

# essay

# LESBIANISM: YANG without YIN

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The Oriental concept of Yin and Yang is said to embody a principle of balance of "masculine" and "feminine" forces and therefore, at least in the popular mind, between man and woman. The complimentary nature of the sexes embodied in this belief is jarred by the existence of homosexual relationships.

This essay will discuss the issue of lesbianism--defined as a life style of some women in which most emotional, sexual and social needs are channeled into relationships with women rather than with men. It is the existence of Yang without Yin.

To describe lesbianism as an issue of contemporary thought is presumptuous. It has certainly been a subject of controversy within and pertaining to the feminist movement, and it has just recently been articulated in political terms by Jill Johnston in her book, *LESBIAN NATION*. Kinsey's classic survey conducted only a little over a decade ago places the headcount of lesbians far below that of male homosexuals. The term "lesbianism" itself was not likely to be found in a psychology text even half a decade ago. "Female homosexuality" was instead included parenthetically under discussions of homosexuality, which was touted as a generic term yet focused upon the male.

Is it visionary then, or extravagant, to view this psychiatric stepsister as an issue which may one day soon drape in lavender the covers of *TIME* and *ESQUIRE* and spice the subject matter of academic soirees? Such a prediction, whether wise or foolish, is irrelevant, for lesbianism is an issue to me.

Standing within the radical fringe, stumbling along the exploding edges of the new feminism, I see this issue as one of those critical points of reference--a marked fissure along which the old may collapse and the new thrust upward.

It is clear that as a part of the new feminism we are experiencing a swift closing of the gap between potential and actual lesbianism, due not to an increase in so-called sexual preference but rather to an increase in consciousness of its availability as a life style. This increase has ushered in a growing headcount, a small increment in recognition and a new groundswell of baffled hostility against both

lesbianism and the feminist movement. Several years ago the epithet that feminists were "just a bunch of lesbians"--whether baldly stated or artfully insinuated--was essentially a means of discarding the possibility that feminism could ever grow in influence beyond the

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adel.

Today, the visibility of lesbianism in the feminist movement, the acceptance of lesbians by the vast majority of heterosexual feminists, and the increasing influence wielded by feminism itself, form a surprising trio of un-

avoidable facts which imbue this former put-down with an uneasy air of prophesy.

What has lesbianism been in the past, how has it been approached, and how does its newly attained visibility and recognition affect both feminism and its antithesis. In the rest of this essay I will attempt to begin an answer.

The first two questions can be addressed only with much guesswork, for lesbianism has been buried within the larger context of homosexuality. First, I must look at the way in which homosexuality has been viewed, and then ferret out finer shadings of atti-

tudes toward male homosexuals and lesbians.

Homosexuality has been roundly condemned in most societies and in most times. Other than that it defies the principle of Yin and Yang, which we will return to later, it has been condemned because it is unnatural and non-productive. Both of these ascribed attributes have been rationalizations rather than real causes of its unpopularity, as

a glimpse into these arguments suggests:

That exclusive homosexuality is unnatural is undeniable. It is an unnatural deviation from an unnatural norm. No animal, and certainly no mammal, has been so rigidly inter-sexual as the human being. In fact, many more homosexuals than heterosexuals approximate the bisexuality which is characteristic of other primates, in that the vast majority have had sexual experiences with others of both the same and the opposite sex. Assuming in spite of this that homosexuality is unnatural, it must be noted by even the most unsympathetic observer that civilization, it-

self, and human behavior within it, is unnatural in many respects. Why has one dimension of its unnaturalness, homosexuality, been so singly scorned?

It is interesting to note as well that those groups and individuals who most condemn the "unnaturalness" of homosexuality are also those most eager to mobilize the harshest forces of social censure toward its control, a tacit and rather pathetic admission of its viability, were the impulses of the flesh to be left unfettered. It is clear we must look elsewhere for the roots of that prejudice which has resulted in, rather than from, this specious logic.

continued on page 10

