

Week 7

Gay Liberation Front

Following the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City, a new generation of gay militants formed the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), explicitly locating gay freedom within the international context of revolutionary socialist and national liberation movements. Through its decentralized and open structure, members of the GLF formed many autonomous affinity groups around particular politics or identities, including the Radicalesbians, the Communist Red Butterfly (distributors of Carl Wittman's essay here, and authors of the afterword), Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), and the Radicalqueens. Essays written by these groups demonstrate the range of the new thinking on gender, patriarchy and sexuality in the milieu of the GLF. We include here two statements from early trans liberation militants. The last essay is by Charlotte Bunch, a member of the Furies, a radical lesbian collective formed in 1971 in Washington, DC.

A note is in order about the pieces by STAR. STAR included multiple political tendencies, and here we find them defending the legitimacy of police. Elsewhere, leading figures in STAR, such as Sylvia Rivera, adamantly rejected police as a social institution, and the complicity of mainstream gays with expanded policing. It is often the less radical voices who author a group's manifestos.

For the secondary reading, we have two recommendations: a recent scholarly essay on the Gay Liberation Front, and to continue with Echols.

Secondary reading: Terrance Kissack, "Freaking Fag Revolutionaries: New York's Gay Liberation Front, 1969–1971," *Radical History Review*, Spring 1995.

Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967–1975*, Ch. 5 (pp. 203–241). University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

7.1 Radicalesbians, The Woman Identified Woman Manifesto (1970)

http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/wlmpc_wlmms01011/

Radicalesbians, "The Woman Identified Woman." KNOW, Inc., 1970.

This paper was first issued by the Radicalesbians in 1970 during the "Lavender Menace" protest at the Second Congress to Unite Women in New York City. The principal authors were Artemis March, Lois Hart, Rita Mae Brown, Ellen Shumsky, Cynthia Funk and Barbara XX.

What is a lesbian? A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion. She is the woman who, often beginning at an extremely early age, acts in accordance with her inner compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being than her society—perhaps then, but certainly later—cares to allow her. These needs and actions, over a period of years, bring her into painful conflict with people, situations, the accepted ways of thinking, feeling and behaving, until she is in a state of continual war with everything around her, and usually with her self. She may not be fully conscious of the political implications of what for her began as personal necessity, but on some level she has not been able to accept the limitations and oppression laid on her by the most basic role of her society—the female role. The turmoil she experiences tends to induce guilt proportional to the degree to which she feels she is not meeting social expectations, and/or eventually drives her to question and analyze what the rest of her society more or less accepts. She is forced to evolve her own life pattern, often living much of her life alone, learning usually much earlier than her “straight” (heterosexual) sisters about the essential aloneness of life (which the myth of marriage obscures) and about the reality of illusions. To the extent that she cannot expel the heavy socialization that goes with being female, she can never truly find peace with herself. For she is caught somewhere between accepting society’s view of her—in which case she cannot accept herself—and coming to understand what this sexist society has done to her and why it is functional and necessary for it to do so. Those of us who work that through find ourselves on the other side of a tortuous journey through a night that may have been decades long. The perspective gained from that journey, the liberation of self, the inner peace, the real love of self and of all women, is something to be shared with all women—because we are all women.

It should first be understood that lesbianism, like male homosexuality, is a category of behavior possible only in a sexist society characterized by rigid sex roles and dominated by male supremacy. Those sex roles dehumanize women by defining us as a supportive/serving caste *in relation to* the master caste of men, and emotionally cripple men by demanding that they be alienated from their own bodies and emotions in order to perform their economic/political/military functions effectively. Homosexuality is a by-product of a particular way of setting up roles (or approved patterns of behavior) on the basis of sex; as such it is an inauthentic (not consonant with “reality”) category. In a society in which men do not oppress women, and sexual expression is allowed to follow feelings, the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality would disappear.

But lesbianism is also different from male homosexuality, and serves a different function in the society. “Dyke” is a different kind of put-down from “faggot,” although both imply you are not playing your socially assigned sex role...are not therefore a “real woman” or a “real man.” The grudging admiration felt for the tomboy, and the queasiness felt around a sissy boy point to the same thing: the contempt in which women—or those who play a female role—are held. And the investment in keeping women in that contemptuous role is very great. Lesbian is a word, the label, the condition that holds women in line. When a woman hears this word tossed her way, she knows she is stepping out of line. She knows that she has crossed the terrible boundary of her sex role. She recoils, she protests, she reshapes her actions to gain approval. Lesbian is a label invented by the Man to throw at any woman who dares to be his equal, who dares to challenge his prerogatives (including that of all women as part of the exchange medium among men), who dares to assert the primacy of her own needs. To have the label applied to people active in women’s liberation is just the most recent instance of a long history; older women will recall that not so long ago, any woman who was successful, independent, not orienting her whole life about a man, would hear this word. For in this sexist society, for a woman to be independent means she *can’t be* a woman—she must be a dyke. That in itself should tell us where women are at. It says as clearly as can be said: women

and person are contradictory terms. For a lesbian is not considered a “real woman.” And yet, in popular thinking, there is really only one essential difference between a lesbian and other women: that of sexual orientation—which is to say, when you strip off all the packaging, you must finally realize that the essence of being a “woman” is to get fucked by men.

“Lesbian” is one of the sexual categories by which men have divided up humanity. While all women are dehumanized as sex objects, as the objects of men they are given certain compensations: identification with his power, his ego, his status, his protection (from other males), feeling like a “real woman,” finding social acceptance by adhering to her role, etc. Should a woman confront herself by confronting another woman, there are fewer rationalizations, fewer buffers by which to avoid the stark horror of her dehumanized condition. Herein we find the overriding fear of many women toward being used as a sexual object by a woman, which not only will bring her no male-connected compensations, but also will reveal the void which is woman’s real situation. This dehumanization is expressed when a straight woman learns that a sister is a lesbian; she begins to relate to her lesbian sister as her potential sex object, laying a surrogate male role on the lesbian. This reveals her heterosexual conditioning to make herself into an object when sex is potentially involved in a relationship, and it denies the lesbian her full humanity. For women, especially those in the movement, to perceive their lesbian sisters through this male grid of role definitions is to accept this male cultural conditioning and to oppress their sisters much as they themselves have been oppressed by men. Are we going to continue the male classification system of defining all females in sexual relation to some other category of people? Affixing the label lesbian not only to a woman who aspires to be a person, but also to any situation of real love, real solidarity, real primacy among women, is a primary form of divisiveness among women: it is the condition which keeps women within the confines of the feminine role, and it is the debunking/scare term that keeps women from forming any primary attachments, groups, or associations among ourselves.

