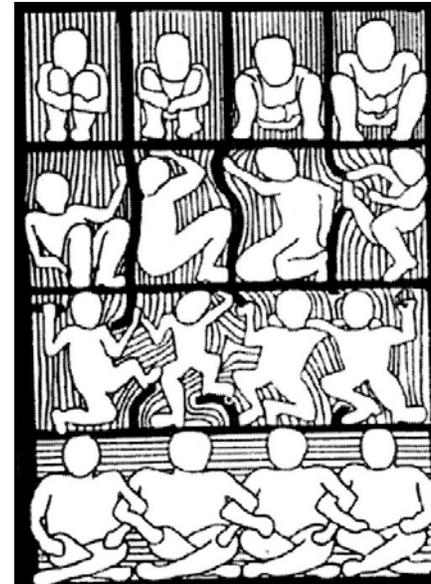


Moral Revolution!

*Creating new values, undermining oppression, and
connecting across difference*



A summary of Sarah Lucia Hoagland's *Lesbian Ethics*
and other sundry quotations

Compiled by Kriti Sharma

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This zine is based primarily on a beautiful book, Sarah Lucia Hoagland's *Lesbian Ethics*, the sources Hoagland wove together to create the book, and a smattering of brilliances from other activists/philosophers/organizers/feminists/folks.

All quotations are from *Lesbian Ethics* unless otherwise indicated.

Write your reflections and stories here!

A Creation Story for this Zine

Once upon a time, a philosopher and chicago-based dyke named Sarah wrote a book called *Lesbian Ethics*. Published in 1982, the book is based on experiences of U.S. communities struggling for liberation in the 70's.

During the emergence of the u.s. women's liberation and gay liberation movements, Sarah writes, "we turned our backs on the fathers' categories and began to focus on each other. We began to follow our own agendas, to listen to, argue with, criticize, befriend, celebrate, in short, to *acknowledge*, each other. And in the process we began to enact new values. We worked to develop nonoppressive structures, and we created conceptual frameworks outside the values of the fathers."

Sarah begins the book reflecting these vibrant liberation movements of the 70s and the hundreds of lesbian projects (from collectives, to bookstores, to healing centers) that sprang up during that time. She notes that many of these organizations grew and fell apart, and identifies four reasons why.

1. External obstacles (violence, economic limits, legal threats, fbi penetration, etc.)
2. Internalized "isms" (racism, classism, etc.) among lesbians.
3. The skills we used to survive under heteropatriarchy were being used against each other.
4. We relied heavily on tradition anglo-european ethical values to structure our judgements about how to act with each other.

"We were losing what I consider our most precious achievement," she mourns, "our connection among ourselves across many barriers." And so, like any radical queer philosopher worth their salt would do, she "began to analyze concepts which structure our interactions and our practical efforts, concepts which I found encouraged attacks and manipulation rather than centeredness and directness." The result is a practical, grounded, and compassionate invitation to everyone working against oppression to transform the values of domination and subordination that rest in our communities, our relationships, our organizing work, and our hearts into values that can truly

foster the egalitarian, compassionate, diverse world that we want to create. Sarah challenges us to “become creatures who are no longer used to domination and subordination”. In short, she is calling for a moral revolution.

It is now 2006. Isn't it still and always time for a moral revolution? This zine emerged from the work of UBUNTU, a coalition based in Durham, North Carolina committed to ending sexual violence and its roots. We hope it will help other groups in their quests to create loving, empowered, and diverse communities.

The first principle of movement building:

Anyone who steps out of political passivity to give time to any progressive effort deserves to be honored, appreciated, and treated with complete respect. Disagreements, mistakes, and oppressive behaviors call for supportive feedback; they are not justification for abandoning a respectful stance. Solidarity is our only strength.

From *Class Matters* by Betsy Leondar-Wright



- we named “productivity” for what it is: “creativity”
- we infused our work with erotic desire, instead of assuming that work is done only through discipline and duty
- we focused on the political judgments in our anger, instead of focusing on coping with anger
- we saw “taking each other seriously” as an important community goal instead of “safety”
- we brought *all* of our faculties and abilities to the table
- we were less concerned about whether our actions are worthy of praise or blame, and more concerned about how our actions help us maintain our moral agency, our ability to survive, go on, make choices, and preserve what is valuable to us
- instead of asking that we be accountable to one another, we asked that we be intelligible to one another
- we made judgments without being judges
- we saw ourselves as selves who are separate from but connected to one another
- we connected with each other across worlds with a sense of playfulness, respect and adventure, that we might know and love each other, without destroying or controlling each other
- we instigated a moral revolution

Imagine if...

The conclusion of this zine is not a conclusion at all, but rather a beginning. It's an invitation to imagine, and create, communities based on new values.

Imagine if...

- we didn't act as if people are always either dominant or subordinate to one another
- we thought of ethics as a matter of making choices, not as a tool for social control
- we didn't see people as fundamentally antagonistic
- we developed self-awareness and expected self-awareness of others, instead of expecting altruism
- we saw the choices we make in terms of what we create through though choices, instead of as sacrifices
- we sought intimacy with one another, instead of seeking to make ourselves vulnerable to one another
- we recognized power as power-from-within, not power-over
- we attended one another instead of attempting to control another's choices
- we assessed the success of our projects not just by how much we can control, but by the quality of our interactions, and by our ability to disrupt and create what we can within limits
- we saw supporting one another as a matter not of approval, but of honest and thoughtful feedback
- we integrated our reason and our emotions
- we thought of feelings not as private things, but things that are created within context and community

What do you mean "moral revolution"?

"My thesis is that the norms we've absorbed from anglo-european ethical theory promote dominance and subordination through social control (what I call heterosexualism). As a result they thwart rather than promote the successful weaving of lesbian community."

"Before we will be capable of resisting and undermining oppression, we must be able to work together in ways that do not nourish thinking which makes oppression credible. This is not a 'personal,' 'private' matter. I believe that without certain changes in the values we affirm through our interactions, there can be no social change which will undermine oppression. Male-led revolutions—economic and military and intellectual—have not changed the essential dominance/subordination relationship at the heart of oppression. I do not believe oppression is going to be lifted from us...If oppression is going to end, we must move out of it. And in part that means becoming beings who are no longer in the habit of enacting oppressive values (values which contribute either to the oppression of ourselves or others)."

"If we operate in a conceptual framework which depicts humans as inherently dominant or subordinate, then we will not perceive resistance or include it in our descriptions of the world unless those who resist overthrow those who dominate and begin to dominate them (i.e., where there is essentially no revolution in value)...When we recognize as resistance only those acts which overthrow the dominators, we miss a great deal of information." (p. 43)

"I want a moral revolution. I don't want greater or better conformity to existing values. I want change in value. Our attempts to reform existing institutions merely result in reinforcing the existing social order."

