



line. She knows that she has crossed the terrible boundary of her sex role. She recoils, she protests, she reshapes her options to gain approval. Lesbian is a label imposed 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 chapter 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 the 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 phrase 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 lesbian 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 great, certain compensations, identification with his power, his ego, his status, his protection (from other males), being "the a 'real woman.'" Finding social acceptance by adhering to her role, etc. Should a woman confront herself by confronting another woman, there are fewer ritualized ones, fewer buffers by which to avoid the stark mirror of her dehumanized condition. Herein we find the overriding fear of many women towards exposing intimate relationships with other women; the fear of 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 sister. 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 forms of sexual relation to some other category of people? Affixing the label lesbian not only to a woman who refuses to be a person, but also to any situation of real love, real solidarity, real primary among women is a primary form of divisiveness among women; it is the condition which keeps women within the context of the female role, and it is the dehumanizing 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 fearful, evasive, or try to incorporate it into some "lesbian 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 man 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 need by 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 any 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., deny any fundamental challenge to the basis of the female role.

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 not 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/psycho-social 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 views us as relative beings who exist not for ourselves, but for the servicing, maintenance and comfort of men. 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 love 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 "ings." 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 available, aesthetic, inauthentic, urgent. He conveys his image of us — of what we have — to be in order to be acceptable by him — without our real selves. He defines our womanhood — as he defines it, in relation to him — but cannot beriff on 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, a paralyzing anxiety at the center. Alternatively, it may be expressed in shrill defensiveness of the glory and desirability 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 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 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 backwards towards our oppressors. As long as women's liberation tries to free women without facing the basic heterosexual structure that binds us in one-to-one relationship with our own oppressors, tremendous energies will continue to flow into trying to straighten up each particular relationship with a man, 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 voice and strength, the divisive barriers begin to melt, we feel this growing solidarity with our sisters. We see ourselves as prime, and our centers inside of ourselves. We find needing the sense of attention, of being cut off, of being left in a no-work window, of being unable to get out what we know is inside. We feel a real love, feel at last we are in touch with ourselves. With our real self, with that consciousness, we begin a revolution to end the imposition of all external identifications, and to achieve maximum autonomy in human expression.

the LAVENDER MENACE STRIKES

On Friday, May 1st, at 7:15 P.M. about 300 women were quietly sitting in the auditorium of Intermediate School #0 waiting for the Congress to Unite Women to come to order. The lights went out, people heard rapping, laughter, a rebel yell here and there and when the lights were turned back on those same 300 women found themselves in the hands of the LAVENDER MENACE.

"Lavender Menace," a fault of the white male press rose again in the persons of the Radical Lesbians of New York who because of the discrimination and sexism with Women's Liberation took matters into their own hands to bring their affirmative and compelling awareness to the women of the Congress. For the first time since women's liberation began, the subject of lesbianism was brought into the open. Significantly the only way this could be done was forcefully, transcending established format — but although the take-over was decisive it was done with great feelings and humor.

Seventeen of the Radical Lesbians wore lavender teeshirts with LAVENDER MENACE stenciled across the front. These women were the first wave of the action and the ones who took over the auditorium. The second wave of the action was vocal support from about twenty sisters who hid their true lavender selves and blended into the audience. What we didn't expect was a third wave which came out of the general audience. Women responded variously — a very few left, the planning committee made a few tentative efforts to restore the "program", some women were pleasantly questioning the action but what was so incredible was the enthusiastic acceptance of most of the women present who began demanding that the lesbian issue remain on the floor.

The action was so successful (we held the auditorium and the attention for two hours) because the issue is of such meaning and relevance at a gut level to all women and because the presentation was done in a humorous and non-threatening way. As the Menaces surrounded the audience and liberated the microphone, rose-colored signs sprang up on the walls and podium: SUPERDYKE

— Radical Lesbians
LOVES YOU, TAKE A LESBIAN TO LUNCH: I trend from a boring panel and able to come up to the microphone and talk to each other women asked each other questions, confronted each other and gave testimony. Perhaps the most significant communication came in the form of the enthusiasm and joy felt by those present. "Thank you for what you have done for us tonight." Our straight sisters were coming up to us with warmth and openness. "I really need to hear this tonight. And I thought I could put off dealing with my feelings for a woman for at least two more years." "Wow, thank you."

So we really built some bridges Friday night — toward Women's Liberation and among ourselves. We learned that our straight sisters have less autonomy, are more unsure of themselves because they are more enmeshed in the debilitating sex role. And for ourselves, at the outset a random group of individuals, and now with a heightened energy and a sense of solidarity and group identification. With that in mind you know that the LAVENDER MENACE will strike again — anywhere, anytime, anyplace.

