

No Man's Land: A Herstory of Lesbian Intentional Communities in Southern Oregon as a
Manifestation of the Pastoral Dream

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Writing in the mid-1970's, Mary Lois knew that she was part of something special. In a collective journal written by members of a lesbian intentional community called Cabbage Lane she wrote: "I love this land, these incredible plants, so unknown to me yet. It is amazing to be able to be outside so much, to be free from electricity and phones and flush toilets and such. This way of living is new to me and feels wonderful so far."¹ Mary Lois lived in one of Southern Oregon's women-only communities. Although Mary Lois described the experience of living on a women's land intentional community as a form of individual liberation, she was also part of a radical new movement of separatist women working to create women-only land. Emerging out of the back-to-the-land movement of the 1960s and the radical wing of the women's movement, Southern Oregon's lesbian (or women-only) intentional communities also harkened back to a long-held component of American cultural mythology: the pastoral dream.

Intentional communities are residential groups formed with the purpose of pursuing common interests or living under a certain set of values. Unlike communities that form organically, intentional communities come together with a purpose related to living in a manner that sets them apart from the dominant society in some way. While this term is currently the most widely accepted, it is just one of many such terms that describe situations of communal living. Others, although they differ slightly in exact definition, include communes, cooperatives, collectives, eco-villages and co-housing communities.

In his book *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond*, historian Timothy Miller compiled a list of criteria which taken together form a definition of intentional communities. The criteria (omitting the descriptions) are as follows: "A sense of common

purpose and of separation from the dominant society; Some form and level of self-denial, of voluntary suppression of individual choice for the good of the group; Geographic proximity; Personal interaction; Economic sharing; Real existence; Critical mass.”ⁱⁱ

As Miller establishes in the first chapter of his book, the United States has a long and varied history of intentional communities. A few of the more commonly known examples include the Shakers, the Hutterites, and the Oneida community. These communities have differed widely in ideology and practice, but together they speak to a long-held, although certainly not mainstream, American tradition of communal living. In his book, however, Miller discusses the drastic change that occurred in the 1960s. He writes, “We are no longer dealing with communes numbering in the low hundreds but rather with thousands—probably tens of thousands—of them, and an incredibly diverse lot at that.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Essentially, although it was rooted in almost two centuries of American tradition, the communal movement beginning in the 1960s was vastly more widespread and diverse.

While not an often-considered aspect of Oregon’s past, intentional communities have a particularly long and vibrant history in Oregon. Beginning with the Aurora Colony in the 1850s, the state has been home to religious communities, groups popularly characterized as hippie communes, and the ill-fated Rajneeshpuram cult. Spanning over one hundred and fifty years of Oregon history, each of these communities differed, to varying degrees according to historical location and political/religious/cultural creed, in goals and visions. Oregon is also known for being home to a large number of lesbian and women’s land intentional communities mostly beginning in the 1970s and continuing, albeit on a lesser scale, to the present day. Located in various regions throughout the

state, these communities were for the most part concentrated in Southern Oregon, along a corridor of I-5 that came to be known as the “Amazon Trail.”^{iv}

Lesbian and women’s land intentional communities developed out of both the back-to-the-land communal movement of the 1960s and the radical wing of the women’s movement. According to Winifred Wandersee’s *On the Move: American Women in the 1970s*, the feminist movement split into factions that differed in political and organizational styles, race, class, and sexual preference.^v One faction of the women’s movement, the New Left, was associated with the broader and male-dominated New Left movement and saw women’s oppression as essentially class repression that could be remedied through a socialist revolution. Radical feminists disagreed. Radical feminism, which emerged out of the reforms of the 1960s, framed its vision within a sort of women-centered consciousness. They defined gender as the root cause of all oppression and specifically located this oppression within the patriarchy, or male dominated society. According to Wandersee, by the early 1970s, radical feminists had actually contributed more to the mainstream feminist movement than other factions had. They developed a new women’s art culture and established a wide array of women’s collectives and community resources including child-care centers, feminist journals, alternative education programs, and women’s centers to deal with issues such as rape, abuse and abortion.^{vi} More than that, they envisioned a gender-free society by advocating that women should be empowered on their own terms rather than relative to men. While individual radical feminists held different opinions on the issue of activism versus separatism, in its extreme form, radical feminism advocated a lesbian/separatist solution.^{vii}

