



SOUHAQ



The Lebanese zine of women with
unconventional sexual identities

These Are Our Stories

SOUHAQ*

We accept your writings, rambings, artwork, thoughts, and comments. We accept your every form of expression.

Think about your life.
Think about your identity.
Think about your love.
Think about sexuality.
Think and write. Think
and draw. Write and draw
and send them our way.

Email us on
nadine@helem.net

Yes, Anastasia, there is such a thing as real lesbians. And yes, some of us are Lebanese. We live amongst you, sometimes obvious, sometimes not so obvious. We put up with a lot of crap. We will not put up with this crap for very long. We are diverse in our beliefs and backgrounds. We are diverse in our sexualities. We have different tastes in music. We are too diverse to be lumped into a single pile. We don't like being lumped into a single pile. Our common ground is that we are diverse.

We are women who love women. We are women who make love to women. We laugh and cry with incredible intensity. We fall in and out of love with greater passion than you can fathom. We are diverse in our attraction to genders. Some of us identify their sexual orientation since when they are fetuses. Some of us struggle. Some of us choose. Some of us hate the labels.

We do not hate guys. They are our fathers, our brothers, and our friends. We love guys. Some of us just don't want to sleep with them. Some of us do. We are not very difficult to understand if you expand your mind a little bit. We are often misunderstood. We will not put up with this crap for very long. We decided to create this zine.

We are the lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered women of Lebanon: the butches, the dykes, the femmes, the bois, the androgynes, the queers, and the still-confused. These are our stories.

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www.helem.net

* "The Crushing" - a literal translation of the Arabic word for lesbianism. We think it's hilarious.

Breaking the Lesbian Stereotypes

When I tell most people that I am a lesbian, they will automatically assume certain things about me - masculine things mostly. They will assume that I drive fast (which I don't), like to build things (which I do), and drink a lot of beer (which I don't). Straight girls will assume that I am in love with them, straight guys will assume that I am jealous of them, and gay men will assume that I want to be their best friend. Worst of all, I think, is the other lesbians, who assume that I hang out at Acid every Friday and am either single and looking or in a 5-year relationship with another lesbian who must be my total opposite. They also assume I love The L-Word (which I don't) and Tatu (which I really really don't). Everywhere I go, I am confronted with assumptions, assumptions, and more assumptions, and I am getting tired of being stereotyped.

And mainstream media isn't helping. The lesbian identity in the West has emerged on the shoulders of thousands of women who toiled, sacrificed, and bled to bring visibility and empowerment to lesbians of future generations, and what have these generations done with it? They have packaged it into a shiny, perky image of what lesbians look like, talk like, and act like, and have sold it to the masses. In Lebanon, lesbians have only these images to look up to, and they are faced with the struggle of conforming to Western stereotypes, while living their Lebanese lives in their family, work, and

public circles. They move in and out of their closets, and it can only get increasingly frustrating.

So how do we break these stereotypes? How do we create our own identity in Lebanon without giving up our roots? A friend of mine always tells me that I should leave Lebanon to really find my happy lesbian life. I don't want to and shouldn't have to. I want to find my own little space in this country of a million spaces and be happy here. And that can only be achieved through a movement that is unique to Lebanese lesbians: a cultural, artistic, literary, social, and activist movement. A movement that emerges from different bits and pieces of all the lesbians, bisexuals, transgender, and queer women of Lebanon, one that exalts individuality and not conformity, an Arabic movement, a movement that breaks the taboos and educates the public. Maybe then, I will stop having to answer to annoyingly ridiculous questions and assumptions. Maybe then I can contribute to something that truly represents me, rather than have to fight my way out of an odd-shaped box every single day.

Lesbian Quotes “I can't help looking gay. I put on a dress and people say, 'who's the dyke in the dress?'”

Karen Ripley

The Fading Joy of Coming Out

contributed by ash

I find it quite amazing how the whole process of coming out as a lesbian keeps changing and evolving for me with time. When I was 18 and still new to coming out, it was always a pre-meditated act. When I came out to my best friend, for example, it took me weeks and weeks of planning what I was going to say before I finally said it. And it came complete with drama and tears and hugs and "I still love you." After a few of those, there came a time of "cheeky" coming outs, because I had developed my gaydar and would easily come out to people I suspected were gay. Sometimes I was right, and if not, they would always turn out to be gay-friendly. So I discovered a joy of finding gay people, mostly men, and playing the "Are you gay? So am I!" game over and over again.

People ask you the same questions like "how did you know?" and "you don't like boys at all?"