Photo by Diana Dapkin



WOMEN COMING TOGETHER with WOMEN

Saturday, 5/2/70

The Lavender Menace (i.e., Radical Lesbians/G.L.F.) arrived at the school on West 17th Street at 2 p.m. for the workshop we announced at the general session Friday evening. We had been assigned a room in meet in and were given another interesting label, "Alternatives in Sexuality", which we changed to "Workshop in Lesbianism". The room became filled with women of all ages and special interests in relation to an exploration of lesbianism, female sexuality, women. We remained in Room 402, our numbers over 200 women, for over 2 hours. During that time, many women went through changes. There was a special kind of tension that came out of us being face to face with each other, confronting the fears and realities, and beginning to relate to each other as relevant and meaningful persons. Our "straight" sisters in the women's movement were not all totally straight, and there was agreement that in what we are trying to build, the labels would be meaningless but that we had to use them now in order to redefine ourselves as human beings without them and to examine why certain labels (i.e., lesbian) are so threatening to women.

Is a lesbian a legitimate woman? In the way that the sex role system is set up in this male-dominated society, if a woman is not fucking with a man, she is not a woman and these kinds of feelings put many of the women up-tight. Many of the women who came to the workshop were interested in exploring their own sex-

uality. I couldn't begin to label the various stages that women were at in the exploration — some were "out", some were "in the process of coming out", some wanted to know how to relate to other women in a more complete, intimate way, and some women could relate what lesbian meant to them in only sexual terms and the consequences in this society of crossing the boundary of one's prescribed sex role (i.e., they would feel like men — aggressive, wanting, if they made love with women). I feel more like a woman today (in my own very best definition) than I ever have before today — solitary, open, vulnerable, welcoming, wanting, — having a definite outline and being moderately filled in the void.

I can feel all the women I've met this weekend and some of the feelings I've felt are incomprehensible to me in that I am changed in subtle ways that are scaring the shit out of me. I feel more alone and less lonely; also, good and more able to be together with others, really feeling touched by my sisters.

Sunday, 5/3/70

RESOLUTIONS FOR DEEP AND CONCERNED THOUGHT:
 Be it resolved that women's liberation is a lesbian plot.
 Be it resolved that whenever the epithet "Lesbians" is used against the movement so positively or against any woman that it be affirmed and not denied. In all discussions of

birth control, homosexuality, must be included as a legitimate method of contraception. All sex education curricula must include lesbianism as a valid, legitimate form of sexual expression and love.

The Lavender Menace/Gay Liberation Front Women/Radical Lesbians arrived at noon to meet with other women in smaller groups to further discuss aspects of lesbianism and women's liberation. We also related to the Congress in its attempt to make and pass resolutions. It was finally voted upon to no longer vote. The resolution making reflected our actual divisions but this is where we must begin because it is a reality. It is also a reality, as stated by the Class Workshop that all women have knowledge of what it is to be a woman, and it is from this base that we must look at each other and begin moving towards one another.

A group of lesbians, black women and women from the class workshop was formed to talk about our experiences that were both common and related. There was a great feeling among us, as women who wanted to use their energies positively to reach out to each other — in working towards an end to class bias, sex/role definition, racism, elitism and many other aspects of liberation that we need to talk about with each other.

Arlene Kistner
 A Radical Lesbian

801 I, #4 pg 14

LAVENDER MENACE DOES IT

Saturday at the Congress there was a sense of relaxation in my head and a feeling of acceptance — an almost totally unfamiliar sensation for me. People were watching for once, some with envy over the reality of physical contact with other women and what appeared to them to be a sense of unity and closeness among ourselves. My natural state of paranoia vanished with acceptance and the realization that I was being seen as a human being.

As the workshop increased in size my elation increased with it. In women's faces I detected a strain, a longing reflected in their eyes. As they made possibly their first attempt at understanding and union. First attempts are often painful, and an attempt to overcome artificial but intensely powerful and emotionally charged societal taboos is an immense and frightening step — and one that must be guided with loving acceptance.

Barriers dissolve into chaos with understanding and a reaching out toward another (who is really the self).

Questions asked pointed out the alienation of the women from themselves and therefore from their sisters.

Later on at the party, the initial mood was discomfortful — most individuals were interested primarily in relating verbally and intellectually, but not physically. They insisted that the bright lights be kept on. This appeared to reflect a fear and a mistrust among the women of their gay sisters. They seemed to want to see every move the "Menace" made. Sitting in a chair is a comfortable way of maintaining distance and verbal communication is often times another.

