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## Beyond the Gay/Straight Split: Socialist Feminists in Baltimore

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*In recent histories of U.S. feminism, collaborations between lesbians and heterosexuals are overshadowed by the infamous “gay/straight split” of the early 1970s. In lesbian history, seventies androgyny is often characterized as a lesbian-feminist indictment of butch-femme lesbians’ gender, which obscures androgyny’s polyvalence. Oral history and a locally published journal illustrate how feminists in a Baltimore neighborhood shared politics and an idealized “socialist gender” in the 1970s. The article reveals that women “dressed down” in ways that de-emphasized their femininity and emphasized their critique of consumer capitalism. It argues that the continuing historical construction of the split between feminist lesbians and their heterosexual counterparts limits both the history of women’s liberation and of sexuality.*

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I was living in this commune, and we were wild and woolly back then. I mean we had the National Liberation Front of Vietnam’s flag painted on our floor, and none of us had full-time jobs, and we danced to Janis Joplin and Roberta Flack. When I look back on it, I think that the common denominator is community. I was part of a community that gave me what I needed at the time. And at some points that was the opportunity to express my rage, or work for change around women and men’s issues, or around sexuality or lesbian community. (Christine 1997)

In Baltimore, second-wave feminists drew upon not only radical and lesbian-feminist ideas but also a pervasive commitment to socialist principles. Perhaps because of the strong influence of New Left men and women, as well as the class issues apparent in their rapidly deindustrializing city, feminist lesbians in Waverly and Charles Village, two progressive neighborhoods in north central Baltimore, maintained a shared critique of capitalism as well as patriarchy from the late 1960s into the 1980s. A mostly white, middle-class community of feminists, many of whom were lesbians, worked and socialized together in the hopes of improving their city. They dressed androgynously in order to refute both gender and class norms, contributed to the burgeoning print culture of women’s liberation, and developed theoretical and practical approaches to ending sexism, racism, homophobia, and the class system as they built a local

community that later would be recalled as “where the lesbians used to live” (Laura 1997).

This article describes this community from the perspective of lesbians who lived and worked in Waverly and Charles Village in the 1970s and 1980s. Primary evidence comes from ten interviews with eleven lesbians paired with analysis of a socialist-feminist women’s liberation journal, *Women: A Journal of Liberation (WJL)*, published in the neighborhood during the same time period.<sup>1</sup> Analytically, I place these women and their community into two distinct, yet related, contexts. First, this history is contextualized in the second wave of feminism in the United States, in which it both confirms and complicates that history as it has been represented in national and local studies. Importantly, this paper argues that even after “the gay/straight split” had occurred in some women’s liberation circles, many Baltimore feminist lesbians continued working with heterosexual women, rather than forming separatist groups. While arguments occurred about sexual politics among these women, many women sustained friendships and political connections in spite of the tension. I suggest, therefore, that not only the existence but also the meaning of the “gay/straight split” should be clarified. This split occurred to different degrees in different places, and it did not necessarily mean a total separation. Rather, feminists who disagreed ideologically about sexuality might still have worked and socialized together in other contexts, as they did in Baltimore. It is important that the sustained links be remembered alongside the divisions, particularly as a challenge to the way that identity politics has framed this history.

Second, I analyze this community as part of lesbian history in the late twentieth century. In this context, the Waverly and Charles Village community complicates representations of second-wave feminists. Typically, their espousal of androgyny appears in historical accounts as a lesbian-feminist attack on butch-femme roles.<sup>2</sup> Dress and style deserve a more polyvalent analysis, for as white, middle-class feminist lesbians did reject butch-femme roles, they did so alongside straight women. For all feminists, gender critiques were motivated by a politics that went beyond “butch phobia,” although that motivated some and was certainly an outcome of the feminist rejection of gender roles. Furthermore, in Waverly and Charles Village, as in other places, many feminists, both straight and lesbian, “dressed down” not only to de-emphasize femininity and sexual availability to men but also as a critique of consumer capitalism and a way to identify with the working-class struggle.<sup>3</sup> These feminists overcame tensions regarding lesbianism or heterosexuality partly due to their shared commitment to socialist feminism, a commitment they made visible in the way they dressed.

These women also shared a relatively privileged racial and class position, and their homogeneity as white and middle class perhaps enabled the continued cooperation between lesbian and heterosexual feminists

in this community. Divisions were far more likely to occur over class identity, and racial segregation remained largely entrenched. Lesbians of color and those who were not middle class often did not share the politics and androgynous style of this mostly white and middle-class community. Indeed, the rejection of butch-femme roles in this socialist-feminist community was also likely a class difference, since working-class lesbians were more likely to embrace butch-femme roles than their middle-class counterparts (Faderman 1991, 167–74; Kennedy and Davis 1993, 13).

I have chosen these two analytical contexts, both of which bridge the divide between straight and lesbian feminists in this 1970s community, in order to release the history of the woman's liberation movement from some of the limits of identity politics. Within the identity politics that marked this history's different strands, lesbians only become visible when mobilized for arguments about lesbian difference, superiority, separatism, or recognition. Thus, lesbians who participated in the women's health movement or socialist feminism are subsumed within that category, a reasonable outcome since it would seem rather odd to footnote each lesbian as "a lesbian." Unfortunately, in resultant histories, visible lesbians are those who insisted upon lesbian exceptionalism, the notorious and perhaps unfairly scapegoated "lesbian vanguard" (Rosen 2000, 173).

In the context of lesbian history, lesbian feminists of the 1970s tend to be represented as a monolithic group of sex-negative, middle-class prudes who rejected butch-femme roles not only out of a desire to remove power from sex but also out of classist and racist assumptions about other kinds of lesbians, often working-class women or women of color whose communities were centered around bars or sports. While in many ways correct, this ignores lesbian feminists who did not reject softball or bar life, as well as the wider context in which lesbian feminists formed their critiques of fashion and gender roles, which included socialist as well as radical feminist ideas.

Furthermore, "lesbian" identity included many layers of political, social, and personal meaning in the early 1970s, which makes using the term as a way to separate women strictly according to their sexual practices problematic. Concepts like the Radicalesbians' "woman-identified-woman" and the choice made by "political lesbians" (women who claimed lesbian identity based on their political beliefs rather than a sexual attraction to women) blurred the boundaries between feminism, lesbianism, and differences in sexual desire or preference (Radicalesbians 1970/1973, 240–6; Rosen 2000, 169–71). Donna, whom I interviewed, is an interesting example; when she lived in Waverly and Charles Village in the 1970s, she was straight and married to a man. She divorced and came out in the early 1980s, staying in the community. Donna illustrates precisely why sexual identity should not be an uninterrogated way to organize memory and history.

There are some risks in reframing the history of feminist lesbians in this way.<sup>4</sup> The homophobia that feminists exhibited toward each other and toward gay and lesbian people outside the movement should not be erased in order to highlight the cooperation that managed to overcome it (just as lesbian vanguardism should not be erased when and where it was divisive). While identity politics tends to oversimplify the history of ideas and movements, identity remains a major component of social movements, and struggles over who belongs occur within movements as well as at their edges (Whittier 1995, 250). Indeed, the research behind this article was originally undertaken in the spirit of collecting a written record of lesbian history, an impulse to document and support lesbian community, which remains an important way of forming identity and institutions.

Yet, it is vitally important to recall that feminists who were also lesbians did not all subscribe to the same theories or practices. As Saralyn Chesnut and Amanda C. Gable note, critiques of lesbian feminism have ignored differences among lesbian feminists and have not accounted for those who disagreed with lesbian-feminist political doctrine. This is due in part to an emphasis on what lesbian feminists wrote, rather than on their practice (1997, 245–6). My analysis reveals precisely the kind of diversity and dissent that Chesnut and Gable mention and seeks to reveal how practice related to a wide variety of lesbian, feminist, socialist, and radical theories, which did not compete but often coalesced in this particular community.

