

## Second Wave Lesbian Feminists

### Statement Against Anti-Woman Violence, Terfing, and No-Platforming

#### A Call to Sisterhood, Truth, and Reconciliation

[http://www.calweb.net/~mschulter/Naomi\\_Circle\\_Statement.pdf](http://www.calweb.net/~mschulter/Naomi_Circle_Statement.pdf)

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## 1. Preamble

As lesbian feminists of the Second Wave, we are raising our voices against a dangerous trend in the LGBTQ and “transactivist” communities: the use of violent rhetoric, imagery, threats, and acts against women because of disagreements about sex/gender theory.

We write to reaffirm our commitment to Second Wave feminism and to celebrate the sisterhood of all women, both natal and transsexual. For the last 45 years, there has been much cooperation within the women’s and lesbian communities, but sadly also some unproductive conflict. In this call to sisterhood, we seek truth and reconciliation through mutual understanding and a recognition of the diversity of our community as a strength rather than a weakness. It is from this perspective that we must challenge the horizontal hostility and sometimes even outright violence that is the antithesis of either the world we seek to live in or the means by which we seek to get there.

The recent Degenderettes art show at the San Francisco Public Library, and the mobbing and acts of physical violence directed against ten or so older lesbian women at the San Francisco Dyke March (June 23), illustrate how violent words and images may lead to violent actions.

Further, we oppose the practices of terfing (labelling a feminist, often a lesbian feminist, as a TERF or “Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist”) and no-platforming of feminists so terfed.[\[1\]](#) A recent prime example is Max Dashu. She is a lesbian feminist scholar specializing in women’s and Goddess history renowned for her scholarship on witches and witchcraft. She was scheduled to present at the Modern Witches Confluence (MWC) on October 28, 2018. Her exclusion led to such an outcry among defenders of free speech and open dialogue on sex/gender issues within the women’s

and lesbian communities that MWC offered to reconsider its unwise decision, but ultimately without restoring her to the program.

As older lesbian feminists not so unlike our sisters who were physically attacked at the Dyke March, or our sister Max Dashu who witnessed this attack and reported on her experience, we would like also to place these dangerous trends of violence, exclusion, and dehumanization within the context of a longer 45-year conflict among lesbian feminists which we know from firsthand experience. Our purpose is to promote truth and reconciliation, and to emphasize that respect for boundaries is essential if we are to live and let live despite inevitable differences on feminist theory and practice.

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## 2. The reality of transsexual or neofemale women

At least since 1972, there has been a controversy within women's and specifically lesbian feminist communities about the presence of transsexual women, people who are born in more or less "standard" male bodies, but by early childhood express a desire to change sex and live as women. After being raised as boys, and thus experiencing male privilege, male-to-female transsexuals choose and undergo a process of sex/gender transition. For such transsexuals who are lesbian feminists, this process of transition has at least four aspects:

- Physical or medical transition, which involves the use of hormone therapy and surgery to change many although not all primary and secondary sex characteristics, so as to approximate the anatomy of women born and raised.

- Social and legal transition, including the obtaining of new identity documents and, of course, moving into the everyday reality of living as a woman.
- Female and more specifically feminist (re)socialization, in which one becomes a “woman-identified woman” (the name of a famous manifesto by Radicalesbians in 1970) by identifying and living not only *as* a woman but *with* other women in sisterhood and solidarity.
- Feminist (re)education, in which one studies women’s herstory, and experiences women’s culture and feminist process together with one’s sisters.

Such a process is emphatically *not* just a matter of saying, “I identify as a woman.” Rather, as in immigration and naturalization, years of transforming education and experience, as well as medical transition, are involved. We also recognize that in places where medical transition is not available as an aspect of universal health care, economic barriers and lack of class privilege can interfere with access to this process; and that certain health conditions may also preclude some or all forms of medical transition.

During what may be called the lesbian feminist movement within Second Wave feminism, roughly 1970-1980, many lesbian groups and communities freely accepted transsexual lesbian feminists as equal sisters. Others restricted membership or events to natal women or Women Born Female (WBF) — a fairly recent term widely accepted by feminists with Second Wave roots. Often lesbian feminists created, supported, and attended events with both types of boundaries, as has also held true since. To describe transsexual women, a good corresponding term might be Women Reassigned Female (WRF), since the process of transition is often called “sex reassignment.”[\[2\]](#)

Then, and now, the sane and sisterly policy is one of mutual respect: to recognize that each women's and lesbian community and event has the right to set its own boundaries and decide its membership using whatever definitions or concepts it chooses.

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### 3. There are different concepts of "woman," "female," and "lesbian"

Some radical feminists and feminist groups place a special emphasis on what may be called "sex-caste oppression" that only women who are WBF, i.e. are deemed female at birth, experience. Here a caste means a social group based on birth. Thus natal women or WBF are raised from birth as girls, and in Naomi Scheman's words "perinatally pinked," facing many disadvantages under patriarchy. Sex-caste oppression involves being directly targeted by role expectations and stereotypes like inferiority in science and math, beauty and glamour culture, sexual objectification, rape culture, etc. It also involves unspoken biases, such as the documented classroom pattern of calling on boys more frequently than on girls.

