

FROM BETRAYAL TO POWER

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Resistance is the secret of joy!

—Alice Walker
POSSESSING THE SECRET OF JOY

What does it mean to love a daughter in a culture that is hostile to her integrity? In a culture where power equals dominance and superiority, men's control of public life—the world of political and economic power that shapes the desires of private life—places mothers in a double bind as their daughters approach womanhood. The common ways that mothers have of guiding daughters—what we call “the paths of least resistance” in chapter two¹—ask girls to make deep psychological sacrifices to straddle the cultural division of work, in the “male” public world of politics and business, and love, in the “female” private world of home and family. As girls find that they cannot enter patriarchy fully and powerfully as themselves, they feel betrayed by their mothers. But mothers did not create the separate spheres of public and private life. It is this cultural betrayal of human integrity, which divides our wholeness into these separate spheres, that makes loving and raising a daughter political work.

The romance-into-mothering myth created in the mid-1800s told women that their true nature is best expressed in the home, in private life.² When market-driven factory life in the Industrial Revolution consumed women's traditional work of producing food, clothing, medicine, and crafts, women were suddenly stripped of their expertise and authority. Rather than adopting a “rationalist” solution of admitting “women into modern society on an equal footing with men,” male experts promoted the “romantic solution” of relegating women to the home, safe and separate from the capitalist forum of work. Romance prevailed for some very unromantic

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1. ELIZABETH DEBOLD, MARIE WILSON, IDELISSE MALAVÉ, *MOTHER DAUGHTER REVOLUTION: FROM BETRAYAL TO POWER* 33-61 (1993).

2. BARBARA EHRENREICH & DEIRDRE ENGLISH, *FOR HER OWN GOOD: 150 YEARS OF THE EXPERTS' ADVICE TO WOMEN* (1978).

economic reasons. The invention of motherhood as we know it, safely nestled in the nuclear family, ensured the increased consumption of goods necessary to a growing economy. Despite the reality that many women worked for pay on farms and in factories, it created the illusion that "true" women, and women who were truly loved, stayed at home with children. Working-class women were presented with a cultural ideal that they could never attain, thus dividing women along class lines. Girls at the edge of womanhood who were asked to embody this ideal of true womanhood suffered from hysteria. Since this time, girls have suffered an increasingly widespread crisis as they enter the culture as young women. They face the choiceless choices of denying themselves public power or dividing themselves internally to balance these separate dictates for living.

Only now do we have the knowledge and power to transform girls' suffering. Girls *struggle* against making the devastating sacrifices called for by the separation of "male" public life from a "female" private world. Carol Gilligan first noticed this resistance.³ As she and Lyn Brown documented, young girls are clear-minded, courageous, and confident.⁴ Even shy girls know clearly what they want and think. At the edge of adolescence, though, girls see what is coming and they fight. But, without help, their courage is quickly turned into self-blame and self-doubt, which can often turn into depression, eating disorders, suicide, and other forms of self-abuse. In the most simple terms, they lose their self-esteem.

Revolutionary mothering encourages girls' resistance; it is a practice of resistance. Revolutionary mothering rejects the myth of the perfect mother who is all nurturing and encompasses more of women's personal and political heritage. Every mother has a personal heritage of courage and resistance that she can reclaim. As women, we can reclaim our collective heritage of resistance. Throughout the centuries, in every country, as Adrienne Rich reminds us, women have displayed a "vital toughness and visionary strength" in their struggle for freedom.⁵ Through the process of reclaiming the courage to resist, mothers begin to join daughters to change a mother's relationship to her daughter from perceived betrayer to corevolutionary.

Transforming betrayal into power begins at home in the intimacy of mother daughter relationships and through the transformation of families into revolutionary cells. But the power of women's reclaimed voices must move into the public world. When we reclaim our connections with each other, we transform mothering from an act of selfless nurturance confined to private life to a political act of solidarity that creates a community for our daughters to join. A revolution of mothers joins all women in the political act of mothering the next generation of girls, as biological or adoptive

3. CAROL GILLIGAN, IN *A DIFFERENT VOICE: PSYCHOLOGY THEORY AND WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT* (1982).

