

by Lorna Weir and Eve Zaremba

Introduction

Relations between feminists, lesbians, gay liberationists and gay men have long been problematic. Much of the struggle has been over the hearts and minds of unsuspecting dykes. Committed gay liberationists of both sexes believe that all politically conscious lesbians belong in their movement, shoulder-to-shoulder with their fellow gays. Women's issues are played down as 'straight' — reproductive freedom, day care, equal pay, even rape. These are perceived as not of personal concern to most lesbians, who, according to this logic, face more discrimination as dykes than as women. Thus any reluctance on the part of lesbians to identify with gay liberation or any preference for a more inclusive feminist analysis is viewed as a sort of perverse female chauvinist separatism: a myopic inability to recognize mutuality of interest with gay people. Feminist lesbians often stand accused (or at least suspected) of 'hiding' behind feminism in order to avoid coming out. This tends to be taken to the point where feminism is seen as a lesbian plot (Phyllis Schlafley would agree): a sort of political closet for the faint at heart.

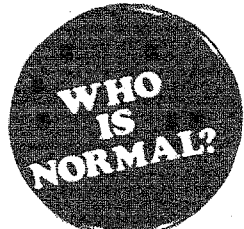
While many gay liberationists wish activist lesbians would smarten up and stay away from feminism, some lesbians and straight feminists view having any truck with gay liberation as disloyalty to women and to feminism. They see no compelling reason to waste precious female energy pulling gay nuts out of the fire by supporting dubious male issues such as pedophilia, public sex, or pornography. Some are frankly uncomfortable with the 'flaunting it' extravagances of gay male style and discount the solidarity of 'queers' in a 'het' world. They see no possible advantage to women's liberation in being identified with gays, wish lesbians would shut up about their sexuality and neither get involved in gay politics nor drag feminism into such treacherous waters.

Most gay men, when they think of it at all, consider feminism irrelevant to their lives at best, and at worst, view it as anti-sexual and possibly dangerous to gays. Predictably, the area where gay and feminist interests clash is sex in all its many manifestations.

Thumbnail Sketch of Gay Liberation History

At the present time the gay media has launched a defence of pornography, pedophilia, public sex and S/M, a defence which has been coupled with harsh criticism of feminist sexual politics. A thumbnail sketch of the history of gay liberation is useful in understanding some of the current conflicts between the women's and gay movements.

In the United States during the 1950's and 1960's the major organization of male homosexuals (the word 'gay' did not become current until the late '60s) was the Mattachine Society. Founded by ex-members of the Communist Party, its beginnings were radical, espousing in such laudable principles as mass collective action by homosexuals, the social value of homosexual culture, and the rejection of categorizing homosexuals as social deviants. Their principle political tenet was that homosexuals constituted an oppressed social minority. The early Mattachine Society engaged in a variety of political activities, ranging from criminal code reform to the defence of homosexuals against police harassment, to what we would now call consciousness raising. After a fierce internal fight in which its founders were defeated, the Mattachine Society in 1953 took on a more conservative political mould, opting for the mildest of political strategies: community acceptance of homosexuals as respectable citizens. To this end, the Society embarked on such projects as blood drives and the collection of books and clothes for distribution among the 'disadvantaged.' Hatred of homosexuals was, they reasoned, caused by individual prejudice, which attitude could be cured through public education.¹

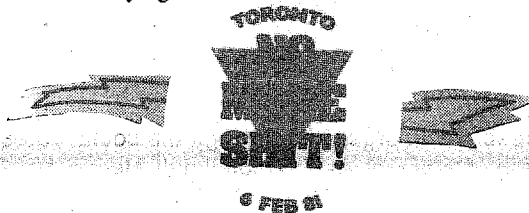


After the routing of early Mattachine politics, a reformist fog settled over the homophile movement for nearly two decades. The chief political priority during this period was the decriminalization of male homosexuality. In Europe and North America various groups organized and lobbied to this end, achieving their goal in England in 1967, and in Canada in 1969. The modern gay liberation movement did not emerge until after the limited decriminalization of homosexuality in these countries. The situation in the United States is harder to encapsulate, since homosexuality was and is under state rather than federal jurisdiction; there was, however, a general trend towards the decriminalization of homosexuality on a state by state basis beginning in the 1960's.