For example, the strategies of the women at greenham common, in resisting the deployment of u.s. cruise missiles, involve innovative means of thwarting the dominant/subordinate relationship – the women simply don't play by the rules and instead do the unexpected. Their strategies are characterized by spontaneity, flexibility, decentralization, and they work creatively with the situations that present themselves.

Yet how do we invoke this participation, especially given that we are all affected by the dominant society's perception of difference in terms of antagonism? Maria Lugones offers the idea of 'playful world travel'....[She] argues that world travel involves two elements: flexibility and playfulness....Playful world travel involves being able to go into the world of another who is quite different from us without trying to destroy it. It involves being able to embrace ambiguity. It involves being open to uncertainty and surprise."

"To be able to play, we have to let go of our world/reality/sense of order. And to let go, we need self-centering and self-understanding; while we acknowledge and understand our boundaries, we also need the flexibility to cross them. To be a playful world traveler, as Maria Lugones notes, we need a sense of being partly at ease with our selves."

"Maria Lugones explains the importance of world travel to our ability to connect: "The reason why I think that traveling to someone's 'world' is a way of identifying with them is because by traveling to their 'world' we can understand *what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes*. Only when we have traveled to each other's 'worlds' are we fully subjects to each other."

"In part, being playful also means being open to being a fool, 'which is a combination of not worrying about competence, not being self-important, not taking norms as sacred and finding ambiguity with double edges as a source of delight. As Anne Throop Leighton suggests, playfulness involves a willingness to be inarticulate and a willingness to hold a connection even though there are gaps, leaps, awkward moments, stumblings, mistakes, and confusion, because there are no rules."

don't want to address something and always change the subject when I bring it up, perhaps breaking down in tears, am I lying to you if I do not force the issue? It is not always clear what counts as being honest."

3. "When two lesbians seriously disagree, often we will also disagree about which principles we think apply. Alternatively, lesbians will be focused on different principles—'she's being racist' versus 'she's applying double standards'—each riveted on the fact that the other is not adhering to the principle she's concerned with. Ironically, principles only work when they really aren't needed."

"Our own attraction to rules and principles comes in part from a desire to be certain and secure. If someone will only tell us a rule we can follow, we won't have to be in doubt about what we are choosing—we won't have to worry about being mistaken. Or if someone will only set down the rules, then everyone will have to conform. (This, of course, is simply false. Refusal to conform is part of what makes us lesbians.)

Our desire for certainty also involves a desire to make judgements regardless of particular circumstances and regardless of individual intentions. If we have a principles and codes, and we begin to cease considering the transformations we go through in our lives as a result of our choices, we ignore a great deal. Acting from principle interferes with rather than enhances our ability to make judgments.

I am not suggesting that we never articulate or use principles or that we abandon strategies and rules of thumb, such as fair fighting, honesty, or antiracism. We have begun developing fairly intricate strategies for interacting. I am merely suggesting that what *counts* as an application of a given principle depends on the circumstances of our lives. And when appeal to principles works, it is because we are already acting with integrity.

To apply principles, we must have an ability to make judgments, and we must be able to gain and assess information about a given situation; we must be adept at making judgments. With that ability and that information, acting from principle becomes superfluous. Principles are not something we can appeal to when all else fails."

Sarah Hoagland's Thesis about Traditional Ethics

1. The focus and direction of traditional ethics, indeed its function, has not been individual integrity and agency (ability to make choices and act) but rather social organization and social control.
2. The values around which traditional ethics revolve are antagonistic, the values of dominance and subordination.
3. As a result, traditional ethics undermines rather than promotes individual moral ability and agency.
4. And these aspects of traditional ethics combine to legitimize oppression by redefining it as social organization. Appeal to rules and principles is at the heart of this endeavor.”

Lesbian ethics is about maintaining our individual integrity and moral agency, allowing us to make judgments carefully and constantly.

“When I think about ethics, I think about individuals making choices, that is, making judgments and acting. I think about our ability to interact, to connect, to be intimate, to respond. I think about our ability to perceive and judge, our ability to gain and attend information. I think about constraints on our choices, limits on our options. I think about transformations we undergo as a result of our choices—how we grow and change. I think about our ability to create lesbian meaning. When I think about ethics, I think about choice under oppression, and I think about lesbian moral agency.

What I am calling Lesbian Ethics focuses on enabling and developing individual integrity and agency in relation to others. I mean to invoke a self who is both separate and related, a self which is neither autonomous nor dissolved: a self in community who is one among many....

Finally, in attempting to develop a different conceptual schema, I in no way mean to suggest that if it works, there will be no problems, no pain,

certain boundaries and limits...Once we become competent at acknowledging our own boundaries and those of others, we will function better within other, more far-reaching limits, to resist de-moralization and resignation under oppression.”

We can be hesitant to acknowledge our limits and our differences in a close community based on intimacy, because our differences seem to threaten our intimacy. However, “rather than perceiving ourselves as essentially isolated, as unlimited and hence thwarted, even threatened, when we come across another, we can perceive our selves *as one self among many* and so enhanced by others.”

“While I may be earnestly engaged in some projects, someone else may perceive me as a jerk. To maintain my self, on Hegel's theory, I must dominate the other and force her to perceive me through my own values. However, if I perceive my self as one among many, then I am not dependent on any one lesbian for acknowledgment (though I may depend on her). Thus, that a lesbian perceives me as a jerk may be something I want to address (or I may not), but it is not something I need to control in order to maintain my sense of self....By perceiving ourselves as one among many, we can realize no one perception defines us and each one gives us some information we can use in making choices.”

Playful world travel: connecting across difference

“Lesbians journeying have many projects—as healers, instigators, educators, archivists, and on, and on. Not all of these will fit together smoothly. For example, a lesbian educator may be acting as a catalyst to shake things up while a lesbian healer may be acting to soothe and bring resolution. As activists and theoreticians and dreamers, we each create different elements to add to lesbian value. Yet no one cancels out another. If we find community among lesbians, it is not because we act as one, nor is it because we dominate another or fit someone else's program. It is because, as we make our choices, we contribute to the ground of lesbian being.”

Embracing intelligibility, and autokoeony, and our ubuntu, means “an awareness of our need for others, a need which is not a subordination, but rather a participation. That others offer what I do not have direct access to is a gift I cherish, and it is part of what makes lesbian community so very special.