Women in the movement have in most cases gone to great lengths to avoid discussion and confrontation with the issue of lesbianism. It puts people up-tight. They are hostile, evasive, or try to incorporate it into some “broader issue.” They would rather not talk about it. If they have to, they try to dismiss it as a “lavender herring.” But it is no side issue. It is absolutely essential to the success and fulfillment of the women’s liberation movement that this issue be dealt with. As long as the label “dyke” can be used to frighten women into a less militant stand, keep her separate from her sisters, keep her from giving primacy to anything other than men and family—then to that extent she is controlled by the male culture. Until women see in each other the possibility of a primal commitment which includes sexual love, they will be denying themselves the love and value they readily accord to men, thus affirming their second-class status. As long as male acceptability is primary—both to individual women and to the movement as a whole—the term lesbian will be used effectively against women. Insofar as women want only more privileges within the system, they do not want to antagonize male power. They instead seek acceptability for women’s liberation, and the most crucial aspect of the acceptability is to deny lesbianism—i.e., to deny any fundamental challenge to the basis of the female. It should also be said that some younger, more radical women have honestly begun to discuss lesbianism, but so far it has been primarily as a sexual “alternative” to men. This, however, is still giving primacy to men, both because the idea of relating more completely to women occurs as a negative reaction to men, and because the lesbian relationship is being characterized simply by sex, which is divisive and sexist. On one level, which is both personal and political, women may withdraw emotional and sexual energies from men, and work out various alternatives for those energies in their own lives. On a different political/psychological level, it must be understood that what is crucial is that women begin disengaging from male-defined response

patterns. In the privacy of our own psyches, we must cut those cords to the core. For irrespective of where our love and sexual energies flow, if we are male-identified in our heads, we cannot realize our autonomy as human beings.

But why is it that women have related to and through men? By virtue of having been brought up in a male society, we have internalized the male culture's definition of ourselves. That definition consigns us to sexual and family functions, and excludes us from defining and shaping the terms of our lives. In exchange for our psychic servicing and for performing society's non-profit-making functions, the man confers on us just one thing: the slave status which makes us legitimate in the eyes of the society in which we live. This is called "femininity" or "being a real woman" in our cultural lingo. We are authentic, legitimate, real to the extent that we are the property of some man whose name we bear. To be a woman who belongs to no man is to be invisible, pathetic, inauthentic, unreal. He confirms his image of us—of what we have to be in order to be acceptable by him—but not our real selves; he confirms our womanhood—as he defines it, in relation to him, but cannot confirm our personhood, our own selves as absolutes. As long as we are dependent on the male culture for this definition, for this approval, we cannot be free.

The consequence of internalizing this role is an enormous reservoir of self-hate. This is not to say the self-hate is recognized or accepted as such; indeed most women would deny it. It may be experienced as discomfort with her role, as feeling empty, as numbness, as restlessness, as a paralyzing anxiety at the center. Alternatively, it may be expressed in shrill defensiveness of the glory and destiny of her role. But it does exist, often beneath the edge of her consciousness, poisoning her existence, keeping her alienated from herself, her own needs, and rendering her a stranger to other women. They try to escape by identifying with the oppressor, living through him, gaining status and identity from his ego, his power, his accomplishments. And by not identifying with other "empty vessels" like themselves. Women resist relating on all levels to other women who will reflect their own oppression, their own secondary status, their own self-hate. For to confront another woman is finally to confront one's self—the self we have gone to such lengths to avoid. And in that mirror we know we cannot really respect and love that which we have been made to be.

As the source of self-hate and the lack of real self are rooted in our male-given identity, we must create a new sense of self. As long as we cling to the idea of "being a woman," we will sense some conflict with that incipient self, that sense of I, that sense of a whole person. It is very difficult to realize and accept that being "feminine" and being a whole person are irreconcilable. Only women can give to each other a new sense of self. That identity we have to develop with reference to ourselves, and not in relation to men. This consciousness is the revolutionary force from which all else will follow, for ours is an organic revolution. For this we must be available and supportive to one another, give our commitment and our love, give the emotional support necessary to sustain this movement. Our energies must flow toward our sisters, not backward toward our oppressors. As long as woman's liberation tries to free women without facing the basic heterosexual structure that binds us in one-to-one relationship with our oppressors, tremendous energies will continue to flow into trying to straighten up each particular relationship with a man, into finding how to get better sex, how to turn his head around—into trying to make the "new man" out of him, in the delusion that this will allow us to be the "new woman." This obviously splits our energies and commitments, leaving us unable to be committed to the construction of the new patterns which will liberate us.

It is the primacy of women relating to women, of women creating a new consciousness of and with each other, which is at the heart of women's liberation, and the basis for the cultural revolution. Together we must find, reinforce, and validate our authentic selves. As we do this, we confirm in each other that struggling, incipient sense of pride and strength, the divisive barriers begin to melt,

we feel this growing solidarity with our sisters. We see ourselves as prime, find our centers inside of ourselves. We find receding the sense of alienation, of being cut off, of being behind a locked window, of being unable to get out what we know is inside. We feel a real-ness, feel at last we are coinciding with ourselves. With that real self, with that consciousness, we begin a revolution to end the imposition of all coercive identifications, and to achieve maximum autonomy in human expression.

7.2 Carl Wittman, A Gay Manifesto (1970)

<http://paganpressbooks.com/jpl/TRB-WITT.PDF>

Carl Wittman, "A Gay Manifesto." Red Butterfly, 1970.

San Francisco is a refugee camp for homosexuals. We have fled here from every part of the nation, and like refugees elsewhere, we came not because it is so great here, but because it was so bad there. By the tens of thousands, we fled small towns where to be ourselves would endanger our jobs and any hope of a decent life; we have fled from blackmailing cops, from families who disowned or "tolerated" us; we have been drummed out of the armed services, thrown out of schools, fired from jobs, beaten by punks and policemen.

And we have formed a ghetto, out of self-protection. It is a ghetto rather than a free territory because it is still theirs. Straight cops patrol us, straight legislators govern us, straight employers keep us in line, straight money exploits us. We have pretended everything is OK, because we haven't been able to see how to change it—we've been afraid.

In the past year there has been an awakening of gay liberation ideas and energy. How it began we don't know; maybe we were inspired by black people and their freedom movement; we learned how to stop pretending from the hip revolution. Amerika in all its ugliness has surfaced with the war and our national leaders. And we are revulsed by the quality of our ghetto life.

Where once there was frustration, alienation, and cynicism, there are new characteristics among us. We are full of love for each other and are showing it; we are full of anger at what has been done to us. And as we recall all the self-censorship and repression for so many years, a reservoir of tears pours out of our eyes. And we are euphoric, high, with the initial flourish of a movement.

We want to make ourselves clear: our first job is to free ourselves; that means clearing our heads of the garbage that's been poured into them. This article is an attempt at raising a number of issues, and presenting some ideas to replace the old ones. It is primarily for ourselves, a starting point of discussion. If straight people of good will find it useful in understanding what liberation is about, so much the better.

It should also be clear that these are the views of one person, and are determined not only by my homosexuality, but my being white, male, middle class. It is my individual consciousness. Our group consciousness will evolve as we get ourselves together—we are only at the beginning.

I. On Orientation

1. *What homosexuality is:* Nature leaves undefined the object of sexual desire. The gender of that object is imposed socially. Humans originally made homosexuality taboo because they needed every bit of energy to produce and raise children: survival of species was a priority. With overpopulation and technological change, that taboo continued only to exploit us and enslave us.

As kids we refused to capitulate to demands that we ignore our feelings toward each other. Somewhere we found the strength to resist being indoctrinated, and we should count that among our assets. We have to realize that our loving each other is a good thing, not an unfortunate thing, and that we have a lot to teach straights about sex, love, strength, and resistance.

