

1500 Women at UCLA hold Lesbian conference

HELEN KOBLIN

Fifteen hundred women representing all parts of the nation convened at UCLA this weekend, April 13-15 for the West Coast Lesbian Conference, the first of its kind in the history of the world. Beaming females, a few topless, swarmed Moore Hall Friday night and lingered around Jans Steps in the sunny glow of Saturday afternoon. However, since Los Angeles is not really Mount Olympus, there was a near riot over a transsexual entertainer Friday night and a male Jesus freak with a sign reading "Dykes repent" had to be protected by the Dyke Patrol Saturday from a group of irate lesbians. But collective enthusiasm countered conflict successfully all the way through, setting a mood for all the Women's Week activities scheduled for the next days.

Friday night at Moore Hall was like any other night with the slight variation of 1,000 women packing the 500-seat auditorium. Maxine Feldman, musician-composer sang her gay song, *Angry Atthus*. Debbie from Oregon rendered her lyric, *I'm Gay and I'm Proud, Now We Can Sing It Out Loud*. Later, she sang *Your Friends Should be Your Lovers and Your Lovers Should Be Your Friends*. Chairwoman Jean Cordova, editor of *The Lesbian Tide*, announced that there would be no men allowed in during the duration of the conference except at noon Saturday for a brief press conference. She took of child care arrangements for lesbian mothers who transported their children (gay men from UCLA had volunteered their services) and of the various housing facilities that had been pre-arranged for out-of-towners. Everything appeared to have been well organized.

A trio called *The New Woman* contributed some more original sounds and lyrics, and received a forceful ovation. Jan Oxenberg's film, called *Home Movie* was then shown. It dealt with early role conditioning for little girls, and their natural rebellions thereto. The film was a campy consciousness raiser. Throughout the program, women openly and spontaneously embraced, stroked and kissed one another, and while these gestures were loving and sensual, they were never overtly sexual. Gay or straight, this free expression of affection has always been the one privilege allotted to women and not men in this society.

Trans-Sexual Entertainment

Life was humming along at a high spirited pace, until about 9:30 when a thorn in the side of the lesbian psyche ascended the stage, guitared and ready to perform. The person was Beth Elliot. Beth is a trans-sexual who claims to be a lesbian sister. Beth was born a male, but made his identification with the female and went through some medical transformations to prove it. However, Beth was not content to be merely a female, merely a feminist, she dedicated herself to being a lesbian feminist. Well, there were a large number of lesbian feminists present who weren't buying Beth's trip, and they vociferously protested her presence.

Lesbian women, not famous for acquiescence, shrieked, moved toward the platform and demanded Beth's removal. One woman stated that Beth had attempted to seduce her four years prior to this occasion. Jean Cordova, who deserves a medal of valor for her calm and patient moderation all weekend, spoke to the audience, took a vote, and found that
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WASHINGTON — Suppose the Watergate scandal had climaxed six months earlier and had propelled George McGovern into the White House. How would President McGovern have handled the problems that now beset the nation?

He has reflected on this lately and he talked to us about it. As President, McGovern would never have lifted the lid on wages and prices. But he would have applied the same controls on interest rates and excess profits. He would also have slashed military spending by \$10 billion and used the money to pay for social programs.

He would not now be bombing Cambodia and he would have cleared all U.S. forces out of Vietnam. He would not have loaded down President Thieu with military supplies to continue the fighting. For the war-battered countries of Indochina, he would have offered economic but no military aid.

In foreign aid, McGovern would have carried on the work of President Nixon in Moscow, Peking and the Middle East. Although McGovern confesses annoyance with his press treatment, he would not be feuding with the press. To head the FBI, he would have appointed Quinn Tamm, a veteran lawman, with instructions to make the FBI more professional and less political. And, of course, McGovern would be doing his best to uncover rather than cover up the Watergate details.



Two members of the Dyke Patrol pose for their picture at the Lesbian Conference at UCLA. Not long after this photo was taken, the girl on the right got punched in the eye when she was protecting a male Jesus Freak who turned up at the Conference holding a sign which read, "Dykes Repent." See story this page. (Photo by Helen Koblin.)

Lesbian conference at UCLA

'We are the women that men have warned us about'

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the majority agreed to allow Beth to perform. The performer proceeded to deliver four songs to a not-too-attentive audience.

One young woman topped off that first evening with a series of amusing stories about her experiences as a barmaid. (She must remain nameless, since she was introduced hurriedly with an unclear first name.) She told of Norman, the proprietor of the bar, her boss, who taught her to hustle drinks, implored her to comb her hair and wear hot pants, and suggested that she even do a little hooking on the side.

