"Feminary" Of Durham-Chapel Hill:
Building Community Through A Feminist Press

Jennifer L. Gilbert
Duke University

April 1993
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the women about whom this paper is written. Nancy Blood, Sherry Kinlaw, Susan Ballinger, Elizabeth Knowlton, and Mab Segrest were generous with both their time and their memories. My admiration for them and for the newsletter they created and sustained is very great.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

The feminist movement in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s was a remarkable experiment in mass movement-building that marked the beginnings of pronounced change for American women. While its political cleavages have been identified and its social dimensions outlined, some of the specific processes through which activist women formed connections and changed community structures on the local level have yet to be examined fully by historians of women. The development of feminist newsletters and newspapers is particularly important in this regard. The emergence of a feminist press was a cornerstone for the movement; it helped create a community of women, bound by their desire to fundamentally alter the way American society treated them.

As the women's movement began to grow, the need to control how feminism was presented to the public became critically important. After 1968, the number of newsletters being published around the country grew tremendously. From It Ain't Me Babe, published in Berkeley, to Lavender Woman, published in Chicago, to off our backs, published in Washington, D.C., the feminist movement sought to create vehicles for public discussion that were controlled by women, created by women, and used by women. It was in this environment of putting feminism into print that women in Chapel Hill and Durham, North Carolina, in 1969, began
to publish *The Research Triangle Women's Liberation Newsletter*, later known as *Feminary*.

For the most part, the myriad publications of the feminist movement have not been examined with the scrutiny they deserve. Alice Echols, in her recent work, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975*, discusses newsletters and newspapers in terms of the different and specific radical groups which produced them; she does not focus, however on how they reflect the dynamics of the entire movement. Echols' present focus is on what the changing titles of newsletters and newspapers tell us about the changing internal specifics of the feminist movement. For example, Echols writes:

... one can see the shift from radical to cultural feminism reflected in the changing titles of feminist newspapers and journals. Whereas early women's liberation papers had titles such as *off our backs*, *Ain't I a Woman*, [and] *Tooth n' Nail*, '70s periodicals carried names like *Amazon Quarterly*, *Womanspirit*, and *Chrysalis*, the latter a self-described 'magazine of woman's culture.'

Echols' book is useful in its discussion of the disagreements that occurred within the most highly politicized wings of the feminist movement. Thus, Echols' discussion of the distinction between radical-feminism and cultural-feminism is important because it defines these different factions in broad terms and how their disagreements affected less highly politicized members of the feminist movement. "Most

---

fundamentally, "she writes:

Radical feminism was a political movement dedicated to eliminating the sex-class system, whereas cultural feminism was a counterculture movement aimed at reversing the cultural valuation of the male and the devaluation of the female. Thus, we find radical feminists mobilizing women on the basis of their similarity to men and cultural feminists organizing women around the principle of female difference.²

Echols' book is also helpful in understanding the theoretical values involved in lesbian-feminism. In a discussion of the Furies of Washington, D.C., the first collective committed solely to lesbian-feminism, Echols writes, "For the Furies, 'coming out' became the feminist equivalent of 'picking up the gun,' the barometer of one's radicalism. Coming out, which they maintained involved breaking the final tie to male privilege, became a way to separate the serious revolutionaries from the dilettantes and the dabblers."³

The dogmatism and homophobia which accompanied early debates over lesbian-feminism strained relations between lesbian women and heterosexual women in the national feminist movement as well as within local communities. However, this issue was not universal and did not have the divisive role in Chapel Hill/Durham that it did elsewhere. Nevertheless, the politics of lesbianism are important to understanding the national feminist movement. Charlotte Bunch, in Passionate Politics: Feminist Theory in Action, is helpful in defining the political position

²Echols, 6.
³Echols, 233.
of lesbian feminism and the demands it made of straight feminsts. At the Socialist-Feminist Conference held at Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio, July 5, 1975, Bunch said:

The heart of lesbian-feminist politics... is a recognition that heterosexuality as an institution and an ideology is a cornerstone of male supremacy. Therefore, women interested in destroying male supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism must, equally with lesbians, fight heterosexual domination - or we will never end female oppression. This is what I call 'the heterosexual question' - it is not the lesbian question."

Sara Evans, in her book, Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left, does not discuss the impact of lesbian-feminism on local communities, but does focus on the local impact of publishing on the feminist movement. She overwhelmingly demonstrates that local community organizing was built around the principle that women had shared experiences of exploitation. "The private experience of oppression and the intellectual perception of sexual inequality," she writes, "merged in the emotional realization: 'I'm not alone.'"

Evans goes on to acknowledge the tremendous role newsletters and newspapers played in the establishment of this sense of community as well as the characteristically collective nature of

---

4 Charlotte Bunch, Passionate Politics: Feminist Theory in Action 1968-1986 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 176. This quote is from a revised version of her speech, as published a decade later.

these early attempts at publishing. She concludes that this desire to operate collectively came out of activist experience with the politics of the New Left.

Radical women had used their organizing skills to set up literally thousands of small groups within which hundreds of thousands of women transformed their perceptions of personal inadequacy into a political analysis of women's oppression. They created dozens of journals and newspapers through which they could share and develop these new ideas and actions. The dynamic excitement of such groups sprang in part from their infusion with the anarchist democracy and the spirit of radical egalitarianism characteristic of the early new left. 6

The emergence of feminist publishing can thus be seen as a continuation of the traditional sharing of information between women which has always existed, as well as a new departure into a more public and more purposeful expression of a particular feminist view of the world. Charlotte Bunch spoke to this issue in an interview with Frances Doughty, also in her book Passionate Politics, in which she discusses "print" as a method of revolutionizing women, not just reaching them. Bunch comments:

My interest in print grows out of my sense that being able to read and write are critical tools for creating change and thinking for oneself. It's not surprising that revolutionary movements have often seen literacy as useful to revolution because it enables people to understand their situation, it gives words to experience, and it helps one figure out what is desirable and how things could be different. 7

William Chafe further reinforces our understanding that collective action and the formation of the community were central

---

6Evans, 222.
7Bunch, 222.
to the successes of feminist activists. In the epilogue to his book *Women and Equality: Changing Patterns in American Culture*, Chafe writes:

> Not surprisingly, women too have scored the greatest gains for equal rights and social reform when they have created their own institutions. Whether these were female reform societies, women's colleges, or consciousness-raising groups, they provided a home base of solidarity and support for carrying on a collective campaign to alter the wider society, offering the 'social space' in which women could develop a new image of self and the confidence to act on it.\(^8\)

Using the framework provided by earlier discussions of feminist activism, this paper attempts to focus attention on the emergence of a feminist-controlled press during the 1960s and 1970s. "Feminary," the Durham-Chapel Hill newsletter used here offers a case study of the difficulties faced by local activists in their attempts at coalition-building, discussion and debate mediation, and in diffusing internal dissension and fracturing. The unique problems faced by those building social activist movements are nowhere more apparent than here.

The development of a feminist media spoke to the need to control one's own image rather than rely on the portrayal of feminism by a male-controlled, hostile press. An early article by Marilyn Salzman-Webb in the newspaper, *off our backs*, confirms this need to take responsibility for the image of the movement. "Women's liberation is a movement developing critical theoretical and programmatic direction and it cannot be left to back pages or...

---

put aside for special supplements or lost forever. It should be our responsibility as a movement to see that an independent women's media is developed.\(^9\)

As Sara Evans has suggested, feminist newsletters and newspapers were used as a social network among active feminist women, a vehicle for achieving contact and support in a culture which saw those connections as dangerous. As early as the May 10, 1970 issue of *Feminary*, for example, there was an article detailing some of the activities of concern to feminists in Seattle, Washington. "During a three week visit to Seattle in March and April, I was able to see many of the things which Seattle women have been working on. . . . there were women's communes, a child-care center, and the beginnings of a Women's Health Clinic."\(^10\) This type of information-sharing was a common aspect of the newsletters of the 1970s. Making connections across the nation was as important as making those connections in specific local communities.

In addition to publishing information within the newsletters about activities of women in other cities, the newsletters and newspapers physically reached other women by seemingly casual methods of circulation throughout the country. This circulation enabled active feminists to read each others work continually and to share perspectives in ways that previously had not been possible. The Durham YWCA, for example, accumulated over forty

\(^9\)off our backs April 25, 1970.

\(^{10}\) *Feminay* May 10, 1970, 2.
different newsletters alone. When *Madness Network News* was first received by the Durham YWCA, "Welcome to the Revolution, Sisters!" had been scrawled on the cover by one of the women involved with the publication in San Francisco.

Judy Grahn, in an interview with *Feminist Bookstore News*, discussed these first attempts at community within the framework of feminist publishing. She describes the fluidity among activists in terms of actual movement-building across the country. Feminists going from California to Boston took books and newspapers with them, and in this very unstructured manner, disseminated feminist publications that might never have been circulated beyond the confines of the original community. She also spoke about the early role feminist presses and newspapers played within this larger community of activists:

> The problem facing us as writers and publishers, once we know we wanted to be out in the world and once we know that we needed a community to read the things that we published and wrote, was that in order for that to happen we had to help these women become a community and we had to help learn how to write checks and get jobs and have money and do exchanges and understand about communication and networks, and traveling and so on and so on.\(^\text{11}\)

In addition, working through the structure of a collective provided women a way to put feminist principles into practice. While this was a problematic structure in terms of efficiency, as Evans pointed out, women involved in publishing were willing to make that sacrifice. Jennie Ruby, in an article in the twentieth anniversary issue of *off our backs*, February 1990, captures some

\(^{11}\) *Feminist Bookstore News* Summer Supplement, August 1990.
of the feelings which motivated women to participate in collective publishing ventures. "Women work on off our backs because they believe it is important to publish news about, by, and for women from a feminist perspective." In addition, she comments, "... women who work on off our backs take part in a social network that provides support and a sense of connection."12 These questions, of maintaining connections between feminists as well as continuing to put feminist values into practice were issues that were raised in the Feminary collective as well, and the answers developed in Durham-Chapel Hill came to define the publication and its future.

Newsletters and newspapers also became the spaces in which the feminist community could freely debate internal splits within the movement itself. As Alice Echols comments in her book Daring to Be Bad, "... I read feminist periodicals from across the country. While some of the conflicts were peculiar to New York, the major debates over the left, class, race, elitism, and lesbianism occurred everywhere, if somewhat later and with somewhat less ferocity."13

The pages of Feminary were not immune from these types of debates. While the split between lesbians and straight women was not the divisive issue in Chapel Hill/Durham that it was elsewhere, debates over issues of class, hierarchy, and race were commonplace. In fact, it is because of these debates that the

12 Off our backs February 1990, 1.
13 Echols, 21.
Feminary collective ultimately came to define itself. Feminary, as a publication, and as a representation of collective action within the feminist movement, must be seen as a wonderful community example of feminist activism. Acting out of a need for community, dealing with dissension, carving a niche for itself in the later part of the 1970s -- in all these ways Feminary is a model both of the successes and failures of the feminist movement and of social activist attempts at movement-building.
Chapter Two

The Women's Liberation Movement in Durham-Chapel Hill and the Emergence of a Newsletter 1969-1971

The Research Triangle Women's Liberation Newsletter had humble beginnings. The first issue of the Durham-Chapel Hill newsletter was released on August 11, 1969. It was two pages in length and its price, two cents. The newsletter informed readers of the imminent visit of Roxanne Dunbar, author of No More Fun and Games, requested support for striking food workers, and announced the emergence of a new journal in Baltimore, simply entitled Women. The newsletter was distributed directly through women's groups operating in Chapel Hill and Durham and by direct purchase at a regular Tuesday literature table set up in the lobby of the student union on the University of North Carolina campus.