Homosexuality is *not* a lot of things. It is not a makeshift in the absence of the opposite sex; it is not a hatred or rejection of the opposite sex; it is not genetic; it is not the result of broken homes except inasmuch as we could see the sham of American marriage. *Homosexuality is the capacity to love someone of the same sex.*

2. Bisexuality: Bisexuality is good; it is the capacity to love people of either sex. The reason so few of us are bisexual is because society made such a big stink about homosexuality that we got forced into seeing ourselves as either straight or non-straight. Also, many gays got turned off to the ways men are supposed to act with women and vice-versa, which is pretty fucked-up. Gays will begin to turn on to women when 1) it's something that we do because we want to, and not because we should, and 2) when women's liberation changes the nature of heterosexual relationships.

We continue to call ourselves homosexual, not bisexual, even if we do make it with the opposite sex also, because saying "Oh, I'm Bi" is a cop out for a gay. We get told it's OK to sleep with guys as long as we sleep with women, too, and that's still putting homosexuality down. We'll be gay until everyone has forgotten that it's an issue. Then we'll begin to be complete.

3. Heterosexuality: Exclusive heterosexuality is fucked up. It reflects a fear of people of the same sex, it's anti-homosexual, and it is fraught with frustration. Heterosexual sex is fucked up, too; ask women's liberation about what straight guys are like in bed. Sex is aggression for the male chauvinist; sex is obligation for the traditional woman. And among the young, the modern, the hip, it's only a subtle version of the same. For us to become heterosexual in the sense that our straight brothers and sisters are is not a cure, it is a disease.

II. On Women

1. Lesbianism: It's been a male-dominated society for too long, and that has warped both men and women. So gay women are going to see things differently from gay men; they are going to feel put down as women, too. Their liberation is tied up with both gay liberation and women's liberation.

This paper speaks from the gay male viewpoint. And although some of the ideas in it may be equally relevant to gay women, it would be arrogant to presume this to be a manifesto for lesbians.

We look forward to the emergence of a lesbian liberation voice. The existence of a lesbian caucus within the New York Gay Liberation Front has been very helpful in challenging male chauvinism among gay guys, and anti-gay feelings among women's lib.

2. Male Chauvinism: All men are infected with male chauvinism—we were brought up that way. It means we assume that women play subordinate roles and are less human than ourselves. (At an early gay liberation meeting one guy said, "Why don't we invite women's liberation—they can bring sandwiches and coffee.") It is no wonder that so few gay women have become active in our groups.

Male chauvinism, however, is not central to us. We can junk it much more easily than straight men can. For we understand oppression. We have largely opted out of a system which oppresses women daily—our egos are not built on putting women down and having them build us up. Also, living in a mostly male world we have become used to playing different roles, doing our own shit-work. And finally, we have a common enemy: the big male chauvinists are also the big anti-gays.

But we need to purge male chauvinism, both in behavior and in thought among us. Chick equals nigger equals queer. Think it over.

3. *Women's liberation:* They are assuming their equality and dignity and in doing so are challenging the same things we are: the roles, the exploitation of minorities by capitalism, the arrogant smugness of straight white male middle-class Amerika. They are our sisters in struggle.

Problems and differences will become clearer when we begin to work together. One major problem is our own male chauvinism. Another is uptightness and hostility to homosexuality that many women have—that is the straight in them. A third problem is differing views on sex: sex for them has meant oppression, while for us it has been a symbol of our freedom. We must come to know and understand each other's style, jargon and humor.

III. On Roles

1. *Mimicry of straight society:* We are children of straight society. We still think straight: that is part of our oppression. One of the worst of straight concepts is inequality. Straight (also white, English, male, capitalist) thinking views things in terms of order and comparison. A is before B, B is after A; one is below two is below three; there is no room for equality. This idea gets extended to male/female, on top/on bottom, spouse/not spouse, heterosexual/homosexual; boss/worker, white/black and rich/poor. Our social institutions cause and reflect this verbal hierarchy. This is Amerika.

We've lived in these institutions all our lives. Naturally we mimic the roles. For too long we mimicked these roles to protect ourselves—a survival mechanism. Now we are becoming free enough to shed the roles which we've picked up from the institutions which have imprisoned us.

“Stop mimicking straights, stop censoring ourselves.”

2. *Marriage:* Marriage is a prime example of a straight institution fraught with role playing. Traditional marriage is a rotten, oppressive institution. Those of us who have been in heterosexual marriages too often have blamed our gayness on the breakup of the marriage. No. They broke up because marriage is a contract which smothers both people, denies needs, and places impossible demands on both people. And we had the strength, again, to refuse to capitulate to the roles which were demanded of us.

Gay people must stop gauging their self-respect by how well they mimic straight marriages. Gay marriages will have the same problems as straight ones except in burlesque. For the usual legitimacy and pressures which keep straight marriages together are absent, e.g., kids, what parents think, what neighbors say.

To accept that happiness comes through finding a groovy spouse and settling down, showing the world that “we're just the same as you” is avoiding the real issues, and is an expression of self-hatred.

3. *Alternatives to Marriage:* People want to get married for lots of good reasons, although marriage won't often meet those needs or desires. We're all looking for security, a flow of love, and a feeling of belonging and being needed.

These needs can be met through a number of social relationships and living situations. Things we want to get away from are: 1. exclusiveness, proprietied attitudes toward each other, a mutual pact against the rest of the world; 2. promises about the future, which we have no right to make and which prevent us from, or make us feel guilty about, growing; 3. inflexible roles, roles which do not reflect us at the moment but are inherited through mimicry and inability to define equalitarian relationships.

We have to define for ourselves a new pluralistic, role-free social structure for ourselves. It must contain both the freedom and physical space for people to live alone, live together for a while, live together for a long time, either as couples or in larger numbers; and the ability to flow easily from one of these states to another as our needs change.

Liberation for gay people is defining for ourselves how and with whom we live, instead of measuring our relationship in comparison to straight ones, with straight values.

4. *Gay “stereotypes”*: The straights’ image of the gay world is defined largely by those of us who have violated straight roles. There is a tendency among “homophile” groups to deplore gays who play visible roles—the queens and the nellies. As liberated gays, we must take a clear stand. 1) Gays who stand out have become our first martyrs. They came out and withstood disapproval before the rest of us did. 2) If they have suffered from being open, it is straight society whom we must indict, not the queen.

5. *Closet queens*: This phrase is becoming analogous to “Uncle Tom.” To pretend to be straight sexually, or to pretend to be straight socially, is probably the most harmful pattern of behavior in the ghetto. The married guy who makes it on the side secretly; the guy who will go to bed once but won’t develop any gay relationships; the pretender at work or school who changes the gender of the friend he’s talking about; the guy who’ll suck cock in the bushes but who won’t go to bed.

If we are liberated we are open with our sexuality. Closet queenery must end. *Come out.*

But: in saying come out, we have to have our heads clear about a few things: 1) closet queens are our brothers, and must be defended against attacks by straight people; 2) the fear of coming out is not paranoia; the stakes are high: loss of family ties, loss of job, loss of straight friends—these are all reminders that the oppression is not just in our heads. It’s real. Each of us must make the steps toward openness at our own speed and on our own impulses. Being open is the foundation of freedom: it has to be built solidly. 3) “Closet queen” is a broad term covering a multitude of forms of defense, self-hatred, lack of strength, and habit. We are all closet queens in some ways, and all of us had to come out—very few of us were “flagrant” at the age of seven! We must afford our brothers and sisters the same patience we afforded ourselves. And while their closet queenery is part of our oppression, it’s more a part of theirs. They alone can decide when and how.

