

lesbian oppression

—Kathy Wakeham

BOB KOHLER

A PARADE IN TOWN: Thousands of Homosexuals are expected to march through the streets of the Village on June 27th.

I see flags. I hear bells. There's a parade in town.

I hear crowds. I hear yells. There's a parade in town.

They will, I presume, be remembering the Stonewall and the Street Queens. The Stonewall, as most of us know, was an illegally-run and Mafia-owned private club catering to under-age Hustlers and over-age Johns and reputed to have been one of the largest Dope Drops in the City. The Street Queens were something else! A source of irritation to Straights and Gays, alike; things that went screech in the night, roaming the streets in outlandish costumes, panhandling quarters, sleeping in the Park and doorways. To Straights, they were to be scorned, ridiculed, and beaten. To Gays, in our infinite mercy, merely scorned, ridiculed, and avoided.

I hear drums in the air. I see crowds in the Square.

I see marchers marching, tossing hats at the skies.

A handful of Homosexuals rioted when New York's Finest raided the Stonewall on June 27th.

Did you hear? Did you see? Is a parade in town?

Are there drums without me? Is a parade in town?

It is assumed that the Street Queens rioted against the Police. I wonder if that is not an extreme over-simplification. No matter — but Oh, what great matter! — they did riot. As tourists flocked to the Freak Show, punks flocked for a piece of the action, and police harassment was stepped up, Homosexual organizers fell over one another passing out leaflets, coining slogans, and forming committees. Quicker than you could say "Poof! You're a malted!" the Lepers had been cleansed; the Street Queens had become Folk Heros!

Cause I'm dressed at last, at my best, and my banners are high.

Tell me! While I was getting ready, did a parade go by?

The kids wallowed in their new-found Stardom. Some of them even forgot how hungry they were.

Did you hear? Did you see?

Was a parade in town

Marches and rallies were planned, there would be Gay Dances and Community Centers, there was even talk of bail funds, clothing and free meals. Some of the kids went to meetings of new organizations. Others went to meetings of old organizations. They manned tables, distributed literature, participated in the Gay Power rally, the Village Voice zap and the November Moratorium. But, it's a long, long time from June to November and they were starting to get us uptight. We couldn't control them. They were too loud and too obvious. They were fucking up our image! They were heavy — they had to go! Confused and discouraged, they began drifting back into the safety of the Park.

Were there drums without me?

Is a parade in town?

I doubt very much if I'll march on June 27th. I think I'll just sit in the Park with my brothers.

Cause they're out of step, the boots are squeaky, and the banners are frayed.

Any parade in town without me must be a second-class parade!

"A PARADE IN TOWN — Stephen Sondheim

I CAN'T HEAR YOU — I HAVE A CARROT IN MY EAR! I seldom go to Gay Bars, they are just not my particular glass of tea. I am, nonetheless a little bugged by the Witch Hunters who keep crying 'Mafia Exploitation' with such overbearing and monotonous regularity. There is without doubt Mafia control of Gay Bars just as there is Mafia control of Banks, Unions, Supermarkets, Industries, Drugs, and much of the air we breathe. Exploitation — like oppression — is a peculiar word; over-used and rhetorical.

The other night, the world — my own private world, I guess — got a little close and I went to a Gay Bar. I was asked for a dollar at the door and was given a chit entitling me to two beers. They were showing an old Bette Davis/Mary Astor movie, THE GREAT LIE, and there



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was a general feeling of good, campy fun in the whole place. The fact that I had to make my way through a density of bulging Levis and leather assesto get to the bar in no way detracted from that feeling. I watched the movie, grabbed some ass, talked with a few people, and laughed a little.