By the August publication date of this first newsletter the University of North Carolina had a number of women's groups operating on campus. Some groups were involved with socialist-feminism, others with lesbian-feminism, and still others were primarily involved in consciousness-raising, the mode of recruitment and organization that allowed women to share their deepest experiences with each other and thereby forge ties of

---

1Research Triangle Women's Liberation Newsletter Vol. 1, #1 August 11, 1969.

2ibid.
solidarity and sisterhood. Most of the women who participated in these groups were graduate students at the university. Undergraduate women were less inclined to be publicly political, as were UNC faculty members; both sets of these women were necessarily more involved with male structures of hierarchies on campus.³ Out of these different action and discussion groups came the Central Communicating Committee which, according to the first issue, "will consider the possibility of taking upon itself the problems of communicating the interests of the different groups to the other groups."⁴ In essence, then, the newsletter announced itself as a voice of unity reporting diversity.

Issue Two was published on October 12, 1969 and the price had risen to five cents. The main function of the newsletter produced by the communications committee was to "produce a newsletter which projects what is being done among the female liberation groups in our area as well as other areas."⁵ The groups that the committee represented were focused on a number of issues and represented the variety of feminist activity occurring in the area. The list included Group Number 27, the Chapel Hill campus-based student group, Group Number 22, primarily a discussion group, the Abortion Committee, a group concerned with

³Elizabeth Knowlton, interview by author, 30 January 1993, Durham, tape recording.

⁴Research Triangle Women's Liberation Newsletter, Vol. 1, #1, August 11, 1969.

⁵Research Triangle Women's Liberation Newsletter, Vol. 1, #2, October 12, 1969.
reproductive rights, as well as Female Liberation Groups 11 and 13.6

Issue Two also reported that the newsletter would be published weekly by the communications committee. Articles were to be written by "anyone concerned with women's liberation" and groups were given space to report on their activities. In addition to news of local interest, the newsletter was also going to provide news of interest to feminists from around the country. The newsletter hoped to provide space for book reviews and bibliographies. The editorial responsibilities for each issue would rotate position among the different groups with copies of the newsletter to be made available at all group meetings as well as on the literature table sponsored by Group 27.7

The second issue of the newsletter also included news of activities from outside the immediate area. In Fayetteville, North Carolina, women marched under a banner of "Women's Liberation" in an anti-War march. A former member of Group 27 was now a member of the Redstockings group in New York City, involved heavily in consciousness-raising. Feminists in Connecticut were considering the publication of a newsletter called The Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement. This information was coupled with news from other publications such as

6According to Elizabeth Knowlton, the numbers attached to each group, in lieu of names, came out of the early preoccupation with socialist-feminism. The groups were modeled after "cells" of an organization -- each distinct yet also part of a larger whole.

7ibid.
The Washington Post and Quicksilver Times. The format -- local information-sharing, articles, opinion, and news from around the country -- was one that would not change until 1977. It provided the Durham/Chapel Hill area with the first real attempt to link feminists pursuing different interests into one community of women.

The Research Triangle Women's Liberation Newsletter became the Female Liberation Newsletter of Durham-Chapel Hill with the publication of the third issue on October 19, 1969. The breadth of the different female liberation groups operating in the area continued to be emphasized with each new issue of the newsletter. While the national feminist movement came under some criticism for its seeming emphasis on issues important to white, middle-class women, the issues within the local community of Durham-Chapel Hill appear to have reflected a greater diversity of interests. Many of the women working on female liberation issues in the area came directly from involvement in the New Left and as a result, some of the groups had a socialist-feminist framework and were especially concerned with issues surrounding working-class women.8

The attention to working-class women is evident in the news from the groups reported in the newsletter. For example, in issue five, November 2, 1969, Group 27 began trying to publicize the dangers of Byssinosis (a fatal lung disease caused by cotton dust) which affected textile workers in the state, most of whom

---

8Knowlton, 1993.
were women. Female Liberation members were also working with striking food workers at UNC and were hoping to publicize the issues surrounding the strike to the students on campus. Concerned that striking women were having problems with day care costs for their children, a temporary day care center was set up in the Baptist student center.\footnote{Female Liberation Newsletter of Durham-Chapel Hill, Vol. 1, Issue #6, November 9, 1969.}

Class issues were also closely intertwined with racial concerns in these first newsletters. Conscious of their class position, women involved in the early female liberation groups were also making attempts to cut across racial boundaries as well. Female Liberation #11, as reported in the December 7, 1969 issue of the newsletter, was attempting to set up a new organization, "Sisters United" in Durham. In addition, these women were working with laborers from Liggett and Meyers who were filing a sexual discrimination suit against the company. The ideological principles behind this organizing work were articulated in this statement: "The fight against white supremacy is the first principle of unity among women because it is the only principle which can unite all women -- black, brown, yellow, red, and white. It is important to build a united front of all women for the battle against male supremacy, since this is the

\footnote{Female Liberation Newsletter of Durham-Chapel Hill, Vol. 1, Issue #5, November 2, 1969.}
only way we can win."  

With the New Year came a new look for the newsletter. The communications committee decided to try an expanded format which included space for fiction/poetry, classified ads, personal statements/descriptions of experiences, as well as signed editorials. However, the themes of solidarity with working-class women and women of color continued. The January 11, 1970 issue brought news of the fight to save Marie Hill, a black woman sentenced to die in the gas chamber for killing a storekeeper in Rocky Mount. The notice went on to say that "while the Marie Hill cause is primarily a battle against racism (rather than sexism), the FL [Female Liberation] movement should demonstrate its readiness to invoke moral (and, if at all possible, material) support to any woman in her fight against discrimination."  

Financial support for the publication of the newsletter came from a number of sources. Because so many of the women involved in the female liberation movement in Chapel Hill were connected to the University of North Carolina, they were able to use university resources for their own ends. The newsletter was surreptitiously mimeographed using the supplies of various departments on campus. "We were able to do it a little bit in this place and a little bit in that place," one movement activist said, "and since we were all connected to the University we were


able to do a whole lot of stuff without money. We were sneaking in and out of offices -- liberating!"¹³

"Liberating" supplies was not a universally approved practice however, as an editorial in the January 18, 1970 issue suggests. Linda Fischer, a member of group 22, wrote "I would like to point out that stealing from people in power just causes them to steal more from their original source of wealth -- you and me."¹⁴ Whether or not all Female Liberation members agreed with the practice or not, the member groups continued their growth. The January 18 issue listed each group's members and their addresses; the number of women involved was over fifty. To the list of the original groups was added Female Liberation group 0, a consciousness-raising group modeled after the Redstockings in New York, and Female Liberation group 2.3, a discussion group focused on changing topics of interest to members.

In December of 1969, the female liberation groups who participated in the newsletter's creation also gave birth to a new female liberation center on the University of North Carolina campus. The office opened at the intersection of Franklin and Columbia streets in downtown Chapel Hill. The rent was paid by collecting dues from women who participated in the group

¹³Knowlton, 1993.

meetings. The center was envisioned as "an active place; open to newcomers, engaged in the distribution of literature; a place for work on articles; a center that would strengthen our Movement and enlarge our ranks." Women were asked to donate furnishings, time, and books to the center in order to insure its success and use by the community.

The female liberation center was an example of the types of community structures whose creation were facilitated by the earlier creation of the newsletter. The shift from a newsletter in which the groups could come together to an actual physical space in which women could congregate seems an easy one. However, the center struggled to remain intact and never achieved the strength which the newsletter had within the community. Attempting to insure that the rent was paid each month was a battle. Constant announcements within the newsletter reminded activists of their responsibility to what was envisioned as a group venture. Moreover, it was in the spring of 1970 that the feminist movement in the Durham-Chapel Hill area began to diversify. While growth in the community was surely a sign of health, growth also meant less cohesion and more internal fracturing.

By April 1970, the newsletter had a set format. Beginning with a calendar of upcoming events, the newsletter contained news from the various female liberation groups, other local news, national information as well as the occasional book review, notice, and personal essay. While the newsletter appeared to have a regular format, the issues around which each group centered had begun to diversify beyond the confines which had bound the feminist community together a year before.

The previous emphasis within the women's liberation movement in Durham-Chapel Hill, as described within the newsletter, had been focused around issues of socialist-feminism and solidarity with working-class women as well as on issues directly related to the functioning of UNC. These issues did not disappear but were joined by different groups with seemingly less militant agendas. For example, a Durham-Chapel Hill chapter of the National Organization of Women was organized in April 1970, and was seen as a vehicle for creating "candidates to push women's lib. ideas, and perhaps a commission on the status of women." In addition to groups like NOW, the Durham-Chapel Hill area also saw the proliferation of various consciousness-raising groups, discussion groups and theory groups during the spring and summer of 1970. Clearly there had been a change in direction.

In May 1970, an open letter appeared in the newsletter on the subject of militancy within the women's liberation movement.

---

Marianne Towler, a member of group 27, articulated the problem this way: "What good is a movement if it does not somehow change, basically change, the society. We might as well be a garden club or a group therapy club." She went on to say "there seems to be a contradiction here -- we cannot be militant or it will turn our sisters off, yet our movement will fail unless we can offer those alternatives. We must resolve that contradiction."\(^{19}\) The contradiction was evident within the local community as new groups met for consciousness-raising while other groups, the older groups, were concerned with the specifics of the conditions for working women on the UNC campus and child-care reform, for example.

The response of women to Towler's essay was expressed in a meeting held on May 23, 1970, to which all female liberation group members had been invited. As it was later reported, women seemed to feel that "militancy for its own sake was not desireable -- militancy was desireable in so far as it got results; and that it was important to exhaust channels and to set the stage educationally before any action which might result in arrests, violence, etc."\(^{20}\) While it is not clear from this report how, in this situation, "militancy" was defined, it cannot be questioned that divisions were beginning to surface among the different goals and tactics of the groups involved in feminist


activism within the area.

These divisions became even more apparent as the summer progressed. The newsletter was printed only four times that summer as female liberation members engaged in other activities. Despite the paucity of newsletter issues, several changes among the groups working in the area should be noted. Child care issues which had centered around the UNC campus and group 27 resulted in the formation of the Concerned Citizens for Children Under 6. By August, the committee had formed The Community School for People Under Six which was set to open on September 14, 1970.21 Members of group 22 who had become involved in writing non-sexist, non-racist children's literature began their own group, Lollipop Power.22 Durham groups 11 and 13 disbanded for the summer without any firm decision of what would happen in the fall.23 While other discussion groups remained in Durham, the end of the summer brought a new organization, the Durham Women's Association, specifically involved in formal politics.24

The end of the summer also brought an end to continuous publication of the newsletter. There were no issues published between August 16, 1970 and February 8, 1971. Women's energy was


23ibid.

being expended in newer, and less cohesive, ways. The new organizations established in the summer as well as actual migration of female liberation members out of the area reshaped the contours of the Durham-Chapel Hill community. When the newsletter was revived in 1971, the new name was the Female Liberation Newsletter of Chapel Hill, representing the new boundaries of the community.

