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BECOMING LAVENDER

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City University of New York

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BECOMING LAVENDER

by

MONA ABRAMS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1980

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract
BECOMING LAVENDER
by
Mona Abrams

Contrasting our current levels of consciousness with a higher level of consciousness, represented here by "species-consciousness," this dissertation is a critique of conventional ways of thinking and acting with regard to human sexuality. The focus of my study was a bisexual women's consciousness-raising group and a political organization called Lesbian Feminist Liberation (LFL). I was a participant observer from April 1973 through December 1978, in New York City.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the concepts gender neutrality (from Geiler, 1979) and species-consciousness; Chapter 2 describes sexual conversion, a change in beliefs regarding one's sexual preference (e.g., going from heterosexual to bisexual to lesbian); Chapter 3, "Coming Out Biographies," examines the implications of the concept coming out and contrasts it with the concept sexual conversion; Chapter 4 centers around the verbal activity of consciousness-raising and the social integration of group members into the world of Lesbian Feminist Liberation; and Chapter 5 is an analysis of the latter organization and a comparison with Centers for Change, a 1960s mixed (female, male) radical

organization also trying to raise consciousness. Chapter 6, "Lavender Graffiti," is a concluding dialogue.

It is my position that sexual preference, whether homosexuality, bisexuality, asexuality or heterosexuality, is learned, and fluid rather than fixed. The direction(s) this sexuality originally/finally/sometimes/once takes depend(s) in part on group consciousness learned through "socialization," whether primary or secondary.

Gender roles are learned, too, and vary from place to place, class to class, and at different times. Gender roles are sex-specific and relative We should abolish gender roles completely: people would be neither feminine nor masculine. Species-consciousness presupposes gender neutrality.

Species-consciousness would abolish divisions according to sex, gender and sexual preference; it presupposes a society in which we enjoy sexual and emotional and other relations with each other qua human beings. In such a society, there would be no such thing as same-sex relationships (homosexuality), opposite-sex relationships (heterosexuality) or both-sex relationships (bisexuality). In a species-conscious society, the individual intellect, spirit, actions and perceptions would develop to the benefit of the individual, the species and other species.

Special thanks to Ishna A. Dog.

The term "lavender" brings with it an implicit commitment to eradicating the rigid sex role system that characterizes mainstream culture. Lavender is a color that has been associated with homosexuals for many decades. The color is implicitly androgynous, a combination of the male principle (blue) and the female principle (pink) which society has sanctified. * (Jay and Young, editors, 1978).

*

Question: "In Lavender Culture, by Jay and Young, the authors combine pink and blue--feminine and masculine-- and come up with an androgynous lavender. Shouldn't they have chosen a color which was neither pink nor blue, rather than both pink and blue?"

Answer: "A gender neutral color would have been more appropriate, yes. But I continue to use the color lavender because it has meaning for many people who are still unfamiliar with the concepts of gender neutrality, gender neutral androgyny (see Geiler, 1979), and species-consciousness."

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Chapter 1. Introduction to gender neutrality and species-consciousness

I.

The first act against humanity occurs at birth, when a baby is labelled female or male. This sexist label divides the species into two parts. At birth, also, racial and other differences are labelled. Later, the adult will be further divided from other humans on the basis of class, age, national origin, religion, education, geographical location, ethnicity, and so forth. Humans, for the most part pawns of a small number of people who control the means of production, are divided against each other. The history of city-states and nations is the history of the separation of human beings from each other.¹ In times of war, each country tries to portray the "enemy" as less than human. Anyone who dreams of a society in which all human inhabitants of the planet Earth are species-conscious individualists risks being dismissed as a fool, a utopian, or both.

In this study, I will examine divisions of female and male (sex), feminine and masculine (gender), and lesbian/gay/bisexual/heterosexual/celibate (sexual preference). All these divisions

¹ "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles." (Marx, 1964b: 57).

prevent humans from being species-conscious. Because human consciousness is grounded in social activity and material existence (Marx, 1947), we cannot even begin to understand human beings by studying, for example, gender roles in isolation. One is a human in a particular society at a particular moment in time. "Equal rights" is a meaningless term in and of itself. The solution to the problems of being female is not to turn every female into a white middle-class Protestant male in capitalist America. On the contrary, it is only by bracketing² (see Schutz, 1967, 1970, 1973) sex, gender, and sexual preference that we can see through conventional presuppositions regarding human "nature."

2

Bracketing is a

methodological device of phenomenological inquiry consisting in a deliberate effort to set all ontological judgments about the "nature" and "essence" of things, events, etc., aside. Thereby, the "reality" of things and events is not denied but "put into brackets." This procedure makes the mental processes of experiencing into the central subject matter of phenomenology. (Schutz, 1970: 316-317).

Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men ((and women)), developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. In the first method of approach the starting point is consciousness taken as the living individual; in the second it is the real living individuals themselves, as they are in actual life, and consciousness is considered solely as their consciousness. (Marx, 1947: 14-15).

As humans, our first concern must be the survival of those who are already alive. I am using this wording to indicate we should not necessarily reproduce ourselves;³ we should attend to the problem at hand: humans living under subhuman conditions.

3

"Moreover, not only does the identification of masculine and feminine with parenthood mean that reproduction is implicitly prescribed for everyone but, as might be expected, it means that alternative role definitions for the sexes are, at best, tolerated, and, at worst, proscribed." (Blake, J., in Peck and Senderowitz, 1974: 33).

"Once women have the power to refuse motherhood, the main source of male domination has gone." (Hudson, 1968:29).

The United Nations has not been able to feed the starving people on the planet Earth.⁴ One of the reasons may be that the organization is composed of representatives of people of countries, each of which has starving people of its own. Who will feed the poor in the "rich" United States, for example, if not the people of the United States? Who will shelter the homeless, such as the "boat people" of the 1970s? If we do not find and discuss the roots of poverty (such as the class system), then liberal solutions such as welfare, food stamps, unemployment checks, etc.-- "band-aid" measures--will continue to fail. When will there be enough jobs for those ready, willing, and able to work? When will there be equal pay for equal work?

We are divided by country, by age, by occupation, by sex, by race, etc. These are all conventional divisions. Species-

4

Sociologist: I don't know what all this stuff about hunger is doing in this dissertation. Where's the review of the literature?

Anthropologist: Food is one of our basic needs (and not only of the species homo sapiens); how can you expect people to philosophize on an empty stomach?

Sage: "Q. What is Tao? (We may take Tao as meaning the ultimate truth or reality.)

A. It is one's everyday mind.

Q. What is one's everyday mind?

A. When tired, you sleep; when hungry, you eat."

(Merton, 1968: 134).

consciousness would abolish such narrow divisions and concentrate on the whole.⁵ As a species, we must take responsibility for the damage we are doing to ourselves, to each other, and to the air, land and seas we share with other species.

Wind subsiding, the flowers still fall;
 Bird crying, the mountain silence deepens.
 (Watts, 1957: 207).

The definition of "human being" varies considerably.⁶ To some theorists the question is simply what is human and what is subhuman (plants and animals are usually considered subhuman). For others the controversy is over what constitutes human needs. For some sociologists the debate is over what humans have learned

5

Watts (1957: 23) said of Zen: "As will soon be obvious, a way of liberation can have no positive definition. It has to be suggested by saying what it is not, somewhat as a sculptor reveals an image by the act of removing pieces of stone from a block." Gender neutrality can be expressed in a negative form: neither feminine nor masculine. Species-consciousness presupposes an end to divisions of sex, gender, sexual preference, race, class. Females and males are members of the species homo sapiens.

6

"Man is willing to accept woman as an equal, as a man in skirts, as an angel, a devil, a baby-face, a machine, an instrument, a bosom, a womb, a pair of legs, a servant, an encyclopedia, an ideal or an obscenity; the only thing he won't accept her as is a human being, a real human being of the female sex." (D.H. Lawrence in Morgan, ed., 1970:633).

in society and what, if anything, is "natural." In most books humanity consists solely of men.

If it were not for its ambiguity, man would be the shortest and simplest English word to distinguish humankind from all other animal species. The Latin scientific label Homo sapiens is long, foreign, and the sapiens part of questionable accuracy. But at least homo-- like the Hebrew 'adham--has the clear advantage of including both sexes. Its inclusiveness is demonstrated by the presence in Latin of the words mas and vir, both of which signify the male person and distinguish him unequivocally from femina or mulier, Latin words for woman. Nevertheless, homo is sometimes erroneously understood to mean "male person," and semantic confusion runs riot when it is mistakenly thought to occur in homosexual, thereby limiting that term to males. (The prefix homo-, as in homosexual, homonym, and homogeneous, comes from the Greek homos meaning "same," and its similarity to the Latin homo is coincidental.)

To get back to humankind, the Greek word is anthropos, from which come words like anthropology and philanthropy as well as misanthropy, a blanket dislike of everybody regardless of sex. Like Latin and Hebrew, Greek has separate words for the sexes--aner for a male person (its stem form is andr-), gune (or gyne) for a female person. So in English misandry is the little-known partner of misogyny; but when the two Greek roots come together in androgyny, they form a word that is beginning to be used to describe the rare and happy human wholeness that counteracts the destructive linguistic polarization of the sexes. (Miller and Swift, 1977: 24).

Species-consciousness presupposes a society in which the terms and ideas of female and male (sex) and feminine and masculine (gender) are obsolete. "By gender neutrality I mean nothing less, and nothing more, than human nature

understood as free of gender differentiation"(Geiler, 1979: 7).

It is only when we are free of divisions into sex and gender that we can become conscious of ourselves as members of a single species. With regard to sexuality, species-consciousness presupposes a society in which human beings have emotional and sexual relations with each other qua human beings. In such a society, there would be no such thing as same-sex relationships(homosexuality), opposite-sex relationships(heterosexuality), or both-sex relationships (bisexuality).⁷

⁷ "In a society in which men do not oppress women, and sexual expression is allowed to follow feelings, the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality would disappear." (Radicalesbians, 1970: 1-2).

II.

This dissertation is a critique of conventional ways of thinking and acting with regard to human sexuality. The focus is a political organization called Lesbian Feminist Liberation (LFL), located first in SoHo and then in Chelsea, in New York City, and a bisexual women's consciousness-raising group which was formed after a discussion of the topic at Lesbian Feminist Liberation.

The methodology was a particular kind of participant observation--that of a complete participant--which drew on the women's movement, the lesbian/gay movement, and on a variety of other sources--such as literature--for inspiration. It is my position that an observer should be free to choose a research topic, a style, and a methodology which seem most appropriate for the task at hand. Often, a researcher must create new forms of expression at the expense of precedent.

It has been suggested to me that a successful dissertation is a rational compromise between originality and slavish imitation. A dissertation is assumed to have a certain format and to be in direct lineage to the work of either a great figure in the

field or a prominent figure in the student's own department. A dissertation becomes an act of homage. The student, on the other hand, may want to rebel against the prevailing biases in the field. In the case of the female student, for example, she may want to question rules set up by males. These rules include theory, methods, and appropriate gender behavior. The female student who rebels may be told she is too "aggressive"(masculine). Or, she may be told she is "irrational"(feminine)--a trait incompatible with dissertation writing.

Being creatures of American society, one perspective permeating much social science to date is sexism. Just as many early sociological writers found "logical" and "scientific" reasons to support racist ideologies and policies, so can one find numerous instances of preference for the masculine principle. Yet, we shall see, it is a sexism that supports not men as a class, but only those men who meet certain ideals of masculinity, primarily white, professional masculinity. This sexism is present in two ways. The social organization of social science is sexist (and racist). Thus, the production of social science knowledge, those "truths" it has produced to date, are bracketed by sexist ideology. (Stoll,1974:58).

This dissertation begins with the self--myself. I particularly dislike glossing practices such as the editorial "we," which automatically lends credence to statements by implying that more than one person saw the same thing. More important, it

establishes social distance on the part of the observer.

What is "objectivity" in social science?

It is God alone who can claim to be objective. While in our books, on the contrary, it is a man (or woman) who sees, who feels, who imagines, a man ((a person)) located in space and time, conditioned by his ((her)) passions, a man ((person)) like you and me. And the book reports nothing but his ((her)) experience, limited and uncertain as it is. It is a man ((person)) here, now, who is his ((their)) own narrator, finally. (Robbe-Grillet, 1965: 139).

As an atheist, I disagree that even "God" can claim to be objective. As individuals, each has their unique stock of knowledge and is different. As a researcher, the most I can do is to identify my biases, and describe them to you; become a member of the groups in question and get an "insider" view; and utilize my knowledge of sociology (an "outsider" view) to produce a manuscript which is original and meaningful to a wide audience, nonacademic and academic, gay and straight, etc. The "topic" is sexual change. "Coming out" shows the prevailing insider view, for example, whereas "Sexual conversion" is my interpretation. A comparison of chapters four and five indicates I was more "distant" and more negative about the large organization than about the small group. It was somewhat to my disadvantage as a researcher that I personally disliked

large groups, meetings, bars, and dances (I like dancing but not dances). On the other hand, I was intensely curious; the research project provided the "cover" for my time-consuming excursions into the lavender subculture. Unlike the other women at lesbian/gay rights demonstrations, I could--if necessary--claim I was there because I was a graduate student doing research. Participant observation allowed me to become a bona fide member of a women's consciousness-raising group and of a political organization. I felt most like an observer when I was at home, taking notes; at school, discussing my research and being a student; at Lesbian Feminist Liberation, coaxing the silent members to talk. It is part of my stance that researchers should passionately choose their research topics and should patiently describe their biases.

Since I am not a "value-free scientist," this book is not a "value-free" endeavor. I am deeply committed to the basic goal of maximizing the opportunities for all human beings to develop to the fullest extent possible their own unique talents, interests, and predilections. My particular interest is in bringing about changes that will encourage males and females to explore and develop their human potentials more fully, as opposed to maintaining the stereotyped masculine and feminine roles foisted upon them by virtually every aspect of this society--as well as most others. In short, I am concerned not merely with "women's liberation," but with "human liberation," although I profess to be a "member" of the former social movement. (Chafetz, 1974: ix).

Not only researchers but also readers should participate:

For, far from neglecting him((her)), the author today proclaims his((her)) absolute need of the reader's cooperation, an active, conscious, creative assistance. What he((she)) asks of him((her)) is no longer to receive ready-made a world completed, full, closed upon itself, but on the contrary to participate in a creation, to invent in his((her)) turn the work--and the world--and thus to learn to invent his((her))own life. (Robbe-Grillet, 1965: 156).

The detached researcher and the detached reader are obsolete.

Just as "Each novelist, each novel must invent its own form"

(Robbe-Grillet, 1965: 12), so must each individual invent their own life. This dissertation concerns individuals who decided to reject heterosexuality and traditional gender roles and to create new lives for themselves.

I did research from April 1973 through December 1978 at the

following locations:

- 1) Lesbian Feminist Liberation (LFL)
- 2) the homes of the members of a bisexual women's consciousness-raising group
- 3) various lesbian bars, restaurants, bookstores
- 4) the Gay Academic Union (GAU), a political organization for lesbians and gay men in academia
- 5) various social encounters--parties, street conversations, gatherings with friends
- 6) public demonstrations for lesbian and gya rights

The data consist of field notes; tape recordings of Lesbian

Feminist Liberation's public panel discussions (known as the

"Sunday panels"); magazine articles, newspaper articles (particularly from the Village Voice and Majority Report); books by and about lesbians; and lesbian records. I attended several lesbian and gay plays and films.

Although there are lesbians of all races, ages, social classes, religions, ethnic backgrounds, geographical locations, etc., most of the members of Lesbian Feminist Liberation were white, in their mid-to-late-twenties(in 1973), either Catholic⁸ or Jewish(there were some Protestants). Although there were a few professionals(teacher, architect, librarian, social worker), most members seemed to do clerical work or to be in school, or both. Some members had unusual occupations, such as piano tuner, exterminator, house painter.

Most of the members of the bisexual women's consciousness-raising group of which I was a member were, in 1973, about 27-29 years old. The six permanent members ranged in age from 22 to 35. Three members described themselves as of Catholic origin, one of Protestant origin, one of Jewish origin; I described myself as an atheist. None of the members was "religious."

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There were a few former nuns.

Except for one member, each had at least an undergraduate degree. Four members had a Master's degree or were matriculated in a Master's program. They were more educated than were the members of Lesbian Feminist Liberation.

All the names of members of Lesbian Feminist Liberation (LFL) and their friends, the names of members of my consciousness-raising group⁹ and their friends, and all other humans who are described here and who wish some privacy--all these names have been changed.

All the members of my consciousness-raising group were white, and Lesbian Feminist Liberation could be described as "virtually" white. From 1973 to 1976 there were a few black members; there were many periods of time during which there were no black members present at business meetings (known as the "Monday night meetings"). At one point, there was one black member, and she was expelled from the organization on charges of "repeated violence." Several members charged the organization with racism, and then the matter was quietly forgotten.

⁹ The names Sunny, Elizabeth, Carmen, Lynn, and Rebecca, etc. are pseudonyms.

It was to my advantage as a researcher that I was a white college-educated female in my late twenties. However, gaining entrée was certainly not a problem. I first heard of Lesbian Feminist Liberation through their advertisement in the weekly newspaper the Village Voice. One Sunday afternoon I appeared at 99 Wooster Street, in SoHo, in front of an old firehouse, opened a door, and went inside. No one questioned me about my sexuality, my intentions, or my philosophy of life.

The following year, when I became a voting member of the organization, I informed members that I intended to write my dissertation about "lesbianism and feminism." As a participant-observer and member of the organization, however, I spent my time being a member rather than an outsider. That is to say, I made no speeches about my research, and I distributed no questionnaires.

III.

Gender roles are learned, and vary from place to place, class to class, and at different times. Margaret Mead discovered that gender roles are sex-specific and relative. In a study of three different cultures(1963), she discovered that what was considered masculine and what was considered

feminine varied from tribe to tribe, and in each tribe there was a role assigned according to sex.

In the division of labour, in dress, in manners, in social and in religious functioning--sometimes in only a few of these respects, sometimes in all--men and women are socially differentiated, and each sex, as a sex, forced to conform to the role assigned to it. (Mead, M., 1963: xi).

It is as members of a society that we learn gender roles.

In the United States today, females are expected to be "weak, helpless, dainty, nonathletic, worry about appearance and aging, sensual, graceful, domestic, maternal, involved with children, church-going; virginal, inexperienced, must be married, female 'catches' spouse; sexually passive, uninterested; responsible for birth control; seductive, flirtatious; emotional, sentimental, romantic; can cry in public; expressive, compassionate, nervous, insecure, fearful; scatterbrained, frivolous, shallow, inconsistent, intuitive; impractical; perceptive, sensitive, 'arty'; idealistic, humanistic; petty, flirty, coy, gossipy, catty, sneaky, fickle; dependent, overprotected, responsive; status conscious and competitive, refined, adept in social graces; follower, subservient, submissive; self-conscious, easily intimidated, modest, shy, sweet; patient; vain; affectionate, gentle, tender, soft; not aggressive,

quiet, passive; tardy; innocent; noncompetitive," etc.

(Chafetz, 1974: 35-36). Males are expected to be "strong, sloppy, brave; breadwinners, providers; sexually aggressive, experienced; single status acceptable; male 'caught' by spouse; double standard; unemotional, stoic, can't cry in public; logical, intellectual, rational, objective, scientific, practical, mechanical; public awareness; dogmatic; leader, dominating, disciplinarian, independent, free, individualistic, demanding; aggressive, success oriented, ambitious, proud, egotistical, confident, moral, trustworthy, decisive, competitive, uninhibited, adventurous," etc.

(Chafetz, 1974: 35-36).

"Gender is just one basis for identity throughout life, and hardly anyone makes it the sole basis for their identity; just as race, ethnicity, or religion ((or sexual preference)) are not the sole standards" (Stoll, 1974: 78).

Nevertheless, gender roles are obstacles to women's liberation, to lesbian and gay liberation, and to human liberation.

What are the consequences of gender roles?

Robert Hodge, Paul Siegel, and Peter Rossi (1966) studied the relative prestige of a large number of occupations in the United States and found that the four most prestigious were: U.S. Supreme Court Justice, physician, scientist, and state governor. Table 2.9 summarizes the data on which stereotypical traits are clearly helpful in attaining and performing well in these occupational roles and which are harmful. While the designation as "helpful" or "harmful" for some few traits is debatable, the overall picture probably is not. Stereotypical feminine traits patently do not equip those who might try to live up to them to compete in the world of social and economic privilege, power, and prestige; the exact opposite is the case for masculine characteristics. Where 15 feminine traits are classified as "harmful," only 2 masculine ones are so designated. Conversely, where 17 masculine traits are classified as "helpful," the analogous figure for feminine traits is 5. The cost of femininity for those who would enter the world outside the home could scarcely be more clear: The more a female conforms, the less is she capable of functioning in roles that are other than domestic ((my emphasis)). (Chafetz, 1974: 60, 62).

Gender roles in the family, through their asymmetry in demands of time and responsibility, produce very different outside employment patterns for married men and married women. The occupations which are held by the two sexes, once employed, differ in a clear and persistent pattern. Not only do men and women tend to do different kinds of work but they tend to be differently rewarded in pay, prestige and power. Both of these patterns, different occupations and differential rewards, are socially defined as appropriate in light of stereotyped gender differences. The belief, mentioned earlier, that our occupations are appropriate to our personal characteristics is a major factor in the ideological defense of gender segregation. If we believe that women

are more nurturant than men, it follows that women make better nurses. Extending the argument, men make better surgeons because they are believed to be calm, decisive authorities. This belief is used by employers to justify differential hiring by sex. It may be accepted by some "third parties" to employment, such as the customers served by the automobile salesperson or the student taught by the home economics instructor. (Davidson, L. and Gordon, L., 1979: 59-60).

In a study of sex differences, we must be as much aware of the shared traits of boys and girls as well as the differing ones. Only then can one say anything about the pervasiveness and distinctions of gender expectations in society. (Stoll, 1974: 81).

