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Double Issue: 3.3 & 4.1

The Scholar & Feminist XXX:

Past Controversies, Present Challenges, Future Feminisms

2005 Conference Transcripts

PANEL 3

CLASS, RACE, AND SEX:
THE FUTURE OF DIFFERENCE

Elizabeth Bernstein: Let me make my introductory comments really, really brief because I, as you I'm sure, am so eager to hear from our panelists. And I want to leave time for lots of questions. The format is a little unusual. It's not a conventional panel presentation.

What we are trying to do here is actually get a conversation rolling amongst the panelists that we have assembled. So I'm going to start out by asking some of the initial questions and then hopefully, it will just go; it will move. And you can pose questions to one another.

And then at some point, maybe at around 12:15 or so, we'll break for audience questions. And then we'll reconvene as a group towards the end. And so, I guess we're starting at 11:10, maybe we'll go until about 1:10.

And fortunately, it's New York. There are lots of places you can eat quickly. That's the good news.

Let me just begin by introducing the panelists. I'm sure you're familiar with their work with many of these people here. And I just want to start by thanking you all for being here and to tell you how honored I am to be moderating this panel. I've been so moved and inspired by all of your work, and I continue to be inspired by it. So, thank you for being here, and thank you all.

[Bios are available at

<http://www.barnard.edu/sfonline/sfxxx/contribu.htm>]

Let me frame the first question very, very broadly to all of you. And it picks up on some of the themes that we just saw in the wonderful film this morning. The theme for this panel is "Class, Race and Sex: The Future of Difference."

And so as I was preparing my questions, I was thinking about your work and I came up with a list of six major axes of difference that your work addresses.

Speaker: Six?

Elizabeth Bernstein: Yes. Class, race, nation, sexual identity, gender identity and sexual labor.

So what I'd like to do, to start out, apart from the formal biographies that I just presented, is to ask you if

you could maybe speak generally about your work in relation to these forms of difference. And then, to also speak about the biggest challenge that your work within these areas has presented to mainstream feminists' theorizing and mainstream feminist activism.

Speaker: Just a small question.

Elizabeth Bernstein: I thought we'd start generally and then go from there. The funnel method. Siobhan, do you want to start?

Siobhan Brooks: Sure, I'll start. My work, for those of you who are not familiar with it -- in the mid-'90s I organized a group of exotic dancers in San Francisco, when I was a college student at San Francisco State University. And interestingly enough, a women's studies major -- and so, as you can imagine, there was a lot of controversy during the time, that I was not only an exotic dancer myself, but a feminist-identified woman.

And also in a women's studies program that is considered very progressive. However, there were issues about some of the students being actual sex workers and in the classroom. There was a lot of contention around the question -- what is a feminist? Are you a good feminist? Is pornography bad? All of that.

So I worked at The Lusty Lady Theater, which had a very high percentage of women who were college-educated -- mostly white, middleclass women. And the biggest challenge was doing the organizing movement -- how do we branch out to women who are situated in sex work in the street, in very non-privileged ways? Meaning, other strippers, for example, who were at clubs where the owners charged stage fees, where people are on welfare and trying to raise kids. How do we bridge the gap between those situations and being in the sex industry in a safe way, amongst all of the sort of sex radical, sex positive feminism that was coming out of the club that I worked at, where most of the women were privileged, race-wise, class-wise, educationally? There they weren't really dealing with the kind of life and death issues, if you will, that other women in the sex industry were dealing with -- mainly mothers, women of color, people who were affected severely by Clinton's 1996 welfare reform movement.

So the biggest challenge was -- how do we put this on a feminist agenda, not only in the classroom which was sort of where my experience began with this particular type of feminist movement? But also -- how do we extend it so that people who do work, for example, with welfare agencies, non-profits, immigrants' rights issues, activists; how do

we bring in the issues like sex work or sex industry issues so that's not a single issue? How do we organize the work around the realization that it covers many aspects of social issues and health issues and race and gender issues for women of diverse sexual orientations, racial orientations, citizenship rights, for example? So that was one of the challenges.

Luckily, I did get support eventually from San Francisco State Womens Studies. Because actually, when I started, suddenly all these books started to come out, like Jill Nagle's Whores and Other Feminists. So then, before you know it, it's like, okay, this was something that was controversial. Professors are like -- oh, my God, how could my students be doing this? And suddenly, they're teaching us in the classroom; and then we become sort of these experts on this issue.

So that was definitely a challenge.

Elizabeth Bernstein: Surina?

Surina Khan: Well, gee, let's see -- I have been interested in movement building across different issues and that's really where I continue to focus my work now. But I guess what I'd like to say is that I really started from a very single-issue focus. I became politicized when I came out as a lesbian about 15, 16 years ago.

And at the time, I was very conservative because I grew up in a conservative family and I'm ashamed to say, in my first Presidential election I voted for George Bush Sr. And so . . .

(laughter)

. . . I bring that up because I think, when we talk about movement building, it's about moving people. And I was moved. Over the years, I have been moved by a number of activists and thinkers, some of whom are sitting here today.

And I think that what I've taken from it is that identity politics are obviously important. It's where I started. It can be a place where people begin. But I think that what I have learned over the years, is that we need to look at ourselves as complicated individuals.

That we have many different identities. We come from many different places. We have many different experiences. And so, we need to look at each of our experiences as unique. And so therefore, we have experiences that might include oppression and privilege at the same time.

And so, in terms of thinking about movement building, we need to look at those multiple experiences in relation to race and class and gender and sex and sexuality -- and

look at the strategies that we do for movement building in relation to that.

So my work, when I was a researcher at Political Research Associates, I looked at right-wing movements and worked with activists who were on the front lines. So they may have been confronting anti-gay initiatives or working on opposing the Welfare Reform Act in 1996, and trying to figure out what was the best way to counter those attacks.

And often, multiple strategies were ones that we used. That might include media; that might include direct action; that might include legal reform. And that might also include a sort of cultural transformation to really move the hearts and minds of people. And what I came to understand during those years, and still, is that it's important that we look for leadership by the people who are most affected by different kinds of attacks.

Right-wing attacks are different things that hold us back. So the people that are most affected are the ones that have the solutions. So it's not only, I think, an ethical thing, but a very strategic thing to do -- which is to look for leadership from people of color, people who are low income, that have suffered the attacks of this world, of this society, of the right wing.

And in the work that I'm doing now in terms of the foundation work, it's very central to that. We look for leadership from the people who are most affected, most marginalized. And if that's not there, then I think that we have to make the decision to reject it.

So that the movement organizations that we see now, if they are not being led by the people who they want to work with, then we have to ask ourselves -- where are they looking for these conversations? If the people who are not at the centers of conversations around human rights or civil rights or equal rights are not included in a very intentional and deliberate way, which changes those power structures, then I think we have to reject that kind of movement building.

Amber Hollibaugh: I was really struck when I looked at the panel. I kind of read the description and thought to myself -- what an interesting panel who's been selected for this particular one, are a set of people who have often been exactly the controversies in our own movements.

Have been, often not voluntarily, forced to make a set of arguments about what is missing or what is different or what is not considered important. And so, I thought to myself -- we're not just talking about difference from the outside or in an abstract way.

But we are actually, the panel itself reflects, I think, some of the most problematic and difficult issues that are not resolved issues at this point in the future of feminism. There is symbolic inclusion often in a whole variety of movements. I don't think feminism needs to be held more accountable than any place else -- though sometimes I feel like that. But that the question of who we are and who we will be and who will represent us, to me, is still problematic and an unresolved issue at this point.

And I've just been hired at the task force of NGLTF -- National Gay & Lesbian Task Force. And I'm thinking about it a lot because it gives me a structure to do national work in an organization that believes that equality is kind of its goal.

And as a friend of mine once said -- equality should be the floor and liberation should be the ceiling. And so, I join it in great joy but with a real understanding that for me, to be equal in oppression is not what I joined the movement to be about. I don't want to be equal to people who oppress.

I don't want to be the same as people who use power in unconscionable ways. And that means I have to hold myself accountable, not just other people. I think the question of accountability is primarily one for myself, and I think

sometimes in movements it's easier to point fingers at each other.

It's another component of the "uh-huh" experience -- we can blame each other and not get the work done. Because you can go to a whole lot of meetings where you talk about how everybody else has fucked it up. And so, then you don't do the work that I think actually needs to happen, which is that in a conversation about difference, we have to decide who's missing. That's a very different conversation than inclusion.

