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This thesis examines the ways in which the underground newspapers of the late 1960s corroborated the growing sentiment that movement women were not considered as valuable to the revolution as movement men, thereby helping the then-burgeoning women’s liberation movement to justify a full split from the rest of the leftist counter-culture. The late 1960s marked the height of the underground press’s popularity as well as the beginning of the independent women’s liberation movement. While women were banding together through consciousness-raising to expose their common dissatisfaction with patriarchal social structures, the underground press, mostly run by movement males, continued to allow mainstream, sexist concepts of gender to inform their papers’ depiction of women. Women were used as sex objects (under the guise of being “sexually liberated”), icons of the revolution, helpmates, earth mothers, and in other symbolic ways, but were denied the voice and agency granted to men. As the women’s liberation movement became more sophisticated in its goals and demands, this hypocrisy came into focus and became the subject of discussion. In the four-year period of this study, 1967-1970, important issues of sexual determinism, freedom of speech, and gender relations within the counter-culture came to a head and were expressed and discussed through the pages of the underground press.
INTRODUCTION

Out of the dissent and radicalism of the late 1960s emerged a journalistic movement that attempted to connect and provide voice for the various arms of the counter-culture: the underground press. Although underground newspapers varied in their content and style, they were all "essentially local papers catering to local communities," and were "loosely tied to an underground community sharing cultural forms and leisure activities outside the Establishment."¹

Hundreds of these newspapers sprang up in cities and college towns throughout the United States and Canada during the late 1960s. They addressed and were aligned with the "movement" or "revolution," loosely defined as the political and cultural opposition to the dominant American system. The term "free press" was often used interchangeably with "underground press," underscoring the difference between the independent papers, for which principles of free speech and individual liberty were of paramount importance, and "overground" papers, which presumably offered canned information and routinely ignored or demeaned the counter-culture.

Publishers of undergrounds wanted local communities to help define the papers; the Midwestern Activist told readers that the paper would "become whatever you want it to be."² A Graffiti editor promised that the papers "[would]
not expound the ideas of the publisher,” but “[would] present the writings of its contributors... The writer may express any view.”³ Most papers expressed a desire to demonstrate such liberality of content, hoping to provide forum for the counter-culture and even to draw various factions of the “movement” together. The Detroit Free Press stated, “Our purpose is to report the news of the hippie, new left, peace and radical avant-garde, other activities, and to be part of a process in Detroit that would bring these elements into something resembling a community.”⁴ The Austin Rag said, “There have always been a lot of beatniks, lots of ethnic folkies, lost of motorcyclists, lots of flipped out artists. But The Rag has brought them together in a funny sort of way.”⁵

By the early 1970s, however, most underground papers had folded, or changed their demographic, due to a fracturing leftist movement and a professionalization of the medium.⁶ But in the last few years of the 1960s, when the underground papers enjoyed their widest circulation, they developed an important dynamic with the nascent women’s liberation movement. This dynamic can be understood on three levels. First, on the level of coverage, the underground press printed some early women’s liberation literature and reported on women’s liberation events and activities, providing necessary if abbreviated

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⁵ Thorne Dreyer, “The Rag,” in Other Scenes, April 1967:3, as quoted in Lewes, 392.
space for women to test out new ideas, practice using the media, and spread their message. Second, on the level of representation, through their sexual objectification of the female body and reluctance to change depictions of women to keep up with the evolving ideas that women had of themselves, underground newspapers demonstrated the need for an independent, specialized women’s liberation press. And third, on the level of analysis, the underground press provided a much-needed forum for men and women to discuss new ideas about revolutionary sexuality, the presence of sexism in the papers, and in the counter-culture broadly.

This thesis, in three chapters, is organized to correspond to the three levels of this dynamic. The first chapter is dedicated to the beginnings of feminism in the late 1960s, with specific attention to the rhetoric and rationale that set up a favorable condition for recognizing oppression within the underground press. The second chapter examines the underground newspapers as visual texts, showing that contemporary with the rise in women’s consciousness was an affirmation in the form of images that women were useful to the movement mainly as sex objects. The third chapter explores these two themes textually, analyzing articles, letters to the editor, manifestos, and other writings that demonstrate the moments where underground newspapers lost liberated female readers. Where the young underground press and the burgeoning women’s liberation movement came into conflict, critical issues of personal freedom, freedom of speech, group solidarity, even the basic definitions of the movement and the revolution were destabilized.
Since the mid 1960s, dissatisfied counter-cultural women had been told their cause was not as important as the male-centered causes they worked for. Casey Haden and Mary King’s unsigned 1964 paper on the position of women at Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was met with ridicule. Women at the 1966 Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) convention were “pelted with tomatoes” and thrown out when they attempted to speak out about the prejudices against SDS women.\(^7\) Challenges to the counter-cultural patriarchy were met with hostile resistance; this hypocrisy did not escape women, who would later focus on this fact as a justification for separatism.

The underground press was never the main source of recruitment for women’s liberation,\(^8\) but it did provide an important testing ground for ideas that challenged basic tenets and practices in the counter-culture itself. Also, by publishing manifestos and articles, the women’s liberation movement could hone its rhetoric, demands, and goals, becoming more sophisticated and more effective. In this way the underground press was an integral tool for liberated women in the early stages of their revolution.

Until late 1967, almost no issues particularly important to women save abortion and sympathetic draft protests were covered. Nineteen sixty-eight was characterized by a limited dialogue centering on the presence of “smut” in the papers. Then, in the fall of 1968, women’s liberation burst onto the scene through the New York Radical Women’s guerilla theater protest of the Miss America pageant. The event was well organized and

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well publicized in both the mainstream and underground newspapers. Several underground newspapers published the manifesto that accompanied the protest; it was bright and white-hot in its condemnation of the pageant and the sexist, objectifying values that supported it. There were few papers that had picked up on a gradual awakening, or a broader discussion among counter-culture women; for most papers, it was just there one day, a new voice shouting for revolution.

Most events involving women as a protest group took place in a few large cities, but because so many underground papers were members of either the Liberated News Service or United Press Syndicate, national syndication services that could claim over 200 subscribers between them, articles published in any one paper were available to any other. Therefore a “women’s” article published in Chicago could have been picked up in New York, Mississippi, or California. It is difficult, then, to pinpoint a moment or place where the underground press “woke up” to women’s liberation. Suffice it to say that 1968 was its first big year.

Underground papers varied in their depiction of women and commitment to women’s issues, much more so than in their commitments to the anti-Vietnam War and black power movements. Because the larger movement could stand for as many or as few causes as the editors or creators of the newspapers envisioned, women’s liberation may or may not have fit into the mental rubrics of the (mostly) men in charge.9 Also, the personal nature of the women’s movement made it difficult to “cover” in traditional (or even

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underground) journalistic style. There were only a handful of actions or events in the late 1960s that garnered press in the traditional style, since most of the work of the women’s liberation movement was accomplished through “consciousness-raising,” the small-group discussion process of sharing private issues and exposing them as political.\textsuperscript{10}

After fall of 1968, there were some women-themed opinion pieces, as well as articles that addressed the difficulties of changing attitudes about male-female relationships. These pieces expressed often-overlooked nuances of the sexual revolution. Letters to the editor describing disappointment and anger at the papers’ use of the naked female figure as a sexual object were also common. Few papers reacted to this criticism by defending or changing their policies on accepting and running “smut” ads and photographs.

Sexuality and other issues that would become central to the women’s movement appeared in almost every facet of the papers. The images varied; women in comics were anatomically exaggerated, vapid sex objects. Personal classified ads solicited ideal girls, commodifying the sexually liberated woman. Illustrations and photographs used the period’s ideal, slim, child-like female to titillate and suggest a freedom from traditional moral constraint or a connection with nature. Advertisers indicated their alignment with the movement by using the female body in these same ways and to bring attention to their ads. The resulting messages about women and women’s sexuality were confusing and contradictory, representative

of a young media’s attempt to make sense of ever-evolving attitudes through a public, subjective forum. As the women’s movement gained momentum and cemented its concerns and demands, the underground press was under more pressure to adapt to its new readership. The refusal to change sexist content became an endorsement for sexism, and a split seemed inevitable.

Few papers blatantly rejected the goals of the women’s movement. Instead, they offered support in the form of some space to print women’s liberation opinion pieces and event coverage, but undermined the meaning of that support by refusing to alter their own sexist practices. Far from being a “leader” in establishing the parameters of gender relations, sexuality, and the image of women in the movement, the underground press reflected the tendency for white, middle-class standards to haunt revolutionary relationships and the lack of unity within the counter-culture. For the women’s liberation movement, this ambiguity was an important call to action: if the self-professed voice of the movement could not accurately portray women’s concerns, how would liberated ideas reach unliberated brothers and sisters? In July of 1969, the issue came to a head when the Radical Media Conference passed a resolution on women and the underground press. It passed without dissent, and yet was almost completely ignored by underground papers.

It is the sense of this conference that the underground press must undergo revolutionary changes in its relationship to and projection of women. Therefore we propose the following:

1. That male supremacy and chauvinism be eliminated from the contents of the underground papers. For example, papers should stop accepting commercial advertising that uses women’s bodies to sell records and other products, and advertisements
for sex, since the use of sex as a commodity specifically oppresses women in this country. Also, women’s bodies should not be exploited in the papers for the purpose of increasing circulation.

2. That papers make a particular effort to publish material on women’s oppression and liberation with the entire contents of the paper.

3. That women have a full role in all the functions of the staffs of underground papers.\(^{11}\)

The general reluctance to adopt these guidelines was a further push in the trend toward separatism, a confirmation that, like blacks, women were going to have to have their own revolution to get their goals accomplished.

Scholarship on women and sexism in the underground press has tended to focus on the issue of sex-themed advertisements and the innocuous nature of the new sexual freedom of the decade. Published in 1972, in the high times of second-wave feminism, Roger Lewis’s *Outlaws of America* vehemently attacked the left for continually oppressing women, but exculpated the underground press, suggesting that sex-themed papers had only “tenuous links to the underground,” and the Radical Media Conference guidelines were more effective than they really were.\(^{12}\) When editors were “offended by the editor/publisher’s laissez-faire attitude toward pornographic and sexist material,” Lewes noted, they sometimes left to start their own papers.\(^{13}\) Rodger Streitmatter in *Voices of Revolution* glossed over sexism in the underground papers by presenting


evidence of both males and females enjoying the crazy fun of the sexual revolution, despite the fact that there were ridiculously few examples of female sexual liberation uninformed by the more exploitational elements of male-dominated culture.  

By including essays by Marilyn Salzman-Webb and former *off our backs* staffers Carol Anne Douglas and Fran Moira, *Voices from the Underground* editor Ken Wachsberger acknowledged the legitimacy of the separatist feminist papers and the reasons they split to begin with. Robert J. Glessing in *The Underground Press in America* spent considerable time on the ambivalence caused by financial need and the $6-per-inch sex ads, the uplifting quality of sexual freedom material for both sexes, and the language of the underground that was “slanted against puritanical sex attitudes.” While Glessing refrained from coming to any clear conclusions about sexism, he mentions in passing that the left’s “gutter language” was in the service of “Peace, Pussy, and Pot,” a seemingly uncritical acknowledgement of the male hegemony of the counter-culture.  