Further, a large majority of natal women can become pregnant and give birth, reproductive powers esteemed in the pre-patriarchal "matrix cultures" so named and studied by scholar Max Dashu, but which under patriarchy become reproductive vulnerability and servitude. Natal women who grow up under the expectation that they will bear children, but are infertile, also experience a kind of reproductive oppression, which may be internalized, by failing to meet this expectation.

In contrast, transsexual women or WRF, who are deemed male at birth and are raised as boys, do not experience these forms of female sex-caste and reproductive oppression. However, WRF who have transitioned do

experience “sex-class oppression,” the everyday oppression visited on all women by the patriarchy, related in fully transitioned transsexual women to their female or more precisely neofemale sexed embodiment. Both a transsexual woman’s sex (physical embodiment) and gender (social position) are involved in this sex-class oppression — as is also true for natal women or WBF, of course.

Some lesbian feminist communities place a main focus on sex-caste oppression, and draw a WBF-only boundary on their membership or participation in events. Others, while recognizing how sex-caste oppression uniquely affects natal women or WBF, place an emphasis on “sex-class solidarity” and welcome natal and transsexual women (WBF and WRF).

In a truly “inclusive” feminist movement, there is room for both approaches, WBF-only and “WBF and WRF together,” with autonomous choice and boundary-drawing by each group or event, and mutual recognition and respect among groups with different positions.

Similarly, some lesbian groups define a lesbian simply as a woman, WBF or WRF, who loves and has a primary affectional orientation and commitment to women. Other lesbian groups hold that only natal women or WBF can truly be lesbian, having shared the sex-caste experience under patriarchy of surviving girlhood. There is room for both views, and a need for mutual recognition and respect of boundaries. The practical reality is that, as Joreen (Jo Freeman) wrote in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, Women’s Liberation groups are often “friendship networks” where free association prevails.

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#### 4. The TERF slur and terfing: Exclusion in the name of “inclusion”

The expression “Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist” or TERF seems to have originated in 2008 in discussions of feminist theory, without any intent to be insulting, but rather simply to distinguish between different radical feminist positions on transsexualism and related sex/gender issues. Yet even at this stage, the Australian feminist writer TigTog (Viv Smythe) and others who evidently invented the term, with some of the first uses dated to August 2008, did so from an adversarial position. Thus in a blog entry on August 19 of that year, TigTog speaks of herself as “initially regarding the TERF position as simply a regrettably prejudiced yet rationally divergent opinion,” but now sees it as also involving “callousness” as well as using “logically inconsistent” arguments.[\[3\]](#)

However, over the next few years, two key factors made a term with neutral intentions of clarifying feminist positions into a slur and indeed often a weapon of dehumanization and incitement to violence. First, feminists favoring WBF-only communities, or taken rightly or wrongly to do so, did not accept the “TERF” label, perhaps not so surprisingly since they quite correctly perceived it as a term coined by their adversaries, even if not in the beginning meant to be disrespectful. Secondly, at least by 2012 or so, as this originally Australian term became more familiar in the UK and USA, those “terfing” these women made it increasingly clear that their intent was often not to distinguish between approaches to radical feminism in a benign or neutral way, but to wound and insult. Thus in a discussion on different forms of radical feminism, one commenter writes on August 27, 2012, “TERF (Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist) is a term that I’ve seen used for those people quite frequently.” Another commenter

replies that same day: “Hey, I like it! Sounds kinda negative. It’s important for an insult to sound like an insult. TERF indeed.”[\[4\]](#)

During the last several years, terfing of women has become, like the patriarchal witchhunts that reached their height in 15th-17th century Europe (not the “Dark Ages,” but the celebrated High Renaissance and earlier phases of the so-called Enlightenment!), or the McCarthyist witch hunts in the USA during the 1950’s, an indiscriminate weapon where any feminist may become “fair game.” Simply defending the right of WBF-only women’s or lesbian spaces to exist, or disagreeing with some tenet of current “queer theory” or “transactivist theory,” makes a WBF or WRF feminist a possible target.

For example, Caroline Criado-Perez, a leading radical feminist in the UK, wrote an article in 2014 critical of the “cis/trans” binary that is a feature of recent queer and transactivist theory. Despite the fact that Criado-Perez has also written about the valuable role that trans women play in feminism, she was terfed on Twitter, receiving immense hostility — after having earlier been harassed and threatened for her many efforts to advance the status of women, by a male antifeminist who was successfully prosecuted.[\[5\]](#)

Not only is terfing a form of disrespect or even violence against women who are our sisters, whatever our disagreements; it interferes with honest and open dialogue about sex/gender issues among feminists based on mutual respect and the willingness to engage in radical listening to each other.