It challenges us differently. And it forces us, I think, to look at the world as the place we're starting, even if we're doing our work in a very particular place. The real challenge for me, in trying to figure out how I do my work is -- how to insist that the way that the issue gets defined isn't the narrowness with which I practice that issue.

For example, at the Task Force now I'm doing a lot of work on aging. Aging, as in old. Not aging as in young.

(laughter)

And it's not to recognize the young people are really oppressed, but it is also to say that old people are invisible and marginalized and completely held in contempt when they try to practice change as old people. So it's

been interesting to me that, at a certain moment your own movement decides that you're expendable, that the only thing that you have to offer is kind of dinosaur bones, which you drag in and kind of repeat this fucking litany of your past, as the only thing you have to contribute. As though you don't still have a mind and a set of goals and values that create your activism as an ongoing thing.

So obviously, I feel pretty strongly about it. But I say that because I think that it's another one of the places that's invisible. Just one more. In progressive politics, as well as many other places. At best, patronizing. Usually invisible. But in fact, for me the question is not which issues we are naming for our future. But whether or not we're talking about building a movement for radical change.

Theory has to be embedded in use. It has to actually do something, not just be something. And it has to, I think, help formulate the way that we understand the world differently. I'm really struck by what Surina said, about where she started. Because I think we're not a very generous movement when people enter it.

That when you don't have the language and you don't know the terrain, you're often treated very badly. Or if your history doesn't quite match up to the moment's voguish

presentation of self, that it's a fucking place to try to enter. And we lose a lot of people precisely because it's a very difficult place to be correct before you know what the language is.

And so, to me the question is whether we're going to step forward and out into the places where we don't know everything. At the point where you actually don't know the answer before you know the question, I think, your work starts to look really different.

Elizabeth Bernstein: Leslie?

Leslie Feinberg: First of all, I want to thank the organizers of this conference and Barnard for inviting me to take part in it. It's an important conference and it's particularly important for me because not only the aspirations for women's and trans liberation; but the actual struggles, the imperative for it run like white-capped rivers through my body and my life.

I can't separate them out. And therefore, if you had asked me this morning, when I was having tea, what I thought was the most controversial or challenging of my work, I would have said back to you that perhaps you might think, if you knew my work, as someone who is woman, who is lesbian, who is butch, who is considered gender-variant and who is not.

Who is considered gender-bent, which you can only be considered in a gender-rigid social system. If you had asked me what my greatest controversy of my work is in relation to mainstream feminism, the women's movement, I would have said -- the women's movement has many currents.

The Combahee River Collective to now. And which current do you mean? And I'm not outside of the women's movement for liberation; I am part of it. And I have been part of it since I was a 14-year-old union butch lesbian organizer in a blue collar upstate New York town.

Or when I was fighting for reproductive rights, not just because I have a uterus, but because I know that if we don't stop the attacks on that front line, it's all of our bodies and all of our lives that are under siege.

I would have said that all of the work that I've done in Women United for Action; price rollbacks in Buffalo and New York or in lesbian organizing -- is part of the women's movement too. And so is all the anti-war and anti-racist organizing that I've done.

For deaf and disabled rights. I don't draw a line between bringing women's issues and sex and gender and sexuality issues to all the struggles for economic and social justice. Just like I fought to bring all the issues

of economic and social justice to what gets called "the women's movement" with all of its many currents.

I would have said to you that issues of transgender, gender variance, trans-sexuality or inter-sexuality -- are also not outside the women's movement, the struggle for women's rights and women's liberation. And have been key and cutting issues in both 19th century and 20th century struggles for women's rights and women's liberation in this country.

Some here may remember more recently, when Phyllis Schlafly tried to use the issue of same-sex bathrooms to help defeat a modest piece of legislation, the ERA. But you know, when I was introduced to you today, the simple pronoun "he" put an enormous barrier difference between me and you.

Whether it's unintentional or not, I'm not trying to put an individual on the spot. I'm saying -- look how simple it is for my life and my work that is so connected to the themes of this conference, to the lives of all the people in this audience, and all the sexes and all the genders and all the sexualities in this room.

Look how easy it is for difference to be assigned and for barriers to be in place. And therefore, I would say --

that is now, at this point, on this panel, the greatest challenge for me and my work.

Elizabeth Bernstein: Before I move to the next question, does anybody want to address anybody else's comments?

Well, I wanted to ask you a more kind of concrete question, sort of narrowing the funnel a little bit. I'm thinking of very concrete spaces, issues and struggles within feminism. What do you think the areas of feminism are that have most successfully responded to questions of difference? And which are the spaces in feminism that have least successfully responded to it?

Siobhan Brooks: I guess I'll answer that. In thinking about the question, what comes to my mind is the feminisms of women of color, particularly queer women of color. And how starting in the early '80s, and of course history before then but really, in my mind, thinking particularly about black feminism, Barbara Smith comes to mind. Audre Lorde comes to mind. All of our foremothers, so to speak, come to my mind in that they were fighting so that all of us could be liberated, right?

The interesting thing about feminism of color for me, being a young feminist, is how we are marginalized in our communities of color when the issue is raised. And that

turns out to be documented in very sort of masculine terms and then often, marginalization in kind of white mainstream, upper middleclass feminism. And the work of people like Cherie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa in sort of really putting all of our differences on the map, just to echo what Leslie said -- that these differences are and should be the starting point of the feminist movement.

For example, I think about women like my mother, who was a mentally ill poor black woman from Louisiana, who migrated to California in the '40s. And I grew up in a housing project in San Francisco; I'm a product of welfare. I started school when I was eight. When I look at my life and when I look at my mother's life, the question for me becomes -- people like my mother should be the starting point and the center of feminism.

And then the whole question becomes -- how does a feminist movement relate to, so to speak, people like my mother and women of color such as I? Many people in this room I'm sure can think of other experiences where their experiences are somewhat marginalized or erased when we talk about feminism. Right?

Where do men fit into the feminist movement? And all of these sorts of complicated questions that I feel the feminism of women of color, particularly queer women of

color, has successfully addressed in the '80s and continues to address now in terms of continuing a model of getting away from single-issue politics.

And I guess, to answer the last part of the question, I think that the other types of feminism -- say, the middleclass white feminist movement -- can really learn from different types of feminisms that are not all around, just inclusion. I personally think that we need to get beyond equality.

I'm not always for equality, which may sound really strange. But sometimes I'm thinking -- we need to get beyond just equality and sort of liberal type of feminism. Because when I look at the situation of black women such as my mother, who was alive during the second wave of the feminist movement -- it didn't do anything for her, honestly.

It didn't do anything for her. It didn't do anything for me being born in 1972 in a housing project in San Francisco. The feminist movement didn't do anything for us. That type of feminist movement. So I think one of the challenges in terms of really starting from people who are marginalized on multiple levels and putting our realities at the center of whatever movements that we are trying to build.

Surina Khan: I think that the issue, again, of leadership and reframing different debates and shifting power structures both externally in the world that we live in, but also, within our movements -- is something that has been a challenge and I think continues to be a challenge. In that context, it's important to do a kind of structural analysis of non-profit organizations here in the U.S. and also across these borders in terms of how they function and where the power lies, and how it gets there.

So if we think about the non-profit structure in the U.S., I think it's important to look at the I.R.S. tax codes that impose different structures. And how that allows or doesn't allow us to sometimes do things differently. And what that often does is it allows people or groups that are well-funded to sort of rise to a level where they have a loud voice.

And I think that sometimes those are not the voices that we need to listen to because the agendas that are being framed are not necessarily relevant to a great number of people. So, women of color groups, groups that have a class analysis are often underfunded, and those are probably the groups that the larger groups should be looking to, in terms of the different strategies that are being used.

And I also think that the issue of equality is an important one to bring up. It was in the film and I agree with you, that it's like -- equal to what? And so we need to think about it in broader terms and I think that there are different paradigms that allow us to do that.

And really, to think more broadly than equality because I think that equal access doesn't bring equal benefits to everybody. So when we pass laws or when things do change in society for the better, we can point to certain recent examples, I guess. But the important question is always to ask whether -- when we are starting a campaign or an organizing initiative or even when we are fighting against the Right -- is to ask who benefits and who loses?

And I think that equal access does not always bring equal benefits.

Amber Hollibaugh: I guess, to me the thing that I think is critical at this moment is to try and figure out whether we're going to fight for bourgeois feminism. Or whether we are going to actually try and [inaudible] I'm trying to think of the language I want to use [inaudible] we are in a difficult place where there is no mass movement.