4. LYN MIKEL BROWN & CAROL GILLIGAN, *MEETING AT THE CROSSROADS: WOMEN'S PSYCHOLOGY AND GIRLS' DEVELOPMENT* (1992).

5. ADRIENNE RICH, *What Does a Woman Need to Know?* in *BLOOD, BREAD, AND POETRY: SELECTED PROSE 1979-1986*, at 7 (1986).

mothers or as othermothers. By fully claiming and sharing the power of mothering, we radically change the role of "mother" from middle manager of patriarchy into visionary and activist. When the dynamic of betrayal no longer haunts women's relationships with each other, women become free to lead powerfully and to support powerful leaders. On all fronts the revolution begins to claim the work of love and the love of work to be equally important and necessary to bring together. A revolution of mothers brings the separate spheres of work and love together so that daughters are not faced with choiceless choices, the either/ors, that divide women from themselves and each other.

Transforming mother daughter relationships begins with voice lessons that encourage resistance; a mother daughter revolution begins with public speaking that resists cultural systems of separation and dominance. Naming for ourselves and speaking to each other about what we are not supposed to know or see are the first steps in transforming betrayal into power. Taking power back from betrayal begins with knowledge. The familiar adage "knowledge is power" happens to be true. Knowledge of our heritage and history, the politics of our psyches, our common differences, and ways to begin to take action gives us the power to know more clearly what options for living and loving we can create. This power of knowledge creates a desire for more than what we are offered in the supermarket of the culture. What do we truly want for ourselves and for our daughters? Clearly, not just what money can buy. As a revolution of mothers, we begin reclaiming our power as women by asking these hard questions of ourselves and each other within the supportive context of our revolutionary cells—the safe houses of families, in concert with othermothers, and in circles of mothers. We can bring our questions into public life in every contact with the institutions of the culture—schools, government, business.

The process of revolutionizing society by tearing down the oppressive walls of the culture and the division between public and private life will continue for generations. Creating a world where our daughters are truly safe and able to live fully certainly will not happen during their childhoods and probably will not happen in their lifetimes. No quick fixes exist for problems that are part of the very fabric of the culture. There is no simple mother-for-success formula that cuts a clear path into the unknown.

The answer is continuing resistance: a process, first, of bringing into knowledge and, thus, power what has been unspoken and unnamed between mothers and daughters, among women, and between women and men; and, second, a resistance that brings mothering into public life by organizing at every level of society—from circles of mothers to politicized networks of women who love girls. What our daughters need to know is that women are serious about making the world a place where they can dare to be whole, true, and powerful. We can create a community of women for them to join. When women resist the guilt and seduction of private life, the true betrayal—the betrayal of girls and women by a culture created by men—can be transformed into greater potential and ways of living fully for daughters and sons, women and men of all classes and races. This is leadership: taking responsibility to bring this vision into reality through our words and actions.

A revolution of mothers calls all women into leadership on behalf of the next generation of women.

I. PUBLIC SPEAKING

What would it mean for women to speak the truth in public? Truth-telling mothers challenge the public world to be responsible to our daughters, ourselves, and each other. Like young girls, revolutionary mothers sound the alarm that life is not fair. Revolutionary mothers join daughters' voices to argue for fairness and compassion in public policy and the world of work. These women talk their talk in community centers, at school meetings, in the halls of legislatures, on television, and with their votes. The call to revolutionary mothering invites women to tell the truths of their lives and to redefine the purpose of public life. The boundary between public and private, work and love, disappears as mothers speak and lead from home to capitol. Only then can girls join the culture without giving up part of themselves.

When women speak in public, separations in the culture get caught in women's throats. As we discussed in chapter two,⁶ the most common routes for women into patriarchy, the paths of least resistance, provide the options for public speaking: either to embrace traditional feminine roles and speak a language of nurturance or to adopt the "girls will be boys" or "one of the guys" approach and think, and speak, "like a man." Feminist public speakers have different voices, but these voices are also distorted in a male-voiced culture. Women in public life are simply in a bind: if they speak "like a man," they are charged by other women with selling out; if they speak for "women," their concerns are marginalized because these discussions take place at the edges of public life, not at its center. So far, none of women's public-speaking voices successfully articulates the full truth of women's experience; none embraces the integration of women's work and love. A primary task of a revolution of mothers is to create new public-speaking voices that transform public dialogue itself. To do so, we need to know how women's truths and voices have been distorted within the existing dialogue.

Women's public speaking, like women's lives, has been framed in the public/private split in the culture. When women speak of the issues that most press on them as they try to balance work and family, their concerns are labeled "women's issues," which, by definition, place them outside the deepest concerns of male culture. Few men speak out about the so-called women's issues of child care and parental leave. The burden of family and children falls on women who are, at the same time, denied cultural authority to voice these concerns. Women, thus, find themselves betrayed both by not being taken seriously on the issues that most directly affect their lives and by being told in a variety of ways to stay in the private sphere.