On February 7, 1971, a meeting was held in Chapel Hill for women interested in women's liberation issues. Members of those groups who remained from the previous summer were in attendance as well as women who were interested in joining old groups and forming new ones. Suggestions were made for forming a campus socialist group, groups for non-students, and new consciousness-raising groups. Clearly much fragmentation had taken place during the preceding months and some attempts at regrouping were in order. The revival of the newsletter was one attempt at reformulating the energy which had diminished since the summer.

The first issue in February had a much smaller list of groups than had been listed the preceding summer. Group 27, the group associated most closely with the University of North Carolina, was still in existence. A new group, Caballa, was introduced and was an "off-campus group presently involved in producing a T.V. show." The other two groups listed were Lollipop Power and the group responsible for the Community School.

for People Under Six. The calendar feature remained intact, as
did the general announcements section and the space for the
reporting of group activity. Submissions were requested for the
newsletter as well as requests for volunteers to be rotating
editor. It was announced that the Female Liberation center had
closed.26

The following issue of the newsletter listed three new
groups which had joined the groups already covered by the
publication. These groups were the Tuesday Discussion group,
working women, mothers and graduate students, the Thursday Campus
Discussion group, composed of single and married students, and
the Thursday Off-Campus group, consisting of mostly married
women. In addition, there was a listing of women who had
attended the February 7 meeting; there were twenty-one of them.
The newsletter also contained the third plea, in as many issues,
for help in producing the newsletter. Elizabeth Knowlton and
Marguerite Beardsley were rotating the position and needed both
help and input.27

After one more issue on March 8th, the newsletter stopped
until April 15th. Heading the announcements in that issue was
this message: "Volunteers are still needed to put out the
newsletter. It will come out irregularly until May unless some

26Female Liberation Newsletter of Chapel Hill, Vol. 3, Issue
#1, February 8, 1971.

27Female Liberation Newsletter of Chapel Hill, Vol. 3, Issue
more help is available."28 Two issues later, May 17th, this plea was made: "There have been a few remarks made about how the same people always do the newsletter and how its publication is sometimes irregular. Well, those facts are linked, believe it or not."29 Unfortunately, these entreaties to share in the production of the newsletter had little effect. In fact, there were only five issues between May and September and they dwindled, in some places, to a single printed sheet. The community had split again for the summer and the newsletter production showed the lack of input from the feminist community.

The next four months witnessed a dramatic decline in the energy surrounding the newsletter. Sincere attempts were made to interest more women in participating in the production of each issue but to no avail. The calendar section dwindled with each issue to no more than three entries for any given week. The announcements of upcoming events revealed the remarkable number of different activities in which women were immersed: abortion referral and counseling, a drama troupe, new discussion groups, even a men's group. The energy within Chapel Hill was no longer so completely tied up in the feminist activism of two years earlier, but now was more diffusely spread throughout the community. While this was not necessarily a bad thing, it meant


that the newsletter had less cohesion and as a result, was much less effective.\footnote{Female Liberation Newsletter of Chapel Hill, Vol. 3, Issues 9-24.}

The final \textit{Female Liberation Newsletter of Chapel Hill} was released on December 17, 1971. It was a single sheet. There were no lists of women's liberation groups. The announcements included, (ironically), plans for the establishment of a women's center, YWCA self-defense classes, an address for information on job discrimination, and the date of Betty Friedan's speech at the North Carolina Women's Political Caucus Convention. In the middle of the page, buried within the announcements, was this line, "Everyone interested in helping with a newsletter for women, meet at the Wesley Foundation January 20 at 1 pm."\footnote{Female Liberation Newsletter of Chapel Hill, Vol. 3, Issue #24, December 13, 1971.} The newsletter never resurfaced; it died of neglect.

At this point however, one aspect of the last year of the newsletter's publication should be noted. During the year of 1971, several mentions of lesbian literature and issues pertaining to lesbianism begin to appear on the pages of the newsletter for the first time. These were sporadic -- often simply a line mentioning a new lesbian publication. Given the tack the newsletter was to take, however, these brief mentions were important. While the \textit{Female Liberation Newsletter} never dealt specifically or primarily with issues surrounding lesbianism, the politics of sexual preference had become a

\footnote{Female Liberation Newsletter of Chapel Hill, Vol. 3, Issues 9-24.}
growing basis for activism for women working and living in the area.

According to Elizabeth Knowlton, a member of group 27 who worked on the newsletter between 1969 and 1971, the process of "coming out" was an important one within the Durham-Chapel Hill community of activist women. "During 1970 and 1971, there was just more and more stuff about lesbianism, and women coming out, and women becoming lesbians..."

During this time, the change involved not necessarily a shift away from working with straight women, but rather, a shift away from being involved in projects in which men participated. Over time, this change would revitalize the energies of lesbian women involved in women's liberation, but it also meant that their energies focused in different places than those of straight women.

Thus while the newsletter ended in December of 1971, by the autumn of 1972, new sources of activism became apparent. Leslie Kahn and Nancy Blood moved to the Durham-Chapel Hill area that fall primarily because of the amount of activity that seemed to be centered around feminism here. In the spring of 1973, Leslie Kahn and Nancy Blood moved into a house with Elizabeth Knowlton and Linda Brogan. Elizabeth, Linda, Nancy and Leslie formed the core of what would eventually become another

---

32Knowlton, 1993.

33ibid.

newsletter; they also were the nucleus of a "lesbian-feminist commune for the area."35

Chapter Three

The Beginning of the Feminist Newsletter
and the Newsletter Collective
1973-1974

Out of the household formed by Nancy Blood, Linda Brogan, Leslie Kahn and Elizabeth Knowlton came a surge of dynamism. Elizabeth Knowlton remembered that "we were able to do all this stuff because we were in such good accord about how we would do everything. There was very little wasted time or energy."¹ In addition to having good relationships among this core group of women, the feminist community in the area had also grown smaller in the sense that there were fewer women's liberation groups in operation. The women that were still active, however, formed a smaller, more closely knit community than had existed since the late 1960s. Nancy Blood remembered that "women who identified as feminists at this time [were] a small enough group -- everyone knew everyone else. There was enough of a critical mass though to form a community."²

The core group of Blood, Kahn, Brogan, and Knowlton formed a collective body to produce another newsletter in January,³ and in February of 1973, the Feminist Newsletter was reborn.⁴ No longer simply an announcement sheet for local feminist groups,

¹Knowlton, 1993.
⁴A Feminary, Vol. 8, Issue #1, January 1977.
the newsletter became a bi-weekly publication in which personal essays, news, poetry, announcements, book/movie reviews and classified ads were printed. Some of the early issues about which women began to write were rape, child care, name-changes, and lesbianism. The members of the collective which published the newsletter were mindful of their responsibility to their community, continually inviting women to contribute to the newsletter as well as challenge what was being published.

At the same time that the newsletter was being revitalized, the feminist community in Durham and Chapel Hill, including the women working on the newsletter, produced a handbook for women in the area, The Whole Woman Carologue: A North Carolina Guide for Women. Published in 1974, and designed as a guide to resources for women in North Carolina, the topics covered included: Health, Athletics, Lesbians, Politics, and Women and the Law. The Carologue concluded with a list of contacts for women by county. The production of the Carologue is important in the story of the newsletter for it was an extension of community-building through print. Women needed information about services which catered to them specifically and the Carologue provided it.

The final entry in the Whole Woman Carologue is a description of the process of working as a collective as the women attempted to construct the guidebook. The issues raised in this essay apply equally well to the process behind the

---

production of the Feminist Newsletter. They wrote:

Intrinsic to the publication of this book has been a collective process of interaction. Our biweekly meetings have continued -- sometimes laboriously, sometimes joyfully -- through discussions of content, format, style, coverage, emphasis, approach, cooperation, audience, accessibility, funding, and skills. We have purposefully remained as unhierarchical as possible; because of this commitment, our process has been democratic and our progress evolving. 6

This process of working as a collective was also the process that governed the production of the newsletter. However, unlike the guidebook, the Feminist Newsletter was a space for women outside the production collective to also get involved. The newsletter constantly requested material, feedback, and editorial help and was seen by the collective as a space in print for women in the Durham-Chapel Hill area to express themselves.

This invitation to the community to participate in the content of the newsletter was a distinguishing feature of the collective that never disappeared, even during later periods of change for the publication. Although later requests for participation were less direct, within the first six months of publication, in the September 16, 1973 issue, the Feminist Newsletter collective published a questionnaire for its readership, seeking information about the newsletter and its features. 7 The responses were printed in the issue of November 11 and reveal much about what was important to the readers of the

6 ibid.

The category of "Womenswork" received the highest number of positive responses. This was an area in which members wrote about issues relating to women in the workforce, to women in unusual jobs and to women in non-professional and non-traditional workplaces. In addition, the respondents requested more information about local activities and local services for women as well as about local issues of sexual discrimination. This continuing dialogue between the collective and its readers and the continuing emphasis on issues of local importance signifies the relationship of the newsletters to the feminist movement as a whole. It was through work on local issues that most women initially came to call themselves "feminists"; thus, the local focus of the newsletters were a vehicle for women to become involved in the national movement and its debates.

As the experience of The Feminist Newsletter suggests, each community newsletter and newspaper developed out of specific local concerns and yet all shared a desire to define for themselves the information and discussion within the community. Consider the issues raised in this essay for the August 19, 1973 issue: "We can become female voices speaking to the female audience, our authenticity to be weighed and reflected by the women themselves. . . . We learn that there is a woman's culture and that this woman's culture is neither a joke, nor a blight on the 'human experience.' From this posture of strength, we begin..."
to take responsibility for what happens to us. This is what we call liberation."⁹ While the author was speaking directly about the potential of consciousness-raising groups, the impulses behind the experience are parallel to the experience of the newsletter collective.

In addition to defining the issues important to the local feminist community, the newsletter collective continually debated the issue of "collectivity" and what it meant to be publishing under the rubric of collective action. The November 11, 1973 issue contained this announcement to readers:

The policies of the Feminist Newsletter are constantly subject to change. Decisions are made by women who participate in the production of the newsletter at OPEN collective meetings held once a month and announced in the FN. These decisions are arrived at after considerable thought, discussion and debate at the meetings. The collective welcomes any woman who wishes to participate and in this way desires to affect ongoing policies as well as be a part of this collective effort.¹⁰

This effort at "anti-leadership consensus"¹¹ has been critiqued as ineffective and problematic. The Feminist Newsletter collective found itself, at times, torn between the need and desire to produce a newsletter and the equally pressing desire to remain egalitarian. This was an issue which was central to feminism in the 1970s as women tried to define new ways of power-sharing. Despite the difficulties it posed for

---

¹¹Evans, 222.
newsletter production, however, the decision to function as a collective never seemed questioned. In fact, collectivity was often celebrated within the pages of the Feminist Newsletter. In the October 6, 1974 issue, Nancy Blood, along with collective members Diana and Leslie, tried to define why collectivity was important for feminists. "To change ourselves as women," they wrote,

"collective working and living is essential because 1) we free ourselves from elite privilege and rigid roles, 2) we select issues that affect us and achieve power over the outcome, 3) we avoid one-to-one struggles for permission and approval, and 4) we support each other in confrontations with agents of the present society who wish to put us down."  

For newsletter collective members then, the collective nature of newsletter production offered more than an alternative power structure. It offered a support network in which each woman found strength through association with other women. However, collectivity must also be seen as more than a static environment. On the contrary, "the power of collectivity lies in the dynamic structure of commitment to oneself, to the other members of the group, and to the constantly evolving ideology."  