Absence of 'Butches'

Norman, who more resembled a rodent than a man, according to the barmaid-poet, finally got around to trying to ball her. Having turned a deaf ear to all her negative responses, she finally copped out to being a lesbian. To this he responded with a barrage of choice epithets, but the writer responded with, "Yes, and I fuck better-looking women than you do." This line elicited a unanimous "right-on" from the audience.

As I scanned the auditorium, which was now solidly packed with women seated on the floor, in the aisles, around the platform, and pouring out into the corridor, I flashed that "the new world comin'" was really here. For most of the women were very young, averaging around 22 to 28, and most looked happy and lovely, and free in that there was a decided absence of the "butch" stereotype that lesbians of the past were conditioned to believe was appropriate to their life styles . . . and that the straight society was conditioned to look for.

Although the "star" system aroused much controversy, two keynote speakers were scheduled. The first was Robin Morgan, author and editor of *Sisterhood is Powerful* and poet-author of *Monster*, a collection of poems. Robin, who is frequently attacked from within as well as outside of the Movement for her radicalism, nevertheless commanded the rapt attention of her

sisters, who were sprawled about the lawn around Janss Steps, where she spoke Saturday morning. Her speech was at once so poignant and poetic, powerful and incisive, informative and insightful, in short, brilliant, that her sisters sat transfixed and made no issue about violating the agreed upon anti-star format of the conference.

Since Robin Morgan took five weeks to prepare her speech so that she would not be misquoted, and

neurotic, crazy, frigid, castrating, bitchy, aggressive lesbians, and broom-riding witches! So I want to start by saying that this shocking stereotype is absolutely true. The days of women asking politely for a crumb of human dignity are over.

"Most men say, 'But you've become so hostile,' to which a good retort is a quote from a 19th century feminist who said, 'First men put up the chains and then when we writhe in

The main thrust was, 'Is she or isn't she?' 'Know anyone who's been to bed with her lately?' 'We can't prove she's a lesbian, so what right does she have to address a lesbian-feminist conference?'

"Now such charges hardly devastate me since I've been straight-baited before. So, it is credential time, once again. I am a woman! I am a feminist, a radical feminist, a militant feminist. I am a witch. I identify as a

movements vs. faggot effeminate consciousness, women, tactics of the women's revolution and the vision of the female cosmos.

"I am an expert with the scars to prove it. I have been in my time, not only straight-baited, but also dyke-baited, red-baited, violent-baited, mother-baited, and artist-baited.

"As you can see, the above credentials qualify me for being an excellent target, available not only to the male rules, but also to any woman just dying to practice, even on a sister. But now to the subject.

