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Country Women: Back-to-the-Land Feminism and Radical Feminist Praxis in the Women's Liberation Movement

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COUNTRY WOMEN: BACK-TO-THE-LAND FEMINISM AND RADICAL FEMINIST
PRAXIS IN THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

by

Jessica Louise Lynn

(Degrees Earned)

B.A., Southern Illinois University, 2007

M.S., Southern Illinois University, 2013

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts.

Department of History
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
May 2013

THESIS APPROVAL

**COUNTRY WOMEN: BACK-TO-THE-LAND FEMINISM AND RADICAL FEMINIST
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Jessica Louise Lynn

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in the field of History

Approved by:

Dr. Robbie Lieberman, Chair

Dr. Natasha Zaretsky

Dr. Janet Fuller

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Date of Approval
March 25, 2013

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

JESSICA LOUISE LYNN, for the Master of Arts degree in HISTORY, presented on March 25, 2013, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: COUNTRY WOMEN: BACK-TO-THE-LAND FEMINISM AND RADICAL FEMINIST PRAXIS IN THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Robbie Lieberman

Historians of American History, cultural movements, the 60s-era, and even the counterculture frequently categorize second-wave feminism as a monolithic movement, its complexity minimized, its successes devalued. While there are a handful of feminist historians who have offered in depth, corrective histories to the popular narrative of the 60s-era, still missing from the historiography of the second-wave is a comprehensive analysis of the feminist women, and women who became feminists, in the counterculture's back-to-the-land movement.

In studying a few feminist farms and communes that developed in the late 1960s, particularly in Mendocino County, California (and some that have survived to present day), and the literature produced therein, I hope to further the historical understanding of how second-wave radical feminist theory was put into practice, and to reveal how the praxis of radical feminism through living on the land enabled women to experience empowerment on a daily basis, and consequently how that empowerment has influenced subsequent generations' feminist undertakings.

Back-to-the-land feminism suggests a way to bridge the gap between radical and cultural feminists, or at least suggests radical, social, and cultural feminism was at work as an intersectional, cross-referential aspect of women's liberation and was less divisive, teleological, or chronologically static than scholars thus far have contended. By examining back-to-the-land feminism, we can locate a specific praxis of radical feminist theory. Women's experiences using

back-to-basics survival techniques on back-to-the-land communes (such as challenging traditional gender roles by learning “male” oriented work), creating alternatives to capitalist consumer culture (like attempting self-sufficiency and trade networks), experimenting with sexuality and finding empowerment in lesbian partnerships, and using grassroots organizing strategies for women’s coalition building and empowerment were some of the ways radical feminist theory was put into practice.

In the process of this historical examination I will explore some pertinent questions: Was opting to “drop out” of society to live in experimental, socialistic communities that were usually anti-government and outside of the hegemonic social order inherently apolitical? If so, does this necessarily oust them from feminist social movement? Were the back-to-the-land feminists enacting cultural feminist values, and if so, were they doing so at an earlier time than cultural feminism is said to have come (*after* radical feminism)? Were back-to-the-land feminists employing strategic separatism and strategic essentialism? And, what is the value in strategic essentialism, “cultural” feminism, and separatism, and how did these “-isms” help back-to-the-land women discover feminist values and enact radical feminism? Finally, how do we measure the success of back-to-the-land feminism, especially since these women are not by current academic standards necessarily considered radical feminists?

By examining women’s experiences in these back-to-the-land communities, exploring their discontent and subsequent feminist enlightenment, as well as locating their activism as radical feminism, I hope to bring to light an element of the feminist movement that has previously been unexamined.

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated first and foremost to all the original country women, those included in this work and those who have yet to be, or may never be mentioned, to my daughter Charlotte, who will grow up with country roots no matter where she goes or who she becomes, and all the country women I know and love, and all the country women to come.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

If you find yourself working on one research project for a number of years, there are many to thank for their help along the way, even those who simply dropped a name in an email, or sent a link to an inspirational article.

First, I would like to thank my long-time friend, mentor, and advisor Dr. Robbie Lieberman who, above all, has remained without end interested, excited, and supportive of this project. Her critical observations have pushed me to push myself. Her personal support has been crucial for my continuation and perseverance through not only this thesis, but also through critical moments in my life when pursuing scholarship was not easy. Finally, her passion for the oft-unmentioned actors in the fight for social justice has in itself been an inspiration that drives my own research interests. I wish her well on all her journeys.

This research would also not have been possible without the unwavering support of my mother, Carla, who sacrificed her own time to ensure I could make the most of mine. She is an amazing and delightful grandmother and mother, without which I simply do not know how I would have been successful.

The support, help, advice, and encouragement of other professors include Dr. Kay Carr whose seminar on Environmental History got this whole ball rolling, and Dr. Natasha Zaretsky who always had an open door for the times when proceeding did not feel possible.

I also will be forever grateful for my final semester of coursework in Women, Gender, Sex, and Sexuality when I was “forced” to take two feminist theory courses—both have been absolutely invaluable in my understanding and critique of history and culture.

Lastly, this research would not be possible without the original country women who went back-to-the-land. I’d like to thank the women with whom I have communicated the most for

their openness and willingness to share their history. In particular, Jennifer Thiermann, who opened up her home to me for my first oral interview; Carmen Goodyear, whose life remains an inspiration and who answered numerous emails and questions; and Sherry Thomas, whose journal I'm sure made possible thousands of other women's liberation in its own, intimate way. These and other country women's history we all owe thanks.

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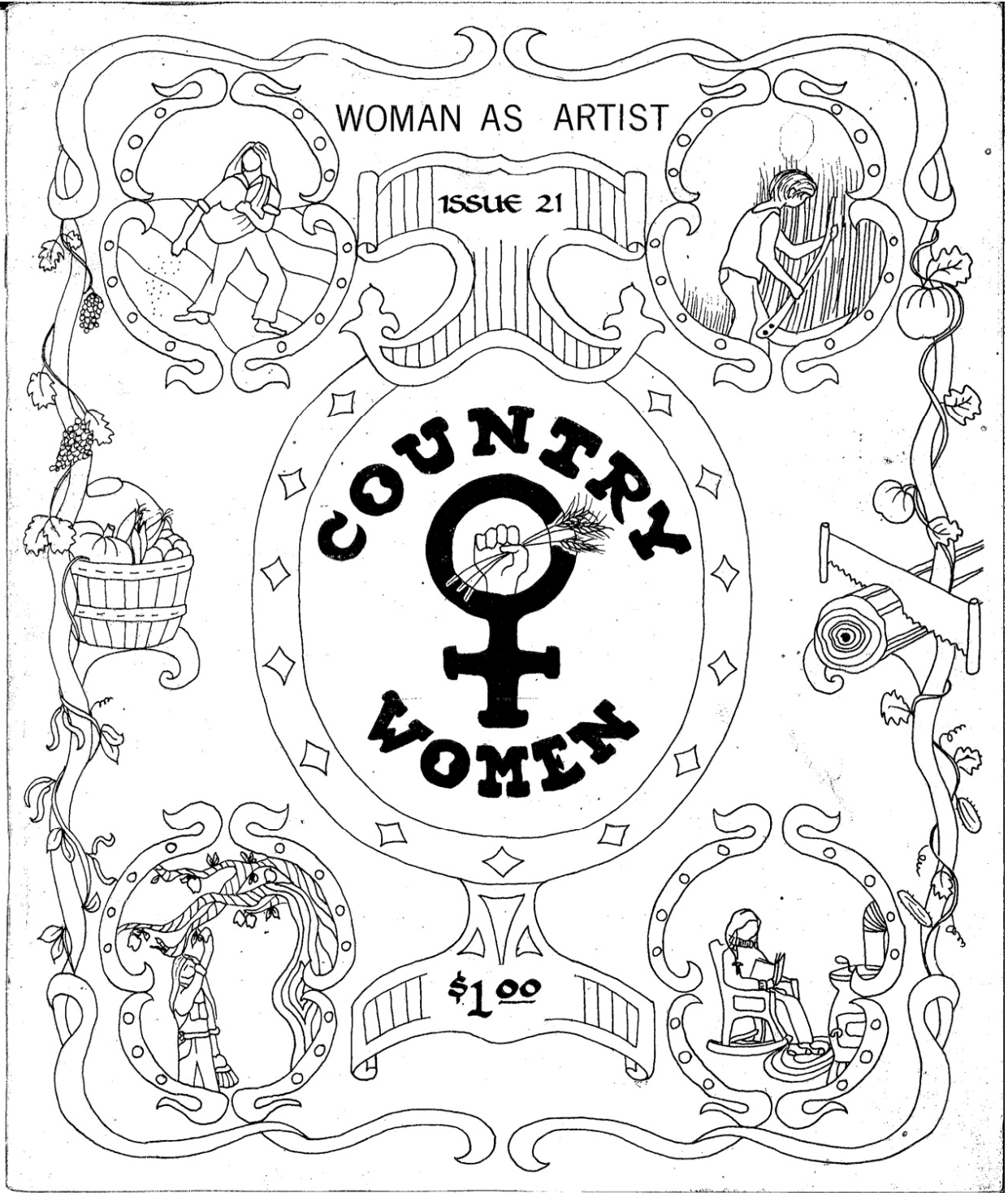


Figure 1: *Country Women Magazine*, "Woman as Artist" Issue 21 (1976), cover.

\$6.95

COUNTRY WOMEN

A HANDBOOK
FOR THE
NEW FARMER

Jeanne Tetrault · Sherry Thomas

*How to negotiate a land purchase,
dig a well,
grow vegetables organically,
build a fence and shed,
deliver a goat,
skin a lamb,
spin yarn and raise a flock of
good egg-laying hens
all at the least possible expense
and with minimum reliance
on outside and
professional help.*



Figure 2: Jeanne Tetrault and Sherry Thomas, eds., *Country Women: A Handbook for the New Farmer* (Garden City: Anchor Press/Double Day, 1976), cover.

INDEX TO PRACTICAL ARTICLES

FROM PAST ISSUES OF COUNTRY WOMEN

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Figure 3: "Index to Practical Articles," *Country Women Magazine*, "Fiction" Issue 25 (1977), 63.

Country Women is in the process of self-examination and change. We need some information from you. If you would take a few minutes to answer these questions, it will be possible for the changes we make to reflect your thoughts, feelings and needs.

1. Do you live in the country small town city
2. Approximately how many issues of Country Women have you read?
3. Does one issue stand out in your mind as particularly good? If so which?
4. When reading Country Women do you usually read the entire issue?
5. Do you generally read all most some of the theme section?
6. Do you generally read all most some of the practical section?
7. What do like most about the theme section?

Least?
8. What do you like most about the practical section?

Least?
9. Do you find the practical articles effective enough to do the task required?
10. What do you think of the politics of the magazine?
11. What words would you use to describe yourself politically/socially/economically?
12. What direction would you like to see the magazine take?
13. What features would you like to see run that aren't now?
14. Any suggestions for future themes? Please list.
15. Any suggestions for future practical articles? Please list.
16. Do you participate in any feminist activities. If so what?
17. Do you read any other feminist literature. If so what?
18. Any bookstore (with address) you'd like to list for us to contact?

PLEASE TEAR THIS PAGE OUT AND RETURN TO COUNTRY WOMEN EVEN IF YOU HAVEN'T ANSWERED ALL THE QUESTIONS. USE AN ADDITIONAL PAGE IF NECESSARY.

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Figure 4: "Survey," *Country Women Magazine*, Issue 25 (1977), 63.

FUTURE ISSUES

ANGER AND VIOLENCE: Women's relationship to anger. How and where are we angry? What are our special blocks or accesses to our anger? What do we do with our anger? Do we feel safe being angry? How do we respond to societal and cultural hostility directed toward women (rape, battered wives, pornography, in medical practice)? How have we internalized this hostility? What is the power of anger? How do we use it? Personally? Socially? Constructive uses of anger. Self destructive uses. The role of anger and violence in the Feminist movement and other movements for social change. Role of anger and violence in our relationship to the planet? How are anger and violence connected? Women's relationship to violence? Sources of violence. Fears of violence. What do we do with violent feelings? Between men and women? Women and women? Children and parents? (Deadline: August 21.)

WOMEN'S RELATIONSHIP TO PLANTS AND ANIMALS: An important part of country living is our increased sensitivity to non-human life forms that we share this planet with, whether they be houseplants or fields of crops, our favorite house cat or a barn full of livestock. What is gained and what is lost when we move from "having pets" to "raising livestock"? Feelings about raising animals for slaughter? What are women's historical connections to agriculture and animal tending? What are the means of communication we use with these non-verbal beings? Experiments done with plants based on the Findhorn information? Relationships to wild animals and plants? Do we have a role as earth caretakers? Share your stories. (Deadline Nov. 1)

THE LEARNING PROCESS/ EDUCATION: Learning new skills and acquiring new information is the way to growth and change. This never stops throughout a woman's lifetime. We are interested in arti-

cles on education of children - feminist changes in institutions and methods. Articles on the way we educate ourselves as we learn new rural skills. The fears of entering new, traditionally male fields. The power of taking control with this knowledge. Articles by older women who have started on new paths. Institutions and books vs. learning-by-doing. (Deadline: Jan. 15)

FUTURE ISSUES DEPENDENT ON ARRIVAL OF MATERIAL:

HUMOR: When we decided after five years to attempt a humor issue Helen said, "It's too late, I'm not funny anymore." We hope you are. What is women's humor, examples, stories, analysis, cartoon strips. The guffaws of living in the country like the time Jenny's longed for Appaloosa foal came out a mule. We want to do a twelve page parody called "Country Girl" so sharpen your satirical pencils. Here's your chance to make fun of us and yourselves, and the whole do-it-from-scratch-holler than thou foolosophy.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN: Analysis of women's changing positions in other countries. Letters from women traveling. How is Feminism affecting women outside of North America? What if any are the forms of a women's movement? Examples of female bonding in other cultures.

FARMING WOMEN: Who are we? Young and old? What are the realities of our lives, our history, our farms? Even if you are not a farmer yourself, here's your chance to interview a woman farmer and write an article about her life. Let's make sure our history is not lost this time. Consider writing the interview in the first person narrative rather than question/answer form. Of the skills or knowledge you brought with you to the farm, which has proved most useful? Do you sometimes have fantasies about other ways you might spend your life? Was farming your choice? If country life was your fantasy, how closely has the fantasy corresponded to the reality?

BACK ISSUES

Back issues available from Country Women, Box 51, Albion, Ca. 95410. Back issues 10-22, \$1.00, #23-24, \$1.25.

- #10 Spirituality
- #11 Older Women
- #12 Children's Liberation
- #13 Cycles
- #14 Foremothers
- #15 Sexuality
- #16 Women Working
- #17 Feminism & Relationships
- #18 Politics
- #19 Mental and Physical Health
- #20 Food
- #21 Woman as Artist
- #22 Country - City
- #23 Class
- #24 Personal Power

SPECIAL PRICE BARN SALE

Choose any 5 copies of back issues #10-#21 for \$3.00 plus 50¢ postage. We need to make room for this year's alfalfa.

Please send us your change of address. It costs us a lot of money to re-mail your issues.

CALLIGRAPHY: Slim

Inside Front Cover: Yvonne Pepin

Back Cover: Kiki Newman

Figure 5: "Future Issues," *Country Women Magazine*, Issue 25 (1977), inside back cover.



Jewelweed, a group working towards a self-supporting agricultural life style, is looking for women of any age, with or without lover or children, to balance out a group of six men (five gay) and two pregnant women. We live collectively on 100 acres of farm and woodland 10 mi. from Ithaca, NY. Call or write: The Cabin, Box 62, West Darby, NY. 14896 (607-564-7271)

We're an intentional communal experiment in egalitarianism, feminism, open relationships, communal child rearing, communal property, bisexuality and joy. We wish to add new members, particularly with child(ren). For more info please write: Aloe Community, Rt. 1, Box 100, Cedar Grove, NC 27231 (S.A.S.E.)

Patchwork Homesteads, a group in the process of forming. Plan a multiracial rural community of individual houses on 1-5 acre sites clustered on a farm outside of Pittsburgh. We are especially seeking one parent families and women alone. Contact: Ann Tucker, 1653 Laketon Rd., Pittsburgh, Penn. 15221

Redbird is a feminist living and working collective in central Vermont. We're having a summer work gathering to build the first buildings for our community. You're invited to come and work with us. No experience necessary. Reservations necessary. For more info write: Redbird, 280 Manhattan Dr., Burlington, VT. 05401

Camping Women is a non-profit corporation which helps women experience & appreciate the values of camping. We hope to help feminists learn to live comfortably in the outdoors and to discover their own inner resources for coping with most life situations. Write: Camping Women, 2720 Armstrong Dr., Sacramento, Ca. 95825.