After that, I expanded my audience to straight people in college and at work. It was a very different experience, and I also enjoyed it, because being a lesbian was "cool" to most of them, and all of them found it very flattering that I chose to tell them. The only people I have never come out to were my family, and that is something that will not happen for many years still because I am not ready. So for a while, I was happy being the "different one" in my circles of friends, but then and again, it got boring and

unexciting. Especially when people ask you the same questions like "how did you know?" and "you don't like boys at all?" I became tired of playing the talking encyclopedia of gayness and of explaining the same things to people. So then, I just stopped coming out to people. A week ago, I found myself telling a co-worker that I am a lesbian in a very casual way, as if I was telling her something as easy as how I like my coffee. It came out in a very spontaneous way, and she was surprised not at me being gay but at how I said it. She said to me: "You are very relaxed about your sexuality." And then it occurred to me that she was right. I was relaxed, and it felt great.

So I guess you lose something and you gain something in return. It is true that I have lost that great excitement of coming out to people and feeling happy about answering all their questions. But in return, I guess, I have gained a certain laid-back attitude about being a lesbian. It is no longer about breaking taboos or shocking people or expressing my hidden self. It is more about being comfortable with who I am and not needing to justify or assert my sexuality to people around me. That, for me, is a well-deserved reward for all my years of so many coming outs. I think of it as my retirement!

SOUHAQ*

comes out of her closet once every month to hang out with you. She is provocative, strong-willed, and loves company. **souhaq** is also looking for

a guest designer and guest editor for every issue. If you would like to make her sound intelligent and look pretty, let her know. To receive her in your inbox, send us your email address. You can get to know **souhaq** better by

visiting the girls section on www.helem.net. You can also communicate with **souhaq** by e-mailing nadine@helem.net. All emails are treated confidentially. **souhaq** can keep a secret.

Creating A Lebanese Lesbian Space

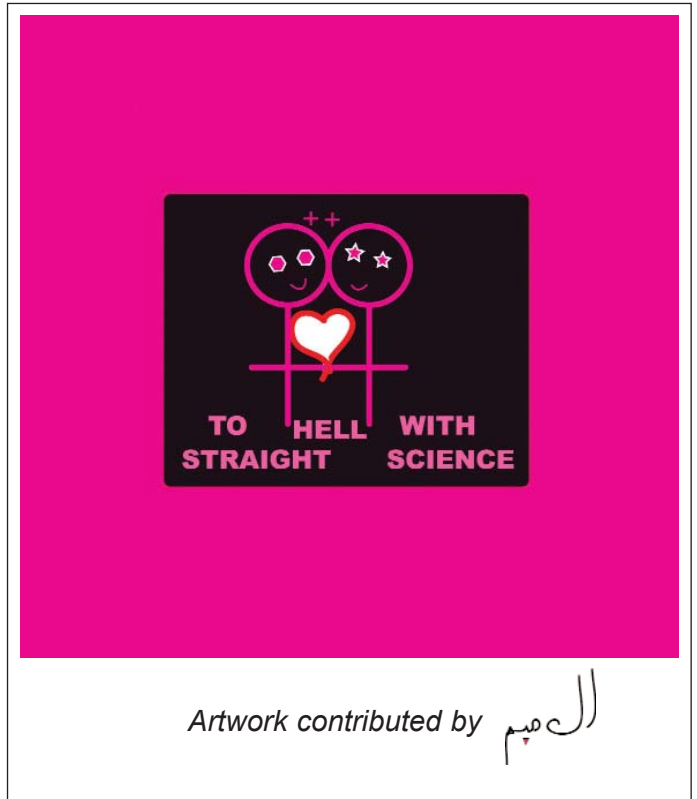
A bunch of Helem girls are currently working on creating projects and activities just for Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LBTQ) women in Lebanon. These are meant to address the specific issues that these girls face, and offer a fun, chilled-out atmosphere of support and solidarity. This zine is one of these projects. "But why?" you ask? Because while LBTQ women have a

lot in common with gay men, feminists, and the Lebanese population in general, they also have their own unique problems and ways of expressing themselves. We believe there is much to be talked

about, deconstructed, and tackled in particular relation to LBTQ women. We also believe it's about time we did. So if you would like to help or suggest an idea, you are most welcome! Email us.

Girls-Only Mailing List

If you are Lebanese and identify as Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer, you can now join the girls-only mailing list and stay updated on LBTQ issues, events, and news, and openly discuss your own opinions. Membership is restricted, so to join, send us an email introducing yourself & we will guide you through the procedure.



Artwork contributed by

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