

GARBAGE AMONG THE TRASH

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Lots of us in the Lesbian/Feminist Movement come from lower and working class backgrounds. It's not true that all of us are middle-class; it's just that the middle-class women have run the show. Middle-class ways of doing things are the standard. Those of us who are lower or working class have gone along with and been successfully divided by middle-class dominance. We have often tried to stop their dominance but middle-class lesbians--because of their larger numbers, power, and privileges--have kept us divided. The following skit shows how one middle-class lesbian (Garbage) can keep two lower (Trash) and working-class (Goodie Goodie) lesbians separated from each other and maintain her control.

Garbage: (To Goodie Goodie) Pass the chicken, will you please? Thank you. (MEANING: Garbage sets the polite tone of the dinner.)

Goodie Goodie: You're welcome. (MEANING: Goodie Goodie's gonna play the game.)

Garbage: (To Trash) I saw Peggy today. She said you were in the bar last night.

Trash: Yeh, me and Peggy had a couple beers together and talked about the old days. We had a real nice time.

Garbage: I thought you were low on money. That's why I gave you that ten dollars.

Trash: I am.

Garbage: Well, if I'm going to give you money I don't think you should be spending it on beer. (MEANING: I can make better decisions than you can.)

Trash: (Gulp. Silence. Defensively.) Well, I didn't spend that much in the bar. I only bought two beers. Anyway, what are you complaining about, you went out to dinner twice last week. (MEANING: Shit, fuck, piss, next time it'll be harder than hell to borrow any money from her.)

Garbage: (Taking advantage of Trash's defensive position, instructs her in the right values.) Why don't you spend your money on useful things? Or save it so you can buy that camera you want. (MEANING: If she'd only use her head like me and be more responsible with her money she'd get what she wants. I just don't understand what her problem is.)

Goodie Goodie: When I was in High School and my family didn't have enough money to buy me a car, I saved for two

years to get one. (MEANING: I worked my way up to be like Garbage. See how I've improved. You could to.)

Trash: (Laughs.) What'd you use for gas money? Your savings account book (MEANING: Hostility.)

Goodie Goodie: (Shot down and angered.)

Garbage: That's not funny. (MEANING: Why aren't you more grateful?)

Goodie Goodie: Garbage works hard for her money. She's been riding the bus to work for months. (MEANING: Garbage works hard for her money and you don't. She sacrifices for you. She's wonderful and so good to ride the bus cause it's beneath her to do it.)

Garbage: (Feeling fired up by the support from Goodie Goodie, speaks from her throne angrily.) Don't you see I'm just trying to help you. (MEANING: I know what's best for you better than you do. What's best for me is what's best. I am right. You're wrong.)

Trash: (Intimidated by Garbage's fierce sense of rightness and Goodie Goodie's sympathy and support of Garbage.) I guess you're right. (MEANING: Anyway, they're both against me, so I'd better keep quiet and go along with them.)

THINGS LEFT UNSAID BY TRASH

Oh, I'm so hungry. I wish I could just grab a chicken leg. I guess I'd better wait 'til everybody's served. I wonder

what I should talk about now. Garbage looks like she has something on her mind. I wonder what it is. So that's it, money again. Christ. What's wrong with beer, anyway? I'm not an alcoholic. I wish she wouldn't bring this up in front of Goodie Goodie. Garbage doesn't like beer. Maybe I should drink Manhattans. But I like beer. I really don't spend that much on the bar. I only went once last week. She went out to dinner twice, probably spent a lot more money than I did. Oh, shit, I shouldn't have brought up about the dinners. She's right, though, I do want a camera. I just don't know how to manage money very well. Even Goodie Goodie knows how to manage money better than I do. But shit, I wish she'd stop rubbing it in. I feel like kicking her in the ass. Ha! "What'd you use for gas money? Your savings account book." Oh, she doesn't think that's funny. Why am I always putting my foot in my mouth? Somehow I never do anything right. I wish I was more together. It'd make it a lot easier. She seems to be able to handle anything. She'd probably already have that camera. Maybe I really don't want it. It's probably my own fault. Sometimes I think I'm hopeless. If I'd save like they say I should maybe I'd get it. She really is only trying to help me; I like her too. "Yeah, I guess you're right." But I really feel down.

This skit is an example of what happens when lower and working class women still accept the middle-class standard. The middle class (Garbage) sets the tone and controls the conversation. Trash is put on the defensive. She feels like she has to explain and justify her actions. She starts out feeling something is wrong with what Garbage and Goodie Goodie are saying, but she ends up feeling like she's wrong.

She begins to doubt herself and feel like nothing she does is worth anything. Then she starts getting angry at herself. Trash doesn't get any support from Goodie Goodie who keeps running to Garbage's aid. Goodie Goodie has a stake in Garbage's staying on top. She gets approval and status from being with Garbage. She doesn't really believe that Trash could support her as well as Garbage does. She wants the approval of the middle class, not of someone who's close to where she came from, because she's constantly reminded by the middle class that where she came from was no good.

