

Amelia Interview

Tape 1. Side One:

Sara: How does the fact that all Amelia women are lesbians relate to the way that the group came together?? Was it coincidence, conscious choice to work with lesbians or is there another explanation for it?

(Laughter)

Sara: I thought about it last night. This is on the more abstract level, it isn't on the who was relating to who and who was working with who together, but it did occur to me that we are part of a community and that it's a feminist community and that part of the nature of this community in Vancouver is that a lot of the women who were active in it are lesbians. And I think that through the political, the feminist political work that we had done and through knowing each other, we all began to know that we all, we were each interested in doing cultural work, and in particular, film and video work and so I think we gravitated to each other over a number of years and took up specific projects. So it has to do with the history, like why we ended up working together as a group as opposed to working other women doing video work, I think had to do with being part of a political community, in part at least. Because there are other feminists in Vancouver, other women who define themselves as feminists who are doing film and video. But they are not active in the same kind of organizing that I think all of us came out of. Or the same set of contacts.

SaraH: But I think, gay you met everybody at SFU, you didn't know anybody in this grouping until you were at SFU, right? And it seems to me from the total outside, that, well like, that was your being a lesbina and them being or Ellen why you began working with Gay a lesbian unconnected with why you began working with Ellen, or was that one of the things that made that happen?

Ellen: I think that both of us being lesbians has a lot to do with how we sort of lept upon each other in the film course and glued ourselves together for two years. Because of being the only support and that had to do with their not being other ~~feminist~~ women, there not being other feminists, let alone lesbian feminists. But we spent a lot of time talking about being lesbians, and being lesbian mothers and being feminists. But had either of us not been a lesbian we probably would have had to glue each other to each other anyways because there weren't other feminists.

Gay: I think that part of the reason that we ended up in the film class anyways is because we are feminists and lesbians. I think that if I wasn't a lesbian I probably wouldn't have been motivated to make it through that kind of process, learning how to lose the techniques, because there wouldn't have been the motivation there.

Sara: Do you mean because it was trying to break down a traditional female model of women's work to learn to do that kind of work in the first place?

Gay: Yeah, to show that there are alternatives, using the media to show that.

Ellen: I think that it's also easier to survive in some ways as a lesbian, because of not being caught in with the male sexual games. I mean they come sort of in your direction and fall down on the floor ~~with~~ on them and don't quite know what to do with it and really cannot figure out how come they can't play the sexual games; because of not being susceptible to those kind of games does make it a lot, particularly in that setting, easier to survive. It might work if you were a clearly married and monogamous and maybe then they wouldn't play the sexual games but I don't even think that would work as well as knowing that you're very clearly not interested because there is so much of it up there.

Sarah: Gay, were you trying to say also that part of the impetus to wanting to do alternate kind of media is because of, well I see it as also because you're in the position where, basically lesbians are imageless and so there's a big push on lesbians in some ways, ~~on~~ some lesbians feel a big push to go from being imageless to ~~being seen~~ being seen and that can be a motivation to getting into media. And it can be a motivation for also seeing that about other people, that a lot of people are and a lot of conditions that people are in are not seen. But it's really obvious when you are a lesbian. And in other situations it might pass you by.

Gay: Yes. Ellen and I had a discussion about this ~~while~~ ages ago, about making a film that speaks to us. And that was basically our motivation. always

Ellen: Needless to say the film department hated ~~all~~ our films.

Sarah: Which to some degree, any feminist films they would have hated. Any films by women they would hate.

Sara: Oh I think that there were some women's films that were acceptable up there but their content really aligned with the dominant image of women as victims. Because there were films that were produced there that were seen as acceptable art film, good technique and the kind of content that really appealed to the people running the film programme, but they reproduced the images of women that those of us who were working up there were trying to break down. For me though when I was involved in the SFU film programme, I was not trying to work as a lesbian, I was trying to do work as a feminist and that's where I ran into the opposition. And my attraction to the women who eventually became Amelia was less focused I think on trying to do documentary work about lesbians or films about lesbians and more on doing general women's documentary work. I think I identified with the women, because of the... I don't know Gay until a different stage in that and then I ~~in~~ knew the kind of work you were doing. But I identified with the political traditions that women came out of who eventually formed Amelia. And that was tied up with being lesbians and having a history of working ~~with~~

women ~~am~~ and working collectively with women.

Ellen: ~~ixthinkxixthatxixxix~~ I also think that politically we gravitated towards each other and being feminists had a lot to do with why we were working with each other. But I think that the emotional bonds that were formed, a lot of the emotional bonds in the group by the time we started being Amelia, were really strong. And had to do with us being lesbians. And that is not something that can be...I'm not convinced that there really aren't other women who I could work ^{well} with ~~xxx~~ too, if I had enough closeness ~~tw~~ with them to know that I could work well with them too. There's probably ~~ix~~ other women out there who I could work with, but I don't know that because ~~xixxxxx~~ I've never been close to them, I don't mean like in a sexual relationship, I mean to having the emotional bonds with. I don't think we should overlook ~~ix~~ that in the general political discussion of how we got together.

Sarah: Well also, distinctly for me, the ~~ix~~ only reason that I got into Amelia was because you dragged me, and the only reason that you were around to ~~ix~~ drag me and the only reason that you were around to drag me was ~~ix~~ because we lived together, well we could have lived together and both not been lesbians, but as it happened, that's how it happened.

Sara: Next? This actually sort of flows...~~wh~~ which of our tapes deal with lesbian oppression, rights and liberation?

Sarah: Oh the one that I wasn't involved with, you know the one where you came in with the equipment?

Ellen: Lesbians Against the Right? We have Lesbians Against the Right, Hardly an Ending...

Sara: Lesbian Mothers...

Ellen: Mothers Day in the last piece.

Sara: Holly Near. All of our tapes are about women and a lot of lesbians are located in work places, are native women. I feel like we have lesbian-specific tapes which deal with lesbian issues and then we have tapes ~~ix~~ where we are giving a voice to women who are lesbians struggling in different

areas of their lives. I think it might be useful to go through each of the tapes and talk a little bit ~~of~~ about the history of the tape and ~~about~~ a little bit of what we were trying to do with it. The content. Why don't we do it chronologically, and start with Lesbian Mothers.

