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## How women are made: a look at the issues of the women's liberation movement

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**"How Women Are Made: A Look At The Issues  
Of The Women's Liberation Movement"**

by

**Lenore Jan Coffey**

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of**

**MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK**

**Portland State University**

**School of Social Work**

**1971**

**This Description includes:**

**Background  
Methodology  
and of this project  
Rationale**

**Statement of Personal Position**

**Syllabus**

**Workshop Plan**

**Seminar Reading List**

**Bibliography**

## Background

This project was originally conceived of as an exploration and written presentation of various dimensions of the contemporary social movement called the Women's Liberation Movement. The exploration was to be through personal experience in the movement and research in movement literature.

I became aware of the Women's Liberation Movement, which was just gaining momentum, in 1969, through a series of articles appearing in Portland's "underground" newspaper, The Willamette Bridge and then through new feminist literature which I began to acquire.

I reread classics: Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique which had appeared in the early nineteen sixties and Simone de Beauvoir's exhaustive work on woman, The Second Sex.

The research project seemed to me to be a vehicle whereby I might explore a social movement which had a strong personal appeal to me and one with which I strongly identified. I decided to call my project "Dimensions of Women's Liberation".

From a research point of view, the specific objective was to identify the issues and elements of the Women's Liberation experience for those who are involved, in other words, to determine what are the salient dimensions of this experience for the individual in Women's Liberation.

## Methodology

Until the fall of 1970, and the beginning of my second year in graduate school, my involvement with the movement was confined to reading and discussion and argument with other people, particularly classmates. I knew that local sympathizers with the movement were attempting to organize in Portland and were following a format established in many areas throughout the country, which consists of some sort of central organization with the base of the movement being small groups or "consciousness-raising groups". Small groups were being organized on a geographical basis in Portland.

With the decision to formalize my inquiry into Women's Liberation, I joined a new group in southeast Portland which met weekly at the home of one of its members. A Women's Center - a large rented house - was just being established, and I began to attend the "structure meetings" or organizational meetings there which had previously been held at Centenary Wilbur Methodist Church.

I subscribed to Women: A Journal of Liberation and regularly purchased Women's Liberation newspapers which are published in several major cities throughout the country. These have such colorful titles It Ain't Me, Babe from the song of the same title by Bob Dylan, Off Our Backs,

Everywoman, and Ain't I A Woman? from Sojourner Truth's often-quoted (in new feminist literature) speech before the Women's Rights Convention at Akron, Ohio, in 1851.

I continued to acquire books, magazines, pamphlets, and bibliographies from the growing body of new feminist literature and examined articles and features appearing in most of the well-known magazines: Time, Look, Newsweek, Harper's, and Atlantic Monthly. Some specialized magazines such as Transaction did many-page features on women, and New Left and Radical publications such as Leviathan from the Bay Area and the new Radical Therapist devoted whole issues to women from a new feminist perspective.

I attended lectures and remained alert to special media coverage of Women's Liberation.

As I studied, listened, watched, and participated, two things became apparent to me: I realized that there was little that I could say in a written product about the vital issues of the Women's Liberation Movement that wouldn't be simply restating what had already been said. I also realized that my participation in the movement not only influenced my personal growth and the way in which I viewed myself and my life, but also profoundly influenced my perspective on the formation, growth, and development of female human behavior as well as heightening my awareness of, appreciation for, and concern with the socio-economic environment with which the individual interacts. All of

which social workers - at least theoretically - are vitally concerned.

Consequently, I began to want to share what I'd learned in a more organized and less casual fashion with other social work students. When Dr. Art Emlen, my research advisor, suggested that my project culminate in some sort of workshop or seminar series, I eagerly agreed. I determined to plan a course which would offer students the opportunity to examine literature, listen to guest speakers, exchange ideas with each other, and decide for themselves whether the Women's Liberation Movement has implications for them - as it has for me - as social work practitioners, and if so, what is the nature of those implications.

The objectives for the workshop and seminar are discussed in the attached syllabus and course plan. An evaluation of the course will be forthcoming at the end of spring term when the course terminates.