A truly inclusive feminist, or more specifically lesbian feminist, movement must allow room for differences without insults, dehumanizing rhetoric, or bullying and threats of violence. We urge all lesbian feminists,

WBF and WRF alike, to join us in reaffirming our commitment to mutual recognition and open dialogue.

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## 5. The Degenderettes art show and anti-woman violent culture

We decry the weaponized and misogynist aspects of the Degenderettes art show exhibited this last March-April at the San Francisco Public Library. The disturbing violent aspects seem related to a movement calling itself Antifa (i.e. “anti-fascist”) which in the name of “progressive” values seeks to “punch” and otherwise launch physical assaults against people deemed to be “fascist,” “reactionary,” or otherwise undesirable.

One of the items displayed as part of this art show was a shirt (apparently) soaked in blood with the motto “I Punch TERFS.” In past decades, feminists have often protested images of violence against women in pornography and the media, such as the notorious cover of *Hustler* magazine showing a woman being run through a meat grinder. This t-shirt was removed from the exhibit only after determined protests, especially from feminist women.

It is not hard to draw a connection between that bloody shirt and the actual violence, accompanied by cries of “TERF,” against ten or so older lesbians at the Dyke March.

Also, the Degenderettes art show included an image with the text: “Let TERFS wither cold and alone.” These words suggest the usual misogynist image of lesbians as dysfunctional spinsters whose failure to fit into patriarchal expectations of heterosexual marriage dooms them to ending up “withering cold and alone.” A printed commentary accompanying this illustration explains that it expresses the hope that feminist women whose

opinions supposedly warrant terfing will be abandoned by partners and friends, a fantasy more worthy of the patriarchy than of women seeking sisterly and respectful dialogue.

In critiquing the terfing of women and display of weapons at the art show, we should emphasize that the Degenderettes is a group also standing for some positive things, including accessibility of places and events for people with disabilities, and much political militancy and humor in the agitprop tradition of groups from the San Francisco Mime Troup to AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power (ACT-UP). The problem with the Degenderettes is not the passionate and dedicated activism of its members, but the way that this activism is at times misdirected when it mimics Antifa in opposing “fascism” by enacting Antifa’s acceptance and even celebration of violence; and more specifically by making terfed women the target of violent rhetoric and images.

While the Degenderettes is a group with a variety of members, oriented generally to “queer” and “transactivist” culture, it appears that many identify specifically as “Trans Dykes.” They terf not only WBFs not inclined to include people not born or surgically reassigned female, but any woman skeptical of any point of transgender theory. In other words, they state their claims and brook no dissent. This begs the question of how anyone who seeks to be recognized and accepted as a woman among women — lesbian or otherwise — could use patriarchal rhetoric and images of misogyny (e.g. older terfed women “wither[ing] cold and alone”) and violence against women. Further, we question, with alarm, how establishment LGBT rights groups can remain silent in the face of rhetorical and physical attacks against WBF and WRF lesbians, or even side with transactivists against lesbians’ rights to physical and sexual privacy and autonomy.

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## 6. The San Francisco Dyke March and physical violence against women

Max Dashu's eyewitness account as an independent observer of what happened at the Dyke March clarifies that the ten or so lesbian elders who were attacked, who were there through invitations from friends rather than as an organized group, at no point themselves initiated violence. Rather some carried signs that expressed their positions on certain community issues, such as "Lesbian Not Queer." Max adds that in her view some of the signs were "confrontational," and that she had urged the use of greater discretion for this setting. A possible example would be a sign reading "Change Our Society, Not Your Body." Yet more provocative may have been a sign raising the issue of puberty blockers given to young people who are or may be trans, and including a statement: "Transitioning Children is Child Abuse." Such a sign might well prove offensive to young lesbian-identified transsexual women and their parents. We urge that the appropriate response to signs from our sisters that may appear offensive is friendly and respectful dialogue, not disrespect, and above all not violence.

In reaction, however, they faced a mob directing at them chants of "TERFS GO HOME!" — sometimes amplified by bullhorns. Members of this crowd then started grabbing their signs. As a result, some of these older lesbians were thrown or tripped to the ground; some resisted in self-defense, assisted by Max when she saw what was happening. There was no security presence to deescalate the incident, although one woman on the scene wearing a National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) cap attempted to use a cane in order to induce participants to move away from the lesbians being attacked so that they could proceed in safety. It was only after completing all but the last block of the Dyke March that some of these

older lesbians sought and received police protection in leaving the event without further attacks on them.

First-hand accounts by older women who were the target of this attack rightly emphasize the elements of fear, disrespect, and intimidation experienced in being mobbed by a surrounding crowd of an estimated 60 to 70 people. Members of this crowd used bullhorns at very close quarters to shout at the women, effectively using amplified sound as an acoustical weapon which served as a prelude to the direct physical assault which followed. This was not reasoned disagreement, but a frightening and frightful show of disrespect and even hatred toward a group of older women presenting no threat to anyone.