We live in a culture where speaking of love in public life is still shameful. Those who show feeling and compassion in the masculine world

6. DEBOLD ET AL., *supra* note 1.

of public life are considered weak and feminine. "Acting like a girl" in public is grounds for ridicule and dismissal. A revolution of mothers claims that love is worth bringing into the work of public life. If we, as a culture, do not exist to encourage the growth and joy of all of our children, then our culture betrays us as well as our children. The love of a revolution of mothers is not maternal self-sacrifice and idealized nurturance. The love of a revolution of mothers is a politicized love, born out of knowledge and understanding of our common differences. Voices of truth that speak out of this love for our daughters have the power to break through the betrayals that have separated us.

In the recent past, activist women have struggled to articulate women's concerns and perspectives and be taken seriously. Through the 1970s, these activists spoke in two predominant voices: the *voice of equality* and the *voice of victimization*. The voice of equality is a demand for rights spoken in a language understood by male culture. Equality speaks of contractual exchange—this equals that—which is the foundation of market relations and the legal system. Speaking in this voice has had the unintentional effect of legitimizing the legal system created by privileged men to protect their interests. The call for women's right to equality with men was made and answered predominantly by white, middle-class women. As bell hooks asks, since all men are not equal to each other in this country, "which men do women want to be equal to?"⁷ For too many women at this stage of the women's movement, the answer was fairly clear: privileged white men. These women, in effect, asked to compete with men on the terms that men had defined. As these women protested to be able to move from the world of love to the world of work, their goals, at best, idealized work and, at worst, sought to give white women the privileges of upper-class white men. This approach inadvertently continued the race and class divisions among women that were created in the middle-class ideal of "true" womanhood.

As many women in the women's movement of the 1970s began speaking with the voice of equality, another voice could be heard in its echo. The voice of victimization attempted to bring the personal plight of many women's pain and powerlessness into public light. This voice has broken the silence around rape, battering, poverty, and the sexual and physical abuse of children. It has caused a deep shift in public awareness. Yet it also distorts women's reality. This voice presents a simplistic polarization of human beings as victims or victimizers. Women's strength and resilience were left out of the equation. For women whose lives were hard but who lived bravely, being cast in the role of victim felt like a betrayal.

By the early 1980s, these voices were joined by a different voice, the *voice of care*. By listening to women describe their experience and ways of understanding themselves and the world, the feminists who first articulated this voice in public speaking attempted to name women's strengths and vulnerabilities *in their own terms* rather than in comparison with men. Those who used the voice of care talked about the primacy of relationship in

7. BELL HOOKS, *FEMINIST THEORY: FROM MARGIN TO CENTER* 18 (1984).

women's lives as a virtue that becomes subverted by women's intimate subordination. Psychologists such as Carol Gilligan and Jean Baker Miller and philosophers such as Nel Noddings and Joan Tronto spoke of the potential power of such a voice.⁸ The voice of care asked for a re-ordering of cultural values; it broke a silence in public discourse concerning issues of human connection and interdependence. Care expresses values that cannot be bought and sold in fair-market exchange. The voice of care asserts that the values assigned to private life are *also* values for public life. These values, speakers of the voice argued, were critical to the future of civilization itself.

To some women, the care voice sounded very similar to the romantic, traditionalist voice—the voice of the patriarchal woman. This traditional voice argues that women are different from men because women are specially called to nurturance. Women are viewed as special and better than men, not simply different because their life experiences are different from men's. Naming differences between men and women has historically been dangerous to women. In the nineteenth century, women insisted that their moral superiority as nurturers should give them the right to vote. After the vote was granted, women almost summarily were sent back home—where they said they belonged. Women's current status as the voting majority has yet to be translated into political power.

Differences between men and women continue to be used to keep women at the margins of the culture. As Susan Faludi documented in *Backlash*, in the 1980s the traditionalist voice of nurturing, supported by business and the media, subverted the voice of care with the intention of pushing back the gains made by women in the 1970s.⁹ The voice of care was distorted into the lullaby of traditional femininity, which reinforces the betrayal of women through their exclusion from public life. The media told story after story of women, worn out by the grind of work and family, yearning for a more traditional life of 1950s motherhood. And for women who were not working outside the home, the traditionalist voice gave them a new opportunity for self-respect. The appeal of such a traditionalist voice, as Faludi also shows, is only a lingering romantic fancy for most women. This voice utterly denies women's practical, economic reality and conjures up the guilt of working women as inadequate caretakers, while pointing to the feminist movement as the source of the problem.