It's not as though there's a kind of activism like there was in the '60s and the '70s. That's something that we are, all of us I think, are trying to figure out how to rebuild. But it's not like it's here yet. But the success of feminism in the way that I now see it, versus women's liberation, to me is a question of whether or not it will represent its capacity or represent its limits.

If it represents its limits, to me what that means is it will be a very particular class and race-based movement whose values and goals will be very limited and serve very few women. If in fact, it can expand to what I think it can imbed and embody, it could be all the things that I think everybody on this panel has been talking about.

I really do think that it has that extraordinary possibility of life-changing impact. It definitely has that for me, coming from a similar kind of background. There are lots of us that are poor and/or of color and/or with many different gender, many different kinds of erotic identities for whom our lives were profoundly changed forever because of the women's movement.

And I think it still has that capacity. But the question is then -- what movement are we describing and what movement are we building? For whom and with whom and by whom? And answering that, I think, becomes more and

more difficult when the remnants of what was women's liberation are kind of in the strategic, but tiny, institutions of colleges and gender studies and women's studies departments across the country.

And then, a few struggling organizations that are identified with feminism. We are going to have to really revitalize it in a way that I think we don't know exactly how to do. And I'll just end by saying that I think it's a very terrifying time to be in the world. It's a really terrifying time.

And I say that, having felt pretty terrified pretty much in my life. But I find it's a particularly horrifying period of time and I think the line is in the sand, and the possibility of messing around and deciding to do a little of this and a little bit of that; kind of being a little bit on the -- "oh, I'll go for it" and a little on the "I won't go for it" is not going to work; we won't survive.

Because I actually think that our survival is fundamentally in question at this point. And I think that the movements that I've been a part of, at least, have often had a complicated history to survival, so that many of the people that most needed them were the people least invited. And we're going to have to make a decision to do it differently.

Elizabeth Bernstein: Leslie, let me just apologize if anything in my initial comments felt marginalizing. I'm really sorry.

Leslie Feinberg: Thank you. The question -- where is found the greatest acceptance for diversity? There's an argument in science about whether organisms find a niche for survival or whether they create it. I think it's an interrelationship of the two. I think that if we talk about periods in which that interrelationship is taking place, it takes place between marginalized groups, groups that are the most disenfranchised or downtrodden, or most the target of repression and economic and social conditions that just become intolerable that force people to come out into the streets.

That's where I have in general, found the most fertile ground for coalition building amongst what gets called difference, but once it's in coalition, becomes diversity. And I think concretely, for example, when I came out of the trade union movement in the factories in Buffalo, how the slogan that I cut my teeth on, the truth that I cut my teeth on was that -- an injury to one was an injury to all.

And when we were fighting for our contract, we didn't just fight for a raise. We had to incorporate all of the issues of disability and time off for before and after

pregnancy for workers; and all kinds of issues of health and safety; and everyone's grievances together. And we had to each fight for them as though they were our own grievances. We had to be committed to fight to win them or else we lost the contract.

I had an experience coming out into age and consciousness in the '60s and '70s, of gaining acceptance from the left wing of the movements that were the most oppressed or were the most revolutionary in their politics. And I'm thinking concretely of, for example, the struggles around open admissions right across the street here in Columbia, where students -- with the leadership of Latino and Black students and militant whites -- took over the campus and renamed it.

And pointed out that it was right in the middle of Harlem, that the landlord of Columbia was trying to set up this little apartheid school. And it was a militant struggle and it was a step forward in winning open admissions and it was the kind of struggle that created a momentum that also helped give rise to women's studies and multicultural education and a lot of the other benefits that came out of those battles.

But not unrelated to it, just weeks later was the Stonewall rebellion just some blocks away. I can remember

how electrifying it was for me to go, as a part of the left-wing of the young gay liberation movement, in contingents that were of many nationalities and different walks of life and those who faced different oppression when they left home in the morning, if indeed they had a home to leave.

When we stood up for the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords, when they were literally being rounded up and shot down in their sleep by the state. When we carried, before there was a pride flag, we carried the flag of the North Vietnamese at the height of the Vietnam war, and that was our pride flag.

When we marched as the left wing current of women's liberation and said -- if you don't factor us in as women's liberationists, you haven't got everybody together to discuss what liberation is going to mean yet. The way in some cities we were the great boycott committee to support the Chicano farm workers, the United Farm Workers organizing.

And the kind of support, we didn't go there to quid pro quo, to say -- I'll support you if you'll support me. And in fact, that "we" was diverse itself. What the left wing of gay liberation was trying to point out is -- look, this population that's gay or trans or lesbian or bisexual,

is itself tied to 1000 threads with overlapping multiple oppressions.

And so, wherever people are fighting back, their destinies and ours are linked with 1000 threads. We have to be there. And I remember what it was like to read Huey Newton's statement that he issued to the movement to say -- where the forces of black liberation meet the forces of gay liberation and women's liberation must be there.

Or how it felt to hear that the Young Lords Party shortly after had started a women's caucus and a gay caucus internally and that Sylvia Rivera, combatant at Stonewall, a transgender Latina who had lived homeless on the streets of New York since she was ten years old, was one of the first members.

Or the support we got from Cesar Chavez. These things, and from the left wing of women's liberation -- that multinational left wing that kind of gets left out now, or because it didn't come into the ascendancy eventually, is that that's where I have gone to find the greatest support for diversity and in fact, that's where I have found it.

I would just add that it was a tough going in the '60s and '70s in a lot of ways, because it was a time of economic upturn. And so, there were all kinds of programs

and money; guns and butter kind of policy that was set in motion. And there were jobs for some, and not for others.

And it was possible, through that, to try to isolate the most oppressed, the most downtrodden and the most impoverished who were in motion at that time. And the student movement too. But this is a time when the cities are being starved to pay for the war, to feed the machinery, the war. And that has the potential to create a very different conflagration.

Broader and deeper. And also, to bring in a very powerful and mighty coalition, the likes of which, if we don't build may not come around for a long time again.

Amber Hollibaugh: I want to talk about a new organization that I work with: Queers for Economic Justice. And I want to frame it by saying that you can have a whole lot of complaints about your own movement, what they don't do. But at a certain point you really actually need to take responsibility, get off your butt and create the thing that you think isn't there.

And in that context, for me the questions of economic justice, of social and economic justice, of queerness, of the way that gender and sexuality impact and are lived through race and class are profound. And for me, and

certainly in the LGBT movement, as much as in the women's movement, I couldn't find what I wanted.

I couldn't find what I thought was the kind of work that needed to be done. And so I've been part of a group of people to start something new. And I think it's important to say it. It is not as though there were the '60s and the '70s and exciting and extraordinary things happened, and now here we are and what a mess.

It's not just how scary it is, which is also true. But also to say that remarkable organizing is going on now. Really remarkable organizing is going on now. Extraordinarily new understandings of old issues are coming forward. I'm about to pull together a group of queer activists to do work on tax cuts and Social Security.

And it's queer activism. It's a moment in time where the luxury of single-identity politics is really being moved to the side profoundly. And the question of how we both respond and how we build in response, I think, is something that this conference and this audience needs to take on.

Because it will be the work that we do from each of our positions that will determine ultimately what this thing called women's liberation or feminism is. It will be determined by every single person in this room. And the

responsibility we take for shaping the movement that we are committed to. It's like, being an activist is a really interesting thing where you stand outside, you have a perfect demonstration in opposition to what you think it wrong, but you don't have to get in the mix and actually try and solve it.

If you actually have to try and figure out what it is that you would say is the answer to the thing that you're critiquing, that then begins to create a vision. And the vision allows people to connect. And so, it gives people more than what's wrong. It gives people the possibility of how to make it right. And that, it seems to me, our job.

(applause)

Surina Khan: I guess I will add a couple more examples of a couple of groups I've been working with on the West Coast. One is called Q Team and it's Queer and Trans Young People of Color, who are organizing in the L.A. area, and maybe Southern California, more broadly. I'm on, I think they call it the CAB, the Community Advisory Board. And in relation to my thinking about some of the structural limitations of non-profit organizing, what I love about Q Team is that they really are doing things a little differently, which is the first thing they said to us, they

needed to form this Community Advisory Board because they were looking for funding.