It is significant that this analysis is local and specific. While national accounts of the history of 1970s feminism have provided important contributions, they also have been criticized for their generalizations. As Susan Freeman argues, much scholarship on lesbian feminism has ignored a “politics of location,” eliding geographical differences in favor of a “unilinear, national narrative” (2000, 140). Alice Echols’s *Daring to Be Bad* has been roundly critiqued for its account, which cites a gay/straight split in the early 1970s among feminists, along with tensions over class difference after which the lesbian vanguard’s emphasis on cultural feminism alienated straight women and led to the abandonment of radical activism (Cragin 1997, 305–18; Echols 1989; Freeman 2000, 140; Taylor and Rupp 1993; Whittier 1995, 51–2). While this may have been partially true in Washington, Chicago, and New York, as local studies proliferate, it seems increasingly clear that in other places, the gay/straight split was less divisive, when it happened at all. In Atlanta and Columbus, for example, activism continued, and an emphasis on culture, which did not emanate only from lesbians in the movement, actually sustained radical ideas and practices (Chesnut and Gable 1997; Whittier 1995). It has become increasingly clear that feminists in local communities adapted the theories and practices of the women’s movement to their own contexts; therefore, they did not necessarily follow the trajectory described in national studies

(Chesnut and Gable 1997; Cragin 1997; Enke 2003; Freeman 2000; Gilmore 2003; Whittier 1995; Williams 1997).

Nevertheless, the gay/straight split continues to shape histories of 1970s feminism. Ruth Rosen's recent national history, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*, improved on Echols's account by including information about how the women's movement developed in "the heartland" and smaller communities. However, Rosen did not use the distinct experiences of feminists outside major cities to revise her larger narrative. She writes, "by 1972, a 'gay-straight' split affected nearly every women's liberation group. Only in small cities or less-urban settings did gay and straight feminists continue to cling together, given the common enmity they faced. By the end of the decade, some heterosexual women clearly felt defensive" (2000, 171–2). Hence, Rosen revalidates the historical assumption that lesbian vanguardism fragmented the movement and implies that a gay/straight split was widespread. Conversely, the relationship between gay and straight feminists in Baltimore was more complicated than either a split or a "clinging together."

Baltimore, an old industrial city, faced high unemployment, a burgeoning drug trade, increasing crime, decreasing population, and a failing educational system in the 1970s and 1980s (Jeffries 2002, 68; Mary Ann and Michelle 1997; Olesker 2001, 263). Unlike other small and mid-size cities, Baltimore's activism was not focused around a single campus; instead, students from several schools, including Towson State, Goucher College, Morgan State, Johns Hopkins, the University of Maryland–Baltimore County, and the University of Baltimore contributed to these movements (Christine 1997; Mary Ann and Michelle 1997; Palumbos 1999).

Race underlies many changes that were underway in the city and in Waverly and Charles Village between 1968 and 1990. By 1970, Baltimore was 46 percent black (59% by 1990) and a racially tense and divided city. Waverly quickly changed from a white, working-class neighborhood to a primarily black area between about 1960 and 1985 (Jo 1997). The white flight that began in Baltimore in the 1960s reached new heights following the 1968 riots in reaction to Martin Luther King's assassination (Olesker 2001).

Christine related that the Black Panther Party in Baltimore was "very active back then, and they knew their survival was dependent on having some white allies because they were getting killed at that point around the country" (1997). This biracial partnership was emblemized by The People's Free Community Health Clinic on Greenmount Avenue, which, like the neighborhood, was an anti-establishment place founded as a joint project of "a Left, white socialist group" from Johns Hopkins University and the Black Panther Party. It was only about a year after the 1968 riots that a group of women published the first issue of *WJL* out of the basement of the clinic in the fall of 1969. At the time, countercultural political people

had clustered in the clinic's home, Waverly, and in neighboring Charles Village. The clinic hosted feminist events such as a weekly women's night and, between 1969 and 1980, shared its space with women's liberation rap groups, the Lesbian Community Center, and the journal (Christine 1997). During the 1970s, the area surrounding the clinic also housed a variety of communes, nonprofit offices, the Women's Growth Center, a bookstore for women and children, a coffee house, and a food cooperative. These and other institutions and organizations lasted anywhere from several months to many years. Lesbians in search of support and community joined other feminists and New Left progressives who were living and working in Waverly and Charles Village.

The journal collective produced each issue through a cooperative process of consciousness raising and consensus building. The members of the collective changed repeatedly; none of the original staff stayed in the collective through the 1970s, though some women served for many years. They published a statement in the first issue, which changed slightly over time but always identified the collective as "socialist feminist, with a commitment to an autonomous women's movement" and solicited articles about working to end "sexism, classism, racism, and imperialism" (*Women: A Journal of Liberation* 1969, 1). Each issue of *WJL* was organized around a theme with related articles and an editorial from the women in the collective about the topic. Each issue also included "Perspectives" (opinion pieces and letters from readers) and "Movement News" with reports, resources, and requests from all over women's liberation.

Feminist lesbians were just one facet of gay culture in 1970s Baltimore and of progressive or countercultural life in the city. Lesbians who were also feminists found themselves politically marginalized as women and as gay people in many of these movements, in which sexism and homophobia often affected their experiences. On the other hand, feminist lesbians from Waverly and Charles Village often had more in common with heterosexual feminists than with lesbians who held distinct beliefs or differed by gender, age, class, or race. Leslie mentioned the race and class differences among lesbians in Baltimore at the time.

It was the middle-class, predominantly white lesbians, the more politicized lesbians, that were getting involved (in the community). There was this whole bar scene that we never related to very much. We would go to bars but there was this whole different—probably primarily working-class, African-American or different bars—But that was still going on while we were getting more political and talking about "the lesbian community." In reality it was *our* lesbian community, not *the lesbians'* community. (1997)

Erin, Cathy, and Jo attested that there were even white lesbians living in Waverly who were not involved in the "lesbian community," due to political and age differences.

There is a distinction in what women remembered as lesbian community depending on when they arrived in Waverly and Charles Village. Seven women spoke of Waverly and Charles Village from personal experience beginning anywhere from 1968 to 1975 and described the early days of women's liberation and feminism there. They revealed a rich context in which a politically driven community culture had flourished, one comprised of lesbians and heterosexual women (and men). Four women arrived later and typically recalled a primarily lesbian community. Their memories offered less evidence of collaborations between lesbians and straight women. The community that they knew in the 1980s may have been far more segregated from heterosexuals, because the socialist feminism that partially tied the community together had diminished.<sup>5</sup> In the 1980s, Waverly became more economically marginalized and saturated with illegal drugs (as did the city), and many people moved out of the area. Also, property values in Waverly and Charles Village boomed in the early 1980s, which meant that homeowners could sell and make a profit large enough to move into a larger house in what they perceived as a safer or nicer area. New progressives did not replace them because of the increased cost of housing (Christine 1997; Donna 1996).

While the issues raised here have implications for straight feminists, their voices are represented only through the journal. I recognize that their voices are at a disadvantage here, but the fact that lesbian memories reveal community institutions and ideas that they shared with heterosexual feminists is perhaps precisely the point. A search for a romantic feminist solidarity across the gay/straight split perhaps would not have revealed the cooperation uncovered here in the memories of lesbians.

### **The Mixed Left and Women's Liberation: Waverly and Charles Village in the 1970s**

Donna, who did not come out as a lesbian until the early 1980s, remembered a mixed feminist and Leftist community during the 1970s. She recalled,

It was the times. This [Waverly and Charles Village] was where political activism was, most of it. (There were) lots of different kinds of progressive people, not just gays and lesbians. I had a number of political lesbian friends, and back in those days there were separatists that wouldn't speak to you if you'd ever had a relationship with a man, so I didn't know many of those people. Some of the ones who are still around are now my friends. But I knew the political lesbians who worked in 'the mixed Left,' meaning men and women, and I was part of that scene, which was in Waverly and Charles Village. (1996)

Lesbians cooperated and coexisted with the others in "the mixed Left" community in Waverly and Charles Village throughout the 1970s. Tension



between feminists due to homophobia and anti-heterosexual "lesbian vanguardism" appear in memories and in the journal. However, feminists across the sexual divide continued to share ideological and institutional spaces, which they also continued to coproduce through writing for the journal, working to serve women's healthcare needs, encouraging socialist lifestyles, and providing social outlets. "Lesbian community" was rarely clearly separated from "women's community," and both were connected to "mixed" socialist groups and ideas in the area.

