

## Sally Miller Gearhart

# The Future—If There Is One— Is Female

*Given the perspective that nothing could be more extreme than the total destruction of our precious planet and all the life on it—a prospect which has crept into our psyches with little more than a shrug and a sigh—the proposal that the affairs of the world be placed in the hands of non-patriarchally aligned women really isn't as extreme as it might at first seem.*

*Most feminist activists accurately identify oppressive institutions and make demands for change or even call for revolution. We tend, however, to shy away from answering how we actually could bring into being an environment so changed that rape, slavery and the specter of nuclear annihilation would become mere nightmares of the past. In what is probably the most radical and concrete strategy for earthly survival presented in this anthology, Sally Gearhart provides careful, step-by-step justification for her three-part proposal: I. Every culture must begin to affirm a female future. II. Species responsibility must be returned to women in every culture. III. The proportion of men must be reduced to and maintained at approximately 10% of the human race. "I believe we are at a great watershed in history," she writes here, "and that we hold in our hands a fragile thread, no more than that, that can lead us to our survival. I understand the rising up of women in this century to be the human race's response to the threat of its own self-annihilation and the destruction of the planet."*

*Sally is careful not to say that men are innately destructive or women innately nurturing. Indeed, she says there is no way to prove such a claim. She asks us to look, instead, at the weight of history, its centuries of male rule accompanied by the growing power and likelihood of total earthly destruction. It is this history/tradition/pattern which must be broken, a pattern intimately tied to patriarchal control.*

*Though Sally's proposal is unique, others have suggested similar plans. According to the book *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods and Cities* by Delores Hayden, (MIT Press, 1981), a feminist activist Lois Waisbrooker proposed a plan in 1893 similar in intent to the one Sally proposes here—almost one hundred years later! In Waisbrooker's novel, *A Sex Revolution*, men agree, reluctantly and under pressure, to change roles with women for fifty years as a social experiment. The women's concern in that book is to end all war.*

*Barbara Stanford's anthology, *On Being Female* (Pocket Books,*

1974), contains a reprint of a 1971 Chicago Daily News item, "Let Women Rule the World, Asks Scientist." It quotes a Dr. Peter A. Corning of the U. of Colorado as saying, "In an age when the masculine virtues are becoming less adaptive for our survival, government by women might actually prove to be superior adaptation in evolutionary terms."

New French Feminisms, an anthology edited by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (U. of Mass. Press, 1980), includes segments from Françoise d'Eaubonne's essay, "Le féminisme ou la mort" (Feminism or death): "Thus a transfer of power is urgently needed, then, as soon as possible, a destruction of power. The transfer must be made from phallocratic man, responsible for this sexist civilization, into the hands of the awakened women." And elsewhere in that volume, "Therefore, with a society at last in the feminine gender meaning non-power (and not power-to-the-women), it would be proved that no other human group could have brought about the ecological revolution because none other was so directly concerned at all levels. . . And the planet in the feminine gender would become green again for all."

There is something in d'Eaubonne's essay which seems to be missing in Sally's proposal as it currently stands, and that is the sense that this transfer of power would be a temporary measure, a step toward the ultimate hope that, as d'Eaubonne writes, "the male would once again become the expression of life and no longer the elaboration of death; and human beings would finally be treated first as persons, and not above all else as male or female." Sally, on the other hand, proposes that the proportion of men be reduced to and maintained at approximately 10% of the human race, though, she says, this must be done by increasing the birth of females and not by any loss of lives. Still, it is the word "maintained" that disturbs even those of us otherwise intrigued by her proposal, for it seems unnecessary that this drastic measure become a part of a new order, but rather that it could conceivably accomplish its purpose in a couple generations—could break the chains of patriarchal tradition, erase from our collective memory the lies about male supremacy, interrupt the habit of female victimization and servitude, and, this done, could give us a chance to start over, refreshed, unburdened by the accumulation of past madness. Sally's essay, in all its intensity, is welcomed to this anthology in the spirit of dialogue (despite its unresolved complications) as we collectively struggle to come to terms with the death culture and our hope for salvation.

Sally, a long time lesbian-feminist activist, is perhaps best known as the author of what has been called "the new underground classic" *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* (Persephone Press, 1978, highly recommended—see the annotated bibliography at the end of this anthology) and co-author of *A Feminist Tarot* (Persephone Press, 1981). She is also chairperson of the Department of Speech and Communication at San Francisco State University, a member of a beauty shop quartet and is "a double Aries with Virgo rising." She is committed to criticism/self-criticism, anti-racist action and animal

liberation.

