been hanging out with, whose sensibility they’ve been absorbing, and to whom they have been looking for their identity.

Which brings us back to “Queer,” where a generation of young Lesbians has been schooled, where the ideas and passions of Lesbian Feminists often seem foreign, to whom the experience of women-only space appears alien, and for whom Dyke consciousness has faded into men of all “genders” and “Queers” of all nations.
Minstrel Blood
A Vacuum to Fill the Void
by Alix Dobkin

Arriving in the mail recently was a UCSF (University of California San Francisco) newsletter announcing that as of Sept. 1, 1998, “the Women’s Resource Center” will change its name to the “Center for Gender Equity.”

And another one bites the dust. Daaa! Feminism is just too hard. Not to comprehend, but to live. Feminism means to stop serving men and their interests. (Patriarchy, and be deeply loyal to women and our interests. When these interests conflict, feminism puts women first.

Simple, but too much trouble, or too fearful, for those who prefer to disregard or obfuscate feminist values. UCSF is more proof that a full-blown retreat from tough feminist political analysis is in full swing. Things like “Gender Equity” come about because they will offend (challenge) significantly fewer males than “Women’s Resource.” Well, daf!

It’s come as a shock to realize that while my colleagues and I weren’t looking, a generation of young Dykes were being robbed of their birthright and raised in a numbing vacuum by guiltless career-feminists and “gender-opportunist” leaders leaving the latest retreat from feminism.

The depressing result is that far too many young Lesbians today wander clueless through the fragmented pieces of what was once a reasonably coherent Lesbian landscape.

Ignorance of the largely vanished Lesbian communities and the feminist values which thrived within their lifetime, most lack the means to negotiate patriarchy.

What they (and we) are left with is a market population, an assimilated, apolitical, Gay ladies auxiliary. Here, “victim politics,” that dreary, disempowering substitute for thought, flourishes. Here is where the most “marginalized” or “vulnerable” get snared up to “worst cause” and forced out to imitate political analysis.

So who disappears? Duh, again.

I was once shocked (but again not surprised) to read in OFF OUR BACKS about the National Women’s Studies Conference entitled “The Politics of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Communities”—hey, WAIT a minute! what is THAT about?) that the first plenary speaker was, you guessed it, a man. Never mind that he is Black. He is a MAN addressing NWSA.

Excuse me for not following the latest party line, but what the fuck??!! That’s a rhetorical question. Anyone with half a brain knows what the fuck. NWSA has always been Lesbian-run and Lesbian-energized. But never has it been Lesbian centered, certainly not Lesbian identified, and has often behaved in shamefully Lesbian unfriendly ways.

Yeah sure, we understand excuses for Lesbophobia as we see through NWSA’s attempt to stone its racist offenses of the past. Understanding bad behavior is not the problem. Patriarchy’s age-old attention deficiency disorder regarding anything focused on women is. But what else, as I find myself saying far too often, is new?

Lesbian space is what’s new. Achieved at huge cost and perpetually under attack, “Women’s space” is almost exclusively a creation of Lesbian energy. But like the NWSA unabashedly Lesbian-run groups pay dearly for their tidiness. Oh, like the former UCSF “Women’s Resource Center,” they disappear.

From visible, if somewhat contentious, networks of related loudmouthed, Lesbian communities, we’ve been reduced to pitiful semi-normality. It’s the, “Please-just-accept-me-I’m-really-just-like-you-except-for-who-fucks-with-school of assimilation, and I say screw that!

Because Lesbians are not like non-Lesbians and are not meant to be. It’s time to quit copying mainstream and, even more important, to quit feeling flattered when mainstream copies us. “Mainstream” itself is a void depending on outsider cultures for whatever life it can appropriate.

The good news is that our Culture, by its very nature, eludes Patriarchy, so all they ever get from us is “Pretend” Lesbian Culture.

The bad news is that so many Lesbians buy into it. “What remains of our formerly abundant, home-made, wholeness, passionate, oddball and currently mostly vanished Lesbian Culture is precious. Rarely do Dykes get together as Dykes to celebrate our wonderful creative selves these days. Mountain Monday Coffeehouse supporters know this, as do members of our “not just a Stage” Lesbian Club in Oakland.

We love our exclusive Lesbian space where we, as genuine outsiders with nothing to lose, defy the bounds of men’s boring, boring, known world. Which is why, with the exception of those Lesbians trying to appear “normal,” Lesbians are so darn interesting.

Politics without feminism is the current wasteland of market culture and virtual “Queer/gender” politics is a joke. And it’s no fun.
Queer and Present Danger
Are dyke issues getting lost in the LBGT movement?

BY ALIX DOBKIN

When my friend asked some men why they were marching in last year's San Francisco Dyke March, they answered that they wanted to support dykes. "Then go to the side and cheer us on!" she told them. They ignored her. After all, our gay "brothers" are men, and as men in a man's world, they are entitled to be anywhere they want.

