

experienced sexual abuse, either within or outside the family, before they were 18 years old. This is exactly the same figure that Diana Russell uncovered in her general population sample of 930 women (see *The Secret Garden: Incest in the Lives of Girls and Women*, 1986). Loulan's study not only replicates Russell's findings, but it also explodes the myth that lesbians are more likely to have suffered childhood sexual abuse than other women.

There are three sections in the research chapter: demographic information, such as race, class, age, religious background, years identified as lesbian; background factors, such as sexual abuse history, alcoholic family history and correlations between these factors and present circumstances; and current sexual activities, including relationships, celibacy, masturbation, frequency of sex, orgasms, sex practices and satisfaction with sex life. One of the most poignant findings was that 80% of the respondents reported that they held hands with their lovers, but only 27% of them held hands in public.

That the majority of lesbians in this survey keep private even the most innocuous act of sexual expression — holding hands — is a statement about the oppression of lesbians in our culture.

JoAnn Loulan wrote *Lesbian Passion* with Mariah Burton Nelson. Nelson describes the collaboration process in the forward "On Pretending To Be JoAnn Loulan While Simultaneously Trying Not to Let Her Get Carried Away." The book was created from tapes of a series of Loulan's lectures, edited and transformed by Nelson. We found *Lesbian Passion* to be better-written than Loulan's earlier, and also important book, *Lesbian Sex*: it has more reach and more pizzazz. This collaboration is an example of how women can work together creatively, drawing on each other's differences and enhancing each other's strengths.

Lesbian Passion would be valuable reading for many women. Lesbian women will recognize themselves in Loulan's often ironic, always warm portrayal of their living and loving. Heterosexual women will see themselves in their

own relationships with themselves and with other women and will learn about the lives of their lesbian friends. The book is particularly important for therapists and health professionals who are working with women.

Lesbian Passion is not only mandatory reading, it's also lots of fun. Loulan has a light touch, and the book is witty and readable. These are its strengths and, to some extent, its weaknesses as well. Sometimes depth is sacrificed for accessibility. The book emphasizes a psychological analysis of lesbian relationships which is sometimes a little thin. Lesbian relationships are celebrated, but some of their complexities are not explored very fully or deeply. The roots of multi-leveled and thorny problems — such as the difficulty of sustaining passion over the long haul — are glossed over, and simplistic behavioral solutions — such as making sex dates — are applied. There were times when we were left wanting more. But, for all of that, *Lesbian Passion* is an affirming and informative read, and it makes a significant contribution.

GEOGRAPHY AND GENDER

Women and Geography Study Group of the IBG. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1984.

Ron Bordessa

Geography and Gender is designed for students in introductory geography courses in degree programmes and written co-operatively by nine members of the Women and Geography Study Group of the Institute of British Geographers. Indeed it is the first undergraduate text on feminist geography.

An introductory section of explication and justification establishes the feminist perspective as essential to a realistic understanding of the structure of social and spatial relations. Feminist analysis is persuasively argued to be more than just another critique of established modes of thought. Marxist and humanist critiques are discussed and their relationship to feminist perspectives noted, just as their inadequacies are shown to offer fertile ground for cultivation by feminist thinking.

Feminist geography itself is conceptualized as a geography "which explicitly takes into account the socially created gender structure of society; and in which a commitment both towards the alleviation of gender inequality in the short term and towards its removal, through social

change towards real equality in the long term, is expressed." The dual focus on the need for understanding and for action is presented lucidly with barely a trace of the polemic which the subject could easily have engendered.

Class, patriarchy and power are identified as concepts essential to an understanding of the structure of society and the subordinate place of women within it; likewise the duality which characterizes the lives of many woman as they perform both domestic and wage-worker roles is shown to be an important distinguishing feature between men and women.

The middle section of the book consists of four substantive chapters which are intended to be examples of the feminist perspective in geography. The organisation of life in the city and particularly the impact of the changing role of women on spatial structures is examined in a sweeping essay. It is not always easy here to assess what developments can really be attributed to women and what to the changing demands of capital. A narrower chapter on women's employment and its linkage to processes of economic change is less ambitious and more successful. Adjustments in employment characteristics and women's participation in the labour force underline the crucial place of women to an understanding of the re-structuring of the British economy. Also the impact of work experience on the lives of women and their families is

discussed, albeit in less detail. Problems of access and time, the norm for working women, are considered to be "an essential part of feminist analysis of women's employment, industrial location and regional change."

A third empirical chapter focuses on access to facilities and particularly to public sector services. Health service provision is used as a case study in which it is clearly demonstrated that women's experiences in this area are often unsatisfactory. One reason for this is that men occupy the power positions and women, although they constitute the majority of workers in the National Health Service, are relegated to more routine positions. Again this chapter exposes general questions and laments "the lack of research within geography directed at the problems women face in gaining access to services and facilities." Finally, a chapter on women in third world countries makes a valiant attempt to rescue women from their virtual invisibility in the literature and put them in their proper place — as active and often leading agents of change.

Part three of *Geography and Gender* outlines the current status of geography in degree-granting institutions in Britain from the perspective of gender bias. The old story is documented anew — while women constitute 45 percent of geography undergraduates, they are grossly underrepresented in graduate schools and on teaching staffs — and the imbalance is

more acute for more senior positions. Women students face difficulties, usually unrecognized by their teachers and often by themselves in the learning environment — and perhaps suffer at the hands of examiners too! A short section on putting feminist geography into practice attempts to encourage students to

identify topics that can be approached from this perspective. And a shorter conclusion rightly portrays feminism as a challenge to us “to examine our personal, political and academic lives...”