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Many of the early gay liberationists looked to feminism to provide the theoretical framework for gay liberation. Gay liberation was at that time thought of as involving both sexual liberation and gender liberation. Sexual liberation: a dream of non-genitally organized, polymorphous perversity; the validation of desire for members of the same sex through the formation of a social movement to overcome barriers inhibiting free sexual expression; a utopia of perfect sexual spontaneity. Gender liberation: freedom from the narrow confines of masculinity as a social institution, i.e., overcoming the 'male role.' To come out as gay men was to abdicate male supremacy in all its forms, to wash gay hands of the oppression of women by men. Strategies for the destruction of capitalism and patriarchy involved living in gay communes, consciousness raising, and coming out to oneself, the gay movement and the world. The gay commercial scene — capitalistic, anti-female and sexually objectifying — was clearly a modern Babylon to be scrupulously avoided and denounced at every available opportunity.²

The structure of gay male life changed during the 1970's, principally as a result of the combined growth of the gay movement and the gay ghetto. In the last five years there has been a gradual re-evaluation of the relation between the ghetto and the political movement. Gay activists have come to regard their previous attitude of disdain as a political error which isolated their movement from the people they were purportedly organizing. Further, gay activists tired of condemning the very services which they themselves patronized. Early gay liberation politics tend now to be regarded as covertly elitist and self-marginalizing by mainstream activists. This makes good sense, for the leadership of a political movement cuts itself off from its constituency by regarding itself as pure in contrast to the masses of supposedly benighted souls it is trying to save.

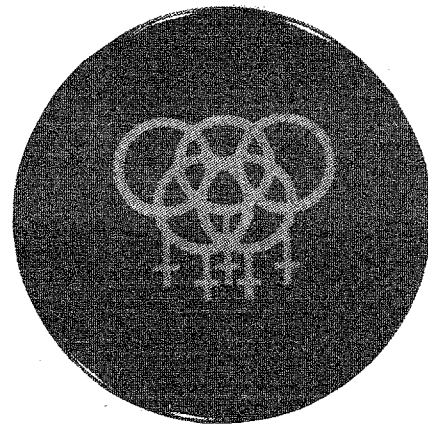


In Toronto, the police raids on the gay baths mark the watershed between early and current gay liberation politics. External attack had the effect of mobilizing hundreds of previously disinterested gay men and bringing movement activists into direct (political) contact with their non-political brothers. The link between movement and ghetto had been established through political defence of a ghetto institution (the baths) which a wide spectrum of gay men frequented. From the viewpoint of early gay liberationism, the baths were a hotbed of sexual objectification and capitalist alienation to be shunned by the pure of body. The defence of the baths led activists to reconsider the sexual practices found therein. And they saw that they were good.

Paralleling the validation of sex in the baths has been a defence by the gay movement of a spectrum of sexual practices found among gay men — public sex in washrooms and parks, pornography, pedophilia and S/M. All these aspects of gay male sexuality have been the subject of increasing police intervention since the decriminalization of sexual acts among consenting adults in private. After the 1969 amendment to the Criminal Code, the heat of state regulation came to be focused on public sex. In England, for instance, there was a "tripling of the convictions of men for homosexual behaviour in what were defined as public places after 1967."³ The current defence of public sex by the gay media is in large part a response to changes in the state regulation of sexuality. Note that public and private are defined by the state. The private is a political construct, and should not be thought of as 'natural,' like a fern growing in a primeval forest. The state, it has been said, has no place in the bedrooms of the nation. This is currently being interpreted to mean that it does have a place everywhere else. And, moreover, what is a bedroom? As feminists, whatever our disputes with the gay movement may be, we have no interest in supporting state-defined notions of the private as the only place where sex 'naturally' belongs.