Aided by the sexual revolution that occurred around the same time, radical feminists attempted to redefine lesbianism in positive and liberating terms. Lesbianism became an alternative for women whose core beliefs made the existing structure of heterosexual marriage unappealing.^{viii} One result of radical feminists' redefinition of lesbianism was a women-centered community lifestyle, which, according to Wandersee, "combined social and political values with an intense emotional and sexual commitment to other women."^{ix} Already advocating a separatist lifestyle and interested in developing women's culture, intentional communities were a logical next step for lesbian radical separatist women. According to Timothy Miller, there was mixed acceptance of homosexuality in 1960s communes. Many communities did accept homosexuals, but were predominantly heterosexual in practice.^x Because of both the lack of existing homosexual communes and the aforementioned radical feminist-born separatist notions, lesbians began establishing their own intentional communities during the 1960s.

Another important component of the relationship between the back-to-the-land movement and the radical faction of the women's movement is that separatist women specifically identified the city as a patriarchal space associated with hierarchical power structures, economic exploitation of women, isolation, and even abuse. Therefore, by moving to the country, they were not only making manifest a separatist dream of creating a women's culture; they were also physically isolating themselves from the oppression they associated with urban space. In 1976, a member of one Southern Oregon women's community, OWL Farm, wrote: "For me, the land trust is a way I, a poor working class woman, can have access and some control of land. I never thought it would be possible to live away from the city—a man-controlled environment."^{xi} This woman specifically

linked the city to the patriarchy, and in doing so, she articulated one appeal of women's land communities: by providing a refuge or an alternative to the city, women's land communities provided an escape from male-dominated society.

An undated pamphlet for OWL Farm states: "We are feminists working and living together to encourage and help one another and to create a life where we are free of all oppressions."^{xii} Another woman wrote an anonymous entry in OWL Farm's communal journal saying, "I don't want to be divided from these sisters because of patriarchy and what pricks have done to us!"^{xiii} Both of these statements demonstrate the separatist aspect of women's land communities. The women expressed anger and frustration with the patriarchy but more importantly, they established the community as a refuge. They called the community an environment free of oppression and suggested that they wanted it to serve as a place of escape from "the pain of our lives out there."^{xiv} Their emphasis on the city as a patriarchal space also suggests that they saw the land (and not just the community that inhabited it) as a refuge. A 1976 OWL Farm pamphlet states, "Recognizing that most women are confined in cities with no access to land, we are attempting to acquire and provide access to land in as many ways as women want it, whether for long-term homesteading and farming or short-term access for recreation and retreat."^{xv} For these women, the land itself acted as a refuge from patriarchal forces of oppression.

Essentially, both the land and the community of women provided escapes from the patriarchy, oppression, and abuse. However, escape was not the only purpose of women's land intentional communities. Instead, by analyzing the documented visions and realities of Southern Oregon's lesbian communities from the 1970s through the 1990s, it

is possible to see that these communities were also about renewal: a simple, wholesome life in the country, connectedness to the land, and spiritual rejuvenation. While it is clear that lesbian and women's only intentional communities in Southern Oregon were rejecting mainstream American culture both by calling it oppressive and by physically trying to isolate themselves from it, they were also embracing a long-held aspect of American cultural mythology: the pastoral ideal.

Essentially, the pastoral ideal is the glorification of rural life and the belief that a simpler, more spiritually pure, and egalitarian life is possible in the countryside. As an important component of American mythology, it becomes significant when discussing a movement of women who rejected American mythology so completely. In 1964, professor of American Studies, Leo Marx, wrote a book of literary criticism exploring the role of the pastoral ideal in America. His book, *The Machine in the Garden*, looks at the relationship between the pastoral ideal and the growth of industrial technology, or “the machine” during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He claims, however, that it is not entirely a book about literature. Rather, it is about “the region of culture where literature, general ideas, and certain products of the collective imagination [...] meet.”^{xvi} Although he spends a substantial portion of his book detailing the pastoral as it is portrayed in American literature, his text provides an important theoretical framework for understanding the pastoral ideal as a theme in American cultural mythology. Like the “American Dream”, and indeed it is a related concept, the pastoral ideal is a way that Americans, collectively speaking (because pastoralism is not a universally held ideal), envision their relationship to rural spaces.