Sally writes, "I'm grateful for dialogues with a number of women and for the written words of others: Baba Copper, Jane Gurko, Sarah Hoagland, Pat Labine, Alice Molloy, Julia Penelope, Cynthia Secor and, over the last eight years, the members of the "Seminar in Patriarchal Rhetoric" at San Francisco State University. I'm also grateful to women like Mina Caulfield, Joanna Russ and Barbara Smith who continue to challenge and creatively criticize some of the ideas expressed in this paper."

In a remarkable science fiction work, *Rule Golden*, Damon Knight wipes violence from the face of the earth by having every agent feel in his/her own body any physical blow she/he delivers: kick a dog and feel the boot in your own rib; commit murder and die yourself. Similarly, stroking another in love results in the physical feeling of being lovingly stroked. Doris Lessing, in *Shikasta*, her recent venture into science fiction, lays the destruction of earth to a lack of the "substance of we-feeling." Both Knight and Lessing articulate for me the necessary connection between *empathy* and *nonviolence*; they remind me that *objectification* is the necessary, if not sufficient, component of any violent act. Thinking of myself as separate from another entity makes it possible for me to "do to" that entity things I would not "do to" myself. But if I see all things as myself, or empathize with all other things, then to hurt them is to do damage to me; I will move around this world with lots less pushiness and lots more care; I might adopt a more respectful nurturing attitude toward the world, wishing all things health and longevity.

But empaths don't live long if the Rule Golden is not in effect. Our world belongs to those who can objectify (or who are forced to objectify) and if I want to protect myself from them I learn to objectify and fight back in self-defense. I seem bound to choose between being violent and being victimized. Or I live a schizophrenic existence in which my values are at war with my actions because I must keep a constant shield of protectiveness (objectification) intact over my real self, over my empathy or my identification with others; the longer I keep up the shield the thicker it gets and the less empathic I am with those around me. So every second of protecting myself from violence makes me objectify more and ensures that I am more and more capable of doing violence myself. I am caught always in the violence-victim trap.

But most people, I'm convinced, do not want to rape the earth or exploit each other. While 53% of the U.S. public may expect nuclear war in its lifetime, nobody wants such an event. Violence has reached such monumental proportions that the ordinary citizen of the world feels impotent and increasingly cynical in the face of the immensity and complexity of the issue. A destructive technology is launched by the discoveries of "morally neutral" scientists; a proliferating consumerism urges 6% of the world to waste what 94% of the world starves in order to produce; clean air, clean water, arable land, wilderness, wildlife, forests and lakes—all are becoming "endangered species," as are "safety," "security," "freedom" and "equality." As one scholar has expressed it, our global society is a train on a downhill grade accelerating at an increasingly rapid pace. There is no engineer. And we are laying the track in front of us as we go. We may not be able to stay ahead of ourselves, much less stop the train.

There are three assumptions that I believe have led to the violence-victim trap. The first two assumptions underlie the science and the technology that have sprung from men: 1) *If it is possible then it must be done* and 2) *anything done in the service of mankind is praiseworthy, even necessary*. Human knowledge as we know it these last ten thousand years has been the bringing into reality of that-which-is-possible, including nuclear research, genetic engineering, computerized living; and it has been an exercise in human chauvinism testified to by the death of millions of laboratory animals, dessicated continents and polluted oceans.

While the first two assumptions underlie *knowledge* the third assumption underlies *power* as men have used it over the millennia: 3) *might makes right*, actually the crudest and most honest expression of the other two assumptions and a kind of justification for them. The stronger always has the greater possibility of subduing the weaker (if it's possible it must be done) and the stronger is of course the Crown of Creation who has dominion over all other things (he must be served, even to the destruction of the rest of the planet).

These three assumptions are responsible for the familiar and highly formalized duet between knowledge and power that we now identify as "western civilization." Put another way, malekind has seen the possible, he has consistently done the possible, he has justified his acts as manifestations of his human superiority, and he has made seem natural and right the use of force in human affairs. His assumptions have guaranteed us all of a strong and constantly proliferating civilization built upon

objectification and violation. For me, the exercise of these assumptions on the part of male knowledge and male power is sufficient to indict the male of our species as the source of violence.

In this paper I want to say what I have carefully avoided saying for a long time: that if the world is to move away from the escalating violence that shapes all of our lives, then the affairs of the world, and of the human species specifically, must be placed in the hands of women.

