



lie. 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 invested 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 towards exploring 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 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., 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 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 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 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, in-authentic, 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 enor-

mous 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 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 ac-

complishments. 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 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 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.

RADICALESSBIANS

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 70 waiting for the Congress to Unite Women to come to order. The lights went out, people heard running, 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 taunt of the white male press incarnate in the persons of the Radicalesbians 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 at 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 good feelings and humor.

Seventeen of the Radicalesbians 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

—2 Radicalesbians
LOVES YOU; TAKE A LESBIAN TO LUNCH; WOMEN'S LIBERATION IS A LESBIAN PLOT. Freed 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 Davies



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 to 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 this exploration — some were "out", some were "in the process of coming out", some wanted to know how to begin 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. Resolve that whenever the epithet "Lesbian" is used against the movement collectively 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 Kisner
A Radical Lesbian