Of those I interviewed, Christine was one of the first of the women to arrive in the neighborhood. She became involved in the journal collective in the early 1970s and wrote several articles in *WJL* during 1971. She recalled that when she came out as a lesbian, others on the staff at the journal "freaked, that really upset their apple cart and I was the only out lesbian on the staff . . . and I left because it was just too intense" (1997). This recollection revealed intense sexual politics, which were born out in the journal, in other lesbians' memories, and in other cities.

Many women's liberation groups across the country began struggling with the issue of sexual identity and difference in the late 1960s, and in many large cities a gay/straight split fractured women's liberation groups in the early 1970s (Echols 1989, 204; Rosen 2000, 171). Perhaps in reaction to this trend, as well as to internal incidents like Christine's coming out, a subsequent issue of the journal dealt with sexual politics extensively. In an issue themed "The Power and Scope of the Women's Movement," Donna Keck (of the journal collective) wrote an article entitled "Laying Guilt Trips on Women" expressing her frustration that "now if one isn't a third-world, working class lesbian, one feels isolated, inferior and politically paralyzed" (1972, 47). However, in spite of their defensiveness about privileged identities, and their discomfort with Christine, the journal collective also chose to print several articles by lesbians in this issue. In "The Shape of Things to Come" Rita Mae Brown (of the Washington, D.C. Furies collective) exclaimed "You can't build a strong movement if your sisters are out fucking with the oppressor" (1972, 45). Sentiments like Brown's appear as quite typical of this moment in women's liberation. In *The World Split Open*, Ruth Rosen quotes Jill Johnston, who wrote that lesbians were "in the vanguard of resistance." Rosen continues, "By sleeping with the enemy, heterosexual feminists were, [Johnston] believed undermining the revolution against patriarchy" (2000, 173).

Indeed, the personal attacks that sometimes occurred in the struggle over sexual identity and feminism had lasting consequences in many women's lives, but this did not necessarily result in separatism, particularly among feminist lesbians in Baltimore. Many women served on the collective or helped produce the journal between 1969 and 1983, and typically, both lesbian and heterosexual women were involved in creating each issue. In counterpoint to Rita Mae Brown, the journal also printed an

article by Christine Mimichild (New Haven, CT) entitled "Gay & Straight in the Movement" in which the author attempts compromise. While she notes how explosive the impact of lesbianism has been on the whole movement, and laments the open splits between gay and straight women that had occurred in some cities, she ends hopefully: "When we consider that in just two years the women's movement has gone from active rejection of lesbians to formal support of lesbianism as a life style, our progress has been phenomenal. . . . In rejecting the prohibition of lesbianism, we are rejecting one of society's most strongly imposed taboos. If we can do this, we can do anything" (1972, 41-2). Mimichild reached out to straight feminists, noting that all women, including feminists, suffer from the same socially indoctrinated homophobia.

As in Washington and New Haven, the radical and political women in Baltimore were struggling with the lesbian issue. A close examination of this tension in Baltimore reveals a strong and sustained critique of its tendency to split women who need to find ways of working together toward a better future, a future with socialist possibilities. The journal collective decided to include the conflicting opinions about lesbian identity and feminism in this issue, but they did not directly engage with it in their editorial. However, it appears implicitly:

Like the rest of the left we are increasingly splintered by ideological squabbles. Many women have confused oppression with revolutionary potential and have wasted valuable energy trying to demonstrate that they are more oppressed (therefore more revolutionary) than any other group in the country. This "oppression chauvinism" is not only bad politics, it's divisive in a movement which is crying for unity. As feminists we must seek new forms of communication with other non-sexist groups striving for socialism. Having established our autonomy, we may be strong enough to build bonds which are not threatening. (1972a, front and back covers)

Without ever using the word lesbian they have alluded to the current tensions in the women's movement, which had to do with other differences as well. Through the idea of "oppression chauvinism" they articulated a critique of the "straight women are betraying their sisters" claims offered by Rita Mae Brown and others. The collective also pointed toward unity across sexual identity, class, and race through a shared socialist politics.

As late as 1977, the journal published an issue themed "Women Loving Women" that again reveals the collective's consistent choice to emphasize shared experience as women rather than their differences. It included a lot of lesbian-focused material, but the *WJL* collective also clearly chose not to engage lesbianism as a problem in women's liberation. Instead, they included articles about all kinds of female love relationships, from adolescent friendships to sisters. In "Experiences/Reflections" from the journal collective, the message was clear: "The experience of women

loving women takes many forms. We love friends, mothers, sisters, lovers. But one thing evident from our personal experiences is that we all seem to feel there is something unique and powerful about women loving women" (1977, 30). Mainstream feminism has historically attempted to create a unified movement by downplaying the differences between women, a move that has continually failed to create unity and is frequently criticized for perpetuating racism, classism, even homophobia. The conversation about women loving women in the journal could be read in this way: the differences between heterosexual and lesbian feminists were being creatively erased through a utopian wish for a "women loving world." However, the political consciousness that gay and straight feminists in the area shared makes it difficult to read this as a straight feminist move to subsume sexual difference. The last voice in this piece from the *WJL* collective remarks,

This is the first time I've ever been in a group of women who love women consciously, and who also feel similar politically. And I have had very close relationships with other women: my sister and a former lover. But loving women and a political consciousness in the group as well, that energy is both powerful and scary [sic]. There's an allowance to be free that I haven't experienced before. (1977, 31)

For these women (in the journal and the interviews), that political consciousness included loving women, believing in socialism, and giving up the material goods and consumerism of middle-class life in order to become conscious of their own privilege. Lesbian and heterosexual white feminists shared this consciousness within the journal collective, and lesbians continued socialist and feminist work in the community in the midst of all the anger and tension over feminist homophobia or lesbian guilt tripping. In fact, the journal collective did not remain exclusively heterosexual for long after Christine left in early 1971. In the summer and winter issues, other women who identified as lesbians wrote articles for the journal; one co-authored a piece about the women's health movement and another wrote an opinion piece on lesbian sensuality (Campbell, Dalsemer, and Waldman 1972, 37–8; Macciocca 1972, 37–8).

By the mid-1970s, in addition to mixed spaces and organizations open to all women (and some to men), as Donna mentioned there were some separatist lesbians in the area. Some of them apparently separated from non-separatist lesbians and straight women, as well as from men, but evidence reveals that separatism more commonly meant disassociating from men. Of course, for many heterosexual women, separating from men was neither possible nor desirable, and so separatism felt alienating, even if not aimed specifically at them.

Mary Ann and her partner Michelle remembered the heady days of lesbian separatism in the late 1970s when Mary Ann lived on a block

of Guilford Avenue with four other households of lesbian separatists. Importantly, neither framed separatism as a split from straight feminists but described it as a split from all men and a commitment to women-only spaces that were supportive of women coming out as lesbians. Michelle exclaimed,

“You got shit if you had a guy roommate, you know a gay guy roommate, any guy! The lesbian separatists wouldn’t even go to male checkout guys at A&P! I mean it was all really out there. And Mary Ann actually was part of it, ha! They were very adamant about creating a lesbian community, I must say” (1997).