Ellen: Lesbian Mothers seems so long ~~in~~ ago.

Sarah: That was your school tpe that you dd on the subject of lesbains.

Ellen: I got 5 credits for it, but it wasn;t a course, it was a course I made up...Now I rememeber, remember Judy Lynn had wanted to do a film and we did research for a film for the NationL Film Borad after Jdy lost her kids there for awhile when the kids got kidnapped~~and~~ and then we talked about doing the film ~~in~~ and she wrote the whole proposal and it was sitting on the shelf and it wasn;t getting made so then I decided that I should just make it. The problem being that I didnt know which end of the video camera was which. And Gay signed this thing out for me and said, "You point it in this direction." (Laughter) And we made the video and then Billie and I edited it sitting in the editing room going, "Now there must be a book arou d here somewhere that tells you how to work this stuff." After Gay gave a 15 minute "push these buttons." That one again was basically that there wasnt a tape, there wasnt the inofrmation.

Sara: What was it like working ~~on~~ a tape taht was about basically your won own ~~ex~~perience as opposed to some of the other work that we've done which is about an experience that we iddentify with because we are women but its a very different experiece.

Ellen: I think at the time I had never imagined ~~working~~ in any other way. Now there's alot more ways that I see the documentary aspects of video, but when I first gotint o ~~in~~ it it was alot more that I had something to say and I felt that ir was alot more effocient to put itin a tape than to say it a thousand times. It would get more pñaces. I mean I wcouldn't

run around and do a hundred thousand speaking engagements on lesbian mothers. And it was something that I talked about a lot because it was important to me. And that was very much how I saw the medium, as a way of putting down the kind of education that we do anyhow as a part of organizing. As an organizing tool. I couldn't have imagined working in another way, the stuff we did in the film course was like that a lot.

Sara: It sort of hit me last night that there was this continuity between the early work that Amelia women were doing which was a lot about lesbian issues and their own experience and that that came out in a lot of ways from the feminists consciousness of women needing to speak for themselves and tell their stories and needing to create a respect for that. And that there was a direct line between that early work which was us telling our stories and work we got into later in terms of the kind of style we use which is very much to encourage other women to tell their stories, to give them a voice to help them have a voice and to do that in as honest and non-manipulative way as possible.

Sarah: I was just thinking that for me the way that I am a feminist is definitely and inextricably tied to the fact that I am a lesbian. And I can't really distinguish clearly. And more and more I am feeling as though I have a lesbian cultural background and I don't think that I really thought of this before this year. And that even though my experience, I see it as a woman's experience but I see it utterly as a lesbian. I feel as though the history of women's oppression is why I'm a lesbian. And that the two of them are totally inextricably connected and that knowing about kinds of women's oppression, how that gets in my mind is it leads up to being a lesbian. And it's not somehow a statement for me about other women's personal sexual choices, but I realize that in my mind the whole history of women and the history of lesbians are, they really do add up in my mind to being my cultural background, that my cultural background is a women's cultural background and a lesbian's

~~mylirak~~ cultural background.

Sara: How about Hardly An Ending? The process of making it etc.

Gay: What actually happened in that one was that I had seen some quote, "lesbian culture" I had seen some Barbara Hammer films and got totally incensed and really inspired by it ~~because~~ because it just made me really furious that here was this mixed audience and that was the images of lesbianism, running around flitting through the woods naked, and I was just really pissed off at it. And decided that I had to do something about that. And I was really glad that I was making films and video because I could try and show some real, live content, some realism/ So that was my conception. And Hardly An Ending has a scene in it of two real, live lesbians watching a film of two goddess lesbians running around in the woods and they end up going home in a rage because they're really pissed off that this is the ending. and that's how the film starts and then they go on to talk about what they would do if they had the ability and the money to make films. And the ~~next~~ rest of the film is about that ~~that~~ their different kinds of films. And it was really directly related to not having lesbian images that were what I considered real.

Sara: I also remember it being really directly related to your experience because I remember when we were working on the film, you came in one morning and we were ready to do a shoot and you were just like ready to scream because your childcare had fallen through for the weekend and that all through that shoot, I think Ellen the same ~~with~~ thing happened to you. ^{Childcare arrangements kept breaking down.} And here we are making this film about lesbian mothers, and their kids.

Ellen: Do you remember the production meeting that went on for about 6 hours with Joe in the background for the entire 6 hours listening to Sesame Street fever...

Sara: Again and again and again, while we're talking about shooting a scene ~~wh~~

where she comes up and says, "I'm hungry."

Ellen: Some of those scenes were actually written, like the scene about Jo being hungry was written after the rest of the stuff was written, when Gay and I were working on the script and Jo came up and did that scene, the scene as it is in the movie, with Jo going, "I'm hungry" and me going, as it is in the movie, "You can have breakfast in the morning." actually happened. When Jo went back to sleep we said, "Hey we can put that in the movie too."

Sarah: There are a lot of lesbians who we wouldn't be able to work with in film and video. In fact from seeing other women's work, we just aren't ~~attracted~~ attracted to that work. In fact one of the things that happened to me is that I was maybe even at the same Barbara Hammer movie. And I remember getting up at the film showing at the NFB and I ~~was~~ turned and I said to Ellen, "Promise me you'll never make a film like that." And she said, "O.K. ." And in that way, our connection to reality, which is I guess sort of partly ~~because~~ because three of us are lesbian mothers, is somewhat different $\frac{1}{2}$ from other people/ And our connection to political activity is certainly strong.

Sara: I think that's really important, ~~because~~ because I think that the work that we do has a class and a feminist perspective. And I think that there are women working in this city who are lesbians doing video stuff, whether documenting its parades in the gay community or work where they don't deal with lesbian issues from a feminist perspective ...I think there is a real ~~diff~~ different basis of unity in this group.

Ellen: I think that all of us see video and film as an organizing tool more ~~that~~ than as an art form.

Sara: They all raised their hands.

Ellen: We had a discussion about this in our film class and it wasn't until that discussion that I realized that anyone would look at it differently.

Gay: Yeah, you were sure outnumbered.