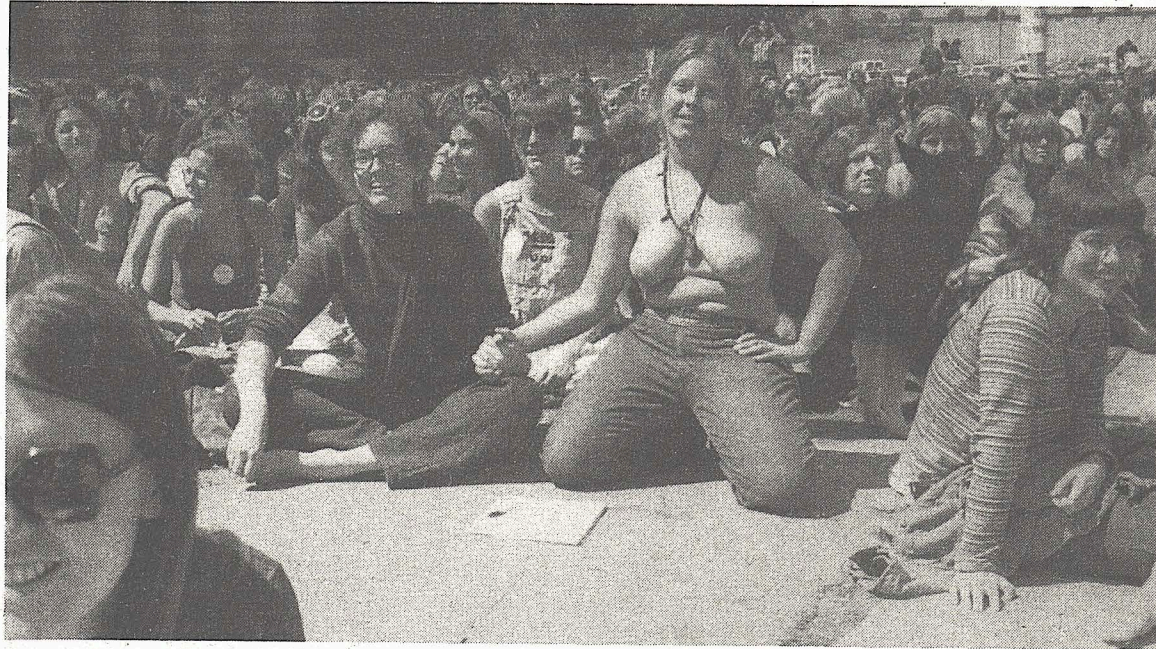
The So-Called Split

"It is necessary to recap history a little. In the early days of the current women's movement, many of us were a bit schizoid. The very first consciousness-raising session I went to for example, gave me the warning. We were talking about sexuality, and I described myself as a bisexual. This was even before the birth of the first gay liberation front, and long before 'bisexual' became a naughty or copout word. Every woman in the room moved, almost imperceptibly an inch or so away from me. This was not the first time I was to have such an articulate reaction.

"Later, with the creation of GLF (Gay Liberation Front) a few of us Jewish mother types spent a lot of time running back and forth between the two movements, telling straight women (feminists) that the lesbians weren't ogres, and telling the lesbians that the straight women weren't creeps. Simultaneously, the intense misogyny coming against lesbians from gay men, drove many women out of the gay movement, and into the women's movement. It was a brief and glorious sisterhood-glazed honeymoon, among all women in our movement.

"Then the contradictions began. I had announced my lesbian identification in the *New York Times* in 1968, before the first GLF had been founded. In 1970, one group of radical lesbians said to me, "Don't you dare call yourself a lesbian. You live with a man and you have a child."

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Women listen to Robin Morgan at the UCLA Lesbian Conference (Photo by Tina Brandon)

because her explanations of the progress of the Women's Movement are rendered with such crystalline consciousness, I have here incorporated the highlights of that speech.

Speech By Robin Morgan

"My very Dear Sisters,

"It seems important at the beginning to affirm why, who and how we're here.

"We all know the mass media's stereotype of the Women's Movement, right? Like, if you've seen one woman's libber, you've seen them all. They each have two heads, a pair of horns, are fire-spouting, man-hating,

agony, they deplore our not behaving prettily.' Enough of that. We are the women that men have warned us about.

"That settled, I want to talk about a number of difficult and dangerous themes relating to what others have called, "the lesbian straights," "lesbian separatism from straight women," and "the lesbian-feminist split."

"As far back as a month ago, I began hearing a few rumbles of confusion or criticism about my keynoting this conference . . . all from predictable people, and none, of course, expressed directly to my face.

lesbian because I love the people of women and certain individual women with my life's blood.

"Yes, I live with a man as does my sister, Kate Millett. Yes, I am a mother as is my sister, Dell Martin. That man is a faggot effeminate and we are together as the biological as well as the nurturant parents of our child.

"Now this confuses a lot of people; it not infrequently confuses us. But there it is. Most of all, I am a monster and I am proud.

"All of the above credentials, qualify me, I feel to speak from concrete experience on feminism, lesbianism, motherhood, gay male

'Nobody wants their queers'

The 'split' between hetero feminists and lesbians

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Now, while I might defensively argue the low conscious argument of this (since) statistically, most lesbians are married to men and have children, I have, nonetheless, learned one thing from all my previous years in the Left ... guilt. So my reflexes went into action, and I obeyed.

"Six months later, another group of radical lesbians confronted me and said, 'We noticed, you stopped calling yourself a lesbian ... have you gone back to the closet ... afraid?' Meanwhile, the monosexual straight women were still inching away from my presence.

"The lines began to be drawn, thick and heavy. Friedan turned her cannon on 'the lesbian menace.' In a show of persistent terror and hatred of lesbians, and indeed, of all women, one might say, she recently announced in the New York Times that lesbians and radical feminists in the Movement were CIA infiltrators.

"We met her attack with a firm political attack in the press, never descending to the level of personal vilification or giving the media the catfight that they were trying to foment.