Indeed, Mary Ann described her experiences as an attempt to make community happen in support of lesbians trying to come out in a hostile world. She said, “There was certainly a lot of rigidity around men and around how one associated with men. I felt as though we really alienated a lot of people because we were very rigid about [how] these were *women-only* spaces, no men could be there” (1997). She goes on to discuss the importance of lesbian space for women who were coming out, as well as the politics of identity and commitment that made it uncomfortable to remember:

I think we were really trying to build a community, and expecting people to be a family to us in a way that you can’t just announce. If you were a lesbian and if you had sort of basic beliefs you were allowed to be in this “family”—and then there would be these discussions of who was in and who was out and who was really a lesbian feminist and who wasn’t really a lesbian feminist. And, oh, it was nauseating. There was a real drive to be supportive of each other, and we were pretty isolated then. There were really a whole group of people that were going to come out, and the world be damned, we were ready. (1997)

Living as a separatist included eschewing contact with men, working to build a space where lesbians could come out, be radicals and be loved, and dealing with some of the same challenging issues that fractured other feminist communities.

Significantly, in spite of her separatist experiences and commitment, Mary Ann remembered many of the mixed women’s organizations and institutions that other women recalled, and she actively participated in the journal and women’s dances. She also remembered the Lesbian Community Center,

A couple of years after I came out, I started working in a group called the Lesbian Community Center, which was basically a telephone at the Greenmount Free Clinic, that was 1976 to 1980. We had a very large mailing list and a switchboard that alternated houses. The main point of that was to give people a place to call who were coming out. So they could find out what was available and find out where people were and what was going on and what activities were available. We had monthly events, we had potlucks, we had dances. It was fun. (1997)

The importance of separate lesbian spaces for supporting women who were coming out appears to have been a major focus of separatist institutions. While this sometimes meant that straight women felt alienated, it seems more significant that men were excluded and a supportive women's space was fiercely protected. It is revealing that although the Lesbian Community Center was for lesbians—as clearly it was—it depended on the resources of other progressives in the area, especially for space. Thus, even separatist lesbians and their projects were part of the interdependent mixed Left community in Waverly and Charles Village. The space that housed the People's Free Clinic is an excellent example because between 1968 and 1980 it shared its space with the journal, the Women's Growth Center, and the Lesbian Community Center.

The 31st Street Bookstore for Women and Children, another example of a mixed community space, opened as a privately owned feminist bookstore in the early 1970s and was popular among gay and straight women, like many women's bookstores elsewhere. Mary Ann, describing her time in Charles Village in the 1970s, said "everybody dropped by the bookstore every Saturday morning" (1997). All of the witnesses and narrators had shopped and socialized there and described it as a central space for the community's lesbians, although it was not exclusively run by lesbians, and it was open to anyone. One could purchase *WJL* there as well. Although other institutions had come and gone by 1983, the bookstore remained there until the early 1990s and eventually symbolized for later lesbians the earlier political community of lesbians and feminists. Due to its long tenure, perhaps its physical presence and its relatively recent demise, the 31st Street Bookstore was often used during interviews as an example of former community and the kinds of politics and institutions that had characterized "the bookstore days" (Dee 1997). Of course, feminists who identified as lesbian, heterosexual, and otherwise helped create, run, patronize, and remember it.

The women's health movement offers another glimpse into how straight and lesbian feminists in this Baltimore community worked together throughout this period of tension. In the issue of the journal entitled "The Power and Scope of the Women's Movement," three women who were involved in the Baltimore women's health movement describe Women's Night at the free clinic (1972a). It included both reproductive and mental health services. In the waiting room, the organizers sought to create a safe and social space. Patient advocates were provided to accompany patients into the examination rooms. The women's night planners note, "There's a feeling of warmth, shelter, of 'yes, you've come to the right place; what can we share with you?'" They note, "We wanted to stress that women are not simply 'pelvics,' but people, and should be treated as such" (Campbell, Dalsemer, and Waldman 1972, 37). In addition to pregnancy tests, abortion referrals, and birth control, Women's Night offered medical treatment

that lesbian women may have found useful—particularly counseling about female sexuality, treatments for sexually transmitted diseases, and education on breast self-exams. Lesbians not only benefited from its services, they also were involved in planning and running Women’s Night, as one of the women I spoke with told me (she also co-authored “Women’s Night at the Free Clinic”) (Campbell, Dalsemer, and Waldman 1972, 37–8; Leslie 1997).

Another organization, the Women’s Growth Center Collective, grew out of these Women’s Nights at the clinic and continued its tradition of cooperation among lesbian and heterosexual women who wanted to make health care better for women. When I spoke to Leslie in 1997, she told me that the Women’s Growth Center Collective began in the early 1970s as a group interested in feminist approaches to mental health. She said, “So all the feminist therapy was sort of based on the idea that most women who consider themselves *depressed* were in fact *oppressed*—more of a social or economic problem. Therapy placed their problems in a larger context rather than a pathological context” (1997). Trained as a social worker and in psychiatry, Leslie focused her activism on women’s mental health and wellness. When I asked about lesbian participation in the growth center collective, she replied, “Initially, when we first started it, I was the only lesbian in the group. Gradually, over the years, the straight women became the minority. And, I think it’s swung back. But there has always been a very strong lesbian component to it, absolutely. But it was not *per se* a lesbian group” (1997). The collective organized workshops for women and feminist therapists and participated in the ongoing feminist revisionism in women’s mental and physical health. They provided services to heterosexual women and lesbians; the latter were probably attracted “because it was one of the few places that lesbians knew they could come where their issues were not specifically being judged by their sexual preferences” (Leslie 1997). Leslie and other feminists, gay and straight, contributed their energy and expertise to improving health care for all women. Indeed, because “women’s health” does not immediately resonate with lesbian meaning, the lesbians who worked to improve it disappear into the category “women.” With no mention in the journal, lesbian contributions would be lost without accounts from women such as Leslie.

The struggle over sexual identity and feminism in Baltimore resulted in several ways of being a feminist lesbian. By the mid-1970s, some of the women in Waverly and Charles Village were interested in building a sense of lesbian community, which did not always mean separation from heterosexual men or women. What separatism meant politically and how that played out at a local level complicates reading it as a gay/straight split. Certainly, lesbian separatists alienated women who loved men, but they also angered other lesbians, like Michelle. On the other hand, women like Mary Ann appreciated the social and political community that separatism

made possible. The community also may have been supported by its homogeneity in terms of race and class privilege, as most of these women were white and middle class. Finally, as a group of politically diverse socialist feminists, the lesbians of Waverly and Charles Village sometimes had more in common with their straight socialist and feminist neighbors than with other lesbians in Baltimore.

## **Socialist Feminism: Theory in Daily Life**

The socialist politics of the community in Waverly and Charles Village emphasized action and experience, and it drew upon the theoretical approaches of socialist feminism, which viewed both capitalism and patriarchy as systemic problems that reinforced each other. Socialist feminists argued that in addition to gender, the economic structure significantly affected women's lives and helped to reinforce and sustain patriarchal power. This combination of capitalism and patriarchy—"the capitalist patriarchy"—was the causal force against which they organized, and which distinguished their theoretical approach from that of radical feminists, for whom patriarchy was the primary form of women's oppression (Eisenstein 1977/1999, 196). In Waverly and Charles Village, socialist activism included formal community organizing jobs and informal attempts to aid and identify with the white, working-class families that lived in Waverly.<sup>6</sup> The women I interviewed described people, politics, community, institutions, and even lifestyle choices as socialist, and they made it clear that both straight and gay, men and women in the area thought that a theoretical critique of capitalism was essential.

In comparison to another Baltimore neighborhood, Penny said, "Waverly was a totally different thing. Waverly was very focused coming out of socialism. There were a lot of political lesbians" (1997).<sup>7</sup> Penny, as an outsider, located Waverly's politics as self-consciously and politically socialist. When I asked questions about socialism during the interviews, I often got answers about dealing with class issues and working with "Left men." Hence, it revealed connections between lesbians and other men and women who were socialist, their experience working in the New Left, and it frequently elicited memories of conflicts over class identity.