Making judgments vs. being a judge

“My concern is not with nailing so-and-so for a given act and holding her up before the community for condemnation....My concern is to develop a way of thinking that helps us understand the parameter of our lives, that encourages us to heal ourselves, that helps us move toward new value, and that keeps our rebellious spirit alive. My concern is with an ethics which functions, not as social control, but to help us develop our integrity, moral agency, and autokoenony [our sense of being one individual among many, a distinct individual in interaction with a group] and so keep alive the spirit of lesbianism.”

I am suggesting here that developing our moral agency involves finding ways to avoid de-moralization and go on, as well as not reducing our judgments to the level of praise and blame. Our lives and our interactions are far more complex than that. Our judgments should be too.

I do not mean to suggest that we make no judgments. After all, to perceive, to notice, is to make judgments. I mean to suggest that our judgments move to a deeper level. I am interested in dissolving the furor of moral righteousness as well as the moral apathy that infests our communities. Neither impulse moves us anywhere.

“The point is that we make judgments, but we are not the final judges. There are no final judges, nor should there be. The same spirit that keeps us from being dominated completely by heterosexual society will also rise up among us when social control is fostered from within the community. I do not want this spirit killed or even tamed.”

Being one among many

Hoagland creates the word “autokoenony” (from the Greek “auto” meaning self and “koinonia” meaning community) to invoke the idea of “a self who is both separate and connected”. It’s much like the idea of ubuntu – “I am because we are, and we are because I am.”

Being a self means having boundaries. This is not a bad thing, or a problem. “To say we are each limited in certain ways is, among other things, to say we are unique....Further, it is through understanding the boundaries and limits of our paths, that we can, by means of our choices and interactions, seek to transform our selves in certain respects and hence to change

no error, no misunderstanding. But if the values of oppression are no longer normalized—are no longer fully integrated into our lives—our interactions will less readily result in destruction. If we can interact in ways that weave a different locus of value, then our habits and instincts and reactions will less likely lead us back to the fathers. And then we may become an energy field capable of resisting oppression.”

Why “Lesbian” Ethics?

“Lesbian existence holds a certain possibility which can effect a transformation of consciousness: the conceptual/material possibility of female agency not defined in terms of an other.” As Billie Potts writes, “The keystone of the lesbian outlook is womon-identification, trusting and giving primary allegiance to womon-energy.”

“This is not to say that as lesbians we are less likely to have absorbed the values of the fathers. Members of oppressed groups will absorb significant aspects of the dominant culture; for while survival requires maintaining a separate status in certain respects, in other respects it requires assimilating into the dominant culture.” However, “despite the conceptual coercion of the fathers’ framework, many lesbians have begun to break from it.”

Can others besides self-identified lesbians adopt what Hoagland calls Lesbian Ethics? Yes. For example, heterosexual women can fit in this framework, but not as members of the category ‘woman’. “When we try to focus on ourselves, often we feel compelled to define what it means to be a lesbian. And immediately the question arises of who gets to count.

We feel we must define what a lesbian is so we can determine who is a lesbian and thereby defend our borders from invasion. We feel threatened from the outside, and we want to determine who we can trust. Yet we’ve found that we cannot trust someone simply because she’s female or because she’s lesbian. Even if we had a firm and theoretically coherent definition which articulated the borders of lesbian community, it would not serve us in the way we have imagined. So I let go of the urge to define. And I begin to think of lesbian community in a different way. I think of contexts. I think of lesbian context, and I do not think of defining its borders. I do not use the metaphor of a fortress which requires defending from invasion. I think of lesbian community as a ground of lesbian be-ing, a ground of possibility, a context in which we perceive each other essentially as lesbians, a context in which we create lesbian meaning. This context exists, not because it has

walls, but because we focus on each other as lesbians.”

“In stressing a centered focus rather than one riveted outward, I do not encourage a uniform perception of each other. I mean to suggest that we perceive each other in all our aspects, from our varied background to our political differences.”



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Intelligibility involves:

1. explaining our choices, not justifying them
2. understanding others' choices and learning from those
3. recognizing others as changing beings
4. perceiving what others perceive
5. engaging in a two-way process of connection

“To express things to you, assuming you are willing to attend, need not be an attempt at justification, at absolving myself of what I did. Rather it can be an explanation in an attempt to reconnect or even just to clear up things hanging from the past....The idea is not that we make no mistakes or that we never hurt each other; the idea is that we understand the full dynamics of our interactions.”

“Yes, something I do can result in harm to you regardless of my intentions. But we need to consider intentions, because we hurt each other quite a bit, and that will continue to be a dynamic among us—not because we are inherently mean and nasty—but in part because of the different wounds and scars we carry as well as our different personalities. Further, we will continue to hurt each other because, despite our most careful plans and best intentions, the effects of our choices and interactions are so intricate.”

“A focus on explanation rather than justification is also important because so many problems between us are simply a matter of not fitting....Thus that two lesbians together keep thwarting each other doesn't make one or both 'bad'. Instead it may just be that their patterns, habits, wounds, and skills grate. Focusing on the energy of explanation rather than that of justification between us will more likely help us understand this.”

“Accountability encourages a one-way process. If I am accountable to you, then the idea is that you judge me on your own terms. If you are accountable to me, then I judge you on my terms.... Intelligibility, on the other hand, is a two-way process....Within the framework of accountability, if you are to be accountable to me for something and there is a failure, the failure is yours: for example, you did not explain yourself well enough and you must come after me trying to get my attention and make me understand. Within the framework of intelligibility, on the other hand, if you are trying to explain something to me, I try to situate myself in such a way that your choices become intelligible to me. Intelligibility involves both of us trying to reach each other, to connect, at some level. Thus it involves, minimally, a presumption of cooperation, not a presumption of antagonism.”

In the first place, pointing a blaming finger is not likely to induce another to change long-time patterns. She will more likely go on the defensive—and by that, I mean sense that she is being forced to respond to someone else's agenda while also sensing that what she has to say may not fit it. And pointing the finger leaves no room for complexity. We may be clear on how she is wrong, but what about the elements in her judgment that are right? Radical surgery, cutting out 'bad' parts, does not yield transformation."

Accountability vs. intelligibility

"We demand of each other that we be accountable, and yet that demand smacks of expecting someone to stand before a judge and jury to be found guilty or innocent. This, again, invokes the perspective of one who has the power to excuse, a judge. It suggests a lesbian must justify her behavior

In the following passage, Maria Lugones discusses racism and classism among white anglo women, but rather than focusing on praise and blame, she moves in a different direction:

"Women who are perceived arrogantly can perceive other women arrogantly in turn. To what extent those women are responsible for their arrogant perceptions of other women is certainly open to question, but I do not have any doubt that many women have been taught to abuse women in this particular way. I am not interested in assigning responsibility. I am interested in understanding the phenomenon so as to understand a loving way out of it."

and gain our approval. It requires the illusion of impartial observers. And it encourages us to separate her behavior from ours and so not examine our part. Accountability invites all the pitfalls of focusing on praise and blame which I've been discussing.

