

Why the Women's Liberation Center?

Women's Liberation movement in the past 3 years has grown enormously, demonstrating unlimited ambitions. Every step in our development has been scrutinized by our own media and mass media. While our media is struggling underground, mass media is having a heyday profiting from our past and present endeavors. On the most part, we've suffered a great deal of grief from male coverage because of their crude rip-offs, poor criticisms and ruthless distortion of facts. Only recently, they've been cunning enough to treat us with some esteem, although Madison Avenue boys roll out their purposely sexist, insult ads, i.e. "Fly Barbara". It's difficult to assess the real impact mass media has or has had on our movement, but we do know more women are coming together and devoting time to women's liberation issues. Indeed, we have strength to change the one-sided nature of this society.

To change social attitudes, we threw ourselves into countless activities to make up for lost time. We attended marches and demos for general and specific women's causes, insisted on more day care centers controlled by women, better employment opportunities without sex discrimination, pushed for new laws and reforms, supported the Abortion Project so that women could know and want to govern their own bodies, involved ourselves in consciousness-raising groups, read and listened to each others' ideas. In the process, we started to understand each other and most important move toward establishing our self-confidence. Patriarchal society was not our bag.

What's puzzling is that in contrast to our movement's growth, Manhattan's Women's Liberation Center has been neglected, not benefiting as it should from our well being. More women than ever before are needed to staff, join collectives, update information, etc., in order for the center to function effectively. Responses to our pleas have been marginal. Essential movement services are demanded of the center by groups and individuals without giving support to do so, financially and otherwise.

Recently, there seems to be an expressed concern to change the situation. Women contacted by phone and/or visiting the center appear to be more interested in what their center is and can be. We know that women's organizations and groups in NYC do not coordinate all of what is going on in the city, nation and abroad, instead they selectively channeled their energies to their specific projects and activities. That is understandable. Only a movement clearinghouse, a women's center, is capable at this point of pulling loose ends together. The center is vital and we know it. The center should be a place to be informed on what is happening, i.e., conferences, liberating buildings, emergencies, services and a place where we can come together and rap, exchange thoughts among ourselves.

At present, we are cramped for space. Many meetings are not held at the center for this reason and others. Suggestions have been considered in terms of where to move, since our lease expires in April. For several weeks now, we have been negotiating with the city for a building suitable to our needs, ample room for Women's Health and Abortion Project, OWL, other groups who need space, feminist library, literature, staffers, projects and collectives. This building will be large enough to hold several group meetings simultaneously, conferences and social events. Also, it is ideal in terms of ~~location~~ location, central and safe.

Politically the time is NOW to support the Women's Liberation Center of NYC. Help get this building for our needs. The best support is by contribution of time ideas, city contacts and money. Remember and keep believing--Sisterhood is Powerful.

XXXX

It's Beautiful to be Women

Women's Liberation center of New York
City

Older Women's Liberation

Older Women's Liberation has existed for two years. We are the hundreds of women who have come to the Women's Center to meet and discuss the special problems and needs of older women (30 years and over). Out of this inter-communication has come the realization that our deepest felt needs are social and economic. The question of the loneliness felt by many older women--for many are alone because of divorce, death of a husband, separation from family and friends--is a vital one.

A quick look at the statistics, and we can see the economic situation of older women. Three-quarters of the women who now work do so because they must help to support families, or do so as the sole provider. Not only are most women paid less for the same work, but a host of dead-end, low-paying jobs are relegated "for women only". More than one-half of the women over 45 hold clerical or service jobs. Only 6% of us are in management positions; only 13% are professionals or technicians. As women get older, their chances for advancement grow slimmer and the possibilities for jobs at all grow slimmer. A woman who has been home raising a family and decides to go back to work has an almost impossible task when looking for work. A survey of 454 companies showed that only 9% of all men and women hired by these firms in 1964 were over 45 years of age. We know that unemployment rates for women are higher than for men. For women 45-54 in 1968, unemployment rates were 50% higher than for men that age. Figures for 1971 are even higher.

There are many reasons why the social life of older women is a sad and lonely one. Women who are in the 45-65 age bracket are particularly lonely because children are grown and away from home. At this time women often feel a uselessness about themselves. Their chances for exciting work or another marriage are next to impossible. Weekends can be a disaster for older women, for as we know, men can easily frequent bars alone. The senior citizens clubs are often too structured and too programmed. To rely on one's children for entertainment can be a burden on the children and devastating for the older woman. An evening at the theater or a concert can be an already-shaky budget way off.