As the evening progressed the fears gradually diminished and people relaxed, allowing themselves to have fun. They forgot the world outside for a little while. No male entered to remind them of it. And this was good, for the entrance of any male, no matter how liberated would have stifled free expression and forced the emergence of false actions and acceptable distances. There is still a very powerful anti-type reaction against having a male role a woman a lesbian and this leads to an artificial woman. (No one seriously knows what it is to be a woman. Years of negativity, brainwashing, make-up and clown clothing have cut us off from the very core of our being.)

Invariably, in order to be born again into a new consciousness one must reach the center, die and be resurrected again in the light of an expanded consciousness. Women are groping their way inward to this center reaching for the core of emergence to the new realities of identity, personality and union.

When the Congress was nearly over and the auditorium was retaken by the Lavender Menace the reaction was almost entirely favourable. There was an instantaneous transformation in the women's faces — from tension to relaxation, anger to peace and from boredom to interest. They were expectant, they were anxious. It was as though they were looking to the Lesbians for an answer — a solution to their oppression.

But have we the answer? Have we any answer? I felt myself inadequate to the task. Who has solutions? Who is really more than a searcher? Learning and unlearning. Watching and waiting. Hope.

— Judy Cartiano
Lavender Menace

TWO VIEWS



photo by Diana Stokes

Women of CLF successfully confronted movement women at two successive weeklies in April.

The Liberation News Service conference of women's activists on underground papers related strongly to the gay movement. About 150 representatives voted on the first day of the conference to break up into rap sessions and discuss the gay issue, rather than see a movie about Cuba.

They proceeded to two different rooms, with no one dropping out despite the late hour.

Two hours of rapping followed with discussion of personal attitudes toward the subject (frequently far-flung, i.e., "Can I go back to men after a lesbian experience?"), to uncertainty regarding how to treat it in their papers ("Should we have straights writing on the subject?").

Their concern was a mixture of curiosity and growing respect which would not have been elicited without the organizing of the radical gay movement a yr. ago.

The workshops, which were continued the next day of the conference, lent a definite consciousness-raising effect. The realization that they are "sleeping with the enemy" brings some Women's Lib people into an exploration of "lesbianism, or at least curiosity about it, but they are hindered by forms of the very oppression leading them to it. One woman in a workshop related that she could not feel turned on by a woman's body, and another countered "How could you — it's usual to see everything from cars to toothpaste."

Another related that friends of hers had found gay life as oppressive as straight life, leading GLF women to wonder how those with as yet superficial commitments expect some magical solution to problems which beset all of us. One CLF woman said, "My liberation won't be won by them solving their problems."

The Congress to Unite Women, broader in scope than the LNS conference, was more dramatically met on its first day, when the Lavender Menace struck! First of being labeled "the Lavender Menace" in the women's movement, it was decided to do something significant. Sunday night at the Congress the lights dimmed prior to an expected one discussion which was abandoned with much relief from everyone except those who had planned it. Down the aisles strode GLF

women in lavender T-shirts with "Lavender Menace" across the front, and holding signs announcing "Women's Liberation is a Lesbian Plot," "You're Going to Love the Lavender Menace," etc.

Gay workshops followed on Sat. and Sun. afternoons and Sunday evening the Lavender Menace struck again. A plenary session was in progress, with much discussion of present resolutions drawn from the workshops. The gay workshop was not to be represented, it seemed, because it had been framed with hate, by force. So, dig it! The Lavender Menace seized the time once again, the women tacitly in charge at the time saying "resignedly," "Here we go again."

The women presented resolutions beginning with "The Women's Lib movement will in the future affirm, not deny, that it is a Lesbian plot," and putting forth lesbianism as the most effective means of birth control. Three GLF back women attacked the WASP character of the Congress, and women from the recently formed Class Workshop espoused the need for consciousness of class oppression. In view of this it was decided to hold a multipleguous workshop upstairs.

There followed an unusual confrontation between blacks & whites, gay & straight, middle-class and working class. It was the most valuable meeting possible. In which movement groups, which may become inauthentic, have one another's biases challenged. Curtailed after an hour and a half only by the closing of the building, the group of about 125 planned to meet again.

By the end of the Congress women were referring to the Lavender Menace in a seriousness, as a viable concern, and in transition from negative to positive, in a politicized camp (and Susan Sonntag said it couldn't be done) it was a force to be reckoned with.

A spokeswoman proclaimed our weariness of signification and demanded open discussion of the gay issue on the floor, as the thing of women covered the area in front of the stage. There was little opposition due to the light-hearted style of the action. As was observed, lesbian love is a loving rather than dividing issue.

Even as the assemblage was lifted from confronting the issue each one to digesting on her own. Finally, though people began coming up to the microphone to relate their experiences and impressions, the usual democratic-arbitrator process of work began, but only that would not have spoken for itself, and whose sincerity was refreshing for everyone.

by clarity