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Cyrana B. Wyker
University of South Florida

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Women in Wargasm:
The Politics of Women's Liberation in the Weather Underground Organization

By

Cyrana B. Wyker

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of the requirements for the degree of
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Department of Women's Studies
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University of South Florida

Major Professor: Sara Crawley, Ph.D.
David Johnson, Ph.D.
Marilyn Myerson, Ph.D.

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Cyрана Wyker

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I examine women's participation in the violent revolutionary organization, Weatherman/Weather Underground. My attempt is to uncover Weatherman's view of women's liberation, their differences to the women's liberation movement and examine the practices implemented. I discuss Weatherman, more generally, in the context and circumstances of their emergence from the Students for a Democratic Society in the late sixties. Influenced by popular revolutionary thinkers Weatherman declared itself and its members revolutionaries dedicated to bringing about a socialist revolution in the United States through strategies of guerilla warfare. Weatherman's insistence on revolutionary violence situated masculinity and machismo within the center of their politics and practice. Weatherman promised its female members liberation through violence and machismo in the fight for a socialist revolution. I explore Weatherman's political position on women's liberation and the result of their politics evident in autonomous women's actions and sexual practices. In addition, I contend that Weatherman's politics more generally, and women's participation in Weatherman was shaped by the cultural hegemony of masculinity, termed by Connell as hegemonic masculinity.

Exploration of women's participation in political violence is important to the acknowledgment of women as agents of aggression and the gender fluidity they represent. Weatherwomen's acceptance and adoption of masculinity provides an example of gender fluidity in contexts outside of common homosexual, transgendered, or queer representations. Furthermore, varying perceptions of women's liberation during the late sixties and early seventies has yet to be explored outside of the narrow scope of the autonomous feminist movement. Women who participated in the Weatherman/Weather Underground, their politics of women's liberation and methods in which to accomplish liberation have been ignored by historians of feminism and the New Left. This thesis uncovers the politics of women's liberation in the Weatherman/ Weather Underground, through which I examine the meaning of women's liberation, methods of liberation, and the empowered and limited position of women within the Weatherman/Weather Underground.

Chapter One: Introduction

In the United States the late sixties and early seventies were times of turbulent social change. Poverty, racism, imperialism and the Vietnam War were grave concerns to many of the youth in America as they positioned themselves within a context for revolutionary social change advocating Black Nationalism, Vietnam's National Liberation Front (the Vietcong) and other militias organized against U.S. imperialism. Young Americans, children of the baby boom bred in affluence of the Cold War, were grappling with discontent, anger, and powerlessness concerning social issues. Identifying politically as the New Left, in order to be distinguished from the Old Left which focused primarily on workers, the New Left militantly advocated anti-racism and anti-imperialism. Activism during the Vietnam War years provides a kaleidoscope of varying perspectives, experiences, and political strategies as different groups organized around political ideologies.

In the late sixties, a group calling themselves Weatherman¹ dominated the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), an organization that became popular after its sponsorship of the successful anti-war march on Washington in April of 1965. The march

¹ I use Weatherman to denote the entire organization prior to their underground activity. The group referred to themselves as a singular unit. In 1970 Weatherman began clandestine activity in the U.S. and were referred to as the Weather Underground (WUO). I use both these references throughout this thesis to serve the purpose of noting aboveground and underground activities. I use WUO generally to discuss particular politics that transcended aboveground and underground activities. Weatherman/WUO's politics of women's liberation adapted in terms of the visibility and display of machismo with their shift to clandestine activity. However, these politics did not change in analysis or practice.

dramatically increased the organization's membership and resulted in the eruption of new chapters on university campuses across the country.² Structured as an anti-authoritarian, participatory democratic organization comprised of ideological diversity, factional groups developed within the SDS that resulted in the emergence of the action-faction, Weatherman. Weatherman encouraged militant resistance to the Vietnam War, racism, imperialism, and police repression. Their activism escalated to the use of armed propaganda, destruction of symbolic private properties as a political statement and consciousness-raising strategy. Weatherman had no official membership but historians suggest that Weatherman had 300 members prior to going underground after which its membership declined to half.³ Although the Weather Underground was a considerably small faction of the New Left movement half of them were female participants.

Weatherman abandoned its illusions of creating a mass youth movement in exchange for clandestine activity in 1970 after the planned national action, called Days of Rage, in Chicago failed to generate masses of youth for a revolutionary movement. Weatherman remained an active organization until it slowly dissipated in the late 1970s. Between 1968 and 1970 political violence against private property became a common expression of social outrage. According to Dan Berger, during the 1969-1970 academic school year 5,000 bombings occurred on university campuses and 70 bombings occurred at off-campus locations. At the height of symbolic bombing activity by radical activists, between September 1969 and May 1970, one bombing or attempted bombing occurred

²Irwin Unger, *The Movement: A History of The American New Left 1959 – 1972* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers: 1974) 87.

³Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, The Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004) 172.

every day.⁴ Weatherman claimed responsibility for twenty bombings between June 1969 and September 1975.

Political violence through “bombings, arson, and other destruction of state, corporate, and university property” was used as a means of political expression and a strategy to rouse a guerrilla war within the United States.⁵ Some academic research has contributed to the exploration of revolutionary violence, violence that is intended and interpreted to have a political message or goal, within the United States by way of Weatherman due to their presence within the radical Left movement. This body of scholarship has discussed women’s participation in Weatherman within general explorations of the organization’s politics and strategy.

This thesis explores women’s participation in Weatherman at the intersection of their politics of revolution and practice of revolutionary ideology with particular focus on women’s liberation. This thesis, by utilizing gender as a site for analysis and theorization, will argue the centrality of masculinity in Weatherman’s perception of women’s liberation. I contend that Weatherman’s strategy of violence and machismo as a liberatory practice for women was shaped by hegemonic masculinity. And furthermore, resulted in constructs in which women’s equality, valuation, and liberation is impossible particularly through ideologies and strategies that require women adopt masculinity as a means of their liberation as women. In effect, Weatherman was unable to offer and implement liberation for women within their model of revolutionary socialist practice.

⁴ Dan Berger, *Outlaws of America: The Weather Underground and the Politics of Solidarity* (California, AK Press: 2006) 117.

⁵ Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, The Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004) 3.

In this chapter, I provide an introduction to the historiography on Weatherman, the approach applied by feminist scholarship on politically violent women, and the importance of women in the WUO through new interpretative methods.

In Chapter Two, I focus on the context in which Weatherman emerged from the Students for a Democratic Society organization of the New Left as an occurrence of organizational defense. I focus on their ideology, politics, and practice that necessitated pro-violent posturing. I explain how Weatherman's embrace of Marxism and theories of guerilla warfare made violence a legitimate strategy for liberation and revolution.

In Chapter Three, I articulate Weatherman's political position of women's oppression and liberation and compare their politics to the women's liberation movement more generally. Weatherman's analysis of women's oppression is evident within their description of male chauvinism and supremacy which diverged from feminist conceptions. Weatherman's program for women's liberation stemmed from their analysis of male chauvinism and supremacy which fit into their broader strategy for socialist revolution. I contend that Weatherman and the women's liberation movement had irreconcilable differences in their method and practice of women's liberation; and fundamentally, the embrace and valuation of masculinity was the basis of these differences.

In Chapter Four, I examine Weatherman's activism and sexual practices ostensibly for women's liberation, in particular autonomous women's actions and the "smash monogamy" campaign. I elaborate on the justification for women-only actions, how women perceived these actions to be liberatory and resistant of their oppression as

women, and the ways in which Weatherman's internal culture undermined the intent or liberatory potential of these actions. I also examine Weatherman's "smash monogamy" campaign, articulated by women and supported by men, as a program for women's liberation. I argue that Weatherman's rigid anti-monogamy practices were exploitative through political manipulation and reinforced women's subordination within the organization and recreated the prescribed domination of women more generally. I discuss women in the WUO's embrace of traditionally masculine behaviors and hegemonic models of masculinity as a manifestation of the Gramscian notion of contradictory consciousness which served to reinforce their subordination as women.

In conclusion, I argue that women's performance of masculinity does not grant women power as female-bodied people. In result of the hegemonic power of gender and masculinity in particular, politically motivated performances of masculinity by women are representative of schisms between theory and practice.

Literature Review

Amongst the historical research available on Weatherman, women are subsumed within examinations of Weatherman collectively with minimal exploration of their unique position. Weatherman asserted that violent and aggressive behavior as political practice challenged male supremacy and chauvinism enacted by individuals and dominant culture. The practice of masculinity enabled women to participate the broader struggle for world-wide socialism which would guarantee women's liberation.

Weatherman's position on women's oppression and consequential strategy for women's

liberation is largely ignored by historians in pursuit of a broader explanation of Weatherman's violence. I begin by addressing the existing literature on Weatherman regarding violence and women's participation.

In *Outlaws of America: The Weather Underground and the Politics of Solidarity* Dan Berger explores the emergence of Weatherman from the SDS and the faction's political transformation into the Weather Underground Organization (WUO). Employing interviews and guidance from participant David Gilbert, Berger tells the story of political solidarity with domestic and international national liberation struggles. Through an examination of the social conditions, political ideology and strategy, repressive Federal Bureau of Investigations Counter-Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) operations and attacks on the New Left, and the dissipation of the WUO, Berger gives us a comprehensive history of the WUO's existence in the anti-war movement of the Sixties and Seventies. He presents the shift from resistance to violence against the State as a response of urgent priority regarding U.S. involvement in Vietnam and COINTELPRO's treatment of the Black Panther Party.⁶ Berger argues that the "bombings were about dramatizing and humanizing revolutionary politics, about exacting a political cost for the state or corporate terror, about challenging institutions responsible for oppression".⁷ He states that women's experienced sexism in the WUO as a result of the "smash monogamy" campaign but emphasizes the importance of Weather politics in women's decision to join the Weather collectives.⁸ He argues that women critiqued male

⁶ Dan Berger, *Outlaws of America: The Weather Underground and the Politics of Solidarity* (California, AK Press: 2006) 121.

⁷ Berger, 151.

⁸ Berger, 291.

supremacy within the WUO during criticism-self-criticism sessions and eventually there was a shift in the WUO's position on women's liberation in 1973 as the Weather Underground was experiencing internal disagreement concerning politics and practice.⁹ He states that the WUO placed "new emphasis on women" as women began to push the organization into a more feminist direction but further notes that the WUO continued to ignore emphasis on male supremacy and former female members have recalled that there was "some solidarity among women but little else in the way of feminist politics."¹⁰ Dan Berger's assessment of women within the organization lacks articulation of how male supremacy and male chauvinism was perceived by women and men in the WUO. He neglects to emphasize that male chauvinism, although a critique during criticism-self-criticism sessions, was directed at women and the methods implemented to combat this inequality such as the mere existence of street-fighting women, autonomous women's actions, and anti-monogamy program fostered further devaluation of women and constrained potential for women's liberation within their political program.

In *The Way the Wind Blew: A History of the Weather Underground* Ron Jacobs's account of the Weather Underground begins with the pivotal year 1968. Jacobs argues that debates about nationalism, class analysis, and youth culture within the SDS would allow the Weather faction to emerge. Jacobs tells the story of the Weather Underground through use of New Left Notes and political statements and tracks the WUO's ideological and political shifts from the Revolutionary Youth Movement paper to the Prairie Fire statement and the emergence of the aboveground WUO faction, the Prairie Fire

⁹ Berger, 291, 172.

¹⁰ Berger, 172.

Organizing Committee at the end of WUO's collective political activities. He argues that the socialist revolution envisioned by the WUO and its support by and of women called for militant aggression. The major shift in the WUO's politics, according to Jacobs, regarded women and feminism.¹¹ He argues that this shift was "related to the changing role of women in the organization and to certain trends as the women's movement grew in the early 1970s."¹² He states that the trend in which feminists "saw the enemy not as men, but as the system of imperialism," now termed socialist feminism, was both "embraced and developed by Weather."¹³ Ultimately, Ron Jacobs argues that the lack of consideration of "special exploitation" of women by society would lead to Weather's demise.¹⁴ However, Ron Jacobs does not confront the meaning of "male chauvinism" or women's oppression for the Weather Underground. He fails to analyze the politics of women's liberation put forth by WUO and thus, fails to address the methods implemented by the WUO to combat male supremacy and male chauvinism.

In *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction, and Revolutionary Violence in the Sixties and Seventies*, Jeremy Varon's work on revolutionary violence juxtaposes the Weather Underground with Germany's Red Army faction. His study, drawn from interviews with participants about their experience and analysis of political actions as complex texts, positions revolutionary violence in an international context to reject the notion that revolutionary violence was a U.S.

¹¹ Ron Jacobs, *The Way the Wind Blew: A History of the Weather Underground* (New York, Verso: 1997) 165.

¹² Jacobs, 165.

¹³ Jacobs, 165-166.

¹⁴ Jacobs, 174.

phenomenon but rather an international confrontation of imperialism.¹⁵ He argues that “it is a mistake to view armed struggle as an aberration or as simply a fringe phenomenon...it minimizes the broader revolutionary impetus of the late 1960s and threatens to make scapegoats of those who acted on the prevalent rhetoric among radicals encouraging violence.”¹⁶ Varon reveals the New Left’s escalation to violence and militancy through language and action to demonstrate that the WUO committed actions of violence of which the larger movement had talked about. He argues that the WUO transcended the schism between New Left’s theory and practice.¹⁷ This transcendence, in the WUO’s view, required strict practices. Varon states that women’s “strong presence in the group was evidence of how deeply outrage at the Vietnam War and racism cut across gender lines” and further asserts that women’s experiences in the group were characterized by a developing consciousness of women’s oppression, second-tier leadership, and activities to further prove themselves such as separate women’s actions.¹⁸ He mentions militancy and violence as practices of empowerment for female participants but neglects in-depth discussion on arguably exploitative and discriminatory practices, such as “smash monogamy”, and women-only actions which I critique later in this thesis.

In Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left, Sara Evans discusses women’s participation in the Civil Rights and New Left movement. Her emphasis is one of the ways in which these movements provided women with a vocabulary with which to describe their oppression

¹⁵ Varon, 5, 16.

¹⁶ Varon, 4.

¹⁷ Varon, 86.

¹⁸ Varon, 58-60.

and experience in political organizing. She tracks the development of the Women's Liberation movement through the circumstances and events within these social movements that influenced women to develop an autonomous women's movement.¹⁹

Furthering Evans' work, in *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975*, Alice Echols provides a history of radical feminism in America. This historical account elaborates on the New Left-feminist split with special attention to events that led up to the divergence and an autonomous movement for women's liberation. She highlights the treatment at demonstrations, conferences and actions of the growing number of women turning their attention to a gender analysis by the members of the New Left. These events are discussed in historical accounts of the era but often silenced; Echols provides the perspective of the emerging feminist movement which is lacking in New Left histories.²⁰ Situating radical feminism in its historical context, Echols' acknowledges that radical feminism was intellectually influenced by the Left yet responded to the politics of the Left with the attempt to unite women based on gender instead of class or race. Echols demonstrates the fluidity of the radical feminist movement to explain the movement in its context. The exploration of radical feminism neglects varying politics of women's liberation formed by women of the Left.