We emphasize that it is not merely unsisterly to direct violence against other women who share the oppression of patriarchy, but fundamentally opposed to human as well as specifically feminist values, particularly at an historic event that has celebrated lesbians for decades. Sadly, the San Francisco Dyke March has not been the only instance where either unreasonable restrictions on lesbian self-identification or even outright violence has occurred within the women's community, sometimes in the name of feminism.

Thus at the 2018 Vancouver Dyke March (August 4), at least one woman was informed that she must not wear the double Venus or double female symbol, a cherished emblem of lesbianism through the decades for lesbians who are natal or transsexual women alike. A possible explanation for this curious prohibition of a traditional Second Wave lesbian symbol at a Dyke March may be the idea that any association of womanhood with female anatomy is somehow "anti-trans." We must differ: the right of lesbians, whether natal women whose bodies have been demeaned and degraded by the patriarchy for our entire lives, or transsexual women who

have gone through medical transition and now affirm our bodies and lesbian orientation, to celebrate our anatomy and sexuality is basic to our identity and politics.

More generally, there is room in feminism for diversity without destructive conflict. Through the decades, sisters in Women's Liberation and lesbian feminism have celebrated a variety of symbols and emblems from the double-Venus to the three-armed modern version of the signs of Venus and Mars to the Amazon labrys and clenched fists of different colors.

The tradition of the Dyke March began as a response to generic LGBTQ (lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer — with Q sometimes also standing for Questioning) Pride events which underrepresented women in general and lesbian feminist culture in particular. A commitment to include both natal and transsexual women who are lesbians is widespread at Dyke Marches, and illustrates the right of lesbian events to set their own boundaries. However, the kind of "inclusiveness" that promotes or at least fails to counter the violence against older lesbians that took place at the San Francisco Dyke March, or excludes famous lesbian symbols such as the double Venus emblem because they allude to female bodies, is actually a form of exclusion, not sisterly inclusion.[\[6\]](#)

An incident which, like that at the San Francisco Dyke March, involved physical violence, took place in the UK at Speakers' Corner in London on September 13, 2017. Maria MacLachlan, who styles herself "simply an old-school feminist," was 60 years old and part of a peaceful group of women and a few men who were planning to attend a meeting on "gender critical" feminist perspectives when they were confronted with a group of young people. One of these, later identified as Tara Wolf, grabbed her camera and punched her in the face, an assault for which Wolf was later convicted and fined. After Tara Wolf's trial, a group of women were

confronted and menaced by a group of which Wolf was a member, called “Class War.” It is also reported that after her conviction for “assault by beating,” more familiarly known as battery, Tara Wolf changed her Facebook name to “Tara The TERF Slayer.”

As the violence at the San Francisco Dyke March was preceded by the violent rhetoric of the Degenderettes, so Tara Wolf had announced her desire to beat up “TERFs” before her violent encounter with the peaceful Maria MacLachlin. A special source of concern is the fact that after the assault had been documented, at least one LGBTQ activist in a position of power successfully used social media and personal calls to urge that this act of violence against her *not* be condemned by Stonewall or other LGBTQ organizations in the UK. To the contrary, we hold that violence against women as a way of resolving differences of sex/gender politics, and likewise the equation of terfed women with “fascists,” are against feminist and humanist values. While those involved in the terfing of women may justify their rhetorical and even physical violence as “progressive” or “antifascist,” it involves in essence the same form of dehumanizing misogyny which, in connection with racism, leads to acts of savage and often deadly violence against Women of Color, including Trans Women of Color. We are opposed to violence against women, and the rhetoric that promotes it.

These incidents should bring home to all feminists that terfing is speech that leads to dehumanization and violence — here, violence against women in their sixties, some with disabilities. As natal and transsexual women, we revere these elder sisters of our own Second Wave generation, and decry the violence directed against them in the name of “inclusivity.” We call for an inclusive feminism that rejects violence and embraces differences.

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## 7. Max Dashu: No-platforming versus an open community

We affirm that our sister Max Dashu's struggle against terfing, no-platforming, and the use of guilt by association is also our struggle as lesbian feminists of the Second Wave.

We note that the Modern Witches Confluence (MWC) wisely decided to reconsider its decision to no-platform her — that is, to deny her a platform where she can express her views and participate in public discourse — and join many other lesbians who affirmed that it must renew her invitation to speak, and thus set a precedent in favor of frank and honest dialogue among sisters that will benefit us all. Sadly, these developments did not result in her reinstatement in the program for the event, which took place on October 28, 2018.

We join Max in decrying the kind of campaign that resulted in her no-platforming: the citing of actual or often imagined past writings, and of alleged ties with this or that activist or group, as a tactic for silencing an eloquent and outspoken woman's voice. If her right of speaking freely is in jeopardy, none of us in the lesbian community is secure in this right.