Christine, for example, related that Diana Press was founded by women in the Ida Brayman Collective but then changed hands and moved to California because of a lot of "class issues that went down. We were too middle class and the women who wanted to do it were more working class and were supposedly more serious about it" (1997). When asked what "being too middle class" meant, Christine connected that question to socialism. She elaborated,

Middle-class privilege meant your parents had money. You were going to college, you hadn't had to work really hard in life, you weren't street-smart. It was a whole leftover from Marxist, socialist theory, that you didn't have a kind of survival investment in liberation because it was not about your economics—your Daddy had always supported you. There was a lot of emphasis on coming from your experience, “praxis is what's important not theory.” And people who were well read or had that kind of knowledge weren't necessarily respected. They were very stormy days, those were. (1997)

Christine's memory of this brand of activist or practical socialism was corroborated by other witnesses, and by the emphasis usually placed on *working* for change within the journal. Several people also recalled ugly fights between feminists over who was truly committed and who was a middle-class interloper, like the Diana Press conflict.

In the *WJL*, socialist-feminist analyses critiqued capitalism intensely. Articles often analyzed aspects of the economic structure and the capitalist system and endeavored to apply socialism to daily life, as well as to raise the consciousness of readers. Many editorials and articles, from 1969 until the journal folded in the early 1980s, link all forms of oppression into capitalism, as did much of the contemporary socialist feminist scholarship. Some themes had obvious socialist implications, such as “Women as Workers Under Capitalism,” “The Cost of Living,” “Class and Money” (1971b; 1975; 1983). Other themes seemed less related to socialism, although in every case the journal collective's editorial clearly framed the topic through a socialist feminist analysis and many of the articles continued that frame.

For example, a 1971 editorial for the issue themed “How We Live and with Whom” stated that the nuclear family was “a microcosm of the capitalist system as a whole” and argues that in order to end capitalist oppression, people must cease living in nuclear families so that their children will not be socialized or culturally conditioned to live as capitalists (1971a, 1 and inside back cover). Sexuality also related to capitalism, and the journal collective offered a variety of articles about this connection in a 1972 issue, themed “Sexuality.” The editorial argued that “sexual myths (women naturally desire exclusive sexual relationships and don't have much sex drive) exist in our society because, first of all, they are ideally suited to shoring up the institution of marriage. . . . In a society based on private property, marriage fulfills an important function” (1972b, inside front cover). The conclusion of the editorial begins, “As radical women, we want to understand the relationship between our sexual lives and the political/economic system under which we live” (1972b, inside front cover). The critiques of marriage in this issue did not necessarily call for an end to heterosexuality altogether. Rather, personal experiences of how to live communally with male partners and children, as well as radical



reinventions of heterosexuality that divorced it from marriage, were offered (Pollard and Munley 1971; Thomas 1971).

Communes were one way in which socialism became part of everyday life in Waverly and Charles Village. While Mary Ann's commune had been lesbian separatist, Christine lived in a commune that included heterosexual women, at least initially. She came to Baltimore in 1969 and by December 1971, left her husband and moved into a women's commune, the Ida Brayman collective. She described it as "very socialist, very connecting women's issues with other social issues. [It] had a kind of economic analysis," which distinguished it from other early women's liberation and lesbian groups in neighboring Washington, D.C. because "we were still kind of wanting to work with men. They were more separatist" (1997). Carmen Arbona, writing for the journal in 1971, described Ida Brayman as a collective that "grew out of women's liberation consciousness and anti-imperialist organizing of various kinds. We came together to find new ways of living and working together as women. Our common interest was the community of Waverly and how to work with people there on the problems caused by a capitalist economy" (Arbona 1971, 28). Their work included volunteering during Women's Night at the free clinic and working with the Waverly People's Food Co-op. Within six months, the women in Ida Brayman had either come out as lesbians or moved up the street to the John Brown collective, which included men and women. Apparently, some of them wanted to work *and live* with men, and it is possible that the lesbian presence also prompted heterosexual women to leave. The Ida Brayman collective lasted until 1973; its economic analysis and contribution to socialist community projects are emblematic of the politics around it in Waverly.

Socialist ideas permeated social and residential life for Mary Ann as well. She described her contributions to the community as primarily social planning and noted the political strands running through their public and private lives in the community:

We had some very elaborate ideas about socialism and how that was going to work for lesbians: how if we could just not have men in our lives that would be the solution to all our problems, if we could banish patriarchy [then] the issues and hardships of people's lives would be alleviated. [M]any people felt that monogamy was a chain that was very destructive to us as women and as lesbians. There was not a lot of integration of our community into the larger community of men. Certainly there were a number of connections with the socialist community. (1997)

The struggle in this community was multifaceted, and as Mary Ann's description implies, socialism, feminism, sexual liberation, and separatism were all in play. In spite of the separatism espoused in her social circle, when she mentioned connections with the socialist community,

she implied that those connections included working with men. She also may mean links to straight women who identified as socialists, but there is evidence that lesbians worked with men when they worked as organizers and participated in socialist groups, such as the Baltimore chapter of New American Movement (NAM) (D'Adamo et al. 1980, 60–3).

Socialist feminism permeated community life and meshed with parallel movements that formed the larger political ethos of this community. Leslie's involvement in women's health was one example. I asked her about socialist feminism, which according to Christine, Penny, and others (and evidenced by the journal) was *the* organizing principle in Waverly. Leslie recalled:

Well, they weren't mutually exclusive by any means. I always supported and was involved in the socialist feminist stuff, but I always thought that socialist analysis was very male and even though I agreed with a lot of it I was still interested in that more personalized thinking. I think other people felt that way, too. If there was tension it was simply that many of the socialist-feminists thought that therapy was useless. It had nothing to do with feminist therapy. It was just the whole idea—and then there were others who felt that if you don't pay attention to the personal stuff how can you develop a political analysis? If you don't take care of yourself first. So it may have been sort of a methodological difference, as opposed to the end point, which we were all sort of struggling with. I never saw it as a major schism or anything like that. (1997)

Her comment both reinforces the centrality of socialist feminism and illustrates again how many women in this community negotiated the political interests in play. Her awareness of the difference in methodologies coexists with her sense that socialists had the same goals in mind. There may be many reasons why she remembers their political differences in 1997 as complementary rather than contentious. However, it seems plausible that part of the reason lies in the fact that this community in Baltimore worked hard to continue cooperating even when political differences threatened to split them apart. Just as straight and lesbian women continued to work together through the tensions over sexual difference, so did feminists with different priorities. The tension between gay and straight women does not seem to have overwhelmed a shared political commitment to creating positive change in Baltimore, and it is clear that throughout the 1970s, straight and lesbian women worked and struggled together. The performance they gave of this particular consciousness was often described as “downwardly mobile” and in addition to socialist feminist activism and consciousness raising, it involved an androgynous mode of dress: jeans and flannel shirts, with sneakers or work boots.

## Androgyny: A Socialist-Feminist Gender

*WJL* published an issue about androgyny in 1974. Originally, the collective had slated "Organizing" as the theme for Volume 4, Number 1, but interestingly the collective switched to androgyny, perhaps in response to Carolyn Heilbrun's recent book on the subject, which had garnered much attention in women's liberation circles.<sup>8</sup> This issue included a wide variety of articles on androgyny that were concerned with one's actions and emotional health as well as how one dressed.

In the contemporary feminist discussion of androgyny, it was typically theorized that the "natural human" is inherently androgynous, and society forces individuals to suppress their masculinity or femininity in order to conform to polarized gender roles. Androgyny was described (in strikingly essentialist terms) as a natural combination of the best traits of masculinity (assertiveness, physical strength, pragmatism, discipline) and femininity (empathy, sensitivity, nurturance, compassion). The goal, according to its proponents, was to combine these traits in order to fulfill one's total potential as a balanced and egalitarian human. Simultaneously, the negative things about being male (obsession with work, rigid goal-directedness, emotional repression, competitiveness, violent aggression) and being female (guilt, sexual repression, hysteria, compulsive desire to protect others) were discarded in the utopian combination. The new person who emerged was not fragmented by this process but always represented as emerging healed and made whole by this reclamation of her or his inherent masculinity and femininity (Blanchard 1974; Echols 1983; Reville and Blanchard 1974).