I didn't stay for the second feature but, instead went to one of the new Fuck Bars. Here, I paid three dollars at the door which, again, covered two beers. The Bar was well-appointed, well-lit, and well-peopled. The Fuck Room was exactly that! No games, no bullshit, no hassles — just simple, direct, down-to-the-nitty, old-fashioned sex! It is not my intent to weigh the pros and cons of 'anonymous' sex; I leave that to the tight-sphinctered Shrinks. I will only say that no little blue pill could come close to relieving the nervous tensions that my two hours in that room did. I touched, I communicated, I related and I loved. (Do I touch differently on a park bench? Do I communicate better in a lighted room? Do I love more freely in Sheep Meadow? Who would presume to count the ways I love?) I also met someone and we went home together.

Check it out: I had four beers, saw a movie, was screwed, blewed and tattooed — layed, relayed and parlayed — and I found a friend. All of this cost me exactly **FOUR DOLLARS.**

I am not making a case for Gay Bars. I am simply asking that we get our priorities together and dig the fine, almost invisible line between Oppressed and Oppressor. The times they are a changin' — There's a new world comin' — and Love is just around the corner. **OFF THE RHETORIC!** I have no alternative to Gay Bars and I can promise none. The GLF dances and the Sunday night get-togethers are miniscule and token offerings, barely touching the surface. I cannot — I will not — judge my Brothers and Sisters and/of their needs. I can and will try to offer counter-cultures and life-styles when and if I am able, making sure the Left hand keeps careful watch on the Right hand. When I housebroke Magoo, I trained him first on paper. I left the paper down as I re-trained him to go in the street. For a while he went both on the paper and in the street. One day he decided enough with the paper — not because I told him not to shit on the paper anymore but, because he decided he would rather shit in the street. I hope that I could extend the same freedom of choice to my fellow-humans.

The gay woman is a person who is very often overlooked within radical liberation circles. Her oppression is two-fold — female and homosexual (if she is non-Caucasian, her oppression is three-fold).

Her two-fold oppression brings forth looks of resentment, feelings of uptightness, and cries of ignorance. She encounters social, political, and economic oppression. Her oppressors are of no particular class, race, structure, etc. Yet, they are identifiable, as most oppressors are identifiable to most of the oppressed.

Well to ramble on about oppression would fill a book; I only want to exemplify an oppressed happening in a short article. On a social level, gay women want to meet other gay women; on an economic level, they frequently pay to do so at most encountering places. (Their economic oppression also includes job discrimination as well as social exploitation; but right now, that's the written subject). These encountering places are gay bars. The gay bars are exploiters of gay women (and of gay men, too).

A typical bar on a typical weekend: \$3.00 for entering (which includes two drinks), \$1.00 for a can of beer, if you don't like watered-down mixed drinks, \$1.00 every time the proprietor sees you without a drink (you cannot stay unless you are with a drink), \$.25 coat check, crowdedness, occasional heterosexual male googlers, Mafia guardsmen at the door.

Straight bars do not exist in this web of social harassment.

This is oppression. Where are gay women going to meet other gay women if they feel oppressed by the above condition? An alternative is needed. An alternative was made. The Gay Liberation Front has held mixed (gays of both sexes) dances that were predominately male. The women of GLF felt that their sisters might want an all women alternative, instead.