Currently, feminist scholarship has ignored women on the Left and for the most part excluded them from conversations on women's liberation. Indeed, most radical

¹⁹ Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

²⁰ Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: Regents of the University of Minnesota, 1989).

feminist theorists critique violence and aggression and associate these characteristics with systems of domination.

Feminist Approaches to Violent Women

Feminist scholars imbedded in feminist theories of gender inequality have been reluctant to discuss female agents of aggression. In “States of Conflict” Ruth Jacobson, Susie Jacobs and Jen Marchbank introduce feminist analyses of gender and violence. They argue that “conflict [is] endemic in human societies...and most has a gender dimension.”²¹ They provide two formulations on violence. The first is that violence comprises “acts of physical coercion or their threat.”²² They state that this definition of violence is problematic because it separates acts of violence from the cultural consequences of acts of violence. The second is that “violence is a gendered phenomenon with the context of patriarchal social relations and that all such violence should be situated analytically within a ‘sexual violence approach’ even where no overtly sexual act is involved.”²³ This definition is problematic because it assumes that all men and only men as a group benefit from violence and that violence is primarily sexual. Jacobson, Jacobs, and Marchbank do not propose a simple solution to either perspective on violence but assert that “gender relations are of central importance, and a restriction to ‘women’ or

²¹ Susie Jacobs, Ruth Jacobson, Jennifer Marchbank, “Introduction: States of Conflict” in *States of Conflict: Gender, Violence and Resistance* (New York, Zed Books Ltd: 2000) 1.

²² Jacobs, et. al., 2.

²³ Jacobs, et. al., 2.

‘women’s issues’ often obscures the relevance to men and to concepts of masculinity in any given context.”²⁴

An example of the sexual violence approach is the work of feminist activist and theorist Robin Morgan. In *Demon Lover: The Roots of Terrorism*, Morgan theorizes violence from the crux of a strictly binary framework of male dominance and female subordination. This analytical predisposition frames violence as a product of male consciousness. In this work, Morgan attempts to provide a “feminist analysis of ‘terrorism’.”²⁵ Morgan states that “the terrorist is the logical incarnation of patriarchal politics in a technological world...the terrorist is the son practicing what the father has practiced.”²⁶ All violence whether enacted by the state or insurgent group is a construct of patriarchal politics. She argues that the “token female hero is an imposter in a realm created and defined by male consciousness and reinforced by male power.”²⁷ She discusses violence as male and women’s participation in violence as an adoption of maleness separate from the behavior of “most women.” Morgan’s basis for this separation is that “women as a group do not mobilize for our own rights through violent means.”²⁸ Her explanation of female agents of violence is that “the ‘revolutionary woman has bought into the male ‘radical’ line...she has learned that in order to be a real revolutionary, she must disassociate herself from her womanhood, her aspirations, her reality-and most of all, from other women.”²⁹ She continues, “she may not rise with her

²⁴ Jacobs, et. al., 3.

²⁵ Robin Morgan, *The Demon Lover: The Roots of Terrorism* (New York: Washington Square Press: 1989) 5.

²⁶ Morgan, 33.

²⁷ Morgan, 59.

²⁸ Morgan, 170.

²⁹ Morgan, 196.

people...if she wants power, she must learn that power is synonymous with *his* power-- and his means of seizing it...If she wants freedom she must learn that this too is synonymous with his definition of it and his struggle for it...She has entered the harem of the Demon Lover.”³⁰

Morgan’s explanation of violence and women’s participation in violence is problematic because in an unfortunate display of essentialism, she assumes that women as a *people* have common goals and aspirations and further assumes that women would utilize the same strategies merely on the basis of femaleness. She ignores women’s agency in participating in violent acts by categorizing them as ‘male’, rather than understanding gender as constructed and therefore, fluid, malleable, and historically and contextually contingent.

I contend that, in affirmation of the first perspective on violence, that violence is an act on which gender has been culturally inscribed. Hence, through this project I examine the meaning of violence for women in *Weatherman*. I reject the essentialist position that all violence is sexual violence because this perspective presupposes and falsely maintains that all agents of violence are of a dominant social status, categorically male, which I contend eschews women’s capacity to be agents of aggression. This feminist formulation of violence is not an adequate framework for examining women’s relationship with masculinity through a gendered display of aggression or the significance of such gendered display.

In terms of the history of the New Left and the history of feminism, there are two divergent streams of scholarship, perhaps influenced by historical factionalism. On the

³⁰ Morgan, 197.

one hand, feminist historians that have contributed to the history of the feminist movement focus primarily on the New Left-feminist split, the reasons for it, and the subsequent feminist groups and the analyses they have generated. On the other, New Left historians have focused on the historical roots of the New Left, political aims of the New Left, and the differences in political ideologies of subsequent groups with little attention to women's participation in the New Left and their participation in political violence. My study is situated within these two streams by adding feminist scholarship to New Left history. The WUO women through representations of masculinity and inescapable manifestations of gender difference developed a feminist analysis limited by rigid political ideologies. I focus on the meaning of adopting masculinity as a liberatory practice for women and the empowerment and limitations this practice presents.

Importance of WUO for Feminist Analysis of the Use of Violence

Feminist researchers that have ignored violent women evade questions that may be troubling for feminists. I beg the question: do feminist researchers neglect violent women in order to ignore that women have the potential to be agents of aggression? In efforts to reject essentialist notions and traditional constructs of femininity, the exploration of violent women is vital to examinations of the relationship between women, masculinity and hegemony. The importance of the WUO as a clandestine organization is not for their extremity but because of their commitment to putting their theories into practice. The group's presence and visibility and women's participation in the group establishes them as a prime subject for research on gender and armed struggle more

generally. The WUO emerged with such visibility for three reasons: first, they dominated SDS at its pinnacle of membership and popularity; second, armed propaganda as a strategy made political statement and communications a necessity to the goal of symbolic violence; and third, their politics mandated that specific practices were implemented with severity. Although intensive research has been conducted on the Weather Underground, including personal experience of participants, the Weather Underground can be further explored through a feminist lens that focuses on gender and sexuality to examine the operations of gender ideology and hegemony in the Weather Underground and the relationship of these women to feminist movements. The women of the WUO politically and historically existed on the outskirts of feminism, conditionally within the New Left, and on the periphery of dominant culture. I contend that an examination Weatherman's gender politics will contribute to discussions concerning gender and armed struggle in the United States.

Methods

In congruence with the historical research available I contend that women joined Weatherman because they shared the same political beliefs and sense of urgency as that of their male comrades. To explore the meaning of women's participation I apply feminist content analysis to the treatment of historical events via archival documents and personal recollections as complex texts. Feminist content analysis is defined by Shulamit Reinharz as the "study of a set of objects...or events systemically...by interpreting the

theme contained in them.”³¹ Subversive reading and deconstruction of these texts exposes the meaning of women’s participation in traditionally masculinized political activity.³² Through the lens of gender theory as an interpretative framework, I am looking for emphasis on masculinity and machismo as a personal strategy of liberation for women and a political strategy more generally. Furthermore, I am looking for manifestations of gender difference in the WUO’s politics and practice and the ways in which such manifestations empowered and limited women. In order to avoid the problematic all-inclusive “feminism” throughout this thesis I refer to the WUO’s position on the oppression of women and method of liberation as a *politic* of women’s liberation rather than a broad and generous employment of the term feminism to describe their political direction.

I will read the following historical documents to analyze the politics and practice of women’s liberation in the WUO: “The Look is You”, “Inside the Weather Machine”, “You Don’t Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows”, “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s Militia”, “Honky Tonk Women”, “Weatherman Politics and the Women’s Movement”, “Motor City 9”, “Women’s Militia”, “The Second Battle of Chicago”, “Health Education and Welfare: An Enemy of Women”, “A Strategy to Win”, and “A Weatherman: You do need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows.”³³ I explore these texts because they are publications of the New Left or

Weatherman in particular and they reference or discuss women in the WUO, women’s

³¹ Shulamit Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 146.

³² Reinharz, 149.

³³ These documents can be found in *Weatherman* edited by Harold Jacobs, *Sing a Battle Song: The Revolutionary Poetry, Statements, and Communiques of the Weather Underground 1970-1974* edited by Ayers, Dorhn and Jones or in *New Left Notes* listed in References section.

performance of masculinity, women's liberation or the practice of women-only actions or anti-monogamy. I have not focused on documents that lack reference to women's participation. Unfortunately, I did not have access to "Moving Mountain Day" and "Six Sisters," unpublished documents written by women in the WUO, utilized by Dan Berger courtesy of a participant's personal files. Dan Berger asserts that these documents attempted to address and establish the centrality of women's liberation and "feminism."³⁴ I contend that Berger's lack of analysis of the WUO's perception of and position on women's liberation and the subsequent practices to implement challenges to male supremacy and chauvinism, which I assert are presented in available documents, make Berger's assessment of "Moving Mountain Day" and "Six Sisters" as feminist documents unconvincing, hence, my interest in writing a feminist analysis in this project.

In addition, I will utilize the memoirs of Susan Stern, *With the Weathermen: The Personal Journal of a Revolutionary Woman*, and Cathy Wilkerson, *Flying Close to the Sun: My Life and Times As A Weatherman*, as primary documents demonstrative of personal experience in the WUO. I have explored these texts because they are currently the only memoirs written by women in the WUO. I have excluded memoirs written by "revolutionary" women who had some interaction with the WUO such as Jane Alpert and Roxanne Dunbar due to the lack of information concerning the internal dynamics of the WUO.

This thesis will assess women's participation in the Weather Underground by asking the following questions: What was the WUO's position on women's liberation? How did they confront sexism as participants in the WUO compared to their women's

³⁴ Berger, 171-172.

liberationist counterparts? In what ways was their participation empowering or exploitative? Did the WUO's politic of women's liberation possess the potential for the liberation women? Is a feminist analysis important for radical social movements?

Chapter Two: White Mother Country Radicals

In this chapter, I discuss the circumstances of which Weatherman emerged as the dominant leadership of the Students for a Democratic Society. In theoretical opposition to the Progressive Labor Party (PL), the Revolutionary Youth Movement faction articulated a position in the debut of “You Don’t Need A Weatherman To Know Which Way the Wind Blows.” The authors then became known as Weatherman and eventually the WUO. In this chapter I will explain the development of the WUO’s theory, analysis, and practice.

By 1967 the SDS had shifted from politics of peaceful protest to politics of resistance, ceasing the appeal to America’s moral conscience regarding racism and the Vietnam War. Frustrated with the lack of progress from peaceful approaches the Movement became disillusioned with liberalism.³⁵ This frustration combined with the increasing brutality of police forces towards protesters at the Oakland Stop the Draft Week and Pentagon demonstrations in 1967 pushed the SDS to distinguish between moral practice and political practice.³⁶ The actions that demonstrated moral outrage to war and racism were out of hope that “the moral righteousness of his/her position would be recognized and would ultimately convince the target of the protest to change for

³⁵ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York, Bantam Books: 1993) 242.

³⁶ Jacobs, 6.

better.”³⁷ In contrast, politically motivated actions were actions that “sought to impart a revolutionary consciousness on the activist...by actively fighting the system.”³⁸ At Stop the Draft Week, also known as “Bloody Tuesday,” demonstrators shut down the induction center for a few hours as they battled nearly two thousand cops throughout the week’s demonstrations. Armed with clubs and Mace, the police charged demonstrators in, according to Todd Gitlin, “a kind of scrimmage.”³⁹ The police indiscriminately battered bystanders and peaceful protesters. Similarly at the Pentagon demonstration police attacked demonstrators and according to Ron Jacobs, signified the state’s strategy to “attack any demonstrations it did not approve of, no matter what their style or size.”⁴⁰ The New Left had been an action-oriented organization without definitive theoretical framework; however, the escalation of aggression towards demonstrators by the state in combination with their responsive shift from moral to political actions culminated the New Left’s disillusion with liberalism and social reform and furthermore, instigated the search for an alternative social system.

Police repression towards and the rise of Black militancy also inspired the New Left. Struggling for theory and method, the SDS sponsored newspaper, *New Left Notes* (*NLN*), reserved a section, *Praxis*, intended for theoretical development and debate.⁴¹ According to Dan Berger, “SDS was shifting its analysis...the group began to identify the problem as one of the use and control of power in society...the structure of society

³⁷ Jacobs, 6.

³⁸ Jacobs, 6.

³⁹ Gitlin, 252-253.

⁴⁰ Jacobs, 6.

⁴¹ Berger, 38.

needed a total overhaul.”⁴² The shift in SDS’s analysis was influenced by the Black Panther Party and the movement for Black liberation which argued that “the roots of the problem were to be found not in individual white racism but in systematic white supremacy - the exclusion of Black people... from meaningful participation in the political and social realms, accomplished through economic domination and, when necessary, brute force” and connected “the anti-racist struggle domestically with the war in Vietnam as emanating from the same system of white supremacy and capitalism—of imperialism.”⁴³ The New Left, originally against corporate liberalism, turned to Marxist ideology and the promise of a socialist utopia as an alternative to U.S. imperialism simultaneously with the Black liberation movement and developed a radical analysis consistent with the cultural context.⁴⁴

Ideological factions of the Students for a Democratic Society

Weatherman emerged from the SDS as an act of organizational self-defense. The SDS at its inception in the early 1960s had been an action orientated organization that mobilized students around issues of campus reform, civil rights, and peace.⁴⁵ Deficient of a definitive political framework, the lack of an anti-communist clause in the organization’s constitution, the *Port Huron Statement*, forged the New Left’s formative identity as “anti-anti-communists” as a way to diverge from Cold War narratives of the Old Left. The organization was left subject to manipulation by a Progressive Labor Party

⁴² Berger, 30.

⁴³ Berger, 32, 34.

⁴⁴ Unger, 96.

⁴⁵ Gitlin, 83.

(PL) regime, a Maoist splinter faction of the Communist Party, that joined the SDS after the 1965 March on Washington to end the Vietnam War to recruit membership for their ranks and “simultaneously working to control the organization’s political direction.”⁴⁶ As the PL cadre grew within the membership of SDS, according to Dan Berger, “at national meetings, and in local chapters where they had a presence, PL members routinely cut off discussion through rhetorical regurgitations of Marxist theory and voted in blocs to exert a bigger power in the organization than their numbers otherwise would have allowed.”⁴⁷ PL’s politics differed greatly from the majority of SDS members who had their political awakening during civil rights struggles.