Marilyn Frye suggests we may not want the idea of justification—of justifying ourselves to someone else or expecting her to justify herself to us—at the center of our notion of moral agency. Rather than appear to 'accountability' in understanding moral agency and making judgments, she suggests we develop a concept of 'intelligibility'.

"Feminine virtues": control from a position of subordination

"In this chapter, I want to discuss the concepts of 'altruism', 'self-sacrifice', and 'vulnerability'. I begin here because very often discussion of ethics being here. For example, philosophers will argue that if human beings are not altruistic, then morality is not possible.

Among lesbians, more importantly, after the initial burst of this wave of the women's liberation movement, many of us began to focus on the kind of society we hoped for among womyn. We talked of learning to be more "open," and by that we meant vulnerable. And as we found our interactions were less than utopian we began to talk about the need for a feminist ethics. Those discussions often began with declarations of how (some other) lesbians were selfish, together with assertions of the importance of self-sacrifice. In other words, while fighting the fathers' politics, we began reaching for their ethical concepts to interpret and judge our interactions."

"Feminine virtues" as survival skills

"Because of male domination, over time women have developed the ascribed feminine virtues into survival skills and created of them tools for control. This power of manipulation is the essence of female agency promoted under heterosexuality."

"When lesbians use these virtues among each other, we wind up using our survival skills against each other; thus our survival skills go awry.... "I want to suggest that the feminine virtues are a means of exercising control in relationships—whether as lovers, friends, or collective members—and that as a result they function to interrupt rather than promote lesbian connection."

Altruism

Much of anglo-european ethics is based on the idea of the inherent selfishness and inherent conflicts of interest. Mainstream ethics "singles out one type of situation as a model for the entire range of human action and motivation" (p.73): the situation in which one person and another have goals that are incompatible, and each is concerned only with their own, narrowly-defined "well-being". Therefore, "we have inherited a dichotomy by which actions are characterized as either egotistical (selfish) or altruistic." Taking

care of ones own self and ones needs equals being selfish and not altruistic and hence, not ethical.

“I am *not* leading up to a suggestions that in a lesbian society there would be no conflict of interests. Nor do I believe that in lesbian community there should be no significant differences in interests; I couldn’t stand the boredom.” [pull-out quote] After all, coming up against our boundaries and noting how they rub others’ boundaries is one source of creative growth.” There will be conflict, but there are many *kinds* of conflict, not just “me versus you” where our interests are in total opposition to each another.

“Altruism and self-sacrifice are considered feminine virtues – virtues either especially peculiar to women or of special concern when apparently lacking in women.” Women are expected to sacrifice for men and children.

Social contract theory says that we need a state in order to restrict those who are unrestrainedly self-serving. “We tend to appeal to the state for regulation, that is, to enforce altruistic behavior.” We expect the state to protect us from the bad things that individual people do. But the state itself certainly does bad things, and has much greater capacities and resources to carry out destruction than any individual.

Self-awareness as an alternative to altruism

“Instead of appealing to altruism, we can begin to seriously evaluate our individual and collective interests, particularly the differences among us. And given that we live in a capitalist as well as a patriarchal, racist society, we can explore ways to keep our economic exchanges out of the capitalist value framework....We need to discuss economic factors among lesbians, examining both our needs—particularly, what we need in order to grow and to weave in this living—and our fears, for example, being left without money or growing old in (greater) poverty. In this respect, self-understanding, not altruism, is the prerequisite of ethical behavior. I think such discussions can help us begin to interact without control and manipulation despite our economic differences.”

Self-sacrifice

The self-sacrifice of another is not necessary helpful to us pursuing our own lives and goals. It’s the interaction with people who intently pursue

Two stories of making choices under oppression

The first story was popularized by the novel *Sophie’s Choice* by William Styron. “Sophie is a woman in a concentration camp who is told she must choose which of her two children will die, and that if she refuses to choose, both children will be killed. As soldiers reach for her son, she grabs him and her daughter is taken to her death.”

“The second example involves Lucy Andrews, a free black who in 1859 petitioned the south carolina legislature to allow her to enter slavery. She was sixteen years old with two children and could find no employment, nor could she stay anywhere longer than a week or two at a time.”

Did Sophie and/or Lucy Andrews make their choices freely? Did they choose any aspect of their situation? Is it useful to think about whether they are to praised or blamed for their actions? Might it be more useful to think about whether and how they were able to resist oppression and live their lives as best they could by the energy they brought to these choices?

cumstances, of the moral agents involved, judgments about their ability to go on and make choices in pursuit of their goals. They are matters of the morale of survival.”

Attraction to praise and blame reveals attraction to holding or conferring upon ourselves or upon others the position of the judge, someone with the power to excuse. We can become riveted on praise and blame. We try to determine whether people are bad or good, and we feel an intense need to stick with a single judgment on that front. Moreover, we can also obsess over making sure that, no matter what else, we cannot be blamed for any bad behavior.

“I am not suggesting that we cease getting angry at each other. That exchange must continue as we unlearn the patriarchal scripts among ourselves. What I am talking about goes beyond anger.

we're in a difficult position.

Nevertheless, the process of such mistakes is part of what moves us on toward lesser ignorance, toward dealing with the issues, and thus toward more informed choices. We don't divest ourselves of our ignorance by hiding or by refusing to engage in order to avoid mistakes. Thus, the other side of deciding that ignorance is not an excuse is the idea of going on and engaging despite the fact that we will make mistakes."

As for coercion, it is cleared to many of us that we are coerced into making certain choices every day. Marilyn Frye's definition of coercion involves (a) the idea that oppressors manipulate situations such that the options of the oppressed are constrained, so that the oppressed are forced to constantly "choose" the lesser of two evils, and (b) coercion involves getting the oppressed to contribute our efforts towards the maintenance of the current hierarchy. "In other words, oppression functions, not just by those in power limiting our options, but by those in power successfully getting us to contribute our efforts toward that maintenance of those oppressive conditions."

Even in coercive circumstances, however, we are agents. It's not *that* useful to say that the oppressed are not to blame for our choices under oppression, because we still have to survive, live our lives, and continue to make more choices under oppression. "Oppression is not a matter of excuse, but rather a dimension within which we make our choices." A more useful question than "are we to be praised or blamed for our actions?" is "how are we to keep ourselves from being de-moralized?" That is, we're living under oppression, being manipulated, being coerced into things. How do we maintain the ability to make choices and to perceive ourselves as people who are able to make choices? How do we not give up? How do we keep from turning against the very things we value?