Ellen: That organizing has to do with ~~being~~ being lesbians, mothers, politica

Sara: I think our form has gotten more refined as we've tried to that kind of organizing work using the medium. That we've had to deal a lot more consciously with how we put a video together to make it speak effectively to the audience that we've ~~chosen~~ chosen to speak to. We've moved beyond purely documenting events or an issue, and just shooting whatever we can. We're a lot more conscious ~~in~~ in both the kind of camerawork that we do and the way that we edit a piece together,

Gay: I remember having a discussion with someone with the film class about that, And I remember saying that my priority was putting content in and that the form would come as I gained experience. I was talking specifically about myself at that time. And it's true. But that still is my priority. If something is a little ~~bit~~ bit out of focus or a little bit off as long as it's there and saying something that's the most important part and the rest ~~will~~ will eventually come and ten years down the line we'll be making technically wonderful film and video.

Sara: Formwise though, a lot of the exploration we've done around narrative in our video is a result of our politics but it's also a result of trying to figure out how to create a video that people and women ~~will~~ specifically watching it will identify with, can see themselves through. Where the experience ~~is~~ is direct enough for that kind of relationship to be set up with the audience.

Sarah: One of the things I have really liked doing and I liked it with the TWU tape is taking what a whole bunch of different people said to us, putting ~~in~~ it together with our view of them, ~~using~~ using only what they said but nonetheless putting it together with our view of them and then showing it to them. And that to me was a really, really good experience, because it

felt like it was a definitely a communicating experience.

SIDE TWO:

Sarah: I guess because that's part of the same thing of wanting, I want people to see how I see the world and I have a lot of respect for the fact that other people should get to show how they see the world and it was an interesting conglomeration when you do it with other ~~pop~~ people and then show it. And those women may not have even heard themselves ~~say~~ the things that they said, but we put it ^g together and took out a lot of extraneous stuff and then showed it to them and it really is a combination of how they ~~see~~ their struggle and how we see their struggle and one of the things that I was glad about was that the when we showed it to them they didn't say, "No that's not how we saw it." In fact, they seemed quite interested in how we saw them. ~~and~~ And I think they also felt quite strong from seeing it. From seeing themselves saying these ~~the~~ things somewhat more articulately than they did, but nonetheless ~~they~~ these were the things that they were saying and we did pick them out and they were quite excited. Their discussion after our showing ~~the~~ tape was sort of exciting, I didn't know what ¹ happened with it since then.

Sara: I think an aspect of that that just hit is, it's like the collective is stronger than the individual within it. ~~like~~ When we put a tape together we're showing that wholeness of people or women in the process of struggle. As just one woman in that you're limited to who you're talking to or to the direct experience that you're having in the struggle, when you see it as a whole which is what the tape does, it sort of organizes it for you. You see yourself as part of a specific historical process, instead of an individual in it or part of a small group that shares a particular view. I think that's part of the power we've given to women through our work. That happened in the Concerned Aboriginal Women tape too where the audience consistently is blown away by themselves, again and again. It really reinforced people's sense of their power in that situation.

SARA: What about Lesbians Against the Right,?

Ellen: Lesbians Against the Right ~~is~~ was one of our tapes that was a straight documentary. There was a workshop at the Lesbian Conference on lesbians organizing against the right and it was one camera of that workshop. Actually some of the choices in doing that was we couldn't do anything fancy as in ~~men~~ audience reaction ~~has~~ shots because the audience were not able to be reareded but it was very much along the lines that the information was ~~un-~~ important and that if you are going to give a speech you might as well get it down there on video. So that those three women can't keep saying the same thing but we can cut the information on the tape and send it anywhere. And the three women who made the presentations ~~were~~ worked quite hard on making it a coherent presentation. I think its one on the real simple uses of videomin organizing.

Sarah: I was really , I think the tape, I watched ~~in~~ it again recently, its a very, very interesting tape for a panel discussion. the Panel was ~~explis~~ extremely good in their presentations and in some ways I think that we probably, that tape is more useful than the use its getting. And I know that its quite excited the women in the workshop, there was tremendous excitement amongst women who were actually there, to some degree the tape continues or catu-hes the level of excitement.

Sara: I think its also a situation which ^{panel} increasingly happens with Amelai, ~~is~~ which is that a group organized a ~~situation~~ or an event and they or we wanted Amelai to document it. Where there is a ~~relationship~~ relationship between the group organizing and the video group being asked in to create a document for ongoing organizing after the event.

Sarah: Its also interesting that the ~~people~~ people who have asked them to do that have not they themselves used the tape for ongoing organizing.

Ellen: I think in Lesbians Against the Right as lesbians all organizing against the right it seemed to stand to reason that we should videotape that workshop.

There were months where, one of reasons the tape hasn't been used as broadly as possible has been, where can we show it. Because of the women in the tape. One of the women who worked in the city didn't want the tape to be on Cable 10. It's changed now...

Sara: It was ~~wierd~~ wierd being on the panel and having Amelai document, it. It was a different experience to be documented by your own group. It was good for me in the sense that it put me in a place where I can now relate to other ~~pep~~ people ~~kn~~ in a panel or struggle situation who are having this crew come in. Even though I knew Ellen and that we had asked Amelai to do it, one of the things that happened to me with the lights on and the camera was that it very much intensified by sense of performance to know that I wasn't only talking to any audience but also talking to a permanent record, it seemed particularly important to have it together. My contact ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ lens fell out. Of course we edited that part out.

Ellen: Of course we were completely together and you had to turn up the lights.

Sara: Mothers Day, 1980. Who wants to speak on that.

Ellen: Well I think the nice thing about Mothers Day is that it has this overview, there's all these women talking...it's a demonstration with various women talking ~~around~~ around women's oppression. And the last speaker ~~is~~ ^{as} a really powerful speaker who talks as a lesbian and a mother. It's one of our tapes where lesbian oppression is part of it. It's not about lesbians but lesbians are part of, lesbians are women, the tape is about women.

Sara: It's integrated like the tape we're doing now: Women Speak Out Against The Right. Lastly, what about Holly Near?

GAY: Holly Near is primarily how a lesbian and a feminist incorporates her political work with her singing and her songwriting and her analysis.

Sarah: It's an interview and music. It's a very good tape, quite inspiring and you feel good after you watch it.

