What We Want

Women’s lives, ideas, desires, and dreams no less important than men’s. We are fed up with working twice as hard to get half as much. Men disregard what we say, don’t treat us as serious intellectual partners and take credit for our ideas. We are called bitchy or too aggressive when we speak up, passive and weak when we don’t. We are not willing to take a back seat while the men in our lives—at home and at work—take center stage.

We want men to do a fair share of the housework, raising children, and the work of maintaining and cultivating relationships—at least half of it. We do not want to be the only ones expected to “balance” work and family. Men must make sacrifices and weigh life and family decisions as heavily as women do. Men need to step up to the plate as our full partners in all the tasks of daily life, the emotional work of family and friendships, as well as the big projects, special occasions, holidays, and crises. Women are overworked. Men need to fully shoulder their share of the load.

We want time for work, family, and ourselves. In order for women to move closer to the feminist dream of time for work, family, and community, the whole society—including employers and individual men—must help pay for and do the work of bringing up children. The generations coming up keep our society running. It is unjust for the labor of raising children to be borne by women alone. For women to move closer to liberation, we not only need individual men to pull their weight at home, we need the whole society to pull its weight. We want high quality education from birth on, national health care, a shorter work week, paid parental leave (for women and men) and vacation and sick time guaranteed by law for all.

We want to be loved and respected for who we are as people. We are enraged when we see that a woman’s weight, clothes, age and hairstyle are more important than her ideas, words, or accomplishments. Women are sexual beings, but sex isn’t all we are. It shouldn’t matter if we have a few wrinkles or a few extra pounds. We don’t want to crash diet, bleach, straighten/relax, shave, pluck, and wear make-up to get attention and affection from men—or even to be thought fit to be seen in public. On the other hand, we don’t want to be ridiculed, judged or told we are stupid or vain when we do alter our appearance. We want an end to the contempt for women’s true selves.

We want full control over the decision to have children. We want free and full access to all forms of birth control, including contraception and abortion. We want to make these decisions without pressure to have children, to go on Depo-Provera, to take hormones, or to get sterilized. We want men to do their share of pregnancy prevention and disease prevention by wearing a condom without being asked, paying for birth control and/or getting a vasectomy. We want doctors to ask men, not just us, what they
are using for birth control.

We want to build upon the victories of the women’s liberation movement of the sixties. Feminism has won important footholds and significant gains for women in crucial areas of our lives, but the need for this fight continues. Strengthened by what we have learned in battles won and lost, we are ready for another assault on male supremacy.

What We Believe

We believe that everyday people make change—not the government, the courts, the media, or celebrities. We believe that the freedom women have now was won by movements of women, organizing and fighting for change. We aim to build a grassroots movement of women to bring new fire to the fight for our liberation.

We are Pro-Woman feminists

Women are screwed over, not screwed up. This simple idea is a key part of the Pro-Woman line, a cornerstone of what we consider the most useful women’s liberation theory. The Pro-Woman line explains so many of the contradictions among women, and also points toward the necessity of a collective solution.

We don't believe that women are brainwashed or conditioned, or that we oppress ourselves. Rather, we do what we have to do to get by in a world that is still run by and dominated by men. Wearing make up, acting flirty, even getting plastic surgery or botox—all are the result of our oppression, and a way of coping with it, not the cause. We don't put on make-up because we feel compelled to due to advertising, but rather because we are treated better when we do. We get compliments and attention—and when we don't wear make-up people tell us we look tired or sick. Beauty magazines don’t brainwash us into dieting, dressing up, or making up—rather, they are how-to manuals on getting by, getting love and getting jobs under male supremacy.

The other side to the Pro-Woman line is that despite everything, women are always fighting back and resisting in some area of their lives. We don’t mindlessly submit to the demands of male supremacy. We women fight back all the time—just not on everything, and often not together in a coordinated, organized way. Gainesville Women's Liberation co-founder Carol Giardina said in 1989, "If you know that we are a sex that fights for our freedom, then you already understand the Pro-Woman Line. Now do we fight for it just in a movement, or were you fighting for it before you even heard of [a movement]? Do you fight for it in the street, in your bedroom, in your classroom? When you take a deep breath and say the thing in class or to your boyfriend that you just can't help yourself from saying. You try to shut it up but out it comes. This isn't really just women, it's all oppressed people who can't stop themselves from fighting back. We call it the Pro-Woman Line because we discovered it about women and developed it in the Women's Liberation Movement."

All things being equal, it probably DOES pay to fight back, even as an individual woman.
Thanks to the feminists who came before us, we can often get away with wearing comfortable shoes and speaking our mind. Getting an education and earning your own money certainly gives you important leverage in relationships with men. We resist—we just don’t resist in the same ways. Fighting back isn’t the same as winning, though, and we can’t possibly fight as individuals on all fronts at all times. That’s why women must unite, and strategically fight together.