According to Marx, there are two kinds of pastoralism: social (also called sentimental) and literary (also called complex).^{xvii} The root of social pastoralism is the “yearning for a simpler, more harmonious style of life, an existence closer to nature.”^{xviii} Americans manifest a yearning for rural life in a variety of ways including migration to the suburbs. Marx also argues that social pastoralism is at work in politics, in the power of the farm bloc in Congress, and in leisure activities such as hunting, gardening and fishing.^{xix} Complex pastoralism, more common in literature, is a bit more difficult to define and involves the idealization of pastoral life, interrupted by the reality of industrialization and the ultimate realization that achievement of such an ideal is impossible.^{xx}

If there is a relationship between lesbian intentional communities and pastoralism, it is not complex pastoralism as Marx defines it because his definition involves the eventual rejection of the pastoral ideal and the women in Oregon’s intentional communities were concerned with the maintenance of pastoral idealism, regardless of capitalist or industrialist influence. Social, rather than complex pastoralism, best describes the attitudes of the women involved in Oregon’s women-only communities, but some of Marx’s points about complex pastoralism apply more generally. For example, in his discussion of complex pastoralism, Marx clarifies that the fulfillment of the pastoral ideal does not necessarily mean the total rejection of civilization. Rather, such idealism can occupy the middle ground between civilization and nature.^{xxi} Similarly, for the most part, lesbian intentional communities did not entirely isolate themselves from mainstream society. Instead, they rejected the social structure of American society and other components of the patriarchy, choosing to live essentially on the margins.

Marx's larger point however, at least as it relates to intentional communities, is that the pastoral ideal, whether in social or literary form, is a dominant theme in American cultural mythology. The glorification of the pastoral is so common in American history and culture, he argues, that it has become part of what is loosely defined as American mythology. Of course, it is difficult to pin down exactly what constitutes American mythology. However, just as literature, popular rhetoric and personal contact with American citizens can justify asserting a definition of the American Dream, Marx uses literature to demonstrate the prevalence of pastoralism in American thought. In his text, he points to the historical roots of pastoralism in Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* and in the works of canonical American authors such as Thoreau, Melville, Hawthorne, Faulkner, and Frost.^{xxii} Their texts, and so many others, idealize the countryside and, as Marx points out, often include an image of a machine (or a symbol of industry) intruding into an idealized landscape.^{xxiii} On a practical level, however, the pastoral ideal is best described in simpler terms: the glorification of rural life and the belief that a simpler, more spiritually pure, and egalitarian life is possible in the countryside.

Southern Oregon's lesbian or women-only communities were striving to attain all three components of the pastoral ideal. However, before it is possible to understand the relationship between Southern Oregon's lesbian intentional communities and the pastoral ideal, it is important to understand the physical development of these communities and their ties to each other. These communities, in many ways, provide an interesting case study. Despite being located in a politically conservative region of the state, many of

these women-only land ventures flourished, creating a sense of female solidarity that extended beyond the confines of individual women-only properties.

In 1974, Jean and Ruth Mountaingrove, a lesbian couple who lived in a number of different intentional communities before buying their own land called Rootworks, founded a magazine called *WomanSpirit*, which explored, among other issues, women's spirituality. *WomanSpirit* served to connect the lesbian separatist movement with other women in both the United States and abroad.^{xxiv} Another, more locally focused, example of the tight-knit nature of the Southern Oregon women's community was Womansource, a non-profit feminist cultural organization that put out an irregularly published newsletter of the same title. During the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, the Ashland-based newsletter published advertisements and news bulletins from a variety of local and regional women's land collectives including Cabbage Lane, Rainbow's End, Rainbow's Other End, and the Oregon Women's Land Trust (OWLT).^{xxv} Womansource also hosted an annual weekend retreat called The Gathering, two annual women-only dances, and monthly coffee house get-togethers.^{xxvi} *WomanSpirit* and Womansource both served as connecting points for the Southern Oregon lesbian community. Although many women lived in individual intentional communities (and many others did not), it is important to note that there was a larger women's community present. Most importantly, these women had important links to each other, and shared a desire to create a separate women's culture.