Thus, for students of the national feminist movement, the internal mechanisms of collectivity within the newsletter production process offers a valuable lesson in the ways in which women attempted to form alternative power structures.

---

13 ibid.

32
Unlike the contents of the earlier Female Liberation newsletters, the new Feminist Newsletters began to address the subject of lesbian-feminism and issues surrounding lesbians within the larger feminist movement. While the earlier issues were not self-consciously lesbian-oriented, the members of the collective putting out the newsletter identified themselves as lesbians and this figured into the production of the newsletter. As Elizabeth Knowlton recalls "the feminist community was not getting any larger, it wasn't growing... A lot of energy was coming from lesbians or women identifying as celibate."14 These issues found themselves on the pages of the newsletter even at the beginning.

The meetings of the Lesbian Rap Group, founded in October 1973, were periodically discussed in the Feminist Newsletter as were other issues with which lesbians in the area were dealing.15 The Lesbian Rap Group, later to become the Triangle Area Lesbian-Feminists (TALF), was an important aspect of the lesbian community, especially in Durham. An open letter in the November 11, 1974 issue of the Feminist Newsletter spoke to the needs of lesbians in the area. Barbara16 wrote, "We talked

16 Wherever possible, I have attempted to use both first and last names as a way to identify those women whom I am quoting. However, this is not always possible as many women who wrote for the newsletter used only their first names or wrote under a psuedonym. In these situations, I have quoted them using the name under the article.
about and around the eternal problems of coming out, hearing about the fears of rejection and ostracization, the resentment about having to make a big issue about your sexuality..."

The space provided the small but growing lesbian community by the Lesbian Rap Group, as well as by the newsletter, were important contributions to the feminist community.

The increasing discussion centered around lesbian-feminism did not mean, however, that issues involving straight women were ever neglected. The December 16, 1973 issue, for example, contained several personal accounts of difficulties involved in being a feminist in heterosexual relationships. This struggle to have "liberated" relationships with men were causing women to rethink their commitment to men on the whole. As it was described, feminism was fast becoming a priority for some straight women and this, in turn, became a hotly contested issue within their relationships. Issues involving straight, lesbian, and celibate women existed side-by-side on the pages of the Feminist Newsletter during this early time period, unlike the newsletter of Female Liberation.

What had not changed, however, from the Female Liberation newsletter days, was the need to constantly ask for support from the reading community. The issue of December 16, 1973 contained a familiar plea not only for submissions but for production help as well. Laura, a collective member, had this to say:

17 ibid.

"unfortunately, the newsletter is having problems -- not financial problems but even more basic ones. Our core number of editors has dwindled over the months and now it is only a small (and a very small) number of women who are doing all the work. As it stands now, we are quite tempted to let the newsletter fold."\(^{19}\) The collective was planning a party to enlist women to join the collective and inject new life into the newsletter. According to Laura, "the party can either be a celebration/reaffirmation or it can be a wake."\(^{20}\) The need for other participants was met, however, and the Feminist Newsletter was saved from lack of community involvement.

The new year brought some new directions for the newsletter. The March 24, 1974 issue of the Feminist Newsletter dedicated a full issue to lesbian-feminism and its repercussions for the entire feminist community. This groundbreaking issue for the Feminist Newsletter began with a note from the editors:

There is rumor going around that the Feminist Newsletter is run by a bunch of lesbians. While this is not usually true, the editorship of the newsletter does rotate, and this time all of the editors are lesbian-feminists. . . . As editors we have decided to devote the major portion of this issue to lesbian feminism to share with you some of our insights and opinions. We welcome readers' responses, and will publish them in an upcoming issue.\(^{21}\)

The issue featured some brief articles about lesbian activities in the area, a review of the lesbian musical group

\(^{19}\)ibid.

\(^{20}\)ibid.

Lavender Jane, an article on Rita Mae Brown's book *Rubyfruit Jungle*, and also a bibliography of lesbian literature in which were listed articles on lesbianism found in other newsletters and newspapers around the country. The central essay of the issue, however, was "The Politics of Lesbianism -- Chapel Hill." The unidentified author of the piece identified her central theme by writing, "What I am concerned about is the way women interact as straight (heterosexual) and lesbian in the Women's Movement here. Mostly they don't." The issue surrounding how homosexual and heterosexual women related to each other within the feminist movement was highly politicized and with this article, the Feminist Newsletter broached the subject for the first time. The author felt "ghettoized" as a lesbian within the local community, and "pushed to paranoia by whispered rumors about 'those women.'" Finally, she concluded that "Straight women need to talk more, not about lesbians, but to them, acknowledging their position as positive to the Women's Movement." Lesbian women felt increasingly marginalized by the feminist movement which was not as receptive to their participation as lesbian-feminists would have liked.

This inability to feel fully comfortable within the feminist community in Durham and Chapel Hill caused lesbian-feminists to discuss their inability to function within society's heterosexual framework. Lesbian-feminists, in Durham-Chapel Hill, did not, at

---

22ibid.

23ibid.
this time, necessarily question the value of working with straight feminist women but found it important to communicate their distress that lesbians felt pressured into remaining less visible. The impulse to separation from heterosexual mores and styles sprang from this disenchantment. In the same issue of the Feminist Newsletter, Barbara discussed her separatist life. "I see feminism, lesbian-feminism and separatism, in my mind, as my vision of the future. . . . At my core are my separatist beliefs. I live a very separatist life which I would like to be even more separatist. I made a decision to immerse myself in women's culture and I find that I have no time for, or support for, the man's world in so far as there is a choice."24

The primacy of lesbian-feminism was took time to surface in the pages of the Feminist Newsletter after it was restarted, in large part because the lesbian community in Durham-Chapel Hill was still quite small. According to Sherry Kinlaw, a member of the collective, "I think that the issue [lesbianism] was slow to evolve because all of us involved at the time were in various stages of coming out. Some of our families knew, some of them didn't. Some of our employers knew, some of them didn't. We weren't in a position to own our own homes -- there was just this huge amount of fear."25 The fear was not necessarily something that straight feminists were asked to confront, and this reality

24 ibid.

forced the collective producing the newsletter to tread lightly on the issue.

Lesbian-feminists believed that straight feminists were not willing to place their concerns at the forefront of the women's liberation agenda. Rather, lesbian-feminist issues always seemed to take second place to issues affecting straight women. Nancy Blood commented, "I just remember that it was the lesbians who had the time and energy to be in there for the long haul. Straight women were still feminists but in terms of putting energy into this particular endeavour, I think they dropped out." Sherry Kinlaw thought that "lesbians had more to lose, [thus making them more radical]" Producing the newsletter was a way, then, for feminists concerned with lesbian-feminism to put their concerns and needs in the foreground and not to have to apologize for politics that may have been too radical for some straight feminists in the area.

The summer of 1974 saw the departure of two collective members integral to the newsletters' resurgence. Elizabeth Knowlton and Linda Brogan moved to Atlanta. The next collective meeting, on August 15, discussed ways to insure the newsletter's stability. Subsequently, the August 25, 1974 issue contained a report from the collective with this invitation: "Several members felt that the FN [Feminist Newsletter] needs a new name, that it originally had been a newsletter, but that now it had the scope

---


of a journal. The new name, if one is chosen, must be a strongly
feminist one, and we decided to ask our readers for
suggestions.\textsuperscript{28}

With the issue of October 6, 1974, the Feminist Newsletter
name was changed for the final time and marks the end of the
eyear phase of newsletter production. The newsletter became
Feminary. The name was appropriated from Monique Wittig's \textit{Les}
Guerilleres and its explanation was printed on the cover of that
weeks newsletter:

The women are seen to have in their hands small
books which they say are feminaries. These are either
multiple copies of the same original or else there are
several kinds. In one of them someone has written an
inscription which they whisper in each other's ears and
which provokes them to full-throated laughter. When it
is leafed through the feminary presents numerous blank
pages in which they write from time to time.
Essentially, it consists of pages with words printed in
a varying number of capital letters. There may be only
one or the pages may be full of them. Usually they
are isolated at the center of the page, well-spaced
black on a white background or else white on a black
background.

* * * * *

The women say that even without the feminaries
they can recall the time when, as was typical of them,
they made war. They say that all they need do is to
invent terms that describe themselves without
conventional references to herbals or bestiaries. They
say that this can be done without pretension. They say
that what they must stress above all is their strength
and their courage.\textsuperscript{29}

While the newsletter continued with its previous format, the
issues covered between 1974 and 1976; community-building,
collective-action and an increased emphasis on lesbian-feminism,


\textsuperscript{29}Feminary October 6, 1974 cover.
shaped and molded the final ten years of the newsletter's existence. These three activist approaches linked the Feminist Newsletter to the national feminist movement as it was on the local level that feminist goals were put into practice. Issues of national importance were discussed and debated in newsletters all over the country. Therefore, the national impact of these larger debates is most clearly seen through local activism. The Feminist Newsletter was part of the local activist network in Durham/Chapel Hill and the debates in the newsletter affected both the publication and its readership.
The new name for the newsletter did not mean that new issues were addressed on its pages. The themes upon which women were concentrating continued to be lesbian-feminism, community-building, and working as a collective. In fact, these issues became more pronounced during the years between the end of 1974 and the end of 1976. The politics of lesbian-feminism appeared on the pages of Feminary with greater frequency. The issues surrounding the emerging lesbian community in Durham also received more attention. The process of working as a collective remained at the fore as well. By the end of 1976, however, the form of the newsletter took a different direction although the issues outlined here did not disappear.

Directly following the introduction of a new name for the newsletter, a new organization was founded for lesbians in Durham. On Sunday, September 29, 1974, the Lesbian Rap Group became the Triangle Area Lesbian Feminists (TALF). The constituency of both the organization and the newsletter collective/readership were bound together by the history of Feminary. Many of the discussions of lesbian-feminism coming out of TALF were reprinted on the pages of the newsletter. In this way, the organization and the newsletter acted as both an agent of community-building and a manifestation of community-building.

The TALF meeting of October 6 focused on separatism, an
important issue for lesbian-feminists throughout the country. The discussion that followed showed how far the issue had come since lesbianism was first broached on the pages of the newsletter. "We all agreed that we cannot completely abandon relating to other groups for practical purposes, but that it is important to direct our energies and not waste time on nonlesbians."¹ The consensus behind this decision to "not waste time on nonlesbians" was growing within the Durham lesbian community. While the collective remained open to all women, lesbianism was important to the functioning of the newsletter and no-one was prepared to subordinate that to concerns that were of more salience to straight feminists.

In this spirit of defining themselves as lesbians and becoming increasingly visible in the local Durham community, approximately thirty Feminary and TALF members attended the Great Southeast Lesbian Conference, sponsored by the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance (ALFA), in Atlanta, on the weekend of May 24-26, 1975.² Five women from Durham who were hoping to attend the conference, Liz, Portia, Dilly, Jo, and Donna, were prevented from doing so because of an incident which occurred in Atlanta on Friday night.³ That incident radicalized not only the women involved but many of the women who heard about it later.

