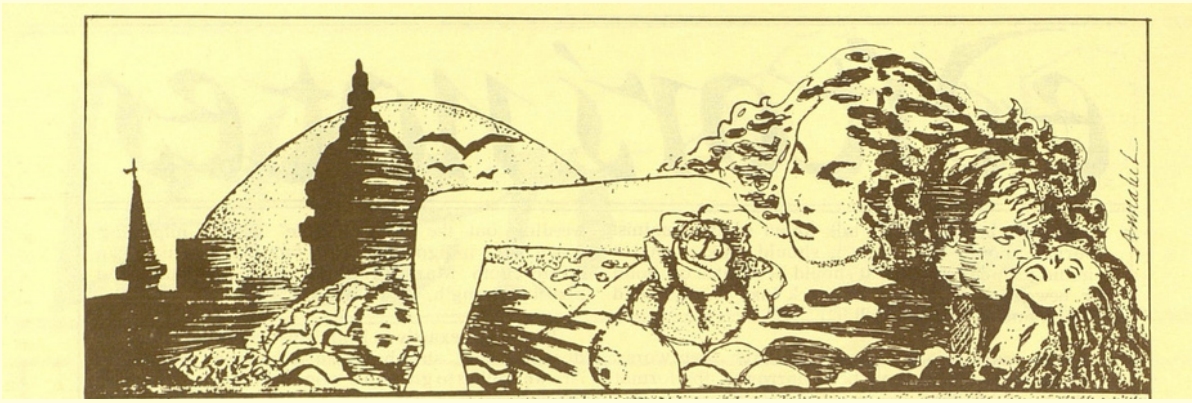


Relational Autonomy  
in  
*Bread and Roses*

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## Introduction

*Bread and Roses* is a non-profit feminist journal, published in the mid 1970's, during Second Wave Feminism, inspired by "a desire to seek something more than equality with men". It gets its title from a poem written in 1911, a commemoration of women's fight for bread (arguably equality as a human), as well as roses (respect for being a woman). Through this, it recognizes feminism's struggle for keeping one's feminine identity, as well as, one of the largest issues that continues onto modern day feminism: Relational Autonomy.

Feminist Theories on Autonomy have come together to form the term, Relational Autonomy, which is not only the reclamation of the body, but also an understanding of how oppressive social conditions and internalized oppression erode at a person's autonomy. The issue I will be working on is the Winter-Spring Issue, specifically titled, "*Our Physical Selves*", written in 1978. This article focuses on subtopics that fall under reclaiming autonomy, such as Reproductive Rights, de facto inequalities, and bodily autonomy itself.

Historically, women have been oppressed. No question of it. There have been various limits on what women can do societally, and having little to no control on decisions about their own bodies.

The fight for reproductive rights started as early as the Progressive Era, but didn't gain traction until the first World War. After the public's attitude towards birth control changed as well as public discussion of it became permissible, sexual values and stigma's began to change, all up to the creation of the very first Birth Control. In this issue of *Bread and Roses*, the article "*The Truth about THE PILL*", gives it a scalding review, one that attacks the male-dominated medical establishment, the issue of its relationship in the context of sexism, racism, and classism, and its complete disregard for women's health and desires.

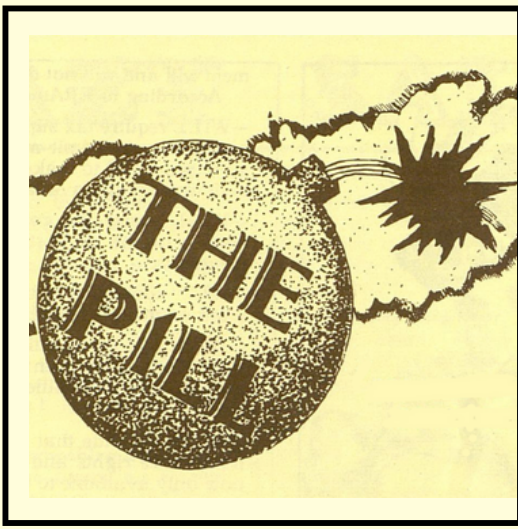
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**"I'm Mad as Hell and  
I'm not going to take  
it anymore!"**

-Ruth Blair, M.D.