The homosexual law reform groups played a role in effecting these legal changes, although they alone did not cause them. The reforms must be seen in a broader context of a tactical shift in the regulation of sexuality since World War II. People have clearly been obsessed with sex/sexuality for about the last 200 years: sexuality has been intensified. Intensification has taken the form of extensive power over and through sexuality: the establishment of obstetrics and gynecology, the development of population control, the gathering of social statistics for policing sexuality, and the countless classifications created by psychologists are aspects of this modern sexual regime. In other words, modern power does not primarily operate to prohibit sex, but to implant and control it. Control through prohibition is a secondary feature — a tactic — of the sexual regime, not its overarching strategy. Tactics can change where strategies remain constant. Power over sexuality switched from tactical prohibition to tactical excitement following the last World War,

Boys and Gi



when the pattern of the intensification altered considerably. Many of the earlier prohibitions have been relaxed, from abortion (banned in the 19th century), to masturbation (ruthlessly attacked from the late 18th century on), to women's sexual pleasure (assimilated as 'nurturance' since the end of the eighteenth century). The decriminalization of male homosexuality, legally banned in many Western countries during the last half of the nineteenth century, should be seen against the backdrop of tactical relaxation of prohibitions governing the entire social terrain of sexuality.

The 'Second Wave' of gay liberation dates from the police raid in June 1969 on the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York City. Gay men resisted the police, a riot ensued, and a militant gay movement was born. Gay liberation groups were being formed prior to this event, but the Stonewall festivities came to symbolize the formation of the new movement: it has a mythic quality. Where the previous homophile movement had been concerned with community tolerance, respectability and legal reform, the new gay liberation, heavily influenced by the 60's counterculture and New Left thinking, conceived of itself as a revolutionary movement locked in combat with capitalist alienation. The new movement identified gay people as members of an oppressed minority whose interests it was to join with other oppressed minorities — workers, women, blacks — to overthrow the common source of their oppression: capitalism. Moreover, since capitalism depended for its reproduction on the twin monsters of sexual repression and The Family, the politics of the new gay liberation movement were implacably anti-repressive and anti-family. Sexuality, and especially gay sexuality, was thought to be destructive of power relations in all their myriad invidious forms.

Present Controversies

It is now 1982 and gay sexuality has not yet threatened the foundations of capitalism and patriarchy. The overall ideology of gay liberation has shifted from countercultural rhetoric to sexual liberationism. Sex is what you might call an organic issue among gay men, a group which, after all, is defined in the first place by a socially prohibited sexual taste. The narrower self-identification as sexual liberationist is a defensive reaction to changes in the regulation of homosexuality, a counter-attack to police encroachments on gay social space. In Toronto we have seen *The Body Politic* dragged through the courts for publishing articles on pedophilia and fist-fucking; Glad Day Books, a gay bookstore, was recently charged for selling an allegedly pornographic publication; the trials of the found-ins at the baths pursue their interminable course; police regularly entrap men in washrooms and parks. Small wonder that the gay movement is here defending pedophilia, pornography, public sex and S/M. Coming out and CR, the tactics of the early gay movement, have given way to the nitty-gritties of fundraising, planning legal battles, and community defence: a narrow but immensely practical vision. Corresponding to the shift in the tactics and techniques of organization has been an ideological re-orientation. From a virtual blanket condemnation of the institutions of gay culture, the movement has swung to praise of the clone, that "gay Everyman," and a Whitmanesque song to the (male) body — a sort of gay populism. It would seem as though our gay brothers are going through a brotherhood phase which the women's movement endured several years ago.

