

Radical Feminist Media Matters

By Gariné Roubinian

Can you imagine what the world would look like if radical feminist media were more prevalent, accessible, and far-reaching? If radical feminist media were a primary lens through which news and social meaning were conveyed? If the Rupert Murdochs and Hugh Hefners of the world were “voted off the island” (or better yet, the planet)? The toxic media landscape of women as pornified blow-up dolls for men’s consumption; women as tokenized junior men advancing male power; women reduced to oppressive and narrow stereotypes and caricatures; women as consumer niches to sell products they don’t need or can’t afford – all of this would fade into the background. In its place, real women would begin to emerge -- as thinking, breathing beings with individual and shared humanities.

Radical feminist media provides an enormous and valuable divergence from the mainstream, corporate-controlled, male-dominated media. Its necessity for womankind – for all of humanity, in fact – becomes crystal clear when we start to think about how differently the world would look – or more accurately, how differently we would look at the world -- if radical feminists could really take back the media from the predominantly rich, white, male bastions of power and their corporate interests.

Radical feminist media works for and achieves a number of vital functions and aims. For starters, radical feminist media exposes the political and structural contexts that are embedded in every “news story,” but rarely if ever mentioned by mainstream media outlets. Rape, poverty, battering, sexual harassment, serial killers, incarceration, prostitution, war, environmental devastation – these and other societal injustices aren’t shown existing in a vacuum, private occurrences that happen here and there, every now and then. Radical feminist media illuminates these injustices from the bottom up and from the macro (structural/class) level out. Realities of power imbalance and abuse aren’t an afterthought to debate or something to purposefully ignore. They are vital and functioning parts of any and all analysis and information transmittal.

The existence and prevalence of radical feminist media helps to free information and media from the hands (and pocketbooks) of pornographers, pimps, racists, fundamentalists, and corporate CEOs (they are often one and



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the same). With the mass media currently controlled by a handful of corporations (e.g. General Electric, Time Warner, The Walt Disney Co., Viacom, and News Corporation), the brotherhood of concentrated power and rule wields a lot of control over individuals and societies as a whole – and what gets defined as social culture. Everything from how individuals and groups of people are perceived and perceive themselves to how “foreign policy” is undertaken is shaped and dictated by the actions and propaganda of the corporate controlled mass

media. For example, would women

and girls be so quick to sexually objectify themselves and strive for the rank of sexually consumable if it weren’t for the glorification of the sex industry in every facet of the media? How might the aftermaths of 9/11 or Hurricane Katrina have been different if information and analysis had been transmitted by socially just media outlets committed to democracy and justice? As opposed to socially bankrupt media institutions working in total cahoots with undemocratic and profit-driven entities (i.e. big business and their cronies in public office)? Societal responses, policy outcomes and current states of affair would be profoundly different if the mass media didn’t have so much power and didn’t use that power (often covertly) for the aims of maintaining and expanding hegemonic power structures.

Radical feminist media allows women to access information that is based on and formed by their life experiences, struggles, voices, and truths. Radical feminist media helps women create and have access to tools with which to critically assess and understand the political dimensions of their personal experiences. This, in turn, leads to raised consciousnesses and the understanding that women, individually and collectively, experience violence and oppression.

Radical feminist media holds men accountable and corrodes through every liberal male fallacy – often in powerful, courageous, and bold ways. Humor is often a strategy utilized as are diverse artistic and political forms of expression and speech. Radical feminist media exposes the toxicity of masculinity and helps to activate its undoing and collapse.

Radical feminist media helps to shatter the two dominant paradigms of how women are depicted in mass media (even in alternate media): as either (1) invisible or (2)

obliterated. In a feminist media landscape, feminists don't have to wonder what's worse: not existing or existing for the sole purpose of patriarchal use and abuse. Women don't have to cringe or seethe or feel alienated and alone every time they pick up a newspaper, listen to the radio, or talk to a co-worker about the new movie they saw over the weekend. They don't have to cuss under their breath every time they walk by a news stand in a grocery or convenience store at how oppression and violence are sensationalized, glorified, used to instill fear and inaction, and manipulated to ensure the reinforcement of dominant paradigms of "us" vs. "them."