The Backlash

"By 1970, the backlash had begun, starting in NOW and in 15 radical feminist groups as well. The bigotry was intense and wore many faces. Hatred and revulsion of lesbian women, experimentation ... using a lesbian for 'an interesting experience,' and then dumping her afterward, curiosity about the freaks, dismissal of another woman's pain if it did not fall within the 'common' experience, etc.

by lesbians, but the pressure came mostly from confusion in different directions, each of which might have led to an enlightened feminism, but which the man exploited into warring factions. He was aided, of course, by the ... internalized hostility of any oppressed people. Tearing at each other is painful, but it is after all easier than tearing at the real enemy.

"People did struggle sincerely and attempt to understand and relate, but

tions and who wanders into a meeting for the first time thinking maybe she has a right to be there because she likes women. That energy, that woman-loving woman energy freed into open expression and, in fact, into totally new forms of relationships by the existence of a Feminist Movement has exploded into marches and demonstrations and dances and films and theatre groups and crisis centers and on and on. A whole affirmative

A press conference was held at noon to which men were invited, but were totally and conspicuously absent. As a matter of fact, the establishment press, male or female, were nowhere to be found at the monumental event. Nobody seemed too concerned about it, since lesbians as well as straight Feminists have consistently charged the media with presenting vicious and distorted images that undermine the Wo-

nurtured through centuries of silence.

Margaret Sloan, an editor of Ms. magazine, and a black lesbian feminist sister changed the mood with an injection of humor. "Hi," she said, following Kim's emotional exit. "I know we all look alike, so I came to play the antagonist instead of Kim. I always do."

Margaret's theme was that too much is done to emphasize the differences between black and white women, and that we ought to discuss things that we can work on together. She underscored Robin's thought that the Movement is for all women, not just lesbians. Rita Mae Brown urged the desperate need for lesbians to band together, "because we're all we got ... nobody wants their queers, not white folks, black folks, poor folks or rich folks."

Robin Morgan spoke again briefly and articulately even though she said she had shot her wad earlier. Always the poet, she described herself as a tool for the goddess that exists in every woman. As to "ageism" reflected in the Movement, she discarded the concept as irrelevant. "We are 30 and we are three and we are 93. We are the oldest people and the largest people on the face of the earth, and we are very very beautiful," she concluded.



Photo by Helen Koblirn

the flaw still widened to a crack and then a split was created by our collective false consciousness. We are now teetering on the brink of an abyss, but one very different from that which we've been led to accept.

Two Factions

"At present, there are supposed to be two factions. On one side, there are those labeled 'heterosexuals,' 'bisexual,' 'asexual,' and 'celibate' women. On the other, there are those labeled 'lesbians.'

"Not that the latter group is monolithic, far from it, although monosexual straight women can in

new world within the world of women."

Robin Morgan then asserted the right of any oppressed people to hate as a class, the oppressor class. "Manhating is an honorable and viable political act," she said.

She also hurled a few diatribes at gay brothers, whom according to her premise, bear every resemblance to straight men in this society in their denigrating attitudes, indeed their ingrained hatred of women. "Boys will be boys, when it comes to woman-bonding, she explained. Therefore, the spokeswoman advised against any kind of unification with men for any political reason.

Robin Morgan compared male transvestitism (drag) with whites who wear black face. The implication is that these people are playing with the idea of identification rather than experiencing the pain of the group that they emulate.

The spokeswoman, with quavering voice, now accused men in the Left Movement as insidiously using women as their "standard bearers." Reaching an emotional pitch that spilled over into tears, she went on, "Every woman here knows in her gut the differences between her sexuality and any patriarchally trained male. That has always been a source of pride to the lesbian community; that the emphasis on genital sexuality, objectification, promiscuity, non-emotional involvement, and tough invulnerability was a male style. And that we, as women place greater emphasis on love, sensuality, humor, tenderness, strength and commitment." She put down the Cock Rock Genre, which under the guise of art produces such racist-sexist gems as "Brown Sugar."

Robin wept openly as she described the hideous rape-murder of a sister who was gangbanged and then killed by the "repeated ramming of a broom handle into her vagina," which resulted in massive internal hemorrhage. This horror was revealed by Robin to expose the manner in which women are frequently indifferent to other women, when they unconsciously adopt the patriarchal attitudes of the society, for the lesbian activists in the area where this atrocity took place refused to take legal action because they were not convinced that the woman was a lesbian.

While the speaker passionately urged against being tricked into incorporating any male-invented apathy or disdain for any woman's suffering, the second attempt to disrupt the conference occurred.

From the top of Janss Steps, behind the speaker, a solitary man, later labeled as a "Jesus Freak" stood with a sign that read, "Dykes Repent." Robin stopped talking and women rose from their places in the grass and rushed toward the intruder. About half a dozen women, wearing T-shirts marked, "Dyke Patrol" attempted to avert trouble by getting between the irate sisters and the man. He was successfully driven off, but one female patroller sustained a punch in the eye from a woman as she tried to protect the man from the rush.