How deep are gender roles? Do females know anything about masculinity and males about femininity? Of course. Although females are brought up to be feminine and males are brought up to be masculine, both females and males have some idea of the gender role forbidden to them. The process by which a person becomes "the person in the street" is the same for both females and males (see Mead, G.H., 1934 and Geiler, 1979, especially pp. 141-147). What are alternatives to gender roles?

1. Some females are masculine and some males are feminine.
2. Some people are both feminine and masculine at once.
3. Some people are trying to become neither feminine nor masculine.

The first is role reversal, the second is androgyny, the third is gender neutrality.

The members of the bisexual women's consciousness-raising group of which I was a member became interested in other women through participation in the Women's Movement (see Gross, 1973: 138). They hoped that by becoming a member of a group of bisexual women, they would be able to abolish distinctions of sex and gender. Some people advocated being more "aggressive"(masculine), while others, like me, advocated being neither masculine nor feminine(gender neutral). We hoped that by sharing and comparing our experiences and ideas we could clarify our goals.

IV.

The consciousness-raising group originated in the Orient. This is surprising, as the Occident usually comes to mind when we think of "talk therapy." However, the consciousness-raising group is not a therapy group. It is much more sociological in that it stresses discussion of wrongs suffered because of sex, sexual preference, gender, class, race, etc., than the therapy group, which is typically in the province of psychology and psychiatry, and which deals with individual problems, personal neuroses and psychoses.

Consciousness-raising groups developed in China in the late 1940s. "Speak Bitterness" meetings, as they were called, were held in rural villages of North China and were occasions for women to speak about the abuses they had suffered qua women. They were the "first known attempt to convert womankind's private laments into political acts" (Dreifus, 1973: 2). These meetings gave women a sense of identification with members of their sex and a new faith in themselves qua women. Even though they had been socialized to believe they were the second sex (see de Beauvoir, 1952), they were able, through talk, through seeing their common problems, by seeing they had been wronged as members of one sex, to develop their human potential.

Consciousness-raising groups in the United States developed independently, twenty years after the first "Speak Bitterness" meetings. Consciousness-raising groups sprang up in the 1960s in the Women's Movement and in the 1970s at lesbian organizations. Consciousness-raising and "Speak Bitterness" groups fostered solidarity based on sex (female). In doing so, they did not eradicate the idea of two sexes; rather, they stressed its importance. However, within the group "females" there were schisms, especially over topics such as marriage.

Although some feminists are opposed to marriage, there are some women who want the right to marry someone of the same sex. Their question is whether same-sex marriage would be as oppressive an institution as opposite-sex marriage. Women who are in favor of legalizing same-sex marriages state that they would be their partner's equal; opponents state that women would inevitably fall into feminine and masculine role playing. Marriage as it is today among heterosexuals in this society and, unfortunately, in many other societies, is patriarchal rather than a partnership.

Both the patriarchal and the partnership status theories of marriage accept the necessity for the state to impose terms and conditions on marriage, but the similarity stops there. The patriarchal system gives one party authority over the other and apportions duties and responsibilities on the basis of sex. This avoids controversies which, it is believed, would be destructive to the relationship; as one judge put it, you cannot have a majority rule in a marriage.¹⁶ It is also a way for the strong (the husband) to protect the weak (the wife). The partnership theory gives neither spouse authority over the other, and gives each sex the same rights, powers, duties, and responsibilities. It assumes, moreover, that the best protection for the "weak" wife is to give her more power, not less. (Babcock et al., 1975: 565).

Engels, on the other hand, was opposed to the institution of marriage altogether, and stated that in order for females to

be free, the monogamous family as the economic unit of society had to be abolished. Within the family, the husband was the "bourgeois" and the wife the "proletariat" (Engels, 1970: 137-138).

Engels' view that male property ownership was the basis for the male's supremacy has been challenged by several anthropologists, such as Karen Sacks.

I do not believe that Engels' evolutionary explanation is correct as it stands: there is too much data showing that women are not the complete equals of men in most nonclass societies lacking private property. There are also many societies, with and without classes, where women do own and inherit property. (Sacks, K. in Reiter, ed., 1975: 220).

It seems likely, then, that in class societies the subordinate position of women derives not from domestic property relations but from something outside the household which denies women adult social status. (Sacks, K. in Reiter, ed., 1975: 229).

I have suggested that there are two aspects to women's position--women as social adults, and women as wives--and that these can vary somewhat independently. What determines how, or whether, women are regarded as adults is not the same as what determines their positions vis-a-vis their husbands. Basically, women are social adults where they work collectively as part of a productive group larger than or separate from their domestic establishment. The meaning and status of "wife," though, depend on the nature of the family in much the way Engels suggests. Where the estate is familial, and the wife works for it but does not share in its ownership, she is in much the same relationship

to her husband and his kin as is a worker to his((her)) boss. Where there are no private estates, or perhaps where the family estate is jointly owned, the domestic relationship is a more egalitarian one (Friedl, 1967). This last point is overstated, since the domestic and social spheres of life are not really independent. On the basis of the American experience, it is difficult to conceive of a completely egalitarian domestic relationship when only the male partner is regarded as fully adult beyond the bounds of the household. (Sacks, K., in Reiter, ed., 1975: 228).

In marriage, it is usually the wife who "gives up" something: her freedom. Legally, the single adult woman is better off than a married woman(Kanowitz, 1969), although the single adult woman is also stigmatized for her "independence"(masculinity). Why do females marry? Perhaps out of ignorance, false consciousness, and fear; perhaps for love, security, and companionship.

Women: Do You Know The Facts About Marriage?

Leaflet by The Feminists (written for a demonstration at the Marriage License Bureau, New York City, Winter, 1969)

Do You Know That Rape Is Legal In Marriage?¹⁰

According to law, sex is the purpose of marriage((some say the purpose is sex for procreation)). You have to have sexual intercourse in order to have a valid marriage.

Do You Know That Love And Affection Are Not Required In Marriage?

If you can't have sex with your husband, he can get a divorce or annulment. If he doesn't love you, that's not grounds for divorce.

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Recently, wives have gone to court to challenge this law.

Do You Know That You Are Your Husband's Prisoner? ¹¹

You have to live with him wherever he pleases. If he decides to move someplace else, either you go with him or he can charge you with desertion, get a divorce and, according to law, you deserve nothing because you're the guilty party. And that's if he were the one who moved!

Do You Know That, According To The United Nations, Marriage Is A "Slavery-Like Practice"?

According to the marriage contract, your husband is entitled to more household services from you than he would be from a live-in maid. So, why aren't you getting paid?¹² Under law, you're entitled only to "bed and board." When you got married, did you know these facts? If you didn't know, what did you think you were consenting to? But these are the laws ((which vary from state to state, and from level to level--municipal, state, federal--and type to type, etc.)). If you had known the terms, would you have signed the contract?

Do You Resent This Fraud?

All the discriminatory practices against women are patterned and rationalized by this slavery-like practice. We can't destroy the inequities between men and women until we destroy marriage. We must free ourselves. And marriage is the place to begin. (The Feminists in Morgan, ed., 1970: 601-602).

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The husband is required to support his wife and family--be the head of the household--and therefore is given the right to choose the family domicile. The husband's job, health, personal preferences are considered too important for majority rule. Here, 1 plus 1 equals 1: the husband, who is given the responsibility of supporting the family and is given the legal power to enforce his decisions on a variety of issues. This part of the masculine role --duty and power-- is unpleasant to many males. It is my understanding that the gender roles played by both sexes in marriage make that institution one of oppression. "I don't want to be a wife or to have a wife," said Lynn, a member of my consciousness-raising group.

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The issue of a salary for doing housework makes the division of labor according to sex seem more attractive than it is.

What are the alternatives to heterosexual monogamy?

1. Heterosexual bigamy.
2. Heterosexual polygamy.
3. Asexuality.
4. Intermittent celibacy.
5. Bisexual monogamy.
6. Bisexual polygamy. (the term "bigamy" was never used, as it had a negative connotation from its heterosexual usage.)
7. Open marriages, two-year marriages, trial marriages.
8. Communal living, with sexual freedom.
9. Lesbianism, monogamous, polygamous, celibate.
10. ((alone or with all of the others)): Masturbation.
(The monogamy-polygamy issue will be discussed in chapter four.)

Lavender people are a threat to heterosexual monogamy, and are--
in 1980-- stigmatized. This situation has not always been so.

In Athens in the sixth century, B.C., for example, lesbianism was free of stigma. Although women in Athens at that time were not even considered citizens, on the poetess Sappho's island colony, Lesbos, both sexes were freer in every sense than in Athens. The situation in Athens worsened over the centuries; by the fourth century, B.C., women were no longer allowed to own property (a precondition for citizenship)--see O'Faolain, 1973: 9 and Klaich, 1974: 131. Six hundred years after Sappho's death, with the advent of Christianity in the Eastern Roman Empire and with the declining position of women, there was an association made between paganism

and homosexuality. ((Some lesbians are trying to revive paganism.)) The Christians burned many of Sappho's poems in 380 A.D.; there was a second burning of her works in the eleventh century A.D. (see Klaich, 1974: 135-136). It is not that there were no great women poets--Sappho was ranked with Homer, for example--but rather that we are ignorant of our own past. ((This dissertation is an attempt to describe an "invisible" group: bisexual women and lesbians.)) It is not that women in the fourth century B.C. in Athens were too stupid to manage property; rather, women were denied an education, denied citizenship, denied the right to own property.

In the democratic United States, it was not until 1920 A.D. that women were given the right to vote. Homosexuality, first considered a physical, then a mental disorder by the physicians, psychiatrists and psychologists who claimed expertise in the "topic" has, since 1973, been taken off the American Psychiatric Association's list of mental disorders. Nevertheless, Jews and Christians alike have condemned same-sex relationships as natural." Homosexuality threatens established ideas about the roles of women and men (to procreate).

Although our society is typical of human societies in that heterosexual coitus is the dominant sexual activity for the majority of adults, it is atypical--using cross-cultural evidence--in the extent of its "stigma" (Goffman, 1963) and its "negative sanctions" toward homosexuality (Ford and Beach, 1951: 257).

Sexuality, whether homosexuality, heterosexuality, bisexuality, asexuality, etc., is learned.

Should one regard sex in humans as a drive, it is still necessary to point out that the enormous area of our lives, both in early "socialization" and in adult experience, labeled "sexual behavior," is almost entirely the product of learning. So much is this the case that even the act of coitus itself is the product of a long series of learned responses--responses to the patterns and attitudes, even as to the object of sexual choice, which are set up for us by our social environment. (Millett, 1970: 54-55).

Humans are probably born with sexual potential--just as we are born with the potential for language; the direction(s) this sexuality originally and/or finally and/or sometimes takes depends in part on group consciousness learned through "socialization," whether primary or secondary, etc.

Men and women who are totally lacking in any conscious homosexual leanings are as much a product of cultural conditioning ("socialization") as are the exclusive

homosexuals who find heterosexual relations distasteful and unsatisfying. Both extremes represent movement away from the original, intermediate condition which includes the capacity for both forms of sexual expression. (Ford and Beach, 1951: 258-259).

In a species-conscious society, humans would be gender neutral.

Species-consciousness would abolish divisions according to sex, gender, and sexual preference; it presupposes a society in which we enjoy sexual, emotional, intellectual and other relations with each other as human beings. This new consciousness would develop in a society not torn apart by sex, class, race, sexual preference, etc., but rather in an equalitarian society, in which the individual intellect, spirit, and perceptions would develop to the benefit of the individual, the species, and other species.

Chapter 2. Sexual conversion

Conversion is not a term used by members of Lesbian Feminist Liberation. I have never heard it used by any lesbians, bisexuals, or gay males. The term "coming out" is used to describe the self-realization of being a lesbian, a bisexual female or male, or a gay male. The same term is also used to describe a declaration to others, whether gay or straight, at home or at work, that one is proud to be a lesbian, a bisexual female or male, or a gay male. A person can come out many times. A person can also come out as a bisexual female one year and a lesbian a few years later. The person coming out assumes that the sexual preference she or he is announcing is a permanent one. Coming out implies a new self-knowledge, a discovery of what one was all along.

Conversion, on the other hand, implies a change in beliefs; it is used to describe religious or political changes, for the most part. I am using it here to describe changes in sexual preference. I consider it better than the term "coming out" because it makes the concept of sexual fluidity readily understandable, whereas "coming out" has a deterministic edge I find objectionable. Another problem with "coming out" is that the past is reinterpreted

in the light of new evidence(e.g., lesbianism). Any interpretation of the past is incomplete, situated, constructed for a purpose. Once we delve into causal models(e.g., the past explains the present), we are on psychoanalytic or reactionary sociological ground. "Broken homes" are blamed for homosexuality, drug addiction, crime, and prostitution: society's "vices." "Broken homes" are not blamed for heterosexuality, racism, white collar crimes, wife-beating, or the frequenting of prostitutes. While I do not want to digress into a methodological debate about correlations versus causality--not to mention the problems inherent in the term "broken homes"-- I do wish to point out that "coming out" has some very reactionary implications. The concept of conversion, in contrast, allows for changes in the person's authentic self. I may be a lesbian today, a bisexual in two years, and a celibate in ten years. When I consider myself bisexual, I accept it without making disparaging remarks about lesbianism. This is not to say I won't be critical of my actual experiences; however, I won't deny the fact that I have changed.

Most of the lesbians and bisexual women I knew at or through Lesbian Feminist Liberation (LFL) believed that their heterosexual experiences(almost all had had heterosexual experiences)

had been "phases"; they had really been lesbians even when thinking they were heterosexuals. This kind of thinking sounds very much like some psychological explanations of homosexuality(it's an "immature stage")--only the lesbians reverse the model. Physiological explanations of homosexuality have given way to psychological explanations:

The view that female homosexuality is in the overwhelming majority of cases psychologically determined, is supported by the fact that a great number of women whose sexual love objects are of the same sex do not give the impression that their physiologic characteristics have undergone changes in the direction of masculinity. (Deutsch, 1944: 333).

To Deutsch, the "cause" of homosexuality must be either physiologic or psychological (never a free choice). As early as 1915, Freud, in a note to the 1905 Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, realized that if homosexuality and bisexuality are to be analyzed and understood, then heterosexuality itself must also be subjected to the same scrutiny.

Psycho-analytic research is most decidedly opposed to any attempt at separating off homosexuals from the rest of mankind ((human-kind)) as a group of special character.... Thus from the point of view of psycho-analysis the exclusive sexual interest felt by men for women is also a problem that needs elucidating and is not a self-evident fact based upon an attraction that is ultimately of a chemical nature. (Freud, 1962: 33-34).

In other words, neither heterosexuality nor homosexuality are "chemical" attractions.

The word "phase" suggests that there is indeed a basic, permanent state, either heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual. Either we are all the same, or different people have different kinds of authentic sexual preferences. In both cases, sexual preference is seen as static and determined. My own research, carried out from April 1973 through December 1978, challenges these assumptions.

I saw my first example of sexual conversion at a panel discussion on bisexuality. It was held at Lesbian Feminist Liberation (LFL) on April 29, 1973. The organization had just been formed; lesbian members of the Gay Activists' Alliance (GAA) had split off from the gay-lesbian group and had formed a lesbian organization. The rationale behind this was that gay males were, above all, males, and therefore would oppress lesbians, who were, above all, females. Practical experience had shown members of the Lesbian Liberation Committee (LLC) that this was unfortunately so. Morale was excellent, and there was a surge of energy and new ideas. The panel discussions, which were held every

Sunday afternoon, attracted a wide variety of females-- lesbians, bisexual women, and some straight (heterosexual) feminists-- and were about a large number of topics. Some were "Lesbians and Sports," "Coming Out," "Lesbian Mothers," "Women in Prisons," "Lesbian Films," "Lesbians Publish Lesbians," "Lesbians and the Law."

On April 29, 1973, the panel discussion was attended by both lesbians and bisexual women. A number of people have asked me why a lesbian organization sponsored a discussion of bisexuality; moreover, why were bisexual women attending lesbian dances, not to mention meetings? From the bisexual point of view, the answer was very simple: to meet women. Bisexuals move in and out of both the gay and straight worlds. At Lesbian Feminist Liberation and other lesbian places, such as bars, bisexuals generally "pass" for lesbians. That is to say, bisexuals are afraid they will be discriminated against by lesbians, just as lesbians fear discrimination by heterosexuals, and therefore hide their sexual preference. Many bisexuals come out as lesbians rather than as bisexuals.

At the panel discussion, everyone except the panelists was

assumed to be gay unless information was given to the contrary. There were many bisexual women in the audience, but each one thought she was one of the only ones. The panelists addressed the audience as if all present were lesbians, too. At one point, a member of the audience stood up, announced she was bisexual, and demanded that all bisexuals "come out of the closets" and declare their bisexuality. About 20 women out of 90-100 women stood up, looked at each other in a daze, and then sat down. Another woman suggested that all women wanting to join a bisexual women's consciousness-raising group meet after the discussion. She pointed to a corner of the room. Several women who had never labelled themselves bisexuals until that day of conversion, and others who were accustomed to referring to themselves as bisexuals met and formed the consciousness-raising group I will be discussing throughout this thesis.

At the time, neither I nor the other consciousness-raising group members used the term "conversion"; however, it seems appropriate. "I called myself a bisexual from that day on," said one member. "All of a sudden I saw I wasn't gay or straight; I was bisexual," said another member. "I felt very high and happy; I loved all women and all men," said yet another group member.

The experience was sudden and very intense. Initially, the term "bisexual" helped solidify unconnected feelings. However, the real conversion experience consisted in a euphoric state which followed the self-knowledge that the person's sexual preference had changed. The conversion experience is one of rebirth. The convert looks at the familiar and marvels, feels exhilarated, and is at peace.

An appearance of newness beautifies every object....This sense of clean and beautiful newness within and without is one of the commonest entries in conversion records. (James, 1958: 199).

The women in my consciousness-raising group expressed great joy in holding hands with another woman, touching each other's hair, and observing nature together. Emotion, romance, and sensuality, which had been dormant for years, were revived at the time of conversion.¹

I had given up on men. They weren't romantic. I felt comfortable with them, but it was all a routine. I'd turned off my emotions. Going out with a woman is much more intense....Even the simple things, like taking a bath together, take on a fresh meaning. Sure, it can be scary, but I never want to be dead inside again.... (Abrams, Field Notes, 1973).

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In this respect, conversion resembles "falling in love."

When the women in my group walked down streets in Greenwich Village, we noticed things we had formerly taken for granted, such as heterosexuality. All of a sudden, we scrutinized female-male couples for signs of role-playing. Whenever we saw a female wearing high-heeled shoes, we complained that she was ruining her feet and her back in order to be attractive to a male. When we saw females wearing makeup, at least one group member would complain that this was an example of the internalization of male ideas about female beauty.

All of a sudden, we were delighted to see female-female couples; we wondered if they were "really" lesbians or whether they were bisexual or heterosexual "friends." We also noticed gay male couples.

I felt a certain indifference to males in general--despite the fact that I was going out with one, about whom I felt intensely.

We felt mischievous, spontaneous, deliriously happy, and free of conventions. Prior to our conversion we had all been depressed, anxious for a change, and tired; now we felt refreshed.

Many religious converts have hallucinations, odd impulses and religious dreams about the time of their conversion (James, 1958: 193). Several group members reported having dreams about women; virtually all the dreams were highly emotional, romantic, and clearly sensual.

Carmen told us about a dream she'd had. She met a man in the subway, they flirted, and she wanted to ask him to go home with her. Because he was a man rather than a woman, she thought she would offer him to her bisexual boyfriend. Then, all of a sudden, she saw that the "man" was a woman. She could tell because there were breasts under the jacket. Carmen was delighted with her discovery. She hugged the woman, saying "I love you!" When she awakened, she tried to make the dream continue, but couldn't. Carmen's interpretation of the dream was that she was really interested only in women.

I told the group I'd dreamed I was in the swimming pool. A woman appeared, and swam under water, through my open legs. She was blonde, young, and beautiful. We got into a taxi and were trying to decide whether to go to her hotel or not. Then I woke up. I also dreamed of having sex with females and males, one after the other, outdoors, on the grass, in the country somewhere.
(Abrams, Field Notes, 1973).

Although many of our dreams were romantic and lovely, others were the subject of group controversy. Lynn described her dreams as "sexist." One was of a fantastic "ass" a woman had had; another showed a woman wearing see-through panties. Lynn had been able to see the woman's pubic hair through her panties;

this had aroused Lynn. Several group members said that what was important was the sex(female) of the person doing the dreaming--not the content of the dream. One member explained that if a male had had Lynn's dreams, they would have been sexist dreams; but since Lynn, a female, had dreamed them, they were "lesbian" dreams and not sexist at all. I disagreed with this interpretation and sided with Lynn, who maintained she had had sexist dreams.

At the same time that we were encouraging each other to fantasize about other females, we were suppressing positive feelings about males. Our bisexual women's consciousness-raising group was advocating lesbianism. We were not species-conscious; we were rejecting half the species (males) and glorifying the other half (females). This is reverse sexism. We talked about problems with males and imagined--naively--that if we went out with females we would not have these problems, because "females are basically similar." As we described our boyfriends' faults, our discontent with the status quo (heterosexuality) grew. We did not, however, ascribe our feelings for other females to group pressure; rather, we felt something wonderful had been revealed to us. Just as religious converts experience conversion to God (and good),

so do lesbians and bisexual women experience conversion to women (and good). Not only were female-female relationships viewed as "politically correct," but females were seen as more enlightened spiritually than males. Males were often described as "hairy" (a fault), and females as "soft" (a virtue).

Language played an important part in our sexual conversion. We called ourselves "women-identified women" (Radicalesbians, 1970) or "bisexual women" (eventually, we called ourselves both "lesbians" and "bisexuals"). At both Lesbian Feminist Liberation and at group sessions, we learned lesbian jokes; key words (such as "lavender" to describe lesbians, as in "lavender menace" or "lavender herring"); names and locations of many lesbian-patronized restaurants, bookstores, bars ; the names of lesbian singers,² etc. If I happened to meet a woman on the street and she asked me where I was going, I could always tell her "to the Dutchess" (bar). If she picked up on this, I might assume (rightly or wrongly) that she was gay. Similarly, if I happened to be in the subway or in

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Kay Gardner, Alix Dobkin, Meg Christian, Willie Tyson, Casse Culver, Holly Near, Cookie Cirillo, Maxine Feldman, and many others.

a mixed (gay-straight) restaurant and heard a group of females talking about "LFL" (Lesbian Feminist Liberation) or "Oscar Wilde's" (Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop--gay/lesbian book store), I might assume they were lesbians. One way of detecting lesbians, then, is to mention key names of places and people and see how they react. However, this technique is risky, as it "flunks" many lesbians who are not part of a particular lesbian subculture. Just as there are many heterosexual worlds, there are--despite the stereotypes--many homosexual worlds. Humans are divided from each other on the basis of race, class, age, ethnicity, education, etc., in addition to the divisions of sex, gender, and sexual preference.