"By ceasing to participate in the dominant belief system—particularly in the lie that we have any acceptable choice in certain situations—we may be able to resist de-moralization and go on to realize, to create, the values which will undermine oppression."

Praise and blame

Praise and blame do not have to be central considerations about morality. That is, when we think of morals, we often think of whether someone can be praised or blamed for a given action. However, in lesbian ethics, what's more central is "the energy and transformation, within particular cir-

their own dreams and goals that helps us with our own goals, our own meaning and value:

"In considering what most contributes to the development of my work, I find that it is *not* those around me giving up their goals to pursue mine. What helps me is others vitally and intently pursuing *their* goals – their music, their writing, their photography, their pottery, their editing, their collective and organizations work, work through which they weave their own meaning as lesbians—work, thus, which contributes to out lesbian ground of be-ing. Certainly I want encouragement and criticism—an exchange of ideas which feeds us both. I need and want attention; but this comes from those who are actively pursuing their own goals, who have ideas which rub against mine, and who spark and are sparked by an exchange. This pursuit of goals is neither a matter of self-sacrifice nor of selfishness. It is a matter of weaving tapestries of lesbian value, it is a matter of creating meaning in this living."

Choice-as-creation: an alternative to self-sacrifice

We tend to believe that it's good to self-sacrifice in certain situations, like for "the movement". But that's how we burn out. "If a lesbian devotes herself to a project in such a way that her identity merges with it while her life goes on hold, and she does not gauge her own needs and limits, she may become unable to pull back at times and so become devastated if things don't go exactly and immediately as she believe they ought to. She may work frantically, as if responsible for the whole situation....until something snaps and she ceases to care, ceases to be able to respond. Self-sacrifice is not a means of engaging."

"When we engage in political work, or projects and relationships, we need not regard this as taking us away from our everyday concerns, as being in conflict with our personal goals, and hence as a sacrifice. Nor is it useful to believe we must sacrifice in order to feel we are truly struggling. Rather, we can regard our work as a matter of pursuing our needs and interests, as part of our means of living in heteropatriarchy, as our means of creating meaning in our living. Ours is a choice of where to engage our energy, and as a result we can understand why we find the project valuable, gauge our abilities and needs, understand our limits, consider at what point the work would cease to be meaningful for us. In this way we make things progress, but we don not so easily lose our self in self-sacrifice and burnout."

"We tend to regard choosing to do something as a sacrifice. I want to

suggest, instead, that we regard choosing to do something as a creation.” The dominant social and ethical system frames every action that we take to help another as a sacrifice of something. But we’re not necessarily sacrificing: we’re *choosing* between options.

“We can regard our choosing to interact as part of how we engage in this living. Such choices are a matter of choice, not sacrifice. That I attend certain things and not others, that I focus here and not there, is part of how I create value. Far from sacrificing myself, or part of myself, I am creating.”

“There is an idea floating about to the effect that if we cannot do everything, if we have to choose some and let other things go, then we are sacrificing something. Given traditional anglo-european philosophy and u.s. imperialist ideology...we tend to think...that everything is potentially ours (or should be) so that when we have to choose between two or more options, we feel we are sacrificing something, or that we have lost something. But everything is not ours; everything is not even potentially ours.... Thus in acting, engaging, making choices—in choosing one thing rather than another—we are not losing anything. In acting, engaging, making choices, we are creating something. We create a relationship, we create value; as we focus on lesbian community and bring our backgrounds, interests, abilities, and desires to it, we create lesbian meaning.”

“What exists here as lesbian community is not some predetermined phenomenon which we opted for but rather a result of what we’ve created. And the same is true of all of our relationships.”

Vulnerability

In our oppressive, hierarchical society, vulnerability is used as a way for people in subordinate positions to show their submissiveness to dominators, and to gain a measure of “security” and even limited control in situations.

“Vulnerability is a way of pursuing a forced closeness which maintains a certain control.” In Adrienne Rich’s words, it can be a tool to “take a shortcut through another’s personality”. (from *Women and Honor*).

“For example, if I share doubts about myself with a lesbian before we have grounds for trust, I am revealing to her what I am defensive about. If she then criticizes me for the very thing I am defensive about, she has declared open war because I ‘trusted’ her with this information which I am

Moral agency and interaction

“Traditionally, [anglo-european] philosophical concern involves whether we could have done otherwise or whether our actions have been determined in some manner—the focus is almost exclusively on whether we can blame or praise toerhs for what they have done and whether we can be blamed or praised for what we have done. Hence there is a strong emphasis on excuses, accountability, and justification. My suggestion, on the other hand, is that moral agency involves enacting choice in limited situations, avoiding de-moralization, and working within boundaries rather than trying to rise about them. I want to suggest that focus of Lesbian Ethics be, not praise and blame, but judgment at a deeper level and ‘the morale of survival.’”

Making choices under oppression: what if we’re ignorant? What if we’re coerced?

In traditional anglo-european ethics, we are said to have chosen something freely unless we were (a) ignorant or (b) coerced into something.

However, ignorance can’t always function as an excuse because there are certain things we are expected to know for the well-being of ourselves and others. “As Cherrie Moraga exploded: ‘What each of us needs to do about what don’t know is to go look for it.’ The degree to which this challenge has been met has depended on a number of factors: the general openness and sensitivity (even without understanding) of the community to the particular issue, the risk involved for those describing immediate experiences, the degree of vulnerability of community lesbians concerning the issue, and the degree of ignorance still prevalent in the community about the issue.”

“As Marilyn Frye notes, ‘one need only hear the active verb ‘to ignore’ in the word ‘ignorance’” to appreciate that ignorance is not a passive state....In fact, over time we come to realize that much ignorance is the result of ignoring.”

“A central part of working out of oppression involves diversint ourselves of ignorance and its effects. This process can be traumatic: aside from facing things we fear, in divesting ourselves of our ignorance we will make mistakes with each other; and by the very setup, the situation is not one that involves being excused for our mistakes. That these mistakes are made in ignorance separates us from those who do such things with full understanding of what they are doing. But our mistakes still result in harm to others. So

goal of safety obscures the possible conflict here.”

“The appeal to safety as a community goal may at times be an attempt to ease the risk of interacting; for whenever we approach someone else, there is a risk of rejection...the issue of safety among lesbians in community mostly involves not being laughed at, put down, ignored, out-shouted, or in general taken for granted. And this is a matter of taking each other seriously. Consequently, I want to suggest that, rather than working toward safety, we work on taking each other seriously as a goal. In weaving lesbian community, I think we might work to create a space in which every lesbian can be attended, taken seriously, and valued for herself—where she can be acknowledged.”