The feminist voice of care has not been able to articulate a way of public speaking that addresses the political concerns of women. It does not speak to the systemwide betrayal of women in discriminatory laws and practices. Within a culture that is so divided between public and private life, this voice is rarely heard as the critique of public life that it is. While it is a voice that transgresses the boundary line between public and private life by

8. JEAN MILLER BAKER, *TOWARD A NEW PSYCHOLOGY OF WOMEN* (1986); GILLIGAN, *supra* note 3; NEL NODDINGS, *CARING: A FEMINIST APPROACH TO ETHICS & MORAL EDUCATION* (1984); JOAN C. TRONTO, *MORAL BOUNDARIES: A POLITICAL ARGUMENT FOR AN ETHIC OF CARE* (1993).

9. SUSAN FALUDI, *BACKLASH: THE UNDECLARED WAR AGAINST AMERICAN WOMEN* (1991).

raising "private" concerns in "public," it is often considered to be a voice that keeps women out of public life because it doesn't sound like the public-speaking voices we are used to hearing and, so, it can be too easily subverted by traditionalists. Hillary Rodham Clinton wants to "build a society based on love and connection, a society in which the bottom line would not be profit and power but ethical and spiritual sensitivity and a sense of community, mutual caring and responsibility."¹⁰ But she says that "the right language remains to be invented."¹¹ For instance, when she tried to translate these ideas into policy, she and social commentator Michael Lerner wondered, "Would the press kill us on this?"¹² And indeed, a prominent reporter did deride these ideas as "unintentionally hilarious."¹³

What would new public voices for the revolution of mothers sound like? We cannot say exactly. We do know that the voices of equality and care must be brought together with a recognition of our different experiences of oppression and exploitation and our extraordinary capacities for joy, resistance, and power.¹⁴ The voice of equality that insisted on women's equal treatment with men must be revolutionized by caring about the particulars of women's situations.¹⁵ Equality of outcome, not equal treatment under the law, is what is fair to redress historical discrimination. Equal rights may have been an important strategic demand in the first phase of the contemporary women's movement. But our issues and concerns are far more complicated than those allowed by a blanket insistence on rights. By holding together the complexity of our lives and experiences, we, and what we care about, are not split into pieces that then fragment our unity as women. The demand for abortion as a simple right, for example, was an important strategy. Women's right to choose when or whether to become mothers, and how often, is fundamental to our ability to be responsive and responsible human beings. Perhaps the prolonged struggle for women's reproductive freedom is a result of the inadequacy of speaking only in a rhetoric of rights that glosses over women's power to bring life into the world—and all of the emotional and psychological complexity that that power brings.

The voice of care humanizes the abortion debate and seems to present a more accurate reading of the choices that women confront in deciding whether or not to have a child.¹⁶ This voice articulates women's sense of responsibility and desire to have the means necessary to do right and care well for themselves and their children. Including this voice is necessary for

10. Michael Kelly, *Hillary Rodham Clinton and the Politics of Virtue*, N.Y. TIMES MAGAZINE, May 23, 1993, at 63, 66.

11. *Id.* at 63.

12. *Id.*

13. *Id.* at 66.

14. GILLIGAN, *supra* note 3 (suggesting, in the last chapter of *IN A DIFFERENT VOICE*, that maturity in adulthood would combine the moral voices that she identified—the voice of justice and the voice of care).

15. See, e.g., MARTHA ALBERTSON FINEMAN, *THE ILLUSION OF EQUALITY: THE RHETORIC AND REALITY OF DIVORCE REFORM* (1991).

16. See, e.g., GILLIGAN, *supra* note 3, at 66-127 (describing the abortion study).

the debate to become less polarized. It is also important to realize that while the debate rages over whether or not women will have the right to make this choice for themselves, poor women, particularly women of color, are being sterilized at an appalling rate. Over one-third of all Puerto Rican women have been sterilized; these Latinas have the highest rate of sterilization in the world.¹⁷ Pregnant women who are poor or are not white have been told that unless they agree to sterilization or abortion, then no doctor will deliver their babies. Sometimes women are asked to sign away their wombs while in the pain of labor. Abortion and sterilization have been used against these women in ways that alienate them from middle- and upper-class white women's insistence on abortion as a right. An unspoken and underlying theme in the debate over women's reproductive freedom is that the state, the instrument of the male public world, wants to control which women reproduce children. Women's separation by race and class prevents us from developing a comprehensive understanding of issues that deeply affect all of our lives.