The early gay liberation activists believed that sex negated power; the events of the past decade have proved otherwise. Singles bars, gay baths, and the mass distribution of sex manuals have not brought about the demise of capitalism or patriarchy. Which is not to say that the implantation of gay male sexuality is without value, but simply to state that it is of more limited good than was originally predicted. If anything, gay sexual liberation and capitalism go together like pasta and wine; marginalization through incorporation is the order of the day. Social protest is best contained through inclusion rather than exclusion: UIC to prevent mobilization of the industrial working class; ineffective equal pay legislation to undercut the women's movement; underfunded race relations boards to keep the anger of people of colour within system-preserving bounds. And ghettos for deviants of all stripes. Incorporation does offer tangible gains to the oppressed — no one would quarrel that the eight-hour day is better than the ten-hour one — but the effects of incorporation are frequently, and intentionally, deradicalizing.

The naive, apocalyptic theories of the early gay movement originated in the rage of people who had little social space, who were legally persecuted and socially despised. Over the last decade, life has become brighter for gay men. A new social space, the gay ghetto, has been created; sexual orientation clauses in human rights codes and union contracts have been fought for and occasionally won through the efforts of gay rights activists; homophobia is proscribed in polite circles. With these breakthroughs has come a deradicaliza-

Girls Together

Feminism and Gay Liberation



tion of the movement, which increasingly comes to define itself as concerned solely with sexual liberation, understood now as demands for more and better sexual services. The idea of contesting the form of the ghetto as a social structure for marginalizing deviants is far from the pragmatic minds of gay liberationists. But what is pragmatism but liberalism unconscious of its own ideological roots? The social terrain being contested by the gay movement has narrowed considerably, a symptom of both maturity and incorporation. The links between gay liberation and other progressive movements have become unclear as a consequence.

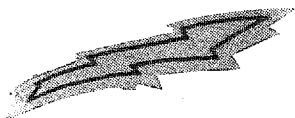
As the gay movement increasingly identifies itself as a sexual liberation movement — at times seemingly as the vanguard of progressive sexuality — it has grown more critical of gender liberation and any critique of institutionalized masculinity. In a society where gay men are still viewed as being less than 'real men,' and despised for it, one would have imagined that gay liberation had an intrinsic interest in the critique of gender in conjunction with the women's movement. Brian Mossop's "Feminism and Lesbian/Gay Male Unity, or Putting the Sex Back into Homosexual,"⁴ an article which is by far the most cogent exemplar which we have seen of recent trends in gay male theory, defines the aims of the gay movement as follows: "... gay liberation means (1) freedom to fuck in whatever way you and your partners mutually desire; (2) freedom from obsession with sex; (3) freeing of love through its disentanglement from sex." Point (3) is left undeveloped in the article. Yet through this point the problem of gender is reinstituted, for, if gay men are to care for one another, they must surely violate the rules of the present construction of masculinity.

Gay populism has further questioned the adequacy of feminist theory to provide a basis for gay liberation. In retrospect, feminists can heartily agree with this, for feminism is an articulation of the oppression of women, whose lives differ in an immense variety of ways from those of gay men. We have little strategic or tactical advice to offer gay men on how to organize the ghetto, and it is downright dangerous for the women's movement to let *any* man call himself a feminist and thus have equal entitlement to defining the oppression of women. Non-sexist men are a joy; feminist men are a potential threat to the autonomy of the women's movement.

The political terrain occupied jointly by the women's and gay movements overlaps much less now than it did a decade ago; but in the common ground we do share — the politics of sexuality — the conflict is more intense than it has ever been. Two or three years ago gay porn/erotica was defended on the grounds that it did not sexually exploit women in any way; more recently, all forms of pornography/erotica have been taken up by the gay media as harmless entertainment. A decade of feminist research, activism and social consciousness-raising on rape, incest, sexual harassment and violence against women is dismissed as puritanical in motivation, an assault on sexual liberation. One might note in this regard that charges of anti-sexuality are used by gay men against other gay men as well. We are personally aware of cases where gay men sexually harassed by other gay men who were in positions of power over them objected to the harassment and were in turn asked if they disapproved of flirting. In a remarkable exchange in the pages of *The Body Politic* last year, a man who had taken issue with some of the content, especially racial discrimination, present in the classified ads section of the paper, was castigated in the following issue as the voice of sexual puritanism on the grounds that racial preferences and avoidances merely reflected harmless individual tastes, similar to fondness of or distaste for mustaches. (!)⁵ When discussions of racism can be so blithely and urbanely dismissed as puritanical, the women's movement is clearly keeping good company.