Robin resumed and concluded with a plea for all women to unify and strengthen their commitment to a total Feminist Revolution.

men's Struggle for Liberation.

A sad-eyed Kate Millett, author of Sexual Politics, spoke of much personal suffering. She told of the society that creates stars, "ballons with faces painted on the front," that are blown up in order to be later shot down.

The West Coast Lesbian Conference was sponsored by the Southwestern Regional Lesbian Working Committee and facilitated by the UCLA Women's Resource Center. The Conference began the Women's Week Program at UCLA which continues through April 20. Call 825-3945 for information about the remaining events and exhibits.

Kate, who has always identified herself as a pacifist, talked of war. "There is someone outside this conference that wants to kill me and kill you ... this is really a revolution of love and art which has suffered much at the hands of the Philistine Left ..."

The third complication occurred Saturday night when a faction of the group objected to the appearance of the next scheduled speaker, Kate Millett. The anti-star feeling was growing, smaller groups were anxious to express themselves and the child care facilities were somewhat deteriorating.

Kate, the intellectual, soft-spoken gentler spirit of the Movement read some of her poetry and described her recent persecutions as an artist. Her recent book was refused publication because it was about "queers". She then expressed her concern about her audience of sisters refusing her a forum. Kate was reminiscent of ancient Sappho, the Greek poetess who tried to do her thing despite all forces that contradicted her privilege as an artist.

After about half an hour, she graciously turned the platform over to those others who were anxious to communicate. From there the program took on the tone of an amateur variety show with overtones of statements on female oppression. Two dances followed, one at UCLA and one at the HELP center, with live all female musicians.

By Sunday everyone had mellowed out after early church services. A variety of workshop and small discussion groups evolved and communications were vitally resumed.

As the caravans departed from UCLA, the power and energy generated by the collective experience will doubtless remain in the individual psyches of each participant, providing a source of hope and strength to deal with the wilderness outside. These women are no longer alone. A small segment of society has conquered fear.

(Editor's Note: Next week the Free Press will report on those Women's Week activities at UCLA which occur after this issue goes to press.)



Jan Oxenberg showed her film, Home Movie, at the Conference. (Photo by Helen Koblirn)

"Meanwhile, lesbians reeling by the hatred expressed by the gay male movement, the fear expressed by the women's liberation movement, began to organize separately. Of course, a great many lesbians had been in the Women's Movement from the beginning. A great many had, in fact, begun it. These included some women who were active in Daughters of Bilitus, under other names, not only to keep jobs and homes and custody of their children but also so as not to embarrass NOW, which they had BUILT.

"In addition, a great many formerly heterosexual or asexual women were declaring themselves lesbians as they found the support to come out of their kitchens and their communes as well as their closet.

"Some women were pressured ...

their fear try to hide their bigotry behind such a belief. So, there are some lesbians who work politically with gay men, some work politically with straight men, some work politically with other lesbians, some work politically with only certain other lesbians ... age, race, class distinctions ... some work politically with all feminists, and some, of course, don't work politically at all.

"As Laurel has pointed out in the current Amazon Quarterly, there are sub, sub, sub-sub divisions between gay women, lesbians, lesbian-feminists, dykes, dyke-feminists, dyke-separatists, old dykes, butch dykes, bar dykes and killer dykes.

"Heaven help the woman who is unaware of these fine political distinc-



Maxine Feldman

she said. She revealed how Time magazine recently depicted her father as a weakminded drunk to explain why "Kate is such a bitter little bitch." Kate was deeply wounded by this bit of exploitive journalism since her father is dead, and she had made her peace with him while he lived.

Ms. Millett described how the superstructure is trying to turn black sisters against white sisters, and then introduced Kim, a young black woman to elaborate on that subject, but who, instead burst into tears and ran off.

If the amount of tears shed by women at this conference over the weekend is an accurate barometer, they have all been a long time suffering, and the convention, in addition to the political purpose it served, also apparently provided a release for pain of unrealized magnitude,

(Photo by Tina Brandon)



Trans-sexual Beth Elliot almost caused a riot Friday night when the former man entertained at the Lesbian conference. (Photo by Helen Koblirn.)



Writer Robin Morgan (left) and Editor Margaret Sloan of Ms Magazine confer at the UCLA conference. (Photo by Tina Brandon)