



Sex and Sensibility: Stories of a Lesbian Generation

Arlene Stein

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In the first book to analyze shifts in lesbian identity, consciousness, and culture from the 1970s to the 1990s, Arlene Stein contributes an important chapter to the study of the women's movement and offers a revealing portrait of the exchange between a radical generation of feminists and its successors. Tracing the evolution of the lesbian movement from the bar scene to the growth of alternative families, Stein illustrates how a generation of women transformed the woman-centered ideals of feminism into a culture and a lifestyle.

Sex and Sensibility relates the development of a "queer" sensibility in the 1990s to the foundation laid by the gay rights and feminist movements a generation earlier. Beginning with the stories of thirty women who came of age at the climax of the 70s women's movement—many of whom defined lesbianism as a form of resistance to dominant gender and sexual norms—Stein explores the complex issues of identity that these women confronted as they discovered who they were and defined themselves in relation to their communities and to society at large.

Sex and Sensibility ends with interviews of ten younger women, members of the post-feminist generation who have made it a fashion to dismiss lesbian feminism as overly idealistic and reductive. Enmeshed in Stein's compelling and personal narrative are coming-out experiences, questions of separatism, work, desire, children, and family. Stein considers the multiple identities of women of color and the experiences of intermittent and "ex" lesbians.

Was the lesbian feminist experiment a success? What has become of these ideas and the women who held them? In answering these questions, Stein illustrates the lasting and profound effect that the lesbian feminist movement had, and continues to have, on contemporary women's definitions of sexual identity.



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