Just as beginning sociology students struggle to talk like veteran sociologists, so do some lesbians at Lesbian Feminist Liberation try to talk like lesbians. Indeed, lesbians are expected to talk like lesbians, dress like lesbians, and act like lesbians in certain settings. In other settings, lesbians are expected to be able to "pass" (Goffman, 1963 and Garfinkel, 1967) as heterosexuals. The advantage of presenting oneself as a lesbian is that other lesbians can recognize you. The disadvantage is that

some heterosexuals may also recognize you, and may address nasty remarks to you:

Why do lesbians make a point of being thin, boyish?
Why are so many lesbians fat and matronly?

Why do lesbians wear tailored shirts; do they want
to look like male executives?
Why do lesbians wear sloppy T-shirts?

Lesbians look like men, and gay males look like
pseudo-women.
No wonder she's a lesbian (someone whispers); no
man would want to go out with such
a self-assertive woman.

Aside from the sex-stereotypes and sexual preference stereotypes, and the contradictions, these statements express the belief that gender roles are "natural" and good. If only lesbians wouldn't try to step across the Maginot Line into masculinity; if only gay males wouldn't try to reject masculinity. Maybe same-sex relationships could be systematically eliminated through sex-change operations; that way, scientists could make sure females were feminine and males masculine. Borderline cases could be forced to choose between the two polar-opposite roles. If necessary, pills could be prescribed, or the patient could be persuaded to undergo psychoanalysis to "cure sexual inversion."

It is probable that most homosexuals are invisible to heterosexuals, who see only the stereotypes.....

Although some lesbians are discouraged by societal stigma, there are many others who enjoy being a member of a deviant group. Just as marijuana users must learn to enjoy the effects of the drug (Becker, 1963), so must lesbians learn to perceive the presentation of self as a lesbian as a pleasurable experience.

It was funny going down Wooster Street, a busy industrial area during the week. Now, the street was deserted except for the women walking toward number 99 (Lesbian Feminist Liberation). This time, I thought I recognized one woman. I perceived all the women as lesbians, and thought it amusing that to an outsider, we didn't look any different from heterosexuals. (Abrams, Field Notes, 4/29/73).

After our consciousness-raising session, we went to Bonnie and Clyde's, a lesbian bar in the Village. We looked both ways furtively before going inside. From the street, it looked like any Village bar. I thought of Chumley's restaurant/bar, which used to be a speakeasy and which had brown, unmarked doors: it looked like an apartment building rather than a bar. In both cases, you had to know what was being hidden from view. Inside the lesbian bar, we saw a counter to the left and a checkroom to the right. In the back was a large dance floor. The clientele was mixed (black, white), and frequented by women (black) in evening gowns, women (black) in men's suits, and women (white, for the most part) in college clothes--casual jeans and a shirt. The music was quite loud, the dancing was varied--generally inspired. Our group sat down together and marveled that we were at a secret place. (Abrams, Field Notes, 5/73).

In the next few months (June-August), lesbian events (Lesbian Pride Week, culminating in a march; consciousness-

raising; going to lesbian bars, etc.) found their way into our calendars. Only Lynn and I did not belong to other groups.

Sunny belonged to a karate group and an anti-rape group; Elizabeth belonged to an anti-rape group; Carmen belonged to Street-Fighting Women; Rebecca belonged to an encounter group and to a therapy group.

Initially, the convert may be discouraged by the cool reception at lesbian bars and organizations. In an Al Carmines musical, The Faggot(1973), about gay males, for the most part, there's a song called "New Boy in Town." The newcomer, who is young, slender, blond, muscular, is pawed and admired by all the bar regulars. In the lesbian world I visited, on the other hand, strangers are often regarded with suspicion or disinterest. The first time I went to Lesbian Feminist Liberation, I expected to be surrounded by women interested in me.

The weather was beautiful and after the films were shown, a lot of women went outside. I felt lonely and somewhat anxious. I wished I knew someone. I wondered if the woman standing next to me and talking to me was talking to me because she found me attractive or because she felt sorry for me because I knew no one. I had hoped to get to know one person that afternoon, and had failed. I had feared being grabbed, yet had been curious about being touched by another woman. (Abrams, Field Notes, 4/73).

I had the same experience at lesbian bars. In fact, all the members--except for Carmen--of my consciousness-raising group initially complained that no one had asked them to dance and that no one had been particularly pleased to dance with them when they had asked strangers to dance. Carmen said we weren't sending the right signals. Which ones were the right ones? we asked. And, added several Lesbian Feminist Liberation members, we have to be sure women don't just come here wanting to sleep with us but not wanting to share in the hard political work that needs to be done. So the best way to meet someone here is to do work for the organization.

The religious convert, on the other hand, is usually welcomed to the group of believers. In Freund's study (1975) of the devotees of Guru Maharaj Ji, he describes the initial screening of the devotees by mahatmas. Those who received the knowledge (were initiated into the knowledge techniques) were called premies. The major religions all have screening processes (e.g., someone who wants to become a Catholic cannot just declare she/he is one; the status must be conferred by a person who is already a Catholic and who has the authority to do so). Once the

religious convert has been accepted, she/he will be welcomed; indeed, church members will try to extract money, time, and enthusiasm in exchange for friendship. In some cases, the exchange may be fair; in others, the new convert may be exploited (as seems to be the case with the Sun Myung Moon cult). Freund described some of the advantages of conversion:

I came close, at times, to being one of them; in effect, I verged on "conversion." I sometimes had a strong yearning for what appeared in many to be a "genuine" peace, a sense of living in a community with a shared sense of existential purpose--and above all, a sense of excitement about life. (Freund, 1975: 58).

Beliefs are maintained through contact with the organization, whether secular or religious. The secular counterpart to doing good deeds and doing service was, at Lesbian Feminist Liberation, selling tickets to dances, selling books, giving out beer and soda, cleaning up after social events; speaking at colleges; lobbying for lesbian/gay rights, etc. In both cases, one's labor was given voluntarily, free of charge. The more menial chores were usually done by newcomers, persons of low rank. Just as the pope can be rich while people in Naples are starving, so can a feminist leader give orders to be carried out by women who have no say in the organization. It is the hierarchy and the alienated

labor (with an extreme division of labor) which I found intolerable.

The officers don't do much work. They try to save the "shit" work, like cleaning up after a dance, for other people. I'm the only person who will play records at dances ((this was not true)). Everyone else says they don't know how; that excuse is a lie. People are really taken advantage of at Lesbian Feminist Liberation. (Abrams, Field Notes, 5/74).

One frequent justification for the division of labor was:

"different women have different areas of expertise."³ This

rationalization was criticized by one member:

Some people can sweep here and clean up after a dance, but they aren't allowed to speak in the name of the organization. This is what's happening and it should be avoided. Or else let's throw out the name and call it a little clique, a little club. (Abrams, Field Notes, 6/74).

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When members of Lesbian Feminist Liberation worked together with gay males, there was a division of labor according to sex. Males justified this by replying that females didn't have the same "expertise" as males, and could therefore type or hand out leaflets but not be leaders.

Many of my objections were shared by Lesbian Feminist Liberation members; some were optimistic about the future of the organization and were willing to keep trying to improve it, while others thought they'd "always" be involved with the organization, although perhaps not continuously. Over the years I have run into many former members who in 1973-1975 never expected to drop out of the organization.

Although members of Lesbian Feminist Liberation maintained that lesbians are women who love women and who treat other women as sisters, I have found that this is empty rhetoric. From Robert's Rules of Order to small cliques, Lesbian Feminist Liberation reminded me very much of the heterosexual organizations I'd known and disliked: student organizations, Leftist groups in the 1960s, faculty groups. Democratic procedures hid the fact that power was wielded by the few and their friends.

A few members stated they had located the "cause" of the problem: it was hard working with potential lovers. At social events, they continued, people treated each other fairly well, but at meetings, women trying to work while listening to other women and deciding whether to ask them out often became nervous,

self-conscious, and irritable. The same, unfortunately, had been true of many consciousness-raising sessions.

Carmen: I was interested in X, who was in the group. I listened to see if she was intelligent enough for me. I wondered if she found me intelligent enough. It made me nervous to be judging her like that. I hardly spoke to her at all; later, I found out she'd thought I hated her. When I did speak to her, she seemed abrupt. I found I was constantly analyzing her in my mind; maybe she took what I said as insensitive, too critical. I treated her worse than the other group members, in some ways. Later, much later, we became friends and talked things over....Maybe friendships are better than relationships; I don't know....I don't feel very confident as a lover--with women. I have so much more experience with men. I get more emotional with women, and I behave worse. (Abrams, Field Notes, 1974).

Heterosexuals also have trouble working with potential lovers.

Good friendships are possible because they are less encompassing and more "realistic" than love affairs. Friendships do not follow the pattern of leading somewhere, a model taken from the world of work. In addition, friends are expected to be equal, whereas lovers are expected to be complementary. Although there are many lesbians who deny that they play roles, others deny that there is anyone in this society who doesn't play roles.

Yes, I'm butch. All people play roles.
 I'm not going to apologize for my role.
 (Abrams, Field Notes, 6/74).

Although some lesbians cut off friendships with heterosexuals, others move in and out of both worlds, gay and straight. Just as blacks learn to act and to speak differently with whites than with other blacks, so do lesbians act and speak and often dress differently with gays than with straights. Several women in my consciousness-raising group expressed negative feelings about the "gay lifestyle" (of bars, lesbian organizations, lesbian friends).

Lesbian bars are sordid places (so are straight singles bars). I don't want to have to go to them the rest of my life. I'm looking for a permanent relationship. The straight world is so much larger. I'd rather be a lesbian in a straight setting, but there are all these taboos. You can be thrown out of a straight restaurant for holding hands with someone of the same sex, for example. It might "offend" the other customers. The lesbian world is strange, but at least it's a safe place for lesbians!
 (Abrams, Field Notes, 8/73).

Rebecca: I love Marsha, but she won't see my straight friends at all. I can't make a commitment to her--she's giving me six weeks to decide whether I'm going to live with her or not. It would be a lie; I have to say no. My own friends are gay and straight. I feel trapped by her ultimatum. I immediately began having fantasies about men. I went out with several, but I didn't like any of them. I went to The Lib ((lesbian bar)), but everyone there seemed so dull.....
 (Abrams, Field Notes, 10/8/74).

Not only bisexual women, but also lesbians have their complaints about lesbian bars and organizations.

I don't meet women that way. You must know much more about these places than I do. I meet women through friends--I already know a lot of lesbians and bisexuals--and at various places of work--mine and other people's. I occasionally go to a lesbian play or coffee house, but I'm really a stranger to the lesbian world. I have no idea what proportion of lesbians lead the so-called "lesbian lifestyle." It's only the ones who do so whom we notice at all. We don't know what population we're dealing with. I have never gone to a Lesbian Feminist Liberation meeting, for example, and probably never will. There's no safer place than my own home; I don't need public lesbian places. (Abrams, Field Notes, 3/75).

In addition--paradoxically--many members of Lesbian Feminist Liberation were prejudiced against the lesbian bars they sometimes frequented. They distinguished between "political lesbians" (like themselves) and "bar lesbians" (women whose lives centered around the lesbian bars). In a play written by Larkin, Lutzky, and Weinberg, called North Atlantic (1974)-- the music is from Rogers and Hammerstein's South Pacific -- there is a coming out scene in a lesbian bar. The heroine, Nellie, from the mid-West and totally inexperienced, is approached by one "butch" lesbian after another. Eventually, she goes home with a butch called Jo, and they make love. Nellie thinks she has found her true love, but Jo was just interested in a "one-night stand." The musical

goes on to show that you can't find love in a lesbian bar but you can find it at a lesbian organization. The play was performed during Lesbian Pride Week of 1974, and was enthusiastically received.

After their conversion, the women in my consciousness-raising group began to attend Lesbian Feminist Liberation social events; we also began going to lesbian bars every Wednesday night. None of us expressed an interest in beginning a relationship with a male. In terms of time and energy, we moved from an exclusively heterosexual world (except for Carmen, who had come out several years before) to an increasingly gay world. In the gay world, we could talk about our interest in women, and our problems with specific women. At both Lesbian Feminist Liberation and at consciousness-raising sessions, we censored ourselves and were censored by other group members who didn't want to hear about men, the "wrong" sex. In addition, we encountered many people who did not believe there was even such a thing as bisexuality; we were, they said, afraid to be gay. The ultimate demonstration of "faith" was to leave a man for a woman. The worst thing was "backsliding," going from lesbianism or

bisexuality back to heterosexuality. "Backsliding" has the same negative connotation in the gay world as "recidivism" has in criminology.

Within the gay world, then, there are hierarchies, with--at Lesbian Feminist Liberation--lesbians at the top and heterosexuals at the bottom. (The status of bisexuals varies.) If you try to include gay males, the task becomes hopeless, as gay males are males (a fault), but gay (a virtue). It was as a protest against unequal treatment by gay males that Lesbian Feminist Liberation was founded.

Integration into the world of Lesbian Feminist Liberation requires the at least apparent acquisition of a way of seeing the world in the light of one's being a lesbian-all-along. The theory of sexual conversion is one framework through which I can analyze field notes filed according to dates. This theory reflects my bias as a sociologist(I see the world sociologically). Coming out is a framework commonly used in the homosexual (f,m) worlds. In the next chapter I will discuss coming out biographies, first from the points of view of the women involved, and then from a Schutzian perspective.

Chapter 3. Coming out biographies

In the natural attitude, much is taken for granted. Everyday life is seemingly known in common, and routinized. The world is seen as strange only under particular circumstances-- for example, through the eyes of a stranger, through "bad news" (when one learns that someone has died), when one is close to death, etc., or when one is in the process of becoming a member of a subculture (as in the case of lesbians or bisexuals who come out into the lesbian world).

It was Thornton Wilder, who in his play Our Town, asked the question: "Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it?--every, every minute?" This was one of the heroine's lines. The reply, by the Stage Manager: "No." Pause. "The saints and poets, maybe--they do some." (Wilder, 1957: 62). The heroine dies and is allowed to go back to her home town and see what's going on; but she remains invisible. For the second time the audience sees the townspeople do what they have always done. But something has changed. We and the heroine are no longer engrossed with that world; the heroine, Emily, is dead and out of place--and we view it all with tearful nostalgia. Indeed, the

death of the heroine has made us reflect upon the world and change our whole perception of it. Concrete "events" stand out and are reinterpreted in the light of this new "information."

Similarly, "Home Movie"(Oxenberg, 1973), a ten-minute coming out film, shows a reinterpretation of the past which begins once the heroine sees herself as a lesbian. This is the new "information." The lesbian depicts herself as "a lesbian all along." She could have shown herself as an "ordinary" tomboy until she had her first lesbian experience. Instead, from the point in time of an adult, she tries to discover what her childhood "meant" to her when she was still a child. Now, according to Schutz (1967: 65), the "meaning" of an action is different depending on the point in time from which it is observed. As we grow older, we add to our stock of knowledge and see through different eyes. It is impossible to totally recapture our past feelings, for in the back of our minds is always a consciousness of the events and feelings that followed.

To the lesbian film maker, however, the film is authentic; indeed, to her, as well as to the Lesbian Feminist Liberation audience, its truth is not even open to doubt. In this group, it is taken for granted that they have been lesbians all along.

All the early scenes of the film show the girl rejecting the traditional "little girl role"(femininity). There is an emphasis on the "boyishness" of the girl (rebelliousness and physical strength). In one scene, the child's mother is rocking and feeding a younger child and, symmetrically, the 5-year old "lesbian" heroine is rocking and feeding a doll. The 5-year old does not like playing with the doll and handles it roughly. In another scene, the girl is shown dancing. She grimaces and keeps hitting a cabinet behind her. Her dancing is angry and ungraceful. Some narration follows the next section of the film((paraphrased)):

In High School my best friend was a woman. One day we were sitting there and I noticed my best friend was staring at me in a way a woman had never stared at me before. I stared right back and was conscious of a strong sexual attraction. (Oxenber, 1973).

Later on in the film, the girl becomes a cheerleader((paraphrased)):

To me the great thing about cheerleading was being with the other women. The game itself and the players were unimportant to me. (Oxenber, 1973).

The film began and ended with adult lesbians playing tackle football. The sexual pleasure of the players was obvious to the audience at Lesbian Feminist Liberation, who clapped and cheered enthusiastically as tackles were made.

This is a stereotypical lesbian biography and deserves close analysis. Oxenberg(1973) does not seem to view lesbianism as a rebellion against roles. Rather, the tomboyish behavior of the heroine is seen as an early sign of lesbianism. The woman was a lesbian all along; as a child, her lesbianism was latent, and as an adult, it is manifest. Until High School, she herself was unaware of her lesbianism; it was revealed to her when her best friend stared at her in a presumably sexual way. The past is reinterpreted in the light of this new information.

Oxenberg's interpretation is not an "innocent" one. By this, I mean that we cannot take what she says at face value.

There are two reasons for this:

- 1) the film reflects commonsense theories about lesbianism (ideas which are not Oxenberg's "own" ideas)
- 2) the film(photos and narration) is a biography, a reinterpretation of the past, and therefore is not the same as the actual experience as it was lived

Some commonsense theories about lesbianism are:

- 1) a lesbian is born a lesbian; lesbians are born, not made
- 2) sexuality is unchanging; a person may think she/he is heterosexual (a heterosexual phase), but eventually the truth will surface and the apparent reality (heterosexuality) will be unmasked by the deeper state of lesbianism; conversely, a true heterosexual can appear to be a lesbian, but not for long ("You can tell")
- 3) lesbians are fundamentally different from heterosexuals (sexual preference is not a question of taste)

What, then, is the coming out biography? It is, among other things, a response to the question "When did you come out?" It is used at the first meeting of a consciousness-raising group; when meeting lesbians at Lesbian Feminist Liberation and at bars; when going out with a lesbian you've just met. The coming out biography is a topic of conversation and a political act.

The coming out biography is a standardized account of the progression from ignorance (manifest heterosexuality) to self-knowledge (pride at being a lesbian-all-along). Another example of biography construction is the autobiography a person writes for college admission. In both cases, the person constructing the biography screens out information which would "look bad." The lesbian who presents an ambivalent biography ("I don't know

if I'm gay or straight") and the applicant who expresses doubts about the choice of college, choice of major, or the world in general, either through being "too honest" or by misunderstanding the unspoken and unwritten rules of biography construction, will be rejected by the group whose membership they seek.

A biography, in these cases, is a statement saying "I am one of you." If the biography is given orally, parts can be amended, deleted, or added, depending on audience response. A person can give a lesbian biography to one audience and a bisexual biography to another audience.

Bisexual women, like lesbians, come out. However, as there are few bisexual women's organizations, most bisexual women that I met between 1973 and 1980 came out into a lesbian subculture. They came out as lesbians, but remained closeted as bisexuals. With their male lovers, many passed as heterosexuals.

A panel discussion on bisexuality was held at Lesbian Feminist Liberation on April 29, 1973. The five panelists discussed how they had come to think of themselves as bisexual. They were all female, in their mid-to-late twenties, and white.

The first panelist said she'd started out heterosexual and monogamous. She had married and had had three children. The marriage ended in divorce. Then she became involved with a

woman. At this point, she said she looked back at her life and reinterpreted it from a lesbian perspective: she said she decided her marriage had failed because, unknown to her, she'd been a lesbian. When the relationship with the woman didn't work out, the panelist went back to men. That was satisfying for a while, and during this period she saw herself as heterosexual, as heterosexual all along. Eventually she began looking for relationships with both sexes; she now defined herself as bisexual and polygamous.

When her marriage failed, then, she did not look for a relationship with another man, but generalized her incompatibility with one particular man to an incompatibility with all men. The same reasoning was used when her relationship with a woman failed; she rejected all women as incompatible and sought relationships with men. Even when she defined herself as bisexual, she didn't mean that a person's sex was irrelevant to her; on the contrary, she still attempted to "represent" both sexes at once.

The second panelist said that she, too, went through a process of changing her sexual preference until she saw that she had no preference. However, she maintains that politically she prefers women (this was in front of a lesbian feminist audience who demanded that each panelist swear allegiance to women over men). As a feminist, she saw men as a group as oppressors; however, she did

not necessarily see particular men she cared for as oppressors. Her problem, she said, was the pressure she encountered from lesbians, who urged her to reject men completely, for political reasons.

The third panelist stated that although she went out with both men and women, she preferred women. When asked about the kind of men she preferred, she replied: "a feminist" and "effeminate." She brought up the difficulty of reconciling politics with one's love life and said that she would not give up her boyfriend even though he was the "wrong sex." She added that she'd never had a long relationship with a woman.

The fourth panelist flippantly described the erotic pleasure of multiple relationships and the fifth panelist called herself "omni-sexual." Polygamy was advocated by all the panelists as a solution to many problems that occur in a relationship. All five panelists said they lived the way they did because they would be unhappy if they lived any other way. They regarded their bisexuality as permanent; they saw heterosexuality and lesbianism as steps toward bisexuality. This is by no means the view of all bisexual women, however.

The audience reaction (many Lesbian Feminist Liberation members were monogamous lesbians) was that if the panelists

really loved women, they would, for political reasons, give up men. In other words, the fact that the panelists were physically and emotionally attracted to men was not reason enough for having sexual intercourse with men. Several members of the audience described situations in which bisexual women had gone out with lesbians and had really preferred men; therefore, lesbians had every right to distrust bisexual women. The panelists felt that they had "the best of both worlds," whereas many members of the audience felt that they, as lesbians, had taken the courageous, politically correct step in refusing to have sex with the "enemy" (men).