Ellen: Definitely one of our more up tapes.

Sarah: And Holly Near said that we were the best crew that she had ever...

Gay and Ellen: She did.

Sarah: That was probably one of our most organized tapes because we had to catch her right in between sets and ~~XXXXXX~~ workshops and everything had to be right.

Ellen: I think she was just impressed because we fed her.

Sara: Now that's part of our lesbian feminist culture, we walways eat well together.

Ellen: We took good care of her and we also recognized that we were putting her under alot of pressure.

Sarah: Well also our equiptment was working.

Gay: That was the first time that four of us, a group of us, that many of us did something togehter,

Sarah: TWU was the first Amelia.

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Sara: How is doing tapes about lesbans different from any other kind of video work that we do? Why is this night different from all other nights?

Sarah and Ellen: On this night we sort of recline.

Sarah: Thats what the main difference is, we sort of relax.

Sara: We know we know what we're talking about.

Sarah: Its interesting to me because the kinds of tapes ~~that~~ that we've done with lesbian issues, one have been , two have been scripted and the rest of them have been panels. Scripted: Hardly an Ending and Lesbian Mothers.

Ellen: Lesbian Mothers! scripted?

Sarah: Well it isn't documentary.

Sara: I think it is.

Ellen: No, it is.. Becuase there's these three women and then there's this ~~gro~~ group of kids. Did I tell anybody what to say, no! thats the whole problem, that's why its so...

Ellen: The mothers group was so fuzzy, the women didn't know each ~~to~~ other.

I think it was quite documentary.

Sara: It was a different kind...

Sarah: A very different kind.

Sara: It's the kind where you consciously bring together a group of people as a videomaker.

Sarah: The thing is that those people weren't doing something that they were documenting, they came together in that grouping because we wanted them to talk. And the panels came together because they were panels.

Ellen: I don't think that making tapes about lesbians is very different from the other work that we do. Because maybe it is but it doesn't feel that way.. It is part of our experience, like in the Aboriginal Women tape, that's the extreme in coming from a different ~~place~~ place and being careful about what ~~our~~ our place was, in not intruding, in being voyeuristic media types. And whereas in Lesbian Mothers I was making the tape about something in my life, so there's that difference.

Sara: Also I think that in a lot of the work that we've done, there's enough of an identification with the kind of work that we've done in our own lives. Like, it is someone else's struggle but there's not that kind of separation. For me, Aboriginal women was a real separation, there is no way that that is my experience, except where I connect as a woman. I know that in CUPW, it was like, well Gay is a postal worker. Various of us have worked in shitty, alienated, but luckily unionized jobs and have been involved with strikes and so on. That there's a ~~place~~ place where we can identify too in being conscious around working women's issues. That's an aspect of our lives and I think the tapes we do tend to reflect aspects of our lives, that's how we get there. I'm trying to think of ~~the~~ other tapes. Mamonova, that was a traditional document. CUPW, Aboriginal Women, TWU, they were distinctive kinds of tapes because they were struggle tapes, they were going ~~into~~ into situations where people were in conflict and creating

a document of that. So the issue there was not whether or not I was more comfortable 'because it was about being a lesbian, in my experience it was that it was a completely different process that we were learning how to document, ~~in a way~~ where people were moving very quickly in a way that we had no control over. and where what we were trying to do was to capture as much as possible and give them a voice. So there was a sense of excitement.

Gay: When I was making Hardly an Ending I had a really long, hard struggle ~~with~~ about using an all-woman crew because it was done at SFU with primarily male people in the class and I wanted to use an all-woman crew preferably I wanted an all-lesbian crew and that made a real significant difference.' The whole concept ~~was~~, knowing that I wanted to have ~~an~~ all-woman crew and knowing that if I was making something else it wouldn't have been so important. But that was a real constraint about that and a fight that I lost. How absurd it is to have to fight for something like that that shouldn't have been an issue at all.

Sara: When there was something like 8 all-woman crews that year. Do we focus on a lesbian audience, how did we find them? Well, we did in the Against the Right tape.

Sarah: Our audience tends to include a lot of lesbians in the women who we hear from but I don't think that we make a conscious effort...

Sara: The one thing we have done is decide to do some of our distribution through Women in Focus which is a feminist distribution centre run by lesbian women and that's been a choice on our part to get our material to the women's community and to women's institutions and through that a lot of lesbians will see our stuff. A lot of lesbians run and maintain a lot of essential women's services.

How do we deal with being lesbians when working on tapes with or about groups that are not aware that we are lesbians. How do we deal with homophobia?

Ellen: I think that there's ways, I don't remember instances yet where we specifically dealt with it, although we don't hide it either. I know that in the tapes that we've made particularly like struggle tapes there was no reason to go around saying, "Heh, we're this bunch of lesbians and we want to make this tape about what's going on here." But, our closeness is very apparent. We lean on each other, sometimes literally, and some of that is tied into work, like somebody's holding a camera and somebody else is holding them. But the male media don't hold each other up, so there is definitely a closeness between us, ~~which~~ ^{that} has to do with being lesbians and is different. None of which we hide. I've seen some of us hold hands in those situations. I have, I know that I have grabbed for people's hands during the Aboriginal women's shoot. In a supportive way. I don't know any time that we have gone and said, "we're lesbians." But I certainly have seen people notice during the process that indeed we probably were lesbians.

Sara: Well I think that with the male media, even if they don't think that in reality we're lesbians, they think that figuratively we're lesbians. Like any all-woman crew, it's the whole thing of strong independent women who can deal with technical equipment, who assert themselves, "They must be a bunch of dykes." Well, they're right. And I remember around the Aboriginal Women's shoot tape that that was, well we were in constant contact with the bourgeois press, and these guys had nothing to do but play cards and harass us which they proceeded to do, to see how we would respond to that. And I think that some of that basis is not just the traditional sexist harassment of women but also the kind of ^{anti-lesbian} energy that men put out when they're fundamentally threatened.

Ellen: I was thinking more of the people we were working with, the people in the union, the Aboriginal Women.