Each individual community also has its own history. Although there were numerous women's only intentional communities in Southern Oregon, the amount of information on these communities varies. A few of the better documented of the groups

are Cabbage Lane, Oregon Women's Land Trust (OWLT), WomanShare, and Fly Away Home. These communities, taken together, demonstrate the variation in form, size, and structure that existed for women's only land groups in Southern Oregon.

Cabbage Lane was among the first lesbian communities in Southern Oregon. In 1972, it began as a mixed homosexual community (gay men and lesbians). However, in 1974, the women asked the men to leave because they wanted to create a separatist community.^{xxvii} In an undated letter to the women living on the property, a group of city 'wimmin' (former residents and longtime friends of the group) wrote to express their concern that men had been allowed on the property. They said, "By tradition this has always meant that the land has been a sanctuary for women with the knowledge that men would not be present."^{xxviii} Cabbage Lane, despite its origins as a mixed gender community, had a strong interest in maintaining itself as a separatist community. Located in Wolf Creek, Oregon, it had some long-term residents and served as a place of retreat for other women.

OWLT, a non-profit corporation also dating from the 1970s focused on acquiring and preserving women-only land accomplished its goal of attaining separatist land through its associated community, OWL Farm in Days Creek, Oregon. An OWL Farm Handbook put together in the early 1990s includes the "herstory" of OWL Farm written in two sections by two different OWL members. The first, which covers the period from 1976 to 1983, details its start as a combined effort by women in Eugene looking for a land-based community in which they could put into practice their liberal political beliefs and other women (some from Northern California) looking for rural land to settle on. Although these women had few resources, they were interested in creating a space

accessible to all women regardless of finances on land that women would own and care for in perpetuity.^{xxix} In 1976, these women formed a land trust (OWLT) and purchased the 147-acres of land near Days Creek that would become OWL Farm by raising a down payment of \$18,850, and agreeing to pay a \$365 monthly mortgage.^{xxx} Sixteen women decided to move onto the land and act as caretakers, and by mid-summer, women were living on OWL Farm. The “herstory” also described the early difficulties that the group faced including issues with childcare, a high rate of turnover among caretakers, burnout, and inexperience with rural life. Then, in 1982, the former owner of the land threatened foreclosure because the women were seven months behind on their mortgage payments. They avoided foreclosure, however, by asking for and receiving financial help from the larger lesbian and feminist communities.

The second half of the herstory, which covers the period from 1983 to 1993, looks at developments on the land and within the community. During these ten years, OWL farm became more financially self-sufficient, grew and shrunk in the numbers of women living on the land, and dealt with interpersonal problems (resulting, particularly notably in 1992, in a number of women leaving the land).^{xxxii} The women struggled to adapt to rural and communal life, navigate sexual relationships, and in some cases, deal with histories of trauma and abuse. Despite the ongoing difficulty of learning to live with women with different backgrounds and beliefs, OWL Farm survived and, according to author Ní Aódogaín, flourished.^{xxxii} In general, OWL Farm was very active both in terms of numbers of visitors and residents, probably largely due to its focus on maintaining open women’s land. The detailed herstory of OWL Farm provides insight into the difficulties faced by Southern Oregon’s lesbian separatists. Other women-only land

communities, of course, shared many of the same financial and interpersonal struggles as well as moments of success.