I believe we are at a great watershed in history and that we hold in our hands a fragile thread, no more than that, that can lead us to our survival. I understand the rising up of women in this century to be the human race's response to the threat of its own self-annihilation and the destruction of the planet. In small ways, in big ways, it seems up to the world's women to take back their responsibilities as life-givers and sustainers.

Even after decades of feminist research we do not know for sure about the nature of female and male people—whether or not the male is “naturally” violent, the female “naturally” nurturant—and we are not likely, while sex roles still exist, to ascertain anything in this regard. This paper then, presupposes that the last ten thousand years of global patriarchy have given us a vivid and grim idea of what happens when men are in charge; it further assumes that as a species and as a global village we have nothing to lose and everything to gain by reversing the present power circumstances and returning to women the fundamental responsibility for human affairs.

But to say “return affairs to women” says too little, for the patriarchal system could continue quite well run by patriarchal women. We need the further understanding that the present system will not do, that even matriarchies—class societies that they were—will not do, and that not just any women will do. Enslaved by male-identification and years of practice within the system as we all still are to one degree or another, the assumption must be that the present system of monopoly capitalism and patriarchy must be replaced and that non-male-identified women must be the responsible ones. This calls for both action and education, for both a freeing of women from the strictures of patriarchal law and custom and an education of both women and men in the voluntary and vast changes that must take place. The call for action and education is not new to feminists, but the specific changes that I feel must happen may not be so familiar.

At least three further requirements supplement the strategies

of environmentalists if we are to create and preserve a less violent world. I) *Every culture must begin to affirm a female future.* II) *Species responsibility must be returned to women in every culture.* III) *The proportion of men must be reduced to and maintained at approximately 10% of the human race.*

## I.

What does a "female future" mean? First of all, it means the affirmation in all people of characteristics historically associated with the female, specifically: empathy, nurturance and cooperation. For the present, leave aside the question of whether these qualities accrue to women by nature or by acculturation. Let us just be sure that we do not make the common premature leap that insists upon calling these qualities "human" ones. To grant them to all human beings loses the point. Precisely the reason that they have taken a back seat to "male" qualities (objectification, violence, competitiveness) has to do with the fact that they are considered "soft," "weak," or "womanlike." When, in western culture, men are empathic or nurturing or cooperative, they are simultaneously branded as "feminine" or "like women" and they lose power accordingly. However loudly they're preached, from Christian pulpits or from the pages of *The Reader's Digest*, these are not the qualities or the values that govern western civilization. They are characteristics associated with the female of the human species. To act upon them is automatically to lose, to be less than a man. They are regularly set aside when the realities of life call for toughness, heroism, patriotism, *i.e.*, objectification, violence, competitiveness.

Some feminists object on strategic grounds to the labeling of these characteristics as "female" qualities. By touting women as less violent, less competitive, less objectifying than men we give support to the antifeminist notion, best articulated in the nineteenth century, that women are too pure for politics, that they are by nature different from men and thus must be limited to their domestic domain. But if by believing that women are by nature less violent we reinforce the sex roles that have held women down for so long, then perhaps it is time to dare to admit that some of the sex-role mythology is in fact true and to insist that the qualities attributed to women (specifically empathy, nurturance and cooperativeness) be affirmed as human qualities capable of cultivation by men even if denied them by nature. That kind of flipping of the coin can only be beneficial, *i.e.*, to insist that men become nurturing and empathic just as

patriarchy has insisted for so long that women who enter its hierarchy become violent and competitive. In a system that has deforested, stripmined and dessicated the earth to the point where population far exceeds the carrying capacity of the land, where nuclear stockpiles are sufficient to destroy the earth forty or fifty times over, an affirmation of such "softer" qualities or such flipping of the coin seems long overdue.

Besides affirming female values, a female future requires that the whole concept of hierarchy be challenged. Male power figures (and female power figures) would have to descend from the high places and acknowledge the travesty that their empowerment has been. In other words, the vertical system itself, which provides the structure for the violence-victim trap would be replaced by horizontal patterns of relationship. If there were in such a revamped system any "supreme power," that power would be understood to be the tangible material earth herself and her biosphere, and any reverence for her would take the form of respect and deliberate care rather than fear and obedience. For that is the point, after all. The earth is ourselves; she is not "out there" giving orders or being worshipped. And the only divinity to be discerned about her has to do with our recognition of the energy we share with her and with others. The earth would not be conquered, tamed, raped in the service of greed; she would rather be related to and cared for in the service of all who live together with her.