"Women & Law", "Women & Health/Mental Health", and "Herstory (women's serials)" - microfilms produced by the Women's History Research Center are now available from Northeast Micrographics, P.O. Box 2, Branford, Ct. 06405. Please ask your library to order them.

The Adirondack Women's Community Center is located in Saranac Lake, NY, a small city of 7000 in upstate NY. We are open as a center to any woman in the No. country area. We hold weekly discussion meetings, and various workshops for and by women. We can arrange to have visitors for short stays at members' homes. Contact us at: Adirondack Women's Community Center, 68 Main St., 3rd floor, Saranac Lake, NY 12983

We are a 7 yr. old alternative high school/farm which the atrophying free school movement is eating away at. We need people with lots of energy for people, education and administration. Write us about yourself: Woolman Hill, Deerfield, MA 01342

Rappahannock Country Women's Festival. Fri. noon Sept. 30 through Sun eve. Oct. 2. Jordan River Farm, Flint Hill, VA. If you wish to teach a skill or coordinate a discussion group, please contact us soon. Women only. Please register in advance. Directions and all additional info can be obtained when you register. There is no charge. Bring enough food and camping gear for the time you plan to stay. Call: 703-987-8273 or 675-3409. Write: Bobbie Mason, Rt. 1 Box 49C, Woodville, VA 22749 SASE No Dogs.

We Want The Music Collective is producing a second women's music festival near Mt. Pleasant, Mi. on Aug. 25-28. Any woman who'd like to perform should send a tape of her music. Also any woman interested in facilitating a workshop at the festival please contact us (workshops not limited to music - production, sound, etc.). WWTMC, 1501 Lyons, Mt. Pleasant, Mi. 48858.

Magic Ferry - an alternative transportation and distribution system traveling nation-wide between contact points called ferry dykings. Rides to festivals and conferences. Feminist products from communities dispersed along the routes. Open to suggestions & requests, as well as group charters. Contact: sisters of Diana, Magic Ferry Bus, Rt. 1, Box 42A, Tishomingo, Ok. 73460.

Women in the Wilderness, a non-profit organization, is dedicated to preparing women for leadership positions in the framework of a female support system, and to initiate & facilitate our own wilderness trips. Write: Women in the Wilderness, c/o San Francisco Ecology Center, 13 Columbus Ave., SF, Ca. 94111.

A Woman's Place has published their first newsletter to share their growth with other women. Write: A Woman's Place, Athol, NY, 12810.

A new Womanspirit project is to gather chants from women/for women everywhere to share. The cassette tape of your chants should be sent to Womanspirit, Box 263, Wolf Creek Ore. 97497. It will be taped and returned to you with chants from other women in place of yours. When enough have been received to fill an hour cassette, Womanspirit will duplicate them in quantity and sell them at a reasonable cost, benefitting both Womanspirit and the women who want to share in the heartmusic being created and expressed in our own chants.

Figure 6: "Contact," *Country Women Magazine*, "Fiction" Issue 25 (1977), 64.

CHAPTER 1

HIPPIE COMMUNE WOMEN IN THE HISTORY OF THE SECOND WAVE

In the 1960s a revolution began that was to continue to the present day—a revolution that shook up the hegemonic order of family life, the workplace, the academy, politics, and the bedroom—when women began to articulate questions of their place in society. Several histories have documented this revolutionary moment in American history, including histories on the liberal women’s rights movement that fought for legal and workplace changes—or changes within the system, and histories on the radical women’s liberation movement that fought to eliminate the patriarchal system as a whole. Less specific to the women’s movement are histories that deal with the counterculture, New Left, and student movements of the 1960s-era within which the second-wave is presented in problematic terms. Often the second-wave feminist movement is marginalized and over-generalized—even in histories that contend with revolutionary social movements that are directly related to women’s liberation. Most typically the feminist movement is categorized as a monolithic movement, its complexity minimized, its successes devalued. While there are historiographical problems within all sections of these histories, missing from all of these approaches is a comprehensive analysis of the feminist women, and women who became feminists, in the counterculture’s back-to-the-land movement.

In the popular mind, the counterculture consisted of drug and sex obsessed, longhaired hippies whose anti-establishment ethics led to dropping out of society. While the counterculture was indeed heavily influenced by “mind-altering” drugs and ideas of “free love,” these representations of the hippie revolution are simplistic and undermine young Americans’ rather

serious quest to find *authenticity* in what they saw as a materialistic, alienated society.¹

Furthermore, the existential crisis was not isolated to hippies. A vast majority of America's youth, many of who participated in the New Left and student movements, who were educated, grew up in affluence, and had plenty of leisure time, were questioning their society. Both movements understood American affluence and conformity to be stripping people of their basic human wills.

The hippies' vision of change, however, included a radical politics of "dropping out." Sharing ideology with the New Left, hippies sought ways to expand their consciousness. They desired enlightenment, community, and believed in love. Establishing urban and rural communes, they hoped to explore new avenues of community and connections to one another. Inspired in part by the burgeoning environmental movement, many hippies joined the mid-century back-to-the-land movement.² Women, men, and children left urban areas, bought (or squatted on) cheap land, and attempted to homestead like pioneers of the past. By building cabins, digging wells for water, gardening, and raising animals for meat and dairy, homesteaders experimented with communal living. Many hoped that this movement would foster environmental change, recapture a lost human connection with nature, and inspire peace and *real* community in a new, authentic society.

Experiments varied in their sustainability, authenticity, and success. Many back-to-landers found simple living too hard and went back to the cities. Others truly practiced

¹ Doug Rossinow explores the "intersection of the search for authenticity" and a "tradition of existentialist politics in ... cold war America" within the 50s/60s counterculture movement as evidenced in "the young people['s]" politics that were centered around "becoming 'real' or 'natural' or 'authentic' and ... transcending their generation's 'alienation.'" Doug Rossinow, *Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 5, et al.

² The mid-century back-to-the-land movement included a wide array of Americans whose decisions to "return" to the land, though fundamentally similar, were influenced by different religious, secular, and political convictions. Timothy Miller's *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999) details many of America's most known (and many unknown) communes, secular and religious alike. Though his work offers little theoretical critique, his bibliography of communes is extensive, without which few communal historians would know where to begin.

participatory democracy, attempted full-fledged egalitarian living in domestic labor and chores, encouraged communal child rearing, experimented with open relationships, and sought out eastern religion and Native American culture as moral and ethical influences. Of course, the sexism that prevailed in the New Left and Civil Rights movement (in which many of these women and men had participated) was just as prevalent in the homesteads. Women encountered extreme divisions of labor based on gender roles, the fallacy of “free love” left them pregnant, and often times single, while they were ostracized from big decision making roles and forced to “choose” between care-giving roles (cooking, cleaning, child-rearing) or starvation and cold.

In the meantime the feminist movement was developing across the nation, and many hippie women, inspired by proto-consciousness raising or other feminist moments of clarity, recognized these sexist hypocrisies—indeed they lived it daily—and took action to rectify their situations. Some left, others demanded men to pick up their slack, and many were developing feminist consciousness through writing what would become feminist theory. At the same time that women in the New Left were posing the “woman question” (first in 1965 and again in 1967), back-to-the-land hippie women were addressing the same feminist concerns in their fledgling communes. In some remarkable cases, this resulted in a shift to all-women communes where country women used separatism as a strategy to enact radical feminism in their day-to-day life in what I call back-to-the-land feminism.

These all-women communities, also called women-only land or women’s (or “womyns” or “wimmins”) land, first stood out to me in a footnote of an article on the back-to-the-land movement. Interest in environmentalism and the counterculture drove me to examine the hippie back-to-the-land movement of the 60s-era. In doing so I came across an interesting headline. “Barn-Building, Fence-Mending, Goat-Raising, Well-Digging Women” was simply a one page

article heralding the efforts of “about 20” women in a “working collective of six farms in Mendocino County, California” accompanied with a drawing of a woman’s hand (marked by long fingernails) wielding a pitchfork, wearing a flannel shirt.³ It took weeks of keyword searches, emails, and scouring of footnotes, but eventually I came across another exciting image (see figure 1) that turned out to be the cover of a magazine. Through several emails and many, many searches, and one on-going exchange in particular, I eventually found out about the handbook, which turned out to be a sort of conglomeration of the magazines (see figure 2).⁴

I then located several women who participated in the back-to-the-land movement. In particular, I was turned onto the Mendocino women who wrote and contributed to the magazine and handbook. I was lucky to meet at least one Mendocino woman, Jennifer Thiermann, in Chicago, and have been in email correspondence with Carmen Goodyear, Sherry Thomas, and Merry Winslow, all original members of the working collective. These women have contributed an amazing amount of detail concerning their experiences. Thiermann opened up her home to me, allowed me to scour through her back-to-the-land artifacts—a virtual goldmine of magazines, literature, pamphlets and hand outs, photographs, and her journal, *and* fed me a delicious lunch. My only regret is that it was the first interview I’d ever conducted. Had I known then what I know now, I would have been much more prepared to take advantage of that amazing opportunity. Goodyear pointed me to other interviews she had participated in and answered a deluge of questions while simultaneously working with partner Laurie York on a documentary about their back-to-the-land experiences creating conscious community (the DVD was released in 2012). In communicating with these women, I was, and still am, constantly in awe of their role in the feminist movement. I am also continually surprised at the lack of research

³ Jeane Westin, “Barn-Building, Fence-Mending, Goat-Raising, Well-Digging Women,” *Ms.* 3, no 2 (August 1974): 22.

⁴ Thanks to Loraine Hutchins interesting email exchanges filled with information that I have yet to sift all the way through.

that has been conducted on women outside of cities who participated in the feminist movement. While my research only surveys a small group of back-to-the-land feminist women, I hope it highlights the different ways in which the feminist movement (liberal, radical, cultural or otherwise) was affecting and affected by an innumerable variety of women.

Indeed, by examining country women's discontent and subsequent feminist enlightenment in several back-to-the-land communities, as well as locating their activism as an integration of cultural and radical feminism I hope to bring to light an element of the feminist movement that has previously been unexamined. Back-to-the-land feminism illustrates the use of separatism as strategy, and suggests radical and cultural feminism was at work as overlapping, cross-referential aspects of women's liberation, and therefore that the movement was less divisive, teleological, or chronologically static than scholars thus far have contended.

My examination of back-to-the-land feminism locates specific praxis of radical feminist theory within a cultural feminist context as early as 1969. Women's experiences using back-to-basics survival techniques in the country included challenging traditional gender roles through learning traditional "male" work, creating alternatives to capitalist consumer culture through attempting self-sufficiency and establishing trade networks, experimenting with sexuality and finding empowerment in lesbian partnerships, and using grassroots organizing strategies for women's coalition building and empowerment. Most notably, these aspects of radical feminist theory were put into practice while women strategically used separatism as a means to explore their feminist identities.

The immediate consequence of these separatist women's communities was the empowerment of back-to-the-land women through self-actualization and self-identification. These concepts, in turn, are integral theories in the second and third wave feminist movements,

especially lesbian and identity politics. Beyond strictly feminist contributions, there are several other movements and politics at present that have their roots in rural or back-to-the-land feminism. Local food movements, organic food movements, eco-feminism, and a pop-culture “do-it-yourself” ethic all can be traced to back-to-the-land feminism. Back-to-the-land feminists also contributed a feminist analysis or approach to the developing and modern perspectives of self-sufficiency, land conservation, and sustainability (aspects of the then burgeoning modern environmental movement). While it may be true that some of these issues were also reflected in the back-to-the-land movement or the counterculture more generally, these were specifically issues that back-to-the-land feminists contended with as they developed feminist consciousness while living on the land.

I contend that these back-to-the-land women approached feminist movement more through practice than theory, particularly because they chose (or at least attempted) to live on the land in as close as possible to a sustainable, ethical, anti-capitalist way. That is not to say they were not producing theory or experimenting with varying aspects of radical feminist theory. Certainly, they were reading contemporary texts—both feminist-produced literature as well as literature influential to the New Left, the counterculture, and radical feminist women—as well as producing their own feminist texts. Though back-to-the-land feminists have been glossed over by counterculture, 60s-era, and feminist historians alike because of their low visibility in the movement—their literal off-the-grid existence that relegated them to the margins of society has rendered them marginalized in the academy—their experiences are pivotal to our understanding of radical feminism in practice.

To begin, it is necessary to understand how scholars have interpreted feminist movements in the United States. Feminism, broadly, has constituted three “waves:” first, in the late

nineteenth century, second in the mid-twentieth century, and third from the end of the twentieth century to present. It is within the second-wave that the U.S. experienced a true revolutionary moment in history with women's issues at the center. True, the mid-twentieth century, or the commonly termed 60s-era, saw a swell of civil rights revolution, wherein the black freedom movement crested, students challenged social and cultural values, and other oppressed minorities (like Native Americans, Latina/o Americans and immigrants, gays and lesbians, and Asian Americans) fought for Constitutional civil liberties. Indeed, the women's movements of the 60s-era gained momentum from (and gave momentum to) these movements as women recognized inherent contradictions in Civil Rights and New Left revolutionary rhetoric and began to articulate a new ideology seeking sex and gender equality, the end of patriarchy and sexism, and the right to self-actualization.

The second-wave is usually seen in at least two parts: liberal feminism and radical feminism, or the women's rights movement and women's liberation movement, although within both camps (particularly radical feminism) there were specific variations (socialist, cultural). Certainly seeing the feminist movement as such is useful in a categorical sense, but women participating in the feminist movement were fluid actors who experienced aspects of the movement as a whole, and although many may have made conscious allegiances to one strain or the other, they were nonetheless mobile across these political borders.

Currently, most narratives exploring the second-wave typically analyze one or the other camps: either the women's rights or women's liberation movement. In the second-wave, liberal feminism (or the women's rights movement) is seen as a mostly middle-class, slightly older generation of (generally white heterosexual) women who sought legislative change in the system, particularly in the workplace and in education, as well as sexual reproductive and marital

rights. Most scholars note that these women were willing to work within the system to change its overt sexism, but that their main goal was the right to equality within a system that they largely saw as functioning more or less satisfactorily.⁵

Contrasted to liberal feminism, radical feminism was a younger generation of still middle-class (generally white) women, whose critique was that the entire patriarchal system was dysfunctional. For these radical feminists, patriarchy (or for socialist feminists, capitalism) was the cause of women's oppression. Unless the entire system was changed there could not be true freedom from said oppressions. This challenge to the system as a whole was directly linked to the radical politics of the New Left. Indeed women who worked alongside New Left men were inspired by the same intellectualism, learned the same protest tactics in the Civil Rights movement, and broadly shared similar ideology, especially concerning racism, capitalism, the war, globalization, and imperialism.⁶ Scholars mark the difference between "politicos" whose politics aligned closer to the New Left, and "radicals" who believed the New Left was too tainted with sexism to wage a serious battle against patriarchy.⁷

Despite the divisions and differences between liberal and radical feminisms, theoretically and politically, not to mention the differences and divisions within the respective camps themselves, there were plenty of overlap and continuities. By reviewing the differences and continuities together, we can more accurately understand the second-wave feminist movement for what it was: a complicated, diverse, theory-rich movement that sought to end the oppression of women. This presents scholars of the second-wave with many challenges. As scholars have

⁵ For detailed history on the women's rights movement, see: Nancy MacLean, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); and MacLean, *The American Women's Movement, 1945-2000: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2008).

⁶ Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Random House, 1979).

⁷ Alice Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis/St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 3-4.

come to realize that “second-wave feminism” is a complicated mixture of divergent, overlapping theories and ideologies of a great many variations of feminism and feminist activists, the challenge of presenting the feminist movement in one, comprehensive, flowing narrative, has yet to be met.

Perhaps one singular narrative shouldn't even be a goal for scholars, considering the way that some aspects would necessarily be glossed over or ignored. Perhaps it is wiser to have several, if not many, detailed narratives exploring the variety and complexity of the second-wave, and studying these texts together would illuminate the overlap (if not represent it) of the second-wave. Being a movement only forty, at most fifty years old, and one with no clear marker of its transition into the so-called third-wave, or modern feminist movement, it is safe to say historians are still working on this dilemma.

In so far as American meta-narratives go, the divisions within the movement have shaped the way popular history writes about the second-wave—as either a monolithic movement or as two-competing movements. Typically, the mid-century feminist movement is often attributed a few pages, at most a chapter, in any given tertiary or secondary account of modern American history. Sadly, this is generally the case in the more specific counterculture and New Left histories as well, especially considering the women's liberation movement was such a massive force directly related to the New Left. A notable exception is Rossinow's *Politics of Authenticity*, which incorporated women's experiences as a distinct and important part of the New Left.⁸

In many cases reference to the feminist movement is still relegated to a small section discussing the radical, if not sudden, and angry politics of women in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This view (by dramatizing the more radical women's *liberation* movement) generally

⁸ Rossinow, *Politics of Authenticity*.

eclipses the wide variety and far reaching scope of the movement, and in particular conflates the liberation movement with the women's *rights* movement. Too often, this generalized characterization leaves students of American history with images of bra-less (or worse, bra-burning!), hairy, angry, man-hating feminists (wherein the label "feminist" itself gets a bad rap), who wrote manifestos denouncing men, marriage, and motherhood. Conversely, when this imagery is not evoked and the radical aspect of the movement does not supersede the liberal element, the inverse occurs. In this view inconspicuous looking women hold signs demanding equal pay, and occasionally birth control. While these demands were hardly conservative or normative, this imagery suggests the second-wave feminist movement was a placid, incidental one that took place alongside demands for desegregation and reformed labor laws.