Within a revolution of mothers, the new voice for public speaking forges a *radical*—meaning, literally, “to the root”—consciousness of the divisions that we have accepted in our lives. Only through our commitment to a radical solidarity of women can we speak in ways that move women, and their allies, to meet the challenge of leadership. There is no essential “women’s” experience but an evolving understanding of sexist oppression and how it is compounded and manipulated through other forms of oppression. A revolution of mothers calls each woman to join in the struggle for solidarity across our differences.

II. FIGHTING FOR SOLIDARITY

A revolution of mothers resists the betrayals of the culture by calling on women to exercise leadership though struggle toward solidarity. When women are denied access to political and economic power, except through the indulgence of men, we betray each other by competing for what little security we can find. Rather than allying with male culture's hierarchies of dominance, we women need first to ally with each other to create other options out of our combined power. Yet this alliance cannot simply solicit from each of us a long-suffering support that idealizes our victimization. The true revolutionary potential of mothers is realized as women join to end the interrelated forms of dominance that separate women from each other and perpetuate patriarchy in the process. Audre Lorde argues that all forms of “human blindness”—sexism, racism, classism, homophobia—“stem from the same root—an inability to recognize the notion of difference as a dynamic human force, one which is enriching rather than threatening to the defined

17. Eugenia Acuna-Lilli, *The Reproductive Health of Latinas in New York City: Making a Difference at the Individual Level*, Paper presented at the 1989 Third World Women's Conference.

self, when there are shared goals."¹⁸ Our shared goal of changing the world for our daughters calls us together to fight for connection through difference.

Just as mothers can risk imperfection and learn to fight of connection with their daughters, revolutionary mothers can fight for solidarity across difference. This is difficult. As girls, we learned that our safety rested with men and their systems. We have difficulty trusting each other because our deepest betrayals came from the women we loved most. Our history as women has done little to dispel these fears. To create true solidarity among women, we begin by understanding and exploring the effects of our betrayal at the wall on ourselves and on women whose experience differs from our own.

Within the last hundred-plus years, white women have repeatedly opted to exercise their race privilege in order to gain an advantage in the competitive public world. The fledgling coalition of white and African-American women fighting for suffrage was violently torn apart when it became clear that Congress was seriously considering granting suffrage to men of color and not to women at all. White women argued that they, because of their race, should be granted the right to vote before men or women of color. This betrayal, white women's shame, leaves a bitter taste in the mouths of African-American women even today. Most women of color have justifiably internalized a deep suspicion and mistrust of white people. Women of color were not heard or considered an integral part of the last phase of the women's movement. Tired of educating white women about their racist assumptions, many women of color have given up on the possibility of speaking across race. White women can begin to educate themselves about the privilege they assume.

The pressure of the class hierarchy that structures the culture has led middle- and upper-class women to act in ways that other women have felt as betrayal. In the 1970s, magazines glorified middle-class women in glossy cover photos and named them "Superwomen." But the working-class women who had always been stretched between work and family named them the "suits."¹⁹ Working-class women, writes bell hooks, "knew that new jobs would not be created for those masses of white women seeking to enter the work force and they feared that they and men of their classes would lose jobs."²⁰ For middle-class women's right to enter the upper echelons of the existing power structures, the greater solidarity of women was lost.

Perhaps the deepest challenge to women's solidarity comes from the ultimate threat to male dominance: lesbianism. As girls, we both deeply loved and eventually felt betrayed by the women we loved: mothers,

18. AUDRE LORDE, *SISTER OUTSIDER* 45 (1984).

19. See Linda Williams, *Ending the Silence: The Voices of Women of Color*, *EQUAL MEANS: WOMEN ORGANIZING ECONOMIC SOLUTIONS* 1, 13 (Winter 1983). The term *suits* was used by working-class women in the 1992 Women's Voices focus groups. They used the term casually and freely, suggesting its common usage. According to Williams, "Blue-collar white women were emphatic in pointing out that they had the least in common with 'professionals,' 'the kind of women who wore suits,' and appeared in American Express ads. Throughout the focus groups, class and lifestyle, not race, were the main dividing points."