Most important a female future means that femaleness itself, being female, would be understood everywhere to be positive, joyful: women would affirm themselves and other women; women would be affirmed by men and by children—much as males are affirmed in our present society. More important, the female would be acknowledged as primary, as the source of all life. The female encompasses the male, can exist without the male, can in a number of species, perhaps including the human one, reproduce without the male. The universal acknowledgement of these capacities is the *sine qua non* of a female-based society. The present unspoken acknowledgement of these female capabilities has been the motivation for patriarchy's desperate widespread and violent dedication to female slavery.

Let us be clear here. The primacy of the female does not mean that men would crawl away and expire. It is, or would be, when all the manufactured evidence to the contrary is swept away, simply a fact of existence that has no better or worse value put upon it. I realize how these words sound, how time after time in human history such words have been used in condescension or

benevolent despotism to assert the superiority of one (usually ethnic) group above the other. I'm aware of the dangers of biological determinism and fear it in precisely the ways that each of us should. And yet, here on the level of human sexuality, I am at last forced to say that I believe the differences to be those of primacy and differentiation, *i.e.*, the most fundamental difference between members of the human race. Precisely because the difference is so fundamental, there is no analogy available to demonstrate how the acknowledgement of female primacy would be qualitatively different from a fascist demand that people of color acknowledge the primacy of caucasians; I fall back again on what ultimately seems to be the truth to me, that female primacy is the fact, the truth, as acknowledgeable by men as by women, while any higher valuing on the basis of race or ethnic background is simply—and obviously—absurd. Further, my belief is that the very nature of the female would preclude her use of the kind of hierarchical power displays that accompany the usual use of biology as a social weapon, both by whites who hold down people of color and by men who hold down women.

Since there is no existing comparison to a world in which femaleness is accorded its proper place in human affairs, the best we can do is to imagine a hypothetical society in which half the population lives twice as long as the other half, say a hundred years and fifty years. That difference between them, recognized at birth, is a fundamental and immutable one that shapes the self-image and social spirit of every person in the community. The portion of the population destined to live longer has an investment in a long-range view and in the overall good of the group. It does not seem far-fetched or unjust to me that the monitoring of the community's survival should fall to the longer-lived people. Nor does it seem incomprehensible to me that the shorter-lived group could acknowledge that reality of existence without hostility. The very fact of having double the number of years to live significantly alters the manner in which the longer-lived group looks at life and its relationship to the environment.

Women, who by their physical nature, bear a different relationship to children than do men and who, I believe, feel more connected and empathic with the environment than men have demonstrated that they do, see life and the role of the human species through experiences and sensitivities that men can possess only second-hand. Historically, they have not objectified quite as readily, and they have exhibited a more group-oriented



and less violent attitude toward human beings and the world in which we live than men have done. I would expect then that, in view of this evidence, men are capable without defensiveness of acknowledging the female nature of the species and the male's role as subsidiary.

Perhaps I am wrong. Perhaps there is no way to avoid the hostility that men would harbor if they "had to" acknowledge the female as primary. Perhaps the best thing to do here is to admit, then, that the coin must be flipped, that the flipping *is* merely an exchange of power, and that women would have to hold men in check by myths, ideologies and education. In fact I don't believe that myths and ideologies would have to be constructed; the truth of female primacy, once it is reestablished, is sufficient unto itself and would make such constructions unnecessary. And the "exchange" seems more a *restoration* of the natural order of environmental processes. But if we must use such language at the outset, I'm ready to say—for the first time in my feminist life—that we should begin thinking of flipping the coin, of making the exchange of power, of building the ideology of female primacy and control. Simple justice suggests that if men have been in power for so many thousands of years and have botched so badly the job of human and environmental health, it is time to give the other alternative a chance.

The most formidable objection to the notion of female primacy points to the women who have gained power in the male system, those who turn out to be cruel, ruthless, or violent or who at least seem to espouse the very destructive values that women, according to this proposal, are supposed to transcend. (The woman governor of Washington campaigns for nuclear plants, the prime minister of England wants to move away from collective power, Phyllis Schlafly opposes abortion, and the woman mayor of my own city vetoes rent controls.) Would the female of the species, if given the chance, repeat the violence of the patriarchy? I argue no, for it seems to me that the system itself guarantees that anyone remaining within it will be affected by its corruption. If we would see how women really manage power and government, then let them demonstrate their abilities in a system that they themselves create out of their own values. There has never been an antipatriarchal woman in power since the beginning of male domination, but only women who are puppets of men behind the scenes, or women who are the pawns of male business interests.