Sarah: I remember this one time we were out there trying to do an interview on

Sarah con't: the TWU picketline and these women would not, they were just we couldn't get an interview so we gave up on an interview and we tried to get a visual filler of Billie walking into a phone booth, trying to make a phone call. She put in her dime and she banged on the phone, it turned out later that it actually wasn't working, as usual, and she walked out and she smiled too soon, she was walking out supposedly being angry, but she actually broke into a smile when she saw me standing there with the camera, so I teased her and she put her arm around me. And the women who were walking the picket line came over to ~~us~~ us and said, "Hey. Do you get paid for this?" and we said "No!" and they said, "We didn't think so because you're having such a good time." And then they proceeded to open up and start to talk because they realized ~~that~~ that we weren't the media in the traditional sense. And that's when they opened up.

Sara: I think that pertains to all of our work. And I think that it's good that we tell them that, and we give them power to look at what we produce, but I think it's also in the way that we work together because again I think that that really comes through in struggle situations because we work very collectively, we stay in touch with each other and here are people who are also going through a parallel experience and I think it creates some kind of bonding between the way we work as a crew and their experience of their own struggle. I remember that with TWU.

Sarah: Another thing. In the Concordia Aboriginal Women's Support Group there was a support group that formed around the action, and there were a number of lesbian groups who made sure that they announced that they were lesbians when they spoke in support and to me that was a very, and I think that probably in the support work, the women from Amelia were clear about being lesbians...

Ellen: Within the community. Within the political community of Vancouver, we're all quite well known as lesbians.

Sarah: I didn't mean only in the support group, I meant from how our action in

the support group publically and to the ABoriginal Women it was probably clear that we were part of this group of lesbians. AND for me that was part of the experience of watching these lesbians insist on doing that, it was very interesting and educational, it gave me some ideas for us.

TAPE TWO. SIDE ONE.

Sara: Its hard because there's some situations where I want people to find out in the process of working with us.. I know tht in some situations, if we ~~it would be, "Goodbye."~~ went in and announced ourselves as a lesbian-feminist-socialist and that it would be, "Goodbye." we want to document them, as opposed to being a group of women who wants to make this documentary, and they work with us and they find out in the process. I think that's the reality alot when you're dealing with insitiutions or people who have had no exposure to open lesbians at all and are afraid. So I guess coming out is something that we do in different ways. I know that in terms of publicizing our tapes, I know that its really important when we talk about the work that we've done, for example in a trade union, that we not just say we do tapes on telecommunications workers, postal wnekers and video display terminals, but to say that we have also done tapes on lesbain mothers, to make it clear who we are in a rounded way.

Ellen: I was recently putting together a resume to apply for a job and I was thinking, "I don't know whether I should pat myself on the back for putting all these tapes in or whejter I'm just plain stupid, to write in Lesbian Mothers, Lesbians Against the R,ght...and write myself out of a job, and then I decieded no way that I'm doctoring my resume to leave those things out and I think that when we talk to people in the ~~labour~~ labour movement its really important to leave those tapes in there and you could guess from thjt that maybe we are lesbians. And I'd actually like to know, in a struggle sitaution its quite silly to knock on the dorr and say I'm a lesbian but sometimes I would like to know better how to make tht clear ~~me~~ when it didn't seem appropriate. Liek the Lesbian Mothers Dedefense Fund, the clearly lesbain groups in the support group. Or whether indeed we're not a

clearly lesbian group because we're a video group and we're lesbians.

Sara: I find that very difficult because I fell like some of the work that we want to do is around lesbian issues, specifically part of how we do our work and our perspective is as lesbians BUT I also feel that there are whole areas of work where that is an indirect relationship, where the direct relationship is with the struggle situation, the identification with working women whatever.

SaraH: What I like is the point of view of forcing people to realize that some of the support they're getting is from lesbians. And to sort of go in that sense, to fight people's homophobia by going, "We're here, we're supporting you with this tape, we're a bunch of lesbians, now figure that out," and I've really felt that way a number of times in my life when it seemed that a number of lesbians were supporting a struggle and it seemed really important that ~~xxxxxxx~~ the people who are involved in the struggle realize that and that we as lesbians say, "Part of the reason that we are doing that is because we as ~~we~~ fight oppression in this way, about this subject in our lives, so that our understanding of oppression it comes from here and we deal solidarity with you."

Sara: I think that's the way to do it, through solidarity. And I think you choose who do it with. I don't know if we say that to union leaders who might be ambivalent or hostile to us anyhow, but for sure to rank and file women to say that's where the solidarity is in part, especially when they know that we also come out of working and mothering experiences and other points of identification with their lives. The fear breaks down by going through a day to day process with someone, ~~but~~ by learning that they really do care about what's happening to your life.

Ellen: The thing that I also like doing is making the analogies, of the ways that my experience as a lesbian makes. although I don't have any experience as an Aboriginal Woman, when they talk about their kids being taken away and the power that the state has to take their kids away and the

fear that I have of my kids being taken away., because of being= a lesbian I can say that my experienfc is not the same as your experience but I can understand some of your experience from my experience as a lesbain,, or my experience of being Jewish, that's one of my favorite way of coming out to people, of being able to say, I think I understand what you're saying becuse that's similar to lesbian opression and I think tht it comes from very similar places. Whenever I've done that people's reaction is, "Oh, right." Its a different way of getting through the homophobia/

Sara: Maybe another place we have to do it is around distribution. I've started to thiunk about this, I remember ~~xxxxxx~~ hearing that some political distributors have been less likely tyo take lesbain and gay issues as serious political issues and that it seemed important to try and distribu e some of the tapes aht we haveabout: t he lesbian struggle through distribu-tors and to audiences that don't usually have that kind of exposure. ~~and~~ For example, the Lesbian Against the Right Tape perhaps and certainly Women Against the RIGHT could be accessible to union audiences. And tht cuold be a fight with some of the unions. ~~xxxxxx~~ You know, the assumptiopn by some leadership ~~xxx~~ people that , "oh our membership wone't like that. They'll go crazy." I fell like we're beginning as Amelia to deal with this more explicitly, and that we need to deal withit in terms of distribnution as well as in terms of the people we make tapes about and with

Sarah: It always makes me mad also because the creeping assumption is that there are no...basically I have a very strong sense that I was a lesbian and nobody knew it for a very long time. And being in groups that were in fact assumed to be completely straight. And a real appreciation for other lesbian coming and saying that they were lesbians eventually. So that I would have soemplace to go. I love this thing about trade union leader. not wanting to bring up this issues of lesbianism when they know for sure that at least ten per cent of their memberships are lesbians.