The Revolutionary Youth Movement (RYM) faction emerged within SDS as a response to PL, a temporary alliance between the eventual Weatherman and RYM II (both constituted the original RYM faction). The Revolutionary Youth Movement used classical Marxism innovatively to expand the class analysis to incorporate privileged workers. They argued, it is privilege “which divides the masses of the working class and promotes false consciousness of particular interest as opposed to general class interest.”⁴⁸ The most divisive issue was white privilege; “the central fact of privilege within the American class structure is nowhere more clearly seen than in the oppression of the black nation within the borders of the U.S.”⁴⁹ The RYM believed “fighting white supremacy” was top priority and identified the vanguard of struggle in the U.S as the Black Liberation

⁴⁶ Gitlin, 122, 180, 190; Berger, 27.

⁴⁷ Berger, 27.

⁴⁸ Jim Mellen, “More on Youth Movement,” *New Left Notes*, May 13, 1969.

⁴⁹ Jim Mellen, “More on Youth Movement.”

movement.⁵⁰ The RYM, comprised of privileged university students, suggested that students are a part of the working class because “the student is merely a worker in training” a role in which “the class struggle manifests itself around issues like the draft, the ruling class uses of the university, police and other agents of the ruling class for social control.”⁵¹ The objective of the RYM was to create a “white fighting force”:

Repression at this time is very serious against the political vanguard of the black liberation struggle, the Black Panther Party. And this repression is facilitated by the absence of substantial material support – power – by the white movement. Unless we recognize the urgency of fighting supremacy by building the material strength of the white movement to be a conscious, organized, mobilized fighting force capable of giving real support to the black liberation struggle, we will be deserting the most advanced leadership of that struggle to the free hand of the ruling-class repression...In terms of cadre development, an investigation of and intimacy with the real life situation and struggles of the oppressed section of the working-class youth will give formerly “student” cadres a clearer identification with and understanding of the interests of the class as a whole.⁵²

The RYM faction of SDS sought to increase militancy of the white movement to aid the Black movement and to impart class consciousness amongst white activists.

The PL caucuses of SDS followed rigid Marxism derived from the study of theory rather than practice. The PL’s rigid analysis of class struggle categorized black workers as “super-exploited members of the working class.”⁵³ The PL refused to support liberation struggles, a cause that was important to the New Left’s political identity.⁵⁴ Prior to the 1969 national convention, ten members developed a resolution to confront

⁵⁰ Jim Mellen, “More on Youth Movement.”

⁵¹ Jim Mellen, “More on Youth Movement.”

⁵² Bill Ayers and Jim Mellen, “Hot Town: Summer in the City Or I Ain’t Gonna Work On Maggie’s Farm No More”, *New Left Notes*, April 4, 1969.

⁵³ Jacobs, 12.

⁵⁴ Andrew Topkind “The Real SDS Stands Up,” *Hard Times*, June 30, 1969.

PL's well-versed Marxist ideology.⁵⁵ The caucus was forced by threat of organizational take-over by the PL to define an ideology of revolutionary social change. According to journalist Andrew Topkind, the PL "challenged SDS to build a rational Marxist ideology based on a national program; it dares SDS to integrate all the Movement activity in the U.S. into one political schema."⁵⁶

At the 1969 SDS National Convention in Chicago, squabbles erupted over proceedings which led to the eventual expulsion of PL from the SDS. Among the presented papers, proposals, and resolutions was the widely circulated, "You Don't Need A Weatherman to Know Which Way The Wind Blows," a document of theory and program set forth by a portion of the RYM faction. These 11 activists, known as the "Action Faction," and eventually Weatherman, dominated the interest of convention attendants. The Weatherman paper written by Bernadine Dohrn, Bill Ayers, Mark Rudd, John Jacobs, Jim Mellen, Howie Machtinger, Karin Ashley, Gerry Long, Jeff Jones, Steve Tappis, and Terry Robbins, according to Irwin Unger, "endorsed aggressive tactics against Establishment institutions, and they now prepared to make this a central point of the SDS program."⁵⁷ On the second day of the convention, chaos erupted when a speaker from the Black Panther Party "promote[d] 'pussy power' as a revolutionary tactic."⁵⁸ Black Panther, Rufus "Chaka" Wells stated "we believe in the freedom of love, in pussy power." The convention hall erupted with shouts of "male chauvinism" and another Black Panther attempted to reconcile by stating Wells "was only trying to say you sisters

⁵⁵ Harold Jacobs ed., *Weatherman* (Ramparts Press: 1970) 5.

⁵⁶ Topkind, "The Real SDS Stands Up."

⁵⁷ Unger, 164.

⁵⁸ Topkind, "The Real SDS Stands Up."

have a strategic position for the revolution...prone” echoing Stokely Carmichael.⁵⁹ The response of “fight male chauvinism” from PL cadre toward Black Panther speakers in combination with their strict Marxism prompted the Panthers to give SDS an ultimatum, allegiance to the Black Panthers or the PL.⁶⁰ The next day Bernardine Dohrn led a walk-out during the convention into an adjoining room where SDS drew up a resolution to expel PL from their ranks. The national leadership, after long deliberation, came back to the convention hall and Dohrn announced the expulsion of PL for being “racist and anticommunist.”⁶¹ Concluding the convention, members of the RYM faction were elected to SDS national committee creating a Weatherman dominated SDS. In the following months the national leadership split over the strategic direction of the SDS; the collective Weatherman was birthed from ideological and programmatic necessity and circumstance.

Weatherman

Weatherman controlled the National Committee of SDS until they closed the SDS national office in early 1970. The national committee, comprised of RYM II and Weatherman, soon split over analytical and programmatic issues. The RYM II and Weatherman agreed on the issues of imperialism but Weatherman insisted on militant action.⁶² The Weatherman politics proposed a context of international revolution against U.S. imperialism based on an international Marxist framework. The enemy was U.S. imperialism and the goal of the revolution was the redistribution of wealth to the people

⁵⁹ Quoted in Unger, 168.

⁶⁰ Unger 169.

⁶¹ Unger 169.

⁶² Berger, 87.

of the world. It is for this reason, that they believed that emphasis on working-class Americans as revolutionary agents was a failure: “Any conception of “socialist revolution” simply in terms of the working people of the United States, failing to recognize the full scope of interests of the most oppressed peoples of the world, is a conception of a fight for a particular privileged interest, and is a very dangerous ideology.”⁶³ Weatherman defined the revolution as the implement of worldwide communism after the “destruction of U.S. imperialism.” Influenced by Che Guevara, they believed that the destruction of the imperialism would be achieved by the overextension of state power. Providing themselves with a revolutionary identity, Weatherman argued that revolutionary struggle within the U.S. would aid national liberation struggles in Vietnam and other countries around the world. They critiqued any framework which limited the ideal of socialism to the U.S. as “national chauvinism.”

Weatherman supported the national liberation struggles of Black nationalists at home and the Vietnamese abroad. Weatherman’s political position asserted that black people were part of a black colony, oppressed and exploited by U.S. imperialism. Self-determination advocated by black nationalists was seen by Weatherman part of the struggle for revolutionary socialism based on the perspective provided by Huey P. Newton, founder of the Black Panther Party in 1966, that a nationalist must therefore be a socialist. Weatherman defined self-determination in class terms:

Self-determination requires being free from white capitalist exploitation in the form of inferior (lower caste) jobs, housing, schools, hospitals, prices. In addition, only what was or became in practice a socialist program for

⁶³ Karin Ashley, Bill Ayers, Bernardine Dohrn, John Jacobs, Jeff Jones, Gerry Long, Howie Machtinger, Jim Mellen, Terry Robbins, Mark Rudd, Steve Tappis, “You Don’t Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows” *New Left Notes*, June 18, 1969.

self-determination – one which addressed itself to reversing this exploitation – could win the necessary active mass support in the ‘proletarian colony.’⁶⁴

Weatherman connected national liberation struggles, including the struggle for Black liberation within the U.S., as the struggle against U.S. imperialism. Initially neglectful to mention women’s oppression, they held the U.S. responsible for racism and white privilege, the exploitation of workers by capitalism, and the Vietnam War. Such exploitations were considered a product of U.S. imperialism and explained by Marxism as a contradiction between the oppressed and the oppressor nation of the United States.

The strategy of Weatherman to build the revolution in America against U.S. imperialism was to “mobilize the struggle so sharply in so many places that the imperialist cannot possibly deal with it all.”⁶⁵ Inspired by Che Guevara, this strategy advocated increased militancy of the New Left to cripple the effect of imperialism throughout the world by two methods: the People’s War which proposed mass-based guerilla warfare and the *foco* theory, the formation of small guerilla groups to execute “exemplary actions” to inspire the masses. Weatherman took inspiration from Guevara and the example of the Cuban Revolution which demonstrated that a revolution could occur without revolutionary theory.⁶⁶ Although Guevara did acknowledge the usefulness of theory as a base to develop revolutionary strategy, he determined “theory is not a precondition for revolutionary action...it will evolve in time along with the practical

⁶⁴ Ashley, et. al., “You Don’t Need A Weatherman To Know Which Way the Wind Blows.”

⁶⁵ Ashley, et. al., “You Don’t Need A Weatherman To Know Which Way the Wind Blows.”

⁶⁶ Hartmut Ramm, *The Marxism of Regis Debray: Between Lenin and Guevara* (Lawrence, The Regents Press of Kansas:1978) 8.

conduct of the revolution.”⁶⁷ The *foco* theory, popularized in the U.S. by Regis Debray in *Revolution in the Revolution?*, asserted that guerillas would inspire the masses by attacking the enemy and thus, compel them to join the revolutionary army.⁶⁸ This assessment “argued that armed struggle could be beneficial well before the stage of People’s War.”⁶⁹ Contradictory to processes advocated by the Communist Party which believed that the national bourgeois could be an ally in socialist development, Debray argued that this regime of the national bourgeois cannot form independently and thus, cannot fulfill “revolution” due to economic weaknesses.⁷⁰ Debray further states that the national army will continue to serve colonial power thus “in order to transform its armed might into a popular revolutionary power, one would have to transform the reactionary consciousness of a majority of its soldiers...into a revolutionary consciousness.” The proposed strategy of the socialist revolution against imperialism is the insurgent *foco* groups that form a revolutionary army. Debray and Lenin both advocate for the revolutionary army as a necessary agent of the revolution.⁷¹ In Lenin’s work he argued that the revolutionary army could force the revolution through agitation and propaganda in a police state by raising the consciousness of the masses. Lenin posited that “a tight organization...of professional revolutionaries...could lead the people to the seizure of power...Only such a party could be an effective vanguard of the working class.”⁷² Debray substantiates Lenin’s argument by asserting that the revolutionary army can

⁶⁷ Ramm, 9.

⁶⁸ Berger, 46.

⁶⁹ Berger, 46.

⁷⁰ Ramm, 11, 12. Ram’s discussion of “Le Castroisme: la longue marche de l’Amerique,” *Les Temps Modernes* (Paris), no. 224, January 1965; Published in English in *New Left Review*, September-October 1965.

⁷¹ Ramm 15.

⁷² Ramm 16.

create revolutionary conditions. Inspired by the theories of guerilla warfare, Weatherman believed that revolutionary action would raise the consciousness of activists and develop them into the revolutionary army that Debray and Lenin considered a necessity to the socialist revolution. It would also inspire the people as Debray had premised and compel them to organize against imperialism. Weatherman sought to develop the Movement into this revolutionary army and targeted working-class youth in their organizing efforts.

Prior to going underground, Weatherman sought to organize working-class youth and youth in general by displaying machismo and toughness to woo young people into joining their ranks for the 1969 National Action in Chicago. Weatherman provoked arguments and fights to appeal to masculinity and machismo. Primarily, the goal was mere shock value and arguably their organizing strategy rested solely on romanticizing violence and the glorification of militancy. To Weatherman, these displays demonstrated their willingness to fight and created situations in which bystanders could be organized into the Movement.⁷³ Termed the “exemplary action” strategy, these displays were Weatherman’s effort at organizing. In Detroit the Motor City Weatherman/SDS created the “Metro Beach Riot” when 30 members distributed leaflets for the National Action and positioned themselves around a red flag. Arguments ensued with bystanders concerning communism, Vietnam, and racism. The Motor City Weatherman/SDS chapter fought the crowd as they attempted to take down the flag. This action was considered an organizing success because it fueled a response from the crowd and gained city-wide attention.⁷⁴

⁷³ Jacobs, *Weatherman*, 138.

⁷⁴ Motor City SDS, “Break on Through to the Other Side” *New Left Notes*, August 23, 1969.

The organizing efforts proved ineffective. The National Action in Chicago, dubbed “Days of Rage,” only brought a few hundred Movement people to Chicago for the four day event. Three days before the scheduled demonstrations Weatherman blew up the Haymarket Square statue commemorating the death of police officers during the Haymarket Riots of labor unions in 1886.⁷⁵ Days of Rage was anticipated by Weatherman to demonstrate militant youth’s willingness to fight the system. In advertising for the National Action Weatherman leadership underscores this ideal: “We know now that the failure of the white mother country movement to expand beyond the limits of bourgeois student consciousness came at least partly from the class base of our movement, and therefore from our own liberalism.”⁷⁶ According to Dan Berger, “The action represented a conscious departure from previous mass demonstration where people fought police only in self-defense, if at all. At the Days of Rage, many in the ranks wore helmets and steel-toed boots. They carried makeshift weapons – rocks, lead pipes, baseball bats – for use against property...and police.”⁷⁷ Consistent with exemplary action strategy Weatherman brought people to Chicago to engage in battle with the Chicago police, an action that they hoped would develop the revolutionary army. Weatherman leadership stated “...we put forth a struggle scenario of the action...Because we know that revolutionaries are created in struggle and not through protest or persuasion, we say clearly that this is an action not to register a complaint...but...to create a solution.”⁷⁸ Weatherman declared Days of Rage a victory, regardless of meager numbers and

⁷⁵ Berger, 108.

⁷⁶ Kathy Boudin, Bernardine Dohrn, and Terry Robbins, “Bringing the War Back Home: Less Talk, More National Action” *New Left Notes*, August 23, 1969.

⁷⁷ Berger, 109.

⁷⁸ Boudin, Dohrn, and Robbins “Bringing the War Back Home: Less Talk, More National Action.”

criticized their critics and opponents. Two months later, Black Panther Fred Hampton was shot while asleep in his apartment by the Chicago police.⁷⁹ Their failure to organize working-class youth and radicalize the broader Left in conjunction with the death of a black revolutionary leader convinced Weatherman that clandestine activity was a necessity.⁸⁰ They would make one last attempt in Flint, Michigan to mobilize their constituency.

Weatherman's program was to create an anti-imperialist army to attack the state in support of liberation struggles in the U.S. and abroad. The National War Council in Flint, Michigan was to represent "the birth of the new SDS" in December 1969.⁸¹ Weatherman's program for the council posited violence as a political strategy and sought to bring together youth in efforts to development a revolutionary fighting force. However, the mounting indictments of Weatherman leaders and constant police surveillance became a prime motivating factor to increase aggression. The National War Council was a display of glorified violence as the Weather Bureau discussed killing white children to end racism, admired Charles Manson's slaughter, and asserted assassinations, bombings, and any other act of violence as a legitimate political strategy.⁸² Weatherman announced their plans to go underground and further Council discussion revolved around possible targets, methods, and preparations. The War Council, as it occurred was in preparation for violence. Historian Jeremy Varon argues that it was an attempt to "develop their own capacities for aggression" and the "ritualized atmosphere of Flint seemed designed to

⁷⁹ Berger, 119.