To say that if women had the opportunity for such power they

would use it as men have done, is to assume that men gained patriarchal control by mere luck or chance. The very fact that women were subdued might testify to their reluctance to use violence even in the face of gradually rising male control. Women are certainly capable of taking up arms, of protecting themselves and their offspring, of training themselves in war or politics just as men have done. But women do not, in my experience, *choose* to become violent, particularly on the large scale that men seem so to choose. To say that women would abuse the power as men have done is to refuse the risk of flipping the coin despite the message of history that women would use that power less violently.

One final objection: there is a contradiction inherent in the idea of bringing about a global "female future," for though some women in the United States and Europe may be articulating the need for such a goal, the majority of the world's women inhabit very different realities. How then, without the same kind of cultural invasion we have witnessed for centuries, can we expect that women of all cultures can respond to the hope of a female future? Who will "go in" to the appropriate African and Arab countries and "stop" the genital mutilation? What right does western culture, even the women of western culture, have to question *pardah*, *suttee*, female infanticide? Even the righteous rage and empathy we have for women does not justify the imposition of our standards on other cultures.

Several things occur to me in this regard. First of all, we sell short the women of other nations to assume that they are unaware of their status as women. With the intensification of economic realities, there are enough rumblings in countries other than European-based ones to suggest that women do know their power and do not need liberation by any outside force. Second of all, consciousness cannot be halted by border patrols, and even consumerism and advanced technology may turn out to be aids in our learning about the lives of most of the world's women, in their learning about the benefits and the strictures of the lives of westernized women. If it is true that women universally have some fundamental sensitivity to the land and air and water and energy with which they live, and if it is true that there is some connection between the critical point that the earth is now reaching in terms of resources and women's awareness of that, then the tide of women's rage may well rise up in response to those conditions. We may talk here in our English words of a female future, but it may well be the women of other nations who ultimately lead us in the most significant steps toward that

future. Finally, nature seems to be giving us unmistakable signals that human beings must begin to think of ourselves not as nations or as employees with loyalties to this or that multinational corporation but as a single entity in relation to its environment. More than at any other time in history "loyalty" is going to have to be a term applied to the species as a whole—and again, perhaps "loyalty" is not the term at all: perhaps "empathy" is. Communication among "nations" of non-patriarchal women offers the natural, most effective, and most revolutionary avenue for global unity.

## II

If we would have the world a less violent place *species responsibility must be returned to women in every culture*, that is to say, women must regain their say-so over the proper size and character of the human race. There is no way to achieve that without our traversing some very familiar ground. The whole of feminism in these last two centuries has been concerned with the liberation of women from their role as sexual servants of men; even to approach the place where women's own bodily freedom is a given, we have to raise all the economic and psychological questions of male domination. But once they have control of their own bodies, then women stand in exactly the critical position necessary for their reclaiming of the more essential responsibility, that of monitoring the reproduction of the species. Certainly the fear of that development must be a part of the male-identified forces that oppose women's reproductive rights even today. We are now negotiating at the bedrock level of societal values and with the fundamental precept of the entire women's movement.

To return species responsibility to women means in very practical terms that erotic and reproductive initiative must be restored to women all over the globe. The task is so familiar, we need only remind ourselves of the following specifics. Place entirely in the hands of every woman the decisions about whether or not intercourse will take place, where and with whom and how often it will take place and under what conditions and with what physiological result to her body. Make the decision entirely that of the woman as to how she will be impregnated and how often, if indeed she chooses to be so at all, and whether by heterosexual intercourse, artificial insemination or a form of ovular merging. Restore to each woman the inalienable right to say what shall become of any fertilized egg and to control

absolutely the number of children she wishes to emerge from her body. Begin now to fight against and to dismantle the religious and financial interests that oppose women's bodily freedom. Introduce and uphold globally the disintegration of the very customs themselves that secure women's bodily enslavement. Grant without delay any woman's right to free abortion on her demand, her right to keep any child she wants, her right to safe birth control and to the freedom from forced sterilization, her right to love sexually other women. Guarantee her freedom from rape, from battering, from genital mutilation, from the sexual slavery that keeps the traffic in women a thriving global business. Explode the mythologies that reinforce women's weakness in contrast to the brute strength of individual men or institutionalized male power. Release women from the economic dependency upon men that requires them to say "yes" to a sex act, whether as wife or as prostitute. Make nonexistent any male's say-so in the process of human reproduction. Create and protect alternative structures of economic and psychological support for independent women—women not attached to men—who are child-bearers and child-raisers.