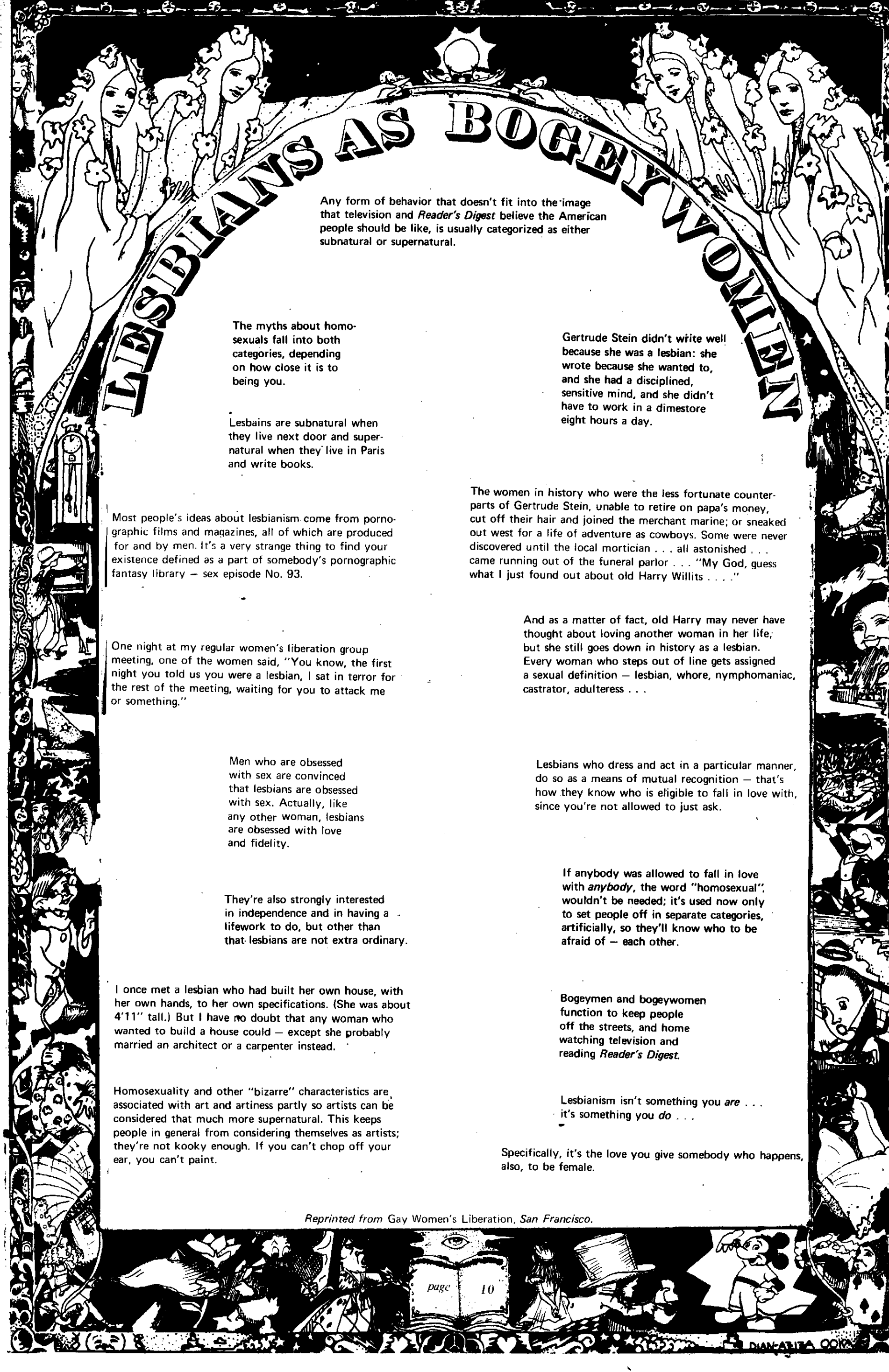
On Friday, April 3, GLF sponsored an all women's dance which was held at Alternate U. The purpose of the dance was to give our sisters an alternative to the oppressive Mafia-controlled gay bars. In the general locale of the gay community in the Village, only two bars exist predominately for gay women. The GLF dance was held within a four-block radius of these two bars.

Two weeks prior to the dance, six GLF women were threatened by the owner of one of these bars while they were giving small calling cards advertising the dance to other girls in the bar. The owner approached the GLF women with the cards; and she told them if they continued advertising, they wouldn't have a dance or an organization.