⁸⁰ Berger, 119, 121.

⁸¹ "National War Council" *Fire*, December 6, 1969.

⁸² "Stormy Weather" *San Francisco Good Times*, January 8, 1970.

help the Weathermen make that transition.”⁸³ The National War Council at Flint Michigan demonstrates the pinnacle of extremity in Weatherman’s frenzy. A few months later an accidental detonation of explosives killed three Weatherpeople in a New York City townhouse.

The townhouse explosion occurred March 6, 1970 on West 11th Street in Greenwich Village. The home that belonged to the father of Cathy Wilkerson collapsed and consumed three bodies explosives accidentally detonated. Cathy Wilkerson and Kathy Boudin escaped the building as the splintered wood floor and debris flew up around them and the solid floor gave way.⁸⁴ The explosion claimed the lives of Ted Gold, Terry Robbins, and Diana Oughton. The explosives were intended to be used on human targets; Weatherman reevaluated.⁸⁵ Dramatically affected Weatherman shifted their political direction. Upon the tragedy of losing lovers and comrades, Weatherman critiqued its own methods and determined that armed propaganda – the symbolic bombing of property – was morally and politically appropriate but made a commitment to ensure the safety of human life.⁸⁶ After the explosion, the FBI under J. Edgar Hoover launched a massive initiative to apprehend known Weatherpeople; making them officially the Weather Underground.

The WUO established themselves as a revolutionary organization in an effort to denounce their white privilege, aid the Black liberation struggle in the U.S. by diverting state repression, and align themselves with the international working class. Through

⁸³ Varon, 162-163.

⁸⁴ Cathy Wilkerson, *Flying Close To The Sun: My Life and Times as a Weatherman* (New York: Seven Stories Press: 2007) 345-346.

⁸⁵ Berger, 129.

⁸⁶ Berger, 130.

romanticized revolutionary violence, the WUO sought to create a revolution. Implicit in their representation of machismo, women's liberation was situated within the Weatherman's political program and transcended into the WUO's clandestine activities. Unconventional political activity for women, such as acts of aggression and militancy, was central to WUO's politics on women's liberation. Women in the WUO advocated violence and aggression, displayed themselves as revolutionary fighters, and emerged as a feminist aberration by creating a politics of women's liberation that valued masculinity and traditionally perceived male behavior.

Chapter Three: Weatherman's Politic of Women's Liberation

In chapter three, I discuss Weatherman's political position on women's liberation and compare it to the Women's Liberation Movement generally. I argue that Weatherman's political position on women's liberation was dependent on gender performance.

Weatherman's negligence of women's oppression adapted to include women within a broader framework for social change and revolution. After their domination of SDS, Weatherman did not conceive of a "special" oppression apart from capitalism and imperialism. Abandoning aboveground political activity, the WUO's politics mandated that women's oppression be considered part of the struggle for world-wide socialism. As a result of the socio-political context of rising militancy of leftist organizations including the struggles for national liberation and government repression of these efforts, domestically and abroad, the WUO placed the "woman question" within their existent Marxist framework which resulted in a specific and rigid agenda for women's liberation in response to women's position in American culture. Weatherman addressed cultural definitions of womanhood, women's prescribed position in the American family and its relationship to the state to determine that women will be liberated from their oppression by embracing violence and aggression in pursuit of a socialist revolution in which women's liberation can be actualized.

In the WUO's collective writings and those produced by women in the organization male chauvinism and male supremacy are defined as practices that occur through social interaction. Neither concept is discussed as a product of patriarchal arrangement or systematic male privilege. Male chauvinism is defined by the WUO collectively as the view of women as sexual objects and described as a system of domination but system that was a manifestation of U.S. imperialism and American life.⁸⁷ In an article written by Bernardine Dohrn and Naomi Jaffe for *New Left Notes* in 1968, the eventual Weather members described women's oppression as a product the cultural definition of womanhood. In "The Look is You," they acknowledged that women were "unfree within the Movement and in personal relationships, as in the society at large." Jaffe and Dohrn state that "the passive-receptive woman role, a product of the structure and development of American society, increasingly defines the culture of that society."⁸⁸ American imperialism and the capitalist system oppress women through prescribed methods of self-definition which limit women to defining themselves as passive decorative sex-objects. This viewpoint became the WUO's narrow assessment of women's oppression. In this view, male chauvinism, commonly attributed to men, could be enacted by women.

Initially, Weatherman had no assessment of women's oppression. Their analytical debut, "You Don't Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows," did not include any analysis of women's oppression but merely recognition of their lack of analysis. The resolution stated: "SDS has not dealt in any adequate way with the woman

⁸⁷ A Weatherwoman, "Inside the Weather Machine", *Rat*, February 6, 1970.

⁸⁸ Bernardine Dohrn and Naomi Jaffe, "The Look Is You", *New Left Notes*, March 18, 1968.

question...nor has the need to fight male supremacy been given any programmatic direction with the RYM. As a result, we have a very limited understanding of the tie-up between imperialism and the women question...”⁸⁹ The WUO’s initial statement concerning the analytical and programmatic gap underscores the need to incorporate women’s liberation with the struggle for a socialist revolution without thorough consideration of women’s oppression.

Cathy Wilkerson attempted to provide an analysis of women’s oppression. She responded in *New Left Notes* with an article titled “Toward A Revolutionary Women’s Militia” and presented a similar perspective to that of Jaffe and Dorhn. Wilkerson defined the cause of women’s oppression as capitalism and bourgeois family roles that define women’s identity through passivity and submission. Wilkerson provided an explanation of how women relate to imperialism and suggested methods of organizing women. Wilkerson asserts that capitalism exploits women through the traditional role of wife and mother in two ways: women “feel more immediately the need to maintain stability so as to keep stomachs full, children clothed; they feel the threat to the stability of their position even more acutely...and secondly, having been taught to feel passive and defenseless, especially in physical ways, they are more threatened by the spectre of black struggles as defined by the mass media, the ruling class through the PTA, women’s magazines, etc.”⁹⁰ She further theorizes that “women’s family roles as wives and mother force them to rely much more than men on social services...[and] these public services are less and less able to meet the material needs of the people, women are most

⁸⁹ Ashley, et. al., “You Don’t Need A Weatherman To Know Which Way The Wind Blows.”

⁹⁰ Cathy Wilkerson, “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s Militia,” *New Left Notes*, July, 5, 1969.

affected.”⁹¹ In Wilkerson’s view, imperialism affects women “not in a different way from or additional way than men, but in a sharper, more extreme, way than men.”⁹² Emphasis on women’s position in the family and passivity comprised Weatherman’s analysis and consequential program for women’s liberation without question of why these positions and behaviors are prescribed to female people.

Weatherman attempted to utilize women’s oppression to organize women into their ranks. Wilkerson asserted: “Male supremacy as an ideology is one of the most important ways that the Man defines individuals and societies in such a way that it makes it difficult to understand how socialism and communism could work, let alone how the forces of people struggling to win these ends could ever be successful.”⁹³ Organizing efforts most often emphasized how white women benefit from the capitalist system which solidified their alliance to oppressors rather than analyzing women’s personal experience in relation to men. They asserted that women are “beneficiaries and victims” of imperialism in which their traditional role as women provides them with a certain amount of power and security.⁹⁴ Wilkerson asserts that the bourgeois family definitions of women and female passivity serve to align women against their ultimate interests to the system of U.S. imperialism. Wilkerson further elaborates on how male supremacy serves imperialism:

It...is a crucial force in promoting bourgeois individualism though false separation of men from women, preventing collective practice. All of this discourages people from allying with the struggles of the international

⁹¹ Wilkerson, “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s Militia.”

⁹² Wilkerson, “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s Militia.”

⁹³ Wilkerson, “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s Militia.”

⁹⁴ Dohrn and Jaffe, “The Look Is You.”

proletariat and encourages them...to ally with the ruling class to try to maintain as much stability and access as possible.⁹⁵

The method used to organize women for the socialist revolution suggested that women's prescribed cultural definition constituted women's allegiance to, what the WUO perceived to be the cause of all oppression, U.S. imperialism. From this position, the WUO theorized women's oppression in terms of women's privileges rather than their marginalization as female-bodied people. This perspective posed an agenda for women's liberation that required women give up their privileges awarded through traditional cultural definition of womanhood.

The rejection of traditional constructs of womanhood required a position on male chauvinism and male supremacy that was packaged within the broader needs and goals of the WUO as a political organization. Employing the *foco* theory for political direction, violence and aggression were essential characteristics needed to execute exemplary actions. The WUO's program of women's liberation satisfied the political direction of the collective by advocating a disposition of aggression for women; therefore, violence and aggression were imperative ingredients of the solution to the "woman question" because these characteristics were also important in building a revolution in the U.S. The WUO's perception of women's oppression fashioned the rejection of traditional femininity as liberatory strategy. Their assault on male chauvinism and supremacy was to "break down the practice in order to destroy the material basis for that allegiance."⁹⁶ The targeted practice in need of elimination is that of femininity and traditional feminine roles. This analysis and method absolved male privilege and held women directly responsible for

⁹⁵ Wilkerson, "Toward a Revolutionary Women's Militia."

⁹⁶ Wilkerson, "Toward a Revolutionary Women's Militia."

performing their liberation. Men in the organization supported this conception of women's liberation because it reinforced women as fighters for the revolution alongside men; and furthermore, the WUO's conception of male supremacy did not critique their position or privileges as male-bodied people.

Women were responsible for their own liberation. Women in the WUO challenged all women to shed traditional femininity and suggested that women adopt traditionally masculine attributes: "women will never be able to undertake a full revolutionary role unless they break out of their woman's role."⁹⁷ The task for women as fighters in the revolution was to create new "forms of organization in which women will be able to take on new and independent roles."⁹⁸ This positioned women as the agents of change in male-female relationships; they were accountable for assuming masculinity and hence, altering their status in these relationships and group interaction. They posit women need to "break out through the pigs' alternative and definitions" of women to become revolutionary women - aggressive, tough, fighting women that take on "male strengths" because they are necessary to building a revolution.⁹⁹ The WUO held the belief that once women developed themselves as revolutionary fighters through militancy, confrontation and exemplary action, they will have achieved egalitarian relationships with their male comrades within the collective. Thus, it was necessary to their agenda of women's liberation for women to demonstrate aggression and prove to themselves, as

⁹⁷ Ashley, et. al., "You Don't Need A Weatherman to Know Which Way The Wind Blows."

⁹⁸ Ashley, et. al., "You Don't Need A Weatherman To Know Which Way The Wind Blows."

⁹⁹ Authors Unknown, "Honky Tonk Women," pamphlet from the National War Council, 1969.

well as to their male comrades, that they are capable militants. In their idealistic view, masculinized women were liberated as women.¹⁰⁰

In comparison to the Black Panther Party (BPP), the Weather Underground's perception of equality on the basis of masculinity is similar to the experience of the Black Panther women although there is no evidence to suggest that the Black Panther women performed tasks to directly challenge their position *as* women. According to historian, Tracye A. Matthews, traditional constructs of femininity had not been prescribed to Black women by dominant culture although some Black Nationalist organizations applied their own constructs.¹⁰¹ Matthews posits "once these black women, involved in militant organizing efforts, stepped outside of traditionally assigned to women or African Americans, their treatment more closely resembled the experiences of their black male comrades."¹⁰² And furthermore, their involvement "represented a challenge to the black community to view [community] issues as indeed black women's issues."¹⁰³ Matthews concludes that the Black Panthers theory and practice of gender ideology was, at times, contradictory; however, the BPP was progressive compared to other organizations regarding women's position in the organization. Central to their treatment of women's position was their response to the thesis of black matriarchy and the representation of the black family structure. In response to these stereotypes the BPP experimented with

¹⁰⁰ "Honky Tonk Women."

¹⁰¹ Tracye A. Matthews, "'No One Ever Asks What a Man's Role in the Revolution is': Gender Politics and Leadership in the Black panther Party, 1966-71" in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001) 244.

¹⁰² Matthews, 245.

¹⁰³ Matthews, 237.

communal sexual relationships and living which, similar to the WUO's practices, often reinforced male-dominance.¹⁰⁴

Participant David Gilbert reflects that the WUO “constantly extolled the role of women fighters in the nat[ional] liberation struggles, as well as their efforts toward women’s lib[eration] but pretty much the only way we saw fighting sexism was promoting women as fighters.”¹⁰⁵ Gilbert’s personal critique of this perspective is that WUO’s “glorification of violence” promoted “male supremacy” and “contributed to the very unfortunate split between a predominantly white women’s movement that did not ally strongly enough with the Third World and an anti-imperialist Left, which was still very sexist.”¹⁰⁶

Armed struggle as liberatory for women was validated by the image of the female Vietnamese. The WUO posited that “these revolutionary women are liberating themselves by fighting in a national struggle” alongside male comrades.¹⁰⁷ It is important to note that the WUO collectively did not address the contextual differences between Vietnam’s socio-political context and that of the U.S. in regards to women’s position within these struggles. However, regardless of their neglect of critical examination, women in the WUO constantly and consistently invoked the image of the female guerilla in their propaganda and actions, such as the graffiti slogan “Vietnamese Women Carry Guns,” to convey women’s participation with men in making the revolution. Often, this image was invoked to discredit autonomous women’s movement as a separatist failure.

¹⁰⁴ Matthews, 241. I discuss the WUO’s alternative sexual practices in Chapter four of this thesis.

¹⁰⁵ Personal Correspondence with David Gilbert, September, 14, 2008.

¹⁰⁶ Personal Correspondence with David Gilbert, September, 14, 2008.

¹⁰⁷ “Honky Tonk Women.”

The WUO asserted that “‘women’s issues’ cannot be considered or dealt with separately from an understanding and strategy of the way the major contradiction affect the whole proletariat of the mother country.”¹⁰⁸ The image of the Vietnamese female guerilla fighting against U.S, imperialists served as testament to the ability and promise of co-ed struggle for socialist revolution.

Women’s Liberation Movement

In this section, I will discuss women’s relationship with the New Left, divisions within the women’s liberation movement, feminist critiques of the WUO, and differences between the women’s liberation movement and the WUO.

The Women’s Liberation Movement and the New Left have had a turbulent history. White women’s participation was limited within civil rights movement and in the New Left to traditionally female responsibilities such as cleaning and typing while male participants held leadership positions and made decisions.¹⁰⁹ Prompted by the failure of efforts to raise the issue of women’s oppression within the New Left, women began to meet in separate groups to discuss their personal experience. As new meaning was created through consciousness-raising strategy the autonomous women’s movement began to develop at an increasing momentum. The sex/gender system was theorized by a majority of women’s liberation groups as the primary system that oppressed women which implies one particular assessment of women’s oppression: “women are oppressed

¹⁰⁸ Wilkerson, “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s Militia.”