Another prominent lesbian community that began in the early 1970s was WomanShare, a community founded by a group of women who met in a collective in Nova Scotia. Before beginning WomanShare, the women started a non-profit women's craft store called The Flaming Apron in Montreal. Eventually, however, they decided they were dissatisfied with the women's community in Montreal and moved out west to find other feminist lesbians.^{xxxiii} They bought the land that would become Womanshare in 1974.^{xxxiv} Then, in 1976, the women of WomanShare collectively published a book, *Country Lesbians*, in which they discussed their experiences as lesbians, and specifically, about their experiences living in a lesbian intentional community. In the afterward to the book, written in 1980, the women wrote that the community was still functioning, although some of the original members had left and other women and children had joined the collective. They explained: "All of us living here have learned to be open to changes...of women, dreams, and goals. We have worked hard over the past four years learning to share money, learning to build new cabins after one of our houses was destroyed by fire, and learning how to feel secure in a constantly changing atmosphere."^{xxxv} Among other things, the WomanShare collective focused on self-sufficiency, and strove to develop positive interpersonal relationships. The collective held retreats and workshops for the larger women's community, and was part of the larger network of Southern Oregon lesbian communities.

Fly Away Home differed from the other communities mentioned so far in that it was comprised of only four women at its peak, and for the most part, there were only two

women living on the land together.^{xxxvi} Although they do not fit the “critical mass” component of Miller’s definition of intentional communities, Fly Away Home shared the separatist, women-only vision of other communities and was part of the larger lesbian-feminist movement. Hawk Madrone and Bethroot Gwynn purchased the land that would become Fly Away Home in the late 1970s. According to Madrone in her book *Weeding at Dawn: a Lesbian Country Life*, “We each [Bethroot and Hawk] were swept up in the dyke back-to-the-land movement of the 1970s, encouraged by friends who had already moved to the hills of southern Oregon.”^{xxxvii} They built a large garden, constructed and improved living spaces and attempted to live off the land as much as possible. Although the land was not open women’s land as was the case at OWL Farm, both Madrone and Gwynn were engaged in the network of women’s land communities. Gwynn, for instance, hosted acting classes at Fly Away Home and at other communities in the area. As a small separatist land group, Fly Away Home demonstrates the diversity of Southern Oregon’s lesbian communities and shows the importance of the larger women’s community as a way to engage women from both large and small separatist land ventures.

Although certainly not a comprehensive discussion of the women-only communities that existed in Southern Oregon during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, this brief survey of four communities offers some insight into the similarities between and variations among communities. With the individual histories in mind, it is possible to analyze the goals and visions of these communities in relation to the three components of the pastoral ideal: simplicity, spirituality, and egalitarianism. Inherent to the pastoral ideal is the desire to create rural spaces that embody these traits, which is done both through

rhetoric such as contrast with urban spaces and though writings that speak to what life was like in these communities.

In various forms, including letters, pamphlets, and journal entries, women involved with Southern Oregon's separatist communities articulated their idealized visions of simple country living and documented the actual material simplicity of life in these communities. Simplicity in this context does not mean simplicity of thought or intention; rather it refers to a conscious choice to move away from, at least to some degree, technology and materialism. In a 1976 pamphlet produced by OWL Farm, one community member stated: "As long as I buy my food, this culture owns me. Land means food...I need to use my body as well as my mind. I need to really experience the entire process of producing life-giving food: thought, labor, love, and the blessings of a fertile environment."^{xxxviii} Among other things, this woman expressed a desire for self-sustainability. Rather than depend on the industrial food system, she was interested in returning to an earlier, more basic method of acquiring food. While this statement does not speak to what actually existed in any particular intentional community, this woman expressed the inclination and intent to simplify her relationship with the food system by growing food for herself. In another, undated pamphlet for OWL Farm, a woman described the actual modes of production, saying: "We furnish our own food, heat source (i.e. wood), transportation, and living essentials. We live without phones, electricity or indoor plumbing. Our water comes from an underground source, a deep water well, and the beginning of a small creek that runs through the land."^{xxxix} Living without electricity, for example, was not a necessity; rather, it was a conscious decision to forgo modern

amenities. Furthermore, choosing to produce their own food, heat and other necessities demonstrated these women's interest in living off the grid.

