

SISTER STRUGGLES

Gay Liberation &
Women's Liberation

From the dawn of history, women have been oppressed as a sex by male-supremacist heterosexual society. The destiny of women has been chained to marriage and the family, and their only socially acceptable function and identity have derived from their roles as childbearers and homemakers. Their tasks as wives and mothers (about which hymns of praise are routinely sung) are in reality held in contempt by society ('she's just a housewife'). Women have in fact been unpaid domestic workers providing housekeeping, childcare and sexual services to men on an exclusive basis.

Women are victims of compulsive sexual morality codified and transmitted by Judaeo-Christian tradition in the name of *divine* law. They are seen simply as the incubators of the future of *mankind*, and female sexuality has been straightjacketed to suit the male heterosexual consciousness of power. Women are supposed to be the passive and ever-available objects of male sexual desire, to dutifully reproduce the species and, through compulsory sexual *fidelity*, to ensure that property is inherited by the next generations's *legitimate* members. Even the need for armies is still used as a justification for keeping women in their traditional role—more cannonfodder must be produced.

brutal suppression

The slightest attempt on the part of women to assume any other role has been brutally suppressed. Joan of Arc is one example of how women who step outside the appointed roles are dealt with. The millions of women who challenged the authority of the church in medicine and were burned as *witches* testify to the agony women have endured at the hands of heterosexual ideology. Up until yesterday, any women who so much as indicated by dress of manner the desire to challenge male supremacy were instantly and systematically labelled *queer* and obviously lesbian—and therefore diseased, mad or evil.

The present gay and feminist struggles offer glimpses of a future theory and practise of sexuality. According to present social role definitions, heterosexual love is justified, in spite of the fact that it gives pleasure, by its *higher purpose*—procreation. Homosexual love has no such purpose, but means pleasure in and of itself; our repressed society therefore bans and condemns it as a sexual option.

Women are developing a female-oriented sexuality one that rejects compulsory premarital or monogamous chastity. Women reject with anger the age-old view that they are simply to be passive partners waiting for the ultimate experience male penetration, and deny that

female sexual pleasure is only to be found through *vaginal orgasm*. Further the increased availability of birth control materials has enabled more and more women to lead sexually active lives and to see motherhood as an option rather than as the main goal of their existence. The message of both the gay and the feminist movements is that the biological fact that only heterosexual coitus can produce babies does *not* mean that only heterosexual relations are valid for every member of the human race.

direct challenge

The rise of the women's movement in recent years has directly challenged the traditional view of women. The development of a powerful feminist consciousness which debunked the hallowed sex roles encouraged gay people to fight for the first time in their own name and interest. The gay liberation movement and the women's liberation movement have much in common, for the source of their oppression is the same. Many of the institutions which oppress women—the church, the schools, the legal system, and particularly the heterosexual nuclear family—also oppress gays.

Gay liberation is a struggle for basic democratic rights, the right to control one's own body and to control one's own life. Gays learned from the struggles of women for control of their own reproductive lives; in turn the feminist movement learned from gays when it began to reject the baiting of lesbian women and to support gay rights. Gay liberation is the sister to women's liberation in that both have to struggle against artificial sex roles and stereotypes. While the major tasks of gay liberation are aimed at achieving emancipation—the right to be who we are—for gay people, it goes beyond that in its implications, as does the feminist struggle. It ultimately aims at liberating the sexuality of everyone from the repressive puritanism of present society, a society in which honest and open sexuality exists only in potential. Our culture, which on the one hand gags and chokes off our sexual desires and on the other hand uses those desires to sell a myriad of products (including sexual attractiveness itself), denies *all* its members their sexual rights.

life link

Lesbians are the real life link between women's liberation and gay liberation. They have fought side by side with their straight sisters, and have worked together with gay men to win their rights as a sexual minority. Individual gay women have long ago braved the ridicule and hatred of men by their dangerous independence of them. Gay women

suffer a double oppression, as women and as gays. In many places they have reached the conclusion that they must fashion their own organizations in their efforts to define their identity.

The precise forms of possible alliance between the gay women, straight women and gay men have not become clearly discernible yet. The women's movement in general will have to relate to, and take up more than it has to date, the concerns and demands of lesbians—for example, the right of gay women to retain their children if they choose in custody battles. Gay men will have to consciously discard their male chauvinism. They know they have no interest in the maintenance of male supremacy since it oppresses them, yet they retain, as men, a male-supremacist consciousness of women. It is only through finding and uniting on concrete issues which affect both the women's movement and the gay movement that these two struggles can combine to defeat a common enemy.

The following motion, introduced by GATE Vancouver, was adopted by the 2nd national gay conference in Winnipeg, September 1974.

Gay liberation recognizes and adopts as its own the principle of the women's movement as a whole that men don't have a place in determining the overall priorities of women. This is an issue because of the double oppression of gay women. It follows that the actions of gay women to set up organizations and collectives limited in participation to women cannot be construed as anti-male or sexist. Gay liberation rejects *per se* the notion that sexism in the gay movement is a *two-way street* because it suggests that women have the ability to oppress men in a social, economic and political sense.

This pamphlet is a reprint of an editorial which appeared in Gay Tide, volume 1, number 4, in January 1974. Gay Tide is the newspaper of the Gay Alliance Toward Equality (GATE), a Vancouver gay liberation organization. We are distributing the pamphlet free, although donations are accepted. Published March 1977.

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