They were applying for foundation funding and if you applied for foundation funding then you need to have a board. And so, they said -- so we're forming this because we want to get a grant, but we are the core of this organization, the youth doing the organizing are the decision makers. You have no decision-making power, but we want you here to help us because you might be able to help us write a grant; or you might be able to help us do fund raising.

So that is exciting. But also, what's more exciting is that they are really making connections across different issues and so, I think about a couple of months ago something came across my email from them, and they had organized an environmental justice toxic bike tour. From Los Angeles to Long Beach, in which they worked with a group called Bike Out, which is queers working on environment issues in relation to transportation in the L.A. area, which is a huge problem.

And so, they got these bikes and they invited people from like 14 to 24 to come with them over a course of a weekend, to travel to different toxic sites. And they

linked environmental issues which are a huge issue in the L.A. area, and queer organizing.

So I thought that was really great. And then another example I want to point to is this group that I've done some work with, which is called the South Asian Network, which is a very progressive group, also in Artesia in L.A. Country that works on a range of issues: domestic violence, immigrant rights and violence and discrimination, generally.

And what they have been trying to do is look at the intersections of sexuality and LGBT organizing. They are a broadly progressive group. They don't identify as a queer group. But they want to bring that to their work. And they've been really deliberate and intentional about it, -- when they are organizing taxi drivers or recent immigrants, or they are going into Sikh temples or mosques or organizing very religious contexts -- how do they bring up issues of queerness and sexuality? And they haven't certainly found the answer, but they are thinking it, they are doing it. And they are doing it every month. They are meeting around it; they have their staff involved, their board involved.

They are going to start doing volunteer training because they understand that it's very much a part of their

immigrant rights work; that it's very much a part of their domestic violence work. And so, those are two exciting examples that I've been involved in recently.

Siobhan Brooks: One of the things that come to my mind, in terms of looking at examples of how we are moving forward is, my position as an Adjunct Professor at Lehman College where most of my students are working class, Black and Latina. And I teach a course called Women and Society. And it's so spiritually-nourishing to me and for the students I teach because a lot of what I do in my class is about self-actualization. My students to come in contact with people like say, for example, Angela Davis for the first time. They don't know who she is, unfortunately. Even though these are the students that reflect the racial background of a lot of the feminists that I teach, a lot of my students, unfortunately, have never heard of Angela Davis. They have no idea.

I have to almost do charades -- the woman with the fro, remember her? The fist in the air?

And then I get -- oh, yeah! She was a Black Panther, right?

And I'm like -- yeah!

And I'm just amazed because I don't even remember how I found out about her, but we often think that these

leaders are accepted knowledge, like anyone is being educated to know who certain people are, and we can kind of move on. But what I'm learning is that that's not the case.

And another thing that I learned from my students is just the commitment that they have to education and just the kind of barriers that they overcome to come to the classroom. It's just amazing to me. Single mothers. I have women who come to school that are pregnant. A lot of times there are murders in the family. A lot of times there are health issues.

And I have to just commend them, that they even get up just to come to class. And the whole issue around whether or not their papers are late or grammatical errors or whatever becomes just so obsolete when I look at their commitment to wanting an education, to wanting access to learn.

And I think that brings up issues such as open admission and the assumption that a lot of us think that everyone is equally, having access to education. I think that's an assumption that a lot of people make -- everybody knows how to write in this particular way; everybody has heard of these people; this is sort of like a review, we can move on.

But that's not the case at all. And so, one of the interesting things for my students is just giving them a sense of purpose through my class, in the sense that what the class does is it reflects their reality as young people of color in New York City, in the United States.

It reflects their reality in that there's a history that they are connected to. There is a tradition that they are connected to, that they didn't know that much about. And so for me, that's a huge form of activism and a way in which we nourish people -- students, in particular -- to take control over their lives with information.

And one thing I wanted to point out, it's really interesting. Every time I ask my class if they're feminists, they just look at me like I'm crazy. I'm like -- oh, are you a feminist? I'm a feminist.

And they're all looking at me like -- uh, no; what's a feminist? And it's all these sort of misconceptions about what feminism is. And one of the things that I thought about was the impact of the media and how, even though I don't remember the '70s much, but my assumption is that there was a lot more media attention to activist-based movements.

Like the Black Panthers and the women's liberation then. What we see in the media now, we would think that

there is nothing going on because we don't see a lot of images of what's going on in terms of non-profit organizing. But I think that in the earlier generation, part of why the movements were successful is because the media was on it.

Like, you saw black people being hosed down on TV. You saw women doing things, whereas the right wing, I think, really got astute. And they were like -- okay, let's put other things on the media. So now, what you see, it makes you think that we are liberated because now we have "Queer As Folk" on TV. Right?

We have some of these black TV shows that show some sort of middle class existence or something like that. Now we have all these TV shows that I think take the place of real activism and what's really going on, to cover up what's really going on so that it sends out a message that there is nothing going on -- one.

Two -- there is really no problem, really. Everything is over. That's in the past; that has cobwebs on it, we can move on. And three -- it keeps us disconnected from one another because then we aren't really sure what's going on unless we go to conferences and we make an effort to network.

And so, I think that's another thing that's going on is that -- the corporate control of the media is really affecting how we see ourselves and how we see the world, and what we think the issues are.

Leslie Feinberg: I think right now, that the questions of war and racism are really defining issues for feminisms, including womanism. And particularly because of the disproportionate burden that's going to be placed on people of color communities, the most impoverished communities.

I think any movement -- war and racism are really the cutting-edge issues, how a movement answers, are these women's issues? Are these issues of women's liberation? -- will determine whether that movement goes forward or backward or dissipates.

And this is true for the LGBT movement, too. Certainly overlapping movements. This was true in World War I, when the women's movement and the gay, trans and lesbian movements were really crushed by answering that an inter-imperialist war to redivide the world for colonies is a racist war, was not really a women's issue, or a gay or a trans or bi issue.

And that enabled the most reactionary elements to be tall in the saddle and the jingoism and xenophobia and all

that patriotic kind of Rambo mentality that just run like a tank tread over those movements. And the movement gave up its independent voice of standing up in opposition to its own rulers, in saying, well, it's a big "we" now. We're behind you and this is our war.

And of course, it destroyed those independent movements. As I touched on earlier, I think that part of the strength of the left wing of the movement in the '60s and '70s was answering -- yes, racism and war are our issues.

If we can't stand up against a war for empire of this racist and colonial character, then the question is -- what can our movement stand up to? What will they fight for? What are they capable of fighting against? And so I think every single social and economic struggle that we have is tied to the war and to the racism and how we deal with it.

The questions of racist profiling -- now you can open the newspaper and turn on TV and see what the code is for it. Is it a medium code or a high code? For those who ask -- how could Japanese Americans have been rounded up and interned during World War II?

This is how it begins, where all of us in Jersey City know Muslim and South Asian and Arab people who disappeared

on their way home from work without any charges, and no one knows where they are.

And we need to address how the Pentagon suddenly becomes the great women's liberation machinery. You know, rolling into Yugoslavia or Afghanistan or Iraq in order to liberate women, when they are bringing rape, not only of women there, but their own GIs are being victims of it. This is the Tailhook Pentagon that's saying that they're going to go in and liberate women's lives.

Issues of youth rights are going to become issues of whether youth are going to be sent to kill or be killed. And this draft now, the draft as of March 31st, that Selective Service Board has announced to the administration that within 75 days from March 31, they will have the apparatus in place for a compulsory military conscription.

That's going to be an issue for our movement. Issues of environment, of disability. This war is disabling those it isn't killing. Some have visible wounds and some less visible.

The question of undocumented workers, of immigrant workers. I mean, these are all -- jobs, education, health care, housing. You can't pick a struggle, let alone gender freedom, in this kind of trying to roll it back to the 1950s "Father Knows Best" era. You just can't fight on any

front without coming up against -- are we going to make the struggle against the war and racism our issues, of all of our struggles?

And I think in light of that, it's important for me to remember that the working class now has changed, since it was 40 years ago or 30 years ago during the '60s and the '70s. It is a much more multinational working class. It is a much larger immigrant population, from many countries who bring with them their own experiences of struggle.

It has a lot more women. It has a lot more low-paid workers, which mean the numerical base of who makes up the movement has been de-skilled and lower-paid and more oppressed workers. And it also provides the basis for a potential of a more radical and an even more revolutionary leadership amongst the working class.