Especially disturbing in the gay critiques of feminist sexual politics is an emerging general hostility to and contempt for the politics of the women's movement as a whole. The gay media are busily constructing an image of the women's movement as monolithically anti-sexual, and using an alliance with S/M dykes to legitimize this view.

Women as anti-sexual; men as sexual predators. *That's* role-playing of a politically invidious kind: gender personality ascribed to each movement, and sexual stereotyping played out in ritual antagonism between the entire women's and gay movements.



Certainly, sexual pleasure has not been high on the agenda of the women's movement in recent years, and we have much to learn from some of the criticisms being levelled at us from within and without the women's movement. Even if we should grant every criticism being made, it should be remembered that sexual pleasure is only a fraction of the sexual politic necessary to feminism, and, further, sexual politics are in their turn only one component of the general politic of the women's movement. Sexual liberation may be the defining characteristic of the gay movement, but the social terrain of the women's movement is far broader than sexual liberation, not for moralistic reasons, but because the

oppression of women is not limited to sexual oppression. Any attempt to discredit the women's movement as a whole for failures in sexual liberation is blatantly ideological and invalid.

Why Bother?

Given this sorry situation, why bother? Why should we bother with gay men, gay liberation at all? Why do we bother to discuss, to co-operate, to try to understand, to support a movement increasingly prone to hostility to us and our liberation?

Because matters are seldom that simple. First of all, whatever our criticism of gay liberation, its undoubted achievements and services to women must be recognized. It was the gay liberation movement, not feminism, which lobbied the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexuality from the list of mental illnesses. It is still gays who work tirelessly to get the Human Rights Code extended to cover gays, including lesbians of course. And how often does the women's movement as such offer financial support to lesbian mothers fighting for custody rights? By and large it is gay liberationists who are vocal and active against police harassment and brutality towards gays. Admittedly most of it is in defence of gay men, but when and if lesbians are defended it is gay liberation which is in the forefront. In Canada, *The Body Politic*, *A Magazine for Gay Liberation* carries more news about lesbians and items of specific interest and help to lesbians than any feminist medium, even when lesbian-run. No matter how we view its politics and its penchant for taking cheap shots at feminism, *TBP* has rendered women a service for more than a decade.

LESBIANS AND FEMINISM

Lesbians are women. Lesbians are homosexuals. This is obvious, but carries a number of important implications. It is rare that lesbians are socially oppressed as lesbians, i.e., the oppression of lesbians is organized through the social categories of 'woman' and 'homosexual.' Hence the phenomenon of lesbian invisibility, and the extreme difficulty of establishing lesbian political groups independent of the women's and gay movements.

Thus dykes are faced with the choice of working in the women's or gay movements; and there is a certain leeway in picking one's primary political allegiance. Most dykes have opted for the women's movement, where the influence of sexism is smaller, and the pool of potential sexual partners larger. Fledgling lesbians, who start out in the gay movement (where other dykes, though few, are easier to locate and where their sexual experience receives more understanding) tend over a period of time to gravitate to the women's movement. This has been the usual trajectory — at least until now.

Yet the very fact that the impulse for a lesbian movement is always with us suggests that the women's movement does not fully meet the need of lesbians. After all, it has been concerned with incorporating lesbians as feminists and not with organizing us. One of the struggles of the 1970's was getting feminists to accept that lesbians as *women* could, in principle, speak to any of the issues of the movement — from day care to job ghettoization. Such acceptance has by now been largely achieved. Paradoxically, we have reached the stage where those feminist lesbians who might provide their sisters with mature political leadership seem to address all movement issues except those pertaining to homosexual women. Many lesbians in both women's and gay movements are filled with defensive hostility towards any all-lesbian formations, an attitude which contributes mightily to the fragility of autonomous lesbian groups.