“Tolerating absolutely anything a lesbian does may not be taking her seriously at all. It may be, rather, confusing empathy with pity, to have no expectations of her and hence to regard her as less than ourselves. This is condescending, and such a space really isn’t safe for her...Taking another seriously means attending her and then evaluation, judging, the situation for ourselves, and making choices about our response. In a space in which we are taken seriously, ‘safety’ is not defined only on our terms. Being taken seriously involves community; it involves engagement with others. I am suggesting, thus, that being able to express our feelings and have others respond to us is also a matter of being able to respond to others. Both aspects are integral to our being taken seriously.”

Integration as empowering

When we integrate our reasons and our emotions, we politicize them, and we gain power. “Toni Cade Bambara noted that those in power discredit other crucial parts of our selves, particularly our dreaming, our intuition, our imagination, and our psychic faculty. I would add our humor. She suggested they do this because they cannot control these parts. They can control them only by disintegrating them: through territorialization, derogation, and objectification they fragment all our faculties and so disintegrate us. Toni Cade Bambara’s concern is to reconnect our parts—to let our dreams touch our daily thoughts, for example—so that when we focus, our whole being is engaged. In this way we are far less likely to be controlled. Thus we create, we create a poem, a relationship, a cassette, a collective, a revolution.”

“In reality our emotions and reasoning as well as our dreams, intuitions, instances, hesitations, nuestra facultad, observations, humor, psychic awarenesses, valuations, imaginings—judgments emerging in lesbian community against a background of racist, imperialist, heterosexual culture—are all we have to guide us on our lesbian journey.”

sensitive about; she has betrayed my trust. This then acts as a constraint on her: so long as we remain friends she cannot openly criticize me in these areas; she must support me (i.e. not challenge me)...Our engaging has thus become a binding, and our friendship has become, not an open, honest exchange of ideas, empathetic critiques, sympathetic suggestions, and perceptive support, but rather a means whereby we have enlisted someone to insulate (protect) us from our fears and pain (as opposed to holding us through them).”

Intimacy as an alternative to vulnerability

“I imagine a time when we can be open to each other with less caution and greater flexibility because we allow greater honesty to inform our exchanges. But I no longer think that this has anything to do with vulnerability.”

“Risk, in our relationships, is not a matter of opening to another and simply exposing our wants and needs. If I regard as simply exposing our wants and needs. If I regard risk as simply a matter of exposing myself, then my goal is control, and my risk is that I will lose control. Further, if I open from vulnerability, I am not really opening. For while I open myself to exposure, I am not open to you, to your needs and changes.”

“For there to be the risk of engaging, instead, we can regard ourselves as having one part in an interaction, and leave those with whom we engage their own parts. For example, if I express something serious to a friend or lover, she may reject me or she may attend and consider what I’ve stated or she may express something equally serious on her part. Depending on her response, our relationship will now develop in one of several possible directions. In other words, the relationship changes.”

“The real risk of connecting lies in a willingness to take the next step, to change the relationship, to let go of the ‘security’ of static predictability. The risk lies, when we connect with another, in letting go of control and embracing the unknown. And such risks are important when we begin relationships, as well as after we’ve been connected for years.”

Power and paternalism: control from a position of domination

What is power?

Distinguishing power-over from power-from-within

“Power over is a matter of dominance and subordination, of bending others to our will through a variety of overt and covert methods....Power-from-within, on the other hand, is a matter of centering and remaining steady in our environment as we choose how we direct our energy. ‘Power-from-within’ is the power of ability, of choice and engagement. It is creative; and hence it is an affecting and transforming power, but not a controlling power.

Paternalism

Though most of us may reject the value of “power-over” by agreeing that might does NOT make right, we’re more susceptible to a more subtle form of “power-over”: paternalism. Paternalism means taking over for others, intervening their lives “for their own good”.

“We tend to believe that to be effective in a situation, we must control it; that to be good, or sisters, to another, we must end her pain and make everything all right; that this is what being powerful means. In the process we discourage her ability to make choices, to respond within the limits of the situation she faces...As a result, we undermine her moral agency.” We can also start to lose respect for those who we are “taking over” for, those who we are acting on behalf of. Paternalism also means that we can condescend to another by accepting what she says just because they says it; this is depriving her of agency – it means that we are not taking her seriously.

Why the attraction to “power-over” and paternalism?

It makes sense that we should want to have power in our lives so that we can have some control of our circumstances. We understandably wish to protect who and what we love. Having lived under oppression, when we come to political consciousness, we are just learning that we are *not* powerless, that we are strong and able to make a difference. But our lack of *total* power can frighten us – it can remind us of the feelings of powerlessness we experi-

Safety vs. taking each other seriously

We may resist integrating reason and emotions because to suggest that emotions are judgments is to say that they’re open to challenge the way that judgments are. Feelings are not private or isolated, though we have a strong sense that everyone has “a right to their feelings”. This makes sense in some ways, because sometimes we may not want our feelings challenged when we are shaky, vulnerable, or tired, or to have them challenged by people who know little about our backgrounds and experiences. Also, sometimes we need to express feelings without a discussion. And sometimes we can’t be rushed through our feelings.

“I want to suggest that our feelings are not private—that is, they are open to assessment and challenge—in that (1) they are not isolated and can be considered in perspective, (2) they may be inappropriate to a particular context or situation, and (3) our expression of them is not private.” In other words, our feelings can be considered in perspective. We choose to focus on certain feelings rather than others. Secondly, sometimes our feelings, although very real, may be out of context, such as when we react in a certain way because we’ve acted that way in the past in a different situation – but the present situation is different from the past one. Third, we don’t express our feelings to brick walls – we expect certain reactions when we share, and this involves an interaction, a relationship.

Because of living under oppression and being under constant attack, we long for safety in community. “In particular, we tend to believe a viable lesbian community is one in which it would be completely safe for us to express our feelings. I want to suggest that, not only is safety an illusion under patriarchy, it is not a useful goal among ourselves—for attempts to guarantee safety involve attempts to control.

When we claim that we need a community in which it is safe to express our feelings, we often seem to be imagining a situation in which we can blow up while others restrict themselves to a range of acceptable responses. The belief that we have a right to express our feelings in any way at any time is the belief that we have certain automatic rights of access and connection to others in the community. The one who is the recipient of the expression of feelings is being asked to respond in certain way—she is being told how she must be responsive. And my suggestion above is that this is open to evaluation and even challenge. For insofar as the one may need to express herself, the other may need to refuse to attend, to withdraw. Appealing to a

components of that need...is that it robs our work of its erotic value, its erotic power and life appeal and fulfillment. Such a system reduces work to a travesty of necessities, a duty by which we earn bread or oblivion for ourselves and those we love.’