And from that standpoint, that's how I view with such excitement the development of the Million Worker Movement, which was initiated by largely African-American unions, the Dock Workers Union, Local 10 on the West Coast. And which has a largely people of color and many black trade union leaders in it, including, for example, in New York City, Brenda Stokely who is leader of SEIU which is a predominantly women and people of color union. These are some of the lowest-paid workers. And so, when I see them

call a May Day demonstration in Union Square, which is for those who may not know, where decades and decades of militant workers' struggles have taken place, and revolutionary led.

It's an exciting thing for me to see -- this leadership which is a very different leadership than emerged during the '60s and '70s and I think it offers a new potential for struggle.

Elizabeth Bernstein: Thank you. Why don't we open this up to questions and comments from the audience?

Audience Member: I'd like to ask you what responsibility we have as feminists for the women in Darfur and places like that? It's a simple question and the answer is very complicated.

Surina Khan: I guess I'll start, which is I think we have a great responsibility for women everywhere, especially in areas that are heavily militarized. And I think it's important to see the relationship and the connections between governments and what governments are implicated in their actions or inaction.

And so we have to make connections across borders, absolutely. I think it's very important. The way that I would approach it is to make connections with other women in other nations who are doing organizing, probably in

different ways that might have connections with women in Darfur that we could communicate with.

I think you have to explore all kinds of possibilities, but it begins with relationship building, with activists who are doing work in other countries, to try to figure out what would be the best intervention, or what intervention.

Amber Hollibaugh: I think the question, in a way, follows perfectly from what Les was talking about, because both the movement and the kind of things that are beginning to occur here are very different. And I think one of the challenges for feminism is whether or not it will be a western feminism or whether it will be a global feminism?

Whether it will be a feminism that doesn't think the world began somehow in, not just New York City, but somehow down the road in this country. But assumes a very different relationship to questions of how we understand the world as the place we're in, not just the city or the country that we reside in. There's enormous global feminism that's going on. It's remarkable work. It is not as though there is nothing happening. It's our links to that work, and often our willingness to support work being done in other places, rather than be in charge or lead it.

Because when you actually change your perspective on how to do work by support and sustaining extraordinary activism that's going on in other places, it changes your relationship to the way that you understand your own work. And it's a real struggle. And so when we are talking about things like class and race, I think it's one of the great challenges -- whether or not we can understand our role, both as actors and as supporters. Rather than, always having to be at the front, in the lead where we control the economics and we get to say what other people do in order to make their activism something that we support.

Leslie Feinberg: I would say that the British, the U.S. and the French imperialists have never gone into Africa for humanitarian purposes. It's really hard for the Pentagon to whip up military intervention or occupation of Africa or Asia or Latin America or even Central and Eastern Europe, by saying -- follow us behind the banner of neo-colonialism and re-enslavement.

(laughter)

Don't ask us to make reparations -- we want to grab more oil, more resources, more labor. We want greater profit. They are saying -- we haven't squeezed Africa dry enough of its blood, of its people.

And we are saying -- the greatest thing that we can do for the people who have fought against colonialism, is to build a powerful anti-imperialist movement that is not fooled for a minute into thinking that the Pentagon is Meals on Wheels. Or that it's a humanitarian institution, or that its goals have anything to do with the liberation of any people.

And to support the self-determination and the sovereignty of the peoples who are fighting against the imperialist powers where we live.

(applause)

Amber Hollibaugh: One of the interesting examples, I think, that doesn't often get talked about but I think it's particularly interesting and relevant here, for a kind of organizing work that's going on. And I think we share this -- it's the enormous organizing, the union drives for sex workers. It has not been taken up either by most labor movements or by most women's movements.

Neither place is willing to claim it. And yet, there are 40,000 unionized sex workers in Calcutta. There are 25,000 unionizing sex workers in Mexico City. I mean, it's just extraordinary work that's going on, and some of the most, really revolutionary work that I've ever seen, to both be included as a worker and to be included around the

particular nature of doing work that's around, that plays through sexuality.

And it challenges many different places. And yet, I almost never hear it discussed. It's almost never talked about, even when sex work is talked about. But the actual extraordinary organizing -- it's just some remarkable work. And I think we need to begin to talk about where there's exciting examples of work that's not claimed by movements who logically should claim it.

How come the women's movement couldn't take on HIV? Why was that always about men? It's like -- pardon me. What does it mean to have class and race politics? What does that mean, as the starting point of where you look to understand what's going on? That we don't do work around prisons?

How can this be, that we look at incarceration, and all the things that result from economic poverty, like substance abuse, that we don't see it as a political issue. It's somehow about public health. That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard in my life.

It's about poverty. So let's look at where people are doing remarkable work in their own name. Truly radical organizing work like around sex work and unionization. And figure out how to tie the way that we support activism with

the places where real activism needs to happen, or is happening.

Audience Member: Hi, I have a comment and a question. I'll try and keep it brief. My name is Amy Jill Goddard[?]. I am a sexuality educator and also an artist and an activist. And I want to address the issue of what who gets a place at the table?

I'm really, really glad to hear both Amber and Surina bringing up issues of the non-profit industrial complex, which I want to call it that because it is that. It is part of the system. I've worked in that system, I've had a place at the table. I've worked with reproductive health organizations who have a lot of power. HIV-prevention organizations who have a lot of power. And who don't address the issues that are being brought up here.

And when I have been that person who brought up the racism in those organizations, and who felt very strongly as a white woman, that I needed to speak out about that. Or who brought up issues of homophobia and trans-phobia, which were very rampant in organizations that should be dealing with that -- I was the one that was attacked and I watched it happen to other people as well. I decided that's not the place for me. That's not a place where I can operate.

But what I'm noticing is that it's getting very, very challenging for people to have a livelihood to exist in other ways. That system is really creating this bigger and bigger disparity of -- you're either at the table, you're working in the non-profit world or you're just giving it up and working corporate. Or you're really, really, really struggling to do it on your own, as an artist, as an activist -- to do the work in other ways, to frame the debate because that organizations are not framing it in a way that represents me, that represents the issues I'm seeing with the people around me.

And it's getting really, really challenging to be able to do that. And I'm seeing that with artists and activists all over. And we're all really struggling with -- wow, how do we stay in this and support ourselves and be able to really do the work and be able to pay the rent?

And then one other comment I want to make is that it's really interesting to me, even that we're sitting in this room talking about race, class and sex and the future of difference. And in the other main room, they're talking about political power and we have representatives from NOW and the former president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America sitting on those panels.

And I want to see the conversation be between those folks and the folks up here. And I find it really interesting . . .

(applause)

. . . and that may be just a subconscious thing that happened on the part of the organizers. And I want to say that this is an amazing conference, and thank you.

(laughter)

I'm thrilled to be sitting in the room with these amazing, amazing thinkers and other people that are in the audience. But I'm looking around and I don't get to see who's in the other room, but I bet you it's a little different. And so, that's really interesting to me, that even here at this conference, we have divided it that way.

That non-profit industrial complex is represented in the main, nice, fancy room in there. And here we are, in the little lecture hall, which I do appreciate because there's a little more intimacy here.

(laughter)

But let's look at that. And so I'd love to hear from people. And Amber, you've taken the steps to now be involved in one of those nationals that does have a lot of power, and what does that mean?

(laughter and applause)

Amber Hollibaugh: Oh, my God! Oh, my God! You know, one of the first times that I was ever was really struck by it was when I started at Gay Men's Health Crisis when I was doing the Lesbian Aids Project. And I hired a staff and my staff would come to me and would say -- I want to go to blah-blah meeting and it needs to be comp time.

And I'd say -- well, but if you think that's an important meeting to go to for yourself, then you go. It's not about whether you get comp time or something. It's true, you have a job and maybe it fits in. But are you deciding whether it's an important meeting or not? And whether you'll attend it by whether or not you get comp time?

Because frankly, it's a gift to be able to work someplace where any of your identities and realities are in any way reflected. That is a gift, right from the start. And most of us that have worked most of our lives know goddam well that what you mostly do when you go to the job is hide the things that make you vulnerable, if you have any choice about that.

And if you can't, you try and keep your back to the wall. And so, I think that when we are looking at non-profits, it is an industrial complex. There's just no getting around it. You can see it. It started in activism

and it expanded into a very different model. And I think all of us have to try and figure out what we can do, and how we can bear it, and whether we can.

And if we can't, then the reality, to me, of activism and social change is that one is not the same as the other. I don't get paid to make a revolution. And I don't expect that NGLTF is going to reflect my politics. I hope that it will reflect the best that it can reflect, and I'll push to do the best I can inside there.