During course preparation I consulted many times with Dr. Emlen; I also met with John Longres and frequently consulted with Diane Pancoast who also happened to be my field instructor and who agreed to go on record as official instructor for the course, although I will actually teach the course. The Women's Liberation small group to which I belonged shared in my plans, offered ideas and suggestions,

and several members agreed to participate as speakers in the workshop and subsequent seminars.

Rationale For The Course - Issues Of Women's Liberation

I would like to defend my stance that the issues with which Women's Liberation is concerned are or should be issues with which social workers are concerned. I'll discuss issues of the movement from the point of view of "Why Women's Liberation?" an article by Marlene Dixon, who is professor of sociology at McGill University. The article first appeared in the December, 1969, issue of Ramparts Magazine and has been reprinted in pamphlet form by the Bay Area Radical Education Project, (941 Guerrero St., San Francisco, California, 94110).

Each student who registers for the course will be given a copy of this pamphlet at registration and will be asked to read it before coming to the workshop and four subsequent seminars.

Marlene Dixon refers to the 1960's as "a decade of liberation" and says that women have been swept up by the drive toward liberation along with Blacks, Chicanos, Indians, and poor whites - all those who are discovering the nature of their oppression in American society and who have become aware that they could live more free and fully human lives.



In less than four years a variety of women's groups have come into existence which range from such middle-class, reform-minded groups as the nationally-based National Organization for Women (NOW) to local, radical, revolution-minded feminist groups in every major city in the country. There are women's caucuses within nearly all New Left groups and in most professional associations in the social sciences.

In 1968, according to Dixon, the movement was focused upon male chauvinism and the psychological oppression of women. However, the emphasis is currently on understanding the social and economic bases for oppression of women and the frameworks for analysis range from democracy to Marxism. But even more striking to Dixon than this shift in emphasis is the loss of fear in women. Women are daring to strive toward becoming complete human beings, daring to look for alternatives to the limited and limiting role which our society assigns them, and are no longer afraid of losing their very identities as women.

The early women's movement, which embraced almost a hundred years, came to an end in the 1920's. In the thirties and forties women were forced into the labor market by hard times and the war, and with the end of the war, they were forced out again. Dixon puts it this way:

The story has been repeated after each war and the reason is clear: women form a flexible, cheap labor pool which is essential to a capitalist system. When labor is scarce, they are forced onto the labor market. When labor is plentiful they are forced out. Women and blacks have provided a reserve army of unemployed workers, benefiting capitalists and the stable male white working class alike. Yet the system imposes untold suffering on the victims, blacks and women, through low wages and chronic unemployment. (p. 2)

In the fifties the average age at marriage declined, the size of families went up and the migration to the suburbs began. Women were expected to live happily and devotedly focused on husband, home, and children.

By the end of the fifties, there were three significant social developments which provided the basis for a rebirth of the women's movement. By the end of the fifties, women made up one-third of the labor force. For the most part, they were in low-paying service, clerical, and semi-skilled jobs for which they were paid less than men for doing identical work.

Second, love and marriage in suburbia were not turning out to be the joyous, fulfilling experience for countless women that they were supposed to be.

Third, the growing civil rights movement, which was later to become the New Left, was attracting thousands of young people, and with their eventual disillusionment

in the face of harsh, political reality came the breakdown of sex mores and roles along with the questioning and rejection of traditional political ideologies and cultural myths. Even in organizations such as Students For A Democratic Society there was tremendous disillusionment on the part of radical women who expected to work side by side with male radicals for what they envisioned as a truly democratic society, but found instead that they were expected to make coffee and keep the beds warm.

The three major groups of women, then, that make up the new women's movement, according to Dixon, are working women, middle class women, and students.

Understandably, working women are most concerned with guaranteed employment, just wages, job discrimination, and certainly, child care. Dixon states that their oppression is rooted in industrial capitalism and an exploitive labor market.

Middle class women are particularly aware of the dehumanizing effect of seriously limited lives, and know the consequences of imposed inferiority and "psychological mutilation and injustice of institutionalized segregation," and the lack of gratification in trying to live vicariously through husband and children.