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## 8. Sexual noncoercion and enthusiastic consent versus rape culture

In any lesbian feminist community, the sexual ethic of noncoercion and enthusiastic consent must be paramount. That is, the only reason for women to have sex with each other is mutually enthusiastic desire and free

consent. Rape culture, sadly, is not only pervasive in the larger society, but can appear within lesbian communities also. Woman-on-woman sexual harassment, outright sexual assault, and domestic violence are tragic realities.

This should go without saying, but we feel a need to emphasize that no lesbian has either a right or an obligation to have sex with any other lesbian!

Why are we stating such an obvious fact?

The reason is because of certain trends in “transactivism,” in which women who choose not to consider or have sex with self-identified “transactivists” are called “transphobes” or terfed. Such conduct is a form of patriarchal rape culture. The simple feminist rule is this: “No means no — no explanations needed.”

Woman-on-woman boundary violations can be committed by and against natal and transsexual women, WBF and WRF, alike. A problem in recent years have been the claim of a few “transactivists” who have not or do not intend to have Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) that it is somehow “transphobic” for lesbian women to prefer to have sex only with people who have vulvas. We reply that each woman has absolute sovereignty over her body and her decision to have or not to have sex with anyone or everyone. This same sovereignty applies to women who choose to have only natal women or WBF as partners.

Within the lesbian community, women have been engaging in various consensual dialogues about body image and sexuality as they relate to matters of race, colorism, fat, intersex variations, disability, transsexual history, etc. However, such dialogues need not and must not bring into play the rape-culture logic: “Have sex with me, or else you’re a bigot.” Such false logic not only violates women’s personal boundaries, but endangers

the health of the women's community and feminist movement. When unreciprocated attractions occur, lesbians must be able to say and accept "No" and continue as sisters and friends in ongoing community. Those unable to do this are contributing to cultural misogyny.

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## 9. Mutual recognition and respectful language

Different feminist groups, as we have noted, may have different concepts of "woman," "female," and "lesbian." A truly inclusive Women's Liberation movement requires mutual respect in sometimes "agreeing to disagree."

Thus terfing must absolutely be avoided if we are to have any kind of open dialogue: WBF-only women's and lesbian communities deserve respect from natal and transsexual women with a different view. Also, some lesbian women enthusiastically participate in *both* WBF-only and WBF-and-WRF groups and events, and their choices too must be respected, wherever they are welcomed.

Clearly identifying an event as WBF-only — or as "women only" or "female only" with a definition of who is deemed to be a woman or female — promotes this mutual recognition and respect. Simply using the term "women-only" or "female-only," without a definition, can promote misunderstandings.

Likewise, groups or events intended for both WBF and WRF participants should make this explicit, as some women may read "woman-only" or "female-only" to mean WBF-only unless these terms are defined.

We also strongly urge that while women's and lesbian groups have every right to embrace and apply whatever definitions they wish on these issues, certain language guidelines can serve to promote mutual respect.

Whether or not transsexual women or WRF are deemed women, (neo)females, or lesbians in a given feminist group, we ask that they not be referred to as “men” or “males.” Terms such as “ex-males” or “male-socialized” express much the same point without seeming to erase a person’s current sexed embodiment or social status. We emphasize that the term *transsexual* continues in use in the 21st century not only because many transsexual women have used it for four decades and more, but because it affirms the importance of embodied *sex* as well as gender status in shaping the identity and affinity of women, WBF and WRF alike.

Also, groups which do welcome WBF and WRF alike sometimes describe themselves as “inclusive” — but women favoring WBF-only groups can take this to imply that they themselves are “exclusionary,” a theme of terfing. We might better speak of “mixed” or “motley” women’s and lesbian groups, terms which define one option in setting boundaries, rather than a monopoly on the moral virtue of “inclusion.”

We emphasize above all else, however, that language which seems less than ideal is not a reason for terfing, no-platforming, threats — and *never* acts of violence against women. We affirm that threats and acts of violence among and against our sisters are not a part of women’s culture.

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## 10. Beyond “Lesbian Not Queer” — and Transsexual Versus Transgender

Women Reassigned Female (WRF/transsexual women), especially those who are feminist, feel and act on sex-class solidarity with their natal female or WBF sisters. Some of these sisters may be emphatically separatist, wishing the exclusion of WRF feminists from their women’s and lesbian communities. They may not condone or participate in any plan to

create and defend WBF women's spaces in which WRF feminists are taking part. They may not even consider negotiating spaces where WBF and WRF can operate in harmony. Nevertheless, there is a gulf between the situation of both WBF and WRF, and the situation of transactivists for whom feminism is at best a secondary value, given the very different outlooks, life experiences, and politics of these groups. **Thus WRF lesbians have every reason to ally with their WBF sisters in the face of anti-lesbian transactivism.** Indeed, transsexual lesbian feminists really do hold to this alliance of some four decades when push comes to shove.

