

"...NOTHING BUT A BUNCH OF DYKES!"

"THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IS NOTHING BUT A BUNCH OF DYKES!"

That cry was heard in the 1960's when Betty Friedan was the Women's Movement. That cry was echoed by women outside the Women's Movement and picked up by women inside the Women's Movement. Both groups heard the cry and were afraid. Those inside the Movement were afraid that the label would make them inoperative, ineffective, and would mean the demise of the Movement. After all, "normal" women wouldn't want to have anything to do with the Movement if it was nothing but a bunch of dykes.

For more than a decade feminists have been called "lesbian" with great regularity. When the label is used by individual men it clearly is used to scare the "real" woman back into her proper place. However, when it is used by the male-dominated media it serves to delegitimatize the aims and purposes of the Movement. This often inappropriate label serves as a consciousness-raiser because it demonstrates to the feminist the clear relationship between being independent and being identified as unfeminine. And, it becomes clear that the feminist--like the lesbian--is an outcast in a society which defines a woman's role as that of caretaker and subordinate to men.

In fact, there were lesbians in the Women's Movement from the beginning. Some had come from the male-oriented gay movement where they were expected to endure the sexism of their gay brothers. These lesbians came to the Movement with organizing and analytical skills hard won, determined to make this their final stand. For them there was nowhere else to go in search of their own liberation. Others came to the Movement to find a new freedom from sex-role stereotyping. They expected to be able to experience their own maleness as well as their femaleness. They expected that "sisterhood" included them.

lesbians? Yet the Movement continues to be fearful of the lesbian--running from her, all the while running toward her image.

The impact of the lesbian on the Women's Movement has been explosive. Not only have lesbians made important literary, political and philosophical contributions to the Movement but they have also confronted the heterosexist attitudes of their sisters in the Movement. Often this confrontation has created a schism bordering on open warfare between gay and straight women. But, out of the confrontation has come more of a willingness to accept the differences and less of a desire to create homogenized sameness. The new rallying cry has become, "DAMN THE DIFFERENCES!!" "ON WITH THE REVOLUTION!!"

consciousness-raising on how being a lesbian is a hundred things more than just sleeping with a woman.

For even though the lesbian is single, married, widowed, divorced, separated, with children, without children, relating to many women, relating to no women, aggressive and shy, strong and gentle, very feminine, very masculine, rich, poor and in-between--even though the lesbian is white, black, third world, young, old, living alone, living with a man, living with one woman, living with many women, college-educated and a high-school dropout, she is still a woman.

But, by and large, straight women in the Movement continue to see and react to every lesbian as if she were a "radical" lesbian. To be more precise, to see every lesbian who views herself as a victim of political oppression and sees her lesbianism as more than merely who she sleeps with as a radical lesbian. And radical lesbianism is frightening to the Movement. While the straight women in the Movement seek equality of opportunity with men, radical lesbians seek separation from men. The radical lesbian dares ask the male-identified woman how she can continue to sleep with her oppressor. This question brings cries of indignation from the straight woman because it is always her man who is O.K. and different from all those other men who are identified as the "enemy". And, finally, the "up-front" lesbian is a continuing threat to straight women because, by her very presence, she forces her straight sisters to question their own heterosexist values.

The lesbian, for her part--whether or not she identifies herself as a radical lesbian--sees herself as the epitome of what the Movement is working toward. The Movement strives toward women who are strong, economically independent, emotionally free, with an ego healthy enough to demand control of her own destiny. What is this if not the day-to-day lifestyle of most

Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon in Lesbian/Woman wrote of personal pain and joy for all those lesbians who had never heard of the Women's Movement and who, in many cases, never knew there were other lesbians in the world.

Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love wrote Sappho Was a Right-On Woman for lesbians in the Women's Movement so that they would understand why they should continue making demands on the Movement.

The N.O.W. women (including the over 200 who met several times during the 1973 National Conference as the Lesbian Caucus to be sure that lesbian interests would not be tabled in favor of the greater interests of the heterosexual majority) struggled with their own organization for more than two years to finally get a National Sexuality and Lesbianism Task Force established in 1973.

There were 200 lesbians who came together at Antioch College in the winter of 1972 for a Lesbian Conference; there were 2,000 who came together in Los Angeles in April 1973 for a Lesbian Conference.

Lesbians have given the Movement books (Sappho...., Lesbian Nation, Lesbian/Woman, etc.) ,magazines ("Aphra", "The Ladder", "Amazon Quarterly"), music (songs of independence, songs of loving other women, songs of freedom), newspapers ("The Furies", "Lesbian Tide", "Ain't I a Woman?") and political theory (lesbian separatism, rejection of male-related privileges, no more sleeping with the enemy).

There have been countless articles describing what it's like to be a lesbian and countless poems and songs describing the joy of loving and being loved by another woman. And many of these have appeared in establishment as well as Movement media. There have been many lesbians who have rejected all-lesbian consciousness-raising (CR) groups in favor of "mixed" (lesbian, heterosexual, asexual, bisexual) CR groups so they could do

Instead they found Betty Friedan making anti-lesbian statements at the Conference to Unite Women (New York City, November, 1969). And at that time whatever Betty Friedan said took on out-of-proportion importance because the media reported her words as if she were the only spokesperson for the entire Movement. The effect--intentional on the part of the media at least--was to create an atmosphere of hostility between the lesbians and all other women. The media seemed intent on driving all women away from the Movement; Friedan seemed intent on driving only the lesbians away. The lesbians also heard other leaders suggesting--in public appearances--that there were no lesbians in the Women's Movement.

Meanwhile, these non-existent lesbians quietly (and not so quietly) continued to work on what they believed was "their" cause. And from their efforts came a tremendous body of art, literature and political thought that was to have a profound influence on the Movement for years to come.

There was Kate Millet who presented an astute analysis of the oppression of women in heterosexual relationships within the context of a heterosexist society. Her book, "Sexual Politics", has already become a classic.

The New York Radicalesbians in their paper, "Woman-Identified Woman", discussed succinctly how the lesbian epitomizes all angry women who want to gain control of their own destinies. It took the fear that "straight" society has of the lesbian out of the closet and into the open.

Ann Koedt in "Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm" confronted the straight woman with the understanding that by accepting the lies of men she sentenced herself to being less of a woman.

Rita Mae Brown and the Furies Collective produced the first lesbian newspaper, "The Furies", which was devoted to lesbian politics, with analytical and theoretical articles on race, class, separatism, lesbian-feminist ideology, feminist culture, monogomy, etc.

SUGGESTED READINGS

"Notes of a Radical Lesbian", Martha Shelly, in Sisterhood Is Powerful, Robin Morgan (ed.), Vintage Books, Random House, New York.

Sexual Politics, Kate Millett, Equinox Books, Avon, New York.

Sappho Was a Right-On Woman, Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love, Stein and Day, New York.

Lesbian/Woman, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, Glide Publications, San Francisco.

"The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm", A. Koedt, in Notes From the Second Year: Women's Liberation, New York.

"The Woman Identified Woman", Radicalesbians, in Notes From the Third Year: Women's Liberation, New York

"Living With Other Women", Rita Mae Brown, in Women: A Journal of Liberation, winter 1971, Baltimore.

"What Every Lesbian Should Know", Charlotte Bunch and Rita Mae Brown, in MOTIVE, Vol. 32, No. 1, 1972.

"gay and straight in the movement", Christine Mimichild, in Women: A Journal of Liberation, Vol. 2, No. 4, Baltimore.