Considering all the above, Older Women's Liberation would like to join with other women's groups to locate a center where we can coordinate needs of older women:

1. A place where we can be together for relaxation and fun,
2. A place where we can go to be with each other to talk,
3. A place where we can have classes on the history of women or what is happening to our bodies, as older women,
4. Because we outlive men and do not have an excess of money, and live many of our remaining years alone, we want to learn to take care of some of the costlier things like learning to repair broken appliances (toasters, irons, electric plugs). Men have always done this. With qualified teachers we can learn to do them also.
5. A place where women who are not involved with women's liberation will be welcome.
6. A place to spend a Saturday night without the stigma of being "dateless."
7. A place where we can put all our talents together to create new means of support, as perhaps selling our wares, art, photography and foods.

The possibilities are endless. All we need is the place to begin to utilize ourselves and to be free of the fears of being older women in a youth-oriented age.

Older Women's Liberation
c/o Women's Center
36 W. 22 St., New York 10010

The Women's Liberation Center of New York

There is no public place for women to meet each other, "hang out", drop in on their world informally -- nothing, in short, that compares with the neighborhood bar for men or the school yard for children. Our "women's center" is a step toward filling this need in the community of women. We work primarily in two ways: as a free meeting-place for women and as a clearinghouse for services needed by women. Our phone number is the only listing in the N.Y. telephone directory for "women's liberation." Thus, we act as informal ombudswomen for women who need almost anything. Our center is the public contact for a woman who wants to reach the women's movement, or who needs something and has heard that the women's movement helps women to get things they need.

Referral -- We can refer a woman who calls to a physician (or a gynecologist or a psychotherapist), a lawyer, a divorce counsellor, a pregnancy or VD test, a consciousness-raising group, an abortion, or a child care center. To keep track of the most-requested services and resources, we maintain various kinds of files. Our referrals are screened so that we can assure our callers that the services we recommend are efficient, non-sexist and inexpensive. Most of our referrals accept welfare, medicaid and free clients. The center's bulletin boards are crowded with apartments for rent, jobs, notices of cultural and political women's events, notices of courses and training programs -- in short, anything that someone wants to post. We also refer to standard social services, such as welfare, drug rehabilitation, etc.

Bookstore, library and newsletter -- The center operates a small non-profit bookstore, offering books, pamphlets and newspapers covering issues, culture and activities of women. We have been building a library, with a decent women's herstory collection, and the works of major women writers. Our newsletter, which goes out approximately monthly, to a mailing list of 1,000 subscribers, carries news of women's groups and services, reviews of new books of interest to women, fund appeals for the center and contributions of women's poetry and art.

Meeting Place -- Within the limits of our present loft on 22nd St. in New York -- more than 50 women cannot be accommodated comfortably -- any group of women, feminist or not, can meet here by signing up for a blank space on the calendar. Thus, many groups of women use the center for a single evening, when their meeting is too large for a living room, or when they want to get a new project started. Groups that meet regularly at the center are Older Women's Liberation, the Women's Health and Abortion Project, the food conspiracy called Safonia, plus various classes.

The women's center is a going concern, not a plan, or a vision. We've been open for two years in a dingy but expensive (\$300 month) commercial loft. We have had to devote great amounts of time and energy to fundraising, to support a budget of \$15,000-\$20,000 a year, despite all economies--limping along from one financial crisis to another. Although we are proud that we were able to do it, this constant burden of fundraising and meeting bills has often diverted us from the work that we most wanted to do. We would like to expand and make our center available to more women in more ways. The encouraging and supportive response we have received from women, the constant demand for more complete service all show us that we are offering a significant social service in an area of great need. That is the main reason we have decided that we must find larger and cheaper space.

What we need -- We need a large, cheap (or free) loft space, heated evenings and weekends both office and meeting areas. The building must be in a safe neighborhood in Manhattan. We must find this place before April 15, 1972. If there is space available which is greater than the space needed by the Women's Center, there are other women's groups who need space, with whom we could probably arrange to share space.