20. HOOKS, *supra* note 7, at 97.

teachers, and other girls. Reluctantly, girls turned to men for protection. As payment for protection and power, patriarchy demands that men be placed at the center of women's lives and loyalties. Loving women, keeping women at the center of our lives, is the ultimate act of disloyalty to male dominance.²¹ As a result, homophobia, the fear and loathing of lesbians and gays, is the most elegant weapon for keeping male dominance in place. The fear of being branded a lesbian—a woman who loves women and, in a world of false dichotomies, is therefore supposed to hate men—is terrifying to women. Lesbians are all too accustomed to exclusion by heterosexual women who fear guilt by association. Such disloyalty carries the threat of being completely cut off from men's power and protection. While much of the fear of lesbians can be attributed to our society's general ambivalence about sex, who sleeps with whom is not the issue. Choosing to love and value women is the real transgression in patriarchy. Any woman who does so in any way is vulnerable to being named "lesbian." Gloria Steinem showed she understood how homophobia buoys sexism when, in the middle of a particularly intense lesbian-baiting incident among national leaders. She suggested that all women declare themselves lesbians and diffuse the power of this poisonous division.

By unraveling our confused questions of loyalty, we can make a serious commitment to creating solidarity among women and a community for our daughters to join. Loving women does not mean hating men, and being loyal to women is essential not only for our daughters but also for our sons. If women can stay joined with women and affirm love for women, perhaps men will eventually question their own unnecessary losses and the need for boys to cut off from mothers and nurturance as the price of being male.

Speaking across cultural divisions is a painful and frightening process that inevitably puts at risk our self-protective strategies. But for the sake of the next generation, we must. This fight for solidarity among women can be a dialogue without blame and guilt, denial and reproach. We have so much to learn from each other. Listening to learn from each other about what we know and feel, naming the dynamic of oppression among us as it happens, creates powerful ways of working together that are not dependent on dominance. Just as listening to a daughter in her own terms is an act of love, listening across culturally inscribed divisions between women is equally an act of love. This love is as necessary in transforming mother daughter relationships as it is in transforming society for daughters.

Mothers' courage to create solidarity among all women for the sake of their daughters transforms girls' experience of entering the culture. Only women united across race, class, and sexual orientation can end the systems of dominance that divide us and cost our daughters. The love that this requires is a radical love, not the idealized love of the romance story. This greater, radical love is forged in the fire of difference. Out of our love for our daughters, revolutionary mothers fight for connection with daughters by acknowledging the differences between them. By fighting for connection

21. See also SUZANNE PHARR, *HOMOPHOBIA: A WEAPON OF SEXISM* (1988) (making a similar but more in-depth analysis of these points).

across our differences as women, we can bring this love into the world. This work, hard and painful and exhilarating, brings us into deeper connection with each other and with ourselves. It is an ongoing process of resistance to easy commonalities and unbridgeable differences. A radical love speaks the truth even when it hurts. This love works to know others' struggle toward wholeness and to identify where we each collude with powerlessness and where we have opportunity for growth.

Through loving, we can work through the betrayals that have divided women from each other. Such love is a process of truth telling that lives always at the edge of what we can recognize as our truths. Through loving our daughters, each other, and ourselves enough to speak our truths in forging a solidarity against dominance, we create a reality that resists co-optation. When women can trust the women they learn from, and, therefore, trust themselves, women will conspire to increase each other's power. Only the power of women united, joined by allied men, can create an alternative to patriarchal oppression. Our daughters cannot experience their power fully without the cultural transformation made possible by such solidarity.

III. A CONSUMING PASSION FOR COMMUNITY

For the sake of our daughters, we can reclaim the power of our desires for a truthful connection with them and greater connection among us all. How do we expend our desire now? The public world of business cultivates a consuming passion within our private lives: perfect women have an endless array of products and fashions to shape themselves. Perfect mothers have an endless list of experiences and things that their children must have to live a good life. Breaking away from these cultural survival strategies is difficult, but far from impossible.

Breaking away begins by asking what we truly want for ourselves and for our daughters. What does happiness mean to us? What brings us joy? Our daughters are good guides for us: girls want the warmth and challenge of real relationship and connection. The *things* of life only become necessary as girls learn from the media, from us, and from their peers that these things are what matter. Breaking away also begins with the courage to figure out the first steps we can take, no matter how small, to integrate the divisions in our lives and to create a community for our daughters to join without having to make the same divisions in themselves.

The radical love that brings mothers and daughters and all women together is a practice that redefines what caring for ourselves means and a continually unfolding process. Where is the end point? As Audre Lorde has said, we can use the "yes!" within us as our guide to expanding our capacity for experiencing and sharing joy.²² We learn to listen to ourselves as we listen and learn from others. Caring for ourselves is a practice of freeing ourselves from the fears of being isolated if we're different and the assumptions built on fear that push us into an acceptance of the status quo. We don't know how women born and raised outside of the culture of

22. LORDE, *supra* note 18, at 57.

dominance would look, act, or feel. By freeing our desires from fearful or resigned acceptance of what now is, we see our deepest desires more clearly. By testing what we want and what we need against who we are told we are and what we must have, we exercise self-care and freedom. We exercise the power to create new selves, new ways of being in the world. As we feel the power of our desires, we can begin to create new ways of living together.