Both narratives work to delegitimize the strength, success, and popularity of the movement and minimize its complexity and progress. The individuals who challenged the sexist status-quo legislatively, the women who denounced daily, regular sexist practices, the millions of consciousness raising sessions, those who died from and were saved from illegal abortions, the thousands of manifestos, pamphlets, posters, and magazines that critiqued sexist (and in many cases heterosexist, racist, poverty-stricken, capitalist, imperialist, etc.) society, and its academic and non-academic intelligentsia who articulated its theory—all of this is lost without a more complex, thorough understanding of the history of feminist movement.

We are, however, not without a few (though still *too* few) crucial histories that do justice to (parts of) the second-wave feminist movement. These works attempt to understand the movement as an historical event with a multitude of interpretations and articulations and its lasting effect on American society, both in the legal system and prevailing culture. They help

correct the oversight of typical meta-narratives that generalize the women's liberation movement, attempting to make visible the complexity of the second-wave feminist movement.

Sara Evans's *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and New Left* situates the roots of the women's liberation movement in the southern Civil Rights movement and northern Student movements of the early to mid 1960s. As women participated in activism either in the Civil Rights movement in the south, or in the student movement, particularly the national organization SDS, they encountered sexism. Women were given auxiliary roles and expected to fulfill duties as secretaries, cooks, and maids. As rhetoric concerning freedom, individualism, independence, and equality grew, women recognized an inherent contradiction between these philosophies and their experience of being treated like children or maids, whose ideas and contributions were rejected or ignored.

Evans's thesis, linking radical feminism to the student movement, was relatively new and further developed than her contemporaries. Through use of interviews and organization minutes Evans locates women in the New Left, revealing how thoroughly New Left men marginalized and exploited them. However, she also locates the influential aspects of the New Left on radical feminism's ideological developments. The personal as political, questioning long-held American traditions such as the nuclear family structure, capitalism via a Marxist critique, sexual mores, even gender roles (at least in theory), were some of the ideologies and politics in the New Left that greatly influenced the women's liberation movement. As well as ideology, Evans notes the important models of activism women encountered, particularly in the southern Civil Rights movement. African American women in the south proved remarkable organizers and leaders. White students learned, as Evans discusses, direct action and non-violent tactics, were inspired

by energetic and capturing rhetoric, and brought back to their own movement useful grassroots organization strategies.

Evans's history of how radical women came to claim their own, separatist, liberation movement out of the pervasive sexism in the New Left's student movement is pivotal to our understanding of second-wave feminism and, it could be argued, for understanding the development of social movements (how they never develop in a vacuum) more broadly. Evans's history is not the only account that situates the roots of radical second-wave feminism in the New Left and Civil Rights movement, but she was the first to locate the activism and personal experiences of New Left women in the most active and transitory years (roughly 1965-1967) of the student movement, suggesting a trajectory closely linked to national and international politics (Civil Rights, the Vietnam War, the Counterculture) that pivoted the focus of activism from human rights to personal oppression. Evans's history remains crucial to understanding the movement's power, momentum, and anger, as well as to see the roots of the tactics and strategies employed in their activism, and to accurately follow the logic and threads in the development of a multitude of feminist theories. It may go without saying Evans's historical account does not trace the experiences of the back-to-the-land feminists. Her mention of the counterculture is to say that its influence on radical feminist politics was noteworthy.

Alice Echols's *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* is an in-depth history of the radical feminist movement and the women who articulated varying radical feminist theories. In many ways her monograph reads as a follow up to where Evans left off. Echols also situates women's activism in the indictment and rejection of sexism in the New Left and takes a close look at the radical sector of the feminist movement that emerged out of those sexist experiences. Echols specifically takes issue with the conflation of radical and cultural

feminism, insisting that cultural feminism comes with the dismantling of radical politics—or that cultural feminism undermined the seriousness of radical feminist politics. Her explanation of the distinction between radical and cultural feminism is useful and set the trend for understanding the differences between the two. Briefly, “radical feminists were typically social constructionists who wanted to render gender irrelevant, while cultural feminists were generally essentialists who sought to celebrate femaleness.”⁹

Echols’s largely intellectual history takes great care to discuss the diverse and often competing ideologies of radical feminism, including the ways in which women identified themselves along particular feminist stances. Echols’s analysis is an excellent framework for understanding these varied elements of radical feminism and how and why radical women split from “politicos,” as well as to see the rise of cultural feminism and to understand how it differed from (and in many ways was a reaction to) radical feminism. However, her focus on all the differences leads one to see the movement as disproportionately splintered compared to other movements. Echols’s focus on the developing, often times changing, and competing theories may do well to underscore the complexity of radical feminism and feminism in general, but unfortunately, as feminist critics have agreed, focusing on the splits, shifts, and in-fighting of the movement highlights the schisms and discrepancies, while eclipsing the progress and success achieved in the *practice* of radical feminism.

Furthermore, Echols’s narrative is (she admits) quite narrowly focused on women and organizations based mostly on the East coast—New York City, Boston, D.C.—and in Chicago. Her narrative may yet be informative, but we are left with a problem not unlike that of histories of other movements. Specifically, we see the radical movement as a traditionally urban-based

⁹ Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 6.

movement and our scope remains on the most visible actors—those who attracted the most media attention (an irony considering radical feminist attempts to refuse media attention to any one person). This is not to say that these women and their organizations were not highly influential or do not accurately portray a majority of the women’s liberation movement (this, in fact, is part of Echols’s defense of her methodology).¹⁰ However, it is to say that there remains a need for histories that explore other areas of the women’s liberation movement outside of cities. Studies that examine women’s activism in areas less publicized—such as in back-to-the-land feminist rural communities—may find other variants of radical activism and different articulations of radicalism.¹¹ For example, when we look at back-to-the-land women, we find that activism assumed to come after radical feminism (like cultural feminism) was more readily embraced, practiced, or intermixed with radicalism earlier than when Echols has argued.

Echols’s *Daring to Be Bad* showcases the radical variant of feminism, its high point, and its subsequent decline (and, as Echols contends, its takeover by cultural feminism), yet it avoids a broader contextualization of feminist movement. It does not deal with liberal feminism except to mark its difference to radical feminism, for example, is narrowly focused on urban feminist movement, and eclipses the many successes and achievements in the praxis of the varied ideologies of radical feminist movement.

Both Evans and Echols’s works are crucial texts without which the radical sector of the second-wave feminist movement would still be hardly understood, if at all. Both scholars provide a significant contextualization of radical feminism—its strenuous beginnings, tenuous development, and empowered revolutionary intellectuals. At the same time, both texts are

¹⁰ Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 20.

¹¹ Robbie Lieberman’s study of grassroots student radicals, for example, focuses on activism in Midwestern college cities and towns. This localized study sheds light on aspects of the student movement and the counterculture that have been previously neglected, such as the unique form student protest took in less radical areas like the Midwest. Robbie Lieberman, *Prairie Power: Voices of 1960s Midwestern Student Protest* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2004).

limited in their scope, either regionally or chronologically, and they do not contend with feminist movement elsewhere. This is less a flaw as it is a necessity to approach their subject matter in as much detail as they do. Nonetheless, though these are two pivotal and crucial texts of second-wave radical feminist movement, back-to-the-land rural feminism remains unexplored.

Finally, there are two more important recent works of the American women's movement. Ruth Rosen's *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* chronicles the second-wave in one ambitious history.¹² While *The World Split Open* may portray the political and cultural impact of feminism—both liberal and radical—on American society, and gives a detailed chronology of feminist success and progress over the last fifty years, specific details of ideology, especially of radical feminism, are sacrificed for breadth. While this may be one of the only attempts to chronicle the entirety of second-wave feminism in a historical narrative, *The World Split Open* lacks an over-arching argument or any helpful generalization of the different variants of theory in the feminist movement.

However inclusive Rosen's study may be, it still yields sickly results concerning women's experiences in the counterculture and back-to-the-land movement. In a matter of sentences Rosen dismisses the counterculture and its hippie women participants as "liberated" in the sense of sexuality and drug-use, and essentialist since "hippie culture tended to glorify women as barefoot and pregnant."¹³ She uses "politically engaged" women's perspectives to perpetuate the assumption that hippie women were apolitical.¹⁴

In another recent feminist history, Estelle B. Freedman's *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* attempts to chronicle feminist movement on a more

¹² Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001).

¹³ Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 126.

¹⁴ Ibid.

global scale.¹⁵ Her history starts in the first-wave, tracing feminist movement to present times, addressing the feminist concerns of U.S. and global women. As a broader history than that of the second-wave, some moments, like radical feminism, are generalized and over-simplified. Freedman wishes to write an accessible narrative of the history of feminism, but in doing so much is glossed over.

Other secondary works on feminist movement are topic-driven histories that also address larger historical questions concerning feminist movement, or social movements, more broadly. For example, Lauri Umansky's *Motherhood Reconceived: Feminism and the Legacies of the Sixties* examines feminist treatment of motherhood.¹⁶ Umansky attempts to debunk the myth that feminists hated mothers and children and explores the complicated discourse of motherhood within the radical, social, and cultural feminist movements. Though Umansky situates her argument in the framework of motherhood, one gets a broader understanding of the women's liberation movement, including the differences in discourse and theory between radical, social, and cultural feminists.

Because of their scope (either too large or too narrow) or because of regionalism, these texts, though crucial, neglect many areas of the feminist movement. One glaring omission from these studies is the counterculture or back-to-the-land movement. As highlighted, these scholars barely contend with the counterculture, let alone suggest that there was anything useful about the back-to-the-land movement. In my research, only one text contends with the counterculture and/or back-to-the-land movement as an area of active feminist movement. Indeed, that is the central focus of Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo's *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties*

¹⁵ Estelle B. Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003).

¹⁶ Lauri Umansky's, *Motherhood Reconceived: Feminism and the Legacies of the Sixties* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

Counterculture.¹⁷

Lemke-Santangelo's study is less specifically a history of feminism than a generalized overview of the hippie women who participated in the counterculture, and (in some cases) the back-to-the-land movement. *Daughters of Aquarius* is filled with anecdotal accounts of women's experience in a largely sexist counterculture. Her study suggests all counterculture hippie women were practicing feminist politics, signifying what Echols, et al. describe as cultural feminism. Yet Lemke-Santangelo ignores the larger, political and historical context of the radical or liberal feminist movement. Lemke-Santangelo's study attempts to examine individual women and their experiences, but the narrative is less than cohesive and the reader walks away without any real sense of one personality—instead the actors in her study become the very stereotype(s) she struggles to debunk as no participant's voice is clear, no individuals actions stand alone, and much of the text reads as anecdote after anecdote. By suggesting counterculture women gave rise to natural-birth, reclaimed motherhood, or found joy in taking up their great-grandmother's homesteading skills without a discussion of cultural feminism, essentialism, or problematizing these issues within an analytical or theoretical feminist framework, Lemke-Santangelo's text comes dangerously close to reifying the essentialism of the counterculture she wishes to critique. The end result is that while this is the only study specifically of counterculture women in the second-wave, it reads more like a popular history—accessible perhaps to the layperson, but its authority undermined in its flippancy.

The historiography of the second wave is brief. The movement is a relatively a new one, being only forty or fifty years old. Plus, the second-wave is a considerably sizeable movement with influences and effects on a vast scale, from the extreme right to the most radical leftists. It

¹⁷ Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius: Women of the Sixties Counterculture* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2009).

also transitioned into the third-wave over the span of a decade, with little consensus on the distinctions between the two, making (like many social movements) its “end” difficult to capture. Thus, chronicling and analyzing the history of feminism, even one moment like the second-wave, has proved incredibly difficult. Yet these texts (particularly coupled with primary documents, anthologies, and memoirs) make for a workable foundation for exploring the second-wave.

Still, while trying to examine the larger picture, these key texts invariably generalize elements of the second-wave and inadvertently eclipse aspects of the feminist movement that help us to understand the powerful influence and prominence of a movement that changed the country. Missing from these more influential feminist histories are stories of feminist activism that happened outside of the cities: counterculture women and their feminist developments, for example. Secondly, most studies either focus on theory production or praxis, but rarely both together. For example, within these histories, scholars rarely analyze essentialism in the movement. Alice Echols notes (with disdain) that cultural feminism is essentialist, but she does not analyze it much further than to problematize it as apolitical. Other scholars, such as Lauri Umansky and Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, offer their view of essentialism as problematic in that it reifies sexist gender roles, but again, neither engages in any theoretical debate concerning essentialism.

In fact, nearly all of these studies operate outside of the debates on feminist theory and praxis. (In some cases, like the earlier texts, the histories came before there was a large enough literature on feminist theory.) However, the discrepancy doesn't stop here. On the flip side, theoretical feminist literature generally does not operate in an *historical* context. Thus, in the literature concerning second-wave feminism, there seems to be a disconnect between theory and

history. Yet when we study social movements, are we not studying theory? Similarly, how can we discuss the production of theory without analyzing the larger socio-historical processes wherein these theory-producing historical actors operated?

In this localized case study I examine counterculture women and the development of back-to-the-land feminism from an historical perspective while analyzing the theoretical basis from which women were operating, and/or developing at the time. My aim is to present these back-to-the-land feminists as pivotal historical actors whose influence on feminist as well as popular culture has been permanent and significant.

In the process of this historical examination I will explore some pertinent questions: Were the back-to-the-land feminists enacting *cultural* feminist values, and if so, were they doing so at an earlier time than cultural feminism is said to have developed? Were back-to-the-land feminists employing *strategic separatism*? And, was opting to “drop out” of society to live in experimental, socialistic communities that were usually anti-government and outside of the hegemonic social order inherently apolitical? If so, does this necessarily oust them from feminist social movement? What is the value in strategic separatism, “cultural” feminism, and essentialism, and how did these “-isms” help back-to-the-land women discover feminist values and enact radical feminism? Finally, how do we measure the success of back-to-the-land feminism, especially since these women are not by current academic standards considered radical feminists?

In studying a few feminist farms and communes that developed in the late 1960s, particularly in Mendocino County, California (and some that have survived to present day), and the literature produced therein, my aim is to further the historical understanding of how second-wave radical feminist theory was put into practice. My thesis reveals how the praxis of radical

feminism through living on the land enabled women to experience empowerment on a daily basis, and consequently how that empowerment has influenced subsequent generations' feminist undertakings.

CHAPTER 2

DISCONTENT IN THE COUNTERCULTURE: THE ROOTS OF BACK-TO-THE-LAND FEMINISM

While the national scene in the mid-1960s shifted from white students fighting alongside black students in the south for Civil Rights to white students fighting for their own autonomy and resisting other oppressive social norms on their own campuses, America's countercultural youth and the New Left were questioning authority and waging a cultural war on tradition. To be sure, the counterculture and the New Left were two separate yet overlapping movements. While they shared similar values they challenged the system in different ways. The New Left drafted memos, constitutions, and statements expressing their resentment, anger, and rejection of normative expectations in mainstream society such as racism and segregation, war, and general conservatism or conformity.¹ The New Left, constituted mostly of students, waged a public political war in an effort to effect societal change. In the counterculture, largely inspired by the Beat generation before them, the youth attempted to contend with social problems through efforts to expand their consciousness. The use of marijuana and psychedelics, the sexual revolution, and, as we shall see the hippie commune movement were aspects of the revolution waged by the counterculture. Desiring personal, intellectual, and spiritual, as well as civil, freedoms the youth of both movements studied the writings of leftist intellectuals and came to the conclusion that American society was anything but great. The Cold War had stifled creativity, individualism, compassion, and any sense of community. Institutions and industrialization severed the connection to nature. Americans had been robbed of their ability to be "real" or "authentic" through conservatism and conformity. People were "alienated" in a

¹ See, for example, Tom Hayden, *The Port Huron Statement* (New York: Students for a Democratic Society, The Student Department of the League for Industrial Democracy, 1964).

society driven by capitalism and war.² Conformity and competition had caused the American people to become alienated, stagnant, devoid of creativity or real love for humankind. For the counterculturalists, the quest for authenticity lay in re-building, re-defining, and expanding community.