¹⁰⁹ Evans 76, 160-162.

as a class.”¹¹⁰ Most all women’s liberationist groups had varying analytical angles and methods. However, all delve into women’s limited social status in institutions such as marriage and family and the implicitly devalued traditional definitions of womanhood. Thus, they argued, the sex/gender system is a system of patriarchal arrangement that subordinates women.

Women suffered discrimination within Leftist movements. Often their critiques of women’s status within the Movement and their requests for equality and egalitarianism were ridiculed and dismissed. At the 1964 Students for Non-Violence Coordinating Committee (SNCC) meeting in Mississippi Casey Hayden and Mary King presented a position paper on sexual inequality.¹¹¹ The position paper was met with Stokely Carmichael’s famous statement, “the position of women in SNCC is prone.”¹¹² Later, Carmichael stated that the issue of sexual inequality was raised to “stop the movement from going towards nationalism, because they [white women] thought that they were going to be put out of the movement.”¹¹³ By 1965 civil rights organizations such as SNCC were shifting in ideology and strategy. A faction of SNCC, the “structure faction” argued that SNCC should be a black-dominated organization. Frustration and anger at the slow process of social change in the United States and the demand for independence from African nations created impatience with non-violence and a turn towards Black Nationalism by many civil rights activists.¹¹⁴ Many white women who participated in civil rights movements continued their organizing activities in the growing SDS

¹¹⁰ Redstockings, “Redstockings Manifesto,” 1969 republished in *Feminist Theory: A Reader* ed. Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005) 220-221.

¹¹¹ Echols, 31.

¹¹² Echols, 31.

¹¹³ Echols, 310, footnote 41.

¹¹⁴ Evans, 94-98.

organization. Casey Hayden and Mary King, according to Sara Evans, “set the precedent of contrasting the movement’s egalitarian ideas with the replication of sex roles within it.”¹¹⁵ Widespread circulation of Casey Hayden and Mary King’s position paper “Sex-Caste: a kind of memo” prompted the women to hold a workshop on women at the SDS conference in 1965.¹¹⁶

The SDS was undergoing rapid organizational change. The SDS experienced immediate membership growth after the 1965 March on Washington and began to abandon “expressive” politics in search of strategic methods.¹¹⁷ The SDS’s relationship to the civil rights movement and eagerness to demonstrate solidarity with emerging Black nationalists fostered the development of radical analysis that positioned peoples and liberation struggles against U.S. imperialism. Emphasis on oppression ideologically influenced women to examine their own situation as women.¹¹⁸ At the 1967 National Convention in Ann Arbor a statement written by Jane Addams, Elizabeth Sutherland, Susan Cloak, and Jean Peak during the “Women’s Liberation Workshop” was presented at the National Convention.¹¹⁹ The “Liberation of Women” stated:

As we analyze the position of women in capitalist society and especially in the United States we find that women are in a colonial relationship to men and we recognize ourselves as part of the third world.¹²⁰

Their analysis of women’s role and demand that men confront male chauvinism was met with an uproar. Part of the program suggested by the resolution was to eliminate women’s traditional roles within the family and household. The SDS voted and passed

¹¹⁵ Evans, 99.

¹¹⁶ Evans, 155.

¹¹⁷ Echols, 42.

¹¹⁸ Echols, 42.

¹¹⁹ Echols, 44.

¹²⁰ “Liberation of Women,” *New Left Notes*, v. 2, #26, July 10, 1967.

the programmatic section of the resolution but the analytic section that asserted women were a part of the “Third World” was omitted.¹²¹ The resolution’s analytical and programmatic inconsistencies were indicative of divisions within the emerging women’s liberation movement. According to David Barber, the analytical section represents the perspective of radical feminists. It theorizes that women are colonized and thus, the separation from their colonizers is a viable solution. The resolution’s program section provides a solution derivative of a different analysis. The program section addresses women’s oppression within the family, thus, the family unit is the root of women’s oppression.¹²² The contradictions in analysis and program represent the schism of factions which historians have referred to as radical feminists and politicos. The radical feminists perceived women’s liberation to be *the* revolutionary struggle. Politico women perceived women’s liberation to be *part* of the struggle for the revolution and continued to use traditional theoretical frameworks to theorize women’s oppression. According to Judith Hole and Ellen Levine, the distinction between politicos and feminists is accurate and deserved. Feminists tend to be the political group that makes this distinction.¹²³ Feminists argue that “denying feminism as political in its own right, politicos subsume feminism under the socialist rubric, thus virtually denying the distinction between politicos and feminists.”¹²⁴ Both sections of the resolution were published in *New Left Notes* alongside a cartoon image of a woman in a short polka dot dress, matching underpants, and stockings carrying a poster with the slogan: “We want our Rights & We

¹²¹ David Barber, *A Hard Rain Fell: SDS and Why It Failed* (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi: 2008) 115.

¹²² Barber, 116.

¹²³ Judith Hole and Ellen Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism* (New York: Quadrangle: 1971) 122.

¹²⁴ Hole and Levine 122.

want them Now!” It was clear that the larger Left did not take women’s liberation seriously.

In the summer of 1967 the events at the National Conference for New Politics (NCNP) propelled radical women to meet in separate groups throughout the country. The Resolution Committee of the conference rejected the resolution prepared by radical women. In reaction to the refusal Jo Freeman and Shulamith Firestone drafted a report that demanded 51 percent of voting power for women and presented the demand to the Chair of the conference, William Pepper. He agreed to permit discussion, however, when the women got up to the platform Pepper patted Firestone on the head, referred to her as “little girl” and dismissed “women’s problems.”¹²⁵ Outraged by their treatment, women began meeting to discuss women’s liberation independently from the Left.

Women’s liberation groups split from the Left to create a movement to raise the consciousness of all women. The women’s movement consisted of multiple groups with varying politics that centered around consciousness-raising. However, the consciousness-raising strategy of the Women’s Liberation Movement was non-violent and gained currency through discussion of women’s experience. The Redstockings Manifesto provides a model theory and practice of the women’s movement:

We regard our personal experience, and our feelings about that experience, as the basis for an analysis of our common situation...Our chief task at present is to develop female class consciousness through sharing experience and publicly exposing the sexist foundation of all our institutions. Consciousness-raising is not ‘therapy’, which implies the existence of individual solution and falsely assumes that the male-female relationship is purely personal, but the only method by which we can

¹²⁵ Barber, 118, Echols, 45-49, Evans 199.

ensure that our program for liberation is based on the concrete realities of our lives.¹²⁶

The women's movement was forming an analysis on the sex/gender system as the primary system of oppression, did not have a tangible enemy to wage war against, and was perceived by the WUO to be theory-oriented rather than action-oriented associated with the New Left. Women in the WUO accepted the Marxist analysis of the larger left and sought to create revolutionary change guided by such frameworks. Their assessment and treatment of the "woman question" labels them as "politicos" to feminist scholars.

The 1968 demonstration at the Miss America pageant exemplifies the division between radical feminists and politics. The New York Radical Women, a group whose members constituted both sides of the divide, planned the demonstration. The radical feminist faction at the demonstration considered the street theatre tactic of crowning a sheep an attack on women rather than an attack on male chauvinism. Division on the purpose and outcome of the demonstration caused the group to splinter. The politico faction of women organized into a group to address imperialism. The Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (WITCH) advocated the Left's analysis of imperialism and colonialism. WITCH dressed as witches and cast spells on corporations on Wall Street in street theatre fashion. They intended their actions to develop a space for dialogue and consciousness-raising on women's oppression within a framework valued to the male Left.¹²⁷ Radical Feminists charged that the witch costume and theatrical antics

¹²⁶ Redstockings, "Redstockings Manifesto" in *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, 221.

¹²⁷ Barber, 132, Echols, 98.

were reinforcing sex stereotypes of women.¹²⁸ Many early women's groups experienced similar division based on the issue of women's liberation.

In addition to differing analysis of women's oppression, race was a major divisive factor of politicians and feminists. Radical feminists sought a space to discuss women's oppression as women which presented a universal category of "woman" synonymous with whiteness.¹²⁹ According to David Barber, some white radical feminists "sought to avoid tangling up what they saw as a clear-cut issue of women's subordination with black women's view of their relationship to the liberation struggle."¹³⁰ Women of Color were sometimes reportedly excluded from consciousness-raising sessions and the discussion of consciousness raising groups, although this varied by locality. However, these experiences vary upon locality. Elizabeth Martinez accounts that her first and only New York Radical Women (NYRW) meeting on the night of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, the women present decided not to discuss his death until after their session. Martinez states, "It was a night to realize that if the struggle against sexism did not see itself as profoundly entwined with that fight against racism, I was gone."¹³¹ David Barber further argues that radical feminists' relationship to anti-racism and imperialism was shaped by their relationship to the male Left which styled itself as the white anti-racist and anti-imperialist organization.¹³² Women's liberation groups formed themselves in rejection of the male Left, and as a result of the treatment they received this rejection

¹²⁸ Echols, 98.

¹²⁹ Barber, 130.

¹³⁰ Barber, 127.

¹³¹ Elizabeth Martinez, "History Makes Us, We make History" in DuPlessis and Snitow, *Feminist Memoir Project*, 118; quoted in Barber, 124.

¹³² Barber, 128.

manifested an ignorance of entanglement of gender, race, and imperialism as systems of oppression.

In the context of the late 1960s, this divide is more of a matter of priority than mutual exclusivity. However, politicians and feminists did have different analyses and strategies for women's liberation. Weatherman was critiqued by the women's movement not for its emphasis on violence but its theory and method. The Bread and Roses collective challenged, "Who terms, whose revolution, for what?" Feminists charged that WUO had misunderstood women's oppression. They legitimized their charge by calling attention to the ways in which women in the WUO proved themselves through machismo and aggression, "male chauvinist standards...defined by men."¹³³ It is alleged that a woman was kicked out of her WUO collective on the basis of "male chauvinism" because "she wasn't militant enough."¹³⁴ The most notorious criticism of the WUO came from Robin Morgan in her article "Goodbye to All that" in which she states:

Goodbye to the WeatherVain, with the Stanley Kowalski Image and theory of Free sexuality but practice of sex on demand for males...the Weather Sisters who, and they know better – they know, reject their own radical feminism for that last desperate grab at male approval that we all know so well, for claiming that the machismo style and the gratuitous violence is their own style by "free choice" and for believing that this is the way for a woman to make her revolution...Goodbye to all that shit that sets women apart from women; shit that covers the face of any Manson Slave which is the face of Sharon Tate...*In the dark we are all the same* [italics hers]– and you better believe it: we're in the dark, baby. (Remember the old joke: Know what they call a black man with a Ph.D.? A nigger. Variation: Know what they call a Weatherwoman? A heavy cunt. Know what they call a Hip Revolutionary Woman: A groovy cunt. Know what they call radical militant feminist? A crazy cunt. Amerika [sic] is a land of free choice- take your pick of titles. Left Out, my Sister – don't

¹³³ The Bread and Roses Collective, "Weatherman Politics and the Women's Movement" *Women*, Winter 1970.

¹³⁴ The Bread and Roses Collective, "Weatherman Politics and the Women's Movement."

you see?) Goodbye to the illusion of strength when you run hand and hand with your oppressors; goodbye to the dream that being in the leadership collective will get you anything but gonorrhoea.”¹³⁵

Morgan’s article demonstrates the hostility of women’s liberationists towards women of the WUO. Women in the WUO agreed that they adopted machismo; however they did not embrace machismo at the mandate of male members. Women played a significant role in creating the WUO’s macho environment; they “attack[ed] the women’s movement, exhibited macho tendencies, and participated in creating the male chauvinist environment they challenged.”¹³⁶

The WUO challenged the women’s movement; it

set itself up against the women’s movement as the only legitimate revolutionary course for women, and set anti-imperialism up against feminism... The Weather ideology did push the women’s movement on the crucial issues of racism and national oppression, but since its politics could only do that at the expense of feminism and the development of feminist theory, it weakened more that it strengthened the women’s movement.¹³⁷

The crucial critique of the women’s movement by the WUO, posited as the failure of the women’s movement to grasp anti-imperialism, was fundamentally a critique of feminist method which cultivated non-violent consciousness-raising of *all* women. Although a valid critique of the liberal women’s rights movement, Weatherman misunderstood the goals and theoretical progress of the radical women’s liberation movement. They asserted that white women were fighting for equality with white men and that these “improvements... are taken from the people of the world” within an advanced industrial

¹³⁵ Robin Morgan, “Goodbye to All That” quoted in Harold Jacobs *Weatherman*, 304-305; Also see *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women’s Liberation Movement*, ed. id. (New York, Vantage Books: 1970).

¹³⁶ Berger, 292

¹³⁷ Naomi Jaffe, “Criticisms of Prairie Fire,” June 1977, unpublished article. Quoted in Berger, 292.

society.¹³⁸ The WUO's critique of the women's liberationist movement ignores the efforts of the radical feminism to develop theory about women's relation to men in a male dominating culture and the attempts to create female self-definition and value.

Weatherman asserted that women's liberation came from a struggle for social revolution alongside men and consistently asserted that liberation derives from violence; "political power grows out of a barrel of a gun, and the struggle to gain and use political power against the state is the struggle for our liberation."¹³⁹ The women's liberation movement was critiqued and thought to be counterrevolutionary by Weatherman simply because they did not embrace violence. They stated: "various political tendencies toward separatist women's movements do not recognize this reality."¹⁴⁰ Weatherman's political identity teetered on their ability to become revolutionaries through armed struggle. Central to this identification, violence is imperative to all liberation.

In addition to different methods, each identified a different source of women's oppression. Weatherman asserted that imperialism and capitalism were the cause of all oppression; and furthermore, charged that the women's liberationists' program was a failure because it did not attack the root of women's oppression. They claimed that the women's movement "accept[ed] the pigs' definition of what is male... [and] ignored the need to formulate and criticize theory and strategy, the need to fight for our freedom."¹⁴¹ Reference to the state's control of gender definition exemplifies the WUO's misdirection and deficient analysis. Ironically, women in the WUO accepted the dominant culture's

¹³⁸ "Honky Tonk Women."

¹³⁹ "Honky Tonk Women." The quote "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun" did not originate with Weatherman. The origin of this slogan is purportedly attributed to Mao Tse-Tung, a communist leader of China.

¹⁴⁰ "Honky Tonk Women."