Radical feminist media challenges the artificial and false polarizations that are commonplace in mainstream media land (as well as alternative media land). The "private/public" split does not exist. Women aren't the fodder for either conservative zealots or leftist fanatics and their classic "virgin/whore" scripts. Women aren't indoctrinated into the role of "victimized" to be saved by men (from men), nor are women deluded into believing that they are never victimized, harmed or damaged. Radical feminist media shows and names the many faces and sides of women's experiences with violence and oppression: victim, mourner, survivor, resister, and everything in between. Radical feminist media shows women as strong, whole, real, fierce (alternatives to current portrayals of women as passive, weak, stupid, boring, and childish) and simultaneously struggling, grappling, enduring, stumbling, battling, falling, and getting back up again.

Radical feminist media joins theory and practice; analysis with activism. Radical feminist media shows the bold and courageous chronicles of women's resistance to violence and oppression and of women's steps towards creating alternative worlds and realities.

Radical feminist media resists the commercialization of resistance and the undermining of social justice theory and activism by post-modernism, sex-liberalism, and other ideologies that serve to protect and further male power and profits. Radical feminist media helps women get and stay active & inspired; helps women strategize, mobilize and create social change. Radical feminist media articulates and centers women's joy, laughter, hope, and sisterhood.

We need radical feminist media and we need it now more than ever. Radical feminist media, in the form of newsletters and publications, films and documentaries, radio shows and oral herstory projects, art shows and theater performances, are a necessity in our current political climate of media systems that cater to male supremacy, racism, capitalism, globalization, and other forms of mass hierarchy and oppression. Radical feminist media offers powerful and passionate authenticity of analysis and action in a highly artificial, consumer-driven, media-entrenched social culture that needs clarity and truth telling; that needs the voices and leadership of radical women.

Currently, there is a dire shortage of radical feminist

media. Many of the few radical feminist media outlets remaining are underfunded or at risk of going on hiatus or stopping forever due to lack of financial support, infrastructure, and resources as well as burn-out, exhaustion, and isolation of those involved.

We need to bring back the explosion of "do it yourself" media creation, resource sharing, and shared political expression that were vital components of the women's liberation movement of the 60s and 70s. We need to bring back to life the grassroots collectives, the fury and flurry of radical and free-thinking media formation and innovation that were a cornerstone of community building and continuation. This is imperative to counter anti-feminist forces from all sides and the backlash in all its guises. This is also imperative to help ignite the culture and communities we want; to bring to life safe, healthy, thriving feminist spaces again.

How do we do this, we ask ourselves? How do we do this in the kind of social reality we live in right now where radical feminism is so vilified and negated? Where our voices are so stifled, silenced and ridiculed? When we are so few in numbers and the authority and command of rich men are so far-reaching and powerful?

The answers aren't always easy or forthcoming, but resistance isn't futile either. We can start small and radiate out. We can create the kind of media we want and utilize them as vehicles to get women, individually and collectively, as well as people in general, to start thinking and feeling again, being critical and pro-active again — ourselves included! We can utilize the tools at hand and just start, doing it solo or with others. We can create zines, newsletters, publications, anthologies, and/or write plays and stage them. We can rent or borrow or share video and editing equipment and make feminist shorts, documentaries, and films. We can use audio equipment to document oral herstories, spoken word, and other oral narratives. We can create political art and stage art shows. We can create blogs, websites, and other social networking forums online. We can start radio shows and cable access programming. Radical feminists can create media.

Yes, time is scarce. Resources are scarce. Money is scarce. But can we not find each other, commit to one thing, and care enough to put it into motion? We may not be able to do everything or give everything, but that should not stop us from doing something.

Yes, we may be skeptical. We may be jaded, cynical, uninspired, burnt-out, and plain t-i-r-e-d. But we can still take steps forward, interrupt the status quo, and be changed in the process. The act of creating is a transformative process that helps dispel alienation, despair, listlessness, and general hopelessness and replace them with renewal, optimism, and inspiration. By acting, new possibilities emerge and unfold.

For me, the creation and on-going publishing of *Rain and Thunder: A Radical Feminist Journal of Discussion and Activism* for a decade has been a journey into trying to

bring to life these radical feminist media aims and visions.