Contrary to much of the current historiography of this moment, there is evidence in the journal that feminists, lesbian and heterosexual, did not wholly embrace androgyny. In a response to the flyer announcing the androgyny issue, "Nancy S." expressed her opinion that "the word and concept of androgeny [sic] is anti-gay, insulting, anti-female, and non-dialectic. To me, there are no such things as male and female characteristics. There are 'dominant' and 'slave' characteristics, dependent on which sex or race is dominant" (1974). She concludes, "I feel you are using this issue topic as a cop-out from dealing with a lesbian issue. The two issues raise entirely different questions and you still have not gotten out of dealing with the question of personal priorities" (Nancy S. 1974, 63). Nancy S. accused the journal collective of using androgyny as a way to counter the argument that straight women betrayed feminism by spending time and energy on men, what she referred to as the "question of personal priorities" (1974). In her opinion, they were arguing that androgyny critiques gender sufficiently enough to defend heterosexuality as an acceptable practice for feminists. She used words grounded in other relationships of power, "dominant" and "slave," which allude to hierarchies other than

gender. Her argument that androgyny and sexuality “raise entirely different questions” certainly complicates the idea that feminist lesbians always espoused androgyny. Nancy S.’s comments foreshadow the critique of androgyny that Alice Echols would offer later about cultural feminism in general; it ascribed certain characteristics to masculinity and femininity, thereby hardening what those labels included, as well as how men and women naturally acted (1983, 440).

In “The Controversy Over ‘Androgyny’” Irene Reville and Margaret Blanchard of the *WJL* collective laid out the debates about this new concept, deploying a socialist as well as feminist defense that ultimately constructs androgyny as something I will call a “socialist gender” (Reville and Blanchard 1974, 58–9). Whether or not androgyny was the utopian solution of middle-class activists was one criticism. They answered it with an argument that tied androgyny to a critique of capitalism as well as gender roles. First, they argued that femininity—not androgyny—was a luxury of the middle class and noted that working women were typically denied feminine daintiness. Next, they claimed that androgyny could raise consciousness about how sex roles reinforce capitalism. Without much explanation of its socialist potential, they proceeded by explaining that through this process of consciousness raising, “expectations about work and sacrifice would be subject to redefinition and people would be more capable of working to change the present system which oppresses men and women” (Reville and Blanchard 1974, 58).

Another problem they outlined was that many women were afraid of appearing “too masculine” and feared that androgyny required one to “give up” femininity. Parenthetically, the authors noted, “Only under a capitalist commodity system do personal qualities become possessions one must ‘give up’” (Reville and Blanchard 1974, 59). In their vision, androgyny allows the best of both genders to surface in each person, a prospect that should frighten only those who wanted to “possess” gender as a commodity. Here, they imply that a desire for middle-class respectability on the basis of proper gender roles underlies apprehension about giving up one’s femininity. Hence, this particular androgyny was a socialist gender, invested not only with feminist critiques of gender roles, but also socialist critiques of how those gender roles supported capitalism.

This ideal socialist gender was evident in other articles as well. For example, Margaret Blanchard wrote another piece titled “The Man In Me,” in which she argued, “Whenever one half of humanity (whether women or *workers*) is delegated certain responsibilities, and the other half (whether men or *bosses*), opposite responsibilities, the result is not cooperation but legitimized escape from responsibility” (Blanchard 1974, 16, emphasis mine). She elaborates on this class parallel later: “Whole persons can scarcely exist in a society which functions through institutional schizophrenia (not just man/woman, *but also boss/worker, intellectual/*

*manual worker, maid/mistress*)" (Blanchard 1974, 17, emphasis mine). Here again, androgyny was discussed in the pages of the journal in the language of socialist feminism. In this example, a critique of the false and damaging dichotomies created by capitalism was employed to reveal the falsity of the dichotomy between masculine and feminine.

Not only psychological and cultural roles but also clothing and appearance were linked to *anti-capitalist* discussions of androgyny. Rather than criticizing styles of self-presentation as gendered, several articles paid more attention to the relationship of style than to class and capitalism. In a short personal piece called "Dress," Anne Thompson from the *WJL* collective wrote, "I was wearing overalls, loose-fitting jeans, work shirts, and boots a lot. It protected my body from having a sexual identification, and it was an effective way of saying 'Fuck you' to those who sold, wore, and demanded neat, tailored, expensive clothing" (1974, 24). The attention to how appearance and power are tied to capitalism is unmistakable. The author seems rather hotly invested in rejecting middle-class norms of appearance, while her protection from gender may be anti-patriarchal or an evasion of harassment. Regardless, sexual identification was not the only reason for dressing androgynously.

Class also shaped descriptions of androgyny during the interviews. Mary Ann recalled the dress code with mixed emotions and mixed memories; "Everybody wore blue jeans and flannel shirts and if you tried to dress up and iron your clothes you were sort of looked down on. You know, there were women who didn't feel comfortable in the particular garb; they liked something else or they wanted to do something else and so that was not as accepted" (1997). In her recollection, clothing choices other than the androgynous norm were suspect when they indicated middle-class privilege, or "dressing up," not necessarily because other styles were too masculine or too feminine.

While Mary Ann felt somewhat culpable for having enforced the style rules when she lived in Charles Village, Penny, who was involved in neighborhood groups before she moved there in 1977, felt personally attacked by them. Her memories are shaped by a very different experience of the community because her social life revolved around the discos and gay bars in other parts of Baltimore during the 1970s, even though she was part of the Women's Growth Center Collective in Waverly and Charles Village. She remembered dressing up in high heels and makeup to go out to the discos and shared a sentiment that echoes Mary Ann's:

That damn political correctness thing that lesbians invented and lesbians held people to forever, you know? That political correctness was a very divisive thing, part of the reason people moved. They were tired of being under the tyranny of whether I wanted to buy a new car or whether I wanted to decorate my house in some way or wear nail polish or lipstick or do whatever. There was a

terrible ethos. I mean it was like you were supposed to look like everybody else, and if you wanted to not be that way you were somehow politically incorrect. Whether someone actually confronted you about that or whether you just felt it, and I think that was something that people felt like they needed to move somewhere else in order to [escape]. (1997)

Penny clearly felt personally attacked by the style rules, which she remembers as a lesbian invention. Yet, the “political correctness” in Penny’s memory was a community policing of class performance, in which buying a new car or wearing nail polish were both outside the lines for those truly dedicated to socialist feminism. As in the journal, the memories of these women revealed that the androgynous dress code related not only to a critique of gender roles but also to the anti-capitalist politics of their community. For feminist lesbians in this Baltimore community, androgyny was more complicated than a rejection of butch-femme roles because it was part of the ethos of the socialist community, which they shared with straight women and men.

In the interviews, memories of the politics of gender were, like class, double edged. Only three of the women who lived in the area in the 1970s mentioned butch-femme roles. In our conversations, androgyny and the dress code never came up in the context of butch-femme critique. Christine remembered the feminist rejection of butch-femme roles but also how “everybody” had a crush on one of the two women in a butch-femme couple who ran a gay bar downtown (1997). Penny expressed a similarly romantic vision of the working-class butch-femme bar scene (1997). Their memories certainly indicate that butch-femme roles were very important markers of lesbian desire, as Halberstam and others have argued (1998). Mary Ann, on the other hand, added at the end of our conversation,

A lot of my friends experienced coming out at a time when you had to choose if you were going to be a butch or a femme—we were the bridge between that and the idea that you didn’t have to be either of those things. We couldn’t accept that you could be butch or femme because then you were buying into the patriarchy. You know, we went to the other end of the spectrum, which was you couldn’t be either one. (1997)

She offered this insight separately from her description of the dress code, and she clearly places butch-femme roles inside a feminist critique of all gender roles under the patriarchy. In remembering the 1970s, she recognizes the tyranny of requiring lesbians not to be either one, which could be interpreted as androgyny, although that was not her term.