But I'm not confused that I'm the same as it. That means I do my activism there. I don't shut up. But I also create the things that I think really do reflect what I believe in -- like Queers for Economic Justice. Because that's how I'm going to get the work done in the places that are completely marginalized and in which these larger organizations and groups almost never take on, and when they do, they often really screw it up.

Really screw it up. So that even when they take the work on, you think to yourself -- do I want the people that I love and care about who are so vulnerable, to be invited in one more time, and then misused? I'm not sure.

Surina Khan: Well, thank you for your comment. I think that it's important to really look at the non-profit structure, which I've been thinking about for the last

couple of years, ever since I left the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission.

In relation to the professionalization of the movement, and really asking the question of -- what happens when activism becomes advocacy? And that's not to say that advocacy -- there's a role for advocacy. But what happens when activism becomes advocacy? What happens when, if we look at the titles for different organizations, we are really taking on a corporate structure so that we have CEOs and Presidents of organizations now, as if Executive Director wasn't sort of corporate enough.

So for me, it's a very personal issue. It's a very political issue. I worked as a consultant for a couple of years, thinking that that was one way that I could resolve it because I could work with organizations that I cared about. And really help to sort of look at issues of capacity and assistance in terms of the issues that they needed. And that was difficult, from a financial perspective, from a personal perspective -- in terms of not working with a group of people. And so I recently took a position at a foundation which supports non-profit organizations and I've only been there a few weeks now, but one of the things that I like about it, I think, is because I'm trying to find places where there is a match with my

politics, and I think that there is one in this particular foundation.

Which is that, it really is about supporting organizations and organizers that have analysis where they are really connected to the communities that they are working with; so that the leadership has to be representative of the communities that they are working with.

And that's a value that I really hold. I don't expect, again, to agree on every issue, but I think that when we take these movement professional jobs, where is it that we can do our activism within the organizations, like Amber said, and make intervention? And bring our values and have those value discussions, which are important to have within the context of this non-profit world.

Siobhan Brooks: I'll just say real briefly, I'm very proud to say I've never really had that whole non-profit bureaucracy, drama. I've never really worked at a non-profit. And I'm really happy, actually, that I never did. But on the same level, I always feel alienated when I'm among activists because so many of the conversations about the non-profit agency they work at, and their titles.

And then they go -- where do you work? And I go to these conferences -- and where do you work, what agency are

you with? And I'm like -- uh . . . I teach, I'm just sort of me. And I kind of like the fact that I'm disconnected from like a non-profit entity, though I did have an experience working with the Exotic Dancer Alliance, which is a non-profit organization.

And there were similar issues there -- the whole question of why is there a president? And the whole disconnect between women who were working in what's called the street clubs, versus who became part of the board members. And the alienation that most dancers felt, even when mentioning -- are you going to the Exotic Dancer Alliance?

They could give two shits about it, honestly. They were just like -- what? I'm just trying to feed my kids.

And so, a lot of what the Exotic Dancers Alliance did, which not to knock them, but the way that they tried to get women to better their working conditions was to have them file for back wages. And that right there alienated a majority of dancers who desperately, probably could have benefited from knowing it, that because of the use of documentations that frightened a lot of immigrant women.

Because a lot of immigrant workers are frightened of anything government -- anything. So there was all this activism about -- okay, we need to have the women come in

and file with the National Labor Relations Board for back wages. And no one was really doing it, but again, the most privileged of the group who felt confidence that they could do it, who understood how to do it; and who could wait as long as it would take for you to actually get something. That was a huge issue.

So I definitely appreciate your comments.

Leslie Feinberg: If you asked me what I do for a living, I have to tell you -- ask me after I've paid my rent next month. I still cobble it together. And every single job has a bathroom issue. And that last job that I worked as a typesetter, and there are reasons why I was able to get typesetting work at the time when there was a union-busting drive going on and they were hiring very queer people, women and people of color on third shift, our of sight of the normal first-shift world, corporate world.

The last job I had, there was an office pool run by the foreman for the first three days about which bathroom I would use. And when I continued to do what I do, when I'm trying to find work, which is to not eat or drink for the entire hours before I go to work, until I do get home from work, and before I go to bed -- they just let me go.

I've just finished a new novel, Drag King Dreams, and I can assure you that it will not in any way change the

precarious standard of living to which I have grown accustomed to.

(laughter)

Really. Unless your Danielle Steele or Michael Crichton, that doesn't really change it. So I continue, as somebody who doesn't fit either of those stick figures, on the binary doors of this society to find work and make a living.

Elizabeth Bernstein: We'll take more questions from the audience.

Audience Member: First I want to thank the panelists, because I really enjoyed your discussion, especially when you mentioned economics. I'm an economist. And Joan Robinson said -- the reason to study economics is to avoid being duped by economics. So I was wondering if I could ask you to talk about something a little bit more that I think all of the panelists mentioned. I was raised Quaker and I was taught to approach equality through really this mystical belief that there is something of the divine in everyone.

And that can either mean that there is something fundamental that is the same between us all, or that we each create our own unique divinity that leads to connections between us all. So I was wondering if you

could talk more about the tension between equality and sameness.

Amber Hollibaugh: Equality and sameness?

Audience Member: Right. That either we're all fundamentally the same or we're unique and have connections between us.

(laughter)

Amber Hollibaugh: It was a good enough question that we're sitting here trying to figure out an answer. It actually really is an interesting question and I don't think there is, I would love to have a conversation because I don't think there is a right answer. But what it reminded me also of, was kind of a contradiction that I think is relevant at this conference, between the way that feminism or women's liberation originally saw sisterhood, saw sameness as something that drew us together.

And what that covered were the things that were different, and so then it exploded inside of this sameness. And so, for me I think the importance of actually creating movements that allow people to be unique and self-determining is fundamental to whatever else we agree to understand about the world.

And movements that create a bond on commonality and can't tolerate difference actually become smaller and

smaller movements that are "uh-huh" experiences after a while, where tinier and tinier numbers of people sit around and agree with each other.

And so, to me the question of actually allowing people to be different in ways that are explosive, problematic, extraordinary -- is one of the most important things, in my mind, that can happen. Even though what that generates, what that absolutely generates is a place where you never can assume sameness as safety.

But I actually think that that's a very dangerous thing, to assume that if I look out in this audience, what I understand about the audience is an identical identity. I don't want to be in a movement that creates multiple twins and triplets. I want to be in a place where I actually don't know what you think, and I have to ask.

Siobhan Brooks: I think that's an excellent question and obviously one that I grapple with. I actually think that we should fight more for difference. I think there's a power in the whole subject of the same to whom, and who gets to define the terms of whatever we're trying to be equal to.

And I think that happens in a lot of movements. It happens obviously in the feminist movement. The black power movement it's similar, where it's like -- okay, what

does it mean, for example, to be black? And then all of the sudden there is this whole notion of what the fundamental aspects of the agenda are that speaks to some, but not to all.

But then, people with power are usually the ones that are able to define the terms as to what we're going to be fighting for, sometimes. And the same to what and all of this. And I think that a lot of women in different types of feminist movements, from my experience, it's always uncomfortable whenever there is talk about difference.

Like, everything is fine in the classroom, when I was a women's studies student, as long as we were talking about gender in very kind of generic ways. And this assumption of what it means to be a women, from this sort of victimized, privileged standpoint.

But then the minute other people started to speak out in the class, suddenly everyone is uncomfortable. People are crying. All of the sudden people want to walk out; there's drama. And you're like -- oh, my God. And it's like, what does that really mean? That everybody in some of these situations are fine, as long as we aren't talking about difference, right?

I believe in coalition-building and then at the same time I believe in autonomy and I think that's the

complicated tension is that -- yeah, we do find common things among each other often, based upon all of these entities.

But then I think that there's also room for separation. I think that there is that need for autonomy or what some people would call separation. I call it strategic separation. So I don't think there's always a need that even doing coalition building, that we have to only focus on how we are similar, similar, similar. And then, sort of try to ignore the differences.

And then, if there is autonomy, see that as a bad thing -- why are these people separating out? We need to somehow have them back in.

I don't think that split is always necessarily bad, but I think we're trained to see any sort of contention as something negative; when actually, I think that's a growth point.

Leslie Feinberg: I agree, and I don't think of difference or sameness as sort of central unchanging categories. They are very relative and they shift. And I would say, not repeating any of the things that have already been said, that there is a big difference between the individual opting for expressing what they feel is

their sameness or difference, and someone else assigning that to them.