Students, as unmarried, middle class girls, are most sensitized to the sexual exploitation of women and rebel against the expectations of passive and dependent behavior in relationships. They also reject the idea that they must function as sexual objects, being defined in primarily sexual rather than human terms, and being pressured to package themselves as attractive merchandise on the sex market.

Dixon insists that all women suffer from economic exploitation, from psychological deprivation, and from exploitive sexuality.

She goes on to say that it's necessary to destroy the ideology of male supremacy which basically insists upon the biological and social inferiority of women, which is the same - not similar, but same - stereotyping that kept blacks in their place for so long. She points out that many women believe that they are, in fact, inferior, and that this is one of the ways in which oppressed people contribute to their oppression.

She points out that the image of woman in this culture is for the most part empty and degrading and hardly encourages taking women seriously as human beings. She states that studies indicate that black acceptance of white stereotypes fostered mutilated identity, alienation, rage, and self-hatred, and that this certainly occurs among women, also.

Women are notorious for not liking other women and for not liking to be identified with other women.

Marlene Dixon points to marriage as being the chief vehicle for the oppression of women. It is perhaps, however, more advantageous to be a drudge in one's own kitchen than a drudge in a factory or office. Also, along with marriage goes improved social status for many women, since women are usually defined by the men they attach themselves to and by their children.

Women do a great economic service for the society. There are 44 million housewives of all ethnics groups, classes, and races. They are providing essential services and labor - free. Since housework is outside of the market place and the world of trade, and since salary often mirrors the value of different kinds of work in this society, women's work has very low status. So do women.

Women are not only free laborers but do another service for the economy as consumers. And then there are the women who work as wage-earners and return home to prepare dinner, clean house, etc. and properly fulfill the requirements of their womanly role.

Sixty-two per cent of women working in 1967 were doing so out of economic need, and the trend is clearly

toward greater numbers of women entering the work force. Dixon provides some impressive statistics which I'll not cite here.

The popular idea of a Black American matriarchy is unfounded, according to Dixon. She states that black women haven't been the oppressors of their men because racism and economic exploitation come from the white world. In fact, Black women are the most discriminated against in terms of opportunity. In 1960, 44 per cent of married Black women with children under six years were working. To begin to compete in the labor force, education is necessary; the bulk of illiterate women are Black. In this society, Black women carry a heavy social and economic burden, with two strikes against them: color and sex.

Dixon also states that the image of the "pampered middle class woman" is incorrect and naive, and that middle class women, widowed, divorced, or with nothing to occupy them at home return to the labor market to find themselves forced into working class life in low-paid, unskilled or semi-skilled work.

She insists that nothing short of radical social change will improve the social position of women; since my purpose here is to outline the issues with which Women's Liberation is concerned from the perspective (a common perspective among

movement women, I believe) of an activist woman in the movement, I'll not discuss reform or revolution.

This is one of the concluding paragraphs of Marlene Dixon's essay:

The heart of the movement, as in all freedom movements, rests in women's knowledge, whether articulated or still only an illness without a name, that they are not inferior - not chicks, nor bunnies, or quail, nor cows, nor bitches, nor ass, nor meat. Women hear the litany of their own dehumanization each day. Yet all the same, women know that male supremacy is a lie. They know they are not animals or sexual objects or commodities. They know their lives are mutilated, because they see within themselves a promise of creativity and personal integration. Feeling the contradiction between the essentially creative and self-actualizing human being within her, and the cruel and degrading less-than-human role she is compelled to play, a woman begins to perceive the falseness of what her society has forced her to be. And once she perceives this, she knows she must fight. (p. 14)

The issues of Women's Liberation are freedom from economic, social, and sexual exploitation; freedom from employment discrimination, and increased opportunity for self-actualization. Increased opportunity for self-actualization is present with greater freedom in the areas mentioned; it is also potentially a significant part of the individual's experience in the Women's Liberation Movement.

A woman who becomes involved in the movement has the opportunity to meet with other women on a non-competitive basis to discuss, analyze, and take action on the issues.