Until we begin, our desire—for connection, or work that is interesting and valuable, and for communities in which we are safe and nurtured—will continue to be channeled into *things*. Our culture has created unlimited *wants* by linking products with the promise of “everything and anything—from self-esteem to status, friendship and love.”²³ A cycle of “work-and-spend,” as economist Juliet Schor names it in *The Overworked American*, consumes working people and eclipses meaningful participation in public life.²⁴ This exhausting cycle, which has seduced all classes, has created a society that is increasingly fragmented and competitive. Earning and spending money becomes one of the few expressions of personal power that individuals hold. Meaning is sought exclusively in the private sphere, rather than in work or through participation in the public world and political community. We are urged to find true satisfaction from the luxuries of private life—the more a family has, the more satisfied its members should be.²⁵

Changes in the meaning and relationship of love, work, and reward are key to our reweaving of the social fabric. Early labor activists wisely resisted losing leisure in exchange for more money to buy things.²⁶ They knew that self-esteem cannot be purchased through material goods. What does success mean if we experience little meaning in what we do for work? What does success mean if work keeps us from creating fulfilling relationships in community with others? Breaking the addictive work-and-spend cycle becomes possible only as we find other alternatives and other sources of satisfaction.

Creating more community-based and communal practices of working is one way to find satisfaction. Creating greater community through new living arrangements is another. The violence and danger in our communities not only keep our daughters from living freely but keep us locked inside our individual homes, isolated from potential communities. Building safe communities is the work of mothers, othermothers, and men who are allies. Expanding our psychic and structural definitions of family and community, we create the possibility of creating contexts where daughters can thrive.

Community, however, is neither simply flexible work nor new living arrangements. True community is an integration of work and love, public and private life, through a restructuring of society. A revolution of mothers

23. JULIET SCHOR, *THE OVERWORKED AMERICAN: THE UNEXPECTED DECLINE OF LEISURE* 119 (1991).

24. ROBERT BELLAH, RICHARD MADSEN, WILLIAM M. SULLIVAN, ANN SWIDLER, AND STEPHEN M. TIPTON, *HABITS OF THE HEART: INDIVIDUALISM AND COMMITMENT IN AMERICAN LIFE* vii-viii (1986).

25. See SCHOR, *supra* note 23 (note particularly *The Creation of Discontent* in Chapter Five, and *The Insidious Cycle of Work-and-Spend*, at 114-117).

26. *Id.* at 120.

will eventually integrate these so-called separate worlds. Even by resisting the language of “balancing work and family,” because of it legitimizing of the unnecessary separation of these parts of our lives, we begin to envision lives lived more fully in balance. Creating ways of living in work and in love where we can come to know and to trust each other will make a profound difference for us and our children. For daughters, every act of joining love and work is proof of our commitment to ending the possibility of betrayal in their lives.

IV. PERSONAL AND POLITICAL CHANGE

“Change is what people want most, and fear most desperately,” says activist Catlin Fullwood. “That’s what accounts for the forward mobility and backtracking that all change efforts experience.” Whether personal or political, change is at best more of a spiral than a straight line. Those of us who have struggled to create new selves from troubling pasts have learned how often we remember and then lose the insights we have gained through our hard work. We disintegrate under stress. Our stories about ourselves and who we are constantly evolve. We dance through our lives doing the two-step: two steps forward, two steps back, side to side, in an energized but ambivalent set of movements. The dance of social change is also the two-step. The flurry of activity in the 1970s was followed by the backlash against women documented by both Naomi Wolf in *The Beauty Myth* and Susan Faludi in *Backlash*. Both in psychological and political change, when we are on the verge of transformation, we feel a strong pull, like a dangerous undertow, to stay as we were. But backlash itself is a sign of progress, a signal that at a personal, relational, or societal level, we are changing enough to cause alarm. It also tells us that we can expect more pressure to turn back with each step forward.