**We believe that women are an oppressed class.**
The problems in our lives are not simply our personal, individual troubles or hang-ups. On the contrary, they are all versions of problems we women have in common. They are caused because men as a group have more power than we do, and use it to their advantage at our expense.

The groundbreaking 1968 paper “Towards a Female Liberation Movement” put it this way: “There is something horribly repugnant in the picture of women performing the same menial chores all day, having almost interchangeable conversations with their children, engaging in standard television arguments with their husbands, and then in the late hours of the night, each agonizing over what is considered to be her personal lot, her personal relationship, her personal problem . . . And unmarried women cannot in all honesty say their lives are in much greater measure distinct from each other’s. We are a class, we are oppressed as a class, and we each respond within the limits allowed us as members of that oppressed class. Purposely divided from each other, each of us is ruled by one or more men for the benefit of all men. There is no personal escape, no personal salvation, no personal solution.”

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As different as our individual relationships with men may seem, our relationships all exist under male supremacy—and they are all poisoned by it.

**We believe that all men receive benefits from male supremacy.**
In 1969, feminist pioneer Judith Brown said: "We define male supremacy as behavior which benefits men at the expense of women; men get better pay, more freedom from menial or repetitive chores in the home, an unwarranted sense of personal worth, and deference from women in a hundred little ways each day." As Redstockings, the groundbreaking radical feminist group, said in its 1969 Manifesto, “Men have controlled all political, economic and cultural institutions. They have used their power to keep women in an inferior position. All men receive economic, sexual, and psychological benefits from male supremacy. All men have oppressed women.”

6 Though we have made a lot of progress, these things are still true.

Men as a class benefit from male privilege: getting paid more than us, being free from harassment when walking down the street, even getting an extra hour of sleep while we get up early with the kids or stay up into the night folding laundry. Even men we might think of as pro-feminist, or "good guys" do sexist things—not because they don't understand, or are inherently evil, but because they get something positive, some benefits or kickbacks from male supremacy. Men have an authority and legitimacy simply by
virtue of being male. They don’t do as much housework or childcare, or send out the thank you cards. They get promoted over us because they don’t ever have to leave early or miss work due to a sick child. Come Thanksgiving most men sit on the couch and watch football while the women clean up—after cooking all day. And we all know we don’t clean for fun. These are just some of the many benefits an individual man might get from male supremacy.

We also know that men use their power over us in both subtle and overt ways to keep us in line—from a smile and a compliment when we conform to the female dress code, to the threat of a beating or worse if we talk back or dare to walk down the street alone at night. Physical and sexual violence are the most extreme tactics in the arsenal of the male chauvinist. Even though most men don’t employ these methods, more than one of us has been told by a man not to complain about doing the housework—because after all, it’s not like we are being beaten.

We believe our oppression is real, not all in our heads, and we cannot escape it through individual acts. We can’t individually liberate ourselves through self-improvement of any sort, be it higher self-esteem, therapy, or any other type of individual self-improvement. If we want lasting changes in society, women have to get together to fight for political power.

Therapy and self help books might give us strategies to cope with the problems and pain male supremacy brings, but it won’t solve them or make them go away. The way men treat us, discrimination at work, the fact that we have to always remember the birth control—these are not our ‘personal’ problems, they are political problems.

Women fought hard for the right to an education and to earn money of our own, and we know how important these are for both our individual lives and our freedom struggle. But getting a degree or a professional job is no guarantee we still won’t end up doing the dishes every night, or that a man won’t get promoted over us on the job.

Finding the “right” partner isn’t the answer either. While some men are certainly better than others, we have yet to meet a man free of sexism. There is no perfect guy, no perfect job, and no perfect family. We could spend our lives looking for that perfect set-up, blaming ourselves when we still haven’t figured out how to “have it all.”

We believe that women are the experts on our own experiences. Much of what we need to know to win in our freedom struggle is in our own minds, our own experiences, and our own feelings. Science, research, history, are all important tools in our arsenal, but all must be checked against the truth and reality of our own lives.

We use consciousness-raising (CR) to compare and contrast our experiences, and draw conclusions to get closer to the truth of our condition. We can gain a clearer understanding of our lives as women by using our feelings and experience as data. As it was originally formulated, and as we use it, CR is not a way to develop listening skills or speaking skills; it’s not a way to give advice to women to solve their problems—if
individual solutions were that easy to come up with we wouldn’t need to organize politically. It’s not a way to get something off your chest, or to feel good in an all-woman space, though sometimes that’s an unintended result. The purpose of hearing women’s feelings and experiences is not to be therapeutic, but to be scientific in our analysis of our condition as women.