¹⁴¹ "Honky Tonk Women."

definition and valuation of maleness through ideological manifestations of masculinity and violence as legitimate ways of resistance. The women's liberation movement, in Weatherman's view, "accepted the chauvinism of men as unchangeable...and thus their strategy is to weaken men and revolutionary male leadership so that women (in the weakness they have accepted as unchangeable) can be equal or superior."¹⁴² Weatherman inverted the purpose of male chauvinism by implying that it is derivative of *women's* weakness rather than a system of men's superiority in the social world. It is therefore, women's responsibility to become stronger and aggressive alongside men to convince men of women's equal capabilities. The focus on women and women's value was viewed by women in the WUO as an assault on men and male leadership, an assault that implied women accepted their own weaknesses and sought to subordinate men. In "Mothering on the Lam: Politics, Gender Fantasies and Maternal Thinking in Women Associated with Armed, Clandestine Organizations in the United States," Gilda Zwerman explores revolutionary women's experience with violence in contrast to the pacifist mother model. Employing interviews with female participants in revolutionary violence more generally, she asserts that women "understood their subordination to be a self-imposed consequence of their own personal weaknesses and fears as revolutionaries, which they would 'hopefully', 'eventually' overcome."¹⁴³ Women in the WUO held the same belief of women's oppression as a product of their own weaknesses.

¹⁴² "Honky Tonk Women."

¹⁴³ Gilda Zwerman "Mothering on the Lam: Politics, Gender Fantasies and Maternal Thinking in Women Associated with Armed, Clandestine Organizations in the United States," *Feminist Review*, No. 47, (Summer 1994), 33-56, 47.

The irreconcilable differences between the Weatherman and the Women's liberation movement were contingent upon different analysis of, and methods for, women's liberation and furthermore, violence was an integral part of these differences.

Adopting Masculinity and Machismo

Gender is ultimately a culturally intelligible performance.¹⁴⁴ Previous social divisions between men and women have been constituted as natural, essential, innate differences presupposing that maleness results in masculinity thus, the definitive of the category "man" and the opposite of femaleness/woman. Contemporary gender theory has established sex, sex category, and gender as distinctive sites of theorization. West and Zimmerman posit that sex is constituted by "socially agreed upon biological criteria" through which the application of gender and "categorization is established and sustained by the socially required identificatory displays that proclaims one's membership in one or the other category."¹⁴⁵ Gender is thus, "the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category."¹⁴⁶

The notion that gender is culturally pervasive and naturalized does not suggest that gender exists without a relationship of domination and submission. Gender, as a naturalized system instituted through repetition and performance holds different consequences for male-bodied and female-bodied people. According to Judith Butler,

¹⁴⁴ Judith Butler "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions" in *The Judith Butler Reader* ed. Sara Salih and Judith Butler (Malden, Blackwell Publishing: 2004)

¹⁴⁵ Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman "Doing Gender" in *Gender: A Sociological Reader* (New York, Routledge: 2002) 43.

¹⁴⁶ West and Zimmerman, 43.

gender “is the apparatus by which the production and normalization of masculinity and femininity take place.”¹⁴⁷ Butler establishes that gender is a social norm in the Foucaultian sense; it is a “form of social power that produces the intelligible field of subjects, and an apparatus by which the gender binary is instituted...as a norm that appears independent of the practices that it governs, its ideality is the reinstated effect of those very practices.”¹⁴⁸ Gender is a system of social standards and activities, a performance of presumed naturalness. Marilyn Frye asserts that sex announcing behavior is compulsory and inescapable and furthermore, “the meaning and import of this behavior is profoundly different for women and men.”¹⁴⁹ Hence, I contend that women’s performance of masculinity is an instance of gender subversion and maintain that male participation in the WUO is an example of the “causal unity”¹⁵⁰ between sex and gender.

Gender situates behaviors, preferences, activities into an oppositional system of male/female, masculine/feminine that systematically privileges one packaged category in relation to another – masculinity is valued over femininity. Gender constitutes a system of oppression for all but particularly for women through prescribed subordination to men and restricted access to privileges awarded to male-bodied people; it is a system of “interrelated barriers and forces which reduce, immobilize and mold people who belong to a certain group, and effect their subordination to another group.”¹⁵¹ Raewyn Connell asserts that masculinity is a cultural hegemony that is “constructed in relation to women and to subordinated masculinities.” Dominant models of masculinity include, according

¹⁴⁷ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York, Routledge: 2004), 42.

¹⁴⁸ Butler *Undoing Gender*, 48.

¹⁴⁹ Marilyn Frye, “Sexism” in *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (New York: The Crossing Press, 1983) 29.

¹⁵⁰ Judith Butler “Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions,” 50.

¹⁵¹ Frye, “Sexism,” 33.

to Connell, an acceptance and acquiescence to violence, whereby “power, authority, aggression...are not thematized in femininity at large as they are in masculinity.”¹⁵²

Masculinity and machismo were integral parts of the WUO’s politics and agenda for women’s liberation. Considered the only legitimate political strategy, masculinity and machismo became liberatory practices for women through which they challenged male supremacy and chauvinism. The WUO mandated that women adopt traditionally masculine behaviors to liberate themselves through an active rejection of femininity. Women in the WUO enacted violence to assume masculinity and the status awarded to masculinized male-bodied people. However, women do not obtain power as women by performing masculinity. Male-bodied people benefit from vicarious masculinity by association with the male body.¹⁵³ In referencing sport and athleticism, Crawley, Foley, and Sheham define vicarious masculinity as “status as men via the athletic successes of other men...It is possible for...men to obtain vicarious masculinity from association with those relatively few elite male athletes...simply because of accountability to the male body.”¹⁵⁴ Women, without ability to claim membership in the category of maleness attributed to male-bodied people, can perform masculinity but cannot obtain the status privileged to men through masculinity.

The WUO’s assessment of women’s liberation justified the manifestation of domination and submission in the binary gender system and further, valued masculinity in relation to femininity. Their participation in revolutionary violence would impart a

¹⁵² R.W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Stanford, Stanford University Press: 1987) 186, 187. Bob (R.W.) Connell has transitioned to Raewyn subsequent to the publication of the works used in this thesis. Out of respect for her chosen gender change, I will refer to her as Raewyn.

¹⁵³ Sara Crawley, et al. *Gendering Bodies* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008) 133.

¹⁵⁴ Sara Crawley, et al. *Gendering Bodies* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008) 133.

liberated consciousness through masculinity and serve the struggle for world-wide socialism which, in WUO's view, would socially and politically guarantee women's liberation. I contend that women's exemplary masculinity, the display of masculinity for political aim and reclamation of power, constituted gender subversion. However, due to the hegemonic form of masculinity and its specific association with the male body (i.e. vicarious masculinity) it is impossible for women to assume power or liberation from performing masculinity.

Hegemonic Masculinity

Weatherman's foremost distinguishable collective characteristic was machismo. Male and female members glorified violence and aggression as politically viable expressions and strategy in general and in particular as a strategy for women's liberation. Although female-bodied performance masculinity demonstrates gender subversion, Weatherman's analysis and practice of women's liberation also reinforced cultural constructs of the category "woman" that create women's subordination. I contend that Weatherman's analysis of women's oppression and their subsequent practice of women's liberation was shaped by hegemonic masculinity thereby, hindering potential for women's liberation within their program.

According to Antonio Gramsci, a cultural hegemony functions through the "creation and perpetuation of legitimating symbols" and by winning "the consent of subordinate groups to the existing social order."¹⁵⁵ A cultural hegemony is established when a world view appeals to multiple social groups and maintains perceived benefits or

¹⁵⁵ Jackson Lears, 569.

privileges for these groups, however, “the emerging hegemonic culture is not merely an ideological mystification but serves the interests of ruling groups at the expense of subordinate ones.”¹⁵⁶ Gender, constituted by duality, creates and legitimates masculinity and femininity, institutes masculinity and femininity as the only culturally intelligible symbols, and always implies domination. Connell theorizes that masculinity is, in accordance with Gramsci, a cultural hegemony. Connell asserts that hegemonic masculinity means “a social ascendancy achieved in a play into the organization of private life and cultural processes.”¹⁵⁷ The definition of hegemonic masculinity then comprised of two parts. First, hegemonic masculinity is the cultural (thus, public) presentation of masculinity; it is a fantastical creation and does portray the lives or personalities of individual men.¹⁵⁸ Hegemonic masculinity is not obtained by force or interpersonal political struggle but rather maintains masculinity as a hegemonic form through ideological manifestations within culture, i.e. institutions, religions, and public discourse.¹⁵⁹ Thus, hegemonic masculinity is discursive domination. However, this domination does not entail the elimination of alternatives but rather further maintains its power through the subordination of those alternatives to models of hegemonic masculinity.¹⁶⁰ Connell argues, “the public face of hegemonic masculinity is not necessarily what powerful men are, but what sustains their power and what large numbers

¹⁵⁶ Jackson Lears, 571.

¹⁵⁷ Bob Connell “Hegemonic Masculinity” in *Gender A Sociological Reader* (New York, Routledge: 2002) 60.

¹⁵⁸ Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*, 184; “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 61.

¹⁵⁹ Connell, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 61.

¹⁶⁰ Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*, 184; Connell, “Hegemonic Masculinity,” 60.

of men are motivated to support.”¹⁶¹ Masculinity as a hegemonic force enlists support and consent from most people and from men in particular because “most men benefit from the subordination of women and hegemonic masculinity is the cultural expression of this ascendancy.”¹⁶²

For Weatherman in general, traditional markers of masculinity – aggression, strength, willingness to risk life, fearlessness, and violence – defined what it meant to be a revolutionary. These characteristics were valued in relation to purportedly feminine characteristics of non-violence, passivity, sensitivity, etc. Violence and aggression constituted forms of political behavior by women that were culturally intelligible and valued because these behaviors are gendered masculine by dominant culture. I contend that women’s participation in the WUO constitute what Connell terms a *subordinated* masculinity which does not position female-bodies as hegemonic beneficiaries. As a result, in the following chapter I question whether women’s exemplary masculinity can be read as liberatory for women.

¹⁶¹ Connell, “Hegemonic Masculinity”, 61

¹⁶² Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*, 185; “Hegemonic Masculinity” 61.

Chapter Four: Weatherman's Practice of Women's Liberation

In previous chapters I have elaborated on Weatherman's position on women's liberation and argued that their perception of women's liberation centralized and valued masculinity, specifically violence and aggression, as liberatory practice. I contend Weatherman's analysis of women's oppression and their promise of women's liberation through violence consequentially rendered women accountable for liberating themselves in ways that simultaneously empowered and restricted women within the organization. In chapter four, I discuss Weatherman's practice of their politic of women's liberation through autonomous women's actions and the implementation of the "smash monogamy" campaign. I argue that women's participation was complex, challenging and reinforcing, gender as a hegemonic system of dominance and submission.

Separate Women's Actions

Initially, autonomous women's actions took form in "jailbreaks." Jailbreaks were an attempt to organize high school and community college students and consisted of a group of women storming into a classroom, guarding the doors and classroom telephone to prevent students from leaving or calling security, distributing leaflets, and spray painting slogans while one member would give a speech that urged students to join

outlaw life.¹⁶³ In August 1969, the women of the Detroit SDS conducted a “jailbreak” at McComb Community College. Nine women, referred to as the “Motor City Nine,” interrupted a classroom, barricaded the doors, and lectured the students on the War, racism, and male chauvinism. When male students got up to leave the room, the women responded by “attacking the men with karate and prevented them from leaving the room.”¹⁶⁴ The women were arrested yet praised by the militant Left because:

They under[stood] that the road to women’s liberation is not through personal discussions about the oppression of women; nor is it through an appeal to the public conscience through demonstrations or guerrilla theater about the issues of female liberation. It will only come when women act, not only around issues of women’s liberation, but when they act on other issues such as the war and racism. Women’s liberation will come when women exercise real power – as it is done in Vietnam and in the McComb College classroom.¹⁶⁵

The “jailbreak” actions were encouraged by many Weatherman-dominated SDS chapters. A similar jailbreak occurred in Pittsburgh when seventy-five women comprised a women’s militia to attack the city; “the women came to the city as an exemplary fighting force, fighting on the side of the black liberation struggle and the Vietnamese struggle, demanding that white kids in Pittsburgh decide which side they’re on.”¹⁶⁶ On Thursday, September 4th, they descended on the predominantly white South Hills High School and covered the walls and sidewalks with graffiti slogans such as “Vietnamese Women Carry Guns.” They disrupted the halls and passed out leaflets for the National Action in Chicago. The women resisted arrest and “fought back, protecting their sisters and the

¹⁶³ Susan Stern, *With the Weathermen: The Personal Journal of a Revolutionary Woman* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press: 2007) 113.

¹⁶⁴ “The Motor City 9” *New Left Notes*, August 23, 1969.

¹⁶⁵ “The Motor City 9.”

¹⁶⁶ “Women’s Militia” *New Left Notes*, September 12, 1969.

Viet Cong flag...They fought liberating every sister that the pigs tried to arrest.”¹⁶⁷ The action in Pittsburgh, like the action in Detroit, resembled an attack on male supremacy because it “challenged the passive, non-political role which women are forced into, a role which only helps to maintain imperialism.”¹⁶⁸ The actions had been planned and executed by women-only groups to foster women’s revolutionary development; thus, their mere *existence* and willingness to be aggressive and confrontational was an attack on male supremacy.¹⁶⁹ This strategy to attack male supremacy was legitimized by Regis Debray’s *foco* theory which emphasizes action above all other political methods.¹⁷⁰ Therefore, an action’s success is gauged by its shock value and disruptive impact which, in this view, validated “jailbreaks” and other acts of aggression by women as attacks on male supremacy even if the action failed to offer an analysis of women’s oppression or demonstrate comprehensive strategy for women’s liberation.

The “jailbreaks” were conducted as practice for women’s militias for the upcoming National Action in Chicago. At the Days of Rage, the women’s action was scheduled to “destroy the Chicago Armed Forces Induction Center.” A contingency of an estimated 70 women listened to a speech given by Weather leader Bernardine Dohrn; she stated, “People are determined to fight here... We are here to tell the people that this is not a women’s movement of self-indulgence... This is not a movement to make us feel good.”¹⁷¹ The women began their march to the Induction Center. When met with a police line, women charged and fought police. Only twelve out of seventy were arrested and

¹⁶⁷ “Women’s Militia.”

¹⁶⁸ “Women’s Militia.”

¹⁶⁹ “Women’s Militia.”

¹⁷⁰ Berger, 101.