And in good coalition building, people are allowed to define that for themselves. And frequently, a diverse coalition, its diversity is its strength, but it's not because it's a kind of front in which maybe is best expressed by that well-meaning slogan -- "Gay, straight, black, white: same struggle, same fight." In which people just chafe and say -- what do you mean it's the same struggle, the same fight?

But a coalition in which people acknowledge that they may face different forms of oppression, degrees of oppression -- but at that moment they're up against a common enemy and that the diversity is the strength.

And maybe we have to come up with slogans like: "Gay, straight, black, white -- show our might, unite and fight." Or something that gives it more expression, so that people don't feel they have to give up all of who they are at the door, for one point of unity. But that by bringing all of who they are together, it's a much stronger coalition.

Surina Khan: I don't think I'll add anything. I feel a lot of sameness of opinion.

(laughter)

Audience Member: Hi, I'm Andrea Klar[?], with News and Letters, a marxist humanist group. I became a revolutionary when I was here at Barnard 40 years ago, and cut my teeth in the black liberation movement, so I'm grateful to Barnard. But what I want to talk about is what I think is just as serious a split in the women's movement, and all the radical movements, as the splits that you've been talking about between people with different jobs, the non-profits versus the unpaid activists.

The single-issue versus the multi-issue. I think there's a much more serious split and it's a split between theory and practice. And I find that split at this conference too. I'm sorry Jan has gone out because we are acting, in a sense -- we, being the activists here -- as if all that's needed is more and more activity.

We're discussing whether your group needs to be multi-issue from the start or make coalitions later, or whatever. But we're not questioning the grounds on which we are organizing in terms of -- what is that vision of the future that several people have mentioned?

And how are we going to get there? Which, I can't remember who in the film -- that's what we should be addressing too. So it seems to me we're very much repeating the mistakes of the past in assuming that the

only thing we have to do is get bigger and bigger and bigger.

And if we could make those coalitions and pull in those marginalized people and reach the poor and the people of color --that we will get so big. Why? We're going to take over the United States government? We're going to overthrow the corporate structure?

I think that we have to do those things, but we have to do those things with a very clear idea that we're going to then work on human liberation; changing the mode of production, et cetera. I can't go into it now.

But we have to think about the power of ideas to both embolden people to fight in these reactionary times. But also, to have some sense of what they're fighting for. And it's not just -- what people said about equality -- it's not just to replace one power structure with another power structure.

And women are in an unique position to be able to understand that because of their multiple oppressions. But we ignore theory at our peril and I think that we are . . . I don't know to what we relegated the academy, but we are not talking here about what ideas from the academy are being produced that would actually help move our movements forward.

Or vice versa -- I think it's a two-way road between theory and practice. And I think this was much more evident at the beginning of the women's movement and women's studies. I go back to those first conferences. It's not surprising that the former conferences we're celebrating today had much more political, radical titles than some of the recent ones.

Because there was a connection between the movements. After all, women's studies came out of the movement. But with the Reagan/Bush counter-revolution, they sort of pushed out a lot of the radicals in women's studies and black studies and made them more respectable and all that sort of thing.

So there has been an enormous split. But that doesn't mean that we should reject theory. Theory is what enables people to see beyond the present, from the standpoint of the future. It gives them hope. So I hope you'll address some of that.

Leslie Feinberg: As a communist, I wouldn't pit theory and action as separates and opposites. I would say, and I'm speaking for myself here, that if theory is not the distillation of experience, then it's not a guide to action. It becomes abstract.

And in that sense, we are very much hammering out theory here, in this conference. And there are many theories here at this conference; there are many currents, as was pointed out by an earlier speaker. If I was going to remember, for example, the great (inaudible) groups of women that came out of the Chinese Revolution, I would say that great theory came out of those groups.

And the second wave of women's liberation also inspired consciousness-raising groups, but they were not just talk shops. They were really coming together, and until you come together with the different experiences that we each bring, then how do we hammer out a common theory?

And without testing it against reality, how do we know if it works? If your theory is that the [Hale-Bopp Comet] is going to come by, and it doesn't, you have to reevaluate your theory. If it does, you're on safer ground.

If I were going to look back at the real split that I think is a really important one to raise here, that really hasn't been addressed yet -- it is really the lies of the anti-communist McCarthy Era in the '50s, and how it smashed the movement that was known as red feminism.

That actually, in many ways, helped to lay a basis for second wave feminism after World War II. And yet, the very contributions of have been forgotten. But the anti-

communism has not, and the red baiting. And we saw it happen again in the '60s and the '70s, where the most radical, the most revolutionary, the anarchists, the socialists, the communists and other revolutionaries in those movements -- ended up being pushed back.

And that whether or not you agree that socialism is the future that you're struggling for, I think that we have to discuss in terms of feminisms and any kind of liberation movement -- if we're not discussing them, how do we find a way out of a reform movement that says "just passing an ERA is important."

And on the other hand, how do we pass an ERA if the left wing of that movement gets red-baited out and suppressed. Then, anyone who asks for a nickel or a quarter is going to get red-baited and they will be pushed back too. In other words, this is something that has a greater impact than just on those of us who do our part of the revolutionary work.

So I would say that theory and action can't be separated, and I'm happy to see the basis of this discussion here, has really been on the basis of how those both historically and the current conditions that we're facing, inform our vision of which way forward.

Siobhan Brooks: After 9/11, the war that we are in, the question on the table about -- as feminists, what are we going to do to really address these things? 9/11 is an issue that also, as feminists, we need to critically talk about in terms of what kind of repression is surfacing after that event?

Surina Khan: I think that there is a connection, a vibrant connection between theory and action and activism. And I would like to see more of it. I think that many academics are activists. Many activists are great thinkers. And I think that there is a lot that can be benefited from when those partnerships come together.

I, myself, I worked at a research center as an activist for a number of years and I think that there's great value in having time to read and reflect and think. And so, I think one of the things I would like to see for activists is that time -- to create a think tank or a center where people can come to really think about what has happened, what needs to happen.

And maybe do that in partnership with academics, maybe with other activists. But I think there's a great important link there. I do see it happening, and sometimes not happening. I have been at academic conferences where, when I will say that -- isn't it important for academic

research, especially as feminists, if we are thinking about movement building, then isn't it important for that research to be informed by communities where important issues are happening?

And sometimes the answer is no. I think sometimes academics need to do research that is not necessarily linked to movement building. But I think when those places do intersect, it's very important and I think it can create greater opportunities for important interventions.

Amber Hollibaugh: I think intellectual, the world of ideas of why we do what we do and how we understand and think through why we are making the choices that we are; why we are moving in certain directions, why the world is what the world is -- needs to constantly be a part of what informs anything else that's happening.

But I also think that there's a real tendency to define a panel like this as though it's not theory. And I find that really, really offensive, actually. That in fact, activism is not the body; the academy is the head. And the split in the women's movement in many other places has often been there, even in the left.

And so, I think it's really important to say that while the particular work that we did on this panel was not specific to a particular theoretical question, I think what

each of the people here tried to offer was a bigger vision of why they were saying what they were saying about practice.

That we weren't saying that it happened in a vacuum and we were all saying that we had profoundly political theories of how we saw the world which was informing why we were making the choices that we were making, and that we thought that was very important to acknowledge.

I think there needs to be more places like Surina's talking about, where people who do not have a structure for an intellectual life, have the capacity for it. Because there are so many people that I work with every single day, who are brilliant and have no place to go and be invested in ideas, be invested in reading, in debate, in challenge to a world view.

And it's fundamentally important and it's one of the ironies of what happens when you have mass movements, is sometimes you have more of that happen because there's a larger involved group of people who fight through an idea to decide on a course of direction.

And because we don't have it now, intellectual life tends to get trapped in certain places where it's acceptable and not seen and not supported in places that are not assumed to be the place where intellectual activity

is possible. And that's a different kind of question, because that is about the question between whether you really believe that people are smart, regardless of where they were born, what language they speak, what gender they live in.

Whether you actually think people have something to offer, regardless of whether they frame it like you do. Or whether you think that only certain people who use a certain kind of vocabulary have the right to an intellectual world.

(applause)

Audience Member: My name is Jasmine and I'm co-founder, along with Leititia Clark[?] of the Revolutionary Alliance of Women at Brooklyn College. Something really touched me when I watched the film and in this discussion, and that was stepping outside of your comfort zone.