Though few histories reveal it, women too were pivotal in the development of these ideological beginnings. As integral members of both the New Left and counterculture movements, they participated in the footwork of drafting theory and were on the front lines of student activism. Their male counterparts, however, did not accord them the respect or esteem they deserved. In the New Left, male leaders casually pushed women to the sidelines and tasked them with “women’s work.” Though they often were outstanding organizers in activist groups and the community, they were rarely recognized as such.³ After several attempts to bring the “woman question” to the forefront of New Left concerns, women were disappointed when promises by SDS to address discrimination were quickly forgotten or ignored. In fact, the New Left so completely abandoned any commitment to the equality of the sexes that by 1967 women were striking out on their own and forming their own radical revolutionary groups, and were soon calling themselves feminists.⁴ Undergirded with a new sense of independence fostered by the women’s rights movement that was gaining momentum and attention, as well as the values, ethics, and ideologies of the student and Civil Rights movements in which they had participated, from 1965 to 1967 women in the New Left were questioning the blatant disrespect, machismo, and sexism of American society at large, and with deft poignancy, of the revolutionaries supposedly committed to equality and justice in the New Left and counterculture,

² Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity*, 5.

³ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 156-192.

⁴ *Ibid.*

respectively.⁵

While these movements were challenging the structure of American society, a parallel, at times overlapping movement was also effecting change. America's growing awareness of the finiteness and fragility of the earth was beginning to challenge previously unquestioned values. While the environmental movement is classically dated from the early to mid-1970s (the image of the earth from space taken by Apollo 17 in 1972, the first "Earth Day" proposed in 1969), its roots are in the post-atomic age of the 1950s and 1960s.⁶ The 1945 dropping of the atomic bomb awakened many to the large-scale destruction capable of modern science, with the long-term effects of the bomb then only beginning to be understood. In 1961, Women Strike for Peace, an activist group made up of mothers concerned about nuclear fallout and the safety and quality of life for their children, went on strike to protest war.⁷ The Cold War continuously undermined American's perception of safety, most notably with the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Both the Kennedy and Johnson administration, concerned about urban sprawl, decay, and environmental ruin were devoted to environmental research and protection and to the preservation of "the quality of life."⁸ Concerns about pesticides became a national issue in 1962 when Rachel Carson's monumental book *Silent Spring* alerted the public to the environmental dangers found a commonly used pesticides.⁹ Her findings sparked Kennedy to request his science advisors research the use of pesticides, and DDT was subsequently banned.¹⁰

⁵ For an understanding of how the women's liberation movement had roots in and broke off from the New Left, see Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, and Evans, *Personal Politics*, and Rossinow, *Politics of Authenticity*.

⁶ For an exceptional analysis of the mid-century environmental movement, including its roots and development politically and culturally, from the Progressive era to LBJ, and housewives to the counterculture, see Adam Rome, "'Give Earth a Chance': The Environmental Movement and the Sixties," *The Journal of American History*, no. 2 (2003), 525-554.

⁷ Rome notes that "Because historians invariably describe Women Strike for Peace as a pacifist or antiwar group, the environmentalism of the organization has received little attention." *Ibid*, 536 and note 30.

⁸ *Ibid*, 532.

⁹ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston, 1962).

¹⁰ Rome, "'Give Earth a Chance,'" 532.

As environmental issues became a growing public concern in the 1960s, the New Left and counterculture were seeking alternatives to the political turmoil of America and the world. Indeed, members of SDS had already drafted the Port Huron Statement.¹¹ To them, it must have seemed quite obvious that their society was teetering on the edge of some permanent destruction. As the environmental movement grew with the backing of cultural historians, ecologists, and progressive scientists it became clear that the earth's resources were not infinite, and that humans were changing the landscape of the earth more rapidly than animals and plants could adapt.

During this time of sweeping social change Americans witnessed a sizeable commune movement. An estimated tens to hundreds of thousands of Americans seeking solace from the political and social upheaval of the country considered communal living.¹² Communes sprang up literally everywhere (the cities, the country, the woods, the desert, the mountains, the coasts), and for all kinds of reasons (to foster art and creativity, environmentalism, religious goals, return to simplicity, to foster community), so much so that leading historian on American communalism Timothy Miller suggests that “no system of categorization can possibly do justice to the thousands of communes [in] the 1960s era.”¹³

Back-to-the-land communes, the distinctly pastoral aspect of the movement, were as diverse as their urban counterparts, motivated by secular, religious, and political ideologies that often intersected. The burgeoning environmental movement at least in part motivated the back-to-the-land communes. Back-to-the-land communes differed from other communes in that their ideology reflected their invariable commitment to living in harmony with the environment.

Though different communards interpreted this in as varying ways as there were communes, a

¹¹ See note 18.

¹² Miller, *The 60s Communes*, xx.

¹³ Miller, *The 60s Communes*, xxvi.

sense of environmentalism that encompassed a vision of peaceful co-existence between humans and nature—or more accurately of humans returning to nature, to live holistically *with* instead of dominating nature—was a driving ethic of the back-to-the-land movement. Other main tenets of back-to-the-land communes were: a disdain for technology, materialism, or sciences that allegedly interrupted the earth’s natural cycles; a desire to establish an evolved, egalitarian community and (in many but not all cases) to explore alternatives to the traditional family structure; an ideal of self-sufficiency; an escape from corruption and a return to (natural) innocence; and a sense of health, well-being, or holism (usually spiritual, though not always religious) that America’s mainstream society lacked.¹⁴ Although not every back-to-the-land commune subscribed to every one of these ideas (and certainly some subscribed to more), these themes were common in most.

Not surprisingly, in the socio-political upheaval of the 1960s-era the back-to-the-land movement attracted many counterculturalists who fervently “dropped out” of “straight” society and joined the movement with zeal. They joined seeking a near-utopian, idealized mythos centered around a pastoral ideal that they believed would transfer them from a chaotic, stressful urban existence, to a peaceful, simple, self-sufficient alternative.¹⁵ But hippie (or counterculture) back-to-the-land communes differed from other back-to-the-land communes. Alongside a deep environmental focus that can be traced to the counterculture’s influential predecessors—the beats—hippies (along with the New Left) critiqued institutions, America’s social structure, government, and capitalism.¹⁶ Furthermore, they hoped to literally commune with nature and this

¹⁴ These ideologies are elaborated upon by Miller, Umansky, and Edgington, and can be traced throughout numerous accounts produced by back-to-the-land participants, then and now. Miller, *The 60s Communes*, 150-158; Ryan Edgington, “‘Be Receptive to the Good Earth’: Health, Nature, and Labor in Countercultural Back-to-the-Land Settlements,” *Agricultural History* 82 (2008): 280-7; Umansky, *Motherhood Reconceived*, 53-55; *Country Women: A Handbook for the New Farmer*; author’s interviews, et al.

¹⁵ Edgington, “‘Be Receptive to the Good Earth.’”

¹⁶ For roots of environmentalism in the beat generation, see Rome, “‘Give Earth a Chance,’” 543.

became one of the reasons to experience LSD, which hippies equated with consciousness expansion.¹⁷ As hippies believed in open or free land and in developing real community, “dropping out” and going back-to-the-land became an obvious choice to create cultural change or a legitimate counterculture.

However memorable, hippie communes ranked in the minority of back-to-the-land communes. Although the counterculture’s environmental and back-to-basic influence on communes is indisputable, it should be noted that the commune movement as a whole was already based on the belief that something was fundamentally askew in America. In fact, Miller argues that as the communal movement developed *before* hippie culture, it was the commune movement that helped create the hippies (and not the other way around)—in other words, although when one mentions the word “commune” our collective memory calls forth images of nudity, “free love,” and drug use, hippie communes are only one variant of the back-to-the-land and/or commune movement.¹⁸ Thus, hundreds of thousands of hippies, non-hippies, back-to-landers, and urban communards alike pursued experimental alternatives to what they perceived as America’s economically limiting, materially excessive, industrialized society in one of the most mythologized movements of the nation’s history.¹⁹

But for the hippies, the back-to-the-land movement was more than an escape from mainstream society, an answer to chaotic government and bureaucracy, consumerism, war, even

¹⁷ Rome quotes historians Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin whose fitting words of hippies and drug use deserve re-printing, “LSD made it possible to have a decent conversation with a tree.” *Ibid*, 543. For the countercultural perspective of the hippie movement, see Leonard Wolf, *Voices from the Love Generation* (Boston, 1968), and Stephen Diamond, *What the Trees Said: Life on a New Age Farm* (New York, 1971). See also Miller, *The 60s Communes*, 17-22 for a brief background on the use of LSD and the beginning of the hippie movement.

¹⁸ Miller, *The 60s Communes*, 2. For more on the diversity of the back-to-the-land movement see note 2 in chapter one.

¹⁹ The historiography of the back-to-the-land movement is still a relatively new one—if stagnant. At least one American communal historian, Timothy Miller, has spent his career interviewing, locating, accessing, and archiving 1960s-era communards and communes, but there is still much work that needs to be done in archiving the records. (As of 2011, Miller was still working to move his records to the Communal Studies Collection at the Center for Communal Studies at the University of Southern Indiana in Evansville.) Furthermore there are still many unknown communes—secular and religious alike—that have yet to be “discovered” by historians.

imperialism—it was the utopian next-step in revolution.²⁰ Conveniently, the back-to-the-land movement became an attractive alternative to the false normatives of materialism, imperialism, nationalism, racism, sexism, and paternalism and became a politics of opting out of the system. Indeed, young dissenters imagined that values of freedom, equality, and peace could be tangibly achieved by going “back-to-the-land.”

In time, many communards’ progressive politics were undermined by chaos: the inevitable pitfalls of unplanned, lawless communities, drug addiction, family planning disasters, and the ever present hypocrisies in their daily living. The most radical hippies and their exploits, complete with their communes’ failures, were disproportionately given prime media attention. In turn, the most famous hippie communes were (and still are today) known for their nudity, drug use, and general craziness, which has helped us stereotype communes as hippie communities, and hippies as apolitical in our collective memory. The media’s focus on supposedly drug-crazed hippies and (notably) vulnerable young women, has left us with representations of the counterculture as free-wheeling, drug-using, long-haired, and of course completely apolitical. This generalization is problematic as it undermines the very intellectual and political roots of the counterculture’s anti-establishment politics and leaves strong, creative, and feminist women out of the picture.

Stereotype or not, hippies who “dropped-out” to join the communal movement were seen by their contemporaries and historians alike as not only dropping out of mainstream society, but eschewing the politics of the New Left as well, cementing the term “hippie” with “apolitical” even if many back-to-landers identified with an unwavering, specific, personal and political cause. For example, artist, writer, filmmaker, feminist and back-to-lander Carmen Goodyear

²⁰ Umansky notes that for the hippie counterculture “daily living constituted the ‘revolution.’” Umansky, *Motherhood Reconceived*, 54.

reveals that the back-to-the-land movement and the feminist movement were similar in that homesteaders and women, respectively, intended to “reclaim power over their own lives.”²¹ Goodyear’s contention that the back-to-the-land movement intersected with feminism may have been atypical, but her political mindset that the movement had a purpose was not. Certainly, back-to-landers identified an exceptional, ideal quality with rural living (and/or communal living) and hoped the simplistic (if not difficult) lifestyle on the land would foster social change.

Others felt a distinct urge to leave the city that for them was not as easy to articulate or identify. Elaine Sundancer, who wrote *Celery Wine: Story of a Country Commune* between 1970 and its publication in 1973, felt the need to leave city life but at the same time she felt a need to change her life in general. A college graduate not ready for the commitment of a career or graduate school, she turned down a fellowship on a “hunch.” She said, “I wasn’t dropping out, I wasn’t criticizing American society, I wasn’t thinking about those things at all. ... But there [do] seem to be a lot of us these days ... that somewhere along the way ... made those half-unconscious choices” to seek out communal, rural living over city life with careers and graduate school.²² Those “half-unconscious” choices affected many young urban Americans who ended up visiting or starting one rural commune or another. Even as Sundancer writes that she wasn’t thinking politically about dropping-out, she was attending meetings about intentional community, criticizing the structured routines of daily life, and of working meaningless jobs to pay rent and buy groceries.²³ “Did I really want meat for dinner,” she recalled asking herself when still living in the city, “if I had to earn it by another hour inside the bar [working as a

²¹ Carmen Goodyear, “Review of *Country Women: A Handbook for the New Farmer*,” *Country Women Magazine: Woman as Artist*, Issue 21 (September 1976): 48-9.

²² Elaine Sundancer, *Celery Wine: Story of a Country Commune* (Yellow Springs: Community Publications Cooperative, 1973), 18.

²³ Sundancer, *Celery Wine*, 20-2.

topless dancer]? I'd rather eat brown rice."²⁴ Certainly Sundancer was formulating a critique of capitalism when she recalled "... I felt that I could judge the value of my actions better than [capitalist society], all by myself."²⁵ Although some countercultural youth were very learned, very specific, and had very concrete plans about their politics and reasons for going to the country to explore communal living, others who believe they were led by "hunches" or vague feelings were no less political, only less familiar in the way they understood capitalist trappings. Although Sundancer didn't classify her actions as "dropping out" per se, she clearly understood the society in which she was participating to be flawed and unenlightened.

Since back-to-the-land communes were so varied and numerous, it is difficult to say with any certainty exactly what were hippie communitarian ideologies and what, if anything made their back-to-the-land/communal ideology different from any other "non-hippie" commune. At least one easy distinction is that of homesteading back-to-landers who rarely eschewed traditional family structures or gender roles. These homesteaders did not necessarily live in communes and typically sought to recreate the world of their grandparents or great-grandparents.²⁶ Usually their residence consisted of a husband, wife, and children. Occasionally they shared space with live-in relatives or other nuclear families. In many ways hippies' communitarian ideology didn't greatly differ from the overall back-to-the-land movement. To be sure, as "hippies" they had an added element of countercultural critique (as previously mentioned), they also had a heavy dose of spiritual influence outside of Christianity (Buddhism, Hinduism, and Native American spiritualism), endorsed experimentation with pot and psychedelics, believed in "open-land"

²⁴ Ibid, 22.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Miller, whose definition I find useful, defines communes as "residentially-based groups whose members pool most or all of their assets or income and share a belief system or at least a commitment to important core concepts" and goes on to list seven features of communal living. Miller also uses Elaine Sundancer's prose from *Celery Wine* to highlight the diversity of communes. Miller, *The Sixties Communes*, xxi-xxiv.

(wherein nobody truly owns the land), and believed community (brotherhood/sisterhood) was central to the positive evolution of the world.

In the country, hippie communes ranged from large, come-and-go communities where individuals and couples lived in tents and yurts or buses, and more permanent settlements where usually couples and families bought land and built dwellings—although most communes were a mix of both. In 1965, Drop City (an artist commune) was established in Colorado, becoming one of the first known rural hippie communes. Other communes, with similar intentions, housed hippies, ex-students, artists, and musicians alike. Though the mechanics of each commune were different, the ideology behind living on the land was similar. “We are a bunch of kooks living out our creative fantasies in geodesic domes, old Western forts, hobbit homes, adobe haciendas, and tree houses,” wrote Roberta Price (Perkins) for *Ms.* magazine in 1974 of her community, Libre, in Colorado.²⁷ Communards, heavily influenced by pastoral mythology found in pop culture like *The Hobbit* for example, sought out places to enjoy independence from mainstream consumer culture and foster creativity internally and with one’s community. Indeed, they believed communal living would enable them to be “free to create, to be introspective, and to work out [their] personal relationships.”²⁸ Experimentation with family structures or getting “beyond the nuclear family” was commonly the foundation of hippie back-to-the-land communes.²⁹ “Several of us have chosen to live alone rather than return to a paired relationship. Others have chosen to live with more than one person, extending the nuclear family. Whatever arrangement we choose, it is, we hope, with a stronger sense of ourselves and what we want from

²⁷ Roberta Price Perkins, “Libre Rising,” *Ms.* 3, no. 2 (August 1974): 96. Roberta Price dropped the Perkins from her name later; I will refer to her as Price.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Jennifer Thiermann, interview by Kelsey Harnist in *The Goat Cheese Papers: Oral Histories of Cloud Mountain*, oral, Chicago: circa 1990s.

our relationships,” wrote Price.³⁰

Communes provided counterculturalists a way to examine relationship structures that they found damaging or limiting in mainstream culture. Getting “beyond the nuclear family,” for Jenny Thiermann and her fellow communards at Cloud Mountain (started in the summer of 1971, east of Philo, California), was a way to break free from the limitations of “one woman, one man, one little house.”³¹ Open relationships were explored, as was “serial monogamy” described by Thiermann as when “You would be monogamous with someone but you would switch lovers every couple of years. ... [And] people stayed together [over the long run] because it was OK to check [other relationships] out.”³² Eschewing the traditional family structure for an all-inclusive community, or expanding or making interchangeable the two, was an important aspect of back-to-the-land communes and in the counterculture where intellectuals were concerned with alienation and authenticity.³³

Practicing self-sufficiency, equally important as experimenting with social structures, was seen as an enlightening way to independence and personal well-being. Farming animals and crops for sustenance kept communards in “good health[,] and feeling [their] own physical strength contribute[ed] to [their] sense of independence.”³⁴ Folks on back-to-the-land communes usually hoped to live in harmony with the earth and that meant they subscribed to a notion, rising in popularity at the time, of local, sustainable agriculture. Many rural communes attempted farming crops and animal husbandry in order to provide themselves with food year round. At the best of times this was extremely hard work and rarely one-hundred-percent successful. Most

³⁰ Price, “Libre Rising,” 96.