Please mail-contributions and inquiries to the Women's Liberation Center of New York
36 W. 22 St., New York, N.Y. 11010
telephone: (212) 691-1860

Groups that meet regularly at the center

1. OWL is Older Women's Liberation. It is the first of several OWL consciousness-raising groups in the city, and serves as a focal point of older women's activity. OWL orients new women, ages 35-up into the women's movement, shows them a bit of what consciousness-raising and sisterhood are about. OWL organizes social events for older women, with particular attention paid to the problems of older women who are alone. If the center finds suitable space, OWL plans to open a weekend "social" for women, especially older women. The social would be a pleasant place, with a coffeehouse atmosphere, food and child care space, music and conversation, as well as informal presentations of interest to the women who come.
2. The Women's Health and Abortion Project refers women to safe, quality abortions at a price they can pay. (Abortion referral number is 212-691-3396.) Besides the referral service, which is the main activity, the project has several smaller collectives. These are, briefly: Videotape, a group which makes and distributes educational films for women, on health subjects. Bus collective, a group of women building a free mobile health clinic in a reconditioned bus. The bus will provide public health diagnostic tests and regular medical consultation to community people.
3. The food conspiracy, called Safonia, buys produce, organic staple foods, and some dairy products cooperatively. Shopping and distribution are at the Center on Fridays. The prices are set so that welfare women, unemployed women and students can afford to buy good food, including organic food.
4. The Anti-Rape group is presently researching and writing a pamphlet to be used for counselling rape victims. Eventually we hope to have active rape counselling, with attention paid to the medical, psychological and legal needs of women who have been raped, and with improved police protection of victims of sex crimes.
5. Classes. The center offers space to groups of women who want to teach or learn a subject. In our two years, we've had many classes, lasting from three weeks to six months. Some of the classes have been: Karate and self defense, Spanish, photography and filmmaking, carpentry, practical fixit technology, women and their bodies - a women's health course, women's history (called herstory) and women's anthropology (called gynepology), printing, feminist theory, and theater.

Dian Sorochan

A beautiful sister suddenly vanished from our circle.
The void is difficult to deal with.
Dian died of cancer March 16.
Her illness was short.
Three weeks prior to her death she mentioned something about her leg.
Then we heard no more until Lorraine called and told us.
What can I say?
I loved her, I wanted to know her better.
I knew she was interested in women.
She wanted so much to change this bitter, cold society.
They insulted and abused her in the hospital.
Her warmth, feelings, body, mind are still vivid in our imaginations.
At the center, she worked on the steering committee, literature collective, protest
of the Miss America Pageant, the anti-rape squad, benefits, etc. etc.
She also worked to form women's groups in Bayonne, where she lived.
She was young and eager.
Life is tragic that way,
when death smashes through our barricades, and breaks down our bonds.

* * * * *

Literature collective - our bibliography has not been sent out to you for a while,
but if you're interested in a list of what's available, please call or write to
the center and we'll send information on to you. Anyone would wishes to join the
collective, join us Tuesday nights at 7:00 PM, WLC. 691-1860

Baseball - every Sunday starting at 10:00 AM women interested in playing baseball,
this includes beginners, should come to East River Park and be included in the
most matriarchal fete around. Location is at end of Houston St., use cross-walk
over FDR drive, descend (sp?) to park, walk north 'til you find an all women's team.

Reviewers welcomed - to date we have had two reviews of women's publications per
month. We would like to offer several short reviews of books too, but more women
will have to help us out. There are a number of interesting publishers' copies
received recently which should be brought to your attention as soon as possible,
books on feminists of the past, novels, poetry, witchcraft, etc. If interested
please contact Women's Center and leave your name and phone number.

8:00 PM

C1 C2 meeting : next meeting is to be held April 5, 1979 -/at Frances Gwozdz apart-
ment. 2020 Broadway Apt. 6C (69th St.) C1C2 is a self-help
psychotherapy group.

Majority Report: We have been serving the Women's Liberation Movement in the New
York area since last May, and now need to attract new subscribers -- women inter-
ested in N.Y. events and feature topics not covered in the establishment Press, as
well as our co-ordinated feminist calendar and group directory. Subscription rate
is \$3 for 10 issues put out monthly. Send your contribution to: Majority Report,
#5B 89-19 171 St., Jamaica, N.Y. 11432. Single copies are available through us
and the WLC for 40¢ a copy. If we receive enough support via subscribers, we
can consider making Majority Report a tabloid size newspaper.

New Building Committee: Women who are working to get new space for the women's
center and other projects are meeting Sundays at 4 pm. You're welcome to come if
you want to work on it, especially if your group needs space. We hope to nego-
tiate with the city for a low-rent, city-owned building, so the projects must be
service projects to qualify. The group grew out of the old Fifth St. Bldg coaliti-
on, and eventually we'd like to get the 5th St. building back again. Right now
we're concentrating on getting a new women's center large enough to house more
groups and projects than the 22nd St. loft can.