Clearly, members of OWL Farm valued self-sustainability, and were attempting to distance themselves from mainstream society. In the OWL Farm Handbook, one community member, Rootwomon, explained the reason why the residents of OWL Farm were interested in a simple lifestyle: "By living simply (at OWL), wimmin are creating an alternative to the technological-consumer society that surrounds us. In this way, we hope that we can be part of the healing of the Mother Earth."^{xi} Later in the passage, she elaborated on their choice: "In living gently on the Earth, we have the opportunity to be healed by Her. To absorb the deep quiet of the Mother, to plant seeds that will grow food for wimmin, to learn ways of living together, as wimmin, that don't harm Her is to begin to live in balance and harmony."^{xi}

Essentially, OWL Farm's chose to live simply by practicing sustainability and foregoing many modern amenities for three basic reasons. The first is ecological: a desire to care for the earth, which they cast as distinctly feminine, by farming and living consciously. The second is social: a desire to remove themselves from the "technological-consumer society" and the patriarchy. The third is personal: a desire for healing from the earth, and subsequently the creation of a harmonious women's community.

A similar approach can be observed in other Southern Oregon women's land groups. For instance, Hawk Madrone of Fly Away Home described transforming an unfinished skeleton of a house into her home, creating a garden, and "figuring out how to make the flow from the mountain spring enter the spring tank, despite the defiance of

leaves, tiny stones and twigs, wanting to block its way.”^{xlii} The challenges she described were the ones of simple “country Lesbian life”, unencumbered by technology or confining social structures.^{xliii} The focus on simplicity in Southern Oregon’s lesbian communities is demonstrative of the desire to create rural spaces that embody this trait. Essentially, these communities strove for simplicity because they saw it as a rejection of the complications of city life and a component of their desire to create living environments which were harmonious, sustainable, and removed from the patriarchal society.

The women in Southern Oregon’s lesbian intentional communities also saw their land as a place in which they could feel free to develop and practice their spiritual beliefs. Spirituality in these communities was often associated with both the land itself (Mother Earth) and the support/presence of a “circle of women” engaged in the same, or similar, spiritual practices. Spiritual practice in this context refers not only to religious practice but also to processes of healing and self-growth. Although some intentional communities subscribed to a particular religious ideology, in relation to Southern Oregon’s lesbian communities, the term more broadly reflects the open and non-denominational spirituality of these communities.

Hawk Madrone described her motivation for buying the land that would become Fly Away Home as follows: “We wanted to join the tribe, the wide network of Lesbians who were rooting their spirituality in the soil, the cycles of the earth, intent upon separating ourselves as much as possible from the world the men have made.”^{xliv} By saying that lesbians were “rooting their spirituality in the soil,” Madrone directly connected spirituality with land. Implying reverence for Mother Earth, she established

land as integral, or at least important, to spiritual practices in women's land communities. In a collective journal written at Cabbage Lane between 1974 and 1978, one woman wrote: "I want this place to be a place where women can come and learn, feel spirituality. A window. I want us to be open. Always."^{xlv} Her aspiration to create an open, free space for women suggests that spiritual freedom was not possible, or often not possible, for these women outside of women's land communities. Essentially, she suggested that the physical space of the community was conducive to women's spiritual growth.

A pamphlet for OWL Farm expresses a similar idea, claiming, "The land is a sanctuary for wommon's spirituality."^{xlvi} The idea of sanctuary, particularly in relation to spirituality, highlights a contrast between how these women imagined spiritual possibility on and off the land. Perceiving women's communal land as a spiritual sanctuary demonstrates that spiritual freedom, at least in their collective imagination, was not readily possible in mainstream society. Boa Snakewomon, a member of OWL Farm, wrote about the healing that occurred at OWL: "I see, again and again, our pain pouring out and our anger pouring out and our screams pouring out-with each other, on each other and alone, in the top releasing meadow, the Mother holding us in her grassy, earthy 'arms'. So many different kinds of healing work happen here."^{xlvii}

One aspect of spirituality present in many writings by members of Southern Oregon's lesbian intentional communities was healing. Snakewomon suggested that the land could serve not only as a place of growth but also as a means to heal from past trauma. Later in the same passage, Snakewomon asserted that when women and girls came to the land and saw that there were no, as she put it, "men/abusers" present, they suddenly felt free to express the pain they had internalized from past traumatic events.^{xlviii}

In that way, separatism, or women-only space, was a necessary component of healing for these women. Madrone also connected spirituality with separatism by stating one objective of women who were “rooting their spirituality in the soil” was to separate themselves from the patriarchy. Both of these women, among others, specifically connected spirituality with rural, women’s-only space. Their writings demonstrate that one goal of lesbian separatist communities was to experience the spiritual growth that they believed was possible on rural, lesbian land.