Most of the scholarship on sexism in the underground press has focused on the battle over whether or not the papers would accept and run sex ads. James Lewes, in his article “The Underground Press in America (1964-1968): Outlining an Alternative, the Envisioning of an Underground,” argued that the acceptance of “sex ads” was a necessary evil for many papers who could not afford to publish otherwise. William Pelz in “The Rise and Fall of

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16 ibid., 115.
the Underground Press, 1969 to 1974,” found that papers that addressed and attempted to correct the problems of sexual oppression faced “circulation drops, loss of advertising revenue and seemingly endless ‘struggle sessions’ around the problem of staff sexism.” In “The Underground Press in America: 1955-1970,” Donna Lloyd Ellis explored the strategic use of “kooky sexual ads,” arguing that editors may have been using the novelty of such material as a way “to hook the reader in the hope that he will pass on to the more serious content inside the paper,” or that papers accepted these ads as part of a long-term plan to become financial independent. Ellis also argued that some editors were openly against censorship of any kind. Like Lewes and Glessing, Ellis noted that sex ads and financial hardship put many editors in the difficult (or not so difficult) position of having to decide whether to publish a sexist paper or no paper at all.

In her Ph.D. dissertation “The Underground Press of the Sixties,” Maxine Ruvinsky gives women considerable attention. “The underground press (with of course relatively rare but laudable exceptions),” she noted, “was not simply unaware of the radical implications of a feminist critique, it was, more prosaically, run (conceived and produced) by men, with women playing largely helpmate roles.” Somewhat more cynically, she continues:

… the men of the underground papers were enjoying the free ‘love’ and sex — that is love and sex without marriage or other payment — of the sixties, and so would have been disinclined to notice the ways in which the freedom they embraced constituted and perpetuated a position of unfreedom for women. They were, in other words, unwilling

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17 William A. Pelz, 61.
18 Ellis, 117.
to blow that abundance of free sex, and thus unlikely to pursue a train of thought that would make of the implicit advantage an explicit dilemma.20

Most discussion of the politics of sexuality dealt with romantic relationships, not relationships within among underground press staffers specifically. Nonetheless there was a general dissent among women working in the underground press, as well as a discussion of sexism in the left broadly, so Ruvinsky’s assessment is indirectly supported in the text of the papers. Elsewhere, however, and in a softer voice, Ruvinsky claimed that the underground press “remained in outlook as well as practice, largely a-feminist, or pre-feminist... rather than overtly anti-feminist, which would have indicated at least some awareness of the perspective.”21 Ruvinsky was more convincing (and closer to the mark) when she asserted that underground men were “disinclined to notice” women’s oppression.

For both women readers and writers, the treatment that women’s issues received in the underground press indicated the way they could expect to be supported in the larger movement of the future. Papers continued to publish sexist material even in the face of male and female objections, making an implicit and explicit commentary on the legitimacy of women’s liberation in the eyes of the male-run established counter-culture.

Conflict in and around the burgeoning women’s movement was often precipitated by a lack of real sympathy for the goals of women’s liberation and a fundamental breakdown of

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20 ibid., 184.
21 ibid., 180.
communication. Many radical groups faced this problem, but two factors made this particularly difficult for women: first, women’s self-awareness peaked at a time when other factions were hardening in their ideologies,\textsuperscript{22} and second, support for the women’s movement came from loose, independent cells, a structure that did not lend itself to a single platform.\textsuperscript{23} By the late 1960s, leftist groups were splitting when contingents developed within that could not reconcile their ideologies. The time for theorizing had passed for many of these groups; solid position statements and meaningful actions were the preferred method of propagation.

By the end of 1969, five women’s publications existed, including the first national women’s newsletter, \textit{The Voice of the Women’s Liberation Movement}. By the mid 1970s, there would be 500.\textsuperscript{24} For the general-interest underground press, this meant a significant shift in readership. Either women were abandoning the underground papers entirely, or supplementing their news and entertainment with more gender-friendly sources. The establishment of so many new periodicals meant that the underground press was missing its goal of speaking to and for the different factions of the counter-culture. An editor of an early Pittsburgh feminist newsletter took a lesson from the leftists before her when she asserted: “You can’t have a revolution without a press.”\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{22} Gitlin, 374.
\textsuperscript{23} Echols, \textit{Shaky Ground}, 85.; Dear Sisters, 14.
\textsuperscript{24} Lauren Kessler, \textit{The Dissident Press: Alternative Journalism in American History} (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1984), 84.
\textsuperscript{25} ibid., also see Alice Echols, \textit{Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975}, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) for a more complete discussion of radical feminists’ desire not to make incremental changes within the counter-culture, but to have a full-scale revolution within the revolution.
CHAPTER 1: RADICAL WOMEN IN CONTEXT

The context, including the rhetoric and consciousness, of the women’s liberation movement predated the height of the underground press’s popularity. Slowly, from 1964 to 1968, the women’s movement built from the inside out, beginning with privately delivered papers and bursting onto the radical and popular scene with a well-publicized protest of the 1968 Miss America pageant. In most underground papers, this protest was the first women-centered event covered. The four years of dissent leading up to it were almost uniformly panned by the underground press, a blind spot that forced the women’s movement from the beginning to find alternative means of spreading the word and reaching new recruits.

The earliest public call for women in various peace and freedom organizations to establish a “dialogue” exploring some of the discrimination particular to women on the left was a paper written by Casey Hayden and Mary King called “Sex and Caste.” The article was subtitled “A kind of memo from Casey Hayden and Mary King to a number of other women in the peace and freedom movements,” what Todd Gitlin considered “a characteristically modest title for a slow-acting time bomb.” It was mimeographed and disseminated to movement women, and was presented at an SDS conference, where it caused a fissure among veteran leftists who either denied the problem or shamefully recognized the roles they had played in the sex caste

system that defined role and worth by gender. “Sex and Caste” later reached a wider audience through a reprinting in the pacifist magazine *Liberation*. Like the poorly received paper the two women delivered at a SNCC conference the year before, this paper drew parallels between the institutional oppression of white women and that of blacks, but went further to detail the unsympathetic reaction to these concerns from male radicals. The memo was clear and particular in its assessment of the situation of women and the possible beginning of solutions.

Interestingly, Hayden and King mentioned the importance of counter-cultural media institutions, which "shape perspectives on men and women." This simple observation, made in 1965, presages the fundamental issue at the heart of the failure of the underground press to speak to and for liberated women. Public forums for cultural expression, in one of which Hayden and King chose to disseminate their message, were regarded as powerful means of building momentum for new movements and solidifying individual opinions. Hayden and King had faith in the written media’s ability to “shape” ideas and realities, a belief shared by many other radicals, and one that would heighten the conflict over the underground press’s content in the coming years. A year and a half passed, however, during which women activists put their own

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27 Ibid., 370.
28 For a more thorough exploration of the connection between the early women’s liberation movement and the civil rights and black power movements, see Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Knopf, 1979).
issues aside and “deferred to more urgent issues, Vietnam and black power.”

The next highly influential (and prescient) call to awareness came in 1967 from women in SDS. The New Left Notes essay “To the Women of the Left” described the evolution of thought that brought the anonymous “SDS Women” authors to express their dissatisfaction:

Our political awareness of our oppression has developed thru the last couple years as we sought to apply the principles of justice, equality, mutual respect and dignity which we learned from the Movement to the lives we lived as part of the Movement; only to come up against the solid wall of male chauvinism.

The address went on to “condemn the mass media for perpetuating the stereotype of women as always in an auxiliary position to men, being no more than mothers, wives or sexual objects. We specifically condemn the advertising concerns for creating the myths about women solely to profit from them as consumers.” Here the culprits were mass media and advertisers who targeted women, but the argument against the radical media and advertisers who used women’s bodies in those same stereotypical ways was not far behind. These criticisms, clear, in undeniably familiar leftist language, percolated beneath the shifting surface of the underground for another year, when theorizing and articulating gave way to action and attention.

After this relatively short gestation period, the first public action of the women’s liberation movement, indeed, the first time the slogan “Sisterhood is powerful!” was heard publicly, was the break-out “Burial of Weeping

30 Gitlin, 370.
Womanhood” that took place in Arlington National Cemetery in January of 1968. A group of younger women separated from the well-publicized Jeanette Rankin Brigade anti-Vietnam War march to stage a mock funeral procession, carrying a blank-faced dummy with blond ringlets lying in a bed of curlers, garters, hairspray, and green stamps. “Don’t Bring Flowers...,” the invitation urged, “Do be prepared to sacrifice your traditional female needs.” The action protested the use of women as “supportive girlfriends and tearful widows,” and organizers told women that, “Until we have united into a force to be reckoned with, we will be patronized and ridiculed into total political ineffectiveness.”

While “Sex and Caste,” “To the Women of the Left,” and the action at Arlington cemetery were panned in the underground press, the 1968 protest at the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City became mainstream and underground front-page news, and was followed by several articles and letters to the editor. Again, the protest was built upon a criticism that could as easily have applied to the underground press as to the overground institutions that sponsored the pageant:

So are women in our society forced daily, to compete for male approval, enslaved by ludicrous ‘beauty’ standards we ourselves are conditioned to take seriously ... the gospel of our society, according to Saint Male: women must be young, juicy, malleable – hence age discrimination and the cult of youth. And we women are brainwashed into believing this ourselves!... To win approval, we must be both sexy and wholesome, delicate but able to cope, demure yet titillatingly bitchy. Deviation of any sort brings, we are told, disaster: ‘You won’t get a man!... If you are tall, short, over or under what weight The Man prescribes you should be, forget it. Personality, articulateness, intelligence, commitment – unwise... Real power to control

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our own lives is restricted to men, while women get patronized pseudo-power...

The protestors went on to state how the image of Miss America was scarred onto women’s minds in an attempt to control women by containment. This criticism was directed at a mainstream institution, but the precise articulation was only a hair’s breadth away from turning on the counterculture itself. By appropriating the language of the civil rights and black power movements before it, women were attempting to establish legitimacy first by identifying ways that they were opposed.

The first arguments for women’s liberation, before the phenomenon even had a name, came out of the bi-racial SNCC and SDS, and included rhetoric comparing women to oppressed blacks in a white society. This was significant since most papers covered the civil rights and black power movements in earnest. In fact, if the papers made any claims to being “political,” it was most likely because they dedicated a good percentage of their copy to these two movements, the anti-Vietnam movement, and reportings on government officials. The women’s movement, however, threatened to upset the balance of power among those who produced the papers, and was not embraced as readily.