There are a number of problematic features to being neither straight nor male. Coming out is a crucial area for dykes vis-à-vis both feminism and gay liberation. The former tends to play down the importance of the experience, while the latter assumes that both the experience and its consequences are the same for men and women.

Coming out has different consequences for women and men because the experience of compulsory heterosexuality differs with gender. Through compulsory heterosexuality, women are given a stake in male supremacy. Men are still most women's meal ticket — but we can only cash in the voucher if we are heterosexual. Lesbians, by stepping outside this framework, lose any direct stake in male privilege. We have to be self-supporting, and discard the illusion of having a male protector. We face all the typical problems of single women in the workforce, plus the added

Prior to the rise of feminism there were traditional links between lesbians and gay men: friendships, parties, support networks, mixed bars. These continue: social pariahs need to stick together. Gay media and (non-sexual) services, since they tend to be unsegregated by sex, are often more accessible and less threatening to women on the verge of coming out or identifying as lesbians. Gay unity, no matter how tenuous, is of special importance in rural areas and small centres. The relatively high profile of gay liberation is a magnet which often draws women towards a better understanding of who they are or want to become. This whole process, with which most straight feminists are not very familiar, is central to lesbians. As such it should be assiduously protected and cultivated by our movement.

All feminists must learn to appreciate the role that gay networks, gay services and gay self-support systems play for lesbians. The women's liberation movement, precisely because it is broadly based and with so all-encompassing an analysis, is not, and cannot be expected to be, all things to all women. It cannot fulfill all the special needs of lesbians in a heterosexual society. A 'community of queers' does this and the space that it makes for lesbians is vital. These are legitimate

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marginality of a 'deviant' lifestyle which has to stay hidden.

Coming out for men does not bring with it the same economic and ideological consequences. Given the different material realities of coming out for men and women, it is not surprising that it should have a potentially much broader and more radical effect on women. One of the characteristics of dykes is that they are relatively easy to politicize — a process of becoming aware, angry and sensitive to a whole range of issues — and hard to organize. Try putting out a leaflet or keep a group together! The opposite is true for gay men; they are generally much less interested in what does not concern them personally and immediately but will put out three pamphlets and a video in no time flat on a single issue about which they feel strongly.

Given the character of compulsory heterosexuality, coming out is not an unitary experience for gay men and lesbians. Assuming that theirs is the norm, gay men remain for the most part mystified as to why lesbians identify with the women's movement, which, after all, has been strategically more concerned for the past decade with violence against women and economic issues than with sex and sexual pleasure. Yet the women's movement remains a better option for dykes despite our problems with it, for unlike gay liberation it speaks to the myriad of economic and social needs which we share with all women, especially single, working women.

What should be of some concern to the women's movement is the recent alliance of S/M dykes and possibly butch-femme women as well, with gay liberation. These two kinds of lesbians, whose spokeswomen self-identify as feminists are being used by elements of the gay movement to divide feminist and non-feminist lesbians and incorporate the latter in the gay movement. This is being done in purposeful opposition to the women's movement, which is portrayed as hostile to lesbian sexual diversity.

It is unfortunately true that many feminists are uncomfortable with lesbian sexuality, and also that feminist dykes have behaved with a degree of arrogance toward bar and street dykes. The assumptions that butch-femme relationships vanished from this earth c. 1970 and that lesbians are 'naturally' feminists were self-defeating. Finally, whatever the last word on S/M may be, the debates to date have already been fruitful in jolting lesbian feminism from its silence in matters sexual.

In order to build solidarity and work with other groups of lesbians, feminists must recognize their existence, learn to appreciate their experience and treat them with respect. The fact that this attitude is not always reciprocated is no excuse on our part. We must make sure that the level and content of our mutual discourse remain constructive and open. •

• GAY LIBERATION, from page 7

achievements of gay liberation as a social movement, not to be lightly forgotten or downplayed.