Sara: What about Cable 10. We work with Cable Ten alot and thats t.v. access. What about lesbian issues there and what about the working relationship ~~there and what about the~~ between a public te.v. station and the wastend dikes.

Ellen: Vancouver East Cable 10 have always known that we are a bunch of dikes. From the very beginning, the first time that I was in there talking about the tape about lesbin mothers and mothers day and how I way making this tape becauser I was a lesbian mother, And they've always been very clear that the rest of us, well we've made references to being a bunch of east end dykes. We make lots, I know they knowthat I was at the beginning, but I think that ~~asx~~ we always, as wach more one of us. made reference to being dykes. And they never seem to bat an eyelash. :

Sara: I think that also Cable Ten has a gay programme called Gablevision. And in fact Vancouver I think is the city which pioneered gay cablevision so I think that there is an acceptaance of gayness as a legitimate community issue and that gays and lesbians are legitimate people to be working in a cable milieu.

Ellen: I'v e never hearf a comment. Lesbians Against the Right and Lesbian Mothers have never been on t.v. but Mothers Day and Holly Near, I've never heard a comment. I alwyas forget that Holly Near is a lesbian and talks about it.

Sara: What about audiecne respons .

Ellen: Never heard of any.

Sara: What about the response to us being an all-woman crew.

Sarah: It certainly helps when you're going into an all-women situation to be an all-women crew and I think it is part of the thing tht makes it really obviouds really fast that we aren't traditional media.

Ellen: People certainly notice.

Sarah: Although once when we were down at the courthouse this old drunk guy har rassed us endlesslybecasue he decided that we were tradutional media/ He

was very, very ~~mag~~ angry at the media for distorting peoples experience and struggles. And he saw no distinction that we were a bunch of women or men.

Sara: I think there's a certain fascination about us, which comes particularly from other women, because we're women who are competent at handling equipment and acting as a media group.'

Sarah: Though I think that part of what it also comes from is that although we're competent at handling equipment we're not super-confident and we're very open if we're having a problem. Organizing things, our process is not really a secret. We don't usually come busting into a place. We also like to spend enough time in a place that people get a sense of who we are.

Sara: I don't know how much people would sense that we were not working in traditional ways with the equipment, although I do think that they see we work collectively. I felt in some situations that there's not so much awe, but that it's neat to see women doing this kind of work and maybe if you could do it, I could do it, sort of thing. And I feel competitiveness from men. This has happened at a couple of shoots, ^{one CUPW shoot} some guy coming up and talking about his ~~home~~ Betamax, his home video equipment, "Oh, I know all about that, ..what kind of lens is that. Why don't you..." And in fact he didn't know very much at all, but it was a real need to assert ~~that~~ with this bunch of women there that he was a competent expert on the scene just in case we needed some direction or advice.

Ellen: I've never had the male media come and try and tell me ~~and~~ as much as they notice, "All women, eh." and that hostility. That we didn't just happen to get sent out all women that day from a fluke from the boss. That we're a women's media group. And sometimes the sense of looking, I pretend to be lot more competent in face of the male media than I would ordinarily pretend to be. No matter what goes wrong I pretend it's not going wrong. Because of being ~~we~~ who we are, where the rest of media was around and we were inside when the rest of the press was not allowed inside. That need with

happened with TWU that happened with the A original Women tape. And there's always been a sense of shock, when the press was standing in the lobby of the TWU building waiting to go up on the tour, for the press conference, and the people who were going to take them on tour got off the elevator with us, coming down for the press conference, in the elevator behind them and then waited with everybody else to go up again on the tour. And there was this. "How did you get up there?"

Sara: Scoops!

Ellen: And the time we came out of the 'Boriginal Women occupation, me and Gay and three children carrying the equipment. Its not just an allwomen crew, its an allwomen and children's crew.

Sara: I'm quite interested to see what happen when we try to interview someone like a corporate president as an all women's crew and try to pass ~~and~~ as the bourgeois media. One of, I'll go in drag. I'll paint a mustache on.

Gay: I look really good in a mustache.

Sara: Who's that lovely young man?

Sara: Future plans for lesbain content work? Finishing the tape on women against the right.

~~XXXXXXXX~~ (jokes on tape on non-monogamy) Sara assured that people serious.

Sara: I think we're serious. It makes me very nervous.

/Can I ask about process now?/ How did we learn our skills? Part of how we learned them was through actually taking courses, part of how we learned them was through Cable Ten, taking workshops and programming for them, we learned on the job mostly and we taught each other.

How do we work as a production collective: skillsharing, ~~choices~~ ^{division} of work, dealing with making choices of work, conflict:

Ellen: Avoidance is basically how we deal with all those issues. Division of work we make lists, everything else we avoid. Although skillsharing is out of necessity, we share ~~of~~ our skills because we work together.

Sara: Choices of work, we tend to group in. We have a certain tendency that if

it moves we try and catch it as quickly as we can whether or not its possible.

We have conflict, we have experienced conflict.

Sarah: I have noticed.

Ellen: But we try and avoid it as an issue.

Sarah: You know this is the second collective that I've been in that periodically comes to the decision that its impossible for it to exist and then turns around and at the next moment continues to exist.

Sara: What kind of conflicts ~~for~~ do we have? I think we have to tell people women ~~people~~ reading it about this because ~~they~~ will be working in other groups and trying to deal with similar problems, like ego-identification with work, and feeling attached to the work we do and needing validation and the way that its hard to accept criticism or to make choices not to take on certain projects or to divide up the work, that sort of thing, letting go of it. ~~There~~ All of us are very identified with our video work.

Ellen: I think we should talk about some of that stuff also in the article because it seems to me to be very not fair to do this article ~~and~~ on this alllesbian women's collective 5 lesbians who work together under very pressured circumstances sometimes and not mention that we have a hard time and have to sort that out.

GAY: We should talk about how during TWU we had a list of things we had to do and phone calls to make a d don't forget to eat and remind each other to do really basic things like "Phone to arrange your childcare tomorrow." and we really had a good system a d it was really necessary too.