Butch-femme roles appeared a few times in the journal, either when lesbians were the subject or in a critique of all unequal gender roles. Role playing was criticized as patriarchal, imitative, unhealthy, and unliberated to varying degrees in these articles.<sup>9</sup> Significantly, criticism of gendered

performances resonated with classed meaning. In a story about innocent lesbian love between school chums, the author, BKO, shared that she and her lover were disappointed in gay bars and by the lack of a homophile movement in Baltimore. She includes a very telling description of what they thought lesbians were:

We thought of the sterile, bitter old spinster in severely tailored tweed suits, who would literally faint if a man touched her. Or, we pictured the traditional "butch" stereotype; the short-haired, flat-chested, heavy-set, foul-mouthed, hard-drinking, hard-fighting, masculine male-imitator who pinches women on subways and who spends twenty-four hours a day, every day, trying to lure innocent young girls into her lair. (Social indoctrination, better known as cultural conditioning, isn't easily overcome). (BKO 1971, 6)

These two stereotypical lesbians are distinguished as much by class as by gender. The fainting spinster's tailored tweeds paint her as a middle-class or perhaps even an elite woman, lonely and anti-sexual in her bitter sterility. It seems difficult to label her either masculine or feminine, although her proclivity to faint at the touch of a man seems slightly more effeminate, as well as frigid. On the other hand, the author ascribed working-class stereotypes to the "traditional 'butch.'" She drinks, swears and fights, looks like a man, and is sexually aggressive. These stereotypes, the spinster and the butch, embody classed constructions of lesbians, as well as differences in their gender.

Among the socialist feminist lesbians in Waverly and Charles Village, androgyny symbolized multiple political commitments. First, it tried to eschew class privilege and aspired to emulate how working people dressed. Second, it remade working-class style for middle-class lesbians who were perhaps as disappointed by the fact that working-class lesbians were not anti-capitalist as by the gender roles they enacted.<sup>10</sup> Finally, androgyny was a protest against the twin enemies of socialist feminism: patriarchal gender norms and capitalist fashion. Paradoxically, these androgynes did not look like most working-class women, and their style was rather masculine.<sup>11</sup> In Baltimore, most of the political women and men in the community dressed down and perhaps, to some extent asexually. All of the political people in this geographic area looked more alike than different, and one wonders how discernible lesbian and heterosexual feminist androgynies were from each other.<sup>12</sup> Future studies may be able to account for the memories, dress, and lifestyles of male and female heterosexual feminists and socialists in Baltimore and other cities.

This version of androgyny is also distinct from other anti-normative gender performances that circulated in the 1970s. The flannel shirt and jeans look differs from more flamboyant androgyny, like the version that David Bowie performed as Ziggy Stardust. Gay male drag, and perhaps some of the androgynous style of the hippie drug culture, were also differently

configured than this form of gender protest, which avoided rather than celebrated femininity and consumption. However, while all these forms of gender-crossing and mixing are anti-normative, for the women of Waverly and Charles Village, androgyny was aimed also at disrupting middle-class respectability, and for many women, it was a way of saying “fuck you” to the norms they had grown up with as middle-class kids.

How androgyny theoretically mediated class difference rarely appears in histories of this moment, in part because those accounts segregate lesbian and heterosexual feminists and attribute androgyny to the lesbian-feminist rejection of butch-femme roles. Here, I have focused instead on how the shared socialist politics of this Baltimore community united white lesbian and straight feminists who together deployed androgyny against capitalism and middle-class norms. This study also reveals a classism in play in the rejection of butch-femme roles in this community, since historically working-class lesbians were more likely to have fully embraced them (Faderman 1991, 167–74; Kennedy and Davis 1993, 13). Sadly, perhaps, most attempts to identify with working-class people in Waverly did not extend to bar dykes, whose gender and class difference marked them as politically unacceptable, although sometimes love connections occurred between middle-class feminists and working-class women (Christine 1997). Reframed in this way, androgyny recalls that feminist lesbians and heterosexual women also shared an internal struggle over how to embrace working-class and non-white women. Those attempts frequently failed because middle-class, white women continued to treat working-class women, and women of color, as the *objects* of their consciousness-raising efforts, rather than incorporating their voices in ways that reconfigured their own ideas about gender, class, and race.<sup>13</sup> Had feminist lesbians done so, they might have discovered the ways in which butch-femme sexuality subverted the male pleasure model of heterosexuality and granted the feminine partner the freedom to enjoy sex (Davis and Kennedy 1990, 432–3; Kennedy and Davis 1993, 10–1).

## Identity and Community: Memories of a Lesbian Past

A view of this neighborhood as a distinctly lesbian community was produced in the memories and folklore of lesbians who joined this community in the 1980s and 1990s, including the interviewer. The memories of later arrivals to this area as “where the lesbians used to live” were not incorrect, only incomplete. It was indeed where many white, educated feminist lesbians lived—along with a lot of other people, whose influence during the 1970s did not always emerge into collective memory in the late-1990s. Not only are the socialist and feminist allies of our lesbian neighbors absent if this is framed as the lesbian community, so are the



other lesbian communities in Baltimore's history, especially those of working-class or non-white women whose communities coalesced around other identities and activities.

Penny talked about the other gay communities in Baltimore at the time, some of which were older or working-class lesbian circles that were still organized around butch-femme identities, while a mixed-sex gay disco scene also began to emerge. She related her memories of the bar at the Roosevelt Hotel:

It was the most gorgeous place in the world. When Camden Yards was one of the largest train stations in the country at the turn of the century, the Roosevelt was one of the posh hotels. It had been completely closed, but the bar downstairs was kept open. It was this old Victorian (hotel), with a gorgeous marble bar, gorgeous marble floors. It was in terrible disrepair and needed a coat of paint but it still had an enormous amount of romance. It was a women's bar, most famous for a little neon sign in the back room that said "It's A Wonderment." It was a very downtown place. There were a lot of diesel dyke types as well as the old femmes—the whole butch-femme thing was going on. There would be fights there regularly. It was quite colorful. There was also some class stuff about it, too. I grew up middle class but there was a working-class scene going on there, which, because we were all gay, I was kind of on the edge of. As you probably know in bars those lines get really blurred, but I think it's worth making the distinctions in terms of really understanding the perspective of it all. (1997)

She went on to describe the disco scene in Mount Vernon where she socialized with gay men and dressed up in high heels, skirts, and makeup, in contrast to the style of the Waverly and Charles Village political community. Trisha Franzen's work on the lesbian community in Albuquerque, New Mexico, cites a similar division between "old gays and new gays" or lesbians whose communities centered around bars and those who only came to the bars after coming out in the women's movement (1993). As it was in Baltimore, this was also increasingly a division marked by race and class, such that working-class women and lesbians of color socialized in bars, while white, middle-class lesbian feminists moved in their own circles and were especially tied into women's liberation groups. In Baltimore, this division was not absolute; several women I interviewed continued going to bars, even though they did not identify as butch or femme, and recall the bar scene as an alternative and important space for lesbians (Christine 1997; Erin and Cathy 1997; Jo 1997; Penny 1997).

Although the socialist-feminist lesbians of Waverly and Charles Village sincerely wanted to fight racism and capitalism, and to include non-white and working-class women in their community, that rarely happened. However, love connections across race and class did occur. In the context of the difficulty of dealing with racism and integrating their community, Mary Ann told me, "There were a number of black women in the

community; they were mostly women who were in a relationship with a white woman" (1997). Christine also explained that in practice, interracial alliances among lesbians were usually the result of a relationship between a white woman and a black woman. In that context, she mentioned The Ultimate Woman, an open lesbian rap group that met at the Metropolitan Community Church in the late 1970s and was perhaps the exception to racial segregation among Waverly lesbians ("The Ultimate Woman: A Lesbian Feminist Organization" 1976, 9).<sup>14</sup> Similar groups or patterns of cross-class and cross-race collaboration also may have resulted from interracial relationships between women (or men) in other cities.