That is, appeals to duty are necessary to motivate us to work because our desire has been severed from our work; thus when we find ourselves appealing to duty, as well as to self-sacrifice, it is an indication that we have lost the focus of our desire. We can acknowledge our lesbian desire as power, power-from-within—particularly, a powerful source of connection, engagement, and focus.”

The Lorde also writes, “Within the celebration of the erotic in all our endeavors, my work becomes a conscious decision—a longed-for bed which I enter gratefully and from which I rise up empowered.”

Anger as political judgment

Anger is an emotion, and it is also a judgment. It is often a judgment that the object of the anger is wrong in some way. When it is directed from subordinates to dominants, it can be used as a political tool to transform the dominant/subordinate relationship. The limits of our socially acceptable anger mark the boundaries of our place in the social order. Consider the relief and empowerment we as feminists and anti-racists (for example) when we began to connect our feelings of anger with our reasonings about political realities, when we began to interact and change the meaning of our anger: “We’re not crazy. We’re angry!”

“But within community, I believe we now focus more often than not on how to cope with anger rather than addressing and evaluating the political judgment of our anger....Why do we focus on the psychological element of our emotion to the exclusion of the political? Why do we address a situation by asking whether we coped well with our feelings, or whether we did the most ‘sensible’ thing, rather than asking questions about the politics of the situation, the judgments of our anger?...In considering the implications of [our] anger, and hence the judgments involved, we become aware not that [we] approach anger differently so much as that they approach politics differently.”

ence under oppression. Under oppression, we have been convinced of our ineffectiveness, and we become afraid that if we cannot control everything, we cannot control anything.

The feelings and the behavior are understandable. The question is, are they helpful to us? Do they help us resist oppression? Do they help us connect with others so that we can collectively resist oppression and live the lives we want?

“When we regard power as an ability to control things and it turns out that we can’t control a situation, we are left facing our own apparent powerlessness. Often we will step back as if we’d failed and assume blame (guilt) for the entire situation as if we had created it; alternatively, we will turn our back on the situation or otherwise deny that there is a real, continuing problem.” Also, when our movement is faced with situations it can’t control, we can start to think that the movement is completely powerless, and therefore we may start to develop contempt and disgust for the movement and for each other.

Attending as an alternative to paternalism

We don’t have to intervene in or control painful situations for others, thus interrupting their process and undermining their agency. Instead we can *attend* to others in such a way that they are strengthened and empowered. Attending “empowers [another] in that it enables her to gather and focus her own strength. Such attending is often what we do when we share joy...By attending one who is in pain, I can help steady her. When she is off-center and in crisis, I can help stabilize her nerves and fluctuations, perhaps acting as a beacon or a magnet. When we attend each other, we can create between ourselves an enabling, adepting power.”

“The point of attending a friend is not that she can better control herself or her own situation, but that she can better act *in* the situation. The point concerns her ability to go on, to make decisions as a moral agent, as an agent who makes choices, who creates value.”

Attending is about steadying each other, witnessing each other, breaking our isolation (that’s how, when the dominant society ignores or denies our experiences, we remember that we’re not crazy!) It is, importantly, about offering support and suggestions, but leaving choices to the one we attend. This is what we do when we support (attend to) a survivor.

One metaphor for attending is midwifery, where the midwife attends the one who is giving birth to help them focus their own strength. This is in contrast to modern obstetrics, which involves physical interference with the birthing process. (This idea comes from a personal communication Hoagland had with Dayo). What other metaphors or ideas come to mind when thinking about attending?

“A friend sat me down—a woman that I’ve lived with for eleven years now and am separating from—and what she did for me is I think what lesbians consistently do for each other, when we are doing our jobs well. She sat em down and said, What are you trying to say? *What are you trying to say: What are you trying to do?* But she did that sitting down of me at the kitchen table, and that questioning of me at the kitchen table, in this utter faith that she has always had, that something significant eventually issues out of the confusion of my thought.” -Harriet Ellenberger

Limits to attending

1. Sometimes people want/need privacy.
2. We need to protect ourselves when we attend to others so that we don’t absorb their energy, but we understand it.
3. If attending means taking on another’s pain, and in particular, becoming a target of their misplaced anger, we are not empowering anyone (neither ourselves nor the one we attend) for we are not taking ourselves or the other seriously.
4. We always have the choice to withdraw our attention from a situation when it threatens to dissolve into a coercive relationship.

ness’... Within patriarchy, women’s and lesbian’s feelings and beliefs and desires are regularly constructed.”

“Now, the patriarchal definition of the meaning of our feelings has its limits. It was socially constructed, and we broke the social agreement when we broke our collective silence. Our twitches and pangs suddenly erupted; we began to name problems that had no names. We created consciousness-raising groups and began to articulate our anger. We created new meaning, and this changed the way we felt; it changed what we understood about ourselves. This was not an individual, isolated, or private endeavor. We explored our lesbian desire, for example, and through lesbian interaction and political analysis, we change the meaning of our desire from an illness and source of shame to a source of pride and joy. This is something we did, but we did it through lesbian engagement and consideration of our social and political context, not through private introspection.”

Infusing our work with desire

We may resist integrating reason and emotions because we have to focus very intently on our paid work under capitalist patriarchy, which encourages us to shut down both reason and emotion. “Many of us have been taught that to get on in this world, we must exercise self-control...We come to believe that discipline is the key to accomplishing anything.” We come to view discipline—or the rule of reason over emotion—as the way to be productive. Actually, as Hoagland points out, our creativity is called “productivity” in capitalist patriarchy. “To create/produce, we [are taught that] we must discipline ourselves, punish ourselves, deprive or sacrifice ourselves for example (rather than choose how we will focus our energy at given times), and force a product to emerge).

In reaction to all this, we tend to also believe that to feel or express something, to be authentic, we must be out of control...While I have been arguing in favor of letting go of control, letting go does not mean being out of control. Nor does it mean giving up the ability, the power, to act. Both being in and out of control are illusions, the dichotomy a false one...Our creativity involves times of engaged focus as well as times of dreaming, day-dreaming, imagining, opening to psychic energy, musing.”

“Audre Lorde [exposes] the impetus of traditional anglo-european duty-centered ethics which excludes desire: “The principal horror of any system which defines the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, or which defines human need to the exclusion of the psychic and emotional

Integrating Reasoning and Emotion

“In this chapter, I want to discuss the split between reasoning and emotions, and the subsequent belief that one must control the other....I want to suggest that accepting the split keeps alive the idea of power as control and keeps our selves fragmented and isolate.d My overall argumetn is that our moral agnecy is encouraged by integrating and so politicaling reasoning and emotions within the community, for this is how we get back in touch with the energy that moves us, energy which is deadened when we separate reasoning and emotions.”