We may be closer than we think to the reality of women's freedom. The very fact that all over the globe in one form or another women are awakening to their oppression suggests that an old Darwinian principle is emerging; the species must adapt or die. No other female has endured as has the human female the assault by males upon her individual person. No other female has endured such usurpation of her natural functions. No other female has been forced by her male counterpart to endanger not only her own species but the life of every other species on the globe. The female, arbiter of life, must take back the power wrested from her: her rightful power to control the size and the quality of life within the human species.

Other mammals do a better job of regulating their species than humans do. If the environment is not fouled (by humans) a number of species maintain themselves without growing beyond their ecological support base. If flocks of ducks can number the same every year whether two of its members die or ten, then the human animal, particularly with our highly touted "intelligence," should be capable of regulating itself. But the human female does not have the freedom of her own reproductive processes, much less control of the species, and the unfortunate result is that the earth suffers with the weight of an overproliferated—and very violent—species called "mankind." A worldwide reduction of human beings to approximately

one-tenth of the present number and maintenance of it at that figure would move our species back to some proportionate and appropriate relationship with the environment.

The patriarchal myth is that it is women who cause overpopulation. The reality is that overpopulation is the direct result of male control of female bodies. Men have imposed on women their "right" to unlimited sexual intercourse. They have protected that "right" and that practice through the careful construction of whole societal institutions: marriage, incest, rape, compulsory heterosexuality, pornography, prostitution, the nuclear family, the church, the law, medicine, and psychiatry to name only the most overt offenders. Men even have us believing that they have a right to our bodies.

Return to women their erotic and reproductive rights and an automatic governor of population will be in effect. Women will bear the number of children they know can be sustained not just by their own social group but by the wide ecological system. They will not bear the children that some man wants only to perpetuate his name or the family possession of his property; they will not bear the children they presently convince themselves they must have because their only role is obedient wife and mother; women will not have the children *men* think are necessary to perpetuate the tribe or the religion or the specific culture. Instead they will bear the children that *they* want, that *they* can care for, and that *they* assess are needed by the specific group and the entire species.

When we consider the efforts of patriarchy to control population we are faced with epics of slavery, genocide and misogyny. For the colonized people of the world, the residents of cultures invaded by educational and later technological models of western civilization, "population control" has meant white men manipulating the reproductive life of less powerful cultures, sometimes encouraging the production of babies (when the labor market needs them, when they can be bought cheap and sold high) and other times conversely holding nondominant groups to a lower density either by forced or uninformative sterilization practices or by birth control propaganda aimed at the destruction of family structures, or by both. The violence done to female bodies when population control is in the hands of men is legendary by now—the pills, the I.U.D.'s, the tubal ligations, the hysterectomies—while vasectomies or male birth control pills go unpublicized or unresearched. The masculine code requires that men control other cultures and, above all, control women. Never are men called upon to reduce their

potency, to take responsibility themselves for a sane human population, particularly when there's a pile of money to be made manipulating human life. It's primarily women who pay the price of men's manipulating.

Imperative then is that population reduction is never done "to" a group but that "we" reduce "our" population, culture by culture, without interference from colonizing influences, monied interests or the exigencies created by cultural invasions. Again, we have to trust the spirits of women in every nation, and the flow of information among us to avoid the mistakes of male history. In every culture it must be women in charge of the changes: woman-identified women, not women who are pawns of men, not women who out of their fear of losing their lives or those of their children, still hold to the securities of that dangerous patriarchal culture, but women utterly free of coercion, free of male influence and committed to the principle that the right of species regulation is their own, and not the prerogative of any man. I suggest that lesbians and other independent women are already moving in this direction.

The objection of men to female bodily freedom and control of the species may well be that they will lose their own rights in the process, the right to have a child, the right to the consequences of their own seed. While that of course is not entirely true, the real argument does stand: except at the will of a woman no man will be able to sire a child, and that constitutes a considerable abridgement of their present power. I have argued precisely the injustice of this and I've talked with men about those deep feelings of wanting a child of "their own." I contrast that desire on their part with the more communally oriented desires on the part of lesbian mothers, for instance, or "single mothers" to share the "possession" of the child, to move toward sets of three, four, five, and seven parents for any child. I contrast the individualized desire for my-child (to inherit my-property, my-name, my-physical-and-psychological-characteristics) with the tendency of lesbian and "single" mothers to form extended families and with the belief that I hold that women move naturally into more communal and cooperative settings than do men.