As explained later in the newsletter, the five women had

finished eating in an Atlanta restaurant, recommended by the ALFA staff, when a disagreement occurred over the bill. While the cashier changed the bill, tempers were not soothed, and one of the women involved commented that she would be sure not to come back "to that f---ing place again." An off-duty police officer, sitting at the counter of the restaurant, grabbed the woman who made the comment and said "You're coming with me." When she resisted his attempts to control her, the officer threw her up against a wall before handcuffing her to another woman. When the other women protested, he informed them that they would all be arrested also. (During this entire altercation, this officer never explained the charges against the women.) When other police cars arrived, the first officer informed the women that they were all under arrest for "creating a turmoil and for criminal trespassing." A gay man who witnessed the scene told the officer that "ladies shouldn't be treated like that." He was promptly arrested also for obstructing an officer. During this entire incident, there was much verbal abuse of the women involved. They were referred to as "goddamn lesbians", "butch bitches", and "bull dykes." The man who was arrested was also harassed about his homosexuality. They were all taken to jail

\[4\] ibid. \\
\[5\] ibid. \\
\[6\] ibid. \\
\[7\] ibid.
and booked; bond was set at $1100 each.\(^8\)

The women spent the night in jail but other lesbians attending the conference had been notified of what occurred. Enough money was raised by Saturday night to pay a bondsperson to post bond and by early Sunday morning the women from Durham were released. Money for lawyers fees and for the fines levied were raised at the conference on Sunday, in time for the hearing which was to take place on Monday morning. On Monday, the charges of criminal trespassing were dropped but the case for creating a turmoil was heard. According to the women involved, the police officer in charge of the arrest lied and exaggerated to the judge and they were all given a ten day suspended sentence and fined $35 each.\(^9\)

Naturally, the women involved viewed the entire incident as one of lesbian harassment. Liz had this to say about her experience: "We all know that the reason we were arrested is because we are lesbians. It is important to realized that the entire situation from beginning to end was a direct result of our heterosexist, misogynous society. Legally we were not protected from discrimination as lesbians."\(^{10}\) She went on, however, to acknowledge the tremendous amount of support that had been shown them by other lesbians at the conference. "The power and effectiveness of group effort was apparent," she wrote, "Our

\(^8\)ibid.
\(^9\)ibid.
\(^{10}\)ibid.
experience has shown us that it is essential that lesbians organize to fight our political oppression."\textsuperscript{11}

The incident surrounding the arrest of five of the Durham women who attended the conference was not the only radicalizing component to the weekend. Several women who were able to participate in the conference also came away with a greater feeling of insurgency and rebellion. Lynn felt that her position as a separatist was reaffirmed at the conference and thought that while lesbianism was political (because it refuses sexual and emotional support to men), it was not sufficiently radical to force change in the heterosexist world-view. "Unless separatism [as a lesbian] is connected to a radical feminist analysis," she wrote, "which questions and consciously defies all the attitudes and systems that oppress women and gays, they [separatists] are going to be subject to co-optation."\textsuperscript{12}

The issue of separatism also figured in an essay written by Claire Ellington, a member of the "Drastic Dykes" group located in Charlotte. Claire was incensed at what she saw as a lack of real understanding by other lesbians at the conference at how marginalized they were by the straight feminist community. In a workshop on separatism, at the Atlanta conference, Ellington notes, "we discussed the fact that many so-called 'women's newsletters, centers, etc. are run largely, if not exclusively, by lesbians. We all agreed that it's time for lesbians to

\textsuperscript{11}ibid.

\textsuperscript{12}ibid.
acknowledge our energy for ourselves -- to stop being the "mothers" of straight women and straight-identified lesbians. To stop being co-opted under terms like 'feminist' and 'women's' which means straight."\(^\text{13}\)

Clearly, this conference in Atlanta, and the issues which arose there -- police harassment and separatism -- led to a greater radicalization by women in the Durham community. The newsletter had never contained such vehement support for separatism. According to Nancy Blood, the vehemence really shocked the community. "It dramatized a lot of issues for them," she commented, "and for the rest of us about living in a police state. . . . I mean, everything was right in your face, and you really felt that . . . you were pretty soon going to be fighting for your life."\(^\text{14}\) "Intimidation tactics," Sherry Kinlaw declared, "made [me] more politicized as a person."\(^\text{15}\)

In this sense, 1975 was a pivotal year in the emergence of a lesbian-feminist community in Durham. TALF had developed as a group with much support, and lesbian-feminism became an issue around which Feminary contributors felt compelled to rally. While the Atlanta conference was not the only focus, it did bring lesbians together within the community. This increased emphasis on lesbian-feminism became so noticed to other members of the readership, many of them not directly involved with lesbian-

\(^{13}\text{ibid.}\)

\(^{14}\text{Blood, 1992.}\)

\(^{15}\text{Kinlaw, 1992.}\)
feminism, that sexual preference as a focal point for political organization became the issue around which the questions of collectivity and community began to be discussed.

On June 16, 1975, the monthly Feminary collective meeting was held at Dilly's. Elizabeth Knowlton had sent the collective a letter from Atlanta commenting on the increasing emphasis in the newsletter on issues relating to lesbians and lesbian-feminism. "I find this new development both exciting and disturbing," she wrote, "exciting because there is a vehicle in North Carolina for the lesbian-feminist voice, disturbing because I have not seen anything in Feminary delineating this change in direction."16 Elizabeth went on to suggest that because the newsletter was no longer focusing directly on problems faced by straight women, the collective should issue a revised statement of purpose indicating this change. While she acknowledge that a more overtly political stance might alienate some straight readers, Elizabeth felt that something should be done.17

The collective meeting on June 16 considered Elizabeth's letter but came to a different conclusion than she had. The collective felt that there were still a number of items on the pages of the newsletter that were of interest to all feminists. In addition, the fact that the collective was comprised entirely of women-oriented women, most of whom were lesbians, seemed enough reason for the increased attention to lesbians in the

17ibid.
Elizabeth's communication had been the first indication, in fact, that some women might not be altogether pleased with the newsletter's content. Finally, the collective concluded that because it was open to all women, and because lesbianism and feminism were intertwined, "we do not want to limit our freedom to include articles by, about and for women other than ourselves, and we see that declaring as a lesbian publication would necessarily have that effect."¹⁸

The decision to not declare as a lesbian publication was held in the relatively open forum of a meeting of the collective. These types of decisions were part of the process in which the larger Feminary collective was involved. In fact, the process here was as important as the final product itself. "Endless process!" remembers Nancy Blood, "we felt that how we did something was as important as what we produced. And I still believe that today."¹⁹ While this process was incredibly important, the power struggles involved in working collectively were somewhat "oppressive" as well.²⁰ Women were expected to participate in all aspects of newsletter production which rationally, seems only fair, but in practice meant that some of the enjoyment of the effort was removed.

Periodic tension and stress aside, members felt that what they were producing was tremendously important and that made the

¹⁸Feminary, Vol. 6, Issue #14, July 6, 1975
¹⁹Blood, 1992
²⁰ibid.
effort worthwhile. "Although we may not get along personally," Sherry Kinlaw recollected, "or agreed and disagreed at meetings, or had this power thing going on, that didn't matter. Well, it did matter, but the individual dynamics weren't the focus, it was the group and what we were producing [that mattered]." In fact, the newsletter continually received letters from women for whom Feminary was their only contact to a feminist community. Seeing Feminary as a connection for women who were the only feminists, or lesbians, in their communities, justified the work the collective was doing. This responsibility also provided a major argument for inclusiveness. "It was very important to publish everything. You do not exclude anyone," Sherry Kinlaw said.  

Significantly, although many of the newsletter collective members were involved with TALF and lesbian-feminism, some others were more identified with an emerging Women's Union. During the summer, a socialist-feminist conference had been held, Sagaris, in which several Durham women participated. These discussions led to the possibility of forming a union that could function for the general feminist community. The needs of the community were seen as "greater cooperation and communication between existing women's groups in the area and individual women; cohesion of political thought and activity; sharing our cultural heritage and growth; learning, exploring and answering questions about who we

---


22 Ibid.
are and how we relate to our sisters."\textsuperscript{23} The Union was an attempt to create "a workable and working coalition of diverse groups and individuals within the Feminist community based on an agreement of general principles of unity and structure."\textsuperscript{24}

At the second meeting, five women, chosen by the August 4th steering committee, spoke from the various perspectives represented by the group -- non-affiliated feminists, the National Black Feminist Organization, Marxist-Leninist, Socialist-Feminist, and Lesbian-Feminist. This presentation was "designed to expose the variety of viewpoints which need to be considered as discussion of 'principles of unity' commences."\textsuperscript{25}

The attempt to form a broad-based coalition of different groups indicated a willingness to work with other interests not directly relating to the work of the lesbian-feminist community. In this way, women associated with \textit{Feminary} and TALF appeared to be returning, in some sense, to the early years of newsletter publication, during which time there was a greater variety of issues around which women were becoming involved.

The new year brought a renewed emphasis on the issues surrounding the collective. In February, \textit{Feminary} announced that it had just under 200 subscribers and approximately $164 in its treasury. The collective was concerned that continuing \textit{Feminary} might not be viable if the number of subscribers dropped

\begin{footnotes}
\item[24] \textit{Feminary}, Vol. 6, Issue #21, October 12, 1975.
\end{footnotes}
significantly. However, it was decided (after much discussion) that Feminary was an important link not only among women in the Triangle area but between feminists in other regions as well. (The collective did request, however, as they had done in the past, for readers to continue to contribute essays and information in an effort to keep the newsletter current.)

The same February issue of Feminary also contained more information on the newly formed Triangle Women's Union. During the meeting of February 2, as reported in the February 28 issue, the members of the Union ratified a structure designed to facilitate the membership of both individuals and organizations. While the structure itself was highly formal, and very different than a group like the Feminary collective, it was designed with cross-group mediation in mind. The "Principles of Unity" adopted by the Union are clear in their intent:

1. We all recognize that we are oppressed as women. Some of us are also oppressed because of our class, lesbianism, age, race and political affiliation. . . .
2. We envision a society of cooperation and equality in which decisions are based on human needs instead of profits. We are working to end male supremacy. . . .
3. We recognize that problems often viewed as individual are collective, are often rooted in societal conditions, and must therefore be resolved in political manner.
4. We are working toward a feminist culture based on our sense of collective identity, history, values and potential as women.
5. We are working for a society that included full and meaningful employment for all. . . .
6. We see the Union as an organization in which we develop leadership and cooperation. . . .
7. We will continue to analyze and evaluate our

---

The efforts of the Triangle Women's Union and the status of the collective producing *Feminary* were the two formative issues for the newsletter in 1976, suggesting that there was more a diversity among both the collective membership and readership than might have been apparent a year earlier.

On April 11, 1976, *Feminary* reported on a March meeting that came to have tremendous repercussions for the future of the newsletter. *Feminary* had been invited to participate in the first annual Women-In-Print conference, scheduled to be held at a Campfire Girl's camp just south of Omaha, Nebraska on August 29 through September 5. *Feminary* offered to facilitate two workshops, on feminist structure and community responsibility. Only two or three women from the collective were going to be able to participate in the meeting as the camp would only hold 150 women. Eventually, two representatives of *Feminary* attended the August meeting, planning on co-facilitating a workshop dealing with "Independence in Relation to the Feminist Movement."

The newsletter also contained reported further developments on the status of the Triangle Women's Union. The groups now officially affiliated with the Union were the Durham Women's Center, the Durham Women's Health Cooperative, Triangle Area

---

27 ibid.