At 3:15 a.m., the night of the dance, the first attempt was made to carry out this threat. Three stereo-type (big, broad, and mean) mafioso forcibly pushed their way into the All Women's Dance. When questioned repeatedly as to their identity, they answered by threatening to arrest the sisters for unlawful assembly. The dance was held in a hall which GLF had legally rented for the evening. They then threatened the GLF women with arrest on the basis of not having a liquor license and rapidly quoted prices that neighboring bars have paid them. The dance did not require a liquor license because donations and *not* prices were suggested for admission and refreshments (beer and soda). After much verbal and physical harassment (a woman who tried to leave was pushed toward a wall, another woman was grabbed by her coat collar and had her coat snatched from her back as she fearfully dashed down the stairs to escape the harassment of these imposters; they physically refused exit to any of the women), they showed the women a badge which was later suggested to be phoney by uniformed policemen who appeared twenty minutes after these men left. Before they left, the three were questioned as to who sent them. "Gianni's, Kookie's?" They laughed, snickering, "who's that, never heard of them." "Oh they're just characters out of Zap Comix." Why bother hassling with reason when they knew Gianni's and Kookie's are just two of our gay tavern-owner oppressors.

The uniformed, legal law-enforcing police were called by the women to verify the identity of these three. The uniformed police stated that no call was made with any precinct to check-out the dance, that the dance was legal, and that these three men showed invalid identification.

This threatening incident is another example of oppression of gay women by an exploitative system. The system tried to scare us but did not succeed. Instead, they brought their oppressive acts to light where they will be dealt with as gay sisters are now more ready and determined to come out and deal with the oppressors.



LESBIANS AS BOGEY WOMEN

Any form of behavior that doesn't fit into the image that television and *Reader's Digest* believe the American people should be like, is usually categorized as either subnatural or supernatural.

The myths about homosexuals fall into both categories, depending on how close it is to being you.

Lesbians are subnatural when they live next door and supernatural when they live in Paris and write books.

Most people's ideas about lesbianism come from pornographic films and magazines, all of which are produced for and by men. It's a very strange thing to find your existence defined as a part of somebody's pornographic fantasy library — sex episode No. 93.

One night at my regular women's liberation group meeting, one of the women said, "You know, the first night you told us you were a lesbian, I sat in terror for the rest of the meeting, waiting for you to attack me or something."

Men who are obsessed with sex are convinced that lesbians are obsessed with sex. Actually, like any other woman, lesbians are obsessed with love and fidelity.

They're also strongly interested in independence and in having a lifework to do, but other than that lesbians are not extra ordinary.

I once met a lesbian who had built her own house, with her own hands, to her own specifications. (She was about 4'11" tall.) But I have no doubt that any woman who wanted to build a house could — except she probably married an architect or a carpenter instead.

Homosexuality and other "bizarre" characteristics are associated with art and artiness partly so artists can be considered that much more supernatural. This keeps people in general from considering themselves as artists; they're not kooky enough. If you can't chop off your ear, you can't paint.

Gertrude Stein didn't write well because she was a lesbian: she wrote because she wanted to, and she had a disciplined, sensitive mind, and she didn't have to work in a dime store eight hours a day.

The women in history who were the less fortunate counterparts of Gertrude Stein, unable to retire on papa's money, cut off their hair and joined the merchant marine; or sneaked out west for a life of adventure as cowboys. Some were never discovered until the local mortician . . . all astonished . . . came running out of the funeral parlor . . . "My God, guess what I just found out about old Harry Willits . . ."

And as a matter of fact, old Harry may never have thought about loving another woman in her life; but she still goes down in history as a lesbian. Every woman who steps out of line gets assigned a sexual definition — lesbian, whore, nymphomaniac, castrator, adulteress . . .

Lesbians who dress and act in a particular manner, do so as a means of mutual recognition — that's how they know who is eligible to fall in love with, since you're not allowed to just ask.

If anybody was allowed to fall in love with *anybody*, the word "homosexual" wouldn't be needed; it's used now only to set people off in separate categories, artificially, so they'll know who to be afraid of — each other.

Bogeymen and bogeywomen function to keep people off the streets, and home watching television and reading *Reader's Digest*.

Lesbianism isn't something you *are* . . . it's something you *do* . . .

Specifically, it's the love you give somebody who happens, also, to be female.

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