Ellen: We all had these individual pressures that were driving us nuts, trying to work in this very pressured situation carrying childcare arrangements or working fulltime. So making tje collective list of what we had to do that day other than editing ^{shooting and}

Sarah: And there has been a problem with people with unequal amounts of time to devote to a project at the moment that a project is happening and the people

w ho can't be there feeling left out by the people who were there.

Gay: And feeling guilty ~~gat ga~~ for not being there. Both of those kinds of things.

Sarah: Also there is the very usefulness of people who haven't been there walking into a situation where people are at their total wits' ends with each other and forcing people to figure out what is going on, how come you look like you're ready to flounce out and you...in short order sorting everything out because somebody in the group walks in and can see what happened. It's extremely tense work too, we've had a tendency in the documentary stuff to have a very short deadline to do a lot of editing and not having much sleep and not having any time and it being an incredible tense eighteen hour day at least for several weeks.

Sara: Sometimes when we're shooting in those situations it's hard and hard things happen on a shoot but you're on a shoot and you can't drop things to ~~make~~ resolve what's making it difficult or conflictual, you've just got to make it through and you've got to find the resources to make it through and there's times when just doing that has left us just wrecked at the end of a shoot or a production. And we've started a process which I think has been very good, which has ~~been~~ been to go back after a production is done and look at what was really good, what we learned ~~and~~ technically and conceptually, but also to clear the garbage out that accumulated during the process of making that tape.

Sarah: And there are these occasions where it's very important to somebody to be right. When there's ~~only~~ only one person in the group to whom it's important to be right at the moment that's not too bad, but when it's two people with opposing views with whom it's very important to be right at this moment about their views it can make it very difficult.

Sara: We're all quite opinionated.

Gay: I'm not.

Sara: Just because you don't say it Gay, it's there, right?

Ellen: Gay will glare. And if it gets really bad Gay'll say, "I really feel sick." also

And also all of us have a really hard time not being involved in everything and wanting to do everything. And I think that its one of our big struggles that we're not quite, one of our struggles that we have to k eep talking about.

Sarah: I have to say that some people have more of a priblem about that thm others.

Ellen: I can't stand missing anything.

Sara: Neither can I.

Sarah: I'd say that three out of the five have this problem.

Ellen: How about you Gay?

Gay: No I just feel guilty if I'm not involved.

Sara: I don't feel so guilty,

Gay: You just do it!"

Sara: Yeah, I just drop everything and do it. No wait, I don't drop anything I jsut do it all at once... I just won't sleep tonight

Ellen: I don't feel guilty if I'm not doing it, I just can't stand it.

Sarah: I thiunk I have a much longer collective experience ~~for~~ than everybody else, you can only do that for so long.

Sara: Well, I was in a revolutionary group and they kept trying for 5 years to convonce me that , "You can't do everything Sara." "

"Yes I can."...

Ellen: I think that one of the ways we'll be able to deal with it somehow is to talk ore about the tapes that we haven't been part of and to realize, for me, everytime we mention the Against the Right Tape...

SIDE TWO.

Ellen: The ejs a couple of tapes now thatI haven't been involved in making wher I'm ~~being~~ beginning to learn that I can survive and still be identified with the tapes. Becuase of my hysteria about needing to be invovled in

everything I was involved in every one of the tapes. Its this process where I am learning that

I can not be involved and its still my tape. I can still be identified, its collectively my tape and not feel like I'm not part of the group, or not part of the tape, or I've been left out, ~~xxxxxxx~~

Sara: I wanted to talk about competition.

Sarah: I guess that the people who want to be involved in everything and who are pushy that I do really see that, I've worked with that kind of thing before and its alot clearer in Amelai because everybody knows ~~at~~ that we have this problem, everybody knows who they are.

Ellen,'

Sara

the one that is absent/

Nobody pretends that there is a political meaning to being an egomaniac, that this is right. But the other thing that I also see is that that kind of energy and that kind of push is also a necessity in the process for the rest of us. As Gay said, I said I would have trouble getting started and she ~~did~~ said that she would have trouble finishing. And thats where that kind of real pushiness is handy.

SaraL: One thing we all share is that we all think conceptually, thats a strength of our group, its something we all really contribute, asense of how to put a tape together.

Sarah: Thats one thing about the group, its really clear the contributions the women of all of ~~us~~ in the group, and how difficult things would be with out any of us, ~~xxxxx~~ The thing about everybody working on all the tapes cannot continue. its a thing that has to stop.

Sara: I was going to talk about competition. I don't want to talk about it, I'm scared to talk about it, I think it ties into the thing about the ways that our egos are attached to our work. I think that there are definitely competitive dynamics within the group, and I think that that's because some of us have lover relationships within the group, I won't mention

How about the majority of us? And the fact that they are also the "egomaniacs".

Sarah: that there are ~~m~~lover relationships and that there is a cert in amount of competition.

Sara: Well its this whole theory, its not my theory, ^{just} but that the boundaries beteen women;s egos break down alot more easily than between men and women and tht women in lover relationships get very tied up, tangled and identified with each other and there¹s ways when its hard to work it also beomes difficult when you have a lover relationship in terms of dependency and support. And its ~~x~~also importasnt ~~x~~for women to be autonomous and thats where some of the competition vomes in, is the need to assert ourselves as independend people from each other adn also the ned to get the reinforcement ~~fr~~ from women who are really close to each other.

Gay: Thats why I avoid, I've never had a lover who "I've worked with and I wouldn't want to because I would get ~~tsaxinvolvedinxaxbigxaddix~~ completely lost and befuddled and not know what I am doing.

Sarah: I worked in a collectibe before which was strong on the idea that women shouldnt be lovers in the collective.

Sara: But which came first here?

Sarah: But uts interesting here ~~forxxxxxxx~~ because its in fact true that what peo le are doing effects mroe than their lovers.

Sara: I agree . There are other aspects to competition.

Ellen: The issue of competition, I don;t understand it very well at all, its something that I would like us to talk=to us more, how it manifests itself I mean I understand egomania, I uderstand the other things, but how competition works, its sympt-oms, I just feel really dense about it. I feel like I don't see it in myself , I don;t see it in other people, and when I see it I see it as other things. I am much more prone to saying, "What competition." And I'm sure that people could point out the 45 ways that day that I've been competitive.