We've been in lots of situations like this skit. It doesn't have to be around money or beer. Anytime middle class lesbians have the power and we're fitting in or identifying with it for survival, the same sort of thing happens. We come off feeling like shit and feeling weak and unsupported. We end up further supporting middle class dominance and the lie that we are nothing on our own without the middle class.

We have found that there are specific things that keep us in this position. They work to undermine, make us feel guilty and strip us of the confidence we do have. The next skit includes some of these ways, but rather than going along with them, the lower and working class lesbians challenge Garbage's control. They've stopped believing she's right because she's middle class.

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Garbage: I thought you were low on money. That's why I gave you that ten dollars.

Trash: I am.

Garbage: Well, if I'm going to give you money I don't think you should be spending it on beer. (MEANING: I can make better decisions than you can.)

Trash: (Gulp. Silence. Anger.) Beer is good for your health, and it's full of B vitamins. (MEANING: Who's she to say what's good for me. Just because she gives me a little money she thinks she can control what I do.)

Garbage: You're missing the whole point. (MEANING: You're stupid because you can't follow my reasoning. It's my money and I should have a right to say how it's spent.)

Trash: The whole point is that you gave me the money but you want me to get your stamp of approval before I spend it. You want me to jump when you hollar. You want me to kiss your ass and act like a proper beggar.

Goodie Goodie: (To Trash) You're behaving like a bar room hussy. Let's be rational about this. There's no reason to argue. Let's talk about it calmly or we won't get

anywhere. (MEANING: Trash, your behaviour is out of line. Garbage's way of talking things over is the right way to work things out.)

Trash: (To Goodie Goodie, angrily) Listen you ass-kisser chicken-shit fart. How many times did you tell me the story of when you were a kid and cashed in your parents' empty beer bottles to get money. You've got the gall to call me a bar room hussy when you drink a glass of wine at every dinner. You're just playing up to Garbage so she'll pat you on the head and throw you a scrap of approval. (MEANING: You're not so superior. You're not so far away from trash yourself.)

Goodie Goodie: (Gulps. Squirms.)

Garbage: This is getting foolish. (MEANING: This is getting out of my control.) I only brought it up because I knew you were trying to save for a camera. I just wondered how it was going. (MEANING: I am pretending concern for you to disguise the fact that I have a right to say where the money's going.)

Trash: (Taken aback) Well, I was going to start putting my money away. (MEANING: Yeah, I really want to get that camera) but... (MEANING: Wait a minute, what is this shit?) What the fuck difference does it make? If I want a camera, I'll get it somehow. You think your way is the only right way. Get off my back will you.

Goodie Goodie: Wait a minute. Let's stop this right here. I'm not sure how this has all happened, but it's gotten to be a mess with me and Trash fighting on each other. I'm

sure Trash will get the camera. (To Garbage) And she doesn't have to give you a detailed account of her actions to get it. What's the camera got to do with this anyhow, or a few beers for that matter.

Garbage: (To Goodie Goodie) I'm surprised at you. (MEANING: How come you're not supporting me?) I've always hoped we could rely on each other. (MEANING: Divide and Conquer. I respect you more than Trash. You are better. I'll even give you the support you need if you will keep supporting my control.)

Goodie Goodie: (confused, angered and somewhat speechless) (To Garbage.) No. Stop this shit. Whenever you tell me how good I am I start expecting it from you. I stop believing in myself and look to you for what I know I already have. I feel like I have to keep behaving then so you won't take your support away. You make me dependent on you when I don't need to be. You make me pay for the support you give to me. I'm through giving you the power to punish me if I step out of line. Do you hear me.

Garbage: (sitting motionless with a stone face) I don't know what you're talking about. (MEANING: I wish to cancel out everything you've said. I refuse to listen to you. Right now you're too threatening to me.)

Goodie Goodie: Well, I'm not surprised. I doubt if you ever really listen to me except when it's something useful to you.

Trash: (To Goodie Goodie) My God. You're really something. I thought you had guts underneath you but I

didn't know what was stopping you up.

Goodie Goodie: I guess I'm just fed up with trying to meet someone else's standard. Always being told you're not good enough as you are but with the right direction you'll become better. Shit. I'm through being a goddam fool.

Trash: I know what you're talking about.

Garbage: (Talking to both but looking at Goodie Goodie) There's no use talking anymore. A person can't get anywhere. I was only trying to help. I really do care about you both though. I don't understand why you both come down so hard on me. (MEANING: A gross guilt trip. I'm a person and you're a couple of nobodies who aren't able to appreciate my superior help. You're to blame for your stupidity. You're on my shit list now and I'll think twice before I throw you a scrap of my approval. Aren't you sorry now for having behaved like you did when I really do care.)

Goodie Goodie: Help if you want to but don't expect me to jump when you bark. I'm not so sure if you do really care about us or if you only care about losing your power over us.

Trash: Well said sister.

Goodie Goodie: (To Trash) What would you think about going to a movie with someone as bad as me?

Trash: I wouldn't miss it for the world.