³¹ Jennifer Thiermann, interview by author, Chicago: March 13, 2011.

³² Ibid. “Serial monogamy” represented an alternative to traditional relationships wherein a couple married and started a family.

³³ On alienation and authenticity, see Rossinow, *Politics of Authenticity*, 5, et al; on questioning traditional family and social structures, see Evans, *Personal Politics*, 175; on the importance of community and human connections, see Umansky, *Motherhood Reconceived*, 54-5.

³⁴ Price, “Libre Rising,” 96.

communards survived, while keeping to a DIY (do it yourself) ethic, by supplementing their self-sufficiency with store-bought bulk grains that they then milled themselves for baked goods.³⁵ Chickens, goats, and vegetable gardens were common. Woodstoves, hauling water (or digging wells for well water), living in yurts, and recycled wood dwellings, were all integral parts of getting back to basics and living harmoniously with the land. Environmental sustainability was key on the most serious communes. Cloud Mountain communards, in California, attempted to “live lightly on the land” and maintain the integrity of the old growth redwoods by building minimalistic dwellings from recycled lumber so that when they left the commune the land would just “go back to the land.”³⁶

Because of the intense labor that living “simply” required, and the necessity of working day in and day out, many communes quickly came to a screeching halt —especially in the cold winter months—when individuals and families found themselves cold and hungry. The few that were fully committed did persevere through cold winters and scarce harvests, usually by supplementing from local stores, like the Cloud Mountain participants. Since going “back-to-the-land” meant a lot of hard work, many communes simply did not function as true back-to-the-land communes or homesteads and were instead experimental, ongoing, partying communities such as Morning Star Ranch or the Wheeler Ranch. Certainly a good amount of hippie experimentalism helped revolutionize many social structures, but the communes which took themselves more seriously, whose endeavor was a true commitment to living in harmony with the earth, and who were inspired by historical communal attempts like Oneida and Brook Farm, (and usually ones with a religious motive), experienced far more longevity and, as communards have documented, spiritual growth. Indeed, it is these communities (some of which remain today) that contributed

³⁵ Thiermann, interview, 3/13/11.

³⁶ Ibid; Thiermann, *The Goat Cheese Papers*.

to today's lingering, anti-establishment, DIY ideal of self-sufficiency. For them, turning livelihood into profit also became a priority. Cloud Mountain communards, as well as several communes near-by, profited from or traded goat cheese. Indeed, in areas where more than one farm or commune was located, small-scale trade networks were developed and fostered the nostalgic sense of community that hippies sought.

Another key aspect of back-to-the-land living was the importance of a holistic approach to the mind and body—physical, mental/emotional, and spiritual health were priorities.³⁷ Inspired by Native American culture, Buddhism, and Maoism, communards wanted to bridge the gap between their industrialized, alienated selves and the land they saw being destroyed by industrialization. Living on the land was to foster a sense of compassion and caring that an urban existence effectively destroyed.³⁸

Living on the land also transformed communard's ideals of physical beauty. Price elaborated, "Living in this beautiful place, my idea of beauty has evolved to an ideal of health and self-fulfillment."³⁹ Communards found a sense of peace that they saw as essential to personal well-being and spiritual growth. Hippie back-to-landers appreciated nudity and sensual qualities associated with femininity. The idea was to get as "natural" as possible. While these efforts are not without their problems, certainly they underscore the disconnection from nature and community many were feeling in mainstream society.

Though the ideological underpinnings of living on the land encompassed a wide variety of idealistic notions, many of which were directly connected to the New Left and national, more urban-based counterculture, few communes meted out those expectations. Living on the land,

³⁷ Umansky, *Motherhood Reconceived*, 54-5.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Perkins, *Libre Rising*, 96.

women encountered dozens of hypocrisies, contradictions, and disappointments. Their discontent eventually led them to make drastic changes. These feminist enlightenments were occurring in “the country” while in the New Left women such as Mary King and Casey Hayden continuously pressured SDS to consider the “woman question.”⁴⁰ While the feminist movement was surfacing in the urban centers of New Left activism, women who went back-to-the-land were also faced with questions of equality and difference. In similar but also vastly different and at times more obvious ways divisions of domestic labor in the back-to-the-land movement widened the gulf between the sexes.

In reality, the work of living “simply” on the land was difficult and trying, and it challenged men’s and women’s notions of domesticity and gender roles, and their understandings of divisions of labor. In many cases men and women fell into traditional gender roles—men on the farm, women in the kitchen with the children. There were a few exceptions, such as at Cloud Mountain, where an egalitarian ethos reigned and members shared every aspect of work. Thiermann notes how none of the work was gender biased: men ground grain, baked bread, and did the dishes as well as women, and women dug gardens, hauled water to animals (uphill), and assembled windmills with the men. “I can’t think of anything that somebody else didn’t try to do,” she recalled.⁴¹ But Cloud Mountain’s egalitarian ideology, though not exceptional, *was* exceptionally successful. Many other communes gave lip service to equal divisions of labor, but in practice failed to live up to any standard of equality. In fact, many communes or back-to-the-land homesteads (particularly religious ones) found stability and

⁴⁰ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 176-192.

⁴¹ Thiermann, interview, 3/13/11.

structure by explicitly returning to traditional gendered divisions of labor.⁴² The essentializing nature of the back-to-the-land movement left many women baffled as to whether or not they were truly experiencing liberation from a paternalistic social structure.

The counterculture back-to-the-land movement mirrored the sexist problems that faced the New Left with *its* patriarchal baggage: discourses on equality and freedom eclipsed (or purposely ignored) the reality that women faced systematic exploitation and discrimination. Men dominated the everyday structure of back-to-the-land communes just as men in the New Left dominated activism, organization, and discourse. (Steven Gaskin, for example, ran The Farm with a guru, absolutist type presence.⁴³) Because sexism had not been truly confronted in the counterculture it was easy for men on communes to continue patriarchal traditions by asserting their control and dominance over women and children, excluding them from decision making processes, and relegating them to the hardest, most time-consuming work (cooking, cleaning, childrearing) while simultaneously devaluing their labor.⁴⁴ Indeed, by limiting women to childrearing and kitchen duties, and by insisting that machinery like tractors or chainsaws were strictly men's work, they reified traditional, essentialist gender roles, despite a rhetorical commitment to equality. One woman wrote of her 1969 communal experience:

Women did most of the cooking, all of the cleaning up, and, of course, the washing. They also worked in the fields all day ... [and] after the farm work was finished, the men could be found sitting around talking and taking naps while the women prepared supper. ... Of course, the women were excused from some of the tasks; for example, none of us ever drove the tractor. That was considered too complicated for a woman.⁴⁵

⁴² Rosabeth Moss Kanter, "Communes for All Reasons: Beyond Group, Grope, Grain Diets, and Family Fences," *Ms.* 3, no. 4, August 1974, 64; Miller, *The 60s Communes*, 214.

⁴³ Gaskin's leadership style, as well as the governance and rules on The Farm can be found in a variety of sources including magazine articles, memoirs, and even The Farm's website. Another infamous commune with male leadership was Morning Star Ranch under founder and leader Lou Gottlieb, famous for its open land policy, nudity, and open/promiscuous sexual exploration among communards.

⁴⁴ Evans makes a clear argument about the counterculture's failure to address its sexism. Evans, *Personal Politics*, 175-9.

⁴⁵ Kit Leder, as quoted in Miller, *The 60s Communes*, 213. Original source: "Women in Communes," *WIN* 6, no. 5 (March 15, 1970): 14-16. Miller notes, without further citation, this was originally published in *Women: A Journal of Liberation*.

This division of labor unequally burdened women, who were relegated to the kitchen—it is no small task to sustain a family, let alone an entire *commune*, with a wood-burning stove and no running water, and in more minimalist communes, no electricity—and to mothering in favor of what was seen as “natural” care-giving roles. This essentialist, exalted role of caretaker and mother was problematic on its own, but especially when entangled with the expression of “free love.”

Practicing “free love” (wherein an individual, male or female, loves whomever, whenever they want and monogamy falls to the traditional wayside) was controversial and had varying effects. Some women felt an exhilarating sexual freedom from heteronormative monogamy by coupling with a variety of lovers, an especially taboo practice for women. Some realized the depth of their sexuality when they encountered less conservative sexual practices, and some felt free to be in same sex partnerships.⁴⁶ However, with the insistence that “free love” was a *political* expression (as if sex magically equaled freedom and would somehow bring about peace across the world) it became all too easy for “hip” men to manipulate or pressure women into open relationships and promiscuous sex.⁴⁷ In fact, the ideology behind “free love” (or in today’s feminist view, that one’s sexuality and sexual performance is an individual’s choice and right) that more-free sexual practices will promote healthy self-actualization for women is still highly contested in feminist discourse. Certainly, at a time when the bedroom was being politicized—that is, the beginning of the sexual revolution—“free love” trivialized women’s sexuality and bodies.

⁴⁶ For at least one discussion of women’s response to the notion of liberation via “free love,” see Lemke-Santangelo, *Daughters of Aquarius*, 59-85.

⁴⁷ Evans problematizes this “revolutionary duty” as creating “another area of male dominance” revealing how counterculture “men frequently demanded that women accept sex with anyone, any time, or admit that they were ‘uptight’ and ‘unliberated.’” Furthermore, Evans’s documentation of women’s experiences in the Civil Rights movement sheds light on a racial element that was present in these “revolutionary” sexual politics. Evans, *Personal Politics*, 177-8 and 78-82, respectively.

Beyond appropriating women's sexual freedom for the alleged political purposes of getting laid, "free love" became increasingly problematic when coupled with the inaccessibility of birth control or safe, legal abortions. Women faced much higher chances of becoming pregnant, and then of being single mothers as men disavowed responsibility under the guise of politically damning monogamy. So many women were faced with this problem, particularly in back-to-the-land communes, that The Farm began a program to adopt unwanted babies. Women flocked to Tennessee to have renowned, self-taught midwife Ina May Gaskin deliver their children, then left them to be raised communally. Women were unequally plagued with the decisions and responsibility of the burdensome outcomes of "free love" as it was *their* bodies, sexuality, and the consequence of motherhood that was on the line.

Women on communes who experienced sexist oppression didn't always see it as such at first. Men's macho attitudes and domineering, paternalistic personalities typically drove women to their own spaces—spaces that, because men either devalued their importance or favored more "masculine" spaces involving tractors and machinery—were already associated with feminine qualities. The introspective journal of Sherry Thomas, published anonymously in *Country Women: A Handbook for the New Farmer* (1976) detailed her experience going back-to-the-land. One can see her subtle transformation from confined, dependent heterosexual woman to an independent, liberated lesbian at the crest of her feminist enlightenment.⁴⁸ She wrote:

Somewhere back in Pennsylvania among five men burning out power saws, pounding nails, and ego tripping, each with his own Grand Design, I began to retreat from my eagerness to learn and to try. I found myself and Claudia, the only

⁴⁸ Tetrault, Jeanne and Sherry Thomas, eds, *Country Women: A Handbook for the New Farmer* (Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976). Sherry Thomas's anonymous journal (as she said in an interview with the author, "edited for flow") is interspersed throughout the handbook. "At that time," Thomas and other Country Women "believed that any woman's voice could stand for any other," a common second-wave feminist ideology based on sisterhood and sameness of woman's experience; this notion would later be problematized by feminists of color in the mid to late 1970s and particularly by feminist theorists of the third wave in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

other woman there, unconsciously gliding out into the garden, attracted to its peace and the simplicity of learning to pull weeds.⁴⁹

Because of sexist divisions of labor and essentialist assumptions, women felt trapped in a sort of back to basics purgatory. They had hoped for a change from mainstream society, yet in trying to achieve country living they found themselves relegated to the same spaces they had been in before they “dropped out.”

Thomas attempted to dialogue about the contradiction:

Yet even here in this circle of women, I feel separate, and I wonder what is wrong with me that I can't accept things, that I am not contented. Today, I was talking to Sarah about the *Politics of Housework* which I had just read and about hassles with Peter over the shopping. She gave me the blankest look, as though I were speaking Turkish. There are no politics to housework here, the roles are so completely set!⁵⁰

But clearly not every woman felt the same. Indeed, in many heteronormative communes, unequal divisions of labor went unproblematized. Then again, in some of those same communes, evidence shows both men and women were contributing equally in all tasks, sharing typically gendered labor like child rearing, cooking, and dishwashing.⁵¹ Nonetheless, the discontent that many women felt after attempting communal living in the counterculture was notable. Thomas's journal revealed her angst and anguish as she became more and more aware of the sexism that permeated communal living, causing her to feel like the “resident bitch” everywhere she lived. Thomas described the frustrations of being in relationships with men who couldn't “distinguish their fantasies from reality” while the women were “trying to free” themselves “from living out their [men's] myths.” She wrote:

⁴⁹ Thomas, journal in *Country Women: A Handbook*, 7.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵¹ The memoir *Celery Wine* mentions household and farming responsibilities often, but does not describe either as particularly geared towards one gender. There are some women and men who appear to have internalized mainstream gender roles more than others, but for the most part dishes, farming, child rearing and other tasks appear to have been shared by both men and women. At any rate, Sundancer does not problematize any task as being tended to more heavily by women or men.

We tried to make them see that their opening the house to anyone who came wasn't so groovy for us since *we* were the ones who cooked and cleaned and cared for the seventeen-year-olds looking for a new Mom.... Even though we knew we were right, I hated how we were: our nagging, challenging, arguing, complaining. We were caught up in their world, on their terms.⁵²

That they were caught up in *their* world, on *their* terms was becoming a glaringly obvious contradiction to women who had believed in the countercultural promise of egalitarianism.

⁵² Thomas, journal in *Country Women: A Handbook*, 30-1.

CHAPTER 3

BREAKING AWAY: ENGAGING IN FEMINIST PRACTICE LIVING ON THE LAND

As discussed in chapter one, second-wave feminism encompassed a wide range of political ideologies. Feminist historians recognize the difference between the women's liberation movement—the struggle against a system of domination (capitalism, patriarchy, or both) that sought revolutionary social change—and liberal feminism (or the women's rights movement), the more reformist struggle that sought relatively incremental legislative change.¹ Though a woman's political orientation could easily have included both liberal and radical positions, typically liberal feminists fought for legal issues such as equality in the workplace under organizations like the National Organization for Women (NOW), and radical feminists fought for issues deemed more personal like affordable/accessible child-care centers, abortion, and birth control access and critiqued the nuclear family and heteronormative sexuality.

Women who considered themselves part of the women's liberation movement also categorized each other. In *Daring to be Bad*, Alice Echols marks the difference between “politicos” and “feminists.” The former had an allegiance to the New Left and saw capitalism as their primary form of oppression, believing a socialist revolution would end women's oppression. The latter were seen as “radicals” and saw patriarchy as their primary form of oppression (for them, gender was more important than class in terms of oppression).² Radical feminists, scholars have suggested, broke entirely with the left to form a social movement based on the liberation of women under a sexist, patriarchal system (versus fighting alongside the left to the ends of a social revolution against a capitalist system). These divisions weren't so precise,

¹ Umansky's introduction is a useful guide to distinguish the different variants of feminism. Umansky, *Motherhood Reconceived*, 13.

² *Ibid*, 3.

but are useful for analytical purposes.

Radical feminists, intent on forming a movement to eliminate the oppression of women, founded groups across America. The most visible groups that have been extensively studied were in New York, Boston, D.C., and Chicago.³ Of course radical feminists existed in other parts of the country, but these feminists received media attention, were positioned well geographically for political activism, and published extensively—New York Women even published notes from the first year (right after the first year) of their founding, suggesting that many feminists realized the important and historic nature of the movement. For radical feminists the issues were big: the nuclear family, marriage, motherhood, rape, and access to birth control and abortion (to name a few). The women's rights movement rarely tackled these issues.

While radical feminists surely recognized the importance of workplace equality and equal pay, they also hoped to change the very system that made these issues a necessary battleground. Using guerilla street theatre tactics, through many, many meetings, spreading the use of consciousness raising, and staging protests that garnered national attention (such as at the 1968 Miss America Pageant), radical feminists challenged everything sexist or oppressive to women.⁴ Though feminists didn't agree on any one answer to any one problem (as is indicated in Echols's in-depth analysis), that women came together at all to discuss issues typically considered taboo (like rape) or that weren't considered by mainstream society as problematic (like childcare for working moms) led to a momentous shift of consciousness. Indeed, by the 1980s radical feminism had a remarkable impact on American society.