The birth of *Rain and Thunder* in 1998 sought to fill a much needed void in an anti-feminist, and particularly anti-radical feminist, social realm in which radical feminists were being assaulted from all sides. *Rain and Thunder* wanted to be an outstretched hand to those who needed to hear and feel radical feminism still persisting on; equally it wanted to be a driving force for social change. *Rain and Thunder* sought to be a politically thriving space where analysis and activism could and would ricochet off the pages and into the everyday lives of women.

Rain and Thunder has been many things to many different women. It has been the often reflective, sometimes raging, voices of women coming into consciousness. It has been the un-silencing of some of the most victimized and vulnerable voices of women that the world has known. It has been a catalyst for women to heal by providing them with a space to name abuse, oppression, and violence; by allowing women to say, "This happened to me and I survived." It has been the voices of courageous feminist activists and visionaries who work tirelessly and passionately for a different world. The revolutionary act of showing women as neither invisible nor obliterated comes to life on the pages of *Rain and Thunder* and I'm deeply honored to be a part of a radical feminist media collective that helps these voices emerge and be heard.

For me, publishing *Rain and Thunder* has been an exhilarating experience. The privilege of reading, discussing, editing, and publishing women's voices has been a tremendous honor as well as a tremendous responsibility. A kind of care, balance, precision, and patience has deepened within me through this process. Working on *Rain and Thunder* has allowed me to gain vast amounts of knowledge — be it theoretical, strategic, etc. — making me a better activist, a better educator, a better writer, and, overall, a better human being. The process of working on *Rain and Thunder* adds to the flames of my passion for radical feminism — it keeps my anger intact and moves that anger into action. It becomes an antidote for the despair and cynicism I feel at times. On a completely technical level, I have seen my graphic design skills improve leaps and bounds and have found great satisfaction in the process of spearheading layout and design. Picking up a finished copy and perusing through my work, I feel pride and delight.

Being a part of the Rain and Thunder Collective has also given me a chance to network, collaborate, and get connected with the radical feminist community nationally and internationally. I marvel at the exquisite opportunities *Rain and Thunder* has presented for myself, Nayiree, and Jen to be in contact with some of the most inspiring, courageous, and ardent radical women across the globe — in Sweden,

Australia, Spain, France as well as all over the US and Canada. Sisterhood is indeed global!

I can't pretend that publishing *Rain and Thunder* hasn't been exhausting and overwhelming at times. Being an all-volunteer operation presents its challenges and obstacles, particularly in finding the time and energy to juggle making a living, being a community activist, having a social life AND publishing a radical feminist journal. Sometimes it's hard to muster the energy or

stamina to sit in front of the computer to edit an article or gather news items or work on layout after a long day of work in "paid employment" land. But we keep on keeping on because it's that important, that life-changing, and that irresistible.

Rain and Thunder has succeeded at putting forth an uncompromising radical feminist politic. We have succeeded at providing critical and dynamic analysis of issues that many have not wanted to acknowledge or engage or only engage with the intent to repackage and resell old oppressions as new forms of liberation. *Rain and Thunder* doesn't change course based on the direction the dominant tide goes. In fact, we seek to expose the way the tide has been manipulated and controlled by unnatural and profit-driven forces and motives. This ability to maintain a steadfast and uncompromising radical feminist center comes from our grassroots, non-institutionalized foundation.

For us, glossiness has never been an objective we've strived towards (though having a glossy *R&T* out on the newsstands next to *Vogue* and *Teen Cosmo* would be quite amusing). Being perceived as hip or chic hasn't been important. Our aim is not to be a *Bust* or a *Bitch*, or even a *Ms.*, in the publishing world. For us grassroots publishing translates into something different and we are working to maintain this strong grassroots base whilst simultaneously expanding our readership and visibility in bookstores, at universities, libraries, etc.

Through the pages of *Rain and Thunder*, radical feminism is alive and thriving. I hope *Rain and Thunder* can be an example to any and all women that creating radical feminist media from the grassroots level is possible. We are a living example that three women strong can create something that radiates out like the sun and has a profound (and warming) affect on those within and outside of our community.

So, go out there and make some radical feminist media of your own. Start a local feminist newsletter; interview women in your community and make a film; organize a feminist art show at your local library; start a feminist radio show — the possibilities are limitless. Radical feminist media needs us and we need radical feminist media. Join the groundswell that says radical feminist media matters!

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