IV. On Oppression

It is important to catalog and understand the different facets of our oppression. There is no future in arguing about degrees of oppression. A lot of “movement” types come on with a line of shit about homosexuals not being oppressed as much as blacks or Vietnamese or workers or women. We don’t happen to fit into their ideas of class or caste. Bull! When people feel oppressed, they act on that feeling. We feel oppressed. Talk about the priority of black liberation or ending imperialism over and above gay liberation is just anti-gay propaganda.

1. *Physical attacks*: We are attacked, beaten, castrated and left dead time and time again. There are half a dozen known unsolved slayings in San Francisco parks in the last few years. “Punks,” often of minority groups who look around for someone under them socially, feel encouraged to beat up on “queens” and cops look the other way. That used to be called lynching.

Cops in most cities have harassed our meeting places: bars and baths and parks. They set up entrapment squads. A Berkeley brother was slain by a cop in April when he tried to split after finding out that the trick who was making advances to him was a cop. Cities set up “pervert” registration, which if nothing else scares our brothers deeper into the closet.

One of the most vicious slurs on us is the blame for prison “gang rapes.” These rapes are invariably done by people who consider themselves straight. The victims of these rapes are us and straights who can’t defend themselves. The press campaign to link prison rapes with homosexuality is an attempt to make straights fear and despise us, so they can oppress us more. It’s typical of the fucked-up straight mind to think that homosexual sex involves tying a guy down and fucking him. That’s aggression, not sex. If that’s what sex is for a lot of straight people, that’s a problem they have to solve, not us.

2. *Psychological warfare:* Right from the beginning we have been subjected to a barrage of straight propaganda. Since our parents don’t know any homosexuals, we grow up thinking that we are alone and different and perverted. Our school friends identify “queer” with any non-conformist or bad behavior. Our elementary school teachers tell us not to talk to strangers or accept rides. Television, billboards and magazines put forth a false idealization of male/female relationships, and make us wish we were different, wish we were “in.” In family living class we’re taught how we’re supposed to turn out. And all along, the best we hear if anything about homosexuality is that it’s an unfortunate problem.

3. *Self-oppression:* As gay liberation grows, we will find our uptight brothers and sisters, particularly those who are making a buck off our ghetto, coming on strong to defend the status quo. This is self oppression: “don’t rock the boat”; “things in SF are OK”; “gay people just aren’t together”; “I’m not oppressed.” These lines are right out of the mouths of the straight establishment. A large part of our oppression would end if we would stop putting ourselves and our pride down.

4. *Institutional:* Discrimination against gays is blatant, if we open our eyes. Homosexual relationships are illegal, and even if these laws are not regularly enforced, they encourage and enforce closet queenery. The bulk of the social work/psychiatric field looks upon homosexuality as a problem, and treats us as sick. Employers let it be known that our skills are acceptable as long as our sexuality is hidden. Big business and government are particularly notorious offenders.

The discrimination in the draft and armed services is a pillar of the general attitude towards gays. If we are willing to label ourselves publicly not only as homosexual but as sick, then we qualify for deferment; and if we’re not “discreet” (dishonest) we get drummed out of the service. Hell, no, we won’t go, of course not, but we can’t let the army fuck over us this way, either.

V. On Sex

1. *What sex is:* It is both creative expression and communication: good when it is either, and better when it is both. Sex can also be aggression, and usually is when those involved do not see each other as equals; and it can also be perfunctory, when we are distracted or preoccupied. These uses spoil what is good about it.

I like to think of good sex in terms of playing the violin: with both people on one level seeing the other body as an object capable of creating beauty when they play it well; and on a second level the players communicating through their mutual production and appreciation of beauty. As in good music, you get totally into it—and coming back out of that state of consciousness is like finishing a work of art or coming back from an episode of an acid or mescaline trip. And to press the analogy further: the variety of music is infinite and varied, depending on the capabilities of the players, both as subjects and as objects. Solos, duets, quartets (symphonies, even, if you happen to dig Romantic music!) are possible. The variations in gender, response, and bodies are like different instruments. And perhaps what we have called sexual “orientation” probably just means that we have not yet learned to turn on to the total range of musical expression.

2. *Objectification*: In this scheme, people are sexual objects, but they are also subjects, and are human beings who appreciate themselves as object and subject. This use of human bodies as objects is legitimate (not harmful) only when it is reciprocal. If one person is always object and the other subject, it stifles the human being in both of them. Objectification must also be open and frank. By silence we often assume or let the other person assume that sex means commitments: if it does, ok; but if not, say it. (Of course, it's not all that simple: our capabilities for manipulation are unfathomed—all we can do is try.)

Gay liberation people must understand that women have been treated exclusively and dishonestly as sexual objects. A major part of their liberation is to play down sexual objectification and to develop other aspects of themselves which have been smothered so long. We respect this. We also understand that a few liberated women will be appalled or disgusted at the open and prominent place that we put sex in our lives; and while this is a natural response from their experience, they must learn what it means for us.

For us, sexual objectification is a focus of our quest for freedom. It is precisely that which we are not supposed to share with each other. Learning how to be open and good with each other sexually is part of our liberation. And one obvious distinction: objectification of sex for us is something we choose to do among ourselves, while for women it is imposed by their oppressors.

3. *On positions and roles*: Much of our sexuality has been perverted through mimicry of straights, and warped from self-hatred. These sexual perversions are basically anti-gay:

“I like to make it with straight guys”

“I'm not gay, but I like to be 'done' ”

“I like to fuck, but don't want to be fucked”

“I don't like to be touched above the neck”

This is role playing at its worst; we must transcend these roles. We strive for democratic, mutual, reciprocal sex. This does not mean that we are all mirror images of each other in bed, but that we break away from the roles which enslave us. We already do better in bed than straights do, and we can be better to each other than we have been.

4. *Chickens and Studs*: Face it, nice bodies and young bodies are attributes, they're groovy. They are inspiration for art, for spiritual elevation, for good sex. The problem arises only in the inability to relate to people of the same age, or people who don't fit the plastic stereotypes of a good body. At that point, objectification eclipses people, and expresses self-hatred: “I hate gay people, and I don't like myself, but if a stud (or chicken) wants to make it with me, I can pretend I'm someone other than me.”

A note on exploitation of children: kids can take care of themselves, and are sexual beings way earlier than we'd like to admit. Those of us who began cruising in early adolescence know this, and we were doing the cruising, not being debauched by dirty old men. Scandals such as the one in Boise, Idaho—blaming a “ring” of homosexuals for perverting their youth—are the fabrications of press and police and politicians. And as for child molesting, the overwhelming amount is done by straight guys to little girls: it is not particularly a gay problem, and is caused by the frustrations resulting from anti-sex puritanism.

5. *Perversion*: We've been called perverts enough to be suspect of any usage of the word. Still many of us shrink from the idea of certain kinds of sex: with animals, sado/masochism, dirty sex (involving piss or shit). Right off, even before we take the time to learn any more, there are some things to get straight:

1. We shouldn't be apologetic to straights about gays whose sex lives we don't understand or

share;

2. It's not particularly a gay issue, except that gay people are probably less hung up about sexual experimentation;
3. Let's get perspective: even if we were to get into the game of deciding what's good for someone else, the harm done in these "perversions" is undoubtedly less dangerous or unhealthy than is tobacco or alcohol.
4. While they can be reflections of neurotic or self-hating patterns, they may also be enactments of spiritual or important phenomena: *e.g.* sex with animals may be the beginning of inter-species communication: some dolphin-human breakthroughs have been made on the sexual level; *e.g.* one guy who says he digs shit during sex occasionally says it's not the taste or texture, but a symbol that he's so far into sex that those things no longer bug him; *e.g.* sado/masochism, when consensual, can be described as a highly artistic endeavor, a ballet the constraints of which are thresholds of pain and pleasure.