³ Echols in particular focuses on these cities. Echols, *Daring to be Bad*.

⁴ Of course, for *which* women became one of the splintering issues at the height and subsequent decline of second-wave radical feminism.

Echols contends that radical feminism was “eclipsed by cultural feminism” after 1975.⁵ Cultural feminism, largely written about in negative terms, is widely seen as biologically essentialist, and is disdained by political historians and activists for creating an allegedly apolitical women’s culture. Indeed, as discussed in chapter one, one of Echols’s main agendas is to highlight the difference between radical and cultural feminism. Echols distinguishes between the two, noting that cultural feminism *did* evolve out of radical feminism, but that “radical feminism was a political movement dedicated to eliminating the sex-class system, whereas cultural feminism was a countercultural movement aimed at reversing the cultural valuation of the male and the devaluation of the female.”⁶ She further states that radical feminists, as social constructionists, “wanted to render gender irrelevant,” and cultural feminists, who were essentialist, “sought to celebrate femaleness.”⁷ In this vein, radical feminism was based on the “similarity to men,” whereas cultural feminism was based on “female difference.”⁸

Cultural feminists have been credited with establishing a positive women’s culture to varying degrees. Women’s bookstores and publishing houses, women-only spaces (living spaces, public and private spaces, festivals) and communities have been criticized by scholars, trans/queer activists and theorists, as well as praised by those who see the value in establishing a positive women’s culture. For many scholars, cultural feminism represents an apolitical turning point in feminist theory for several reasons.

First, many feminists see the celebration of femaleness as essentialist, problematic because it assumes that all women share inherent qualities based on their sex. Philosopher Linda

⁵ Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 6-7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

Alcoff identifies this problem with cultural feminism in a post-structuralist analysis. Cultural feminism “does not criticize the fundamental mechanism of oppressive power used to perpetuate sexism and in fact reinvokes that mechanism in its supposed solution. The mechanism of power ... is the construction of the subject by a discourse that weaves knowledge and power into a coercive structure ... [that] ‘tie’ the individual to her identity as a woman.”⁹ Thus, cultural feminism relies on “essentialist formulations” that presuppose “true” womanhood.¹⁰ In other words, to assume inherent female qualities, even in the production of positive valuations of woman, only serves to reify a heteronormative gender binary (the assumption that there is a “true” male and a “true” female nature, and/or that there are only two genders). This gender binary model based on unchanging, biological differences ignores the experiences of trans people and queer identified folk. The argument of biological gender difference can also be used to establish the superiority or inferiority of one sex over another in the assumption of inherent qualities of either gender, such as female weakness versus male strength, or female emotionality versus male rationality. This discourse can be and is often used to devalue and delegitimize one sex over the other.

Secondly, especially problematic in terms of the second-wave, biological essentialism also assumes that because women share an allegedly true female nature that all women’s issues are the same. This, again, undermines very differing experiences between, for example, white women and women of color in the U.S., or U.S. women and women of developing countries—hence black feminist theorists problematizing the second-wave notion of “sisterhood.” So while

⁹ Linda Alcoff, “Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory,” *Signs* vol. 13, no. 3 (Spring, 1988): 414.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 413-14. For a similar argument on the concerns of essentialist-based identities, see black feminist theorist Ann duCille, “The Occult of True Black Womanhood: Critical Demeanor and Black Feminist Studies,” *Signs*, vol. 19, no. 3 (Spring, 1994): 591-629.

cultural feminists strategized under the assumption of female difference to men, they also assumed all women regardless of their location in space and time, class, or race to share inherent female qualities.

To be sure, Alcoff notes the value in cultural feminism as well. Understanding the usefulness of “self-affirmation” she notes how scholar Hester Eisenstein sees it as “*necessary* to offset the impact of a misogynist culture.”¹¹ Indeed, in Alcoff’s view it is a “helpful corrective to have cultural feminists argue ... that women’s world is full of superior virtues and values, to be credited and learned from rather than despised.”¹² That women should “use a ‘looking glass’ perspective” concerning their strengths and virtues instead of trying to align themselves with a position of maleness helps to highlight the agency and value of women’s contributions.¹³ Alcoff points out how a positive perspective of women can highlight mothers’ survival strategies, the artistry of women’s handiwork, and the value of care-giving in a male competitive culture. But, she argues, since these “genuinely positive attributes [were] developed under oppression, it cannot map our future long-range course” in the struggle against sexism.¹⁴

Thus we come to the third and Echols’s main problem with cultural feminism. For Echols cultural feminism shifts the focus of activism from public politics to personal transformation. She argues that in the cultural feminist movement “patriarchy was evaded rather than engaged.”¹⁵ She criticizes women-only space, “envisioned as a kind of culture of active resistance,” as apolitical because the “focus became one of personal rather than social

¹¹ Alcoff’s analysis of Eisenstein’s view is noted; quoted above are Alcoff’s words, my italics. Alcoff, “Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism,” 414.

¹² Alcoff sees this valuation as a corrective especially to liberal feminists who argued for women to enter the male-dominated public sphere through emulating men (especially in the business world). Ibid, 414.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 5.

transformation.”¹⁶ In fact, for Echols, counterculturalism itself seems to be a black spot on the record of social movements. Echols argues that radical feminism “was not the only radical movement of the ‘60s that succumbed to counterculturalism. With the rise of black nationalism, the black freedom movement became more involved in promoting black culture than in confronting the racist policies of the state.”¹⁷ It appears Echols takes issue with the idea that self-transformation is a political action.

I contend that self-transformation, or the personal, is political. I contend that the difference of success between the political actions of participating in marches or signing legislative petitions versus creating intentional community, critically questioning systems of power, or engaging in emotional, mental, or spiritual transformation cannot accurately be measured. In other words, political and cultural activism are too intimately connected to accurately sift out the differences. Without sacrificing a critical stance on the problems of separatism or essentialism we can find value in each, particularly in an historical context of time and place.

To use the example of the black freedom movement, a focus on creating a black culture with positive reinforcements of black identity, confidence, and self-actualization is as important as, for example, ending segregation in schools. In fact, ending segregation in schools did little in the way of preparing black children for the indignities and hardships they suffered in the integration process. bell hooks describes this process as a confusing, humiliating, and devaluing experience.¹⁸ While fighting for legislative change is *undeniably* important, there is obviously value in the development of a social movement predicated on reinforcing confidence, pride, and

¹⁶ Ibid, 5.

¹⁷ Ibid, 7.

¹⁸ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 2-5.

self-worth.

For any systematically oppressed group of people it becomes necessary to focus on personal growth and development—to establish a revaluation of one’s self. If, as post-structuralism argues, people and their identities are culturally constructed, and a groups’ identity has been constructed so that it “forces the individual back on himself and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way” then the pre-requisite to social revolution is in redefining one’s construction.¹⁹ Historian Lawrence Goodwyn, similar to Alcoff’s looking glass analogy, affirms the necessity of “a new way of looking at things.”²⁰ Goodwyn argues, “‘Individual self-respect’ and ‘collective self-confidence’ constitute ... the cultural building blocks of mass democratic politics.”²¹ Before a movement can become successful, there must be a collective cultural re-valuation. Goodwyn argues this “movement culture” clears the way so that “new vistas of social possibility” can be explored in ways that are free from “inherited assumptions.”²² It is within this context that black nationalists and cultural feminists were operating. Through separatism feminists and black nationalists created space for themselves to attain “individual self respect” and foster “collective self-confidence” by eschewing negative, devaluing, and delegitimizing “inherited assumptions.” Also through this framework, we can see how “dropping out” allowed hippies to redefine cultural values. In all cases, separatism is used strategically to affirm positive identity, for through self-affirmation and transformation “the movement culture” can promote social, cultural, and political change.

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, “Why Study Power: The Question of the Subject,” in *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics: Michel Foucault*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 212, as quoted in Alcoff, “Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism,” 415.

²⁰ Through a study of the Populist moment, Goodwyn analyzes how social movements begin and are sustained. Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1978), xix.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

From a modern feminist (or post-structuralist) perspective, the problem that emerges in both the cultural feminist re-valuation of womanhood and the Black Nationalist re-valuation of black culture is the idea of an *essential* self. Third-wave theorists and post-structuralist scholars continue to analyze the problem of an essential self through the lens of post-structuralism, particularly with Judith Butler's theory of performativity.²³ However, I contend that in the late 1960s, historical circumstances necessitated the establishment of separatist theories and cultural validation.

Did using strategic separatism and essentialism by creating women's-land mean back-to-the-land feminists were cultural feminists? Did the use of strategic separatism undermine radical feminist values? Or, were radical and cultural feminist values more compatible than has been suggested? How did using strategic separatism and essentialism empower women? For the women of this study, strategic separatism helped foster feelings of self-worth, independence, and confidence, and specifically helped them establish and maintain an independent grassroots feminist magazine (and later book). Separatism in particular, however based on gender sameness or difference or involved in promoting women's culture, enabled women to evolve past the stereotyped versions of femininity (limitations, devaluations, and all) that mainstream society had them believing they needed to emulate. In fact, some back-to-the-land feminists were moving beyond essentialism altogether when they eschewed traditional gender roles in both heterosexual and lesbian relationships. In a very contemporary radical feminist fashion, they were experimenting with politics of identity and performativity.

Furthermore, back-to-the-land feminists were enacting (and developing) feminist ideologies that were simultaneously radical and cultural. Thus back-to-the-land feminists cannot

²³ Judith Butler's well known theory of gender performance is argued in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

be easily categorized as either “radical” or “cultural” since their ideologies and practices reflected values of both camps.²⁴ This suggests that cultural feminism did not supplant or undermine radical feminism; instead, it shows that values perceived as cultural and radical were more fluid, overlapping, cross-referential, and compatible than scholars such as Alice Echols contend. To be sure, without Echols’s long-standing history of the radical feminist movement, we might not have any history on the radical women of the second wave at all. But as other scholars are showing (such as recent scholars of the long black freedom movement), categories and timelines can be tenacious and sometimes dangerous tropes.

My research also helps to show the fluidity, mobility, and ever-changing nature of social movements, most notably that the New Left, back-to-the-land, counterculture and feminist movements overlapped and were cross-referential. Women on the land were empowered by radical feminist theory (writings from east coast feminists like Shulamith Firestone, for example), socialist theory (writings from Mao, for example), and New Left politics, while separatism and essentialism—tenets of cultural feminism and the counterculture—proved useful strategies for empowering and motivating women to trust themselves, gain independence, and explore their identities, sexually and otherwise. It is, then, within an overlapping, connected web of influence that a social movement such as feminism is able to thrive and empower activists who, in turn, change society. As we explore the women of the back-to-the-land movement we locate both radical and cultural feminist praxis, appreciate the value in strategies like separatism and essentialism, and better understand the nature and success of social movements.

On the land, women found feminist empowerment in everyday tasks. The basic act of

²⁴ The women I interviewed disagreed on the definition of radical feminist/ism, cultural feminist/ism, and, in fact some didn’t necessarily believe themselves to be feminist at the time at all—or at least at the beginning of their back-to-the-land experience even if they were very much enacting radical feminist values. Therefore, I hesitate to categorize back-to-the-land (or any other) feminists in the first place, even though as a historian I recognize the value in organizing the past.

living in a country setting meant meeting new and difficult challenges. Indeed, most neophyte city dwellers, male or female, who went to the land seeking authenticity and meaning found some form of empowerment in learning to survive in the country in “off the grid” settings since living on the land meant a certain vulnerability that city dwellers simply didn’t encounter. Food production, staying warm and dry, clean drinking water, the abundance or lack of water, and raising and protecting animals were priorities that most people who moved to the country had not had to contend with previously. The bare-bones basic skills to accomplish those feats had to be learned. Back-to-landers had to learn simple tasks such as how to build a fire, but also with each basic skill came more nuanced and complicated knowledge. For staying warm and dry, for example (and food production for that matter) communards had to learn how to chop down trees, or to know the type and quality of wood for burning or building, how to split wood, or even stack it properly to allow it time to season, what type of woodstove to use, and the best way to maintain a fire for warmth and/or cooking. By the mid seventies back-to-landers could gather such knowledge from the plethora of books and magazines that were being published in response to the environmental and back-to-the-land or homesteading movement. Before that in the mid to late sixties, back-to-landers were “getting old stuff” (old books, farmers almanacs) or occasionally tapping into “old timers” knowledge when they would lend advice, tools, or even animals to help out their new rural neighbors, and as back-to-lander Carmen Goodyear remarked, they were happy to do it since “Everybody wanted to learn, every step, every part of the way.”²⁵

But learning to do everything proved difficult for women if there were men around who took control of projects, decisions, and labor. With the challenge of living on the land being emphatically co-opted by plenty of willing, able-bodied, macho-competitive men, at first the fear

²⁵ Goodyear, interview by Bernstein.

of failure was common for women. Inexperience in rural living, the cultural assumption and expectation that women were unable to care for themselves, and the fact that most women began their back-to-the-land journey in partnerships (romantic or otherwise) with (sometimes overachieving) men helped reify sexist, antiquated notions of gendered labor divisions.

Sherry Thomas found that in the presence of men a fear of failing kept her from beginning, continuing, or finishing projects. Thomas acknowledged in her journal how thoroughly the sexist divisions of labor on the land undermined her ability to feel competent:

There are fears in me that go so deep I can't even touch their source, so powerful they paralyze my muscles as well as my will.... I can't remember [when] I became afraid of tools and when I was taught to be afraid of even trying. It's that fear of trying that seems so potent to me now, beyond my control but so in control of me.²⁶

The fear of trying—what so many countercultural women had been eager to do at the onset of back-to-the-land living—was a direct result of the extension of gendered divisions of labor into the countercultural.

However, it was the polarization of the sexes and the extension of mainstream, heteronormative sex-based roles into the counterculture that became, for some, the pivotal point of feminist consciousness. Living on the land and being forced to encounter new types of challenges and struggles that city life simply didn't pose led to a shift in homesteading and back-to-the-land women's perspectives on what they could or couldn't do. This change was gradual for many women whose relationships with men slowly became tenuous entanglements as they incrementally tried to close the gender gap in back-to-the-land labor practices. Women noticed their own angered reactions as time and time again they were treated like incompetent children. Back-to-the-land homesteading or communal living meant constant work, and women resented

²⁶ Thomas, journal in *Country Women: A Handbook*, 49.

being denied important experiences such as farming, building houses, plumbing, or electricity, and being relegated to stereotyped roles such as caregivers.

Thomas, for example, notes a moment of clarity when a fellow communitarian patronizingly allowed her to help build a shed. After several weeks of avoiding building because of feelings of inadequacy, she found herself able to work alone. A child-age friend, however, was helping her. Suddenly Thomas realized she was treating the child the way the men typically treated her—as someone who was there to hand her things. She immediately started teaching the child, engaging him in the process of actively building instead of passively “helping.” In this moment of clarity, the fear of failure and internalized inadequacy that had kept her from doing all the things she wanted to do began to leave her.²⁷ But the feeling of incompetency was difficult to erase.

Thomas wrote:

I wonder how long it's going to be before I *know* that I can do things? How many times of enjoying the work when I'm doing it before I'm not afraid to start? There's a part of me that doesn't believe in my competence. Fear catches me and for five seconds I cannot pick up the wrench. How many shingles and gates and tune-ups and plumbing jobs will it take before I really learn that I can do what I was taught I couldn't?²⁸

Not surprisingly, the development of her confidence coincided with the development of her feminist consciousness. As she read Pat Mainardi's *The Politics of Housework* and Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*, Thomas became even more acutely aware of the sexism that permeated the homesteading and back-to-the-land movement.²⁹ Friends' relationships that mirrored perfectly separate, traditional binary gender roles, and within which the man denigrated the woman and her work contributions, became intolerable. Thomas recognized that expectations

²⁷ Thomas, “Pole Framing,” *Country Women: A Handbook*, 103.

²⁸ Thomas, journal in *Country Women: A Handbook*, 49.