¹⁷¹ Tom Thomas “The Second Battle of Chicago,” 1969 in *Weatherman*, 205.

charged with mob action, battery, and resisting arrest. The women's action was "considered a military defeat" by men in the organization but they acknowledged the action as an "advance" due to the willingness of women to arm themselves and fight. The National Action's women's militia satisfied the requirements of exemplary action by "establishing a presence" of a white fighting force and by "raising the level of struggle."¹⁷²

Once underground, women in the WUO formed a Women's Brigade, the Proud Eagle Tribe, and executed the bombing of the Center for International Affairs at Harvard on October 15, 1970. According to Dan Berger, "the Weatherwomen chose an institution tied to the war in Vietnam as their target in order to counter the notion current among some feminists that Vietnam was not a women's issue."¹⁷³ In the communiqué associated with the bombing, the women positioned themselves as leaders of a women's movement that attacks American imperialism.¹⁷⁴ The Proud Eagle Tribe carried out one other bombing in March 1974 on International Women's Day. The San Francisco Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) was targeted by women in the organization because it was perceived to be an "enemy of women."¹⁷⁵ In the communiqué women in the WUO assert:

HEW directly affects the lives of millions of women and their families. HEW decides who eats how much. HEW is the modern faceless tyrant: it is the overseer, the boss, the landlord, the judge, the official rapist. HEW blames women for poverty and then penalizes them. It is a degrading, violent, aggressive system of control over women...its programs amount

¹⁷² Tom Thomas, "The Second Battle of Chicago," in *Weatherman*, 213.

¹⁷³ Berger, 143.

¹⁷⁴ Berger, 143.

¹⁷⁵ Women's Brigade, Communiqué "Health Education and Welfare: An Enemy of Women", San Francisco, March 6, 1974 in *Sing a Battle Song*, Bernardine Dohrn, Bill Ayers, and Jeff Jones ed. (New York, Seven Stories Press: 2006) 214-218.

to government-enforced malnutrition...HEW runs these programs in a patronizing way that tries to create the myth that women are failures – lazy, immoral and stupid...It is their justification for keeping women as domestic slaves, under the control of men and marriage, poor and without power.¹⁷⁶

These appear to be the only two bombings carried out by the Proud Eagle Tribe while the WUO was a clandestine organization. David Gilbert recounts of the Proud Eagle Tribe: “I don’t think it functioned continuously as a separate unit, or had enough influence within the org[anization].”¹⁷⁷ His statement makes evident that autonomous women’s actions decreased with the organization’s shift underground.

Women in the WUO justified separate women’s actions: “it enables us to fight together against our oppression, breaking out and overcoming it together through struggle...the relationships that we build between us after our self-hatred and competition are broken down reflect the transformation that happens as we become revolutionaries.”¹⁷⁸ Separate women’s actions were legitimized as an attack on male chauvinism for two reasons: the first, these actions gave women the opportunity to develop a revolutionary consciousness and prove themselves as revolutionary leaders in that context and the second, because such actions developed camaraderie amongst women by putting them into situations in which they would have to rely on one another for support and protection. Thus, women fighting the cops in the Detroit and Pittsburgh jailbreaks and in affinity groups at riots and demonstrations qualified as an attack on male chauvinism because women were becoming aggressive and working together antithetical

¹⁷⁶ Communique “Health, Education and Welfare: An Enemy of Women” San Francisco, March 6, 1974, 215.

¹⁷⁷ Personal Correspondence with David Gilbert, September 14, 2008.

¹⁷⁸ “Honky Tonk Women.”

to constructs of traditional femininity. The WUO asserted that the purpose and necessity of all-women's actions was for women to overcome "hatred and fear" of each other. Competition between women would be overcome by women fighting alongside one another to rid themselves of "pieces of Amerika [sic]." ¹⁷⁹

Consistent with the WUO's emphasis on violence as transformative practice, the Pittsburgh Women concluded that their jailbreak action "built self-confidence" and transformed them into "new" women, into revolutionaries prepared to "make a revolution." ¹⁸⁰ Autonomous women's actions or affinity groups were supported by women in the organization and sources suggest that women often experience "sisterhood" within dangerous situations. Susan Stern recalls one such moment after the Avenue Riots in Seattle:

The major thing that came out of the Ave Riots was a heavy corps of street-fighting women. The nights of rioting and fighting together had made bonds among the women that years of talking had not done...The rush of women, long repressed, was suddenly and daringly undammed. Nothing but action, running in the streets, actually fighting with the pigs could have released such a pent-up force. We were tasting the macho strength that characterizes men, but we felt it keenly as women. Eyes glowing we looked at each other warmly. Like sweet perfume in the air we breathed in our first scent of sister-love. It was a precious, dazzling moment, and it turned the tide for the dozen women sitting in that room...I sense my power not individually as a women, but for the first time, as part of a group of women. ¹⁸¹

Stern's sentiment of "sisterhood" experienced through violence and risk resembles the empowerment associated with consciousness-raising of the women's liberation movement. The WUO more generally, and the women in the organization in particular,

¹⁷⁹ "Honky Tonk Women."

¹⁸⁰ A Weatherwoman, "Inside the Weather Machine."

¹⁸¹ Stern, 86.

perceived masculinity as a strategy for women's liberation. The WUO rejected the non-violent method of the women's liberation movement and therefore, experienced their empowerment through aggression and violence.

After the jailbreak conducted in Pittsburgh the women decided to start a women's collective. However, the collective was dismantled by the Weather Bureau because it was suspected as an attempt to usurp power.¹⁸² Details of the dismantling are not recorded in historical documents or described by historians. However, the dismantling of the early women's collective is representative of the authoritarianism and rigid political direction of the WUO. According to Dan Berger's research, strong women within the organization were often silenced and had to stifle their "feminist politics".¹⁸³ However, what constituted "feminist" politics to individual women in the WUO is unknown and based on the WUO's position on women's liberation, arguably divergent to ideas or beliefs commonly attributed to the term feminism.

Empowerment experienced through violence was undermined by the internal culture of the organization. The WUO's enforced obedience to their ideology and politic created an internal culture of competition based on militancy and aggression. According to the research of Jeremy Varon, separate women's cadres were established for women to prove themselves; however, they "were driven by a coerced machismo and encouraged neither true autonomy nor solidarity among the women."¹⁸⁴ Severe practice of criticism-self-criticism reinforced competition amongst women on the basis of militancy and aggression. Adopted from Maoism, criticism-self-criticism was implemented throughout

¹⁸² Berger, 292.

¹⁸³ Berger, 293.

¹⁸⁴ Varon, 60.

the entire organization. The practice entailed the collective selection of one individual to critique during a session which often lasted several hours. Criticisms presented by the group was thought to prevent the individual from critiquing themselves in order to stifle the critiques presented by group members concerning their politics or personality. Practiced to develop individuals into revolutionary leaders, criticism-self-criticism was not a reflective practice but rather a practice that targeted individualism and fostered severe mental and emotional abuse. The internal culture generally positioned all members in competition with each other based on militancy, aggression, and obedience to their political agenda. I contend that women in particular experienced this competition as a substitute for competition based on ideals of femininity.

Criticism-self-criticism sessions were used to stunt outspoken or charismatic women within the organization. Susan Stern, a charismatic personality in her Seattle collective, underwent many criticism sessions, one particularly harsh lead by Mark Rudd when several of the collective's members praised her for her abilities as an organizer, speaker, and fighter. Stern would suffer through the group's vengeance for five hours as she was charged by the collective as being "individualistic, egotistical, self-centered, power-hungry, manipulative, monogamous, dope-crazed, sexually perverted, dishonest, counter-revolutionary and arrogant."¹⁸⁵ Women were expected to play contradictory roles. On one hand, women were judged by their militancy, willingness to take risk, and machismo attitude; on the other hand, women were punished through criticism sessions for performing this standard of behavior when leadership sensed that their control and power was threatened. Men were subjected to criticism-self-criticism as well; however,

¹⁸⁵ Stern, 174.

there are no referenced instances of men being selected as targets for criticism-self-criticism on the basis of charisma, popularity, or growing influence within their collectives.

The WUO's contradictory standards for women situated women's liberation within rigid and narrow boundaries. Their strict definition of "revolutionary" as macho and tough emphasized women's weaknesses rather than strengths¹⁸⁶ and maintained an internal culture contradictory to the group's pronounced intent. The organization's rigid authoritarianism in general undermined the empowerment experienced by women through all-women actions.

"Smash Monogamy": Sex in the Weatherman/Underground

The women in the WUO advocated anti-monogamy as a strategy for women's liberation. Non-monogamous practice did not originate, nor was unique to the WUO; anti-monogamy positions were advocated by some radical feminist and socialist feminist groups. For the WUO, monogamy was perceived as a manifestation of bourgeois lifestyle in which men dominate women. Furthermore, monogamy constituted the basis of male supremacy.¹⁸⁷ Collectively, they asserted that:

Men believe that we are stupid, inferior to them, and that the only way they can be strong is to dominate and possess a woman. Their strength comes from making and keeping us weak – by defining what we should look like, how we should act, and what we should think and feel. We are made into half-people, dependent and passive by definition. We let one man define our lives for us in monogamous relationships that chain us to

¹⁸⁶ In Dan Berger's work, he describes Naomi Jaffe's experience in Weatherman. She stated that her own strengths were not appreciated and recounts her exclusion from a study group on Marx's *Capital* although she had been the only member to have previously read the book, 292.

¹⁸⁷ Ayers, "A Strategy to Win."

the limits he sets and reinforce our passivity, isolation from reality, and free of fighting for our freedom...Imperialist Amerika [sic] teaches its children that this is love, and that this is how we must live.”¹⁸⁸

Non-monogamy as a solution to this relationship of domination was developed by women in the organization. The “Smash Monogamy” campaign sought to eliminate monogamy within the collective because it cultivated women’s oppression. Through the practice of non-monogamy women could develop into independent people and thus, revolutionaries.

Weatherman asserted that new relationships must be established:

The basis of all relationships – men and women both – must be the war we are making against the state. That is the reason our old imperialist values must break down – so that we can become better revolutionaries, better able to make war and destroy the pig. That is the reason monogamous relationships must be broken up – so that the people involved, but especially the women, can become whole people, self-reliant and independent, able to carry out whatever is necessary for the revolution.¹⁸⁹

“Smash monogamy” served two purposes in Weatherman: one, as a means to develop women into revolutionary fighters and two, to discourage emotional attachments between individual members and establish that “each individual’s primary loyalty was to the organization.”¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, emotional bonds between members would limit their willingness to take risks. In their view, “smash monogamy” was a political program to make individuals accountable to the collective and rid them of “bourgeois hang-ups.”¹⁹¹

Men in the organization supported and embraced the anti-monogamy program. By ending monogamous relationships women became accountable for their own liberation and revolutionary development. According to Bill Ayers in “A Strategy To Win”

¹⁸⁸ “Honky Tonk Women.”

¹⁸⁹ “Honky Tonk Women.”

¹⁹⁰ Personal Correspondence with David Gilbert, September 14, 2008.

¹⁹¹ Ayers, “A Strategy to Win.”

resistance to the prohibition of monogamy “comes from men who are involved in a classical pattern of male chauvinism, of finding a woman who they can control, trying to teach that person, build that person up, take credit for building them up, begin feeling a lot of contempt for them, a lot of competition with them, and maintaining that relationship to maintain their dominance.”¹⁹² Stated as a critique of traditional masculinity, this perspective of women’s development assumes men dominate only in interpersonal relationships and furthermore, absolves men of acknowledgment of male privilege. The organization justified its anti-monogamy program because “in practice, when people are operating in collectives and those relationships break down, the women begin to get strong, begin to assert themselves, begin to come out as leaders – not as political people who work through another individual.”¹⁹³

Women’s capability to be militant was attributed to the independence experienced by non-monogamy. The “Motor City 9” women were praised for understanding the necessity of breaking down monogamous relationships. The WUO viewed their success as revolutionaries were due to this understanding, Ayers states: “they got through it and understood the need to take the initiative in changing those relationships, and they did.”¹⁹⁴ Again, Ayers perspective on monogamy allows potential for a critique of traditional men but his emphasis on women initiating the process demonstrates the responsibility of women within Weatherman to deal with male chauvinism to a degree in which they were solely accountable. At the Days of Rage National Action during a criticism session “the male chauvinist women” were criticized by men for their bourgeois

¹⁹² Ayers, “A Strategy to Win.”

¹⁹³ Ayers, “A Strategy to Win.”

¹⁹⁴ Ayers, “A Strategy to Win.”

monogamous relationships and how they hold back both men and women, in the fighting situation as well as in general political development.”¹⁹⁵

Women in the WUO envisioned the practice of non-monogamy as the development of egalitarian relationships between men and women. In addition, same-sex experimentation amongst women was perceived as practice at sexual equality with men.

An anonymous woman states:

Women sleeping with other women, developing full sexual and political relationships with each other, indicates that we are beginning to really destroy the bourgeois values we have believed in for such a long time, and apply revolutionary values to every facet of our lives. As we break down these pig attitudes toward each other, and being to discover what revolutionary love is, we learn how to build satisfying relationships with men too.¹⁹⁶

Ironically, same-sex activity between women was perceived to be a way for women to grapple with viewing themselves as sexual objects. This activity was implemented to promote casual sex as a revolutionary act. The women in the organization believed “smash monogamy” practice to be “most liberating.”¹⁹⁷

The extent to which this practice challenged heterosexuality in the group is unknown primarily due to inconsistency. Some sources suggest that both women and men were encouraged to engage in same-sex activity and that the sexual experimentation of the group allowed gays and lesbians comfortable participation in the group.¹⁹⁸

However, others suggest that the WUO’s anti-monogamy practice was specifically aimed at women. According to Dan Berger, men were often criticized for not having sex with

¹⁹⁵ Shin’ya Ono, “A Weatherman: You Do Need A Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows,” *Leviathan*, December 1969.

¹⁹⁶ “Honky Tonk Women.”

¹⁹⁷ “Honky Tonk Women.”

¹⁹⁸ Personal Correspondence with David Gilbert, September 14, 2008.

all the available women in the organization.¹⁹⁹ For women, engagement in same-sex activity was perceived to be a method of liberation. However, this system also forced women to prove their rejection of bourgeois monogamy (perceived as one man and one woman) in order to develop into egalitarian, heterosexual relationships.

Sexual experimentation within the WUO fit into a broader cultural context of a larger movement for sexual freedoms and elimination of sexual repression (although with different intent) but not unlike the sexual liberation movement, the WUO reinforced sexual stereotypes that exploited women. According to David Gilbert, anti-monogamy “dovetailed with the broader trend of free love” and furthermore “given the inadequate struggle against sexism, the main function of free love was to make women more sexually available to men.”²⁰⁰ I contend that Weatherman’s alternative sexual system represented androcentric motivations on behalf of women and men.

Weatherman’s anti-monogamy practice implicitly and at times, explicitly exploited women in the organization. The anti-monogamy program was implemented through criticism-self-criticism of monogamous couples, rotation of sexual partners, group sex or “Wargasms,” and casual sex to prove political allegiance to the collective.²⁰¹ Although no consistent implementation was established, each collective operated on its own and with the direction of the central committee, individuals showing obedience and militant anti-monogamy were sent to other locations to “discipline” collectives by conducting criticism-self-criticism sessions to break down monogamous relationships. Members were expected to rotate partners, and according to historian Jeremy Varon,

¹⁹⁹ Berger, 105. In reference to Weatherman Michael Novick a homosexual seeking support to “come out”.