VI. On Our Ghetto

We are refugees from Amerika. So we came to the ghetto—and as other ghettos, it has its negative and positive aspects. Refugee camps are better than what preceded them, or people never would have come. But they are still enslaving, if only that we are limited to being ourselves there and only there.

Ghettos breed self-hatred. We stagnate here, accepting the status quo. The status quo is rotten. We are all warped by our oppression, and in the isolation of the ghetto we blame ourselves rather than our oppressors.

Ghettos breed exploitation: Landlords find they can charge exorbitant rents and get away with it, because of the limited area which is safe to live in openly. Mafia control of bars and baths in NYC is only one example of outside money controlling our institutions for their profit. In San Francisco the Tavern Guild favors maintaining the ghetto, for it is through ghetto culture that they make a buck. We crowd their bars not because of their merit but because of the absence of any other social institution. The Guild has refused to let us collect defense funds or pass out gay liberation literature in their bars—need we ask why?

Police or con men who shake down the straight gay in return for not revealing him; the bookstores and movie makers who keep raising prices because they are the only outlet for pornography; heads of "modeling" agencies and other pimps who exploit both the hustlers and the johns—these are the parasites who flourish in the ghetto.

San Francisco—Ghetto or Free Territory: Our ghetto certainly is more beautiful and larger and more diverse than most ghettos, and is certainly freer than the rest of Amerika. That's why we're here. But it isn't ours. Capitalists make money off of us, cops patrol us, government tolerates us as long as we shut up, and daily we work for and pay taxes to those who oppress us.

To be a free territory, we must govern ourselves, set up our own institutions, defend ourselves, and use our won energies to improve our lives. The emergence of gay liberation communes, and our own paper is a good start. The talk about a gay liberation coffee shop/dance hall should be acted upon. Rural retreats, political action offices, food cooperatives, a free school, unalienating bars and after hours places—they must be developed if we are to have even the shadow of a free territory.

VII. On Coalition

Right now the bulk of our work has to be among ourselves—self educating, fending off attacks, and building free territory. Thus basically we have to have a gay/straight vision of the world until the oppression of gays is ended.

But not every straight is our enemy. Many of us have mixed identities, and have ties with other liberation movements: women, blacks, other minority groups; we may also have taken on an identity which is vital to us: ecology, dope, ideology. And face it: we can't change Amerika alone.

Who do we look to for coalition?

1. *Women's Liberation*: summarizing earlier statements, 1) they are our closest ally; we must try hard to get together with them. 2) a lesbian caucus is probably the best way to attack gay guys' male chauvinism, and challenge the straightness of women's liberation; 3) as males we must be sensitive to their developing identities as women, and respect that; if *we* know what *our* freedom is about, *they* certainly know what's best for *them*.

2. *Black liberation*: This is tenuous right now because of the uptightness and supermasculinity of many black men (which is understandable). Despite that, we must support their movement, particularly when they are under attack from the establishment; we must show them that we mean business; and we must figure out which our common enemies are: police, city hall, capitalism.

3. *Chicanos*: Basically the same problem as with blacks: trying to overcome mutual animosity and fear, and finding ways to support them. The extra problem of super uptightness and machismo among Latin cultures, and the traditional pattern of Mexicans beating up "queers," can be overcome: we're both oppressed, and by the same people at the top.

4. *White radicals and ideologues*: We're not, as a group, Marxist or communist. We haven't figured out what kind of political/economic system is good for us as gays. Neither capitalist or socialist countries have treated us as anything other than *non grata* so far.

But we know we are radical, in that we know the system that we're under now is a direct source of oppression, and it's not a question of getting our share of the pie. The pie is rotten.

We can look forward to coalition and mutual support with radical groups if they are able to transcend their anti-gay and male chauvinist patterns. We support radical and militant demands when they arise, e.g. Moratorium, People's Park; but only as a group; we can't compromise or soft-peddle our gay identity.

Problems: because radicals are doing somebody else's thing, they tend to avoid issues which affect them directly, and see us as jeopardizing their "work" with other groups (workers, blacks). Some years ago a dignitary of SDS on a community organization project announced at an initial staff meeting that there would be no homosexuality (or dope) on the project. And recently in New York, a movement group which had a coffee-house get-together after a political rally told the gays to leave when they started dancing together. (It's interesting to note that in this case, the only two groups which supported us were the Women's Liberation and the Crazyies.)

Perhaps most fruitful would be to broach with radicals their stifled homosexuality and the issues which arise from challenging sexual roles.

5. *Hip and street-people*: A major dynamic of rising gay lib sentiment is the hip revolution within the gay community. Emphasis on love, dropping out, being honest, expressing yourself through hair and clothes, and smoking dope are all attributes of this. The gays who are the least vulnerable to attack by the establishment have been the freest to express themselves on gay liberation.

We can make a direct appeal to young people, who are not so uptight about homosexuality. One

kid, after having his first sex with a male said, “I don’t know what all the fuss is about, making it with a girl just isn’t that different.”

The hip/street culture has led people into a lot of freeing activities: encounter/sensitivity, the quest for reality, freeing territory for the people, ecological consciousness, communes. These are real points of agreement and probably will make it easier for them to get their heads straight about homosexuality, too.

6. Homophile groups: 1) reformist or pokey as they sometimes are, they are our brothers. They’ll grow as we have grown and grow. Do not attack them in straight or mixed company. 2) ignore their attack on us. 3) cooperate where cooperation is possible without essential compromise of our identity.

Conclusion: An Outline Of Imperatives For Gay Liberation

1. Free ourselves: come out everywhere; initiate self defense and political activity; initiate counter community institutions.
2. Turn other gay people on: talk all the time; understand, forgive, accept.
3. Free the homosexual in everyone: we’ll be getting a good bit of shit from threatened latents: be gentle, and keep talking and acting free.
4. We’ve been playing an act for a long time, so we’re consummate actors. Now we can begin *to be*, and it’ll be a good show!

Comments On Carl Wittman’s “A Gay Manifesto”

Carl Wittman’s “A Gay Manifesto” represents an important step forward for our movement. Gay Liberation is struggling for a self-understanding which would probe deeply enough into the causes of our oppression to give us a clear vision of the forms and directions our struggle must take. Wittman has provided an analysis of homosexual oppression in America which links the individual-psychological experiences of oppression to the social and economic facts which are at once the causes and effects of this situation. He has spelled out the various aspects of gay oppression from his own vantage point, with self-acknowledged limitations.

Most importantly, Wittman’s “Manifesto” provides a clear statement of Gay Liberation’s goal: to free ourselves as gays and to free straight society in as much as it represses its own homosexual aspects. What is noteworthy in Wittman’s approach is his insistence that we must change our own consciousness to be free to change the institutions which shape our lives. Liberation of the head can never be more than a half-step, a transitional move, until fundamental changes are made in the institutions and cultural forms which create gay oppression. By making this connection so explicit, Carl Wittman is able to go on to link our struggle to those of the other oppressed groups in this society, thus widening the viewpoint of the movement as a whole.