Lesbian Feminists, and Feminary. The Union had developed a general concept of the organization "as a pressure group (via newspaper articles, etc.); this would be a way for us to voice feminist consciousness on local issues and to become visible to others who share our ideas." The Union members decided to raise money to publish a book of writings and drawings, sponsored by TALF, and created by inmates at the North Carolina Correctional Center for Women.  

The beginning of August brought a flurry of activity to the feminist community in Durham. On August 16, 1976 the Feminary collective met a final time before the Women-In-Print conference was scheduled to take place. The financing for the two representatives was culled from personal funds, collective monies, and through a gift of $100 from TALF. It was decided that while at the conference, Feminary representatives would write and distribute a short history of the newsletter and of its processes. The Feminary members were also planning a workshop in cooperation with members of off our backs, around the following:  

-- independence and relation to the feminist movement: editorial politics on covering all different types of groups.  
-- hassles with other feminists or movement groups.  
-- whether we should define our readership or let it define us.  
-- politics of editing and rejecting manuscripts from other than the collective.  

30 ibid.  
31 ibid.  
Even more important than the preparations for the Women-In-Print conference, however, was the discussion about issues pertaining to the future of the publication. Members had begun to think about new formats for the newsletter as a way of making the publication more "relevant and interesting to ourselves and to our readers." It was hoped that this would prompt an ongoing discussion, about the future of Feminary. The collective requested and welcomed input from its readership and from the Women-In-Print conference in order to preserve the vitality of the publication. 33

The Women-In-Print Conference was a benchmark for Feminary. According to Judy Grahn, in an interview with Feminist Bookstore News, the conference was June Arnold's idea. "She wanted to see what would happen," Grahn recollected,

so she took the idea out of her head and put it into action and, with some help from some other women, she invited the entire women in print movement to come to this Campfire Girl's camp near Omaha, Nebraska. And we all went and it was just amazing. The New Yorkers freaked out when they didn't have the New York Times. Some people had to go into town to see third run movies to get a media fix. Some wonderfully crazy women from California looked at the printing industry and concluded that paper was going to become a scarce and restricted commodity that women wouldn't be able to buy so they figured out how to make paper out of Nebraska's grass and had paper-making demonstrations. . . . . We weren't going to depend on anybody for anything! Nobody was going to stop us! That was the energy that was at the first Women-In-Print conference. 34

The conference was held at Camp Harriet Harding directly

33ibid.

34Feminist Bookstore News, Summer Supplement, August 1990.
outside Omaha. Over one hundred women, representing 80 different
groups, had been brought together through the organizing efforts
of June Arnold of Daughters Press, Charlotte Bunch of Quest,
Colleta Reid of Diana Press, and Nancy Stockwell of Plexus and
The Bright Medusa. Four women from Feminary ended up attending
the conference: Beverly Simmons, Mary Paige Smith, Leslie Kahn,
and Nancy Blood.35 The week was spent in a series of workshops,
skill-sharing sessions and political discussions. Some of the
topics discussed included: reviewing books, editing manuscripts,
reporting, interviewing, bookkeeping, political and community
responsibility, division of space, independence and relation to
feminist movement, priorities for women never published, lesbian
communication networks, and cooperative arrangements.36

The entire week was not all spent in professional meetings,
however. During the evenings, conference participants
entertained each other with singing, guitar and fiddle playing,
and even square-dancing. The final night of the conference
witnessed the first Honeybucket Follies: singing, karate
demonstrations, and skits satirizing the events of the week.37
Judy Grahn recalled that Helaine Harris and Cynthia Gair, of
Women in Distribution (WIND), tap-danced on talent night, singing
"We are the Women in Distribution/trying to build and
institution" in the first WIND commercial! (She went on, saying,

35Blood, 1992
37Ibid.
"June Arnold and Parke Bowman did a hilarious song advertising Daughters Press -- 'What makes a daughter/who oughter/know better I think/take to printing/and printing/with lavender ink!')"\(^{38}\)

The conference participants from Feminary returned home rejuvenated and with several new ideas for the collective. The Women-In-Print conference prompted two notable collective members to decide to leave Feminary to pursue more involved projects directly related to printing.\(^{39}\) The first collective meeting after the conference was one that dealt directly with that change. While Nancy and Leslie had decided to leave the group, four new women had joined the collective. There were four specific questions that framed the discussion. Those were "WHO IS OUR COMMUNITY? WHAT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO OUR READERS? WHO READS FEMINARY AND WHY?"\(^{40}\) The collective decided to specifically examine not only these issues but how Feminary could both grow in new directions and still remain a part of the history it had helped create.

The beginnings of answers to these questions dominated the pages of the newsletter for the rest of the year. A Feminary process/progress report was issued in October. A brief profile of the publication was given, helping to define the parameters of the readership and subscription levels. According to the report,


approximately 142 *Feminaries* were distributed biweekly. Approximately 100 of these represented paid subscriptions, while the others were free/exchange copies. Of those 100 subscriptions, 75% were within North Carolina.\(^4\)

The readership, as defined by the subscriptions, was primarily Triangle-based. While the collective itself was mainly lesbian feminist in orientation, members were aware that they had non-lesbian readers and that the newsletter covered areas of interest to all feminists. While the collective wanted to remain true to their own politics, a desire for more diversity was articulated and linked to the desire for more reader input. "Of special concern was the structure of the collective, and attention was directed towards ways in which we could more efficiently organize our time and energy in putting out *Feminary*."\(^4\) Among the ideas considered were having monthly issues of *Feminary* and biweekly meetings of the collective in order to facilitate better planning; rotating editors; and changing the format from mimeographing to offset printing. It was noted that printing was considered not because the collective had any money but because *Feminary* had a volunteer printer, former collective member, Nancy Blood.\(^4\)

The final issue of 1976, the Winter Solstice issue, was a

\(^4\) *Feminary*, Vol. 7, Issue #21, specific date for this issue is unknown, although it is sometime in October, 1976.

\(^4\) *ibid.*

\(^4\) *ibid.*
pivotal one for the history of the Feminary newsletter. While some issues were still very much undecided, the collective had reached some firm conclusions about the publication. Starting with the first issue of the new year, Feminary was going to change from mimeographing to offset printing. It was hoped that this would make the publication more legible and more attractive. The newsletter would come out monthly. The coverage of local news was going to be expanded. Finally, the collective decided to try and appeal to a wider audience than the newsletter had in the past. In so doing, the members defined the readership as "all Triangle Area women who are interested in feminism."44

Along with this information, a new statement of purpose was issued. "Over the past three years," collective members wrote, Feminary has evolved along with the lives and commitments of its collective members; and, when the energies of the collective have been absorbed in specific interests and issues, Feminary has reflected that absorption. This is why our old readers have observed in our publication an increasing emphasis on lesbian feminism. Our present desire to expand coverage and to appeal to a wider audience does not indicate a rejection of our past or of any politics we have associated with it. It does indicate that we realize we have not always fulfilled our aspirations for Feminary. It indicates that we are interested in many areas, including but not limited to lesbian feminism, and that we are now ready to pursue those areas.45

With this new statement of purpose, Feminary changed formats forever. Abandoning the newsletter structure that had served the Durham community for the past three years, the newsletter

45 ibid.

58
collective branched into a new direction.
The next issue of Feminary was completely different in appearance than the mimeographed issues that had been coming out for the past three years. The move to offset printing produced a journal that could support photographs, drawings, as well as graphics. It had been produced by Whole Woman Press of Durham, run by former collective member Nancy Blood. There were nine members of the collective listed on the masthead; some of the women involved were new to Feminary while some of the women had been participants in the earlier issues. The collective's open letter to the readers apologized for having come out so late.¹

The issue also contained several substantive changes including several essays and reviews (announcements and classifieds), all of which were more comprehensive, longer, and detailed than in the older newsletter. Now there existed space for women to really probe an issue, to create an in-depth article, and to present a work of fiction. Some of the issues with which the first journal dealt were: the ERA in North Carolina, women's health issues, battered women, a guide to local women's groups, how to work with household tools, the use of basic herbs, and three book reviews.²

¹Feminary, Vol. 8, Issue #1, Spring 1977.
²Ibid.

60
The Feminary collective also issued its first official editorial policy towards submissions. The new journal, it said, encouraged the "submission of articles, poetry, short fiction, graphics, and photographs." They asked that the submissions be typed, double-spaced, and that all material be signed. (The author could, however, request that her name not be used.) Feminary would not print material that was "racist, sexist, heterosexist, or in any way exploitative of women." The collective reserved the right to edit without returning work to the author, although fiction and poetry would always be sent back with changes for the author's approval. Priority was to be given to local women, although all submissions would be considered and letters to the collective were always welcome.³

Feminary was still in transition. While the format had changed and the submissions were more comprehensive, it had not shifted so completely away from its former self as to be unrecognizable to veteran readers. Nevertheless, the journal was somewhat disjointed. While the essays were firmly entrenched in North Carolina, they lacked the specific community focus of Durham and Chapel Hill. Still, an effort was made to promote continuity by printing a short history of the newsletter which had been put together by Elizabeth Knowlton, a former collective member now living in Atlanta.⁴

The decision that had been made in December to publish a

³ibid.
⁴ibid.
newsletter every month was quickly forgotten as the new format required much more work. The second issue was a Summer issue. Similar to the first, it contained a hodge-podge of features that were both new and old. The articles in this issue included: a look at North Carolina textile workers, poetry, the impact of the International Year of the Woman in North Carolina, a discussion of the impact of the federally-funded WIC program\textsuperscript{5}, an essay titled "On Being the High School Dyke", and a set of announcements. Once again, it reflected both a regional and a local focus.\textsuperscript{6}

The expanded coverage of essays and articles did allow for some interesting exchanges between contributors and readers. Addressing an issue which did not often find its way into the pages of \textit{Feminary}, Kathy and Nancy, both members of TALF, wrote an article called "Things are rough all over, but. . . A Look at Class."\textsuperscript{7} Their four page essay was an attempt to define the ways in which social class exerted a profoundly alienating effect on members of different social groups. While not exceedingly radical or exclusive, the authors did make an honest attempt to articulate ideas that had only surfaced occasionally in previous issues.

The third issue of \textit{Feminary} was produced in the fall of

\textsuperscript{5}\textit{"Women, Infants, and Children."} A federally-funded subsidized food program for poor mothers and their children.

\textsuperscript{6}\textit{Feminary}, Vol. 8, Issue #2, Summer 1977.

\textsuperscript{7}ibid.
1977. The format was again, very similar to the first and second issues. The journal included an interview with runner/marathonist Martha Klopfer, a review of the Fourth Annual Women's Music Festival, poetry, an interview with a woman dying of cancer, as well as two personal essays and a set of classified advertisements and announcements. This issue also contained something different, however -- a detailed response to the essay on class in the previous issue of the journal. 8

Addressing the issue itself Sky wrote:

. . . . you say: "Growing up in America, we were taught that we can get anything we want if we just try hard enough." Maybe you were taught that, I was not. I was taught, you work hard all you life and you're still one jump ahead of the sheriff. Here's what I think: the authors of the article still assume that your middle class experience is everyone's experience." 9

An editor of the journal, on the other hand, had a different response, commenting, "I was floored that a radical group of lesbian-feminists could come up with nothing more provocative after a year's discussions." 10 Regardless of whether or not the essay was radical or moderate, well-received or not, the format allowing for the longer essays and articles had provided a degree of detail that prompted controversy and reflection. This was clearly a sign of health for the Feminary undertaking.