Bisexuals do not have to be polygamous; some alternate between females and males, and others alternate between people regardless of sex. I have personally met many more monogamous than polygamous lesbians and many more polygamous than monogamous bisexuals. In some cases, the antagonism shown by lesbians toward bisexual women is because of the latter's polygamy.

In an all-bisexual group, the bisexual coming out biography is scrutinized in a different way: women who declare they are bisexual are presumed to be bisexual. What counts is the emotional presentation of past and present sexual attractions to women. Whereas the bisexual panelists described relationships with both

females and males, and their difficulty in choosing between them (and between heterosexuality and homosexuality), the women in my consciousness-raising group concentrated on their initial attraction to females and how they came to realize they were not straight. It was taken for granted that group members had been or were "still" attracted to men. The purpose of the group was to have a place to discuss new feelings for women. We also wanted information: how to meet women, what to say, what to do. Initially--except for Carmen--we saw ourselves as fundamentally different from lesbians. Here we assumed, as many heterosexuals do, that a person who is a lesbian must be "abnormal" in "other" significant ways. In our society at the present time, the "normal human being" is a heterosexual white adult male.

Members of my consciousness-raising group gave their bisexual biographies to each other at Jane's West Village apartment May 2, 1973. Jane was an interior designer--the only wealthy member of the group--and her apartment looked like a model for House Beautiful magazine. There were a great many art books and interior design books on one small wall. A large Parson's table dominated the dining area. Track lighting--black and chrome--accentuated the ceiling. There was a huge dark wood *étagère* filled with knick knacks. (Two couches a cluttering.) The view from the wraparound terrace was spectacular:

each of us went outside and gasped as we saw the World Trade Center and the rest of Lower Manhattan in front of us.

Jane was much older than the rest of us, who looked like college students. Lynn actually was a graduate student at the New School, and Rebecca, who taught children with learning disabilities, was contemplating going back to school for her Master's. Carmen was a social worker, Elizabeth had been a librarian, and Marsha and Phyllis had done some counselling-- they used psychological terms now and then. Sunny, the only member who hadn't gone to college, was collecting unemployment and living in a commune. Occupation was something the group was far less interested in talking about than I had imagined. Whenever I tried to elicit "objective" information, such as occupation, age, religion, place of birth, ethnicity, etc., I felt like a sociologist rather than like a group member.

None of the group members resembled the stereotypical "dyke." Lynn and Elizabeth were overweight and looked less attractive to me than the others, though. I looked at each woman carefully and wondered if I'd have my first lesbian relationship with one of them. I was most attracted to Rebecca, who had dark hair, dark blue eyes, clear skin.

I was also attracted to Sunny, who had long light hair, a lovely smile, and who was slender. I was not particularly attracted to Phyllis because she had a rather doughy face and small eyes. Marsha had beautiful cascading blonde hair, but small blue eyes, and crowded teeth. Carmen had long dark curly-frizzy hair, bright dark eyes and long lashes, and a particularly slender waist. She reminded me vaguely of two of my "boyfriend's" lovers, and I felt ambivalent toward her. In addition, she wore "mannish" shoes and behaved aggressively. That is to say, she interrupted speakers to ask questions, and she seemed to want to direct the group. I had heard that consciousness-raising groups are leaderless, and I resented her "bullying."

Sunny was wearing a long skirt, I was wearing a very short skirt, and the others were wearing pants.

The first thing we discussed was "structure." Jane read us the N.O.W.(National Organization for Women) guidelines for consciousness-raising groups, and Carmen reminisced about her lesbian group, which had turned out badly. Jane also discussed her previous experience with consciousness-raising groups. "Should we decide in advance what we're going to discuss or

should we just come in and decide on the spur of the moment?"

We argued for some time. Some members had had bad experiences with too much structure and others had had bad experiences with too little structure. Finally, we all agreed to try structure. Jane had a list of suggested topics, and we briefly discussed them and thought of topics of our own:

- 1) How did you decide you're bisexual? What does it mean?
- 2) How do you relate to a female and a male lover at the same time?
- 3) Discuss problems you have relating to women sexually.
- 4) How do you relate to men and women differently?

The questions themselves reveal presuppositions about the nature of bisexuality. For example, the second question suggests that bisexuality makes "polygamous" relationships necessary. By "polygamous," we meant sexual and emotional relationships with more than one person. Usually, the term refers to marriage with three or more spouses. The third question suggests that we would have problems relating to women sexually. The fourth implies that we would not relate to women and men in the same way. That is to say, it implies an absence of species-consciousness.

We went around the group in a clockwise circle, each articulating what she had hoped to learn from the others. Jane, whose apartment it was, was the first to speak. She was separated from her husband; she saw him on Sundays. Jane had a female lover, who was a lesbian, and a male lover, whom we assumed was straight. She was worried about what the neighbors and doorpeople would think of all her lovers.

First I'm in the hammock((on her terrace)) with a woman and then with a man and there are all these people coming and going. The neighbors are like transplanted suburbanites; they're very nosy. It's very hard scheduling all my friends. (Abrams, Field Notes, 5/73).

Jane was having trouble "relating" to her female lover, and was upset that she didn't like her female and male lovers equally. Did she prefer her male lover because he was a male or because of his individual characteristics? she wondered. Although she'd considered herself heterosexual until the age of twenty, she felt that looking back, she'd always been interested in women.

I was the next to speak, and mentioned problems "relating" to both straight men and lesbians. I hadn't realized there was such a thing as bisexuality((laughter)) and I was glad to actually meet some bisexual women. I had always considered myself straight.

I had been emotionally close to my best friend in high school, and I wondered if I could ever be that close to a male. I was beginning to think that for me at least, straight relationships were hopeless. I was going out with a "polygamous" man who preferred another woman to me. Should I end the relationship, or would he end it for me, saying he had just wanted a casual affair "on the side"? I was ready for a change--a woman--and I hoped the group would provide the necessary moral support and advice. How does one meet a woman? What do you say? What is sex with a woman like? Why was I so nervous at the prospect of undressing in front of someone of my own sex? I had gone to the Firehouse(Lesbian Feminist Liberation), but I hadn't felt at ease((sympathetic glances)). I was attracted to women, but I didn't feel like a lesbian((nods)).

Carmen was next to speak. She had so much to say, she announced. Why hadn't Jane and I spoken longer? she asked. I froze at this remark. Who was she to decide how long each of us should speak? While Carmen had been married, she was saying, she had had a male lover "on the side." She had "fucked over" both her husband and her male lover; "sometimes I saw my lover, sometimes I didn't." She hadn't felt guilty, as she'd been hurt

by men. This helped "even up the score." When a lesbian at the bisexual meeting at the Firehouse had complained that bisexual women "fuck lesbians over," she had felt very concerned. "I couldn't see hurting another woman; I want to keep from hurting another woman." Carmen had known her current boyfriend for two and a half years.

I always thought of the relationship as temporary. At no time at all did I think it would last. But now that I look back on it, I see it as something that's been really beautiful. I think we have a wonderful relationship. (Abrams, Field Notes, 5/73).

Throughout the relationship, however, Carmen had threatened to give up men--as she put it--and Mike had threatened to move to California.

Elizabeth was the only currently married member of the group. Her husband was "a very possessive man." She had never experienced much sexual satisfaction with a man and she didn't care if a relationship with a woman turned out to be sexually unsatisfying as well. What she was looking for in a woman was an emotional closeness more than anything else.

It is interesting to note that group members who had never had sexual relations with another woman wondered/worried that

same-sex relations might not be as satisfying as opposite-sex relations. This is an example of "false consciousness" (see Marx's works). Some heterosexual males, among them influential psychologists and psychiatrists, deny that same-sex relations constitute "real" sexuality; homosexuality has been disparagingly described as "mutual masturbation." The corollary to the myth that a penis is necessary for a woman's pleasure is that, given the presence of a penis, pleasure is assured. Hite(1974) demonstrated that there are a great many heterosexual females who are sexually dissatisfied with the penises at their disposal. Moreover, female sexuality at the present time in this society is diffuse rather than genital-centered(Klaich, 1974: 45-49). Female and male sexuality differ because of social rather than psychological or biological conditions: sexuality is learned.

Of the nine group members, five(Carmen, Lynn, Marsha, Phyllis, Jane) had had same-sex relationships. Some women felt that, looking back, they saw they had always been attracted to other females; others said that it was only after age twenty or so that they had felt attracted to women. Only Carmen described herself as "primarily gay," a label we all

considered inappropriate. Some members had gone from heterosexuality to lesbianism to heterosexuality to bisexuality, others from heterosexuality to bisexuality to lesbianism, etc. There was no one pattern. I suddenly saw that our sexual preference labels were irrelevant: our sexuality was fluid rather than fixed. Despite socialization, we could reject femininity and masculinity, heterosexuality, and determinism.

Lynn, who spoke next, had never been married and had never wanted to marry. At twenty-two years of age, she was the youngest member of the group. Most of the other members were about twenty-seven years old; a few were over thirty. Lynn did not voice her feelings for women until, one day, her best friend said: "Isn't there something you should tell me?" Whereupon Lynn replied: "I love you." They then slept together.

Lynn had a long relationship with an Italian woman, Antonella, who was also having a relationship with an Italian man, Paolo. Predictably, Antonella, a bisexual, rejected Lynn for Paolo. "That's why lesbians don't trust bisexual women," someone pointed out. Lynn said nothing. Later, she said she had joined the group "to meet a woman."

Rebecca first got "turned on" to a woman during an encounter group session. She had never had sex with a woman, but intended to soon. She was living with a man, John, who had been left two or three times before by women for women. She hoped that in the future he'd trust her enough to tolerate her having a relationship with a woman. In the meantime, she was not going to tell him about her feelings for women. She also intended to conceal the identity of the consciousness-raising group. Although she wanted to go out with women, she also wanted to continue seeing John. Sex with him was excellent. However, only a woman could give her gentleness and understanding.

Sunny was divorced. She was living with an Englishman, Jeff, in a commune in the Village. She had never had sex with a woman, but she was certain her next relationship would be with a woman. She was very excited at this prospect. Sunny was highly critical of Jeff and the other men at the commune. Sex with Jeff was terrible, she said, and she didn't like "penetration."

The coming out biography is ahistorical and reflects sex stereotypes in American society today. The context of the biography, and its typicality, are not made clear.

Women coming out at Lesbian Feminist Liberation were not particularly interested in comparing their own experiences with those of other women in other societies or in this society at another period in time. The biography is a unifying account, and comparative "evidence" would be irrelevant. Moreover, few women I met had any background in "lesbian herstory"(as opposed to "history"). This is not surprising, in view of the feminist stress on the personal, particularly in consciousness-raising groups("What was your experience? Don't speak for others.").

My own sociological interest in such things as "biography construction" and the "reinterpretation of the past" struck some group members as bizarre, or too intellectual. I often felt torn between what I considered my "duty" as a sociologist and what I considered appropriate behavior as a group member. My persistent thought that I had to "make sense" of my notes, "come up with something," and "put the material in a framework," not to mention the frightening thought that what I wrote had to be "recognizable as sociology" by my three committee members all conflicted with what I saw as my role as a member of a bisexual women's consciousness-raising group:

have a relationship with a woman and talk about it at group sessions.

Just as the coming out biography is an attempt at a reconstruction of events and feelings and thoughts, so is this dissertation a reinterpretation of the past. Both have the advantages and disadvantages of "distance" from the actual events. In the case of the woman who now "loves women," she may reinterpret the past in the light of this new sexual preference.

It is impossible or nearly impossible to recreate one's own childhood ten or more years later. An important difference between the child and the adult is the child's narrowness of vision. I can examine my own childhood and retrieve lesbian and heterosexual "evidence"; I cannot, however, really remember what it was like to be eight years old, even though I have many memories of happy "events" which occurred at that time. My sense of self cannot be recreated through collages of "events." In addition, since I was ignorant of the terms "lesbian" and "heterosexual," even if I did find "proof" of either, so what?

If I study suicide in Scandinavia, for example, in the nineteenth century, and compare "data" from suicide in Japan in the Middle Ages, I am doing ahistorical analysis. Why should "suicide" have an eternal meaning? Why should "lesbianism"? What did suicide mean to a samurai? What did it mean to a particular samurai? What did love of other women mean to Sappho, who lived in ancient Greece and who witnessed the acceptance of same-sex love? What did lesbianism mean to Jan Oxenberg, who lived in twentieth-century America, and who witnessed lesbian/gay oppression and the fight for liberation? What does lesbianism mean to you?

Living my life and stepping back and labelling people and events and ideas are two contradictory activities. As I go about my everyday life, I call my friends by name. They are not typical of any class of people (students, actresses, teachers, provincials, democrats, Americans) unless I am being critical of them, in which case they seem to be typical academics, members of my consciousness-raising group, men, native New Yorkers, etc. As they become typical, they lose their individual characteristics and become stock characters:

- 1) What are gays like? What are lesbians like?
What are bisexuals like, and what are heterosexuals like?
- 2) What does a typical heterosexual man or woman look like?
- 3) What are the causes of heterosexuality?
- 4) Genetic or environmental?
- 5) Can it be cured?
- 6) Is it like a virus, highly contagious?
- 7) How long does it last?
- 8) Is it an immature state?
- 9) How can they be satisfied with that kind of sex life?
- 10) Why are they heterosexual and not me?
- 11) How can I avoid it?

This turning around of the question is a common tactic used by lesbian and gay liberation groups. If the questions asked about gays were asked about heterosexuals, as in the case above, they would seem funny. This is because heterosexuality is taken for granted in this society at the present time, and all deviations from this norm are labelled inferior, and are stigmatized.

Many people talk at length about their "true nature."

What they consider important is to be what you were meant to be, which is what you were born as. They do not see sexual preference and gender roles as choices. The coming out biography is a description of a passage from ignorance to self-knowledge, in which the signs of the "truth" are shown dimly in the past (all is already there; it just must be recognized). As in religious conversion, the experience itself is exhilarating, as it makes the commonplace striking.

Chapter 4. Consciousness-raising

I.

The goal of the women's liberation branch is a raised consciousness, that is, new and politicized understanding that the aspects presumed to be the most elementary of women's lives (putting on lipstick, shaving one's legs, having a baby, going to a doctor) were imbued with prescriptions and proscriptions about the roles of women. And furthermore, all women were subject to similar treatments. As first conceived in consciousness raising, the frustrations and limitations that women had felt privately were to be publicly acknowledged. In the private and supportive atmosphere of women's groups, individual experiences were defined as political problems....

While women's groups appear to have served the purpose of providing support for individual women and of redefining gender roles to some extent, the expected goal of increased political activity on the part of women was not achieved. While women explored personal, individualized discontents, it was difficult to link this awareness to an awareness of the needs for change in political power of a collective nature (Davidson, L. and Gordon, L., 1979: 204-205).

The aim of the participant observer is to understand people from their own frame of reference. He ((She)) cannot accept the Comtean assumption that one perspective (the inner) is to be explained solely in terms of another (the outer). He ((She)) believes that the inner can be explained in terms of itself (Bruyn, 1966: 28).

Consciousness-raising is a technique, Marxist informed, whose aim is to help people to see that there are other ways of viewing taken-for-granted things than our way. This device is used, for instance, in women's liberation groups to arouse the awareness of women that theirs is a common plight, which can be remedied. While Beckett and other dramatists of this school have been called apolitical, their drama may be seen as a consciousness-raising device--one that has been greeted and responded to in similar ways to the reactions of women who denigrate the women's movement, refusing to acknowledge the absurdity of their own situation. Once one faces the possibility that there are more ways of living, of perceiving, of becoming, than one's own way, there is no turning back. One must then make decisions, perhaps painful decisions. (Morris, 1977: 87).

Life on earth is hell. Some people have nightmares about their job, their family, their friends, and school, while others starve intermittently or die of boredom. The natural environment, while beautiful, can be a source of death (floods, unusually cold weather, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, unusually hot weather, etc.). What is life? A radio announcer, speaking about Wagner's Ring, said: "Life is a terminal disease." How can we renew not just the individual but the whole society? We must examine our beliefs for false consciousness,¹ perhaps in a group committed to compare our beliefs and provide emotional, intellectual, and political support for each other.

¹ Etc.

We know well enough that even the most useful abstractions cannot fit experience perfectly or exhaustively. (Hoffmann, 1975: 17).

II.

Our consciousness-raising sessions had the following structure: 1) arriving; 2) waiting for others to arrive; 3) starting the session; 4) consciousness-raising; 5) ending the session; and 6) leaving.

Each week the group met at a different member's apartment. Most sessions took place at the most convenient locations: the Village or Chelsea. We had more meetings at Lynn's Chelsea apartment than at any other apartment. We hardly ever went to Rebecca's Bronx apartment: it was the last stop on the "D" train. In addition, Rebecca wanted to conceal the identity of our group from her boyfriend. When we did go to the Bronx, we took the subway together, hoping we would not be mugged. My East Village and Carmen's Washington Heights apartments were out of the way and in neighborhoods which frightened us. Elizabeth's Brooklyn apartment was far away but in a relatively safe neighborhood. Rebecca and Sunny sometimes chauffeured us around. In the course of the group, several members moved, especially Sunny, whom we followed to Washington Square, the Upper West Side, Little Italy,

and Brooklyn.

I often arrived on time; Rebecca was frequently late. Sometimes I ran into other group members on my way to our meeting place. The three or four of us would make ourselves at home, and talk about the things friends talk about. Arriving and waiting were the most relaxing parts of the session.

I arrived on time. I was the second to arrive at Lynn's Chelsea apartment. Elizabeth was there; Lynn had gone out for orange juice. Elizabeth then went out for coffee, and I stayed to answer the door. Shortly afterward, Lynn returned and we talked about inexpensive, good places to eat in her neighborhood. (Abrams, Field Notes, May 16, 1973).

Elizabeth and Sunny were going up the steps of Sunny's building when I arrived. We went into the kitchen and Elizabeth started cooking. A male commune member appeared and talked to the three of us briefly. Sunny began to criticize him and the other men at the commune. Elizabeth began her third dinner. Two men sat down and I began to talk to them about communes I'd visited in 1969-1970. (Abrams, Field Notes, May 23, 1973).

What we talked about often depended on where we were. In Brooklyn, we discussed places we knew in Brooklyn; at Carmen's apartment, surrounded by her paintings, we discussed art; at Sunny's commune (above) we discussed communes; at my apartment, we once discussed a book I was reading (Carmen knew the author). Whereas during the session we often traced events in time, before

the session, we tended to focus on the present.

While waiting for others to arrive, then, we made ourselves at home. I generally took off my shoes or boots; Elizabeth often took a shower at Sunny's apartment(s); Lynn usually began rolling joints (marijuana "cigarettes"); Carmen often gave advice. Before one session, Carmen told Sunny how to grow avocados.

Carmen sliced the avocado and remarked "What a huge pit!" She ran tap water over it, picked up a glass of water in which rested an avocado pit held up by toothpicks. "You already have one," she said to Sunny, "but it's upside down." "No, it's not," said Sunny. "Yes, it is," replied Carmen. "The large part is supposed to be at the bottom. Maybe you did it right but it turned over." "No," said Sunny; "I'm growing one that was done the same way." "Show me." Sunny left the kitchen, followed by Carmen and me. "Where is it?" asked Carmen. "Here." Sunny moved the leaves of one plant and we saw the avocado plant behind it. Carmen touched the pit. "It's a nice plant," I said. "You did it right here," said Carmen. "The large part is on the bottom. The ones in the kitchen are the opposite way." "Yes, that's right," I said. "The pointed part is on top here, whereas the ones in the kitchen have the flat part up." "Let me see," said Sunny. We all went back to the kitchen. Carmen picked up the pit and said "Look." "You're right," said Sunny. Carmen put the pit back the right way. (Abrams, Field Notes, October 3, 1973).

Before the meeting, members move about, talk whenever they like, and ask a great many questions: How is so-and-so? Is your cold better? When did you last go swimming? What did you think of the dance? Why were you depressed last weekend?

Although the session was regarded as the time for "heavy" (serious) talk, it sometimes happened that members discussed--in groups of two or three--their problems better before the session. Lynn was generally silent during the session but quite talkative during the waiting period. She was also talkative at dances, bars, and on the street. Sometimes the pre-session talk was extended into the session, as happened with the popular topics "Appearance" and "Polygamy."

Before the meeting, we would prepare dinner. Talk centered around food and the arrival of other group members. In addition, we were busy setting the table and bringing food from the kitchen to the table. We did not begin eating until most members were present. Our meals were delicious, so delicious that no one wanted to end them and begin the session. At one point, Lynn said she would talk first if she could prolong her dinner a little beforehand. Generally, the dinner period ended when 1) all had finished eating or 2) when someone suggested we begin the session. There was a sense that we were there to talk, not to eat; however, we found eating enjoyable and talking during the session a "chore." Although some members happily described the group as a "social group," others complained we would not

succeed in raising our consciousness unless we devoted more time and effort to "heavy" matters.

The session would start when someone indicated a willingness to take a turn. One person might say "I want to talk about such-and-such very much." "Then why don't you start," someone would respond. Sometimes, nobody wanted to start. We might look down into our laps and hope we were invisible; or Lynn might announce she did not wish to talk that evening. "Well, then I'll start," someone would say.

At pauses in the conversation, we would ask questions. A question didn't necessarily terminate a person's turn. Often we would be asked to clarify something by bringing in background information. Once other members understood what was being talked about, the turn-taker could decide whether to continue or to end the turn. There was a rule that a turn-taker was allowed to talk until she wished to stop; however, overly long turns were discouraged. Other members were also entitled to speak, and time had to be divided up. Although we ostensibly went around the room in a circle, if a member became inspired by a turn-taker's talk, she could ask to speak out of turn. One way to do this was to link

her conversation with that of the previous turn-taker.

The topic for discussion was "How do you relate differently to men and women?" Lynn began by talking about a man in her office. She had trouble telling him what she thought of him; she had never had any trouble telling women what she thought of them. I said I felt shy with women. Carmen developed the topic of shyness with women. Several other members said they also felt shy with women than with men. (Abrams, Field Notes, May 16, 1973).