Our criticisms are intended as friendly amendments to Wittman’s “Manifesto.” As Wittman says, “we are only at the beginning.” Hopefully these comments of ours will foster discussion and new thinking throughout the movement.

We feel that two aspects of the “Manifesto” invite further clarification and development. They are difficult issues central to the entire movement. The first is the notion of “coming out” and the importance it ought to have within our movement. The second is the question Wittman raises in

section VII of the “Manifesto”: the kind of social and economic viewpoint most conducive to our liberation as gays.

On the matter of “coming out,” we agree that the phrase is a description of our movement’s overall process, that it both describes what we are about and what we are working for. However, concealed within this idea is an important tension which ought to be unpacked and examined. It is the same tension which Wittman develops throughout the pamphlet: the polarity between personal head-freeing and the need for collective, social action to change institutions. This is no simple issue and it cannot be solved by simple slogans or catchwords. As in any process which has to unite two distinct and in some ways opposed actions, problems result from overemphasis on either of the poles.

Emphasis on personal liberation, the experience of feeling free, which is the meaning often given to “coming out,” can and often does lead to a kind of escapism or regression, to detachment from the actual conditions confronting us. It can also lead to real personal problems for people who act unthinkingly; they end up “free” in their heads but cut off in fact from access to means for changing social conditions. This problem is especially acute for our movement since so much of our oppression consists precisely in being forced to choose between a personal life in a gay ghetto or a de-personalized life in straight society—usually to the detriment of individual growth, no matter which option is taken.

Emphasis on effective action, pushed to excess, leads to similar immobility, but in the opposite direction. The homosexual who hides his identity for the sake of the political movement, the good of his family or whatever, is likely to run into the dilemma of all “boring from within”; the inability to effect change because he is not recognized for what he is or has actually forgotten who he is himself. This is not to say that sisters and brothers may not be entirely correct to go incognito at least for a time and in certain parts of their lives. However, the danger here of copping out is real, and if this strategy were applied by everyone there would obviously be no Gay Liberation movement.

The second issue, the social and economic perspective most conducive for Gay Liberation, is also very basic. On this question Red Butterfly takes a socialist perspective. We assert that human liberation in all its forms, including Gay Liberation, requires effective self-determination, i.e., democracy, in all spheres of social life affecting the lives of people as a whole. This means particularly economic and political democracy: common ownership and decision-making with regard to economic and social matters by society as a whole. We believe that economic and social democracy are the necessary conditions for liberation. In Marxist language, we assert that a democratic socialism is the necessary basis for building a classless society, i.e., communism.

To facilitate discussion of this issue we propose the following scheme for judging a social and economic system which can make a free society possible: Given the material and technological resources of American society, how well can the system in question provide:

1. ecological well-being for the nation and the planet as a whole.
2. the basic economic and social necessities: adequate income, housing, medical care; meaningful employment and democratic civil rights for all participants in the society.
3. protection for minority groups, such as homosexuals; equal opportunities for education, leisure, and personal development for all participants.
4. cooperation with world-wide social and economic development and the self-determination of peoples.

5. effective political power for all, the ability of all social groups to resist exploitation and to determine their own destinies.

This question is basic to our movement, since the answers we give to it will determine the concrete political alignments we make and, ultimately, the success or failure of our struggle for liberation—which in the long run is a political struggle.

Today the fight for eros, the fight for life, is the political fight. –H. Marcuse

–The Red Butterfly (1970) Box 3445 Grand Central Station New York, N.Y. 10017

7.3 Radicalqueens, Radicalqueens Manifestos (1973)

Published: Radicalqueens, “Manifesto #1” *The Radical Queen: The Magazine of the Non-Man*, no. 1, 1973.

Radicalqueens, “Manifesto #2” *The Radical Queen: The Magazine of the Non-Man*, no. 2, 1973.

Source: *The Early Years of Gay Liberation*, ed. by Tommi Avicolti Mecca. City Lights Books, 2009.

Radicalqueens Manifesto #1

Whereas we are tired of being the brunt of most straight oppression, including fairy jokes, physical assaults, and snickering stares;

whereas we are tired of the oppression of straight-identified machismo gays, including remarks about the “tacky queens,” denial of queens as representative of the gay community, and being looked down upon;

whereas gay liberation movements have often denied our right to be ourselves in public and denied our very existence while in the same breath patting us on the ass and telling us we are equal (as long as we remain Uncle Toms);

whereas we have decided that macho straight identification is psychologically oppressive and destructive, we have banded together in a union of Radical Queens: to shatter myths, ZAP! our oppressor (both straight and gay), and thereby stand up and get our right to be ourselves both in the straight and in the gay communities, including wearing makeup, doing drag, and other femme-identified activity that any queen decides expresses him or herself!!!!

Radicalqueens Manifesto #2

Having been born men, having been socialized to be independent, aggressive, competitive, assertive, task-oriented, outward-oriented, innovative, self-disciplined, stoic, active, objective, analytic-minded, courageous, unsentimental, rational, confident, emotionally controlled, having been socialized to be leaders, having been made to consider makeup, dresses, crying, touching other men, kissing other men and other related traits “sissyish” or “faggoty,” having been made to play war games as a child and to believe that life is a battle to be fought in Vietnam, and against the communists and against those men who are not “manly,” having been made to believe that women are the weaker sex, and frail, passive, unexciting, intuitive, emotional, things which real men are not supposed to be, things which only “faggots” are, having been told as men that real men are not hairdressers,

that real men are not artists, actors or female impersonators, having been slapped when we tried on our mother's dresses or jewelry, or when we played with our sister's dolls, having been part of movements that, though liberal, still held onto the definition of man as aggressive, competitive, etc., and still reduced the women in the movement to secretaries and typists, having been part of gangs in school, gangs that taunted effeminate boys, kicking and spitting on them, calling them names, pushing them, stealing their books, sometimes beating them up or forcing them to suck us off, having as men defined ourselves as the creators, the conquerors, the scientists, having as men resisted seeing how ugly these images of men are, how destructive they are!

Radicalqueens are not men, we are non-men. We are not women. We do not accept the attributes of femininity, that is, passivity, non-aggressiveness, fragility, etc., things which our sisters in the Women's Movement see as oppressive and undesirable traits socialized into women. We do not accept the traditional role of women as any alternative to the oppressor role of the male. Both roles are inventions of the oppressor, both are oppressive to those who accept them.

We of radicalqueens feel it is only by becoming non-men, that is, by throwing off the needs of the machismo man, the need to conquer, to suppress, the need to be like John Wayne or any other symbol of strength and "manliness." We feel being sensitive, being compassionate, being able to cry, to touch, to feel, yet without being totally passive, totally non-aggressive, is revolutionary, is Gay. Being homosexual is not the answer to being oppressors. Men have been raised to be the oppressor. All men.

We of radicalqueens will not be the oppressors, we have been working against our own oppressive tendencies. We recommend that all Gay men begin questioning their own feelings. It is only by questioning everything that we can find anything, can find a bit of the truth, by slicing through all of the lies!

7.4 Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries, Street Transvestites for Gay Power Statement (1970)

<http://thespiritwas.tumblr.com/post/43780113854/nyu-occupation-street-transvestites-for-gay-power>

Released during the NYU Gay Liberation Front occupation.