**We believe that women of color are critical to the success of the women's liberation movement.** Women of color were founders and pioneers in the 1960's Women's Liberation Movement. The African American-led Southern Civil Rights Movement of the U.S. was the "borning struggle" for Women's Liberation.7

We oppose racism. We believe women as a class will never be free as long as any part of our class is not free. We believe that gains which benefit white women, at the expense of women of color, or any willingness by one group of women to gain a temporary win at the expense of other women, does not advance, but only weakens women's liberation. Such so-called gains can be easily knocked down, and they divide rather than strengthen the movement for future struggles.

As stated by women of color in the Women of Color Caucus of National Women’s Liberation: Women of color are underrepresented and racism exists within the movement. As a result, ideas and issues important to women of color go unrecognized or are blatantly dismissed within majority white organizations. We believe that women of color must come together and meet separately from white women to develop theory on how white supremacy intersects with other forms of oppression and how best to address racism within the women's liberation movement. However, women of color also have common interests with white women—we all lack power and struggle against male supremacy in its various forms, from fighting against impossible beauty standards and who does the housework to struggling against restrictions on birth control and abortion. Therefore, we also work in solidarity with white women, where possible and desirable, to make effective change for all women.

**We believe that our economic system makes feminist struggle an uphill battle.** The work of women and men, paid and unpaid, creates all wealth. But our capitalist economic system is set up so that women, and all who work for a living, are not compensated for the full value of the work we do. Those who pocket the difference are able to accumulate vast reserves of wealth and power. With this wealth and power, a powerful few are able to control the means of livelihood of the vast majority of the population of our country. But it is our brain and muscle that make the society run.

For women, this system makes us dependent on our employers—and often on men and their employers—for wages, health care, pensions, and our very survival. Employers reinforce male supremacy by paying men more, and by providing benefits to male workers that female workers have less access to.
Our economic system depends on women's work bearing and raising children and our labor in the home. But nearly all of this work is unacknowledged. We need a system that compensates us fairly for all the work we do. We need a system which does not make us dependent on jobs or marriage. And we need the work to be shared fairly between men and women.

The concentration of power in our economic system translates into vast inequalities of power in our political system. To win lasting feminist victories, women need more democracy, and we need an economic system in which we always have the power to say "no" to men and employers. After a feminist revolution, no man will be able to use economic necessity to extract compliance from a woman—we will be truly independent.

**We believe that women need a grassroots, independent women's liberation movement led by and made up of women.**

Men will not give up their male privilege without a fight. In the 1960s, women started organizing independently of men, to fight for our freedom as women. “The need to meet separately was due to a political conflict at that point in social and political history. One could not organize against male power with men right in the room.”

Like the early radical feminists, our goal is not to form a separate culture or segregate ourselves. Our goal is to fight for equality with men. While progress has been made since the 60s, an all-woman movement for the liberation of women is still necessary—and will be until we have achieved the elimination of oppression based on sex.

On the other hand, we don’t believe women should form women-only groups to organize on issues that affect all of us as people, such as war, the environment, or workers’ rights. Men and women need to strategize and fight together, in the same organizations, on issues where we share a common stake and oppression. But women have the right to form all-women caucuses to fight against sexism in mixed groups, and to put forward our demands.

Men did not become less sexist and simply “give” women the right to vote or legalize birth control because of our individual abilities to reason with them or educate them or because they love women so much. Progressive change is made by movements of oppressed people fighting for our freedom. The story of women’s liberation is no different—through an independent movement of women organizing women, we have won victories as a movement that we could not have won individually. The inequalities that persist between women and men are political problems that require a political solution.

We believe that the problems between the sexes are not due to miscommunication or lack of understanding on the part of men. Instead it is the result of a power imbalance between women and men—a power imbalance which benefits men at the expense of women. Men won’t give up all the goodies, big and small, that come from male supremacy unless we as women join together and fight.

“By sharing our secret pains, we will know where to fight;
By sharing our secret dreams,  
We will plan what to fight for;  
By sharing our secret struggles and by joining these,  
We will know how to fight.”

--Judith Brown, 1971

1 We borrowed the formulation "What We Want, What We Believe" from the Ten-Point Program of the Black Panther Party (1966).
3 Carol Giardina, "Women's Studies or Women's Liberation Studies," 1989 Women's History Month speech at the University of Florida. Available from http://www.redstockings.org
4 Toward a Female Liberation Movement by Beverly Jones and Judith Brown, June 1968. Available from http://www.redstockings.org
7 Bernice Johnson Reagon in A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC, edited by Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, page 150.