Sessions ended 1) when members decided it was "late";
 2) when nobody else wanted to speak; 3) when all had spoken;
 or 4) when members, talking about their next destination, began
 to give reasons for leaving.

We all seemed to become restless at the same time: 11 P.M. Carmen said she was sick and had to go home. Lynn said she was tired and wanted to go home. Rebecca said she had to meet someone at the Dutchess. Elizabeth, Rebecca, and I went to the Dutchess. (Abrams, Field Notes, Sep't. 27, 1973).

III.

One night at Bonnie and Clyde's, after our group session, Rebecca said she was going to ask one person to dance that evening. Rebecca and I were both upset because no one outside our group had asked either of us to dance. Sunny, who was more "aggressive," had already found a lover, and Carmen, who had come

out several years before, had been going out with a woman, Lacey, for some time. Carmen knew a great many women at Lesbian Feminist Liberation and at the two lesbian bars we frequented, Bonnie and Clyde's (now called Bonnie's) and the Dutchess. Rebecca and I were sitting at a table, drinking Black Russians, watching the others dance, and wondering if perhaps we just were not attractive to members of our own sex. Finally, a woman who was either very drunk or very stoned asked Rebecca to dance. The woman danced "sexually, aggressively," and Rebecca "passively" let her touch her. Later, Rebecca said she'd enjoyed the dance and had also "felt good" about the woman. I decided I would ask someone to dance. I walked over to a black woman in a low-cut halter top and asked her to dance. I was nervous. She looked at me without interest and replied "well, all right." As we danced, I tried to think of something to say, but my mind blanked out. The other woman, who looked bored, was silent, too. I felt relieved and disappointed when the music stopped.

Then I saw a woman near the pool table. She was standing in a corner, watching the "bitches" play pool. She had long, dark braids, a peasant blouse, and looked "natural." I pointed her out to Rebecca; she said she approved. The woman

looked like someone who would be a good friend, I thought. Undoubtedly, she would love flowers, beautiful poetry, and long walks.....Rebecca told me to position myself nearer the pool table; perhaps the woman would notice me and we would immediately think of many things to say to each other. Filled with a romantic image, I was unable to move. I kept glancing at the woman, and then drank another Black Russian with Rebecca. By the time I was ready to get up and walk over to her, she was gone. Carmen, always observant, said the woman had left with someone. I was crushed.

Rebecca and I began to complain to Carmen about our "problems with women." We asked her how to decide if and when to ask someone to dance.

You look around the room. Pick out someone who interests you. Watch her. See if she dances with different people or if she always dances with the same person. Try to see if she notices you and if she seems interested in you. If so, ask her to dance.
(Abrams, Field Notes, May 1973).

When we complained that other women did not seem interested in us, Carmen replied that perhaps we didn't know the signals. "If someone is signalling to you and you don't respond, she'll give up." I wondered if lesbian signals were any different from

the heterosexual signals we had all learned to take for granted. Perhaps, in observing lesbian signals, I would begin to see heterosexual signals in a fresh way.

Most of the time, I danced with group members. When Sunny tried to lead, I became angry; she responded by calling me names: passive, femme. Lynn liked to touch my back when we danced slow dances; again, I found her too aggressive. When I was with an aggressive woman, I became shy and withdrawn. I enjoyed dancing with Rebecca, who was neither butch nor femme, neither masculine nor feminine: gender neutral. I wondered if I could become more assertive without becoming more aggressive. Rebecca thought this was possible; this was one of her goals, too.

In an effort to become stronger physically, I began swimming regularly; I also took a few jiu-jitsu lessons. Group members--especially Sunny, who was studying karate and who wanted to become a karate instructor--were supportive of my new interests, but my "boyfriend" seemed threatened by them: "Don't beat me up," he cautioned.

Although the group was supportive of physical fitness and of sexuality, there seemed to be a taboo against physical

affection between and among group members. Carmen supported the taboo and Rebecca and I were very much opposed to it.

Rebecca: At my encounter group, we touch each other all the time. After the evening's over, I feel very, very good. But after this group, I feel very frustrated. We're all attracted to other women, but we can't touch each other. Carmen says her old group broke up because two women in the group had a lovers' quarrel. Why should that necessarily happen in this group? Why do we let her order us around all the time? Why can't we be more assertive?
(Abrams, Field Notes, July 1973).

Carmen became so upset every time we brought up the topic that we never fully discussed it or took a vote. In a sense, then, Carmen's negative experiences (her past) with her previous ((lesbian)) group determined our group's policies (our present). Carmen vetoed a great many proposals by citing disastrous effects on her previous group.

At our July 25, 1973 meeting, we discussed our feelings for women and men. Elizabeth began by saying she intended to move out of the apartment she was sharing with her husband, or she would take turns sharing it with her husband. The woman she'd been seeing was also married, and had an arrangement with her husband whereby the person who was sleeping alone slept on the living room

couch and the other partner went into the bedroom with her or his lover. Elizabeth thought this was the perfect solution to her own problems. "It will never work; it's too rational and doesn't take jealousy into account," said Rebecca. "How will your husband feel when he sees you going into the bedroom with a woman?" I asked. Elizabeth shrugged her shoulders. "I used to dislike most men, then I liked only my husband, now I can barely tolerate him," Elizabeth said. Sunny interrupted, saying she didn't even want to hear about men. She began to talk about dropping out of the group. "Some people are still into men," she said, glancing at Rebecca and me, "but I'm not any more." "Are you thinking of joining a lesbian group?" asked Rebecca. "I don't know." "We don't have to talk about men that much, if it's so painful for you," said one member. "We really haven't mentioned men much in weeks," I added. "Well, I don't want to keep you from talking about men if you want to," said Sunny, "but I just don't want to hear that kind of talk." "Well, how about not talking about men at all unless a problem comes up," suggested someone. "That's impractical; if you're seeing men, you're going to have problems you want to discuss," said Sunny. "Well, we don't want you to drop out of the group," several of us replied.

Rebecca complained that she couldn't talk about women with her boyfriend and now she wouldn't want to talk about men at group sessions. "I find I am being censored by both sexes, and I don't like it," Rebecca said angrily.

I revived an incident which still infuriated me. "When I said I'd met someone new, you all said I should tell him I needed a woman, not a man. You said he was the wrong sex. He wasn't the wrong sex; there is no such thing as a wrong sex. I'm looking for a compatible person, regardless of the shape and size of their genitals. You know what my 'boyfriend' is like; you should have been happy to hear I'd met someone else. Instead, you were so negative that afterwards I wished I had followed Lynn's example and remained silent."

"What kind of bisexual group is this? We seem to be divided along lines of sexual preference," said Carmen. "Maybe I'm not a bisexual," said Sunny; "and maybe some people, who joined the group to share experiences with women lovers, are using the group to avoid meeting a woman; instead, they meet new men."

Suddenly we found we were arguing bitterly about prostitution.

Elizabeth: A prostitute has the worst job in all of society.

No one values prostitution. To prostitute yourself is one of the worst things a person can do. Prostitutes are continually degraded, they have no friends other than prostitutes, they have to hide their occupation.

Sunny: The body is sacred and the vagina is the most sacred part. The body is much more sacred than the mind.

Lynn: I think the mind and the body are equally important.

Mona: Most jobs are degrading, secretarial work is degrading, and even a lot of jobs men have are degrading.

Elizabeth: You complain because men whistle at you on the street. I wish men found me attractive enough to whistle at. Fat women and prostitutes are despised in this society. Your self-esteem sinks to zero if all of society dislikes you....

Elizabeth and Sunny said prostitution should be abolished. Rebecca and I said it would always exist enough really deep, broad social change--revolution--took place. We therefore favored legalizing it. The discussion became more and more heated. I suggested we drop the subject. Lynn announced she had nothing more to say. Elizabeth turned to Lynn and said nastily, "You can

be the one at our group massage." Sunny was all in favor of a group massage. "I don't think Carmen will approve," I said.

Carmen was absent.

Sunny stood up and took off her candy pink sweater. "It's too femme," she said, turning around, exposing her breasts and back. "Do you think it looks better backwards?" she asked. "Well, do I look sexy?" "Yes," said Rebecca. No one else said anything. I looked the other way. Earlier, Sunny, announcing she was hot, had taken off her jeans. Now her jeans were on but her upper body was on display. I decided Sunny was an exhibitionist, a trait I dislike, and I was reminded of our argument about prostitution.

A few days later, Lynn phoned me to complain about Sunny's "exhibitionism," Elizabeth's hostility to her (Lynn), Sunny's hostility to me, and the split in the group. We resolved to discuss some of these topics when Carmen returned from vacation.

Jane had dropped out of the group to join a therapy group in the country; Phyllis had dropped out because she was "too busy"; and Marsha dropped out because of the group's bias against men. In May 1973, four members--Marsha, Phyllis, Jane, and Carmen--were having relationships with women and men simultaneously. The

rest of us--Rebecca, Sunny, Elizabeth and I--hoped to follow their example of bisexuality. This conception of bisexuality (both-sex relationships) linked "polygamy" with bisexuality. Another conception of bisexuality is serial "monogamy" with persons of either sex.

As the group developed, and as males were criticized and females were idealized, the remaining members were divided along lines of sexual preference. In July 1973, Sunny and Elizabeth were uninterested in men, Lynn preferred women ("I prefer vaginas to penises," she said), and Rebecca and Carmen were interested in both women and men. I became increasingly committed to species-consciousness, and viewed bisexuality, homosexuality, and heterosexuality as artificial labels which divided the species homo sapiens according to sex and sexual preference.

On July 25, 1973, the group had six members, two of whom were thinking of dropping out. We wondered if we should admit new members, or risk folding completely. As usual, Carmen was the most experienced and the most pessimistic. There would be problems if we admitted new members, and problems if we didn't. Her former consciousness-raising group had collapsed at the

introduction of new members, and she feared the same thing would happen to our group. On the other hand, if we did nothing, we would not have enough members for "real" consciousness-raising (guidelines suggested eight to twelve members as the optimum size).

In August 1973, we all became more integrated into the social world of bars and dances.

In mid-August 1973, Lynn and I went to a Leo party at Bonnie and Clyde's. The party, in honor of those born under the sign of the zodiac Leo, was well-organized and well-attended by both whites and blacks--especially by black butches in drag(men's clothes). I met a Leo who reminded me of many stereotypes: she was a fat black butch; she thought lavender was a "sissy" color; she was prejudiced against Puerto Ricans ("I don't mind swimming in the same pool with them as long as they don't make the place dirty," she said); and she wanted "to do all the things a man should do for a woman but doesn't--like opening car doors." A firm believer in gender roles, she stated that she, a butch, would never go out with another butch. She also described herself as "a masculine woman," and me as "a very feminine woman." Contrary to the stereotypes, she had had sexual experiences with men ("Come back," she told one

man, "you're not leaving yet--I don't feel a thing") before deciding she preferred women. (Virtually all the lesbians I met in the course of my research--1973 through 1979--had had sexual experiences with males. Some had been married and had children.)

On Friday, August 24, 1973, I went to my first lesbian dance. Lynn and I had arranged to go to Lesbian Feminist Liberation together so that if nobody asked either of us to dance, we could always dance with each other. When we arrived--on time, which was too early--there were only about 15-25 women there, sitting in groups. The music hadn't started yet. Women had been urged to "come as your favorite lesbian." On the wall were names of women Lesbian Feminist Liberation members considered lesbians: Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, Jill Johnston, Joan Baez, Janis Joplin, etc. Some of these women have also been considered bisexual and, at certain periods of their lives, heterosexual (sexual preference is fluid rather than fixed). The only women I saw dressed up were Lesbian Feminist Liberation regulars--a half-dozen of them. They were Amelia Earhart, whose sexuality is unclear; Gertrude Stein, "who preferred Alice B. Toklas to Ernest Hemingway"; and a Girl Scout. The latter had one row of

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Girl Scout badges and one row of lesbian buttons such as "Dyke," "Gay Pride." Other popular buttons were "Stars and Dykes Forever," "Lesbians Ignite," and a button with the biological symbols of two women.

I danced with Lynn and Elizabeth the whole time except for one dance with a black woman who asked me to dance. Lynn was asked to dance once, and she asked someone to dance once. Carmen was at Lacey's dinner party; otherwise, she would have been at the dance with us.

Sunny and her new lover, an active member of Lesbian Feminist Liberation, appeared and asked Lynn, Elizabeth, and me to smoke marijuana with them. We went outside to a parking lot and smoked quite a few joints. When Sunny and her lover started kissing each other and rubbing against each other in a sexual way, Lynn, Elizabeth, and I went back to the dance.

Later, when Sunny and her lover were in charge of playing records for a one-hour shift, I walked over to them and began discussing the biggest hits of the summer of 1973: "I'll Always Love My Mama" and "Do You Want To Dance?" Sunny was highly emotional about the music, and equated good music with good

lesbian energy.

Lynn and I gave out free soft drinks downstairs. Doing work was supposed to be the best way to meet women, but nobody wanted to talk to us.

Sunny and Elizabeth had met women by joining groups and Rebecca had just met a woman at a bar.

Lynn and I spent the rest of the evening talking and dancing, or sitting and watching the other dancers.

In September and October 1973, as we were becoming integrated into the world of Lesbian Feminist Liberation, we made a foray into the organization which was then evolving, Bisexual Women's Liberation (provisional name). The party on Friday, September 14, 1973 was attended by both bisexuals and lesbians. Women from Lesbian Feminist Liberation attended to give support ("They knew it would be a bomb if they didn't come," said Carmen and Elizabeth); however, several of these women refused to pay the admission fee ("They expected to be rewarded for their attendance; the reward was free admission," said Carmen). Many women complained about the preponderance of lesbians. Several women from my consciousness-

raising group had already "broken through" at Lesbian Feminist Liberation and saw no point in meeting "bisexual" women rather than "lesbians." If the organization had been founded in April or May 1973, when we were coming out as bisexuals, our group probably would have made more of an effort to contribute ideas and time to the organization. Now, we were passive members: we were on the mailing list (Rebecca used my address so that John wouldn't know she was bisexual); we attended functions; we paid admission fees.

On November 11, 1973, Barbara Love and Sidney Abbott spoke about bisexuality (even though they are lesbians) to a group of women at the Women's Center, in Chelsea. Bisexual Women's Liberation sponsored the talk. I taped the event. Here are some excerpts:

Sidney Abbott: "I'm struggling with the same sort of thing that Barbara ((Love)) I think was struggling with in her talk. That both of us have related to men, but that we identify as lesbians. For example, I don't know why I made that identification exactly. Perhaps if relationships with men in the 1950s and 40s when I was working out my ideas about these things had been easier,

and had been more on a give-and-take basis, of equals, I might very well be a bisexual today. I don't know. At this point, I did move very quickly through a transition period in my mid-twenties to identifying as a lesbian."

Barbara Love: "A bisexual is someone who says they're bisexual."

Sidney Abbott: "There was the story of a bisexual woman who liked a man who was like a tiger and a woman who was like a rose. How can you compare a tiger to a rose?" ²

Woman #1 in audience: "I know a lot of straight women who consider the male to be the enemy, and I think they've got their heads on right."

Woman #2 in audience: "I'm bisexual, and my sexuality has nothing to do with my politics. I go to bed with men, I go to bed with women. I enjoy a person.... I enjoy some people more than other people, but I don't make a genital distinction. I make an individual distinction....Men are the enemy politically, but I enjoy sleeping with my enemies."

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Lynn always liked to say, after that, that she liked women like tigers and men like roses. This is role reversal.

Barbara Love: "I like women physically. I prefer the softness.

When I last remember men, they were hairy, etc."

Woman #3 in audience: "I have great social mobility. I can fit in just about anywhere. It doesn't bother me at all that I'm bisexual and am with heterosexuals at one point or with homosexuals at another. What does bother me are the people who are segregated into little groups and they get very clannish and very afraid of all the other little groups. I'm tired of seeing this..... polarization. Politically, the greatest thing that could happen would be for everyone to become bisexual right away."

Woman #4 in audience: "The whole idea behind women's liberation is for women to do what they want to do....All lifestyles are equally valid: gay, straight, bisexual, asexual, etc."

Woman #5 in audience: "One of the greatest oppressions that women have gone through is being identified sexually. And I'm hearing a lot of that tonight. And I don't want to be either passed on or failed on because my body is soft or hard....I want acceptability for who I am, not for what my body looks like."

Barbara Love: "We need labels now, to change laws. Maybe we can use you a hundred years from now. What you're saying is futuristic."

Sidney Abbott: "That's the essence of the women's movement: self-definition. Not 'you are....' but 'I am....'"

The Barbara Love-Sidney Abbott talk on bisexuality and the discussion which followed were the high moments of the life of Bisexual Women's Liberation. Six months later, one of the founders of the organization communicated privately to me that the organization had failed because of lack of interest on the part of its members. "And the founders had other commitments and could not do it all ; now I am comfortable with lesbians and don't need a separate bisexual women's organization."

The result of the existence of a bisexual women's group was that women began to ask what bisexuality was. Here are the answers I heard frequently:

Answer 1: Bisexuality is the midpoint between enlightenment (homosexuality) and depravity (heterosexuality).

Answer 2: Bisexuality is the sum of homosexuality and heterosexuality.

Answer 3: There is no such thing as bisexuality. People who call themselves bisexuals are really closeted heterosexuals.

Answer 4: There is no such thing as bisexuality. People who call themselves bisexual are really gay but afraid to admit it.

Answer 5: Bisexuals are people who call themselves bisexuals.

Answer 6: Bisexuality is a label.

Answer 7: Bisexuality is very different from homosexuality and heterosexuality. Bisexuality has no exclusionary policies, unlike heterosexuality (none of the same sex) and homosexuality (none of the opposite sex). Ideally, bisexuality means regardless of sex rather than both-sex. In a species-conscious society, people would have emotional and sexual relations with each other qua (as) human beings, not as female or male; masculine or feminine; homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual; white, black, brown, red, yellow,... In a species-conscious society, people would choose people they liked as individuals.

At my consciousness-raising group the discussion was about our self-definition as a member of the group "bisexuals."

We seem to have created an identity for ourselves, an identity of bisexuality, and we seem to have very similar problems. It's almost uncanny.

When Carmen was talking, Rebecca said she was "definitely at the

same place." Several members talked about the desire to become close to another person, and the conflicting desire to pull away from that person. They also discussed the conflicts between going out with a man and going out with a woman.

Carmen eagerly began the discussion. Her relationship with her male lover had developed very slowly; in fact, it was only recently--within the last few weeks--that they had gotten to know each other really well. The problem was that he was planning to move to California. Carmen knew that he always talked of moving to California, just as she always talked of "giving up men." This time, however, she thought he was not "bluffing." In addition, the fact that the relationship was working so well frightened her, and she found herself rushing around to dances and bars in an effort to meet a woman. But the relationship with her boyfriend was always better than any of her relationships with women, and this disturbed her. Elizabeth responded that perhaps she didn't really want to be close to another woman.....Carmen denied this hotly, saying:

In the back of my mind is this feeling that there is this potential for a deeper relationship with another woman, just because we are both women, but the reality of the situation is something else. Maybe the problem is that I met a man first, and when I compare a new relationship with a woman to a long-term stable relationship with a man, the

woman always seems less important.
(Abrams, Field Notes, Sep't. 1973).

Carmen quickly added that she didn't intend "to give up women."

Rebecca said she felt close to John. She was, however, disturbed by the fact that although he knew her better than anyone else, he still didn't know about her feelings for other women. She couldn't bring herself to tell him what he would surely regard as "bad news." And what did she have to offer women, as she was already close to John, she wondered aloud.

Carmen nodded. Rebecca had just met a woman who was living with her parents; John was living with Rebecca. Where could they meet? Sunny had often gone to Lynn's apartment with her female lover; but Rebecca didn't like the idea of imposing on Lynn. Rebecca explained that her female lover seemed to be afraid of opening up:

She must be afraid of being hurt. At first I couldn't understand her oscillations. Now I feel I have to go out of my way to reassure her, to compensate for the fact that I'm living with a man. It's hard for me, and sometimes I feel my stomach knot up. (Abrams, Field Notes, Sep't. 1973).

When asked for my opinion, I replied that I felt sorry for both Carmen's and Rebecca's female lovers. This developed into a heated discussion about "projection," a psychological term used often by

Carmen, Elizabeth, and Rebecca. Then we talked about Sunny, who was absent, saying things were probably much easier for her, as she was involved in a "monogamous" relationship with a woman.

Then we talked about "monogamy" versus "polygamy," and bisexuality.

That would be simplifying it, calling it monogamy or polygamy. It's easier to go out with two men than a woman and a man. We may be women, but we're all used to men. We've all gone out with more than one man at a time, but women are new to us. If you want to go out with women, you have to get into the whole gay scene, which means that you have to move in a fairly structured world; you're not meeting women on the street, at work (where you're pretending to be straight), or through friends (it takes a lot of time to find lesbian friends). You're dependent on lesbian places, such as organizations, for dances; dances take place at certain times. Or you go to the bars, and that's always at night. You go to scheduled meetings. Or join the softball team--that's during the day, on weekends. You have to be seen around a lot. The problem --the other problem-- with women is that we're used to men and it's hard to relate to someone who's psychologically and physically different from men. It's hard even though you know you're alienated from members of your own sex. Knowing this doesn't make matters any easier. (Abrams, Field Notes, Sep't. 1973).

Carmen suggested that the one thing which distinguished us from heterosexuals was that even when we were "relating" only to men, we were conscious of the fact that we found our own sex attractive.

Lynn was silent most of the time. I wondered what she was thinking.

A few days later, Carmen, Lynn and I went to the Museum of the American Indian together. Afterwards, we went to Carmen's apartment, which was nearby, and discussed roles. Lynn was describing what had happened to her at a bar. A woman had asked her to dance-- "a very dykey woman"--and was leading her. Lynn said:

I pushed the woman away and told her she was leading me. "I don't like it. I won't take this from men and I certainly won't take this from women."
(Abrams, Field Notes, Oct. 1973).

Lynn said she had felt "really good" after asserting herself.

Carmen thought Lynn had been too harsh, and said that it must have been "a real down" for the other woman.