Gay Power When Do We Want It! Or Do We?

This is the question that is running through our minds. Do you really want Gay Power or are you looking for a few laughs or maybe a little excitement. We are not quite sure what you people really want. If you want Gay Liberation then you're going to have to fight for it. We don't mean tomorrow or the next day, we are talking about today. We can never possibly win by saying "wait for a better day" or "we're not ready yet." If you're ready to tell people that you want to be free, then you're ready to fight. And if you're not ready then shut up and crawl back into your closets. But let us ask you this, Can you really live in a closet? We can't.

So now the question is, do we want Gay Power or Pig Power. We are willing to admit that we need pigs. But we only need them for crime control. We do not need them to beat and harass our gay brothers and sisters. The pigs are not helping the people who are being robbed on the streets and being murdered. How can they when they're too busy trying too bust a homosexual over the head. Or they're too busy trying to catch someone hustling so they can arrest them. But they do

give us an alternative. All we have to do is commit sodomy with them and they'll forget they saw us. Until next time, that is. So again we ask you, do you want pig power or gay power? This is up to each and every one of you.

If you want gay power then you're going to have to fight for it. And you're going to have to fight until you win. Once you start, you're not going to be able to stop, because if you do you'll lose everything. You won't just lose this fight, but all the other fights all over the country. All our brothers and sisters all over the world will return to their closets in shame. So if you want to fight for your rights, then fight till the end.

We would also like to say that all we fought for at Weinstein Hall was lost when we left upon request of the pigs. Chalk one up for the pigs, for they truly are carrying their victory flag. And realize the next demonstration is going to be harder, because they now know that we scare easily.

You people run if you want to, but we're tired of running. We intend to fight for our rights until we get them.

Street Transvestites for Gay Power October 1970

7.5 Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, Transvestite-Transsexual Action Organization and Fems Against Sexism, Transvestite and Transsexual Liberation (1970)

Published: "Transvestite and Transsexual Liberation." *The Gay Dealer*, October 1970.

Provided by the John J. Wilcox, Jr. Archives of the William Way LGBT Center.

The oppression against transvestites and transsexuals of either sex arises from sexist values and this oppression is manifested by homosexuals and heterosexuals of both sexes in the form of exploitation, ridicule, harassment, beatings, rapes, murders, use of us as shock troops, sacrificial victims, and others.

We reject all labels of "stereotype," "sick," or "maladjusted" from non-transvestic and non-transsexual sources and defy any attempt to repress our manifestation as transvestites and transsexuals.

Trans Lib began in the summer of 1969 when "Queens" formed in New York and began militating for equal rights, The Transvestite-Transsexual Action Organization (TAO) formed in Los Angeles, the Cockettes in San Francisco, Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries (STAR) in New York, Fems Against Sexism, Transvestites and Transsexuals (TAT) also formed in New York; Radical Queens formed in Milwaukee—all in 1970. "Queens" became "Queens Liberation Front."

Transvestism—transsexualism—homosexuality are separate entities. Sexist values incorrectly classify any male who wears feminine attire as a homosexual, and to a lesser degree, any female who wears masculine attire is classified as a homosexual.

Demands

1. Abolishment of all crossdressing laws and restrictions of adornment.
2. An end to exploitation and discrimination within the gay world,

3. An end to exploitative practices of doctors and psychiatrists who work in the fields of transvestism and transsexualism. Hormone treatment and transsexual surgery should be provided free upon demand by the state.
4. Transsexual assistance centers should be created in all cities of over one million inhabitants, under the direction of postoperative transsexuals.
5. Transvestites and transsexuals should be granted full and equal rights on all levels of society and a full voice in the struggle for the liberation of all oppressed people.
6. Transvestites who exist as members of the opposite anatomical gender should be able to obtain full identification as members of the opposite gender. Transsexuals should be able to obtain such identification commensurate to their new gender with no difficulty, and not be required to carry special identification as transsexuals. There should be no special licensing requirements of transvestites or transsexuals who work in the entertainment field.
7. Immediate release of all persons in mental hospitals or prison for transvestism or transsexualism.

We share in the oppression of gays and we share in the oppression of women.

Trans Lib includes transvestites, transsexuals and hermaphrodites of any sexual manifestation and of all sexes—heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and asexual. It is becoming a separate movement as the great majority of transvestites are heterosexual, and many transsexuals (postoperative) are also heterosexual, and because the oppression directed towards us is due to our transvestism and transsexualism and for no other reason. We unite around our oppression as all oppressed groups unite around their particular oppression. All power to trans liberation.

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This statement was prepared by members of STAR, TAO and FAS and does not signify approval by the Radical Queens, QLF or the Cockettes. A national conference of all trans lib groups is being planned later this spring.

OUT OF THE CLOSETS AND INTO THE STREETS
 COME VERY TOGETHER

7.6 Charlotte Bunch, Lesbians in Revolt (1972)

http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/wlmpc_wlmms01033/

Charlotte Bunch, "Lesbians in Revolt: Male Supremacy Quakes and Quivers." *The Furies*, vol. 1, 1972.

The development of Lesbian-feminist politics as the basis for the liberation of women is our top priority; this article outlines our present ideas. In our society which defines all people and institutions

for the benefit of the rich, white male, the Lesbian is in revolt. In revolt because she defines herself in terms of women and rejects the male definitions of how she should feel, act, look, and live. To be a Lesbian is to love oneself, woman, in a culture that denegrates and despises women. The Lesbian rejects male sexual/political domination; she defies his world, his social organization, his ideology, and his definition of her as inferior. Lesbianism puts women first while the society declares the male supreme. Lesbianism threatens male supremacy at its core. When politically conscious and organized, it is central to destroying our sexist, racist, capitalist, imperialist system.

Lesbianism is a Political Choice

Male society defines Lesbianism as a sexual act, which reflects men's limited view of women; they think of us only in terms of sex. They also say Lesbians are not real women, so a real woman is one who gets fucked by men. We say that a Lesbian is a woman whose sense of self and energies, including sexual energies, center around women—she is woman-identified. The woman-identified-woman commits herself to other women for political, emotional, physical and economic support. Women are important to her. She is important to herself. Our society demands that commitment from women be reserved for men.

The Lesbian, woman-identified-woman, commits herself to women not only as an alternative to oppressive male/female relationships but primarily because she *loves* women. Whether consciously or not, by her actions, the Lesbian has recognized that giving support and love to men over women perpetuates the system that oppresses her. If women do not make a commitment to each other, which includes sexual love, we deny ourselves the love and value traditionally given to men. We accept our second class status. When women do give primary energies to other women, then it is possible to concentrate fully on building a movement for our liberation.

Woman-identified Lesbianism is, then, more than a sexual preference, it is a political choice. It is political because relationships between men and women are essentially political, they involve power and dominance. Since the Lesbian actively rejects that relationship and chooses women, she defies the established political system.

Lesbianism, by itself, is not enough

Of course, not all Lesbians are consciously woman-identified, nor are all committed to finding common solutions to the oppression they suffer as women and Lesbians. Being a Lesbian is part of challenging male supremacy, but not the end. For the Lesbian or heterosexual woman, there is no individual solution to oppression.