An early effort was made to set up some kind of alliance between Black Panther women and the women’s liberation movement. Lingering tensions, however, made the alliance an uneasy one. Ideologically, women may have

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34 Kathleen Berkeley in The Women’s Liberation Movement in America (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999) argues that black movement women were wary of being co-opted by white-led movements, felt women’s liberation did not adequately address their needs, and were reluctant to shift the blame for their oppression from white men to black men.
related to blacks’ oppression, but when the issue came to who was oppressing whom, sisterhood often fractured. During a 1969 United Front Against Fascism conference in California, a group of white women disrupted a long-winded white man’s speech; his exceeding the allotted time limit was pushing back the Women Against Fascism panel, so the group began chanting, “Let’s hear the women.” The women organized a caucus the next day because they felt that the late hour relegated to the women’s panel was a deliberate slight. During that caucus white and black women radicals split, with white women calling for redress and Black Panther women taking no part. One white female writer in attendance felt that the attitudes evinced at this meeting set back relations between the two groups. She noted that she “had always felt hostility coming from Panther women (as well as other black women),” and that “the black sisters who watched the women’s caucus with dismay may well feel that they can deal with male chauvinism – even the blatant sort expressed by Stokely – more easily than they fathom white women who go around acting as if they are the only oppressed people in the world.”

These were necessary lessons for the nascent women’s movement. The failed attempts to forge alliances within the left forced women to be bold and experimental in their plans to organize. When counter-cultural men diminished their concerns, they barred men from their meetings. When Black Panther women, hitherto among the most organized group of females, showed little interest in common actions,

35 Marlene Charyn, “Separatist Women Endanger Alliance.” Peninsula Observer, 11 August 1969, 4. Charyn is referring to Stokely Carmichael’s infamous statement that “The only position for women in SNCC is prone.”

36 Lewis, Outlaws of America, 39.
the women’s liberation movement continued solo. When the underground press granted little space to women’s newsworthy events and position papers, feminist papers sprang up to fill the void.37

Recognizing the inherent contradiction between creating a newspaper and systematically ignoring or oppressing a group of its constituents, the Spectator ran in 1969 the Malcolm X quote: “If you are not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed and loving the people who are doing the oppressing.”38 In some ways it was already too late; by 1969 it would take more than semantics to stamp out sexism. Women were not hated, but ignored, ridiculed, put down, and denied the basic personal freedoms that they had been working toward for others. Finding more enemies than friends among the comrades whose causes they had grown with and supported allowed the women’s liberation movement to carve out a specific territory for itself, and to establish a foothold in women’s personal lives that would not be washed away by the changing tide of the New Left.

The Chicago Seed became one of the most ardently anti-sexist papers of the early seventies. But in 1967, like almost all of the underground newspapers, the Seed demonstrated no awareness of the burgeoning women’s movement.39 In fact one of the most common themes of cover art and inside illustrations that year was nude, girlishly figured young women in natural settings. Men did not appear in similar situations as often, and when they did their bodies were less physically idealized and more modestly portrayed. The illustrations of women’s bodies were not overtly sexual, but their sex was the most prominent element of the picture. The Seed made an important and unpopular decision in 1971 to stamp sexism out of the paper, but most undergrounds were unwilling or unable to do the same during the late 1960s.40 Early critics of the underground press, such as Roger Lewis, attempted to distance sexually exploitive papers from the majority of the well meaning underground. “The so-called Playboy philosophy has coined a fortune for Hugh Hefner,” he said, “but whether it has helped anybody to find true spiritual and sexual freedom is dubious.”41 Lewis may have been a touch rosy in his assessment of the goals of even the most idealistic of the undergrounds, but most scholars writing in the period just after the heyday of the underground press also make that distinction.

39 Chicago Seed, 5 October 1970, as quoted in Lewis 78. Lewis argued that little could have been done to combat the problem of sexism in comic strips since comics reflect the individual cartoonist’s perceptions versus an institutional understanding.
This chapter explores the non-textual elements of the underground newspapers that contributed to the overall masculine tone of the free press. A close examination of underground photographs and illustrations shows that the liberal use of sexualized images was not a high-minded defense of human sexuality, but a subtle way to idealize and objectify women, indulge male fantasies, and control the sexual revolution. By containing and attempting to define female sexuality, the underground press ignored the burgeoning self-awareness of movement women and characterized the medium as an unsupportive place for developing feminist ideas.

The underground newspapers were particularly image-intensive; photographs, illustrations, and comic strips appeared frequently and were considered legitimate sources of social commentary. Despite their popularity and proliferation, images of women evolved very little from 1967 to 1969, significant since women were working so hard during that period to effect changes. The reasons for this are unclear. Sex-themed content drew more readers, presenting more of a possible subscription base. Pleasing subscribers and finding alternate sources of income became more important after 1969, when the Nixon administration urged record labels, one of the underground’s main advertisers, to pull their support.42 Some papers intentionally pushed boundaries to entice tourists and other non-subscribers to buy issues as souvenirs.43 Also, the right and ability to print such a picture was itself an assertion of freedom of speech, a challenge to an

42 Lewes, 371.
43 For a brief but tantalizing mention of the recognized kitsch value of sex-intensive underground papers, see Glessing, 122.
establishment that the underground press readers uniformly opposed. The underground press used humor and entertainment, sometimes in the form of sex, to reach a wide swath of the counter-culture and to entice readers to read the more substantial content. The more aggressive inclusion of nude females could also have been a stave against the encroaching factionalism within the left: in the pre-feminist counter-culture, most male readers could be counted on to unite on the desirability of a sexy “fantasy mother.” It could also have been evidence of resistance to or hostility toward second-wave feminists, a bold if unspoken re-assertion that in the war against the machine, men called the shots.

While the reasons behind the evolution of the images are uncertain, it is clear that the non-textual information about women in the underground press communicated that women were not as important to the movement as men were; that the female nude was in the service of the movement both as icon and as titillating object; and that traditional, middle-class gender stereotypes still informed male-female relationships within the underground press.

In April of 1968, the Austin Rag cover image was a nude, reclined female double exposed with an image of leafless branches. June’s cover was the profile of a nude woman silhouetted against the sun (see Fig. 1). The cover images are meant to be artistic; they occupy one half to a full page and are not accompanied by captions. Although the underground newspapers never professed to be objective

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45 Austin Rag, 29 April 1968, cover.
46 ibid., 20 June 1968, cover.
Figure 1 - Austin Rag cover
news sources in the same line as city dailies or weeklies, their main function still was to provide information. And yet by featuring large pictures of nude women on their covers, these undergrounds and others denied the expectation that individuals were featured in the paper because they were newsworthy or had something to say. These women were art objects, and appeared in the newspaper because their images added visual interest. This blending of creativity, subjectivity, and traditional reporting was the essence of the “new journalism” that dominated the underground press, but confounded both the message conveyed about women and the role of journalism in the counter-culture.

Images of “earth mothers” like the ones pictured on these covers spoke to the hippie notion that human beings needed to reconnect with the earth and the natural world, but they also represented the era’s female ideal,\footnote{Gitlin, 372, argues that in the “libertine counterculture,” “men’s ideal was the guru, women’s the Earth Mother. Women were expected (and expected themselves: no conspiracies here) to step off their pedestals, take off their bras, put on long dresses, and bake bread.”} one that was posited against the exploitive, commercialized sexuality of Playboy. And yet the images were not so radically different. Idealized counter-cultural women were white, earthy, natural looking and presented as uninhibited, and yet were exploited to the same end as mainstream beauties.

Some images did not even pretend to be counter-cultural. The Berkeley Barb ran a cover image of two long-haired, topless hippie-like women in November of 1968, which the Seattle Helix reprinted in their following issue with a “letter” from the women. The letter, addressed to the paper’s readers, was signed by the two women, Jane and...
Lela, soul mates who grew up together and became one person named Luna. The authors of the letter attempted to preempt the criticism that the picture was thinly veiled pornography by claiming, “We realize that this is all extraordinary and it will only be the truly beautiful people who understand, we hope this shared information does not fall into the wrong hands – the ‘straights.’ We love you.” By aligning the naked women’s bodies with ideal hippie spirituality (and a none too subtle lesbian implication), the letter-writer precludes effective objection by claiming that critics were straight, not beautiful, and just didn’t get it.

That same year the Barb ran another cover image of a nude woman adorned with Egyptian-styled jewelry. The image appeared to be from around the 1920s, and occupied half of the front page. The Chicago Seed in 1967 featured a woman posed in three-quarters profile, turning to look at the camera (see Fig. 2). She was a nameless “Fantasy mother,” indistinguishable from a James Bond girl except for the swirly, psychedelic frame that surrounded her picture. These stylized images, all of which engaged the viewer by confronting him with a direct female gaze, were not products of the underground, but appropriations from the mainstream sex culture. The appropriateness of these fantasy images for the news venue was dubious, and called into question the images’ essential purposes and the assumption about the readership.

Actual motherhood, personified in photographs of nude pregnant women, was a popular theme in the underground press. In one sense, this was a step forward for women in the sexual revolution. Pregnant women, too, could be sexual entities; they were no longer thought of as
Figure 2 – “Fantasy Mother”
essentially asexual for nine months. An expanded definition of sexuality allowed pregnant women to express their sexuality, but by default also included them in the pool of possible sexual conquests for counter-cultural men. And yet, the pregnant women in these pictures still represented a hippie-girl ideal; even with nine-month-swollen bellies, it was obvious that the women were slender, had pretty faces and long, straight hair. Instead of being part of an equal-opportunity sexual freedom, they were part of an equal-opportunity sexual exploitation. As women’s liberation grew more sophisticated, feminists reviewed “natural” depictions like these and criticized them as sexist.48

Despite the non-revolutionary titillation induced by pictures of naked women, it was a political statement to include a nude female in a newspaper. It spoke to issues of freedom of speech and the desire to smash conceptions of sexuality that involved feeling shame and aversion to human exposure. The women pictured, however, were devoid of context and voice; their sexual liberation had nothing to do with their subscription to counter-cultural ideals or their beliefs about themselves or the society they lived in. They existed solely to express the photographer or editor’s opinion on beauty and sexuality. The political statement was not about female autonomy or sexual freedom, the purported basis of the sexual revolution, but about the right to exploit women’s bodies and provide tantalizing fodder for other men.

48 Gitlin, 375.
Some historians have suggested that advertisers who wished to attract the underground press audience employed the “special language... intelligible only to insiders” and graphics that mimicked the paper’s psychedelic style.\textsuperscript{49} This argument is most often applied to the record industry, which incorporated the style into their “overground” advertising campaigns as well, thereby bringing it into the mainstream.\textsuperscript{50} A major feature of this underground style was a sexual objectification of the female body. Accordingly, advertisers for concert venues, clothing stores, and theaters adopted the accepted underground style that included this objectification and targeted their ads to fit in better with the paper’s overall design.