So in response to that painful outcry of men that they will no longer have the right to have "their" children, I ultimately admit that that is true. Men may have to content themselves with the love and nurturance of the community's children. But if we are taking from men a "right," then let us also remember that it is a right that they have viciously abused. The more fundamental

right must go to the person who has more physical involvement at stake and that is the woman. To risk letting men retain any "right" over children is to risk having them take it all over again.

If we had a world in which women controlled their own bodies and the issue of their bodies, a world in which the most sacred conviction a man possessed was his belief in the necessity for the female's control of her own body, if we had a world in which the value of female freedom and responsibility were the foundation of the culture, then we would have a world vastly different from the violence and greed of the present one. Resistance to the notion of women's bodily freedom makes clear the necessity for a universal change in attitude to a female value system, a female-based future. The re-valuing of the female must occur concurrently with the lifting of the restrictions on her body, for neither can be successful without the support of the other. Essential attitudes for the solution of scores of world problems would flow, I believe, from the change in values and from the female freedom that accompanies that change.

### III

But even if the female body were at last free, and a female future guaranteed, and even if the race began its more proportionate and gentle relationship to its environment, there is still no guarantee that the level of violence, competition, and alienation could be held in check. To secure a world of female values and female freedom we must, I believe, add one more element to the structure of the future: *the ratio of men to women must be radically reduced so that men approximate only ten percent of the total population.* This would have to be done, not by men's traditional methods of war or execution, but without loss of any present human life in the endeavor. Further, it would have to be done within cultures themselves, without outside intervention.

Though women will increasingly demand their rights all over the globe, still it is men who have the power at present and who can act. The likelihood is slim that women could gain the necessary power in time. Men would have to see and understand the necessity for a reduction in their own number. They themselves, the group that would be most affected, would have to take the initial responsibility and be the leaders in education and consciousness. Where men have served the male-bonded Masculine Code they would now see the race as a whole and

move toward the affirmation of a female future and preservation of all of us.

To be sure, by reducing the proportion of males, humans would be in good emulation of other species, very few if any of whom have as high a male population as *homo sapiens* does. But more to the point, the reduction of men is necessary because men resort to violence more quickly and more intensely than do women, both among themselves and toward others—women, animals, the earth. Whether by nature or by nurture, competitive, violent and alienated acts the world over and as far back as recorded history goes seem consistently to be associated with the male of the species, whether in the form of war, rape, gladiatorial games, cock-fighting, or buffalo shooting. That evidence is hard to deny. And beyond history, current sociological studies (such as Paul Erlich's crowding experiments of the late sixties) suggest that individual men are more violent and competitive than women.

But the danger is not individual men, because they can resist the demands of the masculine role and certainly are capable of developing nurturance and empathy. The real danger is in the phenomenon of male-bonding, that commitment of groups of men to each other whether in an army, a gang, a service club, a lodge, a monastic order, a corporation, or a competitive sport. That tightly woven power structure actually defines patriarchal society; it can allow into its ranks at best only tokens from non-dominant groups—*i.e.*, in western culture, people of color and last of all women. A large portion of any male-bonded group's energy and spirit is expended in the exclusion of women and in the derogation of female values and qualities. Women must be the brunt of jokes; their experiences and emotions must be trivialized. Male-bonding's success depends upon that exclusion and that constant derogation. When such bonding escalates with the proportion of available males, the resultant power and power-trips are insurmountable. If men were reduced in number, the threat would not be so great and the placement of species responsibility with the female would be assured.

Some have asked, given the overwhelming association of men with violence, why the reduction to ten percent only? Why have any men at all? I take that question quite seriously. First, I have no desire (and I know few women who do) to do away with men as a group; I cannot bring myself fully to the conviction even in spite of their behavior that men are beyond redemption; the moment I indulge in that conclusion a very gentle and loving man, woman-identified or "sissy"-identified, appears to give



the lie to my generalization. Second, sexual intercourse is the easiest means of reproduction and one that some women prefer; those women must have the freedom to choose it. Finally we need to maintain ten percent males for the simple reason that I may be wrong; we may discover that violence does not disappear with the reduction of males and that for the human species at least the present 47% ratio of males is more nearly appropriate.