The Lesbian may think that she is free since she escapes the personal oppression of the individual male/female relationship. But to the society she is still a woman, or worse, a visible Lesbian. On the street, at the job, in the schools, she is treated as an inferior and is at the mercy of men's power and whims. (I've never heard of a rapist who stopped because his victim was a Lesbian.) This society hates women who love women, and so, the Lesbian, who escapes male dominance in her private home, receives it doubly at the hands of male society; she is harassed, outcast, and shuttled to the bottom. Lesbians must become feminists and fight against women's oppression, just as feminists must become Lesbians if they hope to end male supremacy.

U.S. society encourages individual solutions, apolitical attitudes, and reformism to keep us from political revolt and out of power. Men who rule, and male leftists who seek to rule, try to depoliticize sex and the relations between men and women in order to prevent us from acting to

end our oppression and challenging their power. As the question of homosexuality has become public, reformists define it as a private question of who you sleep with in order to sidetrack our understanding of the politics of sex. For the Lesbian-feminist, it is not private; it is a political matter of oppression, domination and power. Reformists offer solutions which make no basic changes in the system that oppresses us, solutions which keep power in the hands of the oppressor. The only way oppressed people end their oppression is by seizing power: people whose rule depends on the subordination of others do not voluntarily stop oppressing others. Our subordination is the basis of male power.

Sexism is the Root of All Oppression

The first division of labor, in pre-history, was based on sex: men hunted, women built the villages, took care of children, and farmed. Women collectively controlled the land, language, culture, and the communities. Men were able to conquer women with the weapons that they developed for hunting when it became clear that women were leading a more stable, peaceful, and desirable existence. We do not know exactly how this conquest took place, but it is clear that the original imperialism was male over female: the male claiming the female body and her service as his territory (or property).

Having secured the domination of women, men continued this pattern of suppressing people, now on the basis of tribe, race and class. Although there have been numerous battles over class, race, and nation during the past three thousand years, none has brought the liberation of women. While these other forms of oppression must be ended, there is no reason to believe that our liberation will come with the smashing of capitalism, racism or imperialism today. Women will be free only when we concentrate on fighting male supremacy.

Our war against male supremacy does, however, involve attacking the latter-day dominations based on class, race, and nation. As Lesbians who are outcasts from every group, it would be suicidal to perpetuate these man-made divisions among ourselves. We have no heterosexual privileges, and when we publicly assert our Lesbianism, those of us who had them lose many of our class and race privileges. Most of our privileges as women are granted to us by our relationships to men (fathers, husbands, boyfriends) whom we now reject. This does not mean that there is no racism or class chauvinism within us, but we must destroy these divisive remnants of privileged behavior among ourselves as the first step toward their destruction in the society. Race, class, and national oppressions come from men, serve ruling class white men's interests, and have no place in a woman-identified revolution.

Lesbianism is the Basic Threat to Male Supremacy

Lesbianism is a threat to the ideological, political, personal, and economic basis of male supremacy. The Lesbian threatens the ideology of male supremacy by destroying the lie about female inferiority, weakness, passivity, and by denying women's "innate" need for men. Lesbians literally do not need men (even for procreation if the science of cloning is developed).

The Lesbian's independence and refusal to support one man undermines the personal power that men exercise over women. Our rejection of heterosexual sex challenges male domination in its most individual and common form. We offer all women something better than submission to personal oppression. We offer the beginning of the end of collective and individual male supremacy. Since men of all races and classes depend on female support and submission for practical tasks and feeling superior, our refusal to submit will force some to examine their sexist behavior, to break

down their own destructive privileges over other humans, and to fight against those privileges in other men. They will have to build new selves that do not depend on oppressing women and learn to live in social structures that do not give them power over anyone.

Heterosexuality separates women from each other; it makes women define themselves through men; it forces women to compete against each other for men and the privilege which comes through men and their social standing. Heterosexual society offers women a few privileges as compensation if they give up their freedom: for example, mothers are respected and “honored,” wives or lovers are socially accepted and given some economic and emotional security, a woman gets physical protection on the street when she stays with her man, etc. The privileges give heterosexual women a personal and political stake in maintaining the status quo.

The Lesbian receives none of these heterosexual privileges or compensations since she does not accept the male demands on her. She has little vested interest in maintaining the present political system since all of its institutions—church, state, media, health, schools—work to keep her down. If she understands her oppression, she has nothing to gain by supporting white rich male America and much to gain from fighting to change it. She is less prone to accept reformist solutions to women’s oppression.

Economics is a crucial part of women’s oppression, but our analysis of the relationship between capitalism and sexism is not complete. We know that Marxist economic theory does not sufficiently consider the role of women or Lesbians, and we are presently working on this area.

However, as a beginning, some of the ways that Lesbians threaten the economic system are clear: In this country, women work for men in order to survive, on the job and in the home. The Lesbian rejects this division of labor at its roots; she refuses to be a man’s property, to submit to the unpaid labor system of housework and childcare. She rejects the nuclear family as the basic unit of production and consumption in capitalist society.

The Lesbian is also a threat on the job because she is not the passive/part-time woman worker that capitalism counts on to do boring work and be part of a surplus labor pool. Her identity and economic support do not come through men, so her job is crucial and she cares about job conditions, wages, promotion, and status. Capitalism cannot absorb large numbers of women demanding stable employment, decent salaries, and refusing to accept their traditional job exploitation. We do not understand yet the total effect that this increased job dissatisfaction will have. It is, however, clear that as women become more intent upon taking control of their lives, they will seek more control over their jobs, thus increasing the strains on capitalism and enhancing the power of women to change the economic system.

Lesbians Must Form Our Own Movement to Fight Male Supremacy

Feminist-lesbianism, as the most basic threat to male supremacy, picks up part of the Women’s Liberation analysis of sexism and gives it force and direction. Women’s Liberation lacks direction now because it has failed to understand the importance of heterosexuality in maintaining male supremacy and because it has failed to face class and race as real differences in women’s behavior and political needs. As long as straight women see Lesbianism as a bedroom issue, they hold back the development of politics and strategies which would put an end to male supremacy and they give men an excuse for not dealing with their sexism.

Being a Lesbian means ending identification with, allegiance to, dependence on, and support of heterosexuality. It means ending your personal stake in the male world so that you join women, individually and collectively, in the struggle to end your oppression. Lesbianism is the key to liber-

ation and only women who cut their ties to male privilege can be trusted to remain serious in the struggle against male dominance. Those who remain tied to men, individually or in political theory, cannot always put women first. It is not that heterosexual women are evil or do not care about their sisters. It is because the very essence, definition, and nature of heterosexuality is men first. Every woman has experienced that desolation when her sister puts her man first in the final crunch: heterosexuality demands that she do so. As long as women still benefit from heterosexuality, receive its privileges and security, they will at some point have to betray their sisters, especially Lesbian sisters who do not receive those benefits.

Women in women's liberation have understood the importance of having meetings and other events for women only. It has been clear that dealing with men divides us and saps our energies and that it is not the job of the oppressed to explain our oppression to the oppressor. Women also have seen that collectively, men will not deal with their sexism until they are forced to do so. Yet, many of these same women continue to have primary relationships with men individually and do not understand why Lesbians find this oppressive. Lesbians cannot grow politically or personally in a situation which denies the basis of our politics: that Lesbianism is political, that heterosexuality is crucial to maintaining male supremacy.

Lesbians must form our own political movement in order to grow. Changes which will have more than token effects on our lives will be led by women-identified Lesbians who understand the nature of our oppression and are therefore in a position to end it.

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