Book Review: Mothers and Amazons: the First Feminine History of Culture.
by Helen Diner. Julian Press. \$7.50.

"It is intended that the woman shall thus receive a tradition, so that she should not seem without tradition in her own eyes. . . ."

To read a book, any book that deals seriously with woman's past, is worthwhile; yet despite this, Mothers and Amazons proved to be a partial disappointment. Part of the trouble is that the book is old (first published in Germany, in 1932--at the peak of the Freudian influence on scholarship), with outdated theories and viewpoints. At times, also, her scholarship is sloppy and her viewpoint is male-oriented. Beneath its supposedly feminine viewpoint of history, I could smell the male historians busily presenting their versions of matriarchy (if they accept it at all).

Her most prominent "bomb" is when she drags in (or did it come running?) Freudian psychology to explain various phenomena. In the chapter on circumcision she discusses the removal of the clitoris, which she terms female circumcision (not female castration, and indeed she chides feminists for thinking so): ". . . the girl child is merely cleansed of the remainders of bisexuality that it has retained. It sacrifices the clitoris, the rudiments of a penis, with its male shudders. The knife ends a hermaphroditic state of being, leaving only pure femininity."

That is just one painful example. Some of her other views were not so visible, but they seemed even more damaging: "In the matriarchy, world events correlate with the polarities of mother/son, brother/sister." (preface xii). That strikes me as strange. In a matriarchy the daughter carried on the (mother's) name and inherited the household and fortune. Why, in the name of Goddess, would women then concentrate on their sons as their dominant social relationship? Where are the great mother/daughter, sister/sister relationships? As for her viewpoint on matriarchy, I quote: ". . .for the roots of female realms are really found only in the magic foundations of blood and soil, even if their pinnacles often have survived civil activity in the top stratum. They are never states, but realms, irrational . . . no more than a kind of magic incubation of mysticism and feeling . . ." (preface xii). This view of magical primitiveness is contradicted by the chapters on various (very real) substantial and sophisticated matriarchal nations: Greece, India, Egypt, Africa, Lydia, Lycia, Cana, Sumeria and China, to name a few.

In chapter ten, Diner deals rather well with some of the most hated and suppressed of all female heroes, the Amazons, those warlike, independent women. The Amazons were healthy, real women, noted for being fabulous warriors and peaceful, just rulers. I think this chapter dispels the notion that they were totally a warlike, irresponsible crowd of frustrated spinster uglies bent on raping and castrating men. Watch out for her theories, though, and some of her allegations, especially on how they (the Amazons) supposedly burned their right breasts off, which is wrong. In vases and sculptures, the Amazons are always portrayed as double-breasted.

The chapter on symbols contains some real gems. Matriarchy, it seems, favors the left side, while patriarchy favors the right. Right has a dual meaning, implying correctness, accuracy and morality. Night is favored in matriarchy, day in patriarchy. In matriarchy the youngest daughter inherits, as against the oldest son in patriarchy. These and other small facts seem most important to herstory. From them we can/will resurrect a living, flesh-and-blodd portrait of ancient and not-so-ancient female states.

It's expensive--don't buy it. Borrow, or wait for paperback.

--Ann Powers.

Book Review 2: Patience and Sarah by Isabel Miller (copyright 1969 by Ms. Miller under the title A Place for Us) McGraw-Hill 1972

dedicated "to Miss Willson and Miss Brundidge who, quite a while ago, lived something like it, . . ." a painter and a farmer.

Gently with fear, Patience and Sarah moved away from their families for fear of scandal and also pursuit of their dream to settle in the frontier land of Greene County, N.Y. Section by section, alternating between Patience and Sarah as narrator, Isabel Miller unravels a romantic story of how these women met each other, fell in love and seek their own interests. She bases the novel on two historical women, and tries to explain how they might have lived in the society of frontier America. With this in mind, the novel may be refreshing to the reader who is used to the typical plot where "sexual deviants" receive the brunt of society's contempt. Not that the author ignores the issue. Patience's sister-in-law, Martha, stumbles in on a Sunday bedroom scene. Later Martha argues that women loving women is a sin which St. Paul forbade, but she slips by saying "and her not even in the family," then confesses she really loved Patience and married the brother to make a triangle of "Edward and you and me together." Sarah is hammered brutally by her father when their love is discovered, Patience is asked to leave her home by her brother, yet the novel goes beyond that and concentrates on the heroines' ability to take these confrontations and move on. The story's interest, the strengths and weaknesses that the two women bring to the problems that face them develop gradually; the story achieves a believable explanation of how Ms. Willson and Ms. Brundidge really lived. The sex-typing, which is deservedly unpopular in the women's and gay movements today, is gentle and flexible, but unmistakable. Sarah is the man, trained from childhood to do heavy farmwork. Patience's skills are domestic and feminine, and she defines her work as keeping a home for Sarah. The roles do not carry past the economic division of labor, however. In decision making, personal interaction and lovemaking, the two women share equally their strengths and weaknesses. It's a good book, especially for young readers. I think it's ideal for the 14-year-old girl that is still part of me, and seems to occupy some space in all of us.