With each step, each change we make in how we mother, we will experience discomfort or the feeling that we just can’t do it. To oppose the status quo, to betray the culture that expects us to raise daughters who hold men at the center of their lives, to confront the myths of perfection, self-sacrifice, and separation that hold sway for mothering a daughter will not be comfortable. Change almost always feels dangerous and uncomfortable. While it is important that we acknowledge and experience these feelings, they are not always our best guide to action. If we listened to them, we would never move forward. A circle of mothers and a community of women are essential to us in testing strategies and behaviors, sorting out feelings, finding confirmation for our authority, and making choices about where and when to act differently. At a societal level, only true solidarity—even larger circles of mothers—can claim the power of mothering and begin to build communities where girls’ losses are truly unnecessary.

Even with support and validation, change is a voyage into the unknown. Even when our minds and hearts say that change is for the better, change requires that we let go of who we are and of our deepest assumptions about life. In between living as we were and realizing the new, we hang suspended in midair like trapeze artists waiting to be caught. The patterns of our selves have been forged out of fear: we created them to

protect us from being overwhelmed as children. The patterns of our cultural life are similarly forged out of fear. The deliberate psychological manipulation of our fears by advertising and business have created an enormous anxiety about having enough. No matter how much money or resources we have, we're urged to feel that nothing is enough. When we are each incited to consume and consume to achieve security, we become competitive and mistrustful of one another. What we fear most in others is often a clue to what we fear most for ourselves. Competitive individualism leads us away from each other and the possibility of community. To question this dangerous cultural pattern frightens us because consumerism has been billed as our ticket to survival.

Our survival strategies as women and mothers teach us compliance and imprison us in a fear-filled perfectionism. The approach described in this book requires that we risk imperfection and acknowledge the inevitability that we will make mistakes in an area where we care deeply: the way we love and teach our children. For that reason these changes require courage, speaking our minds by telling all our hearts, often moving toward what we want—and fear—most.

Each generation of women has wanted a better life for their daughters. The changes that have already been made for women have been dearly paid for at both personal and political levels. If these changes were easy, life would be different right now. The proliferation of mother blaming and women blaming assures us that our daughters will not love or trust us for our compliance or for demanding theirs at the cost of the lifeforce of their deepest desires. By engaging in continuing resistance to oppression and commitment to solidarity for liberation, we mother a revolution in life as we know it.

American life, argue Robert Bellah and his colleagues in *Habits of the Heart*, has been an experiment in separation and individuation.²⁷ American culture, archetypally modern, broke with traditional European authority to create a nation of individualists. Now, these authors argue, America is at a crisis that sounds surprisingly like the crisis faced by adolescents who have been encouraged to separate. Loosely linked through mass culture and consumerism into a competition among individualists. Now, these authors argue, America is at a crisis that sounds surprisingly like the crisis faced by adolescents who have been encouraged to separate. Loosely linked through mass culture and consumerism into a competition among individuals and between groups, American culture looks remarkably like a teen culture that separated from the "parental" authority of Europe. Consequently, our exaggerated separateness and individualism "must be balanced by a renewal of commitment and community if they are not to end in self-destruction."²⁸ Psychological models of separation and individuation are inadequate for the creation of a complete model of human life at either an individual or a cultural level. To meet the challenge of its adolescence, to decide upon its identity, American culture needs to recognize that renewal through personal

27. BELLAH ET AL., *supra* note 24, at 277.

28. *Id.*

commitment within communities "is indeed a world waiting to be born if we only had the courage to see it."²⁹

What would a world in which daughters were not betrayed by a culture look like? We don't pretend to see this new world clearly. A world of all women and children and men living committed to radical love and solidarity is the vaguest of utopian ideas. Our ever-changing understanding of who we are and what living means alters what we find possible to envision. The theories that we present are working theories, not absolute truths. They are to be tested and explored, refined and expanded, and perhaps eventually discarded. This book could not have been written before now. Recent shifts in thinking about the psychological implications and politics of the traditions that structure the private and public world have created the possibility for our bringing forth this knowledge. No one of the three of us could have written this book alone. Our writing, like the process of solidarity that we have described, required that we work across our differences to create something new.

We ask you to join in solidarity with us. Transforming betrayal into power is a continuous process of resistance: we have attempted to bring forward knowledge and practices to aid in resisting psychological and political oppression. Through practices of resistance, we free our hearts and minds from traditional betrayals. We ask you to join in posing hard questions about mother daughter relationships and about our relationships with each other as women. Leadership begins by laying claim to the important questions, by beginning a public discourse that erases the divisive boundaries in our lives, by seeking partners who challenge our assumptions. Every woman can mother a revolution in her own life and join in mothering a revolution in the world for the next generation. Just as we were asked to join the resistance, we are asking you to join with us. The power of a mother daughter revolution waits to be born.

29. *Id.*