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It points out a clear double standard using Enovid, the first hormonal Birth Control as an example. After its quick release, it was found to have ten times more estrogen than is needed in a contraceptive pill, which has shown an increased likelihood to produce cancer in lab animals and has been well



known to since the 1930's. Recognizing that products that yield negative results in lab animals shouldn't be applicable to men, it was released. Yet, birth control created for was not been released, because the potential theoretical risk to their cardiovascular system is something too complicated to assume. *Bread and Roses* question where this representation will lead us, and how the decisions are made by the gentlemen, and not the "women who will bear the consequences".

The Journal's clear message, is a call for action to further improve these conditions that women have to deal with, such as better representation, or for better products that benefit their consumers to their best ability.

Aside from women's health and needs being ignored, women also fought for independence under the eyes of the law. Women, have historically been recognized and known for their relationships with other people. For example, they were daughters, wives, mothers, and widows, but never if not rarely, just an independent person. Throughout women's suffrage, and every legislative marker they fought for there was the argument of how this would affect the life at home, somehow breaking families apart yet putting them under dominant matriarchal control. At the time this issue was released, the National Women's

Conference of 1977 in Houston had occurred, and was considered a major turning point in Second-Wave feminism in the United States for the number of controversial issues discussed. However, the article "*Will there be life after ERA?*", makes a point to drawn attention away from the center stage and to the primary effort at hand: The Equal Rights Amendment. This would reinstate that Equal Rights will not be denied on account of sex, and yet, it was still in process of ratification, with many states moving to rescind after previously voting to ratify. One of the largest reasons against a straightforward constitutional reform is because it will have harmful effects on society. Somehow, in an attempt to dissuade this amendment from being approved, opposers have conjured up "potential, terrifying consequences of the ERA" that show that they do not have a clear understanding of its meaning. *Bread and Roses* clarifies that, no it won't draft mothers into the military, and it won't force them into jobs and business to abandon their children. Rather, it will require tax supported schools to admit both sexes and provide material equally, and it will support laws banning unemployment discrimination on the basis of sex, as well as other favorable outcomes. It is clear that great research and thought was put into clearing the air on how equality does not mean complete disregard for previous positions in the home and in the world. Yet, it makes clear the lack of reproach on nonequality, and more on the affect it will have on mothers. As much as it is something beneficial to women, *Bread and Roses* isn't afraid to comment on it's threat to feminism, as it removes from the focus on the "integral issues in feminism: the termination of sex roles and sexual stereotyping". It identifies the tricky thing about victories such as this one, as you have to reinstate that, although

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women's positions won't be radically changed and expelled from where they were (in the home), this shouldn't hinder from women's access to the outside world, should they decide to take advantage of this new freedom. They have just as much as a right (now more than ever with the introduction of the ERA) to take up space outside their historical positions as mothers and caregivers. Although they cover popular news on their publications, this is a great example showing how the journal is not opposed to playing devil's advocate to incur further discussion and question the goals of the feminist movement.

Additionally, *Bread and Roses* involves individual voices from the feminist community, one being in an article titled, "*Dialog, Cutting Loose*". A woman shares her experience being continuously sexualized because of her large chest. Peaked by an encounter in which they were sexually assaulted by a man, they realized, "It made me a thing-not a person- and I'd never want to be that empty and lonely again". They proceeded with a Breast Reduction Surgery and have no regrets. As they claimed in the interview, they felt as though society advertises certain body proportions and brainwashes women to glamorize it. Yet, it ultimately did not benefit her, and she made the choice to reaffirm control over her body and change for the better.

This issue of *Bread and Roses* includes more content surrounding the body, like using natural means of dealing with menstruation, and the discussion around the legalization of prostitution. This diversity also includes more than reviews and interviews. Taking advantage of their publicity, they have a section titled "*Crazy Salad*", with many resources like abortion clinics, childcare, and counseling, as well as mentioning Legislative Highlights.

# "My Body, my Choice"

- Popular  
Feminist Slogan

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## Conclusion

*Bread and Roses* makes it a point in this issue to recognize that women have to not only strive to gain, but relearn having autonomy over their bodies, whether that be in family planning, in the ERA, or simply controlling what you do with your body. They recognize that, aside from familial pressure to perform your sex role, there are far greater and powerful institutions and powers at hand that oppress women. As they put it, the amount of freedom they give women have "always reflected the needs of governments and ruling classes as well as the attitudes and requirements of society relative to women...Within this framework, the needs, desires, and the health of women are considered both irrelevant and expendable." This radical take can be applied to a variety of topics, but it speaks most to that of Relational Autonomy, in which the modern women must not be afraid to question the resources and freedoms given to them by the establishment, but achieve liberation and self actualization through the same questionable liberties.