We now come to a critical point: how is such a reduction in male population to take place? One option is of course male infanticide. It differs very little from the female infanticide that has apparently been carried out even into the twentieth century by some cultures. Such an alternative is clearly distasteful and would not constitute creative social change.

Cloning, a process that is itself the response of frightened scientists to the female capacity to give life, does not yield a mixed gene pool. But another genetic breakthrough may be an option: ovular merging, the mating of two eggs, seems not only possible now (after Pierre Soupart's 1979 successes with mice at Vanderbilt) but likely. Human females already volunteer for such experimentation. However difficult the technology that must accompany such merging, the possibility of its perfection is significant, for under such circumstances only female children are produced; if women are given the freedom of their bodies then they may well choose that alternative in great enough numbers to make a significant difference in the sex ratio of women to men. A 75% female to 25% male ratio could be achieved in one generation if one-half of a population reproduced heterosexually and one-half by ovular merging.

Such a prospect is attractive to women who feel that if they bear sons no amount of love and care and nonsexist training will save those sons from a culture where male violence is institutionalized and revered. These women are saying, "No more sons. We will not spend twenty years of our lives raising a potential rapist, a potential batterer, a potential Big Man."

It's significant that little or no money is allocated for research on ovular merging. The threat that it poses to the Code of Masculinity, to the male ego and to the male supremacist system is extraordinary, demonstrating in itself the work that is yet to be done in the education of men—and in the education of women who must still identify according to male standards in order to survive. Yet if we are to make the necessary changes then the financial support of research on ovular merging is only part of the picture. We must begin as well to change our attitudes toward women who defy the patriarchal limits on motherhood—

the single mothers, the lesbian mothers, the women raising children in groups of women—for these women are assuming species responsibility, are reproducing without the influence of men and with some awareness of what the needs are of the entire human race.

A growing number of women feel that still another method of securing a male reduction is possible: if reproductive initiative were returned to women and if female values were the values of the society in its everyday operation, then the natural ratio of females to males would be significantly higher. The present 47% male figure is engendered, they believe, by the high value placed upon males in the world-wide patriarchal system. Women presently survive by producing sons; in some places their lives literally depend upon that capacity. If childbearing women were relieved of that pressure and allowed to value females, even to *desire* daughters in far greater numbers than sons, they might well produce a far greater proportion of female children. Though women cannot presently “will” their children’s sex, some believe that if women had the freedom of their bodies that control could be nearly foolproof. It remains to be seen if, with a different adult sexual ratio, such a different natural birth ratio would result.

Even though we can’t know that a female future would save the world, we have nothing to lose from acting *as if* it would. Even though the restoration of her bodily rights to the female might not make the crucial difference, we have nothing to lose and everything to gain by acting *as if* it would. Even though we have not yet discovered the cause of alienation or violence, we have nothing to lose and everything to gain by approaching the problem *as if* it were caused by the overabundance of males within the human species.

When we speak of a female future and its attendant realities of the female’s species responsibility and the reduction of men to 10% of the population, we are not talking about women imposing their morality or their values upon men. We are not talking about any violent act whatsoever. We are not talking about some arbitrary choice of innocent victim, or even, necessarily, the elevation of one group at the expense of another. When we talk of a female future we are talking of something that once existed and that has been deliberately and with full malice held down and controlled by means so violent that no nonaggressive entity could hope to resist. We are talking here about the power of women, felt by every woman at some time in her life, that tremendously rich and life-giving, life-affirming

force that functions for both men and women, for the earth and her creatures as well as for the human species. When we talk about a female future we are talking about a force that has been denied, hidden, trivialized, ridiculed and suppressed. That's where the violence lies—in the minute-by-minute, day-by-day suppression of the very force that gives us all life. A female future means the challenge to and the obliteration of that violence.

But time is short. And the species may not be able to adapt fast enough. For that reason it's imperative that the rising up of the female future be not just the arising of women but an action on the part of men as well—a movement of men who not only cease to hold down women but who earnestly lend their tremendous male power to the hastening of the female future. We can count on it: it will be for us all the most crucial, the most profound act that women and men have ever undertaken together. It may well be the very last act that we ever undertake together. For it becomes clearer with every moment: **EITHER THE FUTURE IS FEMALE OR THE FUTURE IS NOT.**



Dorothy Marder

Stop raping, stop warring! WPA, 1980.