In this process a woman learns that her "problem" is not a solitary and neurotic unwillingness to be a woman, but rather that she shares in a widespread unwillingness to accept the societal definition of what a woman is and does. This is a "liberating" awareness for a woman, and this awareness--combined with friendship and support from other women, and mutual efforts toward personal growth and development and effecting change in society's treatment of women--fosters greater self-acceptance and increased self-esteem in the individual woman. Her desire for unique and individual self-actualization is called to her attention and legitimized, then, by the Women's Liberation Movement, and the movement becomes, in part, a vehicle through which some of this self-actualization can be accomplished.

Obviously the issues of Women's Liberation are - broadly speaking - issues with which social workers in their professional roles are familiar. The Women's Liberation Movement in America relates to these issues as they apply to the position and plight of women in this country.



### Personal Position

My personal position is this: The Women's Liberation Movement has something to say to social workers who purport to be concerned with the individual's relationship to his or her environment, his or her self-actualization and mental health, and the individual's use and enjoyment of his or her human potential.

The course which I'm offering is an opportunity for social work students to learn that Women's Liberation is not about burning brassiers or acquiring penises, but about human beings who are tired and sick and furious over the waste of their humanness in the name of their child-bearing faculty, or in the name of any other reason, no matter how sugar-coated or romantic or mystical, which claims "differences" between the sexes and manages to keep woman eternally at the service of someone or something.

Anyone who doubts this should consider the enormous threat inherent in the Women's Liberation Movement to many people. The fact that Women's Liberation women who were demonstrating at the University of North Carolina were urinated on by male hecklers probably says more about the position of women in this society than a ton of rhetoric. Why is this movement so threatening? The entire course could be built upon that question.

## SYLLABUS

Course Title: "How Women Are Made: A Look At The Issues Of The Women's Liberation Movement."

Course Number: 507 - To be offered to first and second-year students, Spring Term, 1971.

Instructor: Official Instructor, Diane Pancoast. Actual Instructor, Lee Coffey.

Credit: Two hours.  
Course requires meeting initially for one full day for a workshop and subsequently meeting for four, two-hour seminars, one every other week.

### Objectives:

1. To stimulate social work students to examine a current, vital social movement from a social work point of view and become aware of and begin to deal with the implications of this movement for the social work practitioner.

"Social work point of view" refers to the professional point of view and frame of reference of the individual student social worker. A student in this class might decide that this movement has no social "implications" at all or that the implications are horrifying and as a "social work practitioner" he might make an effort to see that all women in Women's Lib are institutionalized. (He or she would be meeting the first objective of the course, although not in a way which is compatible with the instructor's bias.)

2. To examine from various perspectives some currently taken-for-granted ideas about "inherent" sexual characteristics, sexual identity, and sexual roles of women (and inevitably, men); to encourage thinking about these things in new ways, personally and professionally, and to creatively discuss the feasibility and implications of changes in these ideas.

For example: Most of us grow up believing that all women should be mothers, that women "need" to be mothers. It is now being argued that women don't "need" to be mothers any more than someone with vocal chords "needs" to sing. How do you (student) react to that statement? How will your ideas on women and motherhood affect your practice with female clients? What would be some of the social implications of wide acceptance of the idea that bearing children is one of many opportunities available to women and not necessarily better than others?

3. To provide an opportunity for personal growth.

Nearly all of us are biologically male or female and most of us maintain an identity - at least socially - as a man or a woman. All of us are affected by societal definitions of what is appropriate to being women and men. Students in this class will have the opportunity to critically examine some of these definitions and prescribed behavior, as well as their own attitudes and stereotypes and evaluate them on the basis of proven validity, humanness, and usefulness, and they might find that such an evaluation and the conclusions drawn therefrom result in useful insight in their personal lives.

### Content And Teaching Method

The course will begin with a full-day workshop; all students registering for the course will be given a pamphlet copy of "Why Women's Liberation?" by Marlene Dixon and will be asked to read it before coming to the workshop. Workshop content has been selected to inform students of the key issues of Women's Liberation, to provide information about the movement itself, and to give students the opportunity to talk with women who are active in the movement.