In addition to striving for individual spiritual growth, the women in Southern Oregon’s lesbian communities were interested in reconfiguring power dynamics to create egalitarian rural spaces. In OWL Farm’s collective journal written in 1985 a woman wrote: “I want us to strive for equality and move away from hierarchy—I want “power-over” to stop—I want empowerment and dykes finding their voices and I want us to move away from victim/oppressor roles and see each other in the truth of who we are.”^{xlix} Dissatisfaction, even anger, with mainstream society’s existing power dynamics was clearly a driving force behind the creation of women’s separatist communities. These women saw men and the patriarchy in general as forces of oppression. Consequently, in their attempt to create communities based on equality, they consciously rejected existing societal power dynamics and embraced models of consensus and collectivism. A pamphlet for OWL Farm states: “We have acquired land collectively, thus eliminating owner/tenant power divisions. Skill sharing such as gardening, fire building, carpentry, child care, verbal communication, ecology and cooperative country living are our way of life.”¹ The process of land acquisition highlights the importance of egalitarianism in these communities. Later in the pamphlet, members of OWL Farm

explained the reason they chose to create an “open land” community: “Recognizing that most women are confined in cities with no access to land, we are attempting to acquire and provide access to land in as many ways as women want it.”^{li} Besides purchasing and maintaining the land without having individual ownership, these women emphasized the importance of access to rural land in contrast to the confines of the city, which they saw as a symbol of patriarchal oppression.

In an everyday sense, the aforementioned practice of skill sharing also highlights the emphasis on an egalitarian model of living in which each person contributes their skills to the community. Decision-making, a process that inherently indicates power or government structure, is an important example of egalitarian practice in women’s land communities in Southern Oregon. Many of these communities, including OWL Farm and WomanShare, practiced consensus-based decision-making. Unlike a democratic system in which the majority overrules minority opinions, the consensus structure protects against minority marginalization. Using the consensus model, these communities considered all opinions equally and, unless everyone agreed to another decision-making structure such as a vote, they did not make a decision until everyone could agree. OWL Farm’s by-laws specifically stipulated consensus-based decision making, however the guidelines also allowed for a two-thirds majority vote in occasions in which every women had had a chance to speak on the issue, consensus was not apparent, and the group reached consensus to use the two-thirds majority vote clause.^{lii}

Consensus-based decision-making was not the easiest or most efficient decision-making model and its use at OWL Farm is indicative of these women’s commitment to creating and maintaining an egalitarian living environment. An OWL Farm member,

Hana Amazon, wrote about difficulty of the consensus model while emphasizing its value. She asked, “Hierarchy may be easier, but is it what we want to create on open wimmin’s land?”^{liii} After acknowledging its difficulties, she said, “So we struggle through it meeting after meeting—issue after issue—is it worth it? We are learning and we are growing and changing through it all and we are creating something new. We strive to create a space where there is no patriarchy. We strive for mutual respect and equality.”^{liv} The use of consensus-based decision-making, the collective ownership of land, and the emphasis on skill sharing, all demonstrate the importance of equality in Southern Oregon’s lesbian separatist communities. Furthermore, these women located egalitarianism within the context of their rural, women-only land. Hana Amazon, for instance, said that they were striving to create space and culture outside the patriarchy, and OWL Farm, like other separatist communities, sought out land located outside the city. The focus on egalitarianism coupled with a rejection of the city and of patriarchal power models, demonstrates not only that these women believed they could create an egalitarian community in a rural environment, but also that they actually implemented egalitarian models such as consensus-based decision making in their rural, separatist communities.