~~Sarah:~~

Sarah: I have a tendency to see more two people or three people all insisting that they're right and being totally unwilling to back down and be reasonable. You can see that as competitive and I have a tendency to see that as partly egomania and partly as feeling that you don't get enough in the world, you don't get enough respect, you don't get enough attention.

Sara: But isn't that why people are competitive? The struggle for scarce spoils. Not everyone can have a piece of...

Sarah: ~~The~~ It ~~was~~ also comes up a bit more amongst certain people in the group, the competition ~~is~~ surfaces more amongst v ertain people and I don't know if thats in general because I don't stand up for myself so it doesn't surface in relation to me, although it has on occasion. And it occurred to me after the last meeting, that there seemed to be a big block as to whether or not it was o.k. to disagree with the other people in the group, the other women in the group and there seemed to be a problem where ~~you~~ are trying to be very supportive but you disagree with someone and you don't want to disagree with them because yo're having to be supportive and I think it would be good to have areas of disagreement clear and accepted/ You know that these two people will always disagree ~~on~~ on this question and this is the kind of the question these two people will always disagree ~~on~~ ~~on~~ ~~this~~ ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~kind~~ ~~of~~ ~~question~~ ~~they~~ ~~will~~ ~~always~~ Alot of the conflict seems to come around disagreements, that nonbody's willing to believe that they have a disagreement with this person because they want to be supportive.

Sara: I think that we have some real conflictual meetings. And part of it is that its scary to raise disagreements so that especially with women they get raised in harder ways than they would be if we weren't scared to raise them. Its almost as though we had to take a deep breath and plunge in. So

Sarah: Because you have to be so upset to raise a disagreement that you practically have to be out of it.

Sara: It seems to me to be really worth while to work on how to raise disagreements. Because I think that there are ways of making criticisms that destroy people and ways that don't. And there's a difference between criticism and disagreement.

Ellen: I think that also one thing that's going on, because of the work and because we are all relatively new to the work and that in different areas of the work it's quite hard and we all need a lot of support and validation and all have this sense of feeling incompetent at times around equipment, or... that stuff gets less and less but it has ~~emerged in the past~~ been very true in the past and I still think that it's very true to a degree, which makes ~~it~~ it really hard, when you're really needy of somebody of support it's hard to say, I totally disagree with what you're saying. It seems to me to add to that difficulty.

Sarah: I think it's so ridiculous because I think that all you have to do is decide that on this tape you'll do it that way and on that tape ~~this~~ the other way, and then see what the reactions ~~are~~ to it are and then you'll have an idea of what worked better.

Sara: But that gets into the ego-attachment stuff around work. I think what Ellen's said is really right about learning it. But it's also the area we all want to work at and so it's how we define ourselves and so ~~when~~ that adds to the ways that it gets hard to be disagreed with, because it seems that there is a fine line between people disagreeing with your ideas and people somehow disagreeing with you as a person. And yet that line should be drawn, it's really important to learn how to make that difference, that you are not personally being rejected because people in the group disagree with something that you are putting forward, they are just rejecting this particular concept which is one thing that you have which ~~you~~ you are offering. I think making that separation, any group I've ever worked in that has been a really big place of difficulty, making that separation. I was thinking the other day that what would help our process would be being more consistent in telling

each other what we thought we did well, like to really give each other strokes around the work that we do do.

Ellen: I think that the collective strokes as well, because we all at various points get into "who needs Amelia, I don't want to deal with it, it's too much trouble and work." And to spend some time, not hours upon end, but every once in a while, "Do we want this collective to continue, oh we do." Good let's do that because I think that everybody has, it upsets me when we're not consciously here, I would like us to ~~say~~ every once in a while state to each other that we are consciously part of this group. Rather ~~than~~ than somehow you would end up in this room because somebody made you. We tend to groan at the mention of another meeting and I think that it's important that we validate the conscious choice of being here.

Sara: I think that it's important to say that the whole earlier discussion is essentially a discussion of how it's good to work together, because we've been talking about the difficulty of working together. I know that I feel that I've learned personally just a tremendous amount from being in this group. Not just video skills but how to look at the work and deal with struggle situations.

I: Do we want to work deal with this, how do we deal with non-work related relationships in the group?

Ellen: Avoidance. We talk about it behind each other's backs all the time.

GAY: What are non-work related relationships?

Sara: Friendships and lover relationships. Relationships to the means of production.

Sarah: They cause problems, all those things have caused problems at one time.

Ellen: I don't think that we deal with them. I don't think that we have ever dealt ~~with~~ with them as a group. Hardly ever. We get a D minus with ~~being~~ being up front about what is emotionally going on with each other in nonwork matters, about the fact that one person is having a hard time because somebody ~~else~~ ~~is~~ is being weird with somebody else, our interpersonal

al things.

Sarah: I think that we get A double pluses with being right up front about it, I mean there it is sitting right in front of us.

Ellen: For dealing with it. We do it, we have, it gets in our way all the time, but we don't deal with it concretely hardly ever.

I agree.

Sara: I agree with Sarah that people rub up against it and hit up against it all the time.

Sarah: I think that we still labour, and I think it might be smart, I don't know what you think, but I think that the people who aren't directly involved in this stuff label under a certain code of politeness which is breaking down I will say rapidly, of feeling uninvolved in it, it being something that is a problem but that, feeling as though it's inappropriate to bring it up.

Ellen: Well the more that code of politeness breaks down the happier I feel.

Sarah: Well to some degree it's ~~is~~ politeness and, to some degree I didn't create, well a sort of feeling like wait a minute, I never got into that mess. ~~Why~~ How come "I have to deal with it, to some degree it's really not true because the group is constituted how it's constituted. But it does a lot of bizarre emotional things.

Sara: I think that Ellen you and I have been working to try and change things a lot.

Gay: But it hasn't happened in the group. I feel the need ~~for~~ say things in the group about stuff.

Sara: I feel like we need to know that we're a group. ~~I want to be in the~~
~~I think the group needs~~

End transcript.