Each subsequent seminar will focus upon a specific topic or topics to which students can relate personally as well as professionally. Relevant readings will be assigned each time, and occasionally outside resource persons will be invited to address the group and participate in discussions.

The readings for the first seminar, entitled "What Makes a Woman?" present intelligent and entertaining analyses of the current female situation from a feminist point of view.

In this first seminar, students will be encouraged to react to the workshop and to exchange information about their reasons for signing up for this course, their views on Women's Liberation and relevant issues, and how they relate any of this to themselves as social workers.

The second seminar, "Women And Work - Alternatives To The Existing Division Of Labor", focuses upon women in the labor force, division of labor between the sexes, and consideration of alternatives which might mean a more equitable sharing of responsibility for child care, housework, etc. The readings primarily discuss the experiences of women who are wage earners in various occupations.

The guest speaker will be a woman who will discuss the realities of working in a man's world.

"Sex", the third seminar, revolves around readings which are concerned with sex differences, sexual relations, sexual identity, behavior which is considered sexually deviant, and sexual exploitation of women. The relationship between Gay Liberation and Women's Liberation will be discussed. Guest speakers will be from Gay Liberation.

The reading material for the fourth seminar, which is entitled "Women's Liberation And Social Workers", deals with minority women in Women's Liberation, women on Welfare, women in psychoterapy, and women in revolution and social change; in other words, women in areas in which social workers are theoretically at home.

The guest speaker, Diane Pancoast, will discuss Women's Liberation and social work, and class discussion will address itself to relating the material in the course to the students as social workers.

Seminars will be designed for minimum lecture, maximum discussion. The texts for seminars will be Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings From The Women's Liberation Movement, edited by Robin Morgan (Vintage - \$2.45) and Notes From the Second Year: Women's Liberation, Major Writings of the Radical Feminists, edited by Shulamith Firestone (\$1.50). Other readings will be in the form of handouts.

Some of the ideas expressed in the readings - most of which are written from a radical point of view - might impress some students as extreme, shocking, offensive, "sick", and one-sided. The point, however - to emphasize it again - is to:

1. examine the significance of the fact that these ideas are being discussed at all,
2. discuss the validity of these ideas and points of view, and
3. determine how or if they might be used in a creative fashion by the individual, personally and professionally.

#### Course Requirements

1. Participate in workshop and complete questionnaire.
2. Attend seminars, do readings, and participate in discussions.
3. Complete final written assignment which will consist of an evaluation of the course on the basis of the stated objectives and a subjective statement by the student reflecting how he or she met the objectives of the course.

Women's Liberation Course  
Lee Coffey  
Spring, 1971

WORKSHOP

Workshop: "How Women Are Made"

When: April 5, 1971.

Where: Room 5 (downstairs),  
Social Work I

Agenda:

1. All students complete questionnaire.
2. Get coffee and donuts and view material posted on walls.
3. Presentation by women in Portland Women's Liberation:
  - a) "Why Women's Liberation?"
  - b) "Freud and His Friends"
  - c) "Women and Employment"
  - d) "Social and Economic Roots of Women's Oppression"

Question and answer period after each presentation.

4. LUNCH - There will be a literature table where WLM literature will be available during lunch hour.
5. Demonstration of Self-Defense Techniques.
6. Presentation: "The Movement: How It's Organized"
7. Handout: "What It Would Be Like If Women Win" - Gloria Steinem. (Time essay, August 31, 1970)
8. Break to get coffee and read essay.

9. Divide into small groups. Groups will be asked to reflect upon and discuss material presented during the day and come up with three questions which can be discussed by a panel of six volunteers when large group reconvenes. Panel will consist of three students who are pro Women's Lib and three against.
10. Reconvene. Questions from groups written on board and checked for duplications. Students volunteer for panel.
11. Panel.
12. Students complete comment and question sheet to be used in further planning seminars.
13. Handouts: Schedule and reading list for seminars.

Women's Liberation Course  
Lee Coffey  
Spring, 1971

REQUIRED READING FOR SEMINARS

Texts: Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings  
From the Women's Liberation Movement. Robin  
Morgan, Editor.

Notes From The Second Year: Women's Liberation.  
Major Writings of the Radical Feminists. Shulamith  
Firestone, Editor.