While isolated women-only lands were a means of escaping the patriarchal structure of American society, they were also an effort to create communities that embodied, as Marx says, “a simpler, more harmonious style of life, an existence closer to nature.”^{lv} Adhering to many of the beliefs associated with the radical wing of the feminist movement, these women were interested in developing their own culture independent from American culture.^{lvi}

Acquisition of rural land, then, was a strategy to make manifest their vision of a separate women's culture. At the same time, these women envisioned rural land in many of the same ways that Americans, generally speaking, have long thought of the countryside. The pastoral ideal articulates a long-held component of American cultural mythology stemming from European conception of the New World and Americans' own relationships to the city and the countryside. As such, the members of Southern Oregon's lesbian intentional communities were taking part, perhaps unwittingly, in American cultural discourse on the role of the countryside even as they strove to isolate themselves from American culture. Standing alone, the fact that Southern Oregon's lesbian intentional communities valued and emphasized simplicity, spirituality, and egalitarianism does not constitute a manifestation of the pastoral dream. However, when coupled with the glorification of the countryside as a space where embodying these traits was possible, it becomes clear that these communities were self-conscious participants in pastoral idealism.

In endeavoring to isolate themselves from American society through engaging with the pastoral ideal, these communities were attempting the impossible. While it is possible to live separate from mainstream American society and engage in pastoral idealism, it is not possible to entirely isolate oneself from American culture and still engage in pastoral idealism. As such, by believing in the idyllic possibilities of the countryside, the women in Southern Oregon's lesbian intentional communities were inextricably linking themselves to the past and future of America. Their visions of social and political change then, must be interpreted as part of the American history of idealism, communalism, and activism.

Abbreviations Used in Endnotes:

SCUA: Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon

- ⁱ Cabbage Lane Collective Journal 1974-1978, Box 11, Folder 4, SO CLAP! Collection, SCUA
- ⁱⁱ James J. Kopp, *Eden Within Eden: Oregon's Utopian Heritage* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2009), 21.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Timothy Miller, *The 60s Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), xiii.
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- ^v Winifred D. Wandersee, *On the Move: American Women in the 1970s* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988), xii.
- ^{vi} *Ibid*, xv, xiv, 56.
- ^{vii} *Ibid*, xiv, xv.
- ^{viii} *Ibid*, 64.
- ^{ix} Wandersee, *On the Move*, 64.
- ^x Miller, *The 60s*, 138.
- ^{xi} 1976 OWL Pamphlet, Box 4, Folder 7, SO CLAP! Collection, SCUA.
- ^{xii} OWL Pamphlet, Box 4, Folder 7, SO CLAP! Collection, SCUA.
- ^{xiii} OWL Journal 1985 and 1991, Box 4, Folder 3, SO CLAP! Collection, SCUA.
- ^{xiv} OWL Journal 1985 and 1991.
- ^{xv} 1976 OWL Pamphlet.
- ^{xvi} Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 4.
- ^{xvii} *Ibid*, 5.
- ^{xviii} *Ibid*, 6.
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- ^{xx} Bennett M. Berger, "American Pastoralism, Suburbia and the Commune Movement: An Exercise in the Microsociology of Knowledge," in *On the Making of Americans: Essays in Honor of David Riesman* ed. Herbert J Gans, Nathan Glazer, Joseph R. Gusfield, and Christopher Jencks (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 64.
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- ^{xxii} *Ibid*, 88.
- ^{xxiii} *Ibid*, 16.
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- ^{xxvi} Womansource Community News Jan/Feb 1996, Box 13, Folder 12, SO CLAP! Collection, SCUA.
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- ^{xxxv} Ibid, 193.
- ^{xxxvi} Hawk Madrone, *Weeding at Dawn: A Lesbian Country Life* (Binghamton, NY: Harrington Park Press, 2000), 172.
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- ^{xliii} Ibid.
- ^{xliv} Ibid, 1.
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- ^{xlvi} OWL Pamphlet.
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- ^{liii} OWL Handbook “Diversity and Consensus”, 31.
- ^{liv} Ibid.
- ^{lv} Marx, *The Machine*, 6.
- ^{lvi} OWL Pamphlet.