

Sex And Women's Liberation

So you go to a meeting entitled women rap about sex 1975 and you imagine you will learn things that will enrich your own personal life. However you get to the meeting and you rediscover the women's liberation movement as some whole that is greater than your life. The movement is bigger than your own personal life. But after the experience you return to your life, perhaps equipped with the perceptions you thought you would gain—maybe not—but you return to your life more liberated on a deeper more pervasive level because of your participation and experience of the women's liberation movement. I would like to stress here a minor point or an apparent minor point, which is that many women, myself included, out of laziness but really out of something deeper than laziness, have fallen into the habit of calling it the women's movement, rather than the women's liberation movement. I think the dropping of the word liberation from every reference to the women's liberation movement is a serious loss. All three words are key: WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT. Without a movement nothing can be accomplished, nothing strong and revolutionary can be accomplished without a movement. Women is where you fit in. It is you and your life. But LIBERATION. Liberation is the clue. Liberation is the meaning. Liberation is the common goal. Liberation is a word we should not get into the habit of avoiding just because it is so powerful and maybe intimidating in its implications. Liberation is what it is all about. And every inclusion of the word LIBERATION is a step forward in consciousness: just to have said the word in your brain and sent it out through speech. And every avoidance of the word liberation is a step backward or a step away from liberation. I have been saying women's movement for years and it wasn't until I was copying over my notes that I realized Kathie had said the women's liberation movement and I had subconsciously translated it to women's movement and when I realized the serious implications of that I wanted it to be part of this article. BUT IT CAME DIRECTLY FROM THE MEETING. THE MEETING OF THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT.

The women at the meeting were involved in the women's liberation movement during its earliest, freshest, most crea-

tive and strongest days. If we were young and unconscious and ignorant, we were also strong. The women's liberation movement made it possible for each woman to participate from her STRONGEST SELF. The movement made that possible but the liberation went directly into the lives of the women participants. Liberation began immediately. There was a spirit of strength, honesty and unity and never to be forgotten, never to be slighted over, never to go unmentioned and unrecognized, tremendous INTELLIGENCE. I remember the first meeting I attended in 1967 and my vivid impression and amazement that everyone was so INTELLIGENT. And that never before, in no other radical or revolutionary meeting (and therefore the words do not apply) had I ever experienced the continuous use and display of intelligence. And so, women, I want to share this lesson I have learned: if ever you want to distinguish the authenticity of something or someone in the women's liberation movement—if it is to be deserving of that name—ask yourself: is it really INTELLIGENT and is it LIBERATING? And you will always know the truth. It is important in this era of *Ms.* magazine and other false spokeswomen purporting to be an organ of the women's liberation movement.

I will say that the immediate effect of being in that room with the women from the early women's liberation movement was profoundly liberating to me. The intervening years of being cut off from the women's liberation movement and struggling alone as a woman in this society had a regressive, anti-liberating effect on me. When Alix talked about her experiences she specifically mentioned backsliding and said "I think none of this would have happened (operating out of her weakest and most self-defeating self) if I had been in the movement." Being out of the movement has taken a serious toll on my courage, honesty and strength. I have given up fighting for things. My soul has become caked in mud and it began to crack open at that meeting. Just being at that meeting had an immediate and liberating effect. OF COMING BACK TO MYSELF.

Perhaps it would be useful to communicate my history of sex and the women's liberation movement. When I first began coming around the women's liberation movement I was 23 years old and had been sleeping with boys since I was 19. Even though I was mad about my first lover and was crazy to have sex with him I never had an orgasm. In fact I had never had any kind of orgasm ever and had never

masturbated. Somehow I realized I had to simulate orgasm for him to feel the act was complete or successful or maybe just to get him off me. After that when I would sleep around boys would always say to me afterwards "did you come, did you come?" and I would always simulate orgasm and tell them yes. I thought two things. One that all other women must be having orgasms, or why would they assume like that that I "came?" And two that something was deeply wrong with me as a woman. I was inferior sexually. I was missing. To be a true sexual woman was vital to my self image. Along with looks it ranked at the top of my needs for my self image—with things like intelligence, et cetera, much lower on the scale.