These books have been ordered through the PSU bookstore.

1st seminar - What Makes a Woman?  
4/19/71

"You've Come A Long Way, Baby! Historial Perspectives"

Connie Brown and June Seitz ..... Sisterhood, p.3

"A Psychiatrist's View: Images of Women -  
Past and Present, Overt and Obscured."

Natalie Shainess, M.D. .... Sisterhood, p. 230

"Barbarous Rituals" ..... Sisterhood, p. 161

" 'Kinder, Kuche, Kirche' As Scientific Law,  
Psychology Constructs the Female"

Naomi Weisstein ..... Sisterhood, p. 205

"Woman And Her Mind: The Story of  
Everyday Life"

Meredith Tax ..... Notes, p. 10



## REQUIRED READINGS, continued.

"John And Mary: The Laugh's On Us"

Verna Tomasson ..... HANDOUT

"Love"

Shulamith Firestone ..... Notes, p. 16

"Know Your Enemy: A Sampling of  
Sexist Quotes" ..... Sisterhood, p. 31

2nd seminar - Women And Work - Alternatives To Existing  
5/3/71 Division of Labor

"Sesame Street and Sex-Role Sterotypes"

Jo Ann Gardner ..... HANDOUT

"The Politics of Housework"

Pat Mainardi ..... Notes, p. 28

Selected Readings ..... Sisterhood,  
pp. 37 - 101

"What It Would Be Like If Women Win"

Gloria Steinem ..... Time essay  
31 August 1970

## GUEST SPEAKER

3rd seminar - Sex  
5/17/71

"Primate Studies And Sex Differences"

Sally Linton ..... HANDOUT

## REQUIRED READINGS, continued.

## "The Myth of Vaginal Orgasm"

Anne Koedt ..... Notes, p. 37"We Like To Find A Late-Maturing Girl:  
The Playmate Process"

Thomas Meehan ..... HANDOUT

## "The Hooker"

Ellen Strong ..... Sisterhood, p. 289"Perspectives on Lesbianism:  
Lesbians as Bogeywomen"

Judy Grahn ..... HANDOUT

## "Notes Of A Radical Lesbian"

Martha Shelly ..... Sisterhood, p. 306

## GUEST SPEAKERS

4th seminar - Women's Liberation And Social Workers  
5/31/71

## "False Consciousness"

Jennifer Gardner ..... Notes, p. 82

## "Women And The Welfare System"

Carol Glassman ..... Sisterhood, p. 102"Women In The Black Liberation Movement:  
Three Views"..... Sisterhood,  
pp. 340 - 361

REQUIRED READINGS, continued.

"Colonized Women: The Chicana" ..... Sisterhood,  
pp. 376 - 384

"Female Liberation As The Basis For  
Social Revolution"

Roxanne Dunbar ..... Notes, p. 48

"Open Letter To Psychiatrists"

Nicole Anthony ..... HANDOUT

"Marriage And Psychotherapy"

Phyllis Chesler ..... HANDOUT

GUEST

TAKE-HOME EVALUATION OF COURSE

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Gordon, Linda. Families. Co-published: Bread and Roses, 1145 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, Massachusetts, 02139, and New England Free Press, 961 Tremont St., Boston, Massachusetts, 02118, 1970.

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Vol. 1, No. 4, "Women In Revolution", Summer, 1970.

Vol. 2, No. 1, "Women In The Arts", Fall, 1970.

Firestone, Shulamith. Editor. Notes From The Second Year: Women's Liberation. Radical Reminism, P.O. Box AA, Old Chelsea Station, New York, New York, 10011, 1970.

Transaction. Issue on the American woman. Vol. 8, No. 1/2. November/December, 1970.

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Women's Liberation Front, P.O. Box 1169, Iowa City,  
Iowa, 52240.

Everywoman. 6516 West 83rd St., Los Angeles, California,  
90045.

It Ain't Me Babe. Berkely: Women's Liberation Basement  
Press Collective, 1126 Addison St., Berkely, California,  
94702.

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Cleveland Park Station, Washington, D.C., 20008.

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