One such ad, for a band called Mother Earth, depicted the iconic mother earth as a nude woman splayed out on Cole Avenue, the club’s location (see Fig. 3).\textsuperscript{51} The ad used a literal translation of the figurative mother earth as its design – a sleeping or unconscious woman whose body was blended into the landscape beneath it. While the mother earth symbol has been used throughout history, its connotation here was compromised by the context of the paper in which it appeared. On the cover of that same issue was a woman figure of Justice (see Fig. 4).\textsuperscript{52} Her robe, falling away from her hip to expose her thigh and calf, also clung to her breasts. The image of mother earth alone was not necessarily objectifying, but in conjunction with the provocative cover, neither is it innocuous. The cover

\textsuperscript{49} Ellis, 116.
\textsuperscript{50} Ellis, 116.
\textsuperscript{51} Dallas Notes, 18 July 1969, 11.
\textsuperscript{52} ibid., cover.
Figure 4 – “Abjection Overruled”
and advertisement establish a dynamic with the reader in which sexualized representations of females, even when used iconically, appeared appropriate figures for the newspaper and its advertisers (who presumably exhibited the same counter-cultural values).

Bare or prominent breasts were still rare and risqué enough to catch a reader’s attention, especially on the cover of the newspaper, but also fit well into the deliberately shocking and rule-breaking underground style. In employing female nudity, advertisers could announce that they were hip to the revolutionary scene, but also make sure they didn’t get overlooked in the graphic-intensive issues.

Male nude bodies were also used to attract attention. One particular ad in 1969 used male nudity in the service of the anti-Vietnam War movement (see Fig. 5). On the first page, a naked man stood in a field with his back to the reader, and three young, topless females sat at his feet. The ad read, “What is this man doing?” The reader had to turn to the next page for the finish, now shot from the front so that the women were seated in the foreground and the man faced the reader. A white bandage X covered his genitals. “Not a hell of a lot,” the ad answered. “3.9 percent of wounds in Vietnam are to the genitals!” The ad used explicit sexuality and the novelty of male nudity to catch the reader’s attention and tempt him seek out the ad’s conclusion on the second page. The message of the ad intended to speak directly to the sexually liberated crowd, choosing at its one argument that the possible

““What is this man doing?” Austin Rag, 10 November 1968, 21-22.”
Figure 5 - “What is this man doing?”
impotency resulting from a wounding would be reason enough to oppose the Vietnam War.

But not all women agreed with the popular adage that girls say yes to boys who say no.\textsuperscript{54} This particular ad harkened to the Arlington Cemetery “Burial of Weeping Womanhood” the year before, as well as one of the tenants of the New York Radical Women’s “No More Miss America” protest: “She personified the ‘unstained patriotic American womanhood our boys are fighting for.’ The Living Bra and the Dead Soldier. We refuse to be used as Mascots for Murder.”\textsuperscript{55} The sacrificing and servile female was dying hard with new feminists, and new recruits to the movement did not have the loyalty to other causes (such as the anti-war movement) to complicate their reluctance to fill this symbolic role.\textsuperscript{56} Although this ad objectified the male body and put it to use for a counter-cultural cause, the text of the ad aimed to frighten male readers with a fate worse than death – a life devoid of the possibility of sex with three women at once. Unlike images of nude females, this advertisement assumed a degree of agency on the part of the reader who might identify with this image, and it ignored contemporary female resistance to being used as a tool to manipulate draft-aged men.

Underground newspapers also used nudity to advertise themselves in their own or other papers. A 1967 Other Scenes self-advertisement depicted 12 pin-up women in a wheel titled “The Secrets of Astrology Laid Bare” (see Fig. 6). No explanation was given for this illustration, nor did it tie in with the surrounding content. The only text

\textsuperscript{54} Gitlin, 371.
\textsuperscript{55} New York Radical Women, “No More Miss America,” in Dear Sisters, 25.
\textsuperscript{56} Gitlin, 371.
Figure 6 – “The Secrets of Astrology Laid Bare”
on the page was the paper’s name, Other Scenes.\textsuperscript{57}
Graphically, the picture resembled a bulls-eye, pulling the viewer’s gaze toward the page. The implied message seemed to be: for more of the same titillating and irreverent humor, keep buying the newspaper.

The most unequivocal example of this use of the nude female body occurred when an underground paper used illustrations of naked women to draw attention to its own masthead or subscription insert. The entire back cover of one 1969 issue of the Dallas Notes featured a bemused naked woman in tribal paint sitting with her legs spread and her hands tied behind her (see Fig. 7). A much smaller soldier creature stood between her legs, leaning on her knee casually as he discussed the copious merits of the newspaper that his friend was holding: “I’ll bet you ten minutes on da nipple that this newspaper really gonna’ set precedents in da world of culture…”\textsuperscript{58} In case the reader missed the wild woman’s meticulously drawn breasts at first glance, the text would redirect his gaze. The ad was eye-catching in it size, its novelty and its explicit nudity. A cutout at the bottom of the page urged viewers to subscribe.

The Austin Rag ran a series of mastheads and subscription inserts featuring illustrations of nude women. In the spring and summer of 1968, it became a running feature. In February, a Victorian woman was pictured disrobing, displaying her breasts and abdomen.\textsuperscript{59} Later that month a flower-wreathed woman reclined with a lyre.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{57} New York Other Scenes, no. 9 (1967), 12.
\textsuperscript{58} Dallas Notes, 16 April 1969, back cover.
\textsuperscript{59} Austin Rag, 5 February 1968, 2.
\textsuperscript{60} ibid., 26 February 1968, 2.
Figure 7 - "... ten minutes on da nipple"
In March a bored nymph looked longingly at her satyr, who was busy reading the Rag.\textsuperscript{61} In April, a smoking woman laid back on several pillows, her pubis and breasts turned to face the viewer (see Fig. 8).\textsuperscript{62} In June a woman’s torso and pubis grew from the rocky ground.\textsuperscript{63} In all these illustrations the women were nude or in a state of undress. Their use was quintessentially ornamental; placed next to the masthead and devoid of context, their only possible value could be aesthetic or attention grabbing.

The women in these Rag illustrations were all physically idealized and no text accompanied them. But in the series was one nude overweight woman riding a horse and holding a Rag pennant (see Fig. 9). A nude male angel stood beside her holding a sign, “Take The Rag with you this summer.”\textsuperscript{64} This woman was not sexualized. She did not look at the reader; in fact her face was turned to the side and obscured by her hair. Her belly, not her breasts, was prominent, and the fact that this insert had text directed at the reader indicated that, unlike the other pictures of nude women, this one had to have an excuse to be naked.

Another anomalous illustration featured a nude, well muscled male sitting in a stone washbasin. His head was cocked to one side, he had foppish hair, and he held a cigarette between two fingers. Medieval objects surrounded him: the stone bath in which he sat, a scroll on the floor (labeled Rag), a goblet, and a marble column. The accompanying text read, “Turn on this period with the Rag!”\textsuperscript{65} The man’s sexual orientation was uncertain, and the

\textsuperscript{61} ibid., 11 March 1968, 2.
\textsuperscript{62} ibid., 22 April 1968, 2.
\textsuperscript{63} ibid., 16 June 1968, 2.
\textsuperscript{64} Austin Rag, 13 May 1968, 12.
\textsuperscript{65} Austin Rag, 29 April 1968, 2.
Figure 8 – Reclining Nude Masthead

Figure 9 – Nude on Horseback Subscription
accompanying text both referenced menstruation and suggested that the man’s context, not his nudity, was notable.

All the images served to amuse and attract attention, but only the idealized female figures were presumed to be understood as purely ornamental. These newspaper self-advertisements attempted to grab readers’ attention and make them want to come back for more. It was an implicit endorsement for the use of the sexualized female nude in the service of the movement, here in the form of increased subscription to the underground newspaper. Furthermore, it supposed an audience that would be receptive to such images, namely young movement males.

Images of nude men were used in ways that were inherently different than images of nude women, and sometimes were met with heavy resistance. Unlike female nudes, men were often pictured nude for nudity’s sake, not sexualized, not objectified, just without clothing. Male nudity was more likely to be social commentary, farce, or humor, and was rarely a sexual spectacle.

The idea of a man being naked, exposed, and posed was silly enough to be the punch line all by itself. A 1969 issue of the Austin Rag featured one Reggie Clap as November’s playmate of the month. Reggie mixed cheesecake and comical poses, looking at once irreverent and unaffected. In one picture he was photographed from behind straddling the head of a bronze bust. In typical pin-up fashion, a blurb about Reggie accompanied the pictures:
“Our little cutie (39-32-34!) enjoys romping with nature...” Clearly the article was laughing at the absurdity of commodifying the human body, but in the context of the underground, where the female body was commodified as a matter of course, the joke looked more like mockery than parody.

A 1967 Berkeley Barb covers showed Jeff Poland, a leader in the Sexual Freedom League, lounging naked in an arrow-backed chair, smoking a joint with a bunch of grapes covering his genitalia. Poland was not ornamental, but newsworthy: he was in the paper because he was involved in a San Francisco State “insurrection” and was suspended from his position as columnist at the paper Paisley Power. Poland was not engaged with the viewer and was depicted perfectly relaxed; there was none of the coy camera play often involved with shooting female nudes. His focus was on the joint, not his nakedness. The modesty afforded by the grapes was tongue-in-cheek, not decorous. Situationaly, the reader was clued in that Poland’s nude body was part of the grander message of rebellion, not objectified sexuality.

The Seattle Helix reprinted in 1968 a page taken from student Don Scott’s creative writing project, an art book of images and text (see Fig. 10). The dominant image on the page was a large image of naked Scott, squinting in the light, directly facing the camera and shooting two peace signs into the air. Line drawings that echo the other pop images on the page appear over his stomach, chest and legs. The article accompanying this image was a review of his book.

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An essay condemning the negative response that Scott’s naked image elicited, as well as a polemic defense of the picture, appeared in the next issue.

By covering the genitals and so calling special attention to them, by judging them grotesque and somehow malignly mysterious one is successfully driven to familiarize and legitimize them in the customary way: wedlock in which the mutual prize is a duel set of genitals designed to forever perpetuate the culture and prop the inner sanctum. 68

This assertion seemed to equalize the sexualized body – the shame and subsequent covering of genitals applied equally to men and women, and the idea that sex was the “prize” of wedlock indicated a distaste for the cultural importance of virginity in both sexes. And yet the article ended with an anecdote that unapologetically objectified female readers. A “fully-buxomed” female Helix reader flouted censure and bought the controversial underground “in full view of all those less endowed timid beach girls.” When she got to the Scott’s full frontal nudity, “her eyes fixated for a time in a stoned gaze and then an embarrassed fumbling with the pages. Our beach teaser had been tried and found wanting.” 69 Even in this article defending the use of an image of a naked man, the woman reader became the object of the implied sexual gaze, unable to escape the “special attention” that she received by virtue of her female anatomy.

Another 1968 Seattle Helix feature, “Plan Your Own Paint-In,” began with the Jerry Rubin quote, “The Intellectuals would be better off if they wrote their programs on the tits of naked women,” 70 and continued, “It used to be that men photographed women. This is over. Men

68 ibid. 3, no. 12: 10.
70 ibid. 3, no. 3 (March 14, 1968): 4.
now paint women, women paint men, women women and men men." This optimistic beginning preceded a page full of nude or scantily clad women and one naked man. The feature’s advice to timid couples perhaps best illustrated the real focus of the paint-in: “Let the wife put on her hidden bikini and the husband old jeans and a sweatshirt and practice.” The single naked man was named (none of the women were), and was identified as the “Nude Candidate for President.” It was understood why attractive, barely-clothed women were pictured, but a nude man required serious explanation.