Identity politics, well entrenched by the early 1980s, played a role in creating a history of a separate lesbian microcosm in Waverly and Charles Village that erased the mixed Left members of that neighborhood, as well as all the other locations of lesbian community in Baltimore, like the bar at the Roosevelt or discos in Mount Vernon. As in community memory, in recent national histories of the second wave of feminism, one is likely to find less information about how lesbian and straight feminists worked together and more about the ugly splits between them in organizations and political priorities, although the evidence of their continued cooperation is all around us in the institutions they founded and sustained together.

In accounts of lesbian history, 1970s feminist androgyny is remembered as a *lesbian* feminist reaction to butch-femme roles, rather than a form of protest, which developed out of larger trends in socialist feminism that lesbians shared with other feminists and progressives. In fact, as a visible marker of both identity and political protest, androgyny symbolized the struggle to end all systems of social inequality. In Baltimore (and perhaps elsewhere, as Becki Ross's history of Toronto feminist lesbians suggests), androgyny also had a very important meaning about class consciousness among lesbian and straight feminists and probably among radical socialist men. While feminist lesbians chose androgyny as a new and better way to be lesbian, they also chose it because their heterosexual feminist friends and socialist allies championed it.

Any unquestioned binary between feminists or among lesbians limits the history of U.S. women's liberation and of U.S. lesbians. I am not arguing that splits did not occur. Indeed, the debate over who was more committed to her sisters raged for most of the 1970s, although accusations about a lack of commitment were not always made in reference to sexuality. Rather than validating it as a total rupture, as painful and real as it was in some places, I have chosen to discuss instead the myriad of ways that women in the movement continued to cooperate, even how their shared politics failed ultimately to include those they hoped to liberate.

Local memories deepen our accounts of the collective past by narrowing in on a small patch of ground but imagining the broad scope of its politics. Unfortunately, lesbian-feminist and New Left communities are

more often caricatured than analyzed carefully, but one hopes that future studies will continue to honor the specifics of local history. Such studies will recognize lesbian participation and contributions to institutions and movements not labeled “gay and lesbian,” as well as the ways that “heterosexual” culture shapes what lesbian and gay cultures look like. Perhaps including the many layers of identity and the network of relationships that engender community and inspire social movements can put to rest the divisive insistence that one must choose one identity under which to stand. Ultimately, how we remember the past has everything to do with how we perceive the present and imagine the future.

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## Notes

1. The eleven women I interviewed in 1996 and 1997 were between the ages of 32 and 60. Some were involved in Waverly in the 1970s, while others arrived later in the 1980s. I interviewed a snowball sample that began with one woman who knew lesbians who had been active in Waverly. I promised them confidentiality and have changed their names. They are all middle-class, white women with some college education. Most either grew up in Baltimore or went to college, graduate school, or law school in the area. The women who lived in the area in the 1970s arrived there in their twenties and thirties. Christine, Leslie, Mary Ann, and Michelle were 22 to 24 years old when they arrived in the neighborhood, while Penny and Donna arrived at age 30 and 37, respectively. Jo grew up in the area, from age 10 until age 21 (she left in 1979). Dee, Erin, Cathy, and Laura, who moved to the area in the 1980s or early 1990s, were between 22 and 27 when they arrived.

*Women: A Journal of Liberation* is a source of facts about institutions and a site of ideological debate. Frequently, the editorials and other articles written by the *Women: A Journal of Liberation* collective (the *WJL* collective) were useful in contextualizing memories about the communities and ideologies current in the 1970s. All the interviewees who lived in the area in the 1970s knew of the journal, which indicates that it not only represented but also shaped thought in the community. The journal attracted articles, interviews, reviews, poetry, artwork, and photographs from contributors in Baltimore, the United States, and sometimes abroad.

2. Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis found in their oral history of Buffalo's mid-twentieth-century lesbian community that butch-femme roles were far more complicated than pro-androgyny seventies feminism had imagined. While many had criticized butch-femme sexuality as an emulation of "normal" heterosexual gender roles, their study found that it "both imitates and transforms heterosexual patterns" (1993, 192-3). In a similar move, androgyny is further complicated in this study.
3. For examples of contemporary communities elsewhere, see Krieger 1983; Ross 1995-96; and Stein 1997.
4. In order to avoid confusing individuals with a particular kind of feminism, I am using Trisha Franzen's phrase "feminist lesbians" as opposed to "lesbian feminists" (1993). As Taylor and Rupp have recently noted, "lesbian feminism" is often equated with separatism and "cultural feminism" and placed in opposition to "radical feminism." The women in this community espoused a whole range of personal and political ideologies, and their brands of feminism are not necessarily what some scholars would call "lesbian feminism" (1993).
5. The women I interviewed felt that this was the general trend: an increased separation by the end of the 1970s and a loss of socialist people and commitments in the area at about the same time. This same trend has been documented elsewhere (Stein 1992, 33-55; Taylor and Rupp 1993, 37-8). Becki L. Ross cites a slightly different pattern in Toronto, where a group of socialist-feminist lesbians formed "Lesbians Against the Right" in 1981, after the demise of a feminist-lesbian organization (1995).
6. Mary Ann had a part-time job at a community organization, and many of the people Donna knew in Waverly were Leftist organizers. Further evidence of interest in community organizing in Baltimore can be found in the journal (Winkler 1969; Wildcat Women 1971; "Wildcat Women" 1971; Hill 1975).
7. In this context, Penny is using "political lesbian" to differentiate the socialist feminist lesbians in Waverly from lesbians elsewhere who were not politicized by the women's movement or the New Left.
8. Heilbrun's *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (1973) was reviewed in this issue by Laraine Sommella ("Review: The Search for Androgyny" 1974). Ruth Rosen notes the "much debated" Heilbrun text in her history of the women's movement (Rosen 2000, 412).
9. The "Perspectives" section of *WJL* consists of perspectives on lesbianism (1990, 36-41) and for an example of where butch-femme roles are mentioned alongside heterosexual roles (see 1970, 36-41; also see Koedt 1971 "Lesbianism and Feminism," *Women: A Journal of Liberation* 33-5; journal collective 1974; "Our Own Feeling about Androgyny" *Women: A Journal of Liberation* 34).

10. Susan Krieger discusses the tension between bar women and political women elsewhere over the fact that bar women liked new cars and new clothes and, according to political women, saw femmes as "prizes" or possessions (1983, 125–41).
11. As Becki Ross has pointed out, seventies androgyny borrowed from butch and gay male "macho" style, although the rhetoric of feminism did not allow it to be read as in any way "choosing" masculinity (1995–96, 128).
12. In Wolf's 1979 study of a lesbian community, she found that the main distinctions between straight and lesbian-feminists' androgyny were the lesbians' display of interlocking woman-symbols or a lavender star button to announce their sexual preference, as well as shorter haircuts, boots, lavender aviator glasses, or "macho" hats (86).
13. As Anne Enke has shown in her Minneapolis study, the dominant clothing style of second-wave feminists contributed to a construction of feminist and lesbian sexuality that invoked whiteness, as well as middle-class privilege (2003, 657).
14. The purpose of The Ultimate Woman was to "educate women and provide small group settings in which (they could) react and communicate with each other in a more positive manner than what society has taught us" and to "provide a comfortable atmosphere where lesbians could congregate and meet to discuss anything of interest. After fifteen long hard months of extensive work and meetings, The Ultimate Woman has established herself in the gay community" ("The Ultimate Woman: A Lesbian Feminist Organization." 1976, 9). Locating itself as part of the "gay community" perhaps indicates that The Ultimate Woman supported interracial couples.

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