Lynn also discussed her relationship with her male lover, who had fortunately stopped asking her if she wanted to be whipped. She had just started sleeping with him. At first she had been upset because she had hoped her next lover would be a woman. Why? She preferred the softness of a woman's body. At first she had had trouble going from the lesbian world to being with a man. Then she learned to think only of women when she was with women and to think only of her male lover when she was with him. Her problem was that he was about to take a one-year trip around the world.

Then Lynn explained why she had been silent at consciousness-raising sessions.

It's all gossip. It's worthless.
If people don't have anything better
to say, then they shouldn't talk.
(Abrams, Field Notes, Oct. 1973).

Carmen talked about a woman she had "lost" to another woman, who had "come on sexually" to the first woman before Carmen had had a chance to switch from "coming on in a friendly way" to "coming on in a sexual way." Finally the first woman seemed to be alone, and Carmen rushed over to her. They talked. The woman explained she had a problem: she couldn't stay interested in a woman who appeared interested in her. The story was infinitely more complex, with twists and turns and involving at least ten people. The result was that Carmen's interest in the first woman was not reciprocated, and Carmen was depressed.

Then Carmen, changing the subject, informed Lynn and me that we had been "duds" at bars and at dances because "everyone must have perceived you two as a couple." The only remedy was for each of us to go to lesbian places alone, and to look lonely. Rebecca had told us recently that Wednesday night was "friends" night, not the night for meeting new women. She had urged Lynn and me to switch

nights. However, it was more convenient to go to the Dutchess after consciousness-raising: Wednesday nights.

As time went on, many meetings resembled each other. Routines had been established, and facilitated a certain kind of interaction. It has been said that social order is visible in its negation, in its disorder. Garfinkel (1967) liked to produce social disorder, to make trouble with the familiar. On October 10, 1973 our group experienced social disorder--at my East Village apartment--by accident. I had had a nosebleed--an uncommon occurrence for me--at the swimming pool a few hours earlier and was now, exhausted, in bed instead of performing my "hostess" chores. As each person arrived and asked what the matter was, I told my story, which was always misunderstood.

Lynn arrived first, and then Carmen. Both sat on my bed. Lynn was trying to roll a joint and Carmen was questioning me. Carmen asked me if I had been hit with a soft ball, and why hadn't I put ice on my nose. Lynn said ice would help. I hadn't thought of ice. I thought Carmen had said soft blow. "No, hard," I said. She paused for a moment. "You were hit with a hard ball in the swimming pool?" Sunny arrived and suggested I try ice.

The rest of the evening , we dropped things or crashed into furniture. Carmen crashed into my turntable; she also dropped food on the floor. I dropped food on the floor. Elizabeth dropped ice cream(we were celebrating my birthday a few days early) into her lap. Lynn dropped grass (marijuana) on the floor; she also had considerable difficulty in rolling joints. Sunny acted out everything, usually with the help of her kerchief or simple props. We were all nonverbal at what was typically a verbal activity: consciousness-raising. Words were like subtitles to our actions.

At one point, to dramatize something, Sunny put her leg through the hole in my hammock. Usually, people pretended there was no hole. Wearing blue and white striped overalls, a red and white checked blouse and a blue and white kerchief, Sunny used her clothes as props, too. She kept snapping and unsnapping her overalls, making different shapes out of her kerchief, depending on what she was saying. When she said she had once thought that in the future, she and her boyfriend would be in a rural commune in Canada, with babies, travelling around, Sunny put the kerchief on her head. She looked like a pioneer woman. When she said she finally saw she wasn't going to do that, she folded the kerchief and put it back into her pocket.

Rebecca stood up at one point, violating the rule that group members stay seated at meetings. Someone had to turn her toward her seat and say "Down!" as one addresses a dog. She danced around, sat down, and fell asleep, violating another rule: members must be wide-awake. Sunny woke her up, calling her "Jack," a name she had never used before. Then Lynn called me "Studs"--a pair of jeans I'd found in the trash had studs on them.

After Elizabeth had spoken, she complained she had "bulshitted." We disagreed, asking her if she wanted to take another turn. No. Her problem was that even though she had been going out with several women, she had been unable to form the deep emotional attachment she wanted with a woman. Her experiences with women contradicted the lesbian rhetoric she had learned to believe.

Sunny said with great pride that she had recently gone into a bakery, had been mistaken for a man, and had been served ahead of the "women." The rest of us insisted it was disgusting that men should be served ahead of women in the first place, and that the solution was not to dress like men.

Rebecca took a turn, saying she really had to tell John she was bisexual. She spent an entire day rehearsing a speech,

but he came home late and looked so tired that she didn't think there was any point in telling him then.

Lynn said she had been so "spaced out" that Sunday that she hadn't been able to leave her apartment.

Carmen wondered whether there was an astrological reason for "everyone's freaking out last weekend."

A week later, Rebecca left a note for John--"explaining everything"--and fled from their apartment. When she returned they discussed her bisexuality for two days. Rebecca thought John might "accept" her sexual preference.

Then came the bad news: Rebecca's lover, Charlotte, was in the process of going from gay to straight--going straight--and John, reconsidering, had decided that Rebecca was "sick." Rebecca felt "alienated" from both of them. Trying to see the bright side, she said "at least I now have an explanation for Charlotte's wild swings of mood."

At one group session, Rebecca stated she now thought the women at Lesbian Feminist Liberation were people like herself. She commented that the group had originally objected to several

organizations on the grounds that they were "lesbian" places. She now felt comfortable; there was no pressure to conform to any codes of dress, conduct, or speech, as far as she knew. She had gone to one meeting and found it "boring." However, she was willing to go to a second one. We talked about going together. She suggested we arrive very late, just before the "socializing."

Sunny said she now felt much less hostile toward men, now that she was going out with a woman. She now saw women as "people" rather than as "perfect people." When asked if she thought she would ever sleep (have sexual intercourse) with a man again, she replied: "I might, but I hope not." She explained that she was "more attracted physically to a woman."

In early November, at a meeting I missed, Sunny did imitations of group members. It is unclear whether she intended to do imitations of all the group members or merely those present. At any rate, she left me out. Sunny and Lynn were particularly disturbed by this. Lynn offered to do an imitation of Sunny's imitations.

Lynn said Sunny first showed Carmen pushing her hair back, fluffing it, and then jerking her head back. Carmen and I protested, saying that what she really did was to pull pieces of her hair and

tear off split ends. Lynn showed Rebecca in the process of sitting down. Lynn said Rebecca would kneel before sitting. Carmen and I said we had never noticed this. Lynn said she was shown entering a room, looking to the floor, and saying: "I don't want to talk tonight." Lynn couldn't imitate Sunny's imitation of Elizabeth: her laugh.

On the last day of November, Lynn told me a coming out story with a happy ending. Cynthia, a black lesbian in her office, was about to share an apartment with her female lover. They both came out to their families, who responded by treating them like newlyweds. All four parents were making plans to see the apartment, and the two lesbians were already beginning to receive gifts.

The last meeting of my consciousness-raising group was on Tuesday, December 11, 1973, in Elizabeth's Brooklyn apartment. Lynn was silent most of the time. At one point, she began to speak. Unfortunately, what she was saying reminded me of something and I spoke, interrupting her. Lynn became furious, saying there was no point in talking, since when she did talk, nobody listened to her. I apologized, saying I didn't have perfect self-control.

She glared at me, then lapsed into silence once more.

We made a list of topics we hadn't discussed : fathers, siblings (sisters and brothers), children, how we feel about other group members. Only Rebecca and I were willing to discuss fathers. Elizabeth refused to discuss fathers or children. Carmen and Lynn said they "held a lot against" their fathers and didn't want to talk about them. I said I refused to discuss children. Carmen said she was glad we hadn't told each other what we thought of each other.

We also had the usual announcements from Sunny and Elizabeth, who kept us informed about events at the Women's Center and at Lesbian Feminist Liberation. Sometimes they told us about private parties given by organization members. This time, Elizabeth mentioned a loft party in Chelsea; did I want to go? Not if I won't know anyone, I replied. As usual, we asked each other who was planning to go to the dance at Lesbian Feminist Liberation Friday. Carmen asked Rebecca if she were going to the Dutchess that Wednesday; if so, they could exchange "moral support."

For the first time we tried an Encounter technique, which was now not taboo as the group was ending "anyway." You form a

circle of people, with one relaxed person in the center, who falls backward very gently and is caught by one or more people and gently moved from one person to another inside the circle. This exercise was supposed to demonstrate trust in each group member (trust in a vulnerable situation, like falling backward and hoping to be caught).

Sunny was first. All went well until we decided to lift her. She was too heavy. I was next. I weighed less and was lifted above some women's shoulders. I felt weightless. Rebecca was next, and she didn't want to be lifted. Elizabeth refused to participate on the grounds that we had already had trouble "catching" women who weighed far less than her. We hugged her instead. Lynn had a sore throat and cold and was too sick to participate. Sunny suggested we hold Lynn's hand; instead, we formed a circle and all held hands.

IV.

Can consciousness be raised? I taped a panel discussion on lesbianism and spirituality (Feb. 10, 1974), held at Lesbian Feminist Liberation. There were a great many women in the audience, including many "regulars."

1. Females and males are "naturally" dissimilar. Females are closer to "Mother Nature" and are more spiritual than males, who are more rational. Females are superior to males.
2. Females are inferior to males in many ways. Females are enslaved by Nature, whereas males have learned how to control Nature. Males are more rational, and females are more emotional.
3. We are members of a single species, homo sapiens.

Woman #1: "...A woman is basically a spiritual being, not a political being like a male. A male needs order and security and war and means of defense, etc....Spirituality is the force in women. That's why they tried to kill so many of us in the medieval times, you know. That's why women have been persecuted all over the world, and that's why they've been made prostitutes....in the great empires....women have been made an object. The social system of the world is on the way down. The patriarchal system is tumbling.... Vegetarianism helps you spiritually."

Woman #2: "Lesbians are closer to the Great Mother than any man.... in terms of energy. We're closer to each other than anyone else can ever be...Also, I'm a witch....Witchcraft is the original feminist religion....We have this power inherently and have been persecuted because of it. We have women's intuition. I think it puts us on top, this foresight we have. We're ruled by Venus more. It's just

a different kind of energy. So we can never be as maliciously violent as they could be...."

Woman #1: "Christianity was a male religion....Jesus was a faggot.

Witchcraft was created because women had power over men. Men created sadism and the devil to make everyone afraid. Women were not afraid."

Woman #2: "Witchcraft is anarchistic, loose, not an organized religion. Male religions are rigid, just like they are. That's the difference to me."

Question from the audience: "Are all women witches? If so, why are certain women labelling themselves witches?"

Woman #2: "I do go along with the idea that all women are witches potentially...The witch in you is that instinct, that consciousness that tells you--like all of a sudden-- I really shouldn't go.' There's nothing intellectual about it. It's something you pick up on. You don't have to do a candle ritual every Friday or observe every single Sabbath to be a witch. All women are witches and all women are lesbians. Yes."

Woman #1: "I don't feel like I'm a witch. I think I'm more like a sage or something. I want to be able to help everyone through my mental concentration, my mental powers. I prefer to go through life

studying, like a monk, than to do magic tricks."

Woman in audience: "I'm a woman in this life, but I realize it's only a form, an outward appearance. Some people have the body of a man, others have the body of a woman. But when you go beyond the form, you reach a new stage where there is no form. You reach the void, the place where there is no sex, no female and male. There is total spirit and essence."

At Lesbian Feminist Liberation, which became our new focus of attention after our consciousness-raising ended, we listened to talk about half the species: women. It seemed that females were superior to males in the ways that females had always been considered inferior. Instead of denying there was such a thing as "women's intuition," women at Lesbian Feminist Liberation rejoiced in their inherent powers of intuition. Instead of saying that women of the past who had been billed--and burned or drowned--as witches had been falsely accused, many women at Lesbian Feminist Liberation announced that all women are witches. (In the 1960s, when many women were having illegal--hence dangerous--abortions, motherhood and particularly "natural childbirth" were glorified by women and men.) Lesbian separatism, which is about as odd to

heterosexuals as black separatism was --in the 1960s-- to whites, divides the species according to sex and sexual preference.

At Lesbian Feminist Liberation--which was not a separatist organization--I saw Sunny and Elizabeth regularly at meetings and at social events. In 1974, Sunny was extremely quiet at meetings and Elizabeth, "a bigwig," was fairly vocal. Carmen and Lynn attended social events only. Rebecca sometimes went to dances; more often, she was at the Dutchess and other lesbian bars.

Carmen had given me advice during our consciousness-raising sessions; now, Elizabeth advised me countless times to keep my sexual preference a secret. To convince me, she told me sad stories about "bisexual" women whom nobody trusted. "They try to pass as lesbians, but everyone sees they are married or are seeing a man." I began resenting the heterophobia Elizabeth claimed was widespread. My resentment surfaced in my recurrent dreams.

I dreamed I was with my "boyfriend" in a restaurant. A lesbian I knew, S., saw us and asked mockingly: "Are you still seeing men? Is this the same man you were seeing before?" (Abrams, Field Notes, April, 1974).

Absorbed into a very small world where outsiders (non-lesbians) could be forgotten for hours at a time, I watched people pick at

each other's nerves, bodies, hollow roles-- despite consciousness-raising (there were many lesbian consciousness-raising groups), Sunday panels, coming out/conversion experiences, and the ideology of inherent compatibility (all women are alike; therefore, all women can love each other). I thought of the homophobia of the heterosexual world and the heterophobia of the homosexual world and wondered how consciousness might be raised.

You cannot get it by taking thought;
You cannot seek it by not taking thought.
(Watts, 1957: 156).

Chapter 5. Lesbian Feminist Liberation

I.

In April, 1973, members of the Lesbian Liberation Committee (LLC) of the Gay Activists' Alliance (GAA) seceded from the mixed (female and male) group and formed Lesbian Feminist Liberation. An LFL leaflet given to prospective members explained why:

....Gay politics will never cut deep enough to eliminate the sexism in a totally sexist society, and that to be freed as Gay people would still leave us oppressed as women....

The new organization claimed it had over 100 members and reached 400 women a week through its Sunday forums, meetings, and dances. At that time, there were five committees: Finance, Media, Program, Membership, and Political. The latter had the most prestige. Robert's Rules of Order, a parliamentary procedure, governed meetings.

I attended social events (Sunday forums, Friday dances) from April, 1973 to about January, 1974; from February, 1974 to about August, 1974, I attended meetings regularly and in fact became a voting member. It was not until I became active in the organization, that is to say, did work instead of merely paying an

admission fee to dances and forums, that I realized there was a split between the social and the political activities in the organization. The personal had earlier been declared political; this was often used to urge women to come out, and was an assumption of consciousness-raising. In colloquial terms, sex and sexual preference were seen as political statements, and lesbians were urged not to sleep with men, as they were women's political enemies. Dances and Sunday forums were seen as educational: a service to the lesbian community. At Lesbian Feminist Liberation, as at many organizations, there was a small group of people who did virtually all the work. They often felt they were scattering their energy among the following groups: the lesbian-gay coalition, which fought for legal rights and which had to try to persuade straights (heterosexuals) to see their side; lesbians who wanted to be entertained but who didn't want to share the responsibility for setting up dances and forums, etc.; the Lesbian Feminist Liberation membership, who debated whether the organization should provide a warm lesbian atmosphere at the expense of political activism or whether lesbians should work for the common cause whether or not the organization was made up of people providing emotional support for each other as individuals. There

were also countless arguments over the status of gay men, who were unfortunately men(a fault), but nevertheless also gay (a virtue). In addition, lesbian separatism, which was seen as courageous, divided the membership. To make matters more complex, there were attempts to unite with women in general, whether gay or straight, often through the organization N.O.W. (the National Organization for Women), a middle-of-the-road organization which had never been supportive of lesbianism.

Some Lesbian Feminist Liberation members wanted to set a good example by showing lesbians could work together on social events--as friends and/or lovers. In an all-lesbian setting, there would be no stigma.

It may be suggested that, due to social identity, the individual with a secret differentness will find him((her))self during the daily and weekly round in three possible kinds of places. There will be forbidden or out-of-bounds places, where persons of the kind he((she))can be shown to be are forbidden to be, and where exposure means expulsion--an eventuality often so unpleasant to all parties that a tacit cooperation will sometimes forestall it, the interloper providing a thin disguise and the rightfully present accepting it, even though both know the other knows of the interloping. There are civil places, where persons of the individual's kind, when known to be of his((her))kind, are carefully, and sometimes painfully, treated as if they were not disqualified for routine acceptance, when in fact they somewhat are. Finally, there are back places, where persons of the individual's kind stand exposed and find they need not try to conceal their stigma,

nor be overly concerned with cooperatively trying to disattend it. In some cases this license arises from having chosen the company of those with the same or a similar stigma ((my emphasis)). (Goffman, 1963: 81).

In this safe place for lesbians, contrary to all expectations, there were groups of "closet cases," such as "bisexual women." Some bisexual women saw themselves as half straight (heterosexual) and half lesbian. Some women who labelled themselves lesbians viewed bisexuals as women who were "basically straight" and afraid to "go all the way."¹ Because of prejudice against bisexual women, large numbers of women who liked women and men were passing as lesbians. Many of these "closet cases" wished to see sexual preference labels abolished.

There were also intense personality clashes which threatened to destroy attempts to attract new members and to keep them. Elections for office were often bitter fights among women who had once worked together, and who were now political and social enemies. Members tried to encourage wider participation by changing the structure of the organization. However, although

¹ There are problems with this formulation. If bisexuals are basically straight, why should they affirm their lesbianism? Or, if lesbianism is a choice, and sexual preference is not fixed, then how can someone be basically straight?

the seating arrangement was changed from a semi-circle to a circle, and the chairperson(formerly a different member each week) was eliminated, the pattern of domination continued. There was an in-group(called "the clique") of about ten people; the in-group was split into two smaller groups. Then there were "affiliates" of each small in-group, and finally a very large, unorganized group, made up mostly of newer members. Many members of the in-group had worked together on the Lesbian Liberation Committee(LLC).

The proliferation of committees was reminiscent of academia. It has been suggested to me that the committee structure itself contributed to the failure of the organization to establish and maintain an organization of equals. Those who were most familiar with this structure and with Robert's Rules of Order began with a decided advantage over those who sat mutely through six months of meetings, fearful to speak up out of turn. I considered it my duty as a sociologist to coax the silent members to talk to me. They, in turn, were pleasantly surprised that "someone cared what they thought." Many private conversations have been incorporated into this dissertation.

The Co-ordinating Committee was composed of the heads of committees and was chaired by the Internal Co-ordinator. The spokesperson for the organization was usually present. Although meetings were open to everyone, "the membership" generally didn't attend unless a particular person had a particular issue she wanted to bring before the membership at a later date. In academia, a "closed" example would be the Dean's meetings with departmental heads. The general meeting, which followed the Co-ordinating Committee meeting, generally took the form decided on at the meeting of committee heads. Influential members "got the scoop" at the Co-ordinating Committee meetings and had their speeches ready by the time the motion was on the floor of the general meeting. Newcomers were often shocked at the speed at which motions were made, and dismayed when the motion was finally suspended for lack of information or because the issue was controversial. At a May, 1974 meeting, for example, a motion was made to join the Gay Activists' Alliance (GAA) in a zap(demonstration) on CBS-TV, whose programs showed lesbians and gay men in an extremely unflattering way. After an initial outburst of speeches, the motion was defeated because 1) not enough was known about the issue and 2) some Lesbian

Feminist Liberation members did not want to work with gay men.

Although many members complained that there was a "clique" which was running the organization, members of the "clique" complained that not enough "rank and file" members were willing to take on the responsibilities of running the organization. Right after the CBS-TV zap was defeated, a motion was made by the Internal Co-ordinator that Lesbian Feminist Liberation join the 1974 International Women's Day March. This motion was defeated on the grounds that the organization didn't know the identity of the organizers of the march:

- 1) I would hate to see LFL used by the Socialist Party.
- 2) I have nothing against the Socialist Party.

Someone added that although the International Women's Day activities were traditionally socialistic, they were not affiliated with the Socialist Workers' Party(SWP). "Is N.O.W. supporting the march?" asked a voice. No one suggested phoning the National Organization of Women (N.O.W.) for information. The motion was rapidly losing support until a former spokeswoman, a "charismatic" leader, made a speech in favor of the motion. All of a sudden, the motion gained popular support, and passed easily.

In both cases, there was an avoidance of policy; issues were decided case by case, and the organization never developed a policy toward gay males or toward political parties in general and the Socialist Workers' Party in particular. Like the news media, Lesbian Feminist Liberation was issue-oriented.

II.

The importance of a policy-making group of people was never recognized at Lesbian Feminist Liberation. If we compare this organization to a political organization, Centers For Change, which reached its zenith in the late 1960s, perhaps we can see why this lack of policy weakened Lesbian Feminist Liberation. I have chosen Centers For Change because 1) it was a mixed (female, male) group; 2) the organization was left-wing and took a stand on such issues as the Vietnam War and environmental pollution, the plight of such underdogs as women, blacks, poor people in general, rural-urban conflicts; and 3) the organization aimed at raising consciousness. My material comes from a participant-observation study supervised by Dr. Richard Quinney at New York University in 1969-1970, and carried out by two other students and me in the course of a Senior Seminar in Sociology. The focus of the study was on the viability of urban communes in the New York City area.

We gathered much of our data at Charlotte's Web, the organizational commune for Centers For Change. In addition, we participated in inter-communal meetings, most of which were held in Brooklyn; we also travelled to rural communes such as Heathcote, in Maryland. In November, 1969, we travelled to Washington, D.C. to demonstrate against the Vietnam War.

I made tape recordings of virtually all the meetings I attended.