The previous examples demonstrate that the male body was not objectified in the same way that women’s bodies were, since men were always given context (and often given voice). Furthermore, even when using male nudity to comment on the benefits or equalizing properties of uncovered genitalia, women were still the ones who had something to lose, specifically fickle male approval. Pictures of nude men in the underground press were rare, and their limited use betrayed holdover gender stereotypes and assumptions about heterosexual relationships.

Male nudity was somewhat more common in comic strips. In a “Wild Man Jones” comic, Jones, who “wakes up” to find himself in odd and sometimes dangerous situations, was introduced to the reader handcuffed and naked. The opening caption read, “…two ‘policemen’ handcuffed and stripped him on his way to work!! If you’re a bit puzzled, think how Jones must feel!!!” The implication was that the officers’ motives for stripping and handcuffing Jones were

**Ibid., 8.**
questionable. The focus was not on Jones as a sexual object, but as a temporarily vulnerable hero. Furthermore, “Jones’s” anatomy was exaggerated, but not drawn in detail. Female sexual anatomy was drawn exaggeratedly and in greater detail than other body parts as a rule in comics, a tendency that makes sense since women most often occupied sexual roles. Men’s sexual anatomy was only depicted specifically when sexuality was a theme of the strip.

In “Flyin’ A Funnies,” a man fell asleep while watching a television program. The program star, “Mr. Whiz,” took offense to this and crawled out of the television set to punish the man by making his penis grow to a monstrous size. The man woke up and asked, “What am I gonna do wit’ dis MONSTER of a PRICK, hah??” to which Mr. Whiz answered, “Give your wife the thrill of her life.” Sexual intercourse with such anatomy would be impossible at best, and horribly violent at worst. When male sexuality was exaggerated or abnormal, the male did not become a sex object, but a freak, and the consequences for the female, present or implied, were not good.

Comics were among the most popular features of the underground newspapers, and were the source of direct social commentary. Because a function of comics was to entertain, the content could subvert the women’s movement using humor and an established comic style that sanctioned the use of exaggerated anatomy and “stock” characters. Consequently the “beautiful” (blond, large-breasted, long-legged) woman would be featured as a sex object or

accessory, the overweight brunettes wearing glasses would be desexualized, and sometimes the women’s movement itself would be made fun of. Hostility toward women, especially beautiful women, ran deeply through the comics -- sometimes a mild, smoldering hostility, and other times hostility that erupted in horrible violence.

A 1967 R. Crumb comic, “Life Among the Constipated,” carried by the East Village Other, featured 12 panels of women and men in mostly stereotypical roles (see Fig. 11). In two panels, expressionless mothers indicated resigned attitudes toward their traditional roles: one mother with bags under her eyes, fervently ironing her husband’s shirt, told her constipated child to wait until she finished and she’d give him an enema; the other mother stared straight ahead at the dinner table, and when each member of her family presents her with an issue or question, answered “It doesn’t matter.” The mothers toiled at thankless, meaningless jobs while their families are oblivious to their feelings.

In another panel three teenage boys drew graffiti on a brick wall, including the message, “Rosemary Schwartz blows niggers,” a phallus, and a picture of a nude female torso above a knife dripping blood and the word “screw.” A passing man was shown to be thinking about the same nude female torso. The obvious youth of the boys and the adolescent activity at first made the panel seem to be about randy teenagers. But the echoing of the preoccupation with disembodied female sex organs in the grown man’s thoughts suggested less shenanigans and more a depressing lack of development.

A third panel showed a man lifting the skirt of a young girl and touching her genitals. Another showed a
Figure 11 – “Life Among the Constipated”
voluptuous woman, whose single thought was about her own constipation, being pursued by a sex-crazed man given eight speech balloons to express his attraction to her. In these panels, the male characters were craven, disturbing figures that preyed upon unaware females.

None of the drawings in this comic presented a clear image of femininity, nor a lucid message about the validity of gender roles. R. Crumb’s personal struggle with hostility toward women, explored through the documentary Crumb, has complicated the subsequent reading of his comics. And yet this acknowledgement adds an important layer to the already complex image of women in underground comics and other incarnations. In this comic the men were monsters or dolts and the women unaware of or unable to articulate the substance of their abuse. There is a sense that Crumb was exposing his own version of a male world gone terribly wrong, one in which his own uncensored thoughts got far too much sway. In this unbalanced and unattractive situation, Crumb seems to be acknowledging the legitimacy of women’s anger and resentment of their own objectification by carrying it to a grotesque crescendo. In his comics, at least, male underground press readers were not going to find ready heroes or even characters with whom they would want to relate.

A common theme in underground comics involved a girl getting punished for failing a male in a stereotypically female way. “Hero of the Beach” began with geeky, awkward Philbert and his buxom, bikini-clad girlfriend, Melody, sunbathing at the beach (see Fig. 12). The reader was set up to expect discord since the pair was so obviously mismatched. Furthermore, since Melody’s breasts were her most dominant feature, the viewer expected her femaleness
Figure 12 - "Hero of the Beach"
to become an issue as well. These suspicious were confirmed when a bully abused Philbert, and without question, acquired Melody, the “broad.” Melody’s inevitable transgression followed: she challenged Philbert’s manliness instead of sticking up for him and rejecting the bully. When Philbert morphed into the hulky (and brutal) Wonder Warthog, he got rid of the bully and then punched Melody and sent her flying out into the ocean for committing the ultimate female sin, being a “fickle wench.”

This theme took an even more violent tone in a 1968 Seattle Helix comic where a gangster smacked a naked, rope-bound woman across the face; called her a “cunt bitch”; punched her in the stomach; then stomped on her when she’d fallen to the ground. This comic began with a note from the artists that the strip was an “alternative sequence” in reaction to reader outcry that the previous issue’s strip was “objectionable.” Here the naked female, vulnerable and an obvious target for violence, is exploited to further a political agenda, in this case, opposition to censorship.

By early 1969, feminism and “women’s lib” was a formidable presence in the counter-culture. Late 1968 saw a relative explosion of street theater, underground-press published articles and manifestoes, and the expression of a spectrum of demands from counter-cultural women. Comics from this period emerged from a more contentious context, and may have expressed and criticized some of the fears and anxieties that movement males had about the new, more assertive women.

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74 Austin Rag, 15 January 1968, 7.
On one end of the spectrum were comics like the *San Francisco Express Times* “God Nose.” In “God Nose Mates His Meet... Uh, Meets his Mate!,” The main character, a squatty immortal with a large, oddly shaped nose, was challenged for power by a group of bare-breasted female deities who were released from their statues in remote parts of the world by anthropologists who unwittingly fondled their breasts. The goddesses emerged after thousands of years sexually frustrated and bent on getting revenge against men. The four-part series began with the summary: “Featuring our anthropomorphic hero in a fight to the finish for his masculinity... See the battle of the sexes that determined our post-Grecian enthrallment with male gods and doomed female goddesses to oblivion!” As the first panel foretold, the goddesses were thwarted by the smarter God Nose – he suspected them from the first, assuming they were jealous of his luxurious long hair, and later defeated them with a series of snot-related super powers. This fantastic story contained a heavy dose of female empowerment, but the strength and ingenuity of the goddesses only served to make their eventual defeat more necessary and impressive. Furthermore, the comic linked an awakened female sexuality with the desire to do violence to men, dismissing the systemic social issues that justify their displeasure, and characterizing women’s eroticism as something to fear.

“Those Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers” was somewhat notorious for its anti-woman themes. It was this comic strip that the *Chicago Seed* refused to run during the early

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1970s, when sexism in the then-failing underground press was being widely recognized and dealt with. In one 1969 strip a “groupie” teenybopper friend of the brothers’ cousin ran away from home in Iowa and crashed at their apartment (see Fig. 13). She was drawn such that four of her features were important: her eyelashes, her mouth, her legs, and her breasts. Her constant demands and complaints irked the brothers, so they sent her out to buy food for dinner (which they hoped she would cook). When Fat Freddie finally got her in bed, he found that she had crabs; this malady amused the other two brothers. She moved out because the bed was too lumpy, leaving the brothers in peace to resume their lame, pot-centered lives. This comic expressed but simultaneously made fun of the frustration of older, wiser counter-cultural males whose “revolutionary” lives were being upended by naïve female interlopers who were unable to successfully fulfill their roles as revolutionary women. Instead of cooking decent meals, the groupie spouted canned maxims (“It’s time you guys stopped eating like bourgeois capitalist pigs”). She has also failed as a sexual object, since she did not recognize and correct the unpleasant effects of free love (in this case, a genital parasite). And yet, the activity and focus that she brought to the men’s apartment is sorely missed – one suspects that the three men alone slide from one aimless pursuit to another, having lost touch with the revolution that happens outside of their door.

Among the most violent and stereotypical of the women-themed comics in this period was “Wild Man Jones.” The comic chronicled the adventures of a hapless square, Jones,

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Figure 13 – "Those Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers"
who turned into a violent hulk from time to time, blacking out the whole while, and “woke up” to find himself in the middle of an action without knowing how or why he got there. In one episode, Jones arrived at work after a strange and unexplained episode with two hit men (see Fig. 14). Still frazzled, Jones checked in with his secretary, then panicked as he felt the change take over his body. As the “wild man,” Jones was unaccountable for his actions—he did not remember what he did once he changed back into a normal man. His first action as a monster was to attempt to violently rape his secretary. She first was flattered, “God! He—He WANTS me!!,” the mildly objected, “No!! N-No?... Well, damnit you might’ve let me undress myself!!,” and finally became a willing and excited victim, “Oh, God HURRY! Please! Pant Pant. Don’t make me wait!!.” At this point Jones’s secretary had fulfilled the female stereotype of the woman who secretly wanted to be raped. Jones turned back into a regular man, and instead of worrying about the torn clothing and naked woman in front of him, worried about himself: “Mother of God!! What the fuck have I gotten myself INTO?? Is this my SECRETARY?!” The last three panels showed Jones recoiling, running for the door, then slamming it behind him, leaving his secretary still enraptured and touching her own body. The caption, “Wild Man Jones! He leaves ‘em writhin’!!” closed the comic, a parting thought that reduces women to a group (represented by half a pronoun) of passive sexual objects, and focused the reader’s attention on Jones’s prowess instead of his inhumanity.