In other words I would have gladly exchanged any intelligence I had or any other abilities for beauty and to be truly sexual. I guess truly sexual was defined at that time of my life as vaginal orgasm in the Freudian sense which was pervasive in the era of my young womanhood. I know there are many women who rank intelligence much higher. Although when I was 20 I used to ask men what their secret wish was and they would always say something like to write in the prose style of Nietzsche and I would always dream of looking like Anna Karina the French actress I admired. At that time I generalized to say that women care most deeply for beauty, and men for intelligence. Although I know this is not true. Because many women have told me they care more about their intelligence. So if they were honest then it is not true what I thought. I will say here, however, what I always said at my early meetings, that I think women are more intelligent than men and I have always taken women's high and extraordinary intelligence for granted, although now I have met intelligent men. So I will leave the question open as to whether or not men are as intelligent as women. I don't know the answer.

Anyway I had been faking orgasm for four years when I encountered the women's liberation movement and I had not mentioned it to A SINGLE OTHER WOMAN. I carried my sexual inferiority as a dark secret. When the subject of sex initially came up in women's liberation—or should I say when the subject of sex got liberated—everyone admitted to faking orgasms. And also based on those initial conversations—everyone faking vaginal orgasm—Anne Koedt developed her theory about *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm*.* I don't know what to say about that. Old myths die hard. And I never committed myself to Anne Koedt's theory. What I did do however was stop faking orgasms after that. I was now permitted or was it liberated to have a genuine sexual response—whatever it was—although I think I held on to the vaginal myth. Maybe because other women said they had them. What they said was that they had a total body response and not a local response. I didn't know what to say. I would say maybe it was the myth of my sexual inferiority that I could not let go of. There wasn't enough true evidence.

Out of these discussions came Shulamith Firestone's article

*Available in full in *Voices from Women's Liberation*, Leslie Tanner, ed., 1971.

**Notes from the First Year, 1968

"Women Rap about Sex"*** where the issue of faking orgasms was made public as well as other truths about sexual relations between the sexes. A major and important article. The following year there was a nationwide conference on women's liberation held in Chicago. One of the workshops was a sex workshop organized by a woman and her friend. Luckily I went to this workshop. The two women had organized it specifically to get women to give up sex with men. Images like going to the brink but afraid to go over. The thesis was that the truly liberated thing for a liberated woman to do was to give up sex. Anything else comprised a cop out on liberation. I was dismayed by this—dismayed is a small word—I didn't believe it and I thought her image about going over the brink was apt and she wanted to take the whole women's liberation movement with her. I never for a second considered giving up men—and really at that time the only contacts I had with men were sexual—but I hoped I would find love eventually. Actually that was all I cared about then.

This rap was very rational and well-thought out, very pseudo-intelligent and pseudo-convincing and everything else. Who would dare to say anything after that? Joyce dared. She was sitting on the floor. And after this impressive delivery she said "I don't know. After I had my baby my whole vagina opened up and became much more feeling. Before that I was a clitoris girl all the way. I would just as soon have skipped intercourse completely but after my baby my vagina became much more feeling and now I really like intercourse." Brave and courageous and honest Joyce. Sitting on the floor. Next to this tall impassioned woman. Like a tigress she was. She terrified me. After Joyce talked everyone opened up about sex. It was really incredible. One woman said she and her husband would sing while they climaxed. Fantasies were discussed. "I can only get sexually excited if I have a rape fantasy." There was practically complete union on the subject of "masochistic" fantasies except one woman said she didn't have them.

And I must interject at this point that there were thirty or forty women in that room. So never be fooled by the false argument that meetings are too big. I will always say the bigger the better. It is a divisive argument, that argument about groups being too big for things to happen. I think too that masturbation was opened up at that meeting. And the woman who organized the workshop, I will give her the credit, after being silent for a long time while this discussion was going on, said: "I had heard about these conversations going on in Women's Liberation but I never thought I would be in one. . . ." and then opened up about her sexual fantasies also. The excitement from this meeting carried over and the women who hadn't been at the meeting of course wanted to talk about their experiences with sex and masturbation and the truth about sex for them. The subject of sex was opened up and women could tell the truth about themselves sexually for the first time. Many women who had never "dared" to masturbate began to when they heard other women were. I will not go into the ramifications of any of this—it is just a few pieces of history.

— *An early activist in Women's Liberation, New York City*