Many members of Lesbian Feminist Liberation participated in the anti-war demonstrations of the 1960s and the feminist movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Because they were dissatisfied with the consciousness of males, even of radical males, many women left the left-wing, male-dominated organizations of the 1960s and formed their own all-female feminist groups. The lesbian-straight(heterosexual) split resulted in the formation of all-lesbian organizations, or in mixed(female, male) gay organizations, such as the Gay Activists' Alliance(GAA). By April, 1973, lesbians had seceded from GAA and had founded Lesbian Feminist Liberation. The broad-based groups of the 1960s gave way to specialized self-interest groups of the 1970s. In the process of distinguishing straight from gay, male from female, and radical from "democratic"

(most members of Lesbian Feminist Liberation were affiliated with the Democratic Party), organizations lost sight of fundamental structural inequalities in the country as a whole. The "slice of the pie" approach, made popular by advertisers who showed women smoking cigarettes (this gave women an equal chance to damage our lungs), was adopted by feminists and lesbian feminists in the 1970s. This is the opposite of the "give up everything and move to a rural commune" approach which was popular among some upper-middle-class college-educated females and males of the 1960s. In view of the proliferation of jobs during the Vietnam years, and the recession of the 1970s, this difference is understandable. First things first: food before--

Erst kommt das Fressen,² dann kommt die Moral.
(Brecht, 1928).

First comes the belly, then morality.
(Ewen, translator, 1967).

First comes the grub, then come the morals.
(Stern, translator, 1974).

The 1970s in general have been described as "apathetic" or "more conservative" than the 1960s. (Only the anti-nuclear movement managed in 1979 to attract a broad-based group of activists.)

2

German has two words for the verb "to eat": Essen (used for people) and Fressen (used for animals). Here, Brecht uses the noun das Fressen in describing people.

The focus on the small unit--lesbian rights; a consciousness-raising group of eight to twelve members; a committee; a lesbian couple--prevailed at Lesbian Feminist Liberation. The organization was, compared to Centers For Change, small. Whereas Centers For Change was a large organization which comprised several schools, a commune (Charlotte's Web), and other educational centers, and was founded as a radical organization dedicated to social change, Lesbian Feminist Liberation was "an independent two-issue organization focusing on Lesbian Feminist priorities"(flyer).

At Centers For Change, there was a policy-making committee composed of one person from each branch of the organization, and open to all members of Centers. All members present at meetings were allowed to vote. In addition, there were women's representatives (3) to insure that women were not dominated by the men of the organization.

Centers is concerned with radical education. If it doesn't specifically represent women in its policy making board, then to that extent it's not radical. We're asking for representation to raise consciousness, to first raise the consciousness of women and then to communicate this consciousness to the men of Centers, to the point at which this consciousness becomes part of policy. (Abrams, Tape, 10/69).

Because of the cultural milieu in which we all were raised, it would be expected that men would obtain the dominant positions in this group merely because of the culture from which we came. Therefore, I would urge some sort of proportional representation for women. (Abrams, Tape, 10/69).

Despite these structural attempts to fight male chauvinism, some female members of Centers became convinced that they had to create their own organization and concentrate on their own consciousness. Some men complained of female chauvinism; others pointed out that humans are insensitive to each other qua humans.

Men are insensitive to other men.
Why is the women's issue different,
if it is different?

I find that I am being oppressed by
all sorts of things, including myself.

I think we would be making a mistake
if we tried to create a structure which
reflected policy. The structure should
be a facilitator.

Every person in the United States
is oppressed--not just women at Centers.
(Abrams, Tape, 1969).

The motion on proportional representation for women was passed
after the following statement:

I'd like to speak, if I may. I think the
women in this organization all want it. I
think it's incumbent upon all of us to vote
for it. And it's not in keeping with my

position on what the structure of a seemingly--or sometime--anarchist organization should be. However, because the women want it, and we are a function of people's needs, I think it's necessary for all of us to support it. (Abrams, Tape, 1969).

At Centers For Change, there was an attempt to represent women in the policy-making committee; however, it was already clear that members were divided along sex lines.

At Lesbian Feminist Liberation, the situation was more complex. Although all members were ostensibly "women loving women," there were deep splits according to sexual preference, race, class, age, political views, many of which seemed incomprehensible in terms of

- 1) women's common socialization into "feminine roles."
(females and males are equal but different)
- 2) women's inherent common nature--such as intuition.
(females are superior to males)

Why aren't we more alike? was a frequent question at meetings and at consciousness-raising groups. Policy was viewed as divisive to the membership, which was already experiencing rapid turnover, and therefore was never established. In addition, to many members policy was relatively unimportant compared to specific decisions about motions on the floor. Even in the area of decision-making, the organization relied heavily on the postponement of the

vote. One example concerns the annual Gay Pride Week march. In June 1973, there was a mixed (female, male) rally after the march. Many women left the rally vowing never to unite with gay men in that way again. In 1974, Lesbian Feminist Liberation discussed the possibility of having separate marches and separate rallies for females and males.

We're pressed for time; this year, all women will march together, but next year, women won't march with the men at all. Lesbian separatism is growing because we've found we just can't work with gay men. At least all the women will be together in the march. Originally, the five or six lesbian groups drew numbers all over the place, but we've arranged to have all women march together. There isn't any time to reschedule a separate lesbian march this year. At least this year we'll be visible as lesbians; hopefully, the media will notice us at last. Next year, we'll march on our own and arrange for media coverage on our own. Whenever we march with men, the drag queens get all the coverage, and they're in the minority. People need to see we don't look like freaks. Next year, they'll see that "an army of lovers cannot fail." (Abrams, Field Notes, 1974).

People were defined and ranked in terms of sex and sexual preference, as is common in the straight(heterosexual) world. In this respect, the people at Lesbian Feminist Liberation carried their stock of knowledge(see Schutz, 1973) from the straight to the lesbian world. Goffman explains why:

3

Attributed to Rita Mae Brown.

The normal and the stigmatized are not persons but rather perspectives. These are generated in social situations during mixed contacts by virtue of the unrealized norms that are likely to play upon the encounter. The lifelong attributes of a particular individual may cause him((her)) to be type-cast; he((she)) may have to play the stigmatized role in almost all of his ((her)) social situations, making it natural to refer to him((her)), as I have done, as a stigmatized person whose life-situation places him((her)) in opposition to normals. However, his((her)) particular stigmatizing attributes do not merely determine the nature of two roles, normal and stigmatized, merely the frequency of his((her)) playing one of them. And since interaction roles are involved, not concrete individuals, it should come as no surprise that in many cases he((she)) who is stigmatized in one regard nicely exhibits all the normal prejudices held toward those who are stigmatized in another regard((my emphasis)). (Goffman, 1963:138).

Garfinkel(1967) demonstrated--in his case study of Agnes--that a transsexual held basically the same views about sex and gender as the person in the street. Agnes, like many transsexuals, also believed that opposite-sex relations were "healthier" than same-sex relations. Changing one's sex is the alteration of the physical body to "match" a role which is sex-specific. Just as transsexuals may be prejudiced against homosexuality, so may lesbians be prejudiced against transvestites and transsexuals(and so may blacks be prejudiced against Puerto Ricans and Puerto Ricans against blacks, or Jews against non-Jews and non-Jews against Jews).

Transsexuals aren't "real" women; they aren't even "real" men. They make human beings stand out as dressed-up animals, freaks, Halloween painted faces. I gave up wearing makeup when I came out. I don't want to see men doing things women used to do out of ignorance. Feminists don't hide behind designer clothes, rouge, or high heels. Transsexuals look like caricatures of women with false consciousness. Their makeup looks cheap. They overdo gestures because they haven't had enough early childhood practice. How can they mutilate their bodies in order to be female and feminine? At least transvestites are just dressing up; they are male and feminine. Better still would be a situation in which people who were neither female nor male, neither feminine nor masculine--gender neutral or gender-free--could set a good example. (Abrams, Field Notes, 1974).

Transsexualism is attacked by both gays and straights on the grounds that it is unconvincing. It destroys the commonsense notion that a person is born female or male and remains in the original "state" forever. Along with hermaphroditism, transsexualism shatters a taken-for-granted which is perhaps even more "basic" to our self-conception than is sexual preference.

Both lesbians and straight women disagree among themselves over the question of the origin of sexual preference: learned or biologically given?

1. I have always felt I was a lesbian.
 2. I fell in love with my best friend and became a lesbian.
-
1. I could never make love to another woman.
 2. I once thought I could never make love to a man; but I learned to enjoy it. Now I think I could learn to make love to another woman and enjoy it.
 3. I enjoy making love to women and men: people.

change. Which should we try to change first, attitudes, the law, or the society as a whole? people asked.

Many members were tired of fighting among themselves and welcomed the opportunity to work together against a common enemy--straights, gay men, etc.....

Some members of the organization "seized the initiative" at a Lesbian Feminist Liberation Saturday dance (June, 1974) and announced that the following day, there would be a separate women's rally following the Lesbian/Gay Pride Week march from the Village to Central Park.

Marching uptown in the hot sun, we tried to cool ourselves in the shade of the skyscrapers. The women were all together, shielded from the men. We had our own martials, women's martials, women martials. Many of us wore lavender, the color associated with lesbianism. We were casually dressed. I tried to find women I knew; I couldn't seem to make any friends at this happy occasion. Some women laughed and held hands. Other women looked lonely; or perhaps only self-absorbed. We moved forward at a good pace, a corridor of women beneath buildings lurching toward the open skies.

There was a fork in the road: one way for the men's rally and another way for the women's rally. I wondered if there were a bridge to connect the two rallies at some point or whether choosing one meant not choosing another. It was even futile to contemplate choosing in the first place, for the crowds of women pushed toward the women's rally, and we were swept away with them.

Which way to "gender neutrality?" I wondered as the crowd pointed me toward an agreeably grassy slope.

I was going to go to the rally with a gay man, and now I can't find him, complained a woman to her "peers."

Wrong sex, wrong sex, shouted a significant other.

Why are we here? Is this democracy or is it the working of the clique again? Why wasn't I told? Why wasn't I allowed to speak and vote? asked many angry women.

You should have gone to the dance last night, I hear they announced it then. Maybe we should stop going to meetings and just go to dances, if that's where the decisions are made.

I was very angry myself, said a woman, but then I found out they had been trying to phone me. After all, we have to give an incentive to women to speak out and act.

Any woman here may speak, any woman here may speak, announced an LFL member, who had a prepared speech in her hand.

But we haven't had time to prepare our speeches!

Speak from the heart; you don't need prepared speeches.

Then throw away your prepared speech!

Any woman here may speak, any woman here may speak. I really think you should be more grateful.

Grateful? We've been manipulated by our "sisters"!

We couldn't wait till next year to act. We were bold. Why are you all so hostile? Go to the men's rally if you want to see a freak show. Or stay and contribute.

(Abrams, Field Notes, June 1974).

The action at the rally was labelled "politically correct" by organization leaders. The co-ordinator of the dance, and head of the Lesbian Pride Week Committee, hadn't even been consulted. She "had had a good feeling from the other((men's)) rally, but felt manipulated to go with my sisters." "We've oppressed

ourselves," someone said sadly.

There was no opportunity--except at large Sunday forums-- to discuss lesbianism and feminism; lesbians and gay men; stereotyping; law and social change; consciousness-raising..... At one point, the organization planned to prepare position papers. I made a brief, impassioned speech about the need for theory. Then there were other priorities, and the papers were never written....In the concrete issue of whether or not to pay women performers during Lesbian Pride Week events, no policy was ever set: some got more, while others got less. The organization was most effective when dealing with "outsiders," lawmakers who favored legalizing same-sex relations and lawmakers who stigmatized same-sex relations. The organization was better at uniting against a common enemy than she was at providing a warm, safe, friendly place for women who loved women.

III.

From March 1974 through June 1974, the three ad hoc committees--Building, Intro 2, and Lesbian Pride Week--met after the Monday night general meeting, in a SoHo loft. When the committees were forming, one woman, looking around the room, asked: "Now which committee has the most attractive women?"

Although the general meeting was less interesting than what took place at the loft, most people--probably because of fatigue--left as soon as the general meeting was over. Those who remained usually stopped at a deli--for a sandwich and something to drink--before going to the loft. There were always refreshments at the loft--pretzels, potato chips, beer, soda--but nothing was nutritious.

I joined the Lesbian Pride Week Committee, which invaded a round table near the kitchen. There were a few women who did nothing but sit there, but most women did actual work for the organization. What we generally did was read a list of jobs that had to be done and decide who was going to do each one. Then we would take a break and get to know each other socially. I was reminded of cocktail parties of my childhood. I tried to talk to one person at a time, but I generally had trouble beginning a conversation. When I assumed my role as a sociologist, and began asking sociological questions, I felt more at ease but less like a committee member. For the other committee members, this was a good opportunity to meet women in a relaxed setting. The loft, the home of a friend of an LFL member, was beautiful. "God Bless Our Lesbian Home" waved a silkscreen banner.

One night we met as usual and experienced "social disorder" for the first time. People mocked the rules mercilessly, whether they were from Robert's Rules of Order or from the organization's constitution. Space shrank as members jumped up from their seats, milled around, and sat down in committees they hadn't joined. All of a sudden, everyone had a sense of humor! What about the usual order of business? a voice asked. The head of the committee remarked that Sandra was eating a beautiful sandwich. For about half an hour, we discussed the pros and cons of Sandra's sandwich. Then we discussed sandwiches we had eaten in the past, and those we hoped to eat in the future.

Once at a Monday night meeting, all was chaos. The order of business, usually decided at the Co-ordinating Committee meeting, had not yet been worked out, and speech flowed roughly, or stopped abruptly. The spokeswoman was late, and everyone wondered aloud how this could be so. When she arrived, she had missed the beginning of the long harangue, and spoke out of turn. We were supposed to see videotapes, but they weren't ready. Then they were ready, but we were in the midst of a heated discussion. People were misunderstanding the simplest sentences, and there was hysterical laughter at the explanations which followed the

confusion. As in some of Garfinkel's (1967) experiments, there was marked hostility on the part of the person who could not "make sense" of what was happening. At the meeting, people remarked that everything was "very strange tonight." People broke free from parliamentary etiquette and no one was "in charge;" something was loosening up. We all tasted the chaos.

IV.

Sodomy, fellatio, cunnilingus, pederasty,
 Father, why do these words sound so nasty?
 Masturbation can be fun
 Join the holy orgy kamasutra
 Everyone.

(Ragni and Rado, 1968--"Sodomy" from Hair).

In the fight for lesbian/gay rights, sexuality was played down; the issue was defined as a civil rights issue rather than one of "free love." Once again, people debated the origins of sexual preference. Some, following a medical model, maintained that lesbianism was a virus, and could easily be caught, especially by young school children. Others maintained that homosexuality was in the genes--or wasn't. Still others maintained that lesbianism, like heterosexuality, bisexuality, and gayness in males, was learned, and therefore could be unlearned, or relearned. And yet others maintained that since sex was given to us so that we might reproduce

our species, same-sex relationships were unacceptable because of their inherently "sterile" nature. Others claimed that same-sex relationships were essential to curb population growth.....

In the official transcripts of the New York City Council, you will not find descriptions of the experience of being in the audience and listening to debates over your sexual preference. We were long rows of females, separated from the males by an aisle. From the point of view of a television camera, we were off to one side: out of the way. As the cameras passed us by for the third time, we wondered if we were really there at all. Yes, lesbians can be invisible without really trying. At the next sweep, we put our arms around each other's shoulders--posing for the picture--and smiled. I don't know if we were photographed or not.

When Bella Abzug appeared, wearing of course a hat, we relaxed into our seats. Even if we couldn't attract the attention of the cameras ourselves, she could. Then the cameras were evicted.

Several women were keeping track of the votes, and they told us things didn't look very promising. We were bodies who couldn't vote, and we watched others argue for us. "We should feel sorry for the people we frighten, for they do not know how to accept

responsibility for their gender and sexual preference," said a voice from behind. "Unnatural" is what you yourself either do not do or do not admit to doing. We sat there solemnly, doomed.

I glanced at a woman who had stood up and screamed for the cameras. No one knew her; she was atypical of the group present. She would be on every telescreen in the area that evening.

The speeches were theatrical and repetitious. Each person seemed to be playing a role. As we were not allowed to speak, we had to hiss, cheer, stamp our feet, wave, groan, moan, etc. to express ourselves: like animals. Some women took charge and became our orchestra conductors, so that we could hiss in unison. We were cutouts, rows of female bodies, sitting and waiting for the verdict.

A few of us wished to escape by going through the time tunnel and living with Sappho.

((To Aphrodite))

You know the place: then

Leave Crete and come to us
waiting where the grove is
pleasantest, by precincts

sacred to you; incense
smokes on the altar, cold
streams murmur through the

apple branches, a young
rose thicket shades the ground
and quivering leaves pour

down deep sleep; in meadows
where horses have grown sleek
among spring flowers, dill

scents the air. Queen! Cyprian!
Fill our golden cups with love
stirred into clear nectar

(Sappho, translated by Mary Barnard, 1958: 37).

After the bill failed, someone announced that there was going to be a demonstration in front of and inside St. Patrick's Cathedral. The rationale was that the predominantly Christian, especially Catholic, membership should show the cardinal that the church should be a place of sanctuary, and not a place of betrayal. There were several gay churches and synagogues in the New York City area.

I felt claustrophobic in the cathedral, and I had a headache from the debates over whether we were just female bodies or instead people who could speak on their own behalf. While we argued over who was who and what was what, whispered negotiations took place in sheltered corners of the huge building. Several women, like nuns, took refuge overnight to show their seriousness of purpose. The rest of us were eventually released into the night, where cameras flashed at us and blocked our view of the deep blue-black sky.

V.

In my woodland, flowers have no
symbolic meanings. They have only
color and perfume....
(Vivien, 1904, 1976: 37).

Many members of Lesbian Feminist Liberation blamed "the city" for disunity within the organization. There was an image of a country house filled with women; at a Sunday panel, we saw a film about a lesbian country commune. In the summer of 1974, several women moved to Ithaca, New York. One woman had secured a teaching position at a college in the area. Two of the women, former East Village neighbors of mine, had once operated a lemonade and chocolate chip cookie stand in the Village. Another woman had once worked as a cameraperson for educational television, and then had been laid off. Still another woman had worked for the YWCA; she had helped organize nude swims there for Lesbian Feminist Liberation members. I knew all the women casually. They used to visit the country a lot; once, they brought me back some tomatoes.

I was not surprised to run into my two neighbors at the Dutchess(lesbian bar), but they were rather taken aback to see me. I sometimes danced with one of them; they gave me countless rides home, late at night. There was a certain comraderie I liked.

To some members of Lesbian Feminist Liberation, moving to the country was a personal solution to personal troubles with urban pollution, a rushed schedule, unemployment, lack of space, a need for better vegetables, etc. Moving to the country was not seen as an alternative to capitalism. To some members of Centers For Change and the commune coalition (1969), the ideal was to move to the country, farm, and learn to get along with fellow commune members. Bartering was preferable to working for money to buy commodities. Farmers could barter.

- 1) You are hopeless romantics; good luck!
- 2) You are selfish; only the well-to-do can afford to leave the city and buy personal property in the country. You can't solve urban problems by fleeing. It's a cop-out.
- 3) It won't work unless you bring in capitalist money.

At a commune coalition meeting in October 1969, we discussed the urban-rural dichotomy. The following is a transcription of part of a tape. We were at a Brooklyn commune. About ten people, female and male, were present.

Jeff: It came to me one day that such voluntarily organized units, such as communes, could run the country in such a way that people wouldn't hate the work they were doing to earn a living. I was thinking that

factories could be run by communes.....

Bill: ((skeptical)) Factories?

Jeff: Well, maybe not, but I'm just thinking that the standard justification for capitalism is that you have to pay people to make them work.

Alison: We really don't need that many people making material things.

Jeff: No, you don't.

Pat: Most of the stuff produced in this country is not needed at all. Everybody doesn't need a new car every year. In fact, we don't need half the cars that are on the road now.

Jeff: I'm trying to work on a project to get people out of the ghetto and into farming. I'm working on setting an example of how people can live on \$50 a month. The same amount of bread that pays the rent here for one month can pay all your expenses out on a farm for months.

Alison: But if you're trying to end the ((Vietnam)) war, I don't think you should just disappear and forget your commitments.

Paul: At Heathcote, we don't pay war taxes; we're classified under alternative service. If you're not paying war taxes, then you're fighting the war.

Jeff: Living in the country is not necessarily getting away from the problems of the world.

Pat: I go to the country to get a slightly clearer picture of my problems.

Jeff: You know how wonderfully against the war New York City is, but what about upstate New York? The main political backing that you find for the war is in the countryside.

Alison: Like Vermont.

Jeff: That's right.

Mike: I'm sick and tired of sucking the tit((note the sexism here)) of the economic system in the city, of paying high prices for bad food, of paying high prices for tenements to live in, and I want to get out of it and form something that supports me and my people.

Pat: Can you make it?

Mike: I think that this will work.

Larry: I don't know for sure, but I see your idea as copping out.

Mike: I don't agree with you.

Pat: Can you move the poor to the country, really, I mean?

Alison: We can't all be farmers. And there aren't enough jobs in the country. That's why people commute to the city for work.

Mike: The city and the country can cooperate. The country communes that grow food can very easily give part of it to programs like this, through which the food can be used to feed the poor of the Lower East Side, etc., and also offer a place for these people to get away from the ghettos. And maybe they can start their own place if they're into that.

Larry: Unfortunately the country communes do not raise food as efficiently as---

Mike: But it can be done.

Larry: The technological knowledge exists, but--

Mike: You don't need that much money. You need a couple of tractors. I know a group in Vermont that will soon have a potato surplus. They might as well give them away. This is a religion of changing this country, of changing the world.

VI.

"Don't say you're a bisexual and don't say you're an academic," Elizabeth advised me regarding Lesbian Feminist Liberation. "They won't feel comfortable with you. You should talk about the organization. We don't talk about our schooling." (Abrams, Field Notes, July 1974).

Q: What year are you in, Mona?

M: This is my last semester.

Q: Then are you going back to--?

M: I don't know what I'm going to do after I get my B.A. in French. I want to find some sort of alternative to the regular process, get your Ph.D. and all that.

Q: Well, there's always Centers For Change.

M: Well, yes there is.

Q: We can grant a Ph.D. You know, if you want one, we can grant you one. We are an educational organization, a radical--

M: Well, I don't want one.

Q: If you want a Ph.D., we'll give you one. You just come in and we'll write you one up. We'll give you one.

M: Well, I don't want one.