**“Wild Man Jones.” Dallas Notes, 17 September 1969, 10-11.**
Figure 14 – “Wild Man Jones”
Sexually explicit photographs, comic strips and illustrations were a hallmark of the underground papers. The explicit violence of “Wild Man Jones,” “Wonder Warthog,” and various R. Crumb comics was the extreme, but dozens of other comics like “The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers,” and “God Nose,” as well as illustrations and photographs supported the idea that women were sexual objects; victims; inherently inferior to men; useful as symbols of naivety, virtue, and life close to nature; and devoid of an autonomy that might refute these ideas. Part of the intent of this imagery was to indicate rebellion or irreverence in the face of mainstream society, to entertain, and to dispel common, “straight” ideas that sex was shameful and the naked human form dirty or unattractive. It was the female body that most usefully conveyed this message, though, undermining and diminishing importance of actual women to the movement. Women’s naked bodies were almost exclusively used in this regard; while some images of nude men appeared, they were more often making a social comment. After 1968, this use of the female body, thematically and artistically, was imbued with political significance; it bespoke a lack of support for the women’s movement’s goals and demands for equality within the counter-culture. The result was that instead of being the avant-garde of the women’s movement and women’s role in the sexual revolution, the underground press reinforced mainstream, traditional notions of womanhood and alienated a significant portion of their readers.
As early as late 1967, papers were opening dialogues on the use of sex in advertising, sexually solicitous classified ads, and the editorial use of the nude female body. Respondents were not always members of the women’s movement; most often they identified themselves simply as readers of the underground newspapers, and demonstrated an interest in shaping the revolution’s course. As the women’s movement grew more sophisticated, articles and editorials appeared that generalized dissent among women, but most of the early arguments focused on individual issues and took place in the letters to the editor.

Many underground newspapers dedicated considerable space and attention to letters to the editor, a practice that helped to establish their legitimacy as the “voice” of the movement. Some letters were opinion pieces dealing with various movement issues, but often, in traditional newspaper style, letters would comment on the paper’s content. This forum provided some of the most straightforward commentary on female sexuality in the underground press. At that time there was no working definition of pornography or obscenity outside of abstruse legal language, and there were few unofficial parameters to determine offensive or oppressive use of the female body. Writers attempted to help underground papers navigate the increasingly hostile waters of female sexuality by making suggestions and defenses for a variety of policies, but editors and publishers still made the ultimate decisions on the papers’ content.

**Lewes, 392.**
Despite mass national syndication of material, there were individual, regional, and stylistic differences that made it impossible to generalize the image of the sexual revolution in the underground press. Some papers made efforts to reflect readers’ preference regarding the use and depiction of sex, while others neither solicited nor printed reader responses. Some papers made conscientious changes to reflect an expanded understanding of “revolutionary” and “liberated” sexuality; others refused to alter their practices. This diversity is telling; loosely banded women were just beginning to articulate opposition to sexist portrayals and practices in the newspapers -- even for these relatively like-minded individuals, definitions and goals were difficult to establish. For the underground newspapers, which tried to be everything to everyone in the movement, presenting a fractured and imperfect representation of womanhood was inevitable.

The most prolific discussion of sexuality in the underground papers centered on the use of “smut.” Discussions ranged from the application of the legal definitions of obscenity to the significance of pictures of naked women in the movement as a whole. Seldom did any conclusions come out of these discussions, but it is significant that there was a dialogue where countercultural men and women attempted to reach common ground.

A reader of the Dallas Notes, a paper that had previously had legal trouble related to charges of pornography, was practical about the implications of printing “naked ladies”: “...if you really are serious about
the cultural revolution’s coming to Dallas, you will cut out all the unnecessary antagonism. This may include some beloved four-letter words and naked ladies, but your mission in Dallas may require that you relinquish such pleasures.\textsuperscript{80} Caught up in court, the paper was effectively silenced by the “Establishment.” To this reader, being able to publish at all was more important to the revolution than the paper’s right to use explicit language and sexuality. It was not a matter of principle, but of priority.

Papers that solicited feedback found that readership was split on the role of explicit sexuality in the underground press. In response to such a request for readers to comment on the issue, the Austin Rag received these two letters:

Since you ask, there are two reasons why I, for one, would not like to see you begin accepting ads for girlie pictures and movies and for running columns of classified ads for sundry varieties of sex and sexual partners. 1.) It would seriously detract from the revolutionary effectiveness of [the paper]…2.) Accepting those ads would make you silently acquiescent in the American conviction that sex, like everything, is a commodity which can be advertised, bargained for, and sold, and that the importance of sex is not as a personal relationship, however fleeting, but as a subject of barter… Perhaps the Free Press should re-examine its name.\textsuperscript{81}

I (personally) find the sex-ads fascinating reading… The Revolution is straight across the board, and it involves (among a lot of other things too) a franker and more open attitude toward sex… That the issue has come up at all means that some of these castrated fake-Leftist neo-puritans have begun to put their two cents’ worth into the doings of The Rag.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{80} Lois Wetzel, “Dear Notes,” The Dallas Notes, 4 March 1969, 2.
\textsuperscript{81} Nancy Phillips, “Letters to the Funnel: More on Smut.” The Austin Rag, 8 January 1968, 2.
\textsuperscript{82} Anonymous, “Letters to the Funnel: More on Smut.” ibid.
Both letters linked the presence of sex in the underground press with the revolution it served. The writers’ interpretations of how sex should be used, however, were at odds. The first writer objected to the mainstream use of sex as a commodity, a practice that undermined its value to two people in an intimate relationship. It would enforce the paper’s “revolutionary effectiveness,” she argued, if the editors made a conscious decision to protest this commodification by eliminating its presence in the paper. To the second writer, sexuality in the revolution was uniformly uninhibited and without restrictions. The suggestion of censorship meant to him or her that the paper was becoming more influenced by the “fake-Left” mainstream. In resisting definitions of the sexual revolution, this writer was using revolutionary logic that was, in a purely semantic sense, just as valid as the writer who argued against oppression by commodification.

Many editors, too, felt that to censor sexually explicit advertisements and classifieds would have been contrary to the spirit of the underground press.\(^83\) The classified ads manager of the Los Angeles Free Press was unwilling to impose restrictions on the kinds of ads he would accept, citing the fact that he would be alienating the one-third of the paper’s readers who bought the paper primarily for the sex ads.\(^84\) At the Free Press, it seemed as if the editors’ allegiances lay with paying customers, not necessarily the ideals of the movement.

The decision to run sex-themed ads and images was fraught with moral conflict. In addition to using revenue from sex

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\(^83\) Ellis, 118.

ads to stay in business, editors and publishers also used the popular sex ads to hook readers into the more “serious content inside the paper.” This was again putting women’s sexuality in the service of a cause, here the uplifting of readers through trickery, alternately thought of as good business practice. These kinds of compromises may have been suitable trade-offs for many editors, willing to give verbal support to women’s liberation but not willing to sacrifice their paper’s future or their personal principles for it.

Despite the forward-thinking call for readers to respond to sex in the paper, and the varied responses it received, the Rag resolved the issue for itself by continuing to run sex-themed classifieds and images. In fact, for three months after the two opposed responses were published, the Rag’s masthead appeared next to drawings of different bare-breasted females (see Fig. 8).

If the Rag was at all unclear about exactly what changes some readers would have liked to see, letters in the subsequent months offered tangible suggestions. From March of 1968: “...why did such a liberal publication as The Rag accept an advertisement in which the writer clearly indicates his discrimination against a substantial segment of our society, namely women over thirty.” This writer objected to discrimination (here age and sex discrimination), an issue that was, to many, a mainstay of revolutionary thinking.

A more forcefully worded letter came to the Rag in May of 1968:

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85 Ellis, 117.
I am writing to you in protest against both the sexual discrimination and the sexual double-standard policies exhibited by your paper... Out of the pictures which I have seen, only one contained a male nude figure! And he was photographed in a very conservative pose in comparison to the female figures...you have either rationalized away the question or resorted to commercialization of the female sex to promote your sales.87

This letter accused the Rag’s of having counter-revolutionary profit motives and challenged the paper’s commitment to an anti-sexually exploitive depiction of women. For many papers, the realities of shoestring budgets and the dearth of sexually exploitive material made the issue difficult to ignore.

Most underground newspapers subsisted on a combination of reader contribution and meager advertising income from record companies, alternative-lifestyle retailers, and dance clubs.88 Increasingly, and especially after 1969 when the Nixon administration urged record companies to pull advertising from the underground papers, many papers felt compelled to accept sex ads to stay solvent and publishing. Several papers that continued to run sex ads, especially if they were already fairly well established, survived to see the end of the 1960s. Many papers that objected to and rejected sex ads folded. Those that did not became increasingly dependent on reader support.89 An East Village Other staffer admitted torn feelings among those who produced the papers:

Some of us would like to ease up on ads for girly books, nude movies and sexual aids. And there’s been talk about cutting out the classified ads from ‘a lonely masculine man

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87 Bonnie Marie Heckman, letter to the “Funnel.” The Austin Rag, 13 May 1968, 2.
88 Lewes, 391.
89 Lewes, 391.
who seeks other for fun and games.’ But the business manager says those ads pay in advance. ‘$5 is still $5.’

Scholars have established that there was a financial imperative to underground papers’ acceptance of sex-themed ads, but have ignored the fact that women’s consciousness and exposure of that motivation was self-legitimizing. It is highly doubtful that those familiar with the operation of the underground press would have denied the charges of sexism; in some ways, though, the charge was irrelevant. If a paper could not earn enough money to publish every week, the paper would dissolve, leaving the movement without news, analysis, entertainment, or a sense of community. If a paper was dedicated to providing the information that a counter-cultural community wanted, and that community wanted sex, then the papers were essentially fulfilling their mission by publishing sex. Outraged women were blowing the whistle on hypocrisy and trade-offs that replaced the idealism on which the undergounds were founded, but the movement was becoming more practical in its old age, and the mostly men in charge made sacrifices where it would personally hurt them the least. The issue was complicated by the fact that the idealistic language of the counter-culture was broad enough to cover opposing arguments at the same time. Women and men were both working for freedom, liberty, revolution, and equality, but how these goals would be achieved for everyone remained unsettled.

To many men and women in the underground press, conflict arose where sexism ran into free speech. A female Spokane

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90 As quoted in Ellis, 117-118.
91 Pelz, 62, Ellis, 117, Lewis, 383.
Natural writer addressed the complexity of the relationship between obscenity and the free press, coming to a conclusion that was probably most common among the undergrounds. The passage bears quoting at length because it touches upon issues that are only implicitly raised elsewhere in the underground press:

What Spokane needs to offset the spiritually desiccating effect of the establishment press is just such a funky, horny, and refreshingly titillating newspaper as the NATURAL… History may well record that the single most important event creditable to the ‘hippie’ revolution of the late sixties is the emergence of the Underground Press… The phenomenon of the marginal newspaper… marks the emergence of a form of social cohesion in an almost totally noncohesive movement, and it may well be credited with spurring a change in the value system of Western man, away from… the snarling viciousness of the war-oriented blood and semen flecked Image of Man to the wholesome horniness of a Mailer or Miller… who can see man in proportion to his environment in a healthy, regenerative and pleasantly hedonistic way – born to live, love and die – and whose only moral imperative is to “go and do thou likewise.”