Secondly, while there is no need to bend over backwards to accommodate them, it is useful to try to understand why gay men have so much trouble with the feminist approaches to sexual matters. They are male. Gay men no less than their straight fellows generally lack a concept of sexual exploitation. They seldom experience it directly as victims (boy prostitutes and rape victims are exceptions). Power and bodily autonomy are the birthright of males. For most gay men, sex is relatively unproblematic, at least as compared with women, whether straight or gay. Few men have the experience to imagine that sexual pleasure/liberation as they conceive it can only be a tiny part of the sexual politics of feminism, i.e. for women whose social and sexual identity is drastically different. How can gay men grasp (or care) that birth control and abortion are more critical to sexual pleasure/freedom for women than pedophilia, wash-room sex or S/M? No matter what the rationalizations, domination and exploitation have a whole other meaning for women (and children, and people of colour and Jews) than they do for white adult males.

It was interesting in this regard to see the furor around the movie *Cruising* in the gay press. A controversy erupted as to whether or not to recommend that gay men see the film. It was clearly exploitive of gay men; a film about gay men without gay input made by straight men for a heterosexual audience. If hundreds and thousands of films were produced in which straight men defined gay male sexuality for straight audiences, gay men might find themselves upset at such a social phenomenon, especially if the straight men called them anti-sexual for objecting to it. This hypothetical situation is in some ways analogous to the current regime of heterosexual male pornography in which men define their sexuality of women for other men to the exclusion of women. The anti-porn movement has its flaws, but it is difficult for gay men, lacking the category and experience of sexual exploitation, to diagnose its failures except through the crude concept of the 'anti-sexual.'

It does not help that some lesbians, having rightly rejected the crippling gender roles which are thrust upon us all, find it easy to identify with gay men to the point of adopting a gay liberationist politic. These women are doing nobody a favour; they confuse other lesbians and mislead gay liberation. They are sources of inaccurate and distorted information on the women's movement; they validate gay male misperceptions of feminism; they prevent gay liberation from developing links with lesbians who have organic ties with lesbian and feminist organizations. These women, perhaps interested in preserving a self-marginalizing power base, block co-operation, cripple the difficult project of constructing political links and undermine inter-movement solidarity.

Some of the confusion between gay liberation and feminism is probably due to the mistaken notion on both sides that divergences in perceptions and lifestyles completely undermine the possibility of political co-operation. This is a preposterous and highly destructive idea from which only the patriarchal establishment can profit. Lesbians do not need to act, think or have sex like gay men in order to work towards common objectives. It is legitimate to question gay male sexual practices and some of the social objectives of their movement, but only with a full realization that, while feminism

can inform the theory of gay liberation, it can never define it or mandate its practice.

Thirdly, feminists should not buy either the straight or the gay media stereotyping of gay men; they are not all uniformly affluent, white and possessed of exquisite taste. Most of them aren't even particularly kinky. Gay men on the average are neither more nor less likely to despise women than straight men, and, although gay men on the whole do not have sex with women, they do not live in a world completely cut off from us. What is perhaps more relevant, there is a small but significant number of gay men whose understanding and commitment to anti-sexist and anti-male supremacist radical change is every bit as thorough and sincere as that of many feminists. These men are important as allies, friends and co-workers.

While we may believe, and not without foundation, that gay men want most of all to be accepted as 'men,' with all the privileges that entails, it is not true that, as is somehow said, 'gay men are no different than straight men.' Gay men, as should be clear by now, are an oppressed group: the ghetto is subject to police raids; gay meetings are infiltrated by undercover cops; gay men can be fired from jobs and evicted from homes solely on the grounds they are gay; parents are not enraptured to discover gay sons. And queer bashing, both physical and emotional, is much more prevalent than many people would like to believe.

However serious the conflicts between the women's and gay movements may be, we feminists owe the gay movement political support for its efforts to battle heterosexist domination. We must unconditionally affirm the right of gay men to organize and form their own social movement, to express their sexual preference freely without fear or discrimination.