Whenever I talk about women, as I often do while touring at universities, I can count on at least one female student asking, "But what about men?" This happens whenever nonfeminist women are asked to prioritize themselves as women. So it's not surprising to me that young lesbians who came of age after the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s are now identifying as "queer." It's also not surprising that many lesbian activists now are describing themselves as part of a "lesbian" or "LBGT" movement, thereby identifying themselves with men and men's issues.

I have a problem with that—not because I don't think it's important to make coalitions with other groups. I have a problem with lesbians identifying as "queer" or working in a "queer" movement because a movement run by men has no use for examining power relationships between men and women—not respect for sacred women's space. These lesbians who identify as "queer" or LBGT always want to include men in lesbian events. Gender studies is replacing women's studies in the academy, and "queer" is replacing "dyke" in the streets.

Yet heteropatriarchy, the institutionalized heterosexual male dominance first identified 25 years ago by lesbian feminists, is still very much in place. Feminism means being deeply loyal to women and our interests, and no longer serving men and their interests. When these interests conflict, feminism puts women first. Feminism demands that we reverse our priorities and remake our self-image. That's just too hard for some people—not to comprehend, but to live. But why?

In a world dominated by men—and ours still is—men of every race, class, and culture enjoy universal access to power. Lesbians, like all women raised in patriarchal societies, have been conditioned over thousands of years to feel incomplete without a man to validate our existence. Each and every woman carries in her bones the memory of the most savage penalties devised by men for disobedient women. Logical and compelling as our feminist analysis of patriarchy is, not one of us truly escapes. But some of us do.

Enter the concept of "women-only." After 25 years it is still the most courageous, most radical, and most threatening action women can undertake in patriarchy. Remember your first women-only event? Mine was in 1971, during my prelesbian days in New York City when I had just started learning about feminism through my consciousness-raising group. I walked on air for days. Women-only! I loved it instantly, then and now. It just feels different. But for too many dykes, the ideas and passions of lesbian feminists appear foreign, and the experience of women-only space seems alien in a world where lesbian consciousness has been absorbed into men of all genders and queers of all sorts.

Think gay culture and lesbian culture are one and the same? Obviously, you haven't walked into a gay male bookstore lately. "I find it very empowering," rhapsodized the proprietor of a popular gay male Web site recently, "to see all these people with so much energy and enthusiasm about sucking cock." Just as "gay male" has nothing to do with women, "lesbian" has nothing to do with men. We are connected to gay men only as victims of bigotry. But is that really how we want to be identified?

To most people, the words "gay" and the more defiant "queer" both denote men, with women in an auxiliary role. Both are therefore less dangerous labels than the woman-centered "lesbian." Just ask Ellen DeGeneres, who could barely pronounce the word "lesbian" even after she came out as one.

Women gain validity by aligning with men, and men's support can help women survive life in a man's world. In addition, some men are genuine allies to women. I, too, include myself in progressive, antiracist, Jewish, and sometimes even queer communities. But I'm much more than a sexual minority—the category that lesbians have been dumped into ever since we helped everyone else come out.

My mission is to explode the sexist controls of what's considered normal, to advance that which frees us from the confines of those who would dominate us and dictate our choices. As a feminist, I want every creature on earth to freely fulfill her, or his, creative, unique destiny.

In a way, I like the fact that increasing numbers of young people feel secure enough and yet defiant enough to name themselves as queer. Women standing up for women have created whatever safety exists for anyone who chooses personal freedom over conformity. That's our job and we do it better than anyone else. In a way, the current popularity of queer identity among young lesbians reveals our success. It reflects women's universal desire to champion the oppressed, to enlarge a safe and comfortable community, and to widen and diversify our world.

But homophobia and lesbianophobia are as different from each other as men are from women. And like men and women, they are not interchangeable. Homophobia means fear of homosexuality or fear of one's own homosexual desire. Lesbianophobia means fear of women-centered being—that is, women without men. It's the end of civilization as we know it. And it can't come soon enough for me.

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In spite of what we all know about elections, they are not a matter of choice. The election results are not determined by the people who vote, but by the structure of the system itself. The media, the parliament, the judiciary, and the executive all have a role in shaping the outcome of elections.

The election process is based on the principle of majority rule, which means that the candidate or party with the most votes wins. This is not a democratic process, as it does not take into account the opinions of minority groups. The result of an election is often determined by the way in which voters are organized, rather than by their actual preferences.

The role of the media in elections is crucial. The media can shape public opinion and influence people's votes. However, the media is not impartial and can be biased towards certain candidates or parties. This can lead to the distortion of information and the manipulation of public opinion.

The judiciary also plays a role in elections. The courts can determine whether an election is valid or not, and can also decide who the winner is in the event of a tie. However, the judiciary is not always impartial, and can be influenced by political pressure.

The executive also has a role in elections. The government can influence the outcome of an election by controlling access to media and other resources. The executive can also influence the way in which elections are conducted, such as by setting the date of an election or by limiting the number of candidates who can run.

In conclusion, elections are not a matter of choice, but are determined by the structure of the system itself. The media, the judiciary, and the executive all have a role in shaping the outcome of elections. It is important to understand the role of each of these institutions in the election process, in order to understand the limits of democracy in elections.