Q: Why don't you learn how to make candles? That's what I do. Brings in a lot of money. Or don't do anything. I have never had a 9 to 5 job. I dropped out of college. There are lots of alternatives, the problem is finding them. I go to colleges and talk about radical education. You don't need special skills or degrees to survive; you need to be in touch with yourself and with others, at least that's what I think. (Abrams, Tape, October 1969).

VII.

The creation of mental constructs--such as gender, sexual preference, and sex--enables the researcher to "make sense" of "data," to readily classify and thereby freeze experience in a seemingly objective fashion. Reality is socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

Once the categories have been established, experience seems to fall naturally into these categories. The categories themselves become taken for granted: presuppositions behind theories. The most obvious example of this is the scientific classification

system of humans, plants, and animals. Humans are ranked highest; indeed the world itself is viewed as centered around human action. (People used to think the sun revolved around the planet Earth.) Nature is viewed contemptuously; it gets in our way. Females, subject-- so they say--to the twin curses of menstruation and child-birth-childrearing, are viewed as lesser versions of the "true" human being, who is male. Males are seen as controllers of nature, while females are seen as subject to the laws of nature.

This division of human beings into female and male is an artificial one. Species-consciousness would abolish this division. The separation of human beings from other living things in the universe is also a conceptual division, and a misconception.

Humans are further--and again, artificially--divided from each other by gender(feminine, masculine). Babies are labelled female or male at birth, and treated differently in order to produce feminine females and masculine males. Unfortunately, some theorists ignore the process(see Mead's works) and instead

assume that females are naturally feminine and that males are naturally masculine. Gender has no biophysical basis:

Under circumstances beyond gender valuations, our social nature can be realized in terms of gender neutrality--a patterning of human evolution encompassing the human factors common among the experiences and actions of females and males alike. (Geiler, 1979: iv).

We have become so accustomed to seeing through the framework of sex and gender that we readily perceive people in these terms. At a lecture, we may perceive one speaker as more masculine than another; or, while looking at a magazine, we may perceive a person as a masculine type--as in the case of the cowboy in the Ralph Lauren clothing advertisement. Similarly, when being with members of a lesbian group, we may perceive members as feminine or masculine, or as feminine or masculine types. As we get to know the members as individuals, we see them less as types.

We can say that the world of contemporaries is stratified according to levels of anonymity. The more anonymous the type (by means of which a contemporary is experienced), the more strongly objectivated is the meaning-context that is foisted upon the Other. (Schutz, 1973: 80).

Gender neutrality (Geiler, 1979) is a framework which enables us to be and to perceive human beings as free of gender differen-

tiation. Species-consciousness presupposes gender neutrality.

With regard to sexuality, species-consciousness presupposes a society in which human beings enjoy emotional, sexual, and other relations with each other qua human beings. In such a society, there would be no such thing as same-sex relationships (homosexuality), opposite-sex relationships (heterosexuality), or both-sex relationships (bisexuality).

If we are not naturally female or male; masculine or feminine; heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, asexual, then what are we naturally?

All experience of social reality is founded on the fundamental axiom positing the existence of other beings "like me." (Schutz, 1973: 61).

Chapter 6. Lavender graffiti

This chapter is a dialogue between myself as researcher and myself as examiner.

Examiner: Can you describe your experience of participant observation?

Researcher: It was a search for meaning, a classifying and unclassifying of the experience of being lavender, of becoming lavender.

Examiner: Can you be more specific?

Researcher: Specific, yes, if I consult my field notes. Here it is: Day One. Document:

I noticed that a large proportion of the lesbians((I perceived all the women present as lesbians..)) were fat or overweight. In comparison, I seemed thin. There were about three or four women who looked like men to me. They walked like men and had men's bodies((this is incorrect; they had female bodies disguised by masculine body language and style of dress)). In fact, I was certain one lesbian was another lesbian's visiting younger brother until I heard her voice. I perceived the women as "masculine," as "feminine," or "like men." Some women looked "just like heterosexual women"((there are all kinds of heterosexual women--what does this mean?)), but others looked like a combination of feminine and masculine((1973 ideal of androgyny))--but I knew they were females((how?))....I do not know

how the lesbians here describe and differentiate each other; I hope to learn this soon. I am sure there was a great deal I didn't see, and which was there, obvious to the "real" lesbians. At a deeper level, there is much about a person that remains hidden because it is not behavior. I would be very foolish if I thought I understood anything of the inner personality--the less conventional side--of the women I observed today(Abrams, Field Notes, April 22, 1973).

This is from an Easter Sunday celebration at Lesbian Feminist Liberation.

Examiner: How was Easter celebrated?

Researcher: With baskets of jelly beans and lesbian films:

"Home Movie"(Oxenberg, 1973),¹ "Holding"²(Beeson, 1971), and

a film whose name I've forgotten. It doesn't appear in my field notes. Here's all I've got:

The film was awful. Poorly ad libbed. At one point a woman said:"I think when each person reaches the age of 82 she should have the choice whether to become an eggplant or a sesame seed." ((audience laughter and booing))(Abrams, Field Notes, April 22, 1973).

"Home Movie" and "Holding" are well known and well liked.

Examiner: Let's return to your document. Were you perceiving gender roles because they were an issue for the women involved, or because they were an issue for you?

¹ See Chapter 3.

² An explicit sex film, "Holding" has done much to promote an aesthetic which is simple; mundane; sensual; total-environment--rather than genital-centered; warm; passionate; varied; spontaneous, lyrical.

Researcher: Both. I saw women through men's eyes(see pages 63-5): false consciousness. I preferred the more "feminine" women; I found the more "masculine" women--who were rebelling against the norm that females be feminine--sexually undesirable. I was attracted to women "like me." In addition, when I was with a woman who seemed significantly more "feminine" than I was, I felt extremely ill at ease. Group members pressured me to be less feminine. I eventually stopped wearing makeup, but--like Carmen-- I kept my hair long as a sign that I was still attracted to males. Fashions changed, and clothes that in 1973 had seemed "masculine" and "gay" were adopted by straight females(e.g., Frye boots). I noticed that males complimented me on "feminine" clothes, whereas lavender women complimented me on "sporty" clothes. I resented the attempts of both females and males to control my style of dress, my actions, and my thoughts. My professional life--as a graduate student--was tainted by the sexism, power struggles, pettiness, and lack of imagination on the part of the predominantly male faculty. I felt like a stranger everywhere. This perspective--while not "objective"--gave me autonomy.

Examiner: What do you mean by "stranger"?

Researcher:

Another expression of this constellation is to be found in the objectivity of the stranger. Because he ((she)) is not bound by roots to the particular constituents and partisan dispositions of the group, he ((she)) confronts all of these with a distinctly "objective" attitude, an attitude that does not signify mere detachment and nonparticipation, but is a distinct structure composed of remoteness and nearness, indifference and involvement (Simmel, 1971: 145).

Examiner: In 1973, how did the women at Lesbian Feminist Liberation view androgyny? Had they heard of androgyny?

Researcher: At that time, androgyny meant combining the gender roles. In the case of some women, this would mean being a career woman and wife/mother. Production and reproduction. For a woman at Lesbian Feminist Liberation, it might mean learning carpentry or karate (being masculine) and having long hair, speaking in a soft voice, wearing jewelry, wearing the color pink, etc. (being feminine). For members who were lesbian mothers, it might mean having a job or a career and raising one or more children alone or with another woman.

Examiner: And you don't think this is "enough" of a change?

Researcher: Gender neutrality has the potential of changing the institutions of family and work.

Examiner: How would gender neutrality prompt legal changes?

Researcher: The Equal Rights Amendment, if ratified by the requisite number of states, would promote gender neutrality.

I would also favor passage of homosexual, bisexual, and heterosexual rights bills. In New York State in 1980 it is unlawful for adults--whether of the same or the opposite sex, married or unmarried--to engage in oral or anal sex in their own homes. This is clearly a violation of our right to privacy. In practice, heterosexuals are rarely prosecuted; however, the law is on the books and presents a potential threat to heterosexuals who are considered "deviant" in other ways (e.g., drug users or "radicals"). There should be free abortions on demand, free contraceptives, free day care centers providing excellent day care, and so forth. Both parents should be equally responsible for their children. Why wait until the divorce to consider joint custody? At the present time, in this society, marriage forces people into gender roles. The division of labor according to sex and gender must be abolished if we are to be free--this is a necessary but not sufficient condition. Each woman should refuse to reproduce until the above conditions have been met. Children should be brought up by human beings--not stereotypes of polar opposite gender roles. In terms of the two guardians or

parents, the question might arise in this form: who will take care of the child from birth until the age of, say, three? Parents should demand parental leaves of absence-- at half pay, like a college professor's sabbatical--so that for the first two or three years, both parents can take care of their child together. An alternative solution is to work half days at half salary. In this way, one parent could take care of the child in the morning, the other in the afternoon, and both in the evening and at night. The problem with this is that the parents must either have the kind of occupations which lend themselves to part-time work((such as college teaching)) or the world of work must be changed in order to meet parental demands. In addition, gender neutrality, by abolishing the concentration of females in the lower ranks ((through equal pay for equal work and through equal opportunities for females--so that physicians will be female or male, nurses will be male or female, business executives will be female or male, and secretaries will be male or female)), may make careers more attractive to females than they are now. Many women may choose not to reproduce. Others may choose to reproduce and raise children with a partner of the same sex.

Examiner: What about people who choose not to reproduce?

Researcher: They should be able to do as they please without being stigmatized. There could be some sort of middle ground, whereby people who wanted to spend a few hours a week with someone else's children could do so. We must curb population growth.

Examiner: How do you feel about cooperatives? A nursery school run by parents, for example.

Researcher: It would enable children to make friends at an early age. There already are many cooperatives....

Examiner: How would gender neutrality improve the life of the privileged sex, males? Or would females gain rights at the expense of males?

Researcher: All humans would benefit from gender neutrality.

Chafetz (1974) and many other textbook authors point out that females complain about what they can't do, whereas males complain about what they must do:

Females complain that they cannot be athletic, aggressive, sexually free, or successful in the worlds of work and education; in short, they complain of their passivity. Males complain that they must be aggressive and must succeed; in short, of their activity. The (sanctioned) requirement that males be active and females passive in a variety of ways is clearly unpleasant to both (Chafetz, 1974: 59).

Role reversal puts females in masculine roles and males in feminine roles but does not abolish gender roles. The career wife-househusband situation is role reversal. The world of work must be radically altered so that it is not "sickening." In many cases, the division of labor has made work bureaucratic, uninteresting, and, in some cases, devoid of any meaning except the sound of a machine. It is clear to many people that equal rights with men is not an answer at all, as males are divided from each other according to class, race.....Unless the entire species is considered, the fight for women's rights will not fundamentally change our basic institutions. We should feed the hungry, yet countries play politics with grain..... people play the war game RISK --forgetting the Hell, no, we won't go! chants of the 1960s anti-war demonstrations..... some of these people are too young to remember the 1960s, and somehow were never told what the decade was all about. Develop solar energy--

Examiner: How can we raise our own consciousness with regard to gender roles?

Researcher: You're getting ahead of yourself. Let's go back to my field notes.

Examiner: On the first day of your research, then, you were trying to classify your experience using the classification system of your "subjects"? Is this correct? You assumed they had a system of classification and that it differed from your own, right?

Researcher: Here's a statement of purpose. It's a very short proposal, dated September 25, 1973, and called "Bisexual Women." It was submitted to the instructor of my Qualitative Methods class.

This is a participant observation study. Using Bruyn's (1966:15) terminology, my perspective can be described as that of a complete participant. I am a member of the bisexual women's consciousness-raising group I'm observing. No one in the group doubts my identity as a bisexual who's a part of this group. Besides the group, I also go to lesbian bars, dances, discussions, and go out with persons of the same sex. We can "pass" as heterosexuals, bisexuals, or lesbians. (I began this study as an oral report for a fascinating course on Social Control, taught by Professor Marvin Scott at Hunter College, The City University of New York, and plan to continue collecting data for several more months.) This study, which is my Master's thesis, was not begun to prove or disprove a hypothesis or to explain the "causes" of bisexuality or homosexuality. My principal aim is to show, to describe the bisexual women I feel I "know."

The participant observer considers the interpretations of his((her)) subjects to have first importance, and initially the observer may not want to understand these interpre-

tations objectively; he((she)) may want to understand them subjectively through his((her)) own involvement with the culture before he((she)) can understand them from any other viewpoint(Bruyn, 1966: 12).

The women in the bisexual consciousness-raising group knew few if any bisexual women before joining the group; they had no contact with groups of bisexual women or organizations for bisexual women(for, until recently, there was no such organization). It was the women in the consciousness-raising group who, as they talked at each weekly meeting, began to create a bisexual identity. In other words, before joining the group each woman saw herself as a woman with these or those problems but did not abstract these characteristics to the typification (Schutz, 1973: 73-87) of "bisexual woman." One focus of this study is to describe the process involved in the creation of this new identity. The changes in the members' way of dress, goals, speech, expressions, gestures and descriptions and the members' descriptions of the meaning of these changes will be presented at great length.

The meaning of an experience does not inhere within the experience "as such," but rather is conferred in a reflective advertence(Schutz, 1973: 53).

Finally, I will present an analysis, primarily from an ethno-phenomenological point of view, of the meaning I myself see(Abrams, Field Notes, 9/25/73).

Examiner: You say the members of your consciousness-raising group created an identity of bisexuality for themselves, right? Can you outline a "career" for the bisexual women in this study? By "career," I am referring to Goffman's(1961) use of the term.

Researcher: Quote:

One value of the concept of career is its

two-sidedness. One side is linked to internal matters held dearly and closely, such as image of self and felt identity; the other side concerns official position, jural relations, and style of life, and is part of a publicly accessible institutional complex. The concept of career, then, allows one to move back and forth between the personal and the public, between the self and its significant society, without having to rely overly for data upon what the person says he ((she)) thinks he((she)) imagines himself ((herself)) to be(Goffman, 1961: 127).

In terms of the women who had just come out as bisexuals, the first step was to appear at a lesbian organization, in this case, Lesbian Feminist Liberation. Joining a lesbian or bisexual women's consciousness-raising was the next step. Group members helped each other become integrated into the world of lavender women. We kept each other company, confided in each other, danced with each other, introduced each other to people, etc. At first we attended social events exclusively. Later, Elizabeth, Sunny, and I began to attend meetings and to work for lesbian/gay rights. If you were active in the organization, you met people. Eventually, the organization could be--at least for a time--a substitute family. The lavender world could replace or complement the straight world.

Examiner: In your own presentation of self, did you make your sexual preference clear? Did you always present yourself as a bisexual, for example?

Researcher: I try to choose people as individuals. Because of my experiences with males, I am skeptical about human relationships.

Examiner: Then you were converted to openness with persons of the same sex, but you were not convinced same-sex relationships were better than opposite-sex ones? What about the other group members?

Researcher: That depends on the point in time from which you choose to observe. Initially(4/73), we all idealized women. I was no exception. Sunny interpreted this to mean her consciousness had been raised. I felt disillusioned. If women were no better than men, we reasoned, they were surely no worse.

Examiner: Then for most of the women in the group, the conversion was to being women-loving-women. This sexual preference was profound and at least more permanent than the label "bisexual," wasn't it?

Researcher: Only Sunny went back to heterosexuality--in 1975. Many of us went from bisexual to lesbian, some from bisexual to lesbian to bisexual....For five out of six group members, the conversion was to being lavender.

Examiner: This new definition of lavender--women-loving-women--includes bisexual women. Usually lavender refers to female and male homosexuals.

Researcher: There are lesbians and bisexual women at Lesbian Feminist Liberation ; lavender represents their sexual, emotional, spiritual

and political love for other women. We were all originally heterosexual, and we all became lavender. One member went back to heterosexuality--but I am no longer in touch with my former group members. As sexuality is fluid, perhaps some members are still "evolving."

Examiner: Why did Sunny reconvert to heterosexuality?

Researcher: I don't know. Maybe she wanted a change from the lavender subculture, or maybe she met a man who attracted her. The last I heard, she was teaching women karate and looking well.

Examiner: How did the others react? Who told you the news?

Researcher: Elizabeth and Lynn relayed the news to me. I don't know who told the others, but they all knew. The group reaction was shock, hostility, regret....

Examiner: Would you agree that Centers for Change was part of a counterculture whereas Lesbian Feminist Liberation was part of a subculture?

Researcher: Yes, the most radical thing about Lesbian Feminist Liberation was the sexual preferences of its members. Politically--except for lesbian/gay rights--it is a middle of the road organization. It is more radical than the National Organization for Women but less radical than organizations such as Radicalesbians or the New York Radical Feminists(no longer exists). The women at Lesbian Feminist

Liberation were trying not to duplicate gender roles--

I thought that by studying lesbians and bisexual women, I could learn whether 1) one has to be gay to be a "real" feminist or 2) straight and gay feminists are remarkably similar. (Abrams, May 1978).

Examiner: But you had no control group of heterosexual women. How could you compare one small group of bisexual women and lesbians with "heterosexual women"? There are all kinds of people--

Researcher: I realize all this. But--at the beginning, at least-- I could still be the "heterosexual woman" and see whether the women at Lesbian Feminist Liberation were more "radical" than I was. Where else could I start, if not with my own consciousness?

Thus if we want to focus on consciousness (as did Descartes, Hume, Kant, and others), and if we want the best available samples of it in order to make our descriptive judgments with the best evidence, then there is no alternative except to reflect on my own consciousness, and each of you on his((her)) own. (Zaner, 1970: 122).

Examiner: Where could you end?

Researcher:

82. Feel the consciousness of each person as your own consciousness. So, leaving aside concern for self, become each being. (Reps, no copyright date:171).

Examiner: Those are two extremes. And why would you want to become lavender, for instance? For emotional closeness, sexual pleasure; what else?

Researcher:

The central importance of entering into worlds other than our own--and hence of anthropology itself--lies in the fact that the experience leads us to understand that our own world is also a cultural construct (Walter Goldschmidt in Castaneda, 1968: viii).

By becoming lavender, I could learn about heterosexuality--

Examiner: What is lesbianism?

Researcher: While many women believe they were born lesbians, a significant number see lesbianism as a choice, as a political act and statement, as an alternative to gender roles.

Lesbianism isn't something you are-- it's something you do--(Grahn, 1970: 37).

I think most gay women are gay, mainly, because they couldn't stand to be shut up in the traditional women's roles and options. The deep basis for their sexual choice was a moral protest against the standards of second-class adulthood implied in the behavior of heterosexual women in relationship to men (Sontag, 1974: 33).

In a society in which men do not oppress women, and sexual expression is allowed to follow feelings, the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality would disappear (Radicalesbians, 1970).

Examiner: If lesbians tend to duplicate gender roles, then lesbianism per se isn't radical, is it?

Researcher: As a rejection of dependence on males for money; power; prestige; sex; a feeling of fulfillment, lesbianism is radical.

Examiner: What were your findings, if any?

Researcher:

1. Sexuality is learned; sexual preference is fluid, changeable.
2. Gender roles make us social types rather than individuals.
3. Heterosexuality is something we are born into and soon take for granted--like a religion. It is prescribed for almost everyone in the United States in 1980, for example. Nevertheless, some people convert to other sexual preferences.
4. Consciousness-raising is an attempt to avoid "psychologism"-- which rests upon the idea that "if we study a series of individuals and their milieux, the results of our studies in some way can be added up to knowledge of social structure"(Mills,1959:67).

Resistances To Consciousness

Thinking that our man is the exception and, therefore, we are the exception among women.

Thinking that individual solutions are possible, that we don't need solidarity and a revolution for our liberation.....

Peslikis in Morgan, ed., 1970: 379).

In so far as the family as an institution turns women into darling little slaves and men into their chief providers and unweaned dependents, the problem of a satisfactory marriage remains incapable of purely private solution. (Mills, 1959: 10).

Examiner: The bisexual women in your consciousness-raising group had to typify their experiences in order to create first a bisexual and then a lesbian identity. But you, on the other hand, wanted to see them both as individuals and as types.

Researcher: As a writer, I wanted to portray the members as individuals.

Begin with an individual, and before you know it you find that you have created a type; begin with a type, and you find that you have created--nothing. (F. Scott Fitzgerald, 1960: 152).

As a sociologist, I was looking for patterns; shared values, beliefs, lifestyles, etc.; explanations of experience. I learned to classify ("we are all bisexual women") and to unclassify ("each of us is different") simultaneously. In the same way, each of us was an individual, a member of a small group, and yet also part of a society--

Examiner: No one became gender neutral. Is this correct?

Researcher: Yes. But some of us tried....Just as I may have a mental picture of something concrete and be unable to draw it, so may a person trying to break out of conventional ways of seeing and acting have an idea of gender neutrality but still be unable--for a period of years--to throw away familiar gender roles. For

some people, shallow, materialist, and unreflecting, gender roles are very deep; for others, they are a burden happily thrown away. Most of us, probably, fall in the former group.³

Examiner: Can consciousness be raised? Can you give an example of it?

Researcher: I'll tell you a story and let you decide for yourself.

37. Publishing the Sutras

Tetsugen, a devotee of Zen in Japan, decided to publish the sutras, which at that time were available only in Chinese. The books were to be printed with wood blocks in an edition of seven thousand copies, a tremendous undertaking. Tetsugen began by travelling and collecting donations for this purpose. A few sympathizers would give him a hundred pieces of gold, but most of the time he received only small coins. He thanked each donor with equal gratitude. After ten years Tetsugen had enough money to begin his task. It happened that at that time the Uji River overflowed. Famine followed. Tetsugen took the funds he had collected for the books and spent them to save others from starvation. Then he began again his work of collecting. Several years afterwards an epidemic spread over the country. Tetsugen again gave away what he had collected, to help his people.

For the third time he started his work, and after twenty years his wish was fulfilled. The printing blocks which produced the first edition of sutras can be seen today in the Obaku monastery in Kyoto. The Japanese tell their children that Tetsugen made three sets of sutras, and that the first two invisible sets surpass even the last. (Reps, no copyright date: 35-36).

³ Fortunately, "socialization" is neither complete nor irreversible. If it were, social change would be impossible.

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