Also included in this third issue of the journal was a small note from the collective. Its numbers had dwindled

8Feminary, Vol. 8, Issue #3, Fall 1977.
9ibid.
10ibid.
precipitously. Not only was the collective in need of input in terms of the journal's content, Feminary was still grappling with the issue surrounding the direction of the publication. "Are we a radical feminist publication with a singular political and cultural aim?" they asked, "Are we instead trying to offer a forum for women's voices in an effort to bring about dialogue among any and all of us in the Triangle Area? All or none of the above?" 11 As Mab Segrest, a Feminary collective member, remembers the situation, "It was a fairly loose collective then. It didn't feel like we had a lot of identity, we were groping around for what it should be." 12

The growing sense that the journal had no specific identity began to change with the publication of the next issue. Produced in spring of 1978, Vol. 9, Issue #1 was a thematic issue dealing with the formidable subject of "Lesbian Community." 13 Dedicating an entire issue to this topic had been the idea of Mab Segrest, who had joined Feminary as it had become a journal. 14 The issue was a turning point for the new journal and solidified its identity as well as its collective and its readership.

The collective issued a statement at the beginning of the journal explaining the decision to try a thematic format.

11 ibid.

12 Mab Segrest, interview by author, 11 February 1993, Durham, North Carolina, tape recording.

13 Feminary, Vol. 9, Issue #1, Spring 1978.

Discussion had revolved around the connection between audience and community and as a result, members had decided that as a lesbian collective, they could only speak knowledgeably about lesbian community.¹⁵ The statement reminded readers that the decision to focus on a specifically lesbian community was not meant to deny or exclude women who were not lesbians. On the contrary, "the lesbian community serves as a kind of laboratory for relationships between and among all kinds of women, since it is not only lesbians who have lived and worked in isolation from one another."¹⁶

The issue began with an article by Julia Stanley on "Lesbian Relationships and the Vision of Community." In her article, Stanley focused on the themes of sub-culture, defined as "other" by society, and community, a voluntary grouping of like-minded people. Stanley's thesis was that lesbians were treated as a sub-culture but were not yet a community. Also included in the journal was a collection of poetry, and an article from Sinister Wisdom, a journal in Charlotte, North Carolina, which dealt with issues surrounding lesbian separatism. Susan Ballinger contributed a short history of both Feminary and the lesbian community in Durham. Other selections included two essays on community, an article on the Whole Woman Press as well as two personal essays; one from Mab Segrest and the other from Susan

¹⁵Feminary, Vol. 9, Issue #1, Spring 1978.
¹⁶ibid.
The process which was begun by the publication of this issue had to do with regrouping and refocusing. The collective membership had grown ever smaller. By the spring of 1978, the only full-time members of Feminary who remained were Susan Ballinger and Mab Segrest. Participating in the Southeastern Gay Conference in Atlanta, Susan and Mab met Catherine Nicholson and Harriet Desmoines, who had founded Sinister Wisdom, and who were leading a workshop on Southern writing. Before the conference, Mab had also become acquainted with Minnie Bruce Pratt, a writer who had also been attending TALF meetings in Durham. At the conference, Susan and Mab were able to persuade Minnie Bruce to join the Feminary collective. Later, Minnie Bruce's lover, Cris South, also a writer, was also persuaded to join. According to Mab, "this was the core of the collective who started doing Feminary as the literary journal, emphasizing lesbian visions."21

The announcement sheet which heralded the new direction for the journal was a direct and forceful statement of purpose for the new undertaking. Feminary would now be known as "a Feminist

---

17 ibid.
20 ibid.
21 ibid.
Journal for the South: Emphasizing the Lesbian Vision."22 "We want to hear Southern lesbians tell the stories of women in the South --" Feminary announced,

our mothers, grandmothers, aunts, cousins, and friends. We feel we are products of Southern values and traditions but that, as lesbians, we contradict the destructive parts of those values and traditions; and we feel it important to explore how this Southern experience fits into the American pattern.

We are committed to working on issues of race....

We want to encourage feminist and lesbian organizing in a region whose women suffer greatly in their lack of political power.

We want to provide an audience for Southern lesbians who may not think of themselves as writers but who have important stories to tell -- stories that will help to fill the silences that have obscured the truth about our lives and kept us isolated from each other.

We want to know who we are.

We want to change women's lives.23

Clearly, this was a new focus for the collective and a new phase for Feminary as a publication. This shift appeared to provide the cohesion that the collective needed. As Mab remembers, "[the collective] took on this very solid identity which continued on for about five or six years."24 No longer attempting to accept the double responsibility of speaking for both a local and community focus, Feminary had freed itself to change directions and grow away from where it had been.

The shift in emphasis had implications for the collective. The tension between working as a collective and also trying to produce a publication had always been present within the Feminary.

22Feminary, Vol. #9, Issue #2, Summer 1978.

23Ibid.

dynamic: however, a fundamental change in emphasis began to take place at this juncture. For *Feminary* collective members working on the literary journal, the process behind working as a group and forging an identity now took precedence over such mundane issues as making sure the issue came out on time. According to Mab, "I had a very strong sense that we would be filling a need in ourselves. To understand what it was to be lesbian and that given the resonance of questions of Southern identity which had omitted lesbians openly, that we could make a go of it. That we could get a real response."\(^{25}\)

The new *Feminary* got a very real response. It was inundated with submissions -- enough submissions, in fact, that the collective could not respond in a timely fashion to each person who submitted material and for the first time, could truly afford to be selective.\(^{26}\) There is no better evidence for this new shift than the fact that the next issue of *Feminary* which was supposed to be a summer issue was not released until November of 1978. All the submissions were works of poetry.

It was the first issue of 1979 that showed most clearly the combination of essays and literature envisioned by the collective. The journal was divided into poetry, interviews (with Bernice Reagon), personal essays, book reviews, and a regional news section in which items of interest to feminists all

\(^{25}\)ibid.

\(^{26}\)Susan Ballinger, interview by author, 15 November 1992, Durham, North Carolina, tape recording.
over the South were listed. In a voice that resonated with the voices of former collective members, Mab Segrest described their work as one which helped create community. "There was a strong function that lesbian writing served in creating lesbian consciousness and lesbian community." 27

The new emphasis on process was one that worked well for some members of the collective. As Mab remembers, "[things like] getting it out on time was least important [to us]. The process of how we all interacted was primary. We were a crucible for sorting through questions of identity, and what it meant for some of us to be middle-class and some of us not, for me and Minnie Bruce to be middle-class and with Ph.D.'s." 28 Mab remembers the collective as incredibly supportive and loving, with conflicts resolved by endless conversation and discussion.

It was not necessarily that way for other members of the group. Those women especially who had been involved with some aspect of Feminary before it became a literary journal felt that the dynamic of the group had been altered for the worse. The change in emphasis clearly had to do with the specific people involved. The core group within the collective at this time were writers, and two members were Ph.D.'s. There was an obviously literary slant to the undertaking. 29 This new focus, however, meant that other issues were neglected. For some, there was

28 ibid.
disenchantment over what was perceived to be a new preoccupation with insuring that all t's were crossed and all i's dotted rather than making sure that the publication came out on time, for example.  

Unlike earlier collective meetings, one or two people now took charge of discussions. In the early years, that responsibility had generally been designated. Sherry noted that she sometimes "watched people who were more forceful roll over the people who weren't. Everyone was supposed to work as hard as everyone else, though, and there wasn't a whole lot of forgiveness if, for example, someone couldn't come to a meeting." I would not say that the majority of time I worked on it," mused Susan, "that it was fun." Nevertheless, a new direction had been taken, no matter what one thought of the "tyranny of the Ph.D.'s."  

The Feminary collective became involved in a serious undertaking in the summer of 1979. "Woman Writes" was a writers conference for Southern lesbians that took place over the weekend of June 14-17, 1979, in a Georgia state park. Participants in the conference were involved in a series of workshops directed towards either writing or printing. The evenings were spent in readings which prompted discussion and excitement. The 

---

31ibid.
33Sherry Kinlaw, 1992.
conference was a tremendous success. Mab Segrest, however, bemoaned the lack of participation by black women and third world women. "I learned several lessons," she said, "that white women should be especially sensitive around areas of traditional white privilege. . . ." She went on to say "that all women should be responsible for getting the word about the event out to all women, not white women to white women, black women to black women, leaving black participants feeling like 'deputies to the coloreds.'"34 The conference did, however, thrust Feminary and the women who organized it into the truly regional focus they had been striving to achieve.35

By the fall of 1979, the collective had solidified into a core group which consisted of Susan, Cris, Minnie Bruce, Mab, and Helen. Helen was a graphic artist and writer who joined the collective when it became a journal.36 However, although process was all-important to members of Feminary, the circle of women producing the newsletter was beginning to fragment. The journal began to appear less and less frequently. After the issue in which WomanWrite was discussed, only three more Feminaries were published. Vol.11, Issue 1 and 2, was produced in the Spring of 1980. The theme for the issue was "Being Disobedient" and was an issue in which the contributors came from

---

35 ibid.
all over the South. Vol. 11, Issue 3, which should have been issued in October, did not actually get printed until March, 1981. The theme for the journal that issue was "Southern Women's Humor" and contained a letter from the collective to the readers which is important in the insight it gives not only to the process within the collective but also the outside influences under which these women were laboring.

The comments from the collective were addressed to "readers who have written to inquire if we are alive, and especially those who reported us to the Better Business Bureau." The explanation went on to inform readers that Feminary had always been low-budget and labor-intensive and that the journal was produced on top of the collective's full-time job responsibilities. However, the editors promised a new energy: the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines had given Feminary a $1200 grant to rent time on a better printing machine and Eleanor Holland, another graphic artist and writer, had officially joined the collective. This infusion, promised the editors, would insure that four month delays would become a thing of the past. Just to be sure, however, Feminary was only going to be issued twice a year from that point on.

There were outside forces working against not only Feminary,
but the gay community in Durham as well. The acquittal of six Klansmen in Greensboro of the murders of five Communist Party members was a shock to the community. The Reagan administration was only weeks in office and the message seemed to be spreading that violence against certain groups was permissible.\textsuperscript{41} Then in April 1981, the "Little River" incident occurred in Durham. Four gay men, sunbathing, were beaten with clubs by a group of four men and two women. One of the men died. Individually, members of the Feminary collective tried to find ways to respond to the violence. A group response on June 27, 1981, took the form of North Carolina's first Gay Pride March.\textsuperscript{42}

These outside forces affecting lesbians living in Durham could not be dismissed. The incidents began to change the focus of the collective at Feminary along with some internal shifting. Cris described the shift as one from "reconstructing herstory to determining to change history -- in whatever ways, at whatever levels we can manage."\textsuperscript{43} For various collective members this meant becoming more involved with issues and activities outside the boundaries of the collective. "In some ways I think," said Mab, "we came to the end of, came to the limits of, the kind of internal identity, sorting-through process that we had been involved in... It felt like to me that it was too much of a luxury to do only literary work. I needed to figure out a

\textsuperscript{41}ibid.
\textsuperscript{42}ibid.
\textsuperscript{43}ibid.
different, more activist arena."\(^44\) The collective was moving in different directions and not all the impetus for change had come from the outside world. The crucible for discussions of identity was beginning to splinter over conflicts about racism and that issue too needed to be addressed.\(^45\)

As white women the journal collective had long tried to deal with issues of racism. There were black women who worked on Feminary off and on during this period. "They started articulating the degree to which the magazine, as it was constructed," remembers Mab, "didn't meet their needs. Partly it was because we were talking about race from a white woman's perspective and partly because they were calling us on racism within the collective."\(^46\) While racism within the collective was a divisive issue, there were still other, more personal, splits occurring.

