

The Male Supremacist Attack on Monogamy

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Not the least of the crimes committed against women under male supremacy is that of our emotional abandonment by men. Though it is harder to quantify than economic exploitation and less dramatic than physical brutalization, it is this central fact which is a prerequisite for all the other actions taken against us by our oppressors. It is also a starting point for understanding the currently fashionable "smash monogamy" line borrowed from the male left and the counterculture: the "liberal," innovative wings of male supremacy. This line serves a number of functions for those men who are forward-looking enough to see the inevitability of change in male-female relationships and clever enough to try to see to it that this change is one of form and not substance. It suggests that male domination in individual relationships is not the result of too much power over women, but of an artificial, unnatural restraint placed over *both* partners which can only lead to *mutual* disagreeableness. It suggests that females can escape their oppression by males by exchanging masters more frequently. It means that "progressive" males need not stick around too long—very convenient in this era of feminist demands. It means that the time-honored game of playing off wife against mistress, girlfriend against girlfriend can be further institutionalized. There is no surer way for two women to end up hating each other than if they're sleeping with the same man and this knowledge is an important motivating factor for the man involved. It means above all, that the *real* tradition in male-female relationships—the tradition of tantalizing tastes of "love," dispensed and withheld at will, depending on the adequacy and obedience of the female in providing domestic, sexual and emotional servicing of the male—will continue to be covered up. This tradition outlived the harem. It outlived the 19th century system of lifelong marriage, relieved for the male by a flourishing market of poor women supporting themselves through prostitution. It continues under the present system which is a combination of the old 19th century system and the new 20th century trend of serial marriage even further diluted by the "sexual revolution" of the 60's. The only system in which this emotional cat and mouse game would lose its effectiveness would be a system of true monogamy—of shared emotional commit-

ment— and that is something we have never seen and can be sure of never seeing as long as men are in a position of political and economic supremacy.

"Smashing monogamy" is nothing new for men. They have been doing it for centuries. So much so that the image of the jealous, "possessive" wife confronting the husband with a roving eye has become a truism, reflected in the literature of many periods and cultures. What is new however, is its elevation to the level of an ideology. What was once grudgingly accepted as inevitable male irresponsibility is now presented as a new ethic. The cult of "non-possessive" relationships is found in its most sophisticated form among leftist men and in the hippie culture. Not surprisingly it has been enthusiastically picked up by other groups of men, for example, those who frequent "swinging singles" bars.

Radical men have not only used this ideology to exploit women individually, they have also attempted to institutionalize it in programs calling for the "abolition of the nuclear family". On the surface it seems quite innocent, even praiseworthy. "Women have been oppressed in the family. As good radical men we're opposed to that. We have to develop new forms that will "free our sisters". The trouble is it isn't the forms that have been oppressing women, it is those same "brothers" who are running to our rescue. Now they are offering us "freedom." Freedom from love; freedom from emotional support; freedom from sharing the material privileges they have enjoyed for so long. What these men are essentially demanding is that women continue to perform all the usual services expected of us, but without asking anything in return.

It is easy to understand the anti-monogamous convictions of men. They've been with us for a long time and we've had time to figure them out. But how has this line come to be the prevailing ideology of a movement purportedly representing the interests of *women*?

It is a measure of how far we have to go that so much of what passes for "feminist theory" today is derived from intellectual systems developed by our oppressors. This is not to say that we can learn nothing from ideas developed by men. It does mean that we have to scrutinize very carefully the self-interest of the men who developed these ideas and just as important, put ideas to the test of our own interests as women. The right wing of male supremacy provided psychological idealism, the left wing of male supremacy provided overlooked "materialism" which simply overlook the realities of women's lives although it described other oppressive situations quite well. And various

women's groups rather than building their theories from individual facts we knew to be true and seeing what patterns fell into place, imported patterns from the male intellectual world and then tailored their experiences to fit them—however much cutting and squeezing that required.

Of course, there were always stirrings from underneath; women who insisted on thinking independently no matter how much Reich or Engels were thrown at them; women who continued to state their real desires.

The first step was to invalidate the expressed desires of women. This was done by asserting that because women are conditioned, damaged, dependent or whatever, our present desire can't be taken too seriously.

Once the desires of women were invalidated it was easy enough to fall in line with those of men. Obviously men and women have been at loggerheads over the monogamy issue for too long. What easier way to get peace than for *us* to change, to pretend that we want just the same things that men want for us, we just weren't liberated enough to admit it before.

The feminist realization was that you don't get what you want—in this case monogamy, love and commitment—by pretending you don't want it. And you don't get what you

want by pretending you already have it. You only get what you want by fighting for it.

Part of the problem in the women's liberation movement, too, was confusing long range goals with the practical daily ways we have to live right now: thinking, for instance, that a woman could not call for, sincerely want, monogamy and leave her husband at the same time; that a woman could not see everything that was wrong with "free love" and still decide that it was the best she had right now.

Further, it was not understanding the differences, even the contradictions, between what we want and what we have to do to get there. There was a feeling that demanding love from men meant you were willing to give up anything for it, when actually demanding love, real love, from men meant no longer giving things up, being ready to stop giving things up, when what you were getting for it was not really love at all and couldn't be as long as you had to give up basic human needs for it.

Giving things up had to be equal for love to be gained.

—*The major part of this paper was written in September 1971*

THE MORE I REVOLT THE MORE I WANT TO MAKE LOVE;
THE MORE I MAKE LOVE THE MORE I WANT TO REVOLT!

— *May, 1968, Paris uprising wall slogan*

"LEFT" AND RIGHT ERRORS

"LEFT"

The liberal man is attracted by the light of the radical woman but repelled by the heat.

The liberal man has respect for women, in general, but contempt for any woman in particular.

With the liberal man, sex is all clitoris, no vagina.

RIGHT

The conservative man is attracted by the heat of the radical woman but repelled by the light.

The conservative man respects his particular woman but has contempt for women in general.

With the conservative man, sex is all vagina, no clitoris.

— *K.S. & F.L.*

SUGGESTED READINGS

Woman to Woman, a book of poems and drawings by women, 5251 Broadway, Oakland, Calif. (\$1.50).

A Dialogue, James Baldwin & Nikki Giovanni, 1973.

To Be Of Use, by Marge Piercy, 1973.

"Women in Japan: Lucy Leu Interviews Michimi," In *The Second Wave*, Winter, 1974, Box 344, Cambridge A, Cambridge, MA 02139. (\$1).