One very basic reason is that **WRF who have successfully transitioned both physically and in terms of resocialization share the concerns of WBF about bodily privacy and sexual boundaries**, because they come with living as female in our society. Transactivists who do not respect the lesbian culture of noncoercion and enthusiastic consent (see Section 8) exempt neither WBF nor WRF from pressures to socialize as female peers, date, and/or have sex with them. Such transactivists have terfed WBF and WRF (some of whom transitioned decades ago) alike for standing up for women's boundaries.

Both WBF and WRF who are lesbians face a push to turn us into generic "LGBTQ people" whose community and culture, rather than being founded on our unique lesbian and woman-identified heritage, are dissolved into a vague (and usually male-defined) "LGBTQ" or "Queer" culture. Problems occur especially when the right of lesbian women to draw our own boundaries on sexual relationships, to have vulva-only or WBF-only preferences, are questioned. To subjugate our lesbian culture and fail to respect our bodily autonomy is the essence of lesbian erasure, as it affects WBF and WRF alike.

From the 1970's to the present, this commitment to lesbian autonomy has taken different forms, one of them being lesbian separatism, where lesbian women seek to form distinct and independent communities, with each community defining its own boundaries. Some lesbian separatist communities, seeking what they see as maximal independence from the patriarchy and male culture, have defined these boundaries in WBF-only terms, including only women who have lived their entire lives as female. However, some lesbian separatist communities have accepted transsexual women as members; and some transsexual as well as natal women have embraced this separatist commitment. We resist lesbian erasure by affirming the right to separatism as part of our heritage of lesbian autonomy, including WBF-only groups and communities for those lesbians who choose them.

Another aspect of lesbian and female erasure is the refusal of some transactivists to understand the nature of women's oppression. The situation of a WBF feminist who has lived under sex-caste oppression for her entire life, or of a WRF feminist who has experienced sex-class oppression for a good part of her life, is equated with that of a transactivist who retains male privilege in everyday life and sometimes cross dresses or takes part in other cross-gender expression. This leads to the idea that self-identification alone makes one a woman — as opposed to either one's body or one's everyday social condition as a woman. Claims to access female facilities such as spas or changing rooms where nudity is expected, based on self-identification alone or before surgery, are problematic for many women, WBF and WRF alike.

Certain transactivists and allies have promoted female erasure by objecting to vulva cupcakes and celebrations; an event for women's reproductive rights entitled Night of a Thousand Vaginas; and other affirma-

tions of women's bodies and experiences that are shamed and degraded by the patriarchy, such as menstruation and childbirth.

To WBF feminists, these events are an opportunity to shake off lifelong external oppression and internalized misogyny. To WRF feminists, who have acted out of a deep-seated need to share this embodied female reality through what might appear extreme measures (hormones and surgery), such events — even those intended for WBF only, a boundary to be respected — are a treasured affirmation of what they now share in good part (although not menstruation and childbearing, for example) with their WBF sisters. To seek an end to such events and celebrations is an act at once of female erasure and lesbian erasure.

Shockingly, in 2018, transactivists succeeded, after a long effort, to frighten off the Red Tent Temple from participation in Pantheacon, an annual Neopagan gathering first organized in the late 1970s.<sup>[7]</sup> The Red Tent Temple movement is a nine-year-old tradition of creating space for women to decompress and center in female company one day a month, around the new moon.<sup>[8]</sup> This is a practice connected with female spirituality's prehistoric roots, without the rediscovery of which there would be no Neopaganism and certainly no Pantheacon. In their Facebook statement (see note 7), the Red Tent Lost Forest Lodge stated, "with great sadness" and "thoughtful reflection," the "difficult decision" to withdraw because "it has come to our attention that there are some community members who are 'irate' and thoroughly 'outraged' at the very idea of a Red Tent and that our safety, privacy, and sovereignty would be at 'high alert' level risk." This state of affairs has shocked even some heterosexual Pagan men into discontinuing their attendance at Pantheacon. It comes, along with yet another deplatforming of Max Dashu (a perfect presenter for Pantheacon), despite Pantheacon 2019's statement that "This year we especially want to

**emphasize** that PantheaCon is a **Safe Space** for all. We tolerate no harassment of anyone by others. This is called Pax Templi where differences of opinion are set aside for the duration of the Sacred Space”(emphasis in original; irony readily inferrable).

Yet another facet of female and lesbian erasure, highlighted by Max Dashu, is the replacement of Women’s Studies in much of academia by Gender Studies, as if the latter could be a substitute for the former, as opposed to a possible complement or alternative perspective (as with chemistry and physics, which may look at some of the same phenomena in different ways). Unfortunately, the loss of Women’s Studies departments has tended to deprive dedicated WBF feminists of careers, with “Queer Studies” or “Trans Studies” displacing them. Lesbian feminists, WBF and WRF, affirm the centrality of women’s herstory and women’s culture.