²⁰⁰ Personal Correspondence with David Gilbert, September 14, 2008.

²⁰¹ Personal Correspondence with David Gilbert, September 14, 2008.

“some male leaders essentially shuttled particular women between collectives in order to sleep with them.”²⁰² Weatherman connected monogamy with imperialist values and therefore, set forth severe methods to ensure monogamous relationships were stifled. For men, the non-monogamy practice did not require them to be sexually accessible. Hence, the practice reinforced sexism in its execution. It required women to prove themselves worthy as revolutionaries through sex and accessibility. For women, the anti-monogamy program positioned female bodies as battlegrounds to prove loyalty to the collective.

Women were coerced into sex by and with male leaders with the promise of reward. Susan Stern’s collective in Seattle received a visit from Weather leader Mark Rudd, who disappeared with one woman upon arrival, Mark Rudd entered into the shared room of Stern and another woman and coerced the female member to have sex with him. According to Susan Stern, she heard the muffled sobs of her roommate met with Weatherman propaganda regarding commitment to the collective: “You have to put the demand of your collective above your love. Nothing comes before the collective...” As she pleaded with him (according to Susan Stern this plea included the word “No”) Rudd promised her “command of the collective.”²⁰³ Susan Stern notes:

It was interesting to note whom Rudd, and J.J. when he came, slept with, because it was all part of positioning for power. Both Rudd and J.J. slept with both Carol and Georgia, for they were the chosen Bureau Leadership. They slept first with one and then with the other. They traded them off, putting them in competition for Bureau approval, and for position as primary leadership.²⁰⁴

²⁰² Varon, 58.

²⁰³ Stern, 176.

²⁰⁴ Stern, 198.

Sex in Weatherman was manipulative. The anti-monogamy program created opportunity for women to be sexually exploited; it restricted women's control of their bodies. Sex, coerced or consented, solidified their obedience to male leadership and earned women leadership positions in their collectives.

The alternative sexual practices of the WUO at times occurred in order to prove political solidarity to the collective. After forming a romantic relationship with leader Terry Robbins, Cathy Wilkerson moved to his New York Collective. Her arrival at the New York collective was commemorated by sex with another woman, she recounts: "After a brief time with the whole group, Terry informed us that I and the other woman, Martine, needed to get to know each other, and they would leave us alone for a couple of hours...I began to realize that we were expected to have sex as a way of forging our ultimate loyalty to each other and to the group."²⁰⁵ Wilkerson claims that this was less intimidating than the group sex which she rationalized: "I knew that combat groups that depended on each other for their survival regularly ritualized their intimacy to recognize and seal their mutual dependence."²⁰⁶ Wilkerson's narration of the act itself implies the disempowerment of this practice for women:

We blundered through the physical act itself, confused that the stimulation of risk-taking did not genuinely transfer to sex. Inevitably, there was no sense of discovery, or power. Quite the opposite...When the others returned we both put on those protective masks that we had learned to use so well in previous months, insisting that we were the best of comrades....The fact that I have only a vague memory of the encounter is testament to its emotionally numbing impact.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Wilkerson, 328.

²⁰⁶ Wilkerson, 329

²⁰⁷ Wilkerson, 329.

Wilkerson's account of this activity demonstrates the failure of the WUO's sexual practices to empower, much less, liberate women.

Michel Foucault asserts that power is "force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization."²⁰⁸ Sex and sexuality, according to Foucault, are sites of power relations.²⁰⁹ The "deployment of sexuality operates according to...contingent techniques of power" and engenders continual extension of areas and forms of control.²¹⁰ The WUO's use of sex and sexuality as political control of women exemplifies unequal power relations. These practices resemble a paradox; they were unable to provide liberatory potential for women and more generally, were enforced upon all members and reduced all activity to "an effect of obedience."²¹¹ As Foucault theorizes: "where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power."²¹² Power relations are implicit in sex and sexuality; the use of alternative sexual practices to challenge existing power dynamics between men and women further continued to manifest dominant cultural constructs and values. Feminist theorist Catherine MacKinnon asserts a feminist theory of sexuality in which sexuality "is a pervasive dimension throughout the whole of social life, a dimension along which gender pervasively occurs and through which gender is constituted."²¹³ MacKinnon argues that gender identity is fused with sexuality which "equals the sexuality of (male) dominance

²⁰⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* Vol. 1 (New York, Vintage Books, 1990) 92.

²⁰⁹ Foucault, 103.

²¹⁰ Foucault, 106

²¹¹ Foucault, 85.

²¹² Foucault, 95.

²¹³ Catherine MacKinnon, "Sexuality" in *Feminist Theory: A Reader* Ed. Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005) 477.

and (female) submission.”²¹⁴ She poses the question to Foucault: of what is sexuality socially constructed? And further asserts that power, meaning power imbedded in gender, constitutes sexuality.²¹⁵ In this view, gender as a hegemonic power comprises sexuality, and thus, the alternative sexual practices of the WUO, whether heterosexual or same-sex activities as practice for egalitarian heterosexual relationships, did not have liberatory potential because sex and sexuality continued to be culturally defined by power relations prescribed to particular bodies.

The smash monogamy campaign, developed as a strategy for women’s liberation, was implemented in the crudest of ways. All aspects of the anti-monogamy program were reinforced through criticism-self-criticism and punishable by the collective’s members - all competing for the Weather Bureau’s recognition and reward. The anti-monogamy campaign reinforced women as sexual conquests accessible to male members and did not liberate women from domination in heterosexual relationships. Weatherman’s analysis of women’s oppression and their method for women’s liberation was narrowly defined; consequently, their practice greatly undermined the potential for women’s liberation that their methods may have offered.

Hegemony and the Liberatory Potential of Masculinity

Women’s performance of masculinity not does grant power or equality to female-bodied people. The inability of women to gain equal status with men by assuming masculinity is indicative of the hegemonic power of masculinity which grants status to

²¹⁴ MacKinnon, 478.

²¹⁵ Mackinnon, 478.

particular male-bodied identities. Furthermore, political strategies for women's liberation that validate masculinity are products of this hegemony. Gramsci posits that a cultural hegemony functions to some extent with consent. This notion of consent is ambiguous; it is a contradictory relationship between one's thoughts and one's actions:

Two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his [or her] activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed. But this verbal conception is not without consequences. It holds together a specific social group, it influences moral conduct and the direction of will, with varying efficacy but often powerfully enough to produce a situation in which the contradictory state of consciousness does not permit of any action, any decision or any choice, and produce as a condition of moral and political passivity.²¹⁶

A contradictory consciousness, and its relationship to Gramscian consent, explains the meaning of women's participation in Weatherman. Their inadequate analysis or practice for women's liberation challenged and reinforced a hegemonic gender system which implies women's oppression. The embrace of violence and machismo maintained masculinity as *the* legitimating performance.

Performing masculinity was a mandatory political expression and in particular, a response to women's oppression. Uncritical of male privilege, they absorbed gender discourse and therefore, their politics and practices reinforced women's subordinate status *as* women. Visible in autonomous women's actions women were valued on the basis of aggression. Autonomous women's actions allowed women to assume leadership roles and experience empowerment; however, these actions demonstrate a necessity for

²¹⁶ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* ed. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York, 1971) 326-327, 333 quoted in Jackson Lears, 569.

women to prove themselves as capable. In addition, the “Smash Monogamy” campaign intended to challenge male-dominated heterosexual relationships served to reinforce women’s sexual accessibility to men and more generally, created manipulative sexual situations. Both strategies for women’s liberation are products of hegemonic masculinity and represent simultaneous resistance to and reconstruction of dominant gender ideology.

Although the women in the WUO subverted traditional femininity prescribed to their female bodies, attempts to liberate themselves through masculinity proved to be an ineffective strategy for women’s liberation. Weatherman’s programs for women’s liberation, separate women’s actions and “smash monogamy,” served to reinforce traditional expectations of women in exploitative ways. Ultimately, the WUO failed to provide a politic and program for women’s liberation and demonstrate a socialist practice wherein women are equal.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis explores the WUO's politic of women's liberation and the unique meaning of women's participation in revolutionary violence. In chapter one, I provide the current historiography on the WUO, feminist approaches to politically violent women, and the importance of examining women in the WUO through the lens of gender theory. I argue that the historical works which have explored the WUO have neglected to include their political position on women's liberation and the strategies in result of this position. Furthermore, I contend that feminist scholars have neglected research on violent women in order to evade acknowledging that women can potentially be agents of violence, although these women are a testament to the fluidity of gender and the discursive power of the gender system.

In chapter two, I focus on Weatherman's emergence from the Students for a Democratic Society. I explain the influence of theories of guerilla warfare on Weatherman's political practice. Inspired by Guevara, Marx, and Lenin, Weatherman created a revolutionary identity and sought to create revolutionary conditions within the United States. The absence of theory and analysis was not a deterrent for SDS; they believed exemplary actions executed by *foco* groups would inspire the masses to armed struggle for revolution (although they failed as a group to incite such mass uprising). Exemplary actions included violent acts of aggression against state institutions, and in

particular, the display of masculinity and macho posturing. Violence was perceived as a legitimate political strategy against U.S. imperialism and subsequently, for women's liberation.

In chapter three, I articulate Weatherman's position on women's oppression and liberation and compare it to the women's liberation movement more generally. I argue that women's oppression was situated within a broader framework that identified U.S. imperialism as the root of all oppression. Women in the WUO posited that their oppression as women was a result of bourgeois family roles and cultural definition of woman as passive, sexual objects. Although similar to the critiques presented by the women's liberation movement, women in the Weatherman posited a different solution. They asserted that masculinity was a liberatory practice for women. I apply gender performance theories to acknowledge that women's participation in violence is an instance of gender subversion. However, I apply Raewyn Connell and Antonio Gramsci to argue that gender is a cultural hegemony wherein female-bodied people are not awarded power through representations of masculinity. Thereby, women can perform masculinity. However, hegemony operates because people consent. Women therefore can create a subordinate masculinity but women are not awarded power or privilege available via hegemonic masculinity.

In chapter four, I examine Weatherman's practice of women's liberation. They executed women-only actions to provide women with the opportunity to prove their aggression and build solidarity with other women. However, the mere necessity for women to prove themselves is indicative of women's gender difference within the

organization. In addition, I examine Weatherman's sexual practices. The "Smash Monogamy" campaign was intended as a means for women's liberation from their subordinate position in heterosexual relationships. Supported by men in the organization, their non-monogamy practice was intended to allow women to develop into revolutionary fighters, responsible to the collective and accountable for their own liberation. Gender difference manifested in the exploitative ways these practices were implemented. I apply the Gramscian notion of contradictory consciousness and consent to argue that women's participation in Weatherman was shaped by hegemonic masculinity. Their politics and practices challenged and reconstructed dominant gender ideology in which women's subordination is inevitable.

The historiography on the Weather Underground has neglected to assert analyses of women's involvement with the organization. Historian Dan Berger has posited that women's involvement forced the organization to deal with feminism; and in similarity to his claim, Ron Jacobs has asserted that the organization dissolved due to the organizations inability to adequately deal with feminism. My research has demonstrated that the Weather Underground did have a position on women's liberation and furthermore, that women within the organization participated in the creation and practice of the group's politics. Therefore, it is a misrepresentation of the organization in general and women in the organization in particular, for Jacobs and Berger to make these claims regarding feminism and the women's liberation movement. The Weather Underground did maintain a faulty perception of women's liberation due to their inability to recognize and address the issue of male privilege. The women in the organization maintained a

political position and practice that reinforced masculinity as the legitimate personhood and thereby, recreated constructs that subordinate women. The group did not disband due to internal conflict regarding women's position in the organization. More specifically and accurately, the organization failed to be a viable political entity due to their emphasis on masculinity and machismo. The politics and practice put forth and implemented by the organization mandated extremity and abuse; intertwined with these manifestations was gender ideology. The organization attempted to use their entitlement to work against race and class privilege, however, utilizing violence and aggression assumes an authority awarded by positions of entitlement and women's use of masculinity reinstates entitlement awarded to male-bodied people by hegemonic masculinity. The adoption of masculinity by the Weather Underground implicates the necessity of the application of gender theory in combination with historical research. Without such considerations the organization is grossly misrepresented.

Feminist scholarship has neglected women's activism on the Left from the history of feminist movements and feminist thought. The women in the WUO developed a politics of women's liberation that fit within their analysis of U.S. imperialism. They asserted women's oppression and privilege was relative to issues of race and class in American culture. Currently, feminist theory and women's studies curriculum has established the importance of intersectionality, multiple intersecting systems of oppression and marginalization, and positioned explorations of women's reality within these intersections. It is detrimental to feminist scholarship, theory, and practice to ignore

Leftist women that have attempted to address, however insufficient or lacking, these issues.

Leftist women of the Sixties, existing in a historically contingent space, are associated with the militancy and violence of the “male” Left. I contend that as a result of historical factionalism between the New Left and the women’s liberation movement the activism of these women has been attributed to “male” violence and consciousness, for example, the work of Robin Morgan. Feminist scholars have not utilized the rich territory presented by these women’s politics and practice in an unfortunate adherence to essentialist frameworks that reject women’s agency in political violence. The women in the WUO’s politics and practices were shaped by hegemonic masculinity which impaired potential for women’s liberation but these politics were their own. Although feminists may not appreciate their existence, they were undeniably an aberration, a gender subversion, which demonstrates gender as socially constructed and historically and culturally contingent. Research in the area of gender and armed struggle in general would serve feminist scholars as fertile ground concerning issues of resistance to and acceptance of dominant ideologies.

Feminist scholarship needs to expand the boundaries and definitions of “feminism” and “feminist activism” to include all women that have fought for social change. The contemporary feminist movement is broad and expanding; the development of coalitions is challenging, however, we cannot hope for social change, revolution, or liberation without space for plurality. Explorations of women at these intersections, outside the historically imposed boundaries of feminism, their successes and failures,

contain pertinent knowledge of political theory and practice and the space in which these meet. Particularly concerning feminist theory, these theoretical spaces would cultivate fresh ideas detached from linear frameworks of patriarchy and male domination.

Furthermore, I contend that further feminist study of women's political violence, particularly the Weather Underground, will broaden bodies of scholarship that emphasizes the social construction of gender and the affects of gender as a social system on women's experiences and reality. For gender theory, this opens a vast arena of possibilities. Commonly, gender theorists have made examples of trans-identities or lesbian and gay subcultures to demonstrate gender as a performance. I contend that examinations of gender subversion that focus on a variety of identifications would benefit the field of gender studies. The theorization of gender as a cultural hegemony and therein, the manifestation of gender ideology in political and performative practice complicates notions of resistance and internalization, however, provides a realm in which to discuss power negotiations and the implied meaning of such negotiations. Weatherman's embrace of masculinity and violence represented an ideological manifestation in political practice. Furthermore, their extreme commitment to transcending the gap between theory and practice make them a fascinating subject for studies on the schisms between one's political intent and the effects of one's actions.

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