One of the curious facts about the contemporary women's movement is that many feminists can be at once lesbian-positive — seeing lesbianism as politically necessary to the women's movement — and gay negative. Those straight feminists who are uncomfortable with gay male promiscuity ought to be reminded that no form of sexuality is more fraught with contradictions and compromises than heterosexuality. There is no reason why sex must occur in the context of a relationship in order to be ethical. For far too long feminists have held up long-term relationships of perfect mutuality as ideal and downgraded other types of sexual contact. Sexual pluralism need not entail political liberalism.

The women's movement needs an understanding of sexuality which does not presume a single sexual norm nor presuppose a naturally nurturant women's sexuality. This point having been established, we will be able to begin discussion on the very difficult questions of power and sexuality which are causing deep divisions within the women's movement today: (a) the representations of power in sexual images (the problem of 'objectification' in pornography/erotica); (b) the manifestations of power in different forms of sexual desire (the problem of 'inequality,' from romantic roles to sado-masochism); and (c) the exercise of sexual power (the problem of 'exploitation,' and the boundaries of consent and force). The examination of these questions would be of value to all of us, whether male or female, lesbian, gay or straight.

(Charlotte Bunch, lesbian-feminist activist and theorist, will be in Toronto for a panel discussion of *Gay Liberation and Feminism* on Friday, October 22, 7:30 pm, Trinity United Church, 427 Bloor St West. Everyone welcome.)

FOOTNOTES

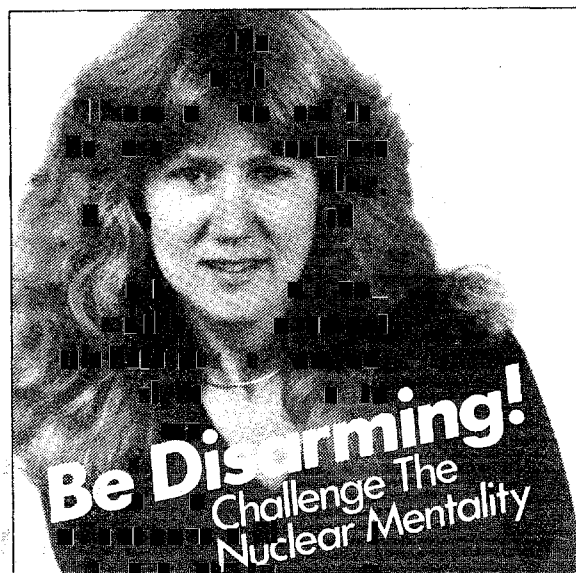
¹ For the history of the Mattachine Society, see John D'Emilio, "Dreams Deferred: The Early American Homophile Movement," in *Flaunting It!* Ed Jackson and Stan Persky, eds. Vancouver and Toronto: New Star Books and Pink Triangle Press, 1982, pp. 127-37.

² For the politics of the early gay liberation movement, see Simon Watney, "The Ideology of the GLF," in *Homosexuality: Power and Politics*, Gay Left Collective, ed. London: Allison and Busby, 1980, pp. 64-76 and Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out*, London: Quartet Books, 1977, pp. 185-206.

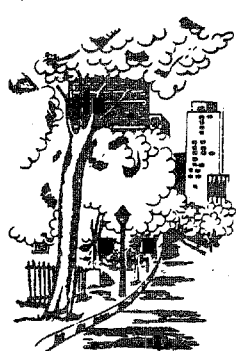
³ Jeffrey Weeks, "Capitalism and the Organization of Sex," in *Homosexuality: Power and Politics*, op. cit., p. 18.

⁴ GLARE Pamphlet No. 1, *Gay Men and Feminism*, Toronto, 1982, p. 28.

⁵ Peter Bowen, "So What's Wrong with Discrimination?" *The Body Politic* 77, Oct. 1981, pp. 6-7. The title, with its tone of cheerful bonhomie and wilful political evasiveness, faithfully mirrors the content of the article.



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