



Emerald Graphic

Women must be allied, panel members agree

By **LESLIE FARRIS**
Of the Emerald

Women must become more women-identified if they are to regain the power long denied them.

That was the consensus of participants at a Wednesday Women's Symposium panel titled "Ma, Can I Be a Feminist and Still Like Men?"

"One thing that's happened to women because of our society's compulsory heterosexuality is that we see our relationships with men as a different caliber relationship than those with women," said Kap Richards, a feminist counselor. "We need to make long-term committed relationships with other women as we have with other men."

In her work as a counselor, Richards said she sees the oppressive nature of male-female relationships as a crucial problem, with women most frequently the victims. That oppression is built on a foundation of violence — whether actual, implied or historical, she said.

"While men are not oppressed as women are, they are stuck. Their rewards for being the oppressor are small," she said.

While many women attending the discussion agreed that there are men who would like to end women's oppression, most believed that few men are actively confronting sexism.

"Very few men are dealing with feminism as an important factor in their lives," said Jean Lorraine. "Some men will show support when they talk with me personally, but they won't put their asses on the line when in mixed company."

Men who want to support feminism should work with other men because that's where the work is needed, one audience member said.

Richards suggested that if women act as though they expect men to be their allies, maybe some men will live up to those expectations. She said most men were socialized not to respect women as equals, and most men will continue that disrespect. If women expect the worst from men, they may alienate potential allies, she said.

Another panel member, Rene Cobb, said the question, "Can you like men and still be a feminist?" mistakenly implies women's relationships with women are defined by women's relationships with men.

"It also implies the false myth that lesbians are man-haters," said Cobb, who is a lesbian.

One reason for the myth is that a lot of men have trouble accepting lesbians because lesbians do not act for men's approval, said an audience member.

Cobb said all feminists — heterosexual or lesbian — should work to end the "institution of compulsory heterosexuality" because it affects all women and reinforces male supremacy.

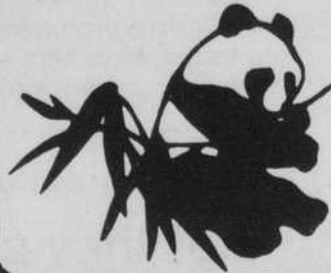
It's not enough to view lesbianism as merely a personal preference of sexuality, Cobb said. "Many feminists see heterosexuality as an economic relationship, but they fail to see the economic hardships of lesbians in a heterosexual society."

Panel member Marcia Kraus said non-lesbian and lesbian women should work together against society's oppressive institutions and not let relationships with men cloud the issues.

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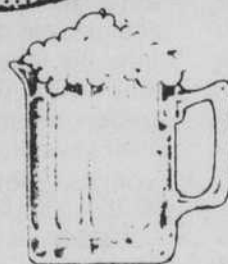
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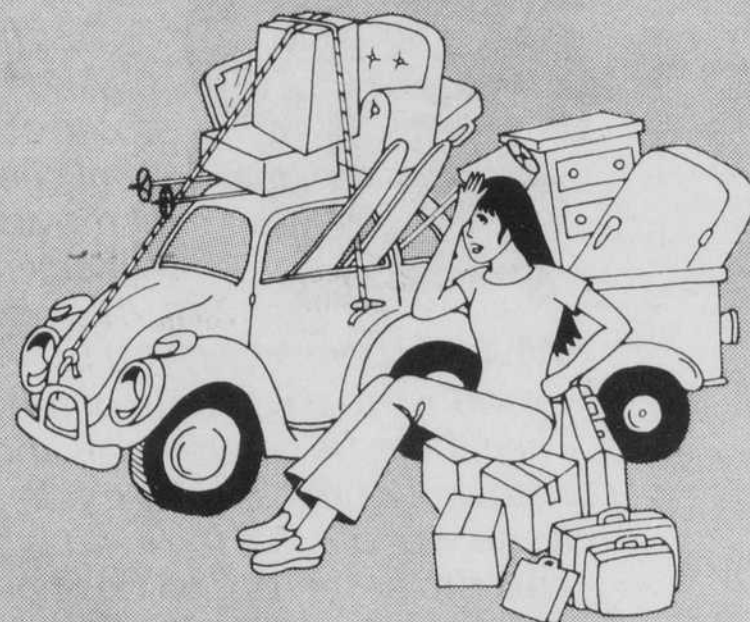
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