²⁹ Pat Mainardi, *The Politics of Housework* (New York: Redstockings, 1970); Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Morrow, 1970).

for a women's role commonly meant a traditional, oft taken-for-granted "mother role," whether for children, husbands, or other men. Furthermore, as communal living took hold of the counterculture, it was typically women who bridged the gap between the reality of staying fed and alive and the fantasy or ideal of self-sufficiency and sustainability. "I feel," Thomas wrote, "as though I've spent years being 'Reality' for men, bringing them back to earth. All the soft, gentle, giving, loving parts of me feel dead or lost, so much of me is spent being a 'reaction to' ... [that the] woman in me is getting killed."³⁰

Sharing stories of discontent in relationships, fears of failure, and desires for something better helped women to feel empowered and enabled them to let go of internalized incompetence. For women like Thomas, meeting with like-minded country women in consciousness raising groups helped ferment the discontent they were experiencing in their sexist relationships. Consciousness raising groups were happening all around the nation, in the New Left, in grassroots activists groups, and in burgeoning radical feminist groups. The idea of consciousness raising was not altogether new, but was definitely used by counterculturalists as a means of enlightenment and self discovery by the late 1960s. For women, consciousness raising became a source of validation, if nothing else, when women shared stories with other women about their experiences, from cat-calls on the street to physical and emotional abuse at home, rape (in all forms, including marital), and illegal abortion. Consciousness raising helped women of the 60s-era contemplate sexism and explore potentially new identities.

One consciousness raising group in Mendocino County, California, attracted a large number of homesteading and back-to-the-land commune women. Lesbian couple Carmen Goodyear and Jeanne Tetrault moved to the Mendocino coast in 1968. With inheritance money,

³⁰ Thomas, journal in *Country Women: A Handbook*, 30-1.

Goodyear purchased land with the intention of starting a farm. Having no knowledge of farming but a love of animals, Goodyear and Tetrault had simply yearned to get out of the city.

Mendocino, an attractive area for artists and hippies, became their new home when Goodyear purchased the land complete with a white-picket fence and old farmhouse. While learning to farm, the women were intrigued by a friend who had started going to a consciousness raising group at Stanford. Reading “a few key pieces of literature,” (such as *The Dialectic of Sex*) they said, “we want this to be happening here!”³¹ They then contacted other women they knew in homesteads and on communes, “maybe five other ... homestead wives ... and [they] met to have a consciousness raising group.”³² That group, Goodyear remembered, lasted almost nine months wherein the women “all grew so close ... and wanted to move in together but couldn’t.”³³ After that ran its course they began another group, this time with about seventeen women. “Jeanne and I were still the only lesbians,” Goodyear remarked.

As the consciousness raising sessions focused on relationships, Goodyear and Tetrault’s lesbian partnership proved influential. As lesbians who desired to transcend traditional gender roles they particularly challenged hetero women to examine their relationships. Goodyear remembered influencing straight women, “I feel like Jeanne and I, as lesbians, did not want to fit into that [women in the kitchen] stereotype. We were already, in our relationship, exploring different roles rather than a butch/femme duality.” Goodyear and Tetrault realized the allegedly alternative butch/femme gender roles were still modeled on the male/female binary. Instead of dividing work based on constructed gender roles they “wanted to try everything that pertained to living on the land. And then other women who were [of] heterosexual couples saw that and said,

³¹ Goodyear, interview by Bernstein.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

‘Sure! Why not me, too?’ So ... lesbianism [played] a big role in” challenging traditional gender roles.³⁴

Indeed, Goodyear’s and Tetrault’s relationship examining in consciousness raising groups had a profound effect on others. “We would hear hours of bitching about what relationship was and we’d say, that’s not what relationship is, you don’t have to be in those kind of oppressive roles and situations: you can walk. And women got that message,” Goodyear explained.³⁵ At least ten women from the Albion consciousness raising group left their husbands to explore lesbianism and alternative relationships, including Thomas.

Sherry Thomas and her husband Chris had moved to Albion to farm, but to earn money Chris became a commercial fisherman. Consequently, Thomas spent a lot of time alone farming and working alone wherein she realized her ability to successfully live on the land independently. Meeting other women in the Albion area, such as goat farmers Goodyear and Tetrault, led Thomas to “quickly join ... [the consciousness raising group] being very frustrated with the sexism of the times.”³⁶ Thomas remembered:

As part of the consciousness raising group, a lot of us came out or got involved with other women (not everyone stayed a lesbian). We were basically falling in love with each other and with a profound sense of possibility. Because there were no models, we felt that anything was possible. If I could build a barn, then I could do anything else I wanted to too. And we were all teaching each other to be plumbers, electricians, veterinarians, farmers and more.³⁷

For some women “going back to the land” wasn’t even necessarily to join the back-to-the-land movement; indeed, Thomas saw the movement as “rife with ‘my old lady’ and women with babies on their hips.”³⁸ Instead, moving to the country meant “inventing a life in which it was

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Sherry Thomas, interview by author, email, February 22, 2013.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

possible to find meaningful work as a woman and to develop a profound sense of self esteem,” because being as self-sufficient as possible was “profoundly satisfying.”³⁹

But in order to pursue that meaningful work, in order to be self-sufficient as women, and to develop that self-esteem, women first had to confront daily encounters with systems of domination and oppression they had hoped they left behind in the city. Tired of men who “would end up fighting with us about everything and want[ing] to take control and be the bosses” Carmen Goodyear and the other women on Tai Farm took a stand and declared the farm women’s land.⁴⁰ As Goodyear put it, men (who had come with some of the women) “became furious that we had the final say in how projects were carried out,” and “we [women] soon decided to call the farm ‘women’s land’ and ... kicked [the men] off.”⁴¹ As it became clear that living with men meant an unending struggle for the women to explore their full autonomy and authenticity as people attempting to live outside traditional society they “finally just said, ‘No. ... We have something else to do here, and it’s to learn how to be full people,’” Goodyear recalled.⁴²

Women-only space (or separatism) was “necessary,” Goodyear affirmed, “in order for us to grow into the full human beings we aspired to be.”⁴³ As someone who grew up at an all-female boarding school, Goodyear felt that being “surrounded by a female world ... allowed me to become myself, irregardless of gender” (sic).⁴⁴ In other words, Goodyear early recognized the powerful implications inherent in the gender binary model, and that the power of this complete division severely limited roles for women. For her, when gender was rendered irrelevant (for

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Carmen Goodyear, *Women on the Land: Creating Conscious Community*, DVD, directed by Carmen Goodyear and Laurie York (Mendocino: Mendocino Coast Films: 2012).

⁴¹ Goodyear, interview by author, email, April 14, 2011.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

example in a “female world”) then a girl or woman could have the chance to develop her potential without those imposed sexist limitations.

For scholar Alice Echols, the idea of rendering gender irrelevant was a radical feminist, social constructionist phenomena, not something that would be a characteristic of cultural feminism. Yet the separatist creation of a “female world,” very much considered a tenet of cultural feminism, enabled Goodyear and other back-to-the-land feminists to deligitimize the socially constructed power of gender. Clearly since back-to-the-land feminism meant practicing both radical and cultural feminist ideology, country women’s experiences complicate the notion of cultural feminism, especially its tendency towards essentialism, and its opposition to radical feminism.

Learning how to be “full people” without sexist limitations, boundaries, or gendered expectations became possible with separatism. Because there were no men to co-opt difficult, strenuous physical labor, undermine women’s decision making, or for that matter to clean up after, women were free to meet the challenges of living on the land. Women who worked the land with other women, without the presence of men, became “barn-building, fence-mending, goat-raising, well-digging women” who dismantled self-doubt and incompetence through consciousness raising and by doing the work that country living demanded.⁴⁵ Women quickly recognized the capability of their bodies, the range of their strength, and the value of community building. “I learned specific ... building skills, a huge range of animal care skills, some amount of car mechanics, plumbing, electricity,” Goodyear remembered, “Those are incredible skills for a woman to have. We were all encouraging each other to learn these things and not be dependent

⁴⁵ Westin, “Barn-Building, Fence-Mending, Goat-Raising, Well-Digging Women.”

on men.”⁴⁶ Another woman recalled, “I wanted to learn everything ... because it really was about empowering women to break out of traditional roles.”⁴⁷

With the understanding that back-to-the-land living could foster strength, self-esteem, and empowerment in women, Goodyear, Tetrault, Thomas and other women from Mendocino County area farms and communes wanted to share that knowledge. They envisioned a magazine with the purpose of inspiring other women to experience feminist empowerment while living on the land. In that way *Country Women Magazine* was developed (see figure 1). “Very soon we decided to have themes,” Goodyear said in an interview in the 1990s. She recalled that to prepare an issue or to write on a topic for a magazine they “consciousness raised about it. That was the format ...,” she recalled, “We’d set up a kind of consciousness issue raising group around a topic and meet about it once a week and just share ideas.”⁴⁸

Goodyear particularly remembered the third issue, which was on women and artists. Goodyear and another woman who had “always drawn and enjoyed drawing [but] never considered [themselves] artists” decided to lead the issue.⁴⁹ They discovered many other women who didn’t consider themselves artists but who had been creating for years, “*always* making music, *always* dancing[,] and had never taken themselves seriously.”⁵⁰ “None of us were writers or artists or anything. We didn’t have skills ... the [layout of the] first [few] issues was hysterical. But the appreciation that we got ... always kept us focused,” Goodyear recalled.⁵¹

Among those counterculture women in Mendocino seeking independence from the oppressions of patriarchy, capitalism, and materialism, *Country Women Magazine* became at

⁴⁶ Carmen Goodyear, *Women on the Land*, DVD.

⁴⁷ Unknown speaker, *Women on the Land*, DVD.

⁴⁸ Goodyear, interview by Bernstein.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

least one project that encouraged weekly meetings and feminist consciousness raising, and helped foster a growing sense of self-actualization innate in the feminist movement. The magazine, a conglomeration of articles written by Mendocino women as well as submissions from across the country (and eventually internationally), became a staple of homesteading, farming, communal, and/or back-to-the-land *feminist* inspiration for women across the nation. Each magazine had a different focus. The practical articles were numerous, and the political and ideological articles were pertinent. The last few pages of the magazine were particularly telling. One page listed an index of practical articles in past issues: bees, keeping bees, raising, butchering, feeding chickens, raising cows, goats, horses, pigs, rabbits, sheep, turkeys, veterinary skills, building animal and human housing, baking bread, making cheese, using grown produce, canning, drying, growing and using herbs, extensive list of gardening skills, baby care, homebirth, birth control, menopause, nutrition, pre-natal care, vaginal/breast self help, sexuality, class, spirituality, yoga, recycling, quilting, self defense, car care, farm tools, power tools, tractors and machinery, environmental struggles (see figure 3).⁵²

A page from issue 25 asked readers to fill out a survey on readership demographics, to enable the magazine's editors to go through a "process of self-examination and change" so that "the changes we make ... reflect your thoughts, feelings and needs" (sic).⁵³ Editors wanted to know if readers found practical advice useful, if they considered themselves political, if they participated in feminist activities or read feminist literature. Indeed, locating the responses to the questionnaire could be a historian's goldmine (see figure 4).

At least one magazine also ended with a section entitled "Future Issues" (see figure 5).

⁵² "Index to Practical Articles," *Country Women Magazine*, "Fiction" Issue 25, 63, and Inside back cover, "Woman as Artist" Issue 21, (San Francisco: Waller Press, 1977 and 1976 respectively).

⁵³ "Survey," *Country Women Magazine*, Issue 25 (1977), 63.

The issues country women were concerned with indicate a distinct feminist politics, both “radical” and “cultural.” Topics included: “Anger and Violence,” “Women’s Relationship to Plants and Animals,” “Humor,” “International Women,” “Farming Women.”⁵⁴ Each issue heading was followed by a long paragraph of questions intended to spark interest, debate, and dialogue. For example, women were concerned with issues centering on anger and violence such as “rape, battered wives, pornography, [and] in medical practice” as well as “women’s relationship to anger. ... The role of anger and violence in the Feminist movement and other movements for social change. Role of anger and violence in our relationship to the planet?”⁵⁵ These clearly resonated with radical feminist issues. On the other hand, under “Women’s Relationship to Plants and Animals” the editors asked “What are women’s historical connections to agriculture and animal tending?” and “Do we have a role as earth caretakers?”⁵⁶ While an interest in women’s historical connections to the land may be too vague to assume essentialist undertones, certainly contending with the question of women as earth’s caretakers is grounded in the essentialism found in the counterculture, environmental movement, and eco-feminist movement. Country women, then, did not necessarily align themselves with either radical or cultural feminism as they were pursuing an agenda that spoke to both variants.

Because of the success of the magazine by the mid 1970s, Mendocino women were approached about publishing a book—a full-length source for feminist back-to-land living. The handbook, published in 1976, was yet another testament to the growing popularity of the back-to-the-land and women’s liberation movements, as well as their overlap. *Country Women: A Handbook for a New Farmer* (see figure 2) was a 381-page book primarily aimed at other

54 “Future Issues,” *Country Women Magazine*, Issue 25 (1977), inside back cover.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

women. It anthologized how-to information (mainly from the magazine, but much of which was newly written), poetry, art, drawings, resources, and inspiration on farming, animal husbandry, home and barn building, land purchasing, well-digging and other homesteading concerns “with minimum reliance on outside and professional help.”⁵⁷ One special feature was Sherry Thomas’s journal (as previously mentioned in chapter two), sectioned off as insets and thoughtfully paced throughout the handbook. Told with impassioned detail, her back-to-the-land journey was a testament to many women’s experiences of sexism and subsequent feminist enlightenment living on the land.

The skills women learned living on the land and the ways that they shared their knowledge for other rural women in *Country Women Magazine* and *Country Women: A Handbook* highlight the uniqueness of back-to-the-land feminism and the way it enabled country women to become “full people.” The self-transformation that occurred by learning traditionally male-oriented skills was the foremost way country women found empowerment. Sharing those skills was a political strategy to promote feminist awareness. The way they shared the skills, as is evident in the magazine’s and handbook’s articles and drawings, was through the use of radical feminist rhetoric and a radical feminist focus (pointing out patriarchy and sexist culture), but was also mimicking aspects of cultural feminism (songs, poems, and drawings conveyed a strong valuation of an essentialist women’s culture). The convergence of these ideologies that scholars such as Echols contend are two wholly separate variations is located in the actions of women’s skill-learning and living on the land, and captured in the magazine and handbook.

As basic skills were necessary right away when living on the land, women quickly

⁵⁷ *Country Women: A Handbook*, front cover.

encountered situations of either failure or empowerment, as we saw in Sherry Thomas's journal. Women understood the immediate ramifications of learning those skills (or not learning), and that knowledge was the most important basis of the magazine and handbook. They knew there was nothing essentially different or unique about men or women communards who arranged for comfortable living on the land. The difference was that men had a higher chance of knowing how to use tools, or being familiar with certain procedures like carpentry, plumbing, or electricity, and women on women-only lands had to teach themselves.

Splitting wood, for example, as anyone that has ever tried knows, takes a lot of muscle, time, and energy and can be exhausting work. As country women learned to appreciate the nuances of collecting and splitting wood, they reveled in a newfound sense of accomplishment and competence. "I am so excited to feel that I can do it," Thomas expressed, "There is such pleasure in the work and constant motion—tensions become grounded. And the woodpile grows much faster than the garden."⁵⁸ Learning a new, typically male-oriented and difficult task fostered confidence and challenged the stereotype that women couldn't perform such physically demanding labor.

In *Country Women: A Handbook*, Goodyear explained the challenge of splitting wood—how to deal with green wood, how easily seasoned wood snaps, the benefit of knowing different types of wood and of having an axe of the proper weight appropriate for the woman doing the job, of using the least amount of energy, how to avoid knots, and how to maintain proper posture.

Chain sawing wood was even more challenging. Using a heavy, loud chain saw required a shift in thinking. "I love their efficiency; I hate their loud and angry nature," wrote back-to-

⁵⁸ Thomas, journal in *Country Women: A Handbook*, 17.

lander Jenny Ross, a contributor to *Country Women: A Handbook*.⁵⁹ Ross and her co-ed fellow communards decided to purchase a chain saw as it was the obvious choice in staying warm and dry. The women immediately realized the importance of learning to use the tool.

The chain saw is a sacred male tool. Women are in no way expected to be able to use one. And many women have accepted that place out of lack of confidence. ...[Now] I feel really good about knowing how to run a chain saw. ... And that's a new experience for sure, controlling a machine basic to my survival. ... in the country the control is [clear]—either you get a man to do it at the price of losing some freedom and self respect, or you do it yourself.⁶⁰

Adept and informative (even spiritual as one author imagined a connection between herself, the earth, and the log she was splitting) and complete with graphics, articles such as “Splitting Wood” and “Chainsaws” were meant to inspire other country women to overcome limitations. As women understood the importance of learning country skills, in most cases separatism created space for women to learn those skills themselves. As they learned and became skilled at working traditionally male-oriented tasks, women challenged normative expectations that work need be gendered or based on the biological difference of sex. They engaged in theory-making by journaling, writing, consciousness raising, and publishing their experiences for other women’s potential liberation. By experiencing feminist enlightenment, or the freedom to become “full people,” and promptly sharing with other women via their grassroots magazine, country women contributed greatly to the production of radical feminist theory.