WANDA, a film by Barbara Loden

Barbara Loden kindly allowed the women's center to show her film as a fundraising benefit. For the women's center, as with its original commercial run, Wanda was a critical success and a commercial failure. We didn't make money, but we liked the film. Wanda portrays a woman, who starts at the bottom and ends hardly any higher. She starts by leaving her husband and children, she's cheated at jobs used and abused by men. The main development of the story concerns her involvement with a cheap con man who aspires to rob the Third National Bank of Scranton, Pa. They're a pathetic pair, but he at least can be arrogant, short-tempered and contemptuous of Wanda. He, however, does allow her to drive the car and eventually trusts her to assist him with his bank job. It all turns out horribly, but Wanda survives (survival is what this film deals with) and drifts on.

The film seemed controversial to the audience, and has proved to be since then in discussions among the people who saw it. The question generally is, Does the film show a woman as a passive, dumb broad? Is it basically a sexist film? I don't think so; I liked and felt sympathetic toward Wanda, however pitiful. Wanda is a dull, wooden (or plastic) character in many ways. The film shows us much more about her surroundings, the alternatives she has to choose from, than it shows of Wanda's feelings or thoughts. Those surroundings and alternatives tell a lot, though. She has chosen to be a drifter (possibly a prostitute, possibly a drinker) rather than a beaten, prematurely-old Appalachian mother. This is not passive, whatever else it might be. In the film she takes advantage of every meagre opportunity she gets, and survives, even if she looks (and is) awkward and pathetic as she acts. She's enough of a human being that I felt outraged when she was humiliated, and exhilarated when she talked her way out of a traffic ticket and fought off a rapist. That's about the same treatment I give to fortunate, articulate and passionate heroines.

Dear Sisters on the Mailing List,

If you haven't heard from us in 9 months, it's because we switched last June to our smaller, cheaper, paid-for "subscription" mailing list--those who paid your \$2. You others can still get the regular, monthly-or-so newsletter for \$2 if you like. We decided to send the April newsletter to the "inactive" big list, spending all this money for postage and supplies, because this is an important time for the center. We need to re-establish contact with all the women who have been involved with the women's center in our two years of existence. On April 15 our lease expires, although we have given up hope that we'll be able to move by then. We want a new building, and we'll need much more money than we have, so send lots if you can. In other words, more than a \$2 (going up soon to \$3) mailing list subscription.

We thought we should share with our own mailing list some of the fund-raising papers we've been writing. So we included the description of the center's services and the proposal for an older women's center. There's the usual inspired appeal for money and support. There's a dandy calendar this month. There are two book reviews and a film review if we can squeeze it in. Announcements of various events of interest and reports from collectives also get included wherever there's room. And there's a memorial to Dian.

Next month, besides continuing work to get our new building, or at least someplace to move into, we are planning two more quickie fundraising events. There will be dances/parties at the center on April 14 and 28. The first of these small parties at the center was very pleasant, successful and didn't cost us anything, so the money we made - about \$50 - was all free and clear. Please turn out and make the April dances as nice as the first one. We'll try to get together another film benefit by May. It will be in the May newsletter, sent to the smaller, paid list. GWLF is having an April Fool communal supper on April 1, so bring something good and come to that too. The general assembly on April 13 will be an especially important one, because we hope that we'll have something to make a decision about moving the center. Come around the center if you haven't recently (or if you have) and help us participate in these events and decisions. We can go farther if we're together.

Women's Liberation Center
of New York

36 W. 22 St.

New York, N.Y. 10010



Florence Rush
120 Elk Ave
New Rochelle, N Y. 10804

4

first class mail