Positively, we affirm the celebration of natal female and transsexual female bodies as a vital and liberating ongoing tradition of Second Wave feminism. We emphasize that this tradition includes a celebration of the bodies of intersex women, whether deemed female at birth or deemed male at birth and later transitioning to female. Further, we urge that the Second Wave tradition is also relevant to the celebration of other kinds of trans or nonbinary bodies and communities, with the moving memoir of Hida Vilorio, *Born Both: An Intersex Life*, as a powerful statement.

For the lesbian feminist community, “inclusion” has two sides, one of them too often neglected. The first side, better known, is recognizing that the lesbian community as a whole includes both WBF and WRF feminists alike — and also includes a myriad of lesbian groups and spaces with a right to draw their own boundaries (e.g. WBF-only) without being branded “exclusionary” or “TERF.”

The other side of inclusion is that lesbian women have a right to have our community's character and culture respected, not erased, and likewise our personal boundaries. Erasure is the ultimate form of exclusion. This is why lesbian feminists, WBF and WRF, are determined as women-identified women to resist this erasure, **however delicate the politics involved within our community and regardless of the fears some of us may have of becoming collateral damage as we maintain resistance together.**

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## 11. Conclusion

As Second Wave lesbian feminists, we express unity with our sisters who are being terfed; targeted for no-platforming, like Max Dashu and many other feminists working on issues such as sex trafficking and racial stereotyping;<sup>[9]</sup> degraded and subjected to violent words and images like those of the recent Degenderettes art show; and sometimes physically attacked, like the older lesbians at the San Francisco Dyke March.

In opposing this trend of misogyny and violence against women, we also hope to demonstrate by example how natal and transsexual women, WBF and WRF, can stand together as sisters in the struggle for Women's Liberation and a flourishing lesbian feminist community and culture. In such a culture, differences lead to open dialogue, and boundaries are respected.

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## 12. Acknowledgements

As authors of this statement, we would like to thank our sisters who have shared ideas, criticisms, and many valuable contributions. Barbara Ruth offered very extensive and creative feedback and additions reflecting her many decades of activism, making

this a better document, although the responsibility for any remaining flaws and imperfections belongs to us. Joan Annsfire wrote a powerful eyewitness account of the violence at the 2018 San Francisco Dyke March (see Section 6 above), helping to bring about this statement as one response, and seeking since to bring about constructive feminist community dialogue on the issues raised by this and related incidents. Sherri Golden's own description of the events of the march, including violent treatment of a disabled woman, informs that report. Esther Newton, another Second Wave activist and also a Professor Emerita of Women's Studies, in related discussions shared some of her wisdom growing out of a knowledge of lesbian feminism and the lesbian community that is the basis for her book *My Butch Career: A Memoir*. We additionally thank many others who participated in dialogues growing out of the San Francisco Dyke March and Max Dashu no-platforming incidents, and who share our purpose of constructive peacemaking, truth, and reconciliation within the women's and lesbian communities.

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### 13. The Naomi Circle (Who we are)

Kes Sparhawk Amesley grew up somewhere between poor and working class, and organized her first protest at the age of five. In her teens and 20s, she was involved in campus issues, including defining a student women's commission as a radical feminist resource, being elected student body president, and serving as board member and president of the U-YWCA. She has four advanced degrees, including a PhD in cultural studies and an MFA from the Iowa Writers Workshop. As a professor, while teaching classes in public address, rhetorical studies, and public speaking, she and a colleague proposed what became a Women Studies department at Drake University. She has also taught courses in rhetoric, ESL, and English. She specializes in the history of the Second Wave and other social movements, and defines "woman" as either born female and raised as such, or acquiring the experience of being subordinated through cultural expectations for women; ie non-essentialist patriarchal policing.

Amesley has also worked with survivors of sexual and domestic violence. She is a trained facilitator and organizer, helping neighbors get drug sellers out of their manufactured housing parks, and protecting tenant rights. She was born female, and sees the oppression of women in the West rapidly increasing in a world where she

assumed it would decrease. She is dedicated to building a theoretical bridge between radical/lesbian feminism and socialist theory. She has never had any aloha for postmodernism. Her theoretical work has mostly focused on class, race, gender, and marginalization.