While learning these skills, women also engaged in the production of another radical feminist theory. No longer subject to the male gaze, women found strength in rearranging their thinking about their bodies. Instead of seeing themselves as objects of desire for men, they began to see their bodies as tools or extensions of their inner selves. Recognizing the physical

⁵⁹ Jenny Ross, “Chainsaws,” *Country Women: A Handbook*, 72-5.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

difference between male and female bodies encouraged women to learn how to efficiently do something based on an average woman's size and strength. Learning to approach labor in ways that would maximize efficiency and spare their bodies overtaxation and undue strains, women were able to accomplish physically demanding tasks.

An article in *Country Women: A Handbook*, "Our Clothing, Our Bodies," (a play on *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, 1971) explores this body consciousness and the importance of connecting with one's body as a "precious tool."⁶¹ Understanding how to relate to one's body "no longer [as] a vehicle" but as "an expression" of oneself was crucial in the development and practice of back-to-the-land feminism:

I am coming to love my body ... I can't remember a time since childhood when I felt comfortable with my body, never being pretty, tall, slender, graceful, desirable, attractive, poised, casual. Never being what a man would want, I've lived as though my body weren't a part of me. I've looked out through eyes that believed that awkward gesture, frizzy hair, self-conscious pose had nothing to do with *me*. Now learning to work with my body ... I'm discovering a new freedom. ... I love the power I'm discovering in this body.⁶²

The new and positive experience of body consciousness came from the understanding that society expected the work they were doing ought to be performed by men (tools and attire were made for and marketed to men, not women, for example). They also understood that certain manual labor might require specialized training of muscles and use of tools. "Our Clothing, Our Bodies" is a reference guide for how to optimize the best clothing, posture, and other habits for unfamiliar work (e.g. don't chop wood barefoot, wear and keep hair back when using power tools, wear flannels, etc.). Once again, this indicates that women were consciously resisting heteronormative gender roles and divisions of labor by actively seeking ways to efficiently and effectively perform challenging tasks traditionally deemed too difficult for female bodies.

⁶¹ "Our Clothing, Our Bodies," *Country Women: A Handbook*, 16-24.

⁶² Thomas, journal in *Country Women: A Handbook*, 46.

Furthermore, this shift of how to perceive one's body—as an extension of one's inner self instead of as an object of (male) desire—was a main tenet of second-wave radical feminist ideology and was an early exploration of the identity politics of the third-wave.

Further exploration of identity politics include the ways in which country women were experimenting with sexuality and lesbianism—notably earlier on than feminists documented in the more urban-centers of the movement. As previously discussed, Goodyear and Tetrault's lesbian relationship evaded heteronormative gender roles, as well as the common lesbian “butch/femme duality.”⁶³ Attempting to create relationships that eschewed both heteronormative and alternative gender roles, back-to-the-land feminists were engaging in proto-identity politics as early as 1969.

Indeed, attempting to learn how to do everything on the land accompanied this progressive ideology, but engaging in lesbian partnerships, even attempting to love everybody equally, was an experiment in both community and personal identity. Women's consciousness concerning what relationship meant quickly evolved. The socially constructed identities of “mother” or “wife” were challenged with communal child-rearing and in serially-monogamous lesbian partnerships. Women became *partners* who approached relationship with equality in mind. Mothers became fuller people, no longer trapped in a one-dimensional, self-less role. These challenges to the heteronormative, traditional roles for women were directly related to and/or reflective of radical feminist ideology. Through the development of a “female world” in which gender was rendered irrelevant, back-to-the-land feminists were enacting radical feminist praxis, and were able to do so in the wake of values associated with cultural feminism—separatism and a positive women's culture.

⁶³ Goodyear, interview by Bernstein.

As women learned how to obtain water and plumb, run electricity, build houses, maintain a woodpile, build fences, breed, birth, maintain, slaughter, and butcher livestock, grow their own vegetables, and grow together past traditional, socially constructed, limiting roles, they learned how to trust their own strength and power. By challenging gender roles and expectations by learning work traditionally thought of as male-oriented or masculine, by creating alternatives to consumerism through self-sufficiency, grassroots coalition building, and local trade networks, and through experimenting with sexuality and eschewing traditional expectations of sex and relationship, country women forged a valuable, unforgettable path from a world of conservatism and separate spheres and sexist ideology to a burgeoning *counter*-counterculture of egalitarianism, environmental consciousness, and self-actualized intellectualism through back-to-the-land feminism. They overcame fear and incompetence by re-imagining the extent of their capabilities, as women *and* outside of gender categories, and they embraced the task of experimenting with new, untold identities, sexuality, and community. Through these actions they developed a different variation of feminism—back-to-the-land feminism enabled country women of the 60s-era, as well as unconventional feminists of subsequent generations, to operate through a more wholistic feminist lens.

CHAPTER 4

MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF BACK-TO-THE-LAND FEMINISM

Through the lens of back-to-the-land feminism, country women's actions highlight the ways that feminists outside of urban areas were putting feminism into practice all the while developing theory at consciousness raising sessions and through the creation of feminist literature such as *Country Women Magazine* and *A Handbook for the New Farmer*.

The overlapping nature of back-to-the-land feminist values highlights the fluidity between theory and praxis. Were back-to-the-land feminists enacting “cultural” or “radical” feminist values? My research has shown that through the use of radical *and* cultural feminist ideology, their unconventional back-to-the-land feminist praxis highlights the overlap of the second-wave (along with other revolutionary social movements) and complicates the assumption that there is little value in separatism or essentialism. Conversely, back-to-the-land feminism shows that there are specific historical moments when separatism and essentialism become *strategies* to pave the way for expanding consciousness. Back-to-the-land feminism, then, is a previously unexplored variation of feminism in the second-wave that can highlight continuity over schisms in the women's liberation movement.

But how do we measure the success of such a cross-referential, overlapping, and largely hidden movement? For one thing, simply looking at the “Contact” section of *Country Women Magazine* highlights the influence that the original back-to-the-land women of Mendocino who produced the magazine had on the feminist back-to-the-land movement (see figure 6).¹ By 1977 feminist communes, communities, organizations, not-for-profits, and collectives had obviously become quite popular. Whether this is a testament to the “cultural” feminist undermining of

¹ “Contact,” *Country Women Magazine*, “Fiction” Issue 25 (1977), 64.

radical politics is, perhaps, left to be explored by scholars.

However, I contend that the communities of people advertising for their commune or organization or community, again, were resisting categories and acting from radical and cultural feminist sources. A commune in New York looked for another member to “balance out a group of six men (five gay) and two pregnant women.” A commune in North Carolina wrote, “We’re an intentional communal experiment in egalitarianism, feminism, open relationships, communal child rearing, communal property, bisexuality and joy” and wished to add new members. One group planned “a multiracial rural community.” Another feminist living and work collective sought helpers to build their first buildings in central Vermont. A non-profit corporation “Camping Women” “hope[d] to help feminists learn to live comfortably in the outdoors and to discover their own inner resources for coping with most life situations.” Did an organization with the goal of helping women live independently mean it belonged to the cultural feminism camp or that it was apolitical because it was aimed at and for women only? Again, with these overlapping issues I contend divisions become more and more arbitrary. The organizations and communities may indeed signify the growth of a women’s culture, but within those organizations it is apparent that members were contending with feminist and identity politics, were consciousness raising, or were attempting to educate women about feminist ideologies such as independence and self-respect.

Perhaps the shift from political radical feminism to personal cultural feminism is in actuality a positive testament to the popularity and extension of the women’s liberation movement from small, radical feminist groups, such as those in northern urban cities Echols focuses on, to the rural towns and countryside. It could also mean that the way in which activists engaged feminist values shifted with the influence and success of radical feminism. These

communes and organizations clearly indicate the success of the women's liberation movement, and specifically of back-to-the-land feminism.

Actually, the diverse and overlapping nature of back-to-the-land feminism has proved influential for a variety of movements, not just back-to-land living or the surge of women's groups and collectives. In addition to the already discussed lesbian and identity politics that are integral theories of both second and third-wave feminism, eco-feminism and other modern feminist perspectives of environmentalism, have roots in back-to-the-land feminism. Living in the country led women to contemplate varying aspects concerning human interaction with nature. Nationally and internationally, women submitted essays, articles, poems, songs, fiction, and visual art to *Country Women Magazine* that conveyed their earth-based feminist convictions. These details, either in prose, poem, or drawing, in the magazine and *A Handbook* reflect communards' sensuous, acutely observational, empathetic, and emotional reactions to the natural world.

Since hippie back-to-the-land women (in the same vein as other hippie counterculture land-owners) did not necessarily agree with land-ownership, many believed "'owning' [was] a reciprocal arrangement between [one]self and the land, involving responsibility, commitment, and exchange."² This perspective differs from the common western perception that nature is something to be owned, managed, or controlled.³ Back-to-the-land feminist women who equated the non-human world (nature) with the human world practiced an environmentalism that resisted human exceptionalism and honored a more holistic (and/or wholistic) ecology.

This perspective (that humans are a part of and not separate from nature) led women to

² "The Economics of Buying Land," *Country Women: A Handbook*, 12.

³ For a discussion on essentialism and nature in Europe and America see Carolyn Merchant's two extensive studies in *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1990) and *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

write about their interactions with nature as a discovery or new enterprise. For example, when women described their observations of nature, they also described the way they breathed, smelled, touched, and tasted their surroundings. “I am moved to tears by the tiniest details;” said Thomas, “the hint of purple in the spring green grasses, the curve of a foxglove blossom against an ancient redwood stump, the taste of sun-warmed blackberries.”⁴ Other impressions included the “magnificent rediscovery of natural cycles and rhythms and find[ing] yourself slowing and calming down” when “you sit under your favorite tree and watch the scampering lizards, listen to the singing wind, and find your bond to the land already growing strong.”⁵ Jenny Thiermann described coming back from the city to nature like “returning to a lover” and said, “I was very intimate with all of it, from the tiniest insect to the brightest star.”⁶ Recognizing a sisterhood, kinship, or other unobtrusive (however imagined) relationship with the environment was a form of resisting contemporaneous paternalistic and anthropocentric ideologies of dominating the earth, and these expectations preceded the eco-feminist movement of the late 1970s-1990s.

Back-to-the-land feminist women also recognized the finiteness of resources due to their experiences in the country:

The miracle of digging a hole into the ground and having it fill with clear water is reenacted each day. I never turn on a faucet without being aware of where that water comes from. As I drink, I can shut my eyes and still see that last despairing shovel full of clay from under which the water began slowly to bubble and to seep.... [I feel] a shock as I watch city visitors run taps on full with no thought for the water flooding down the drain.⁷

Back-to-the-land experiences such as this one clearly made an impact on counterculture women (and men), and the memories of these experiences did not quickly leave them. Thiermann

⁴ Thomas, journal in *Country Women: A Handbook*, 9.

⁵ “Choosing Your Land,” *Country Women: A Handbook*, 11.

⁶ Thiermann, interview by author, March 13, 2011.

⁷ *Ibid.*

remembers to conserve water, after having hauled it from a well and having observed the limits of rainfall in California summers.⁸ The same manner of conservation applied to lumber as well. *Country Women: A Handbook* preaches recycling and reusing wood from old structures and denounces “devastating large-scale logging operation[s].”⁹ This perpetual consciousness or reverence for the resources and natural world around them continued to influence the back-to-landers even if they returned to mainstream life. Acts of conservation, land preservation, and minimizing waste, while not new ideas, were imprinted as important values on back-to-landers, and the act of writing and publishing about earth-awareness were contributions from back-to-the-land feminists that helped make popular the environmental movement.

Similarly, country women understood that “In eating, [we] take the lives of other living things. Butchering a lamb is part of the same continuum as pulling up a cabbage in the garden. In a larger cycle, we all take our turns as consumer and consumed.” The act of raising one’s own food left the small farmer “with consciousness and thankfulness” in the act of consuming (both as market consumer and producer/taker of life).¹⁰ This theme presently runs strong in the grassroots campaigns for “slow food” and local food, as well as in the popularity of vegetarian and veganism.

Clearly back-to-landers developed an acute consciousness of the natural environment around them; whether it was the California redwood forests, or the hens and goats they raised from birth, their reverence for life and acceptance (but appreciativeness) of death was fostered in the country. An early concern for spreading awareness about where one’s food came from is directly connected to today’s slow food and local food movement. Even more so than the organic

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ “Choosing and Handling Wood,” *Country Women: A Handbook*, 120.

¹⁰ “Butchering Sheep, Deer and Goats,” *Country Women: A Handbook*, 343.

food craze of the 1990s and early 2000s, “slow food” (the opposite of fast food in every way) is recognized as an essential part of sustainable living. Carmen Goodyear, of Tai Farm, and partner Laurie York released their documentary *Women on the Land: Creating Conscious Community* (2012) with the theme of the slow food movement in mind. Her work as a back-to-the-land feminist, farmer, rancher, and film maker are living testament to the direct correlation and connection between back-to-the-land feminism and modern food movements.

The back-to-the-land movement, along with the counterculture, is also partly responsible for today’s popular (if at times hypocritical) D.I.Y. ethic. Country women developed coalitions and grassroots networks to trade goods and knowledge. This was even practiced nationally through the magazine. Today that ethic remains about attempting self-sufficiency with a goal of sustainability. Its ideology is as influential on chefs of the slow food movement (who attempt to grow their own herb and vegetable gardens, shop locally for ingredients, and cook in-season produce and meats) to corporations who have jumped on the “go-green” bandwagon. But truly, the grassroots D.I.Y. ethic of the countercultural back-to-the-land movement can more realistically be seen in the ways average Americans desire to own their own chickens, obtain solar powered energy, build from recycled materials, cook their own meals and/or grow their own produce, and in many circles live in intentional communities.

Clearly back-to-the-land feminism is a unique model of feminist theory and praxis that sheds light on how so many social movements were overlapping and subscribing to similar ideas. The women who went back to the land have left their indelible mark on today’s feminist women. Back-to-the-land feminists’ farming success (Tai Farm as well as many other farms still exist and function) and visceral empowerment that led to the contributions to the production and praxis of feminist theory is a powerful moment in American history that ought to continue to be explored.

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APPENDICES

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Issue 25, p 62

and all text including:

a copy of a survey from Issue 25, p 63
a copy of the "Contact" page- Issue 25, p 64
a copy of "Index to Practical Articles"- Issue 21, p 63
a copy of a survey from Issue 25, p 63

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Country Women: Back-to-the-Land Feminism and Radical Feminist Praxis in the Women's Liberation Movement

Major Professor: Robbie Lieberman

Education:

B.A.- English- Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, *cum laude*, 2007

M.A.- History- Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, in progress (expected date of graduation 5/10/13)

Fields: Early United States, Modern United States

Graduate Certificate: Women, Gender, Sex, and Sexuality

Special Interests: Women's History: second-wave, radical feminism, cultural feminism, third-wave, black feminist theory, post-structuralism and feminist theory; Long Black Freedom Movement; New Left; Counterculture and 1960s social movements; U.S. Environmental History- colonial to present.

Educational Employment:

Research Assistant- Southern Illinois University, Carbondale: 2008

Researched gender and masculinity in colonial Indian literature- Dr. Joseph Sramek

Grading Assistant- Southern Illinois University, Carbondale: 2008

Grader- Dr. Peter Argersinger- *Modern American History 1877-present*

Grading Assistant- Southern Illinois University, Carbondale: 2012

Grader- Dr. Natasha Zaretsky- *Contemporary US History*

Grader- Dr. Shannen Williams- *United States History to 1877*

Teaching Assistant- Southern Illinois University, Carbondale: 2011-present

History 110- *20th Century United States History*

History 101b- *World History since 1500*

History 101a- *World History to 1500*

History 101b- *World History since 1500*

Guest Lectures:

“Voices of Resistance: Black Poetry and Song in the Harlem Renaissance,” in Women’s Studies 303i: *Women, Blues and Literature*. Southern Illinois University, Altgeld, October 20, 2010.

“The Women of *The Color Purple* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: Black Feminism in Fiction,” in Women’s Studies 303i: *Women, Blues and Literature*. Southern Illinois University, Altgeld, November 10, 2010.

Professional Service:

Judge- Southern Illinois Regional History Fair: 2011.

Panel Moderator- *Southern Illinois University History Graduate Student Association Conference*, Carbondale, Illinois: April 2011.

Judge- Giant City School History Fair: 2012.

Conference Presentations:

Country Women: Resistance and Empowerment of Women in Communal Experiences, Windy City Graduate Student History Conference: *Contested Spaces, Contested Identities: Exploring Power and Resistance in the Modern World*, University of Illinois at Chicago, Illinois: October 2011.

Country Women: Back-to-the-Land Feminism and Radical Feminist Praxis in the Women’s Liberation Movement, *The Inaugural Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies Conference*, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois: April 5, 2013.

References:

Dr. Robbie Lieberman, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. 618. 453.4391

Dr. Natasha Zaretsky, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. 618.453.4391

Dr. Janet Fuller, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. 618.453.5141

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