And something that RAW always tries to do is be all-inclusive and focus on everybody's issues. But in doing that we sort of ignore the differences, focusing on the differences. And something that has been very difficult for me, as a Latina and a feminist who is proud of being both -- one way of stepping outside of my comfort zone is reaching out to Latin women.

When you had a mother who cried and cried and cried
when you co-founded the Revolutionary Alliance of Women . .
.

(laughter)

. . . because the reasons she left the women's
movement was due to a severe case of homophobia, and also
due to her culture. And I am betraying my culture. It is
hard for me to reach out to a group of women who I think
really, really, really need the activist community and the
feminist community to reach out to them.

There is a group on our campus called Latin Women and
they do work with RAW, but they are very clear about the
fact that they are not a feminist group. They are a Latin
women's group. One thing I would like to do and one thing
that this conference has inspired me to do is step outside
of my comfort zone and reach out to Latin women and other
Latin women -- not only on the Brooklyn College campus.

Being a feminist and a Latina who doesn't know enough
about feminists or activist history or enough to preach to
people, I would like to know if you all have any references
for me -- like organizations, people -- to look into so
that I can bring something to the table for Latin women.

Not shove anything down their throat, but at least
try. And also, of course, I'm opening myself up to anybody

who is here right now and wants to network and offer me any information afterwards. Thank you.

(applause)

Amber Hollibaugh: I think a lot of us will find you after this. But I think that it's really exactly the histories that have the effect that you're talking about, are the histories of this room -- not just somewhere else. And there are resources. And part of what's problematic in creating change through time is how history is lost. It's a complicated history that Les was referring to, that many of us have been talking about.

And that history actually can support your work. Not just undercut it. And so, I think people should really find you and then find out from you what you could really use, from what it is that they may have access to, so that it makes a difference to you and you're not alone in trying to figure it out.

Siobhan Brooks: And I would just add around connections -- I live in Brooklyn and there is, I think they're called Sister Sisters. They're a group of young women of color who are very active in the community, and I think that would be a good resource for you, along with probably other resources of young women of color who are doing things in different boroughs here.

But again, it gets back to networking and -- how do we find each other? There is a lot going on and how do you make those connections? But definitely, people will find you.

(laughter)

Leslie Feinberg: And I just want to mention, we can talk a lot more, because it's a wonderful thing about having a whole day for the conference. But I wanted to mention the role of Latinas and Latinos in the anti-draft military resistance, anti-recruitment movement.

There is, next Saturday at one o'clock, at P.S 41, going to be a youth-led conference, and it will be multi-generational too. And I'm thinking about some of the, both youth and parent leaders who are involved in it.

And the other thing is -- come to May Day in Union Square and let's talk about the decades of struggle that have gone on; and see really the kind of liberation currents of leadership that are not going to be getting quotes in The New York Times or Newsday or anyplace else, who are really leading the kind of struggles that the great African peoples and latinos and native and whites led for the abolition of slavery in this country -- are now leading now against this capitalist system.

And bring with them just decades, if not a century and a half or more, of experiences.

Elizabeth Bernstein: I want to say that it's getting a little bit late and people are looking like they're about to expire, so maybe if you can just ask your questions in a succinct way, and then we can go get lunch and keep talking.

Audience Member: I'm from Radical Women and my name is Emily, and we are happy to be a part of the film this morning, as part of a left wing that Leslie has talked about. And I guess what I wanted to address was, when we talk about the whole question of what kind of movement do we want to build, and then bringing class in, because that is often lacking in feminist spacing.

What kind of class perspectives? It made me think about, in terms of global feminism and especially in Latin America and other Third World feminist spaces, even though they may not call themselves feminists, but they are fighting a feminist fight. There's a very natural, a very organic connection between the fight against patriarchy and the fight against capitalist neo-liberalism, because it's just so inherent in the whole work situation with the (inaudible) doors and everything.

And I think that's not quite as organic here, in the U.S. I think there are those of us who consider ourselves left feminists or social feminists. But in terms of the women's movement or the feminist movement, I wanted to put out -- what do you think the prospects are for bringing that anti-capitalist perspective together with anti-patriarchy perspective?

Because I think that's so crucial to the movement that we build here. I think a lot of people are totally disaffected by the Democrats, and that's going to bring a much more anti-capitalist perspective because as far as I'm concerned, as long as we have capitalism we're going to have war and all the other things.

War on women, war on Iraq, war on Cuba -- et cetera. So I just wanted to put that question out. [Pause in taping]

Leslie Feinberg: . . . question, but I think it was an eloquent statement. It stands on its own. The only key ingredient I feel a responsibility for is the best way to build that kind of international movement, is for us to take our responsibility here to build, not only an anti-capitalist, but an anti-imperialist movement to show that we know that the international policy of the U.S. is a really distilled form of its domestic policy too; and that

we know that we have a responsibility not just to fight here for our own lives and our co-workers and our neighbors and our loved ones.

But to build a powerful international movement.

Elizabeth Bernstein: Does anybody want to make any final comments before we . . . I'm sorry, I didn't see you.

Speaker: I wanted to thank the panelists again, on behalf of us all.

(applause)

Not just for your presentations, which I think were really caring and thoughtful, so I want to thank you for that. But also, for the organizing that you are doing, for the activism that you've been doing for decades now. And my question is a quick question on tactics.

Getting back to a question that Amber had raised about the kind of movement we're building and who for. That is - - is this the kind of movement, is this a liberation movement? And if it is, is this the kind of organizing that we need to be doing to accomplish that?

And I was thinking back to the late '60s, the '70s, the mass movements, the women's movement, the gay movement, the anti-war movement. Mass movements of people who went out to the streets, and where we moved that movement, I think, was an era which was into the Democratic Party.

Which went and supported the Democratic Party. And I think in the final analysis, we have to say -- it failed us. And I think we have every indication that it will continue to fail us. So the question is -- where do we move our movement now, to be a truly liberation movement, given that I think we can no longer rely on the Democratic Party?

Amber Hollibaugh: Gee, that's a short question.

(laughter)

I actually think that it's a remarkable moment in time that much is possible now, as well as much is needed. So that it's another moment, I think, we can do much more explicit, radical work than at times when at least for small parts of this country, people think that they are winning rather than losing.

I actually think most people feel very desperate. I don't think that it's just the desperation in this room. I actually think people are really eager for finding a way to be engaged and to be invited in. And that our job now is to try and figure out how to open the doors that have often been closed, in what remains in our own movement.

Or to start new things so that people can find us and people can be involved. Because it's hard to find movements. Those are not easy things to do, if you're not

already connected. And so, our job is then to make, to create vehicles where we can have larger and larger numbers of people who engage in the crisis of today and the vision for the future.

Because people are really terrified. And really worried, and know that the structures that they've often thought of as resolving those problems, are not working. And that means that there's new opportunity for us to be creative. And to begin to engage in many different communities, the possibility of being involved again.

That there is a way to respond to despair, with hope and hope isn't a false hope. Which is to say -- nothing will change until you get here, and you begin to work with other people to make a difference. It will not happen alone, in despair.

Surina Khan: Well, I guess I will just say thank you all for being here. And just sort of, reiterating what's been said here earlier, which is that -- we have to talk about different issues as our own issues, looking at ourselves as complicated people with unique experiences. That we have to bring that to our organizing work, so we have to look at, really, an intersectional analysis.

And the last think I just would say is that, in terms of movement building, we have a long way to go. There are

a lot of different steps that we need to take and I think that, as we are moving forward, to also just make a distinction between institution building and movement building.

Leslie Feinberg: I would just conclude by saying that I think that the more we can adjust our lens and focus on all movements -- women's liberation movement, the left, all of these groups, all these currents get put forward as one monolithic group.

And see them as having different political positions and different currents -- the more we will see which currents are in ascendancy. And that will determine which way forward. It's not a question of reform versus revolution, because if we don't win reforms, it's a question of who's going to fight for them, and who is going to take it?

Are we going to say -- now that we've got them, we can give up? Or are we going to say -- look, we won that, let's use that as a stepping stone to the next victory. We've got to keep fighting until every battle is won.

But I would say that the great abolitionist and the great supporter of women's rights, one of the greats in this country, Frederick Douglass said it most succinctly and best -- that power concedes nothing without a struggle;

it never has, it never will and when we take it out into
the streets with that as our banner, that's going to be in
the direction of liberation.

(applause)

Elizabeth Bernstein: Thank you.