The last issue of Feminary produced for the South, in North Carolina, was issued in the Spring of 1982. The theme was ironic considering the internal splintering which was being experienced within the group. "The South as Home: Staying or Leaving" was the topic, with the final collective members listed as Eleanor, Helen, Minnie Bruce, Mab, and Cris. Unfortunately, the choice for the collective seemed to be to "leaving" as opposed to "staying". Cris and Minnie Bruce broke up and Minnie Bruce

\(^{44}\)Segrest, 1993.

\(^{45}\)ibid.

\(^{46}\)ibid.
decided to move to Washington, D.C.. Eleanor and Helen also decided to leave the collective and head for Washington. Mab felt as if she were left holding the bag. The process which had held these women together had finally led them in different directions. There was some bitterness and anger around these personal relationship choices but the real blow was to the journal. Feminary had ceased to exist in North Carolina. 47

After the publication of the final issue, the remaining collective members placed classified ads in women's journals and newsletters to see if there was another group who would be willing to take on the responsibility for publishing Feminary. There were two responses. One was from Atlanta and one was from San Francisco. The Atlanta group was an all-white collective, while the group from San Francisco was multi-racial. The group from San Francisco thus "appeared to be more consistent with what we hoped for the magazine and that they would be able to take [Feminary] past what we had been able to do." 48 While the moving of the journal to San Francisco was a sad day for Durham, Mab remembers that it was done with some sense of relief. "It had died; but we didn't have to kill it!" 49

According to the masthead of the first San Francisco Feminary, the new magazine (and it resembled a magazine much more than the smaller journal format) had become, in 1984, a "national

47 ibid.
48 ibid.
49 ibid.
magazine with an international perspective, a magazine of lesbian feminist politics, passion and hope. It is the editorial policy of this magazine to publish material which portrays lesbians in our struggle from survival to empowered forces for change.⁵⁰ After only two issues, however, the transplanted magazine died for good. There was a sense of loss nationally as well as locally.⁵¹ "There was that Southern [journal]," Judy Grahn said in her interview with Feminist Bookstore News, "that should never have moved out [of the South] -- it was a beautiful magazine -- Feminary."⁵² Now, it too had become a part of history.

---


Chapter Six

CONCLUSION

The newsletter, and subsequent journal, were significant for the Durham and Chapel Hill areas for a number of reasons. First of all, the product itself was a voice for the feminist community in the area. It provided information, news, as well as personal accounts of both oppression and triumph. This voice for feminists, and especially for lesbian-feminists, created a sense of community by giving activists a common product that they could call their own. The journal had a somewhat different role in the community than the newsletter but it was no less important. The journal attempted to move past the politics of the local area and bring the social space which had been created by the newsletter to women across the South. It was a vehicle for exploring not only lesbian-feminism but Southern identity as well.

For Elizabeth Knowlton, "it was vital that the newsletter come out frequently and the calendar, the calendar was the vital, central part. Even if there was no time to write an article, letting women know what other women are doing was the central thing."¹ Feminary served that function for the Durham-Chapel Hill community of feminists. It was a vehicle for disseminating information to a community which lacked other, more formal, channels of communication. The newsletter was also a way to connect with women who lived in other parts of the state.

¹Knowlton, 1993.
Feminists who were isolated and marginalized in more remote areas needed to be able to receive a publication that put them in touch with women who thought the same way they did. Breaking the barriers around isolated feminists was a major contribution made by Feminary not only to the local area, but the state of North Carolina as well.

The journal, while not as connected to local information channels as the newsletter, provided other feminists across the South with a publication which was willing to publish articles which no mainstream press would have considered. Stories about coming out, growing up a lesbian in the South, poetic creations about conflicting identities -- all these and more found a home within the pages of Feminary. While different than the newsletter, this creative force for Southern lesbians was no less important in its contribution.

The process behind Feminary's production also had great significance through its nearly fifteen years in existence. The ways in which feminists learned to connect with each other, work with each other and produce a newsletter/journal with each other affected each member of the collective in different ways. Attempting to put feminist theory into practice, feminists working in a non-hierarchical framework faced different problems coming up with different solutions. However, for these feminists, working as a collective was worth the effort and the sacrifice. It was not only the product, the final form of the newsletter/journal, which was significant. It was also how women
put it together. As Elizabeth said, "The coming together to put out the newsletter and to discuss the things, was a wonderful experience in its own. Even if no-one had read it at all!"\(^2\)

While the positive aspects of the process behind working collectively were tremendously important for all Feminary members, there were drawbacks to this structure as well. The constant negotiation, discussions, and struggles that go along with collectivity were often emotionally draining and filled with pressures. "The drawback [to working as a collective] is how long it takes," Mab said, "and that was another frustration with Feminary -- we processed so much that it was hard to get out a magazine. So [there is a] tradeoff between process and product."\(^3\) Still, even given the constraints collectivity forced upon Feminary members, alternative structures were never considered.

Finally, the production of this newsletter offered lesbians, in the Durham-Chapel Hill area, a way to insure that their politics were treated with the seriousness they deserved. Feeling increasingly marginalized by a heterosexist and homophobic feminist movement, lesbian-feminists used Feminary as a mouthpiece for events within the lesbian community in Durham. Members of the collective were instrumental in the development of organizations like the Triangle Area Lesbian Feminists (TALF) and in establishing new ways for lesbian-feminists to express

\(^2\)ibid.

\(^3\)Segrest, 1993.
themselves. The process of producing the newsletter/journal gave the feminists in the collective an opportunity to take themselves seriously and in so doing, they created a community institution whose roots are still in evidence today.

Social movements are not judged only by the changes they affect, the products they produce, or the information they propagate. Social movements are also defined by the ways in which people are radicalized and changed by their participation. This is no less true for Feminary. The members of the collective were altered by Feminary. Their experiences with the newsletter/journal radically changed the ways they viewed not only themselves but their community and the larger world as well.

"All my work with the newsletters, up until 1974," remembered Elizabeth, "it was all an arm of the women's liberation movement."4 It was a catalyst, a vehicle, for becoming involved in one's own process of politicization. According to Nancy Blood, "its hard for me to isolate the newsletter from becoming a political person, and a lesbian, and a feminist. It is the most important thing that has happened in my life. . . . It was formative -- I feel I became a person at that point in time."5 For many of the feminists who worked on Feminary, it was the first time they had been involved with feminism in a public way and the first time they had worked with lesbians in a public way; the process of participating in that


81
venture made women feel genuinely responsible for their own issues and identities.

For Susan Ballinger, Feminary gave her a perspective on her own experience that she might not have had otherwise.6 When asked if working with Feminary was a radicalizing experience, Sherry Kinlaw said that the process of working with the newsletter "let me know just how oppressed I was. Before, I could deny it. I was white, middle-class. Feminary changed that."7 According to Mab Segrest, Feminary and working on the journal was the learning experience in her life. "I learned to write there, be a lesbian there, grew up there. I got away from graduate school there." More than anything, Mab learned there that her writing was something that could never be taken away from her.8

So, the meanings and importance behind the Feminary newsletter and behind the process of working as a collective are multiple. There was meaning in the newsletter for Durham, and for an emerging lesbian-feminist community, and for feminists in other areas of the state. There were also personal, more private, meanings in terms of the formative experiences of the women who worked on Feminary. For them, the importance was both public and private, both personal and political. The newsletter/journal did only touched the feminists for whom it was

---

7Kinlaw, 1992.
8Segrest, 1993.
written; it touched and changed the women who wrote it as well.

There is a larger theme to this study, however -- the ways in which feminists, in the 1970s, moved to establish their own presses. The first Women-In-Print movement conference, which took place in 1976, was a recognition of all the work that was already being done. Clearly, the conference also led to new ventures, but by 1976, feminist communities were already establishing presses and printing books, pamphlets and newsletters. Several of the women involved in Feminary in Durham were also interested in print as a vehicle for shaping feminism.

Susan Ballinger remembers that publishing "seemed like something that women could take charge of and do." During the 1970s, thousands of printed materials began to come from feminist collectives like Feminary all across the country. "The leftists knew that if you want to change something," recalled Judy Grahn, "you start a newspaper and distribute it. You give the ideas to the people and they'll take the ideas and run with them. That was the idea, and it seemed to work." Feminary should be seen therefore, in the context of an emerging print movement within the larger feminist movement and not solely within the confines of local feminism in action.

The small, independent presses which are run by feminists provide other feminists with ways to get published material which would otherwise never see the printed page. Jan Claussen, in a

---


10Feminist Bookstore News, Summer Supplement, August 1990.
special issue of Sinister Wisdom dedicated to lesbian writing and publishing, had this to say about feminist publishing ventures: "The women's presses are simply indispensable to us. Most of the work they publish would otherwise never be seen. In large part they are responsible for the amazing vitality and variety of contemporary women's writing. At the same time, they can in some measure serve as a testing-ground for our vision of what truly feminist publishing -- publishing on our terms -- should be."  

This is the larger tradition into which Feminary fits. The publishing done in the 1970s was "done on a shoestring and at great personal sacrifice."  

But it was done because it was important and because activists in social movements need structures which can reach a wide audience. Feminists were attempting to control what was said about them, for them, and to them. In all likelihood, "if feminist publishing hadn't existed in the '70s, the larger publishing houses wouldn't be publishing feminist material today." Feminist publishing proved that there was a market for women's writing and that women were willing to support those ventures which printed them.

The loss of Feminary to the collective in San Francisco did not mean that the Durham-Chapel Hill lesbian community lost a voice. In 1981, in response to the gay-bashing incident at Little River, several Durham women decided that the community

---

13Ibid.
needed another newsletter. Although Feminary was still in print at the time, it was being produced in journal format. Nancy and Leslie, and six other women, formed a group and in October, 1981, began producing The Newsletter. The newsletter was mimeographed, contained articles, a calendar, and essays. "We gave up something [the newsletter format] in 1976," recollected Nancy, "and didn't realize until 1981 [with the attack at Little River] how much we still needed that."14

The introductory statement, found on the first page, of the first issue of The Newsletter, said this:

With this first issue of the newsletter, we begin what we hope will become a vital and ongoing vehicle for communication among lesbians and feminist women in our local Triangle community. . . . We hope that this newsletter will be a participatory one, drawing most of its contents from its readers. We want political articles, essays, funny articles, graphics and cartoons, reviews of what we read and hear and see, articles about our experiences at work; with our families, with our friends and with our lovers. We want to print whatever is part of our varied lives. . . . The newsletter will survive and flourish only with your support.15

Feminary was gone but The Newsletter is still being published. Feminary was a beginning. It was a first step in public articulation of a feminist politics which was in the process of emerging and of flourishing. The newsletters produced in the 1970s were a printed record of the discussions feminists were having with each other. Issues of race, of class, of

14ibid.

15The Newsletter, Vol. 1, Issue #1, October 1, 1981.
gender, of sexuality, were all recognized on the mimeographed and stapled pages of these publications. None of the conflicts surrounding those issues were resolved or are resolved but the emergence of a feminist publishing movement insured that those conversations would be written about and read about and remembered.