Expressing her view with passion and verbosity characteristic of the medium, this writer extolled the underground press’s ability to uplift and bring together a community. Social cohesion in the movement, represented by the unbound papers, may well be the key to a Western revolution, she argued. Although she did not discuss sexist portrayals of women specifically, in her wholehearted endorsement of Mailer and Miller, one may well suspect that she would defend a paper’s right to include such material. Furthermore, she found the expression of sexuality “wholesome,” “refreshingly titillating,” and “pleasantly hedonistic.” She extended her assessment all the way out to posterity, speculating that free speech would be

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"Liz S. Strata, “Concerning a definition of Obscenity,” The Spokane Natural, 16 August 1968, 8."
important to the way “history” remembered the time she lived in. Like the letter writers to the *Rag*, she was concerned about the place obscenity would have in the “hippie revolution,” and has determined that ideals were more important than restrictions, however judiciously applied.

There was a fundamental disagreement between this writer and the disenchanted readers of the *Rag*. At issue were their different understanding of the limits of the sexual revolution and the limits of the application of free speech. The increased liberality of the sexual revolution made explicit images and ideas more accessible, removing female sexuality from beneath teenage boys’ mattresses and reclaiming it as a healthy expression of the enlightened youth culture. While, in theory, many women were glad to be so liberated, the expectations that a more freely expressed sexuality would become the dominant feature of a woman’s identity was an unwelcome development. The consistent depiction of counter-cultural women as indiscriminately sexual (as in solicitous classified ads), physically idealized (photographs and illustrations), and in the service of the various factions of the movement (anti-Vietnam and free speech proponents) served to re-restrict women in new ways that were neither revolutionary nor liberating. The women and men who protested such use of the image of women were not necessarily questioning the underground papers’ right to free speech, but rather their sagacity in employing it.

After September of 1968, when the New York Radical Women’s protest of the Miss America pageant exploded onto
the pages of the underground and mainstream presses, any article or image related to women was politicized. Thereafter papers were either ignoring the demands of women’s liberation or commenting upon it; either reaction had significance to counter-cultural readers who were trying to make sense of the Johnny-come-lately movement.

The Los Angeles Free Press, the largest and oldest of the underground newspapers, increasingly put off its comrade papers with its gratuitous vulgarity and pornography, and by making “sick sex and drugs” fashionable. The Underground, also a Los Angeles paper, openly attacked the Free Press for such excesses.94 One cultural commentator even took the Free Press’s stance on sexism as proof that the paper no longer supported the ideals of the counter cultural, and therefore no longer deserved to be called “underground.”95

In late 1968, a petition circulated that referred to the remarkably mild Spokane Natural as “obscene,” and attempted to get Washington legislators to stop the paper from printing. This challenge forced the paper to defend and define itself:96

Taken as a whole, the NATURAL does not contain any sizable amount of material that is offensive to the average adult’s concept of sexual morality. Our articles deal predominantly with social concerns such as racism, housing problems, economic problems, civil liberties, problems of the war and the draft, drug problems… Unlike many of the so-called underground papers, articles on what could be termed “sexual liberation” have been noticeably absent from the NATURAL… Our predominant appeal must therefore be said to be to political, intellectual, cultural, literary, or artistic interests.97

95 Lewis, Outlaws of America, 34.
96 “Q: Will the NATURAL be found OBSCENE?” The Spokane Natural, 6 December 1968, 3.
97 ibid.
This article suggested two important criteria for determining what was and was not obscene: first, the degree and amount of “offensive” material; and second, the presence or absence of “sexual liberation” articles. Judged against other undergrounds, this writer was confident that the Natural would seem tame. The author suggested that obscenity was a relative concept, and that “the average adult’s concept of sexual morality” was a suitable indicator.

In a letter that ran under the title, “Pornography is the Enemy’s Weapon,” an anonymous male wrote, “the so-called ‘free press’ is lending itself to the debauchery used by our enemy, the Establishment. The ads, the photographs, the letters and solicitations in the columns, etc. are commercial and male, sick and chauvinistic.” A woman editor responded to his letter, “The Observer has tried to avoid printing pornography because the staff, male and female, basically agrees with you and has consciously rejected it.”98 The newspaper staffs of the Natural and the Observer may truly have agreed that pornography and offensive, chauvinistic material were distasteful; they may even have made daily decisions to weed out such content. But if readers and editors disagreed on the basic definitions of obscenity and pornography, the offended readers would perceive that their concerns were being ignored.

98 “Pornography is the Enemy’s weapon.” The Peninsula Observer, 25 August 1969, 10.
Surprisingly, as sexually charged as the underground newspapers were, sex itself only rarely was mentioned. Although evidence of the sexual revolution was unfurled in almost every issue by way of references and depictions, information about sex and sexuality was indirect and often confused. The Berkeley Barb ran a sex-themed medical advice column called “Dr. HIPpocrates,” which became (along with the erotic classified ads) the paper’s most popular feature. But few other undergrounds picked up the column or the concept. Knowledge of the physical and emotional aspects of sex among young counter-culturalists may have come from mainstream women’s magazines, parents, peers, and personal experience, but it certainly didn’t come from the self-proclaimed herald of the movement. The expected venue for such discussion was noticeably quiet on the matter.

Alternatives to monogamy did occasionally appear, though. “Clap Hands for the Orgy,” written in 1967, described the difference between “hip” orgies and “square” orgies (also known as love parties and swinger parties respectively), and described both in detail. At a swinger party, “Whether a woman... is considered chattel or an independent and free agent will be clearly reflected in sexual attitudes.” The author continued, “At a love fest you might actually get to know someone, but not at a ‘swinger’s party’.” This piece, however, was more of an exposé than an instruction manual, and barely touched upon the theories of “free love” underpinning the love fest. There was a sizable hole in the function of the underground

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99 Streitmatter, 209.
100 “Clap Hands for the Orgy,” The Berkeley Barb 5, 8 September 1967, 7.
newspapers where a straightforward model of contemporary, revolutionary sex might have been.

This lack of instruction may have been an attempt to avoid the easily slung charges of obscenity, but may also have been done in deference to the individualism and experimentation of the movement. Underground newspaper columnists may have been reluctant to assert authority over such a personal matter as sex, and probably had few models of their own to work with. The women’s liberation movement itself followed this practice and refrained from dictating or advising for fear of alienating readers.  

The influential and groundbreaking *Notes from the First Year* opened with, “All articles in this publication, though growing from a year of group discussion and activity, are to be taken, not as group position papers, but of the opinion and responsibility of the individual authors.”

Few of the women who had made names for themselves in women’s liberation would presume to represent all countercultural women. This intentionally unstructured model of organization, while an effective protest against the intellectual elitism of the male-run left, did not translate into the most efficient use of the media. Furthermore, women who had the strongest opinions on the politics of the bedroom tended to publish in places other than the underground press. Consequently ideas central

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to the women’s movement -- those dealing with women’s sexuality, sexual oppression, and personal relationships -- appeared in the underground press sporadically, and often filtered through male writers and editors.

If there was little practical, usable information on how young couples should interact, there certainly was commentary on how young radical women shouldn’t act. In a Liberation News Service interview, a male writer attacked the popular culture phenomenon known as the Plastercasters for lacking a real and articulated sense of their role in the sexual revolution. The Plastercasters were a group of young women who slept with rock stars and then took plaster casts of the musicians’ genitalia. The writer struggled to understand these women’s motivations. He began the article by denouncing them and their “gig”: “We’re not opposed to selling papers, but we’re opposed to selling them in an exploitational way: the tits-‘n-ass approach or its variants are easy ways to sell out, both papers and soul.” (Interestingly, neither tits nor asses were mentioned in the article – the author seems to be equating explicit sexual imagery with female sexual anatomy, and disdaining its use to increase the circulation of papers.) He then confided, however, that he was intrigued by the idea of “groupies,” and found “the concept of girls balling just for the fuck of it very liberating.” He “got an object lesson a few later (sic)” with a former groupie (not a member of the Plastercasters), but complained that “It was a shitty lay,” and the conversation afterward was stilted and uninteresting. Once he had conquered and demystified these strange nymph-women, he could condemn them freely and with the confidence of one who spoke from experience. Moving on to the Plastercasters specifically, he noted:
Aside from their gig, they are completely unremarkable; they have almost no awareness of themselves outside of what their publicity tells them... It’s hard not to feel sympathetic with them – they utterly lack subtlety, wisdom, or wit... They are celebrated as the vanguard of the sexual revolution. This they most assuredly are not. If fucking a lot was all it took to bring about a revolution, sexual or otherwise, then we’d all be in Nirvana by now. It takes more than that...  

If these women had been “balling just for the fuck of it” out of alignment with the right ideology, if they were self-aware, if they were subtle, wise, or witty, their behavior might have been excused or even celebrated. But they were not -- they were just normal young women who happened to challenge the author’s definition of sexual liberation, so he excommunicated them from the revolution. The rigidity with which he interpreted sexual liberation contradicted the free and individualistic underpinning of the counterculture broadly, and demonstrated the difficulty of conceptualizing individual male-female relationships in terms of the sexual revolution.

An article entitled “Nary a Piece in Haight,” which ran just under an unrelated picture of two topless, tan, smiling women, appeared in a 1967 edition of the Berkeley Barb. The article reported the findings of a “study” done by the Barb concerning the uneven ratio of men to women in the Haight-Ashbury area. The paper found 16 “eligible” men for every “eligible” woman, and solicited comments from the street on these findings. One “sensitive” man said, “[Women are] playing games, like coming on real strong then shutting you down cause they know there’s another million horny guys running around. That’s a game for straight

chicks, not hippies.” Another remarked that most “eligible” women preferred to be single, whereas most men “seem to prefer a warm bedmate to a night in the park.” The article ended by stating that “The general consensus... was that steady gigs are still the best and still the hardest to come by,” and that many were holding out hope for the summer season to bring more women to the area.¹⁰⁴ The distinction between acceptable behavior for “straight chicks” and “hippies” shows the unequal pressure liberated women were under to freely give sex to counter-cultural males, and yet the early awareness of singlehood as a preferable and viable option for women shows that a noticeable number of women were rejecting this sexual pressure. The paper itself complicated the meaning of this article by sarcastically referring to one of the Haight-Ashbury men as “sensitive,” and yet placing the article under a picture of pointlessly bare-breasted women.

These two articles demonstrate that confusion, contradiction, and open hostility emerged when sexually liberated women did not conform to the standards expected of them. No longer protected by an established dating etiquette, counter-cultural women risked reproach when they attempted to define acceptable behavior themselves. Without agreement on the definitions and limits of the sexual revolution, oppressive patriarchal elements kept circulating and informing male-female relationship. Under these conditions, nonconformist women had the most to lose.