The split between reason and emotions and the belief that one must control the other

There is a longstanding idea in traditional anglo-european ethics, dating back to Aristotle, that emotion/passion takes us out of control and reason brings us in control. Also, being good is seen in this view to equal being in control (controlling emotion, not giving into temptation, controlling others for their own good.).

“The idea of reason controlling emotion or emotion controlling reason or a will separate from and so controlling both is prevalent among lesbians. We tend to believe that to do anything we must be in control andthat to feel anything we must be out of control This fragments us, and it encourages us to psychologize our emotions while regarding political correctness as a set of rules with which to control ourselves and each other.”

Feelings are not private – they arise in a social context

It is important to name names, to connect our feelings of depression with oppression, instead of taking for granted that “this is just the way things are” or that our despair is an isolated, individual problem. This means being able to connect our reason and our emotion.

“We tend to regard emotions and feelings as private, separate from reason, and discoverable only by introspection. Naomi Schemann challenges this idea. She argues that emotions, beliefs, intentions and expectations are not simply individual states [that we discover by introspection]....Under patriarchy, specific meanings have been given to our psychological states. For example, women’s, slave’s, and lesbian’s anger is named and developed as ‘mad-

How do we evaluate our power and the success of our projects?

“[Within dominant u.s. culture], ‘ability has come to be associated with ‘power-over’ through the concept of ‘cause’: we assess ability in terms of our capacity to perform ‘effectively’; what I am able to do is measured by what I can cause to happen. We put less stress on how we engage—and the effects on others of our engaging—and more stress on how much we produce. Since our output quantitatively increases if others help with our projects, ‘ability’ comes to be connected to our talent for getting others to lend their efforts to our projects. Insofar as we perceive ability as actual power, we tend to evaluate it in terms of whether we can get others to do what we want.”

“Ability as power in the dominant society is the ability to designate tasks, to make assignments, to manage, to direct, to handle or control others [in other words, it’s an administrative not a creative ability] – sometimes called ‘leadership’”.

So sometimes, we may ignore or devalue our power or the power of others because we have a limited concept of power, and cannot recognize power when we see it unless it takes the form of administering. Similarly, we may ignore or devalue the successes of our projects because we have a limited concept of “success” as “the ability to control the whole situation” or “the ability to dominate those who dominate”, and may not recognize success if it takes other forms.

Hoagland gives an example: “We may decide to demonstrate because a friend is fired. But how we approach it makes a difference. Our focus could involve a do-or-die energy such that if we don’t block this instance of oppression we’ve failed, we’ve make no difference. Alternatively, we can shift the focus of our attention to our friend and how this action enables her and us. Partly, this shift involves clarifying what will count as success in the endeavor. If the friend chooses to bring suit, must winning it be the only gauge of success? Success may be a matter of simply thwarting the smooth functioning of the master’s plan. Success may be a matter of our friend finding the means to fight back, to cause trouble, to make the employers acutely aware that we are not willing to accept the situation. Viewed in this way, success is in her hands: she can make a difference with her living; she is a moral agent; she moves here, and things are no longer the same.”

Also, sometimes there can be “success”, or “growth and enablement even it there is no resolution at first and even if there is misjudgment and error.” For example, “In a group of lesbians, both lesbians of color and

white, a lesbian of color declares she cannot relate to white lesbians because the questions in her own mind only become greater and more confused when she tries to talk about them. The understanding of intimacy, at this point, is just not occurring. The white lesbians have proved to be unreliable in their attention, and not only does she have to explain much to them, they just don't get it. She decides that to address her own needs she must withdraw.

If we value this development in terms of control, it could be regarded as a failure of all the other lesbians – white and lesbians of color—to make a space in which she could explore her questions. Her choice could throw the others back on their inability to control things, their apparent helplessness; and they might shut down or shut themselves off from her for a variety of reasons. Reacting in this way, they would fail to attend her pain and learn from what she is saying.

If, on the other hand, the others can touch their own pain and fear from this development in the situation, they may be able to understand that theirs was a context in which she could clarify her needs sufficiently to withdraw. They may be unable at this point to attend her because they don't have the ability to perceive her questions and confusion without blocking or crumbling before them, thinking they ought to have answers now. But they can perceive her reactions and attend the pain their ignorance is causing, and they can learn from the situation. This understanding, rather than leading them to react helplessly, empowers them to go beyond blocking or liberal guilt, to gain further understanding.”

On approval and criticism

We can start to confuse “support” and “approval”. We may begin to depend on the approval of another in order to feel supported by them, instead of depending on their honest judgment.

“In a skit designed to expose some of the power games middle-class lesbians play with working-class lesbians, Dolores bargowski and Colette reid have one working-class character say: “Whenever you tell me how good I am I start expecting it from you. I stop believing in myself and look to you for what I know I already have. I feel like I have to keep behaving then so you won't take your support away. You make me dependent on you when I don't need to be. You make me pay for the support you give to me.”

As Hoagland writes, “in a relationship where there is mutual respect, giving a negative judgment is not oppressive. As Marilyn Frye points out in

another context, the mark of a voluntary association is that one can survive displeasing the other.”

“By suggesting we interact with each other in terms of support rather than approval, I am not appealing to...amorphous support. Amorphous support means we aren't really attending what the other says; we're not taking her seriously. A highly attentive critical evaluation of our work can be very supportive. But if the critique is given in the form of approval or disapproval by someone who has become the ‘authority’ on what is good and what is not, then it becomes a problem. When a critic has an axe to grind, when her words are treated as if she is a moral authority, or when her message, besides being critical, also trashes the other, what she says can be devastating.

There are serious abuses in our evaluation and criticism of each other's work. Nevertheless, I think the key is not to set up rules whereby we critique each other only in certain ways, according to certain polite standards. I think the key is that we not regard the critics as impartial arbiters of truth, beauty, and political analysis. Thus, we regard the one who critiques our work as making a statement as much about herself as about our work...It is a statement from where she stands, from her own center and connected to her own needs; and we can use the information we gain from it to further consider what we are doing from where we stand, from our center. We can take what we find useful and, if we're not dependent on her approval, leave the rest. (Of course, once this is articulated on paper, it is a snap to enact it in practice.”

In sum

“If we are to form an empowering community, it will be on the basis of the values we believe we can enact here: what we bring, what we work to leave behind, and what we develop as we engage with each other. If we are to transform subculture to community, it will be on the basis of what we create, not what we find. And attempts to control each other won't hold us together....

Given that we are trying to develop a diverse community, paternalism and feminine values do not serve us. Trying to control each other replicates patriarchy, and keeps us ignoring each other. I am suggesting that by attending rather than controlling each other, we can interact in such a way that within limited circumstances we can empower ourselves and each other, and undermine (some of the) values of the fathers.”