Beth Elliott is a published author and an independent recording artist whose lesbian activism began with the 1970s. She was a local chapter officer of the Daughters of Bilitis and a Shirley Chisholm alternate delegate in the 1972 California Democratic primary. She was driven out of DOB and the movement by a coterie of radical dyke feminists attempting to impose their standards on all lesbian groups, most infamously through a false accusation public denunciation at the West Coast Lesbian Conference (of which she had been an organizer) in April 1973. (This is chronicled in "Fear and Loathing in Westwood," an appendix to the 2011 edition of her biography *Mirrors: Portrait of a Lesbian Transsexual*.) She won health insurance coverage for her SRS at Stanford in an arbitration hearing whose finding was that the surgery was medically necessary and not a cosmetic procedure. In the early 1990s, writing for *TransSisters: A Journal of Transsexual Feminism* under the pen name Mustang Sally, she was an early critic of the emerging transgender political correctness. She later joined in an open letter to Son of Camp Trans opposing its adversarial stance to the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (though still blacklisted from performing there herself). In 2006 she drafted an amicus brief for the beloved women's Japanese-style bath Osento when transactivists threatened a complaint to the San Francisco Human Rights Commission to gain access (and therefore go naked) on the basis of gender identity alone. In 2011, she wrote a rebuttal to the Brennan-Hungerford petition to the UN to ban trans anti-discrimination legislation that promoted a hostile environment sexual harassment defense for women's facilities privacy, only to see later legislation and the like specifically breach that protection. She retired from her day job as a paralegal in 2018 and is the beloved eccentric aunt of a long-time California family.

Margo Schulter is a lesbian feminist of the Second Wave with transsexual history who was born in Los Angeles. In 1974-1975, she was active in Boston, taking part in the group Lesbian Science Fiction Liberation Theater, and writing as a member of a thriving lesbian feminist community within the larger community of *Gay Community News* (GCN). Returning to California in 1976, she took part in San Francisco politics, lesbian and otherwise, and then moved to Sacramento in 1984 where she has continued with

more of the same. She is also interested in the music and tuning systems of medieval and Renaissance Europe, and of the Near East.

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## Notes

- [1.](#) Feminist scholar Max Dashu has proposed that the word “terf” (or “TERF”) be used only as a verb, to describe the act of labelling or branding someone as a “terf.”
- [2.](#) One contributor to this statement would prefer a term other than “reassigned,” which suggests a change in sex/gender status that happens to a person rather than is brought about by that person as an exercise in autonomy and self-determination. However, like naturalization, sex reassignment for a transsexual woman is indeed a social process with consequences not entirely under her control, as is also true for the experience of living as a natal woman. It may be that there are better terms, and we leave this question open.
- [3.](#) See TigTog (Viv Smythe), “[An apology and a promise](#),” (August 19, 2008) *Finally, A Feminism 101 Blog*,
- [4.](#) Comments to Heather (Heather McNamara), “[In a radical feminist world, there is no transphobia](#)” (August 24, 2012). See comment of Lena (August 27, 2012 at 11:48 AM); and comment of Great American Satan (August 27, 2012 at 2:29 PM).
- [5.](#) Thus see Caroline Criado-Perez, “[What Does Being ‘Cis’ Mean For A Woman](#),” (August 1, 2014), and “[Becoming a Woman: Trans Women and Male Violence](#)” (January 28, 2015).
- [6.](#) We emphasize, based on experience in participating in, organizing, and providing security for events, that organizers of such events have a positive responsibility to prepare for possible incidents or disruptions by training in nonviolent methods of de-escalation and conflict management. Part of this training, especially for monitors or others at the event committed to peacekeeping responsibilities, is how to cope

nonviolently even with outright counterdemonstrators who come as adversaries to the main purpose of an event, as well as with differences among those who are attending the event to support that purpose (here, the celebration of lesbian identity and culture). The lack of such preparation, training, and affirmative nonviolent peacekeeping presence at the Dyke March contributed to what became menacing and indeed dangerous acts of aggression and outright violence against older lesbians who posed no threat to anyone. There can also be an element of ageism in operation, since terfing is often targeted at older feminists, and specifically those perceived as having Second Wave roots. Again, we hold organizers responsible for violent attacks.

7. See their statement, accessible on Facebook as of late November 2018: <https://www.facebook.com/notes/the-red-tent-lost-forest-lodge/red-tent-pantheacon-2018/1993757523974547/>.

8. <http://redtenttemplemovement.com>.

9. For example, feminist Nina Paley was no-platformed in July 2018 by the Arcadia cafe in Urbana, Illinois, which in its own words “**has made the decision to cancel the Art Salon with Nina Paley event.**” As Arcadia explained, “We do this not to silence Nina’s art or her artistic voice but because this event is no longer about Nina’s art. There are many divided opinions regarded the topics that have arisen from Nina’s personal stances on certain issues. Our small business is not in a position to hold the forum for such a debate over these issues.” It is easy to imagine basically the same language being used to justify the practice of blacklisting (another variation on no-platforming) during the McCarthy Era in the USA. We hold as feminists and champions of free speech that the public interest is best served by providing forums where we can experience Nina Paley’s art, even at the risk of delving into some of her political stances and possibly arriving at a more well-informed view. Note also how the no-platforming of her art show merely because of her political opinions compares with the Degenderettes art show (see Section 5), with its weapons and violent rhetoric against terfed women.