These attacks on liberated women did not go unchallenged. Clear defenses, however, took time to muster. Women who had experience organizing other leftist

groups knew first-hand the importance of semantics and effective verbal communication. But like the suburban women of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, counter-cultural women before 1968 had a hard time articulating exactly what they objected to and why. In trying to explain why she was against free love, one writer said, “...trying to explain why has been like attempting to describe phantom-limb syndrome to a man (or woman) with a full quota of appendages... I couldn’t understand what I was saying myself, and neither could they.”¹⁰⁵ For some women, this was part of the draw: “No one can say exactly what female liberation is or what the result of the fight for it will be. In fact one of the most beautiful aspects of our struggle is that it can be as creative, as far-reaching, and as open as we wish.”¹⁰⁶ This idealism gave way to the realities of the medium. If women were going to legitimize their independence from the counter-culture to themselves, other women, and men, they had to be able to articulate cogent arguments.

By 1969, the underground press demonstrated an awareness of women taking charge of their own goals and definitions. A writer identified as a women’s caucus representative in Vancouver wrote an article entitled, “A Strategy for Love: Sexual Guerrillas,” which approximated a ultimatum for revolutionary women: “We must soon state clearly to ourselves and to men that one of the main objectives of the women’s movement is to find ways of loving men, of loving together with men, in the context of

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She indicated the importance of men and women being on the same “side” and demonstrating a willingness to work together toward a common solution. She continued,

If we are to begin to develop a strategy for love as revolutionaries, if we are to make a kind of personal revolution that will free us to love now and in a new society, we must carefully analyze what happens in the old role relationships that makes love impossible.

In other words, relationships built on traditional mainstream role models were destined to fail in the revolution. The first step, she argued, was to recognize this fact and brace for a new model. She continued to detail the attitude changes that must accompany this “revolution,” including a mutual and respectful understanding of sexual expectations and the active rejection of mainstream male-female stereotypes. A woman who identified herself as older than this writer responded the following month that communication, understanding of differences, and respect were not revolutionary qualities, but characteristics that developed naturally over time. She blamed “free love” and frequent partner changes for the failures of communication among counter-culturalists. “It might be a good thing,” she concluded, “to make many dialogues among men and women as to WHAT IS REVOLUTIONARY?”

Counter-cultural men and women in the late 1960s stumbled over abstract concepts that didn’t necessarily parlay into helpful action or solutions. They could rally

108 Killian, 12.
around ideas like freedom of speech, justice for all people, and freedom from oppression and discrimination, drawn together by their mutual dissatisfaction with the status quo and a desire to affect a change in key issues such as the Vietnam War and civil rights. But for many editors and publishers, the logic that led to magnanimous actions on behalf of these movements either precluded support for women’s liberation or did not to apply to the oppression and objectification of women.

The early mentioning of female dissatisfaction with the status quo was friendly – it bespoke a willingness to work it out within the movement first. But the sentiment itself was so radical that its mentioning alone showed that women were keenly aware of the contradiction between the way “liberated” men talked and how they treated their wives, girlfriends, and female comrades. Women developing their own consciousness and movement expected support from the men whose causes they had rallied behind, whose papers they had typed, and sometimes, for whom they had cooked and cleaned. In an article Robin Morgan wrote for WIN magazine that was syndicated by the Liberation News Service, she stated, “...it is really mind-blowing to hear some young male ‘revolutionary’ – supposedly dedicated to building a new, free social order to replace this vicious one order his ‘chick’ to make supper or wash his socks or to shut up – he’s talking now.”

Like so many of the leftist groups from whence they came, liberated women began by reaching out to their oppressors, men, through the underground press, their shared medium. Morgan concluded her article with, “And a

110 “What’s with the Women: Women’s Liberation,” The Spectator, 1 July 1969, 7.
word to the men. You few ‘male radicals:’ Civilize your own ‘communities’ (other men), as blacks said to whites, rap with your brothers about the petty, continual ways they make women suffer. You’re beautiful, and we need you, and you need us.”\(^{111}\) This was a preemptive olive branch and warning. The comparison with the black power movement served a dual purpose, too; although one of the most widespread and popular co-operations, ultimately, blacks and whites working together for civil rights and an end to racism failed. Blacks split off to establish separate groups, forcing white supporters to cheer from the sidelines. Morgan’s reference to this trend shows her willingness to take that step.

A letter to the editor writer in 1969 echoed Morgan’s sentiments: “The woman on the American left is right to expect more than a worker/boss relationship with the man spouting revolution and would ask that at least he understand the contradiction, and make an attempt to overcome it.”\(^ {112}\) Interestingly, this writer anticipated the friction this would cause in personal relationships and offered a small step for couples to begin a more harmonious life together. The secret ingredient to changing attitudes, which she appended to her letter, was a cookie recipe, “simple enough for men who want to begin making amends... and nice enough for any woman who wants to indicate that she’s still on her man’s side.”\(^ {113}\) The rhetoric here indicated that this author was steeped in the counter-culture and wished to remain so – she was not courting

\(^{111}\) ibid.


\(^{113}\) ibid.
independence, but wanted small, personal changes to begin the overhaul of the radical left.

The Vancouver women’s caucus writer of “A Strategy for Love” paraphrased what “men in the movement” said to women: “it is your duty to the movement to screw with me and not to ask me to stay with you or even to treat you in a very human manner.” “Left-wing objectification,” she ended, “is still objectification.”

Few papers printed feminist material this radical, but the sentiment was certainly represented, and looked increasingly incongruent with pictures of pin-up style women and large-breasted cartoons.

In articulating their dissent, these writers used language and objectives that were sophisticated and familiar. With such plain and common demands being ignored, women had little recourse but to split from the male-dominated undergrounds. The decision to reject the male-domination of the sexual revolution was solidified by the end of the 1960s. A 1972 article in Ms. boldly asserted that,

The new freedom of the Sexual Revolution was at best a failure, at worst a hoax – because it never caused significant changes in the social attitudes and behavior of men to correspond with this New Morality being forced upon women... the Sexual Revolution and the Women’s Movement are polar opposites in philosophy, principles, goals and spirit.

In order to have some say in the sexual revolution in which they were necessary participants, feminists began to feel that they had to take control of the language, action, and media of the movement.

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114 Killian, 12.
No set of rules or complete descriptions of the sexual revolution ever made it to the pages of the underground newspapers – one wonders if such a piece could even exist. Where the fractured understanding of the sexual revolution broke down, the women’s liberation movement made its first inroads to establishing legitimacy in the movement. Readers were often split on issues of free speech, obscenity, and the editorial use of female sexuality, but the limited discussion showed that the burgeoning feminists were not simply whistling into the wind.
CONCLUSION

In 1969, Julius Lester wrote a closing chapter on the 1960s. The "movement," he said, was "no longer an identifiable political entity, but... more a socio-political phenomenon... loose groupings of people around the country who share a common outlook, common life-styles, and common aspirations." He continued, "once... composed of a few political organizations," the movement now "was becoming a separate society, with its own newspapers, it own life-style, its own morality." Lester was both in awe of the bigness and potential of the movement by the late 1960s and disenchanted with its lack of focus and cohesion. In this essay, Lester appeared the bleary-eyed movement veteran who suddenly found himself bleakly wishing we could all just get along. His assessment hinted at a dissention that was still more felt than seen for many radical males: socio-politically speaking, ties between movement folk were more loose than common, and the life-style(s) and moralit(ies) characterizing this "separate society" were aimed at each other’s throats. Lester is right that the movement was different by 1969. It was not simply that the pluralities could no longer agree; it was that they were at cross-purposes.

Robin Morgan articulated that incongruence in 1970. One year before, Morgan had courted male support in an article syndicated by the Liberation News Service. Finding instead ridicule and mockery, she strung up the underground newspapers in her essay, "Goodbye to All That." She denounced

The token 'pussy power' or 'clit militancy' articles. The snide descriptions of women staffers on the masthead. The
little jokes, the personal ads, the smile, the snarl. No more, brothers. No more well meaning ignorance, no more co-optation, no more assuming that that this thing we’re all fighting for is the same: one revolution under man, with liberty and justice for all. No more.\footnote{116 Robin Morgan, “Goodbye to All That,” in The Word of a Woman: Feminist Dispatches, (1968-1992), in Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women’s Liberation Movement, eds. Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 53.}

Morgan was not alone in feeling that the revolution was a sham for women. Gloria Steinem’s Ms. began on that premise in 1972, and the sheer number of feminist periodicals in existence by the beginning of the 1970s bespoke a widespread dissatisfaction with generic movement newspapers.

The Blue Bus claimed in 1968, “We oppose any system or part of a system that destroys an individual’s freedom.”\footnote{117 “Statement of Purpose,” The [Newton Sq.] Blue Bus 1, no. 3 (1968): 2, as quoted in Lewes, 392.} But such ambiguous statements are hard to adhere to. Because the treatment of women in the underground newspapers did not evolve along with radical women’s idea of themselves, women who read and produced the paper were indirectly encouraged to abandon the idea of a cooperative, multi-faceted movement press, sometimes in favor of an issue specific one that addressed their needs and concerns. In the factional and separatist trend of the late 1960s, it is likely that these feminist papers would have come into existence even if the general-movement underground press had taken their demands seriously. It may not have been the case, however, that so many aspects of the left would have been recast in gendered terms.

For example, until 1969, underground classified ads appeared in a section called “unclassifieds,” because ads for cars, guitar lessons, dates, revolutionary literature,
and babysitting would be jumbled together on one page. Increasingly after 1969, though, papers divided this page into sections like “Gay Liberation,” “Women,” “Body and Mind.” This practice recognized the growing separatisim in the movement, but also relegated what were once at least nominally considered movement issues, like reproductive rights and access to birth control, to women’s sections. Abortion advocacy and educational organizations had co-existed with other leftist groups since the mid 1960s, and regularly took out classified ads in the underground press offering counseling services and lectures. In placing abortion under this new heading, the sometimes consequence of “free love,” changed from an issue that affected liberated couples to a “woman’s theme.” Through straightforward language like Morgan’s and more subtle reorganizations of standard movement issues such as abortion advocacy, women were encouraged to take control of the sexual revolution and its consequences.

In a latter-day analysis of the failures of the sexual revolution, prominent feminist cultural critic Sara Evans noted that despite experimentation “with new frontiers of sexual freedom,” there was no concomitant “critique or reevaluation of female sexuality,” but instead “the promiscuity, emotional detachment, and consumption orientation associated with cultural definitions of male sexuality became defined as sexual ‘freedom.’” By recognizing and objecting to the small ways that this sexual “freedom” infected their daily lives as working radicals, liberated women were able to reclaim a degree of

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118 Austin Rag, 14 June 1971, back cover.
sexual determination, and distance themselves from the obligations of free love bestowed upon them by virtue of their association with larger, male-run factions of the counter-culture. If the sexual revolution meant that women had to fall into the role of helpmate, earth-mother icon, or willing sexual object, by the late 1960s women were able to articulate a stout refusal to participate in it. And what was the sexual revolution without women? By recognizing and exposing the subtle ways that they were continually oppressed or misrepresented by movement men, second-wave feminists divested the sexual revolution of its association with high-minded abstracts like love, liberty, and freedom, and instead established a new framework in which they could function freely as competent counter-culturalists working simultaneously as women and as revolutionaries.
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