This book is well argued and written and ought to be read by all geographers — men and women alike. It is careful to

appeal to its intended undergraduate audience and offers many stimulating lines for discussion and research. It will be worthwhile reading too for other social scientists — as much for what geography can offer to feminism as the latter can to that discipline.

FEMINISM UNMODIFIED: DISCOURSES ON LIFE AND LAW

Catharine MacKinnon. Cambridge:
Harvard University Press, 1987.

Mariana Valverde

The first question facing a prospective buyer of this book is: what is feminism supposed to be unmodified by anyway? The thought of the important American radical feminist Catharine MacKinnon is best grasped by answering this question at some length, for she begins by assuming a position in the centre of a ‘pure’ feminism and then defending it against all outside (and even inside) threats.

MacKinnon herself names socialism and liberalism as the twin evils threatening to undermine or co-opt what she calls feminism *tout court* and others would call MacKinnon’s thought. We will take up these two enemies in a minute, but first let us clarify that MacKinnon has profound disagreements with most influential radical feminists, from Susan Brownmiller to Mary Daly; to explain these is to delineate her particular position within the by no means homogeneous radical feminist current of the women’s movement.

Mary Daly is, like many other radical feminists, a thorough philosophical idealist. She believes that it is the ideology of patriarchy which oppresses women in the first instance; her revolution is located in language and in philosophy, not in workplaces, streets and homes (See my article “The Religion of the ‘Race’ of Women: A Critique of Mary Daly,” *Rites*, Oct. 1985, pp. 14-16). MacKinnon rejects this and insists that “male supremacy” [her term] is organized and maintained through practices more than through ideas. However — and this is the first serious problem in MacKinnon’s perspective — her rejection of idealism does not lead her to emphasize women’s economic and political struggles. On the contrary, she names pornography as enemy No. 1, and has in fact dedicated most of her energy in the last few years to developing a civil-remedies approach to remove pornography from sight. One

would think this is because she believes that the images of pornography shape men’s attitudes to women; but this isn’t how she explains it. She wants to claim that pornography is not a cultural genre but an actual practice of “male supremacy;” pornography, she says “is a form of forced sex” [emphasis mine].

That pictures of sex or violence are not in the same ontological plane as actual sex or violence is thus denied by MacKinnon. The view that pictures of sex are to be treated just as if they were sex is precisely that implicit in obscenity law (certain pictures are illegal because the activity portrayed in them is illegal), which is rather ironic given MacKinnon’s rejection of obscenity law as irrelevant to feminist concerns. Her unwitting support for the obscenity approach is reinforced by her belief that what is pornographic and objectionable is not only violence but even sex itself. The infamous terms “sexually explicit,” which most feminists want to eliminate from anti-porn legislation, are included in MacKinnon’s proposed anti-porn ordinance. This is because in MacKinnon’s view sex is *per se* degrading to women. Why? Well, because it is pornographic, that is degrading, she argues circularly. Those who persist in talking about sexual freedom, she says “claim not to be able to grasp how sexuality could be *always already* pornography” [emphasis mine].

Having set up, through circular reasoning, a closed cycle of male domination/female victimization, MacKinnon professes to be surprised whenever any woman rebels or even speaks. This brings us to another way in which she differs from most other radical feminists, namely her refusal to portray women as essentially better than men, as morally superior. Women are simply not subjects, moral or otherwise. (As a whole she has little trust in women as a group, which is probably why the only feminist favourably referenced in her book is Andrea Dworkin). The word ‘resistance’ is therefore absent from her vocabulary. Defending her use of the term “victims” to refer to women, she states that her task is “exposing the truth of women’s victimization.” Any discussion of social

change, of the possibilities for non-patriarchal living, she dismisses as “fantasy and entertainment.” This is another instance of her either/or, absolutist frame of mind: she rejects the vapid optimism of neo-maternal feminism only to paint a picture of a patriarchy so powerful that it is difficult to see how any woman has ever rebelled. She goes so far as to claim that “female power” is “a contradiction in terms.” How can feminism then exist, one wonders?

The main contribution of the book is its critique of liberal feminism. MacKinnon rejects all notion of individual women making a difference in the world or in their private lives. And she has a well-deserved critique of the assumptions of liberal jurisprudence regarding individual equality: for instance, she refuses to use the term ‘person,’ which tries to overcome actual gender differences through an abstract and purely formal equality. Now, to criticize American bootstrap individualism may be necessary, but MacKinnon goes to the other extreme: she portrays women merely as instances of a gender defined in turn solely through its oppression. Thus her whole approach to sexuality neglects to inquire about individual desires and fantasies, or for that matter about collective struggles to redefine the terms of sexual discourse and experience. For her, sexuality is not permeated by contradictions and tensions (as it is for most other theorists): it is simply dangerous, simply oppressive. This feminism is “the night in which all cows are black,” to use Hegel’s words.

This brings us to the other ‘enemy’ who ought not to modify feminism, namely socialism. (Incidentally, MacKinnon seems to be unaware of the fact that much of her critique of liberalism was developed over a century ago by Marxist and non-Marxist socialists). Socialist-feminism is dismissed as simply a male-left approach to ‘the woman question’ lacking any alternative analysis of women’s very real class situations. In her list of the ‘practices’ that supposedly make up patriarchy, women’s economic subordination through both paid and unpaid labour is conspicuously absent. The fact that only a middle-class white woman could possi-