

**BIG HOLLYWOOD ISSUE! OUR 4TH ANNUAL MOVIE AWARDS**

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# Girlfriends

Lesbian Culture, Politics, and Entertainment

April 2001

## HET FLIX GO QUEER

Judith Halberstam  
Explains

## POWER DYKES

Network in  
Hollywood

## CHURCH & STATE

How Bush  
Will Screw Us



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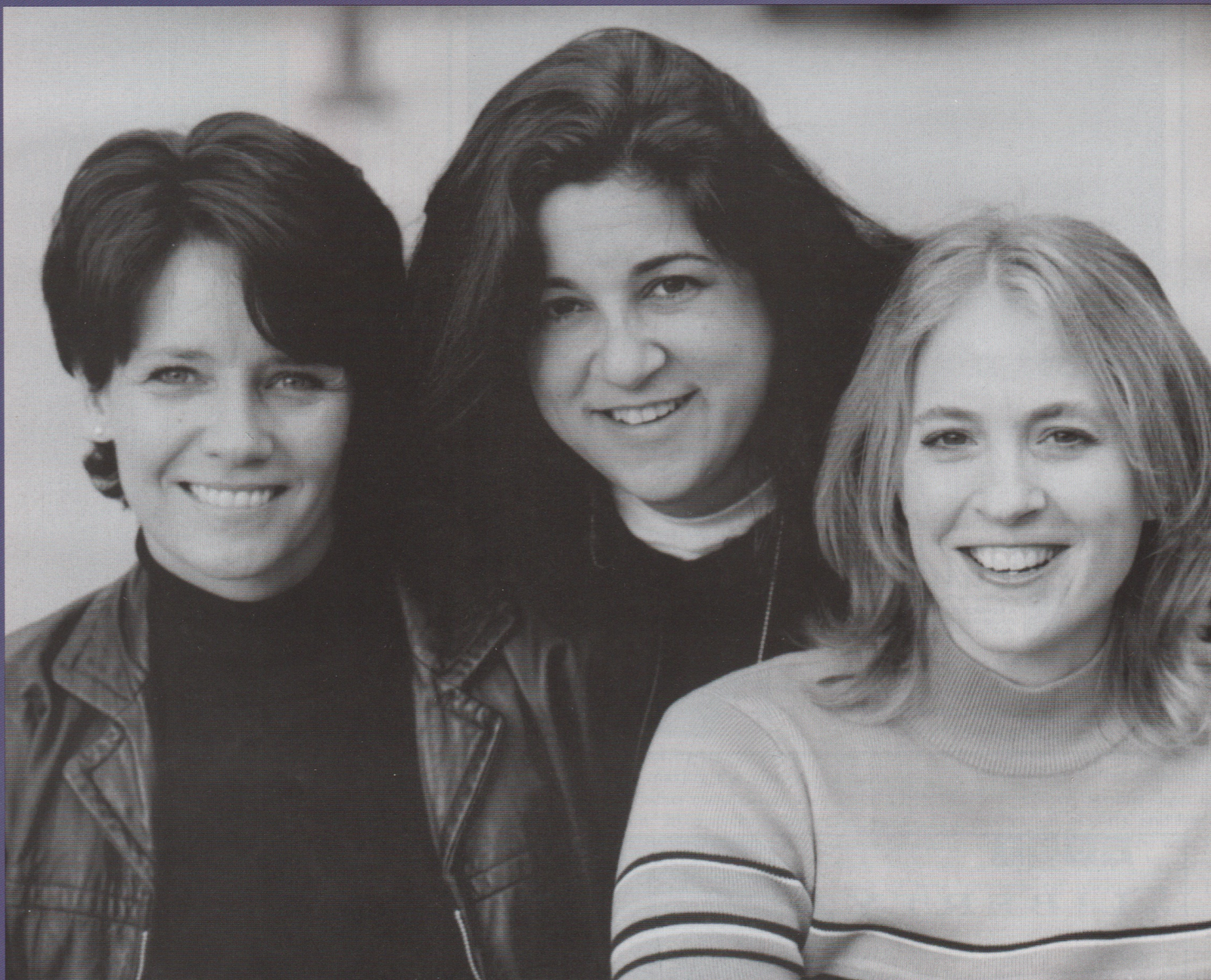
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Display until April 30

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KEVIN ACKERMAN

Power Up founders Amy Shomer, Stacy Codikow, and K. Pearson Brown

# power up **GIRLS**

A new  
professional  
organization offers  
Hollywood dykes  
career-boosting  
community.

by **CANDACE MOORE**



**H**ollywood power player Stacy Codikow doesn't have time to deliberate about her order. "Sometimes I have so much on my mind, it's easier to have preselected something—one restaurant for this, one restaurant for that." Today's lunch is her usual at the Beverly Hills trattoria Madeo's: rigatoni bolognese. The 15-year film veteran has more important things to ponder. After just three months, Codikow and fellow producers Amy Shomer and K. Pearson Brown have parlayed a brunch discussion about Tinseltown lesbians' need to network into a booster stronghold with upwards of 200 members.

Power Up (Professional Organization of Women in Entertainment Reaching Up) was conceived when the three met last March to volunteer for the April 2000 GLAAD media awards, which honor positive portrayals of homosexuals in film and television. Brown had previously produced video projects and media ceremonies for GLAAD (Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) in Washington, D.C. Shomer, who produces TV commercials and public service announcements, co-chaired the event. Codikow came to the rescue by providing Sophie B. Hawkins and Joan Jett as last-minute entertainment. The three women gravitated toward each other, discovering they had inside industry contacts and info to share.

"I think Stacy was the one who said 'Why isn't this happening all over the place?'" the power-suited Shomer remembers. "There's a very good opportunity to bring a group of people together that have a common thread. And our lifestyles are a common thread. We know so many people that have had misfortunes that want to give somebody a leg up. We can make this happen. And at the end of the day, we want to have people building their résumés, maybe getting a door opened a little bit into a career, or fine-tuning the skills they have, to be able to gain a reputation."

So the trio set to work. They cemented their mission statement: to promote, encourage, and support out women in entertainment. Targeting A-list types from their combined rolodexes, they culled an impressive board of directors, including producer Jan Oxenberg (*Chicago Hope*, *Once and Again*), director Lee Rose (*The Truth About Jane*, *A Girl Thing*), director Jamie Babbit (*But I'm a Cheerleader*, *Popular*), producer Andrea Sperling (*But I'm a Cheerleader*, *Prozac Nation*), and producer Leslie Belzberg (*Coming to America* and *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*). Their prep work culminated in a \$15,000 half-page ad in the "Gay Hollywood" *Variety* issue announcing a launch party to take place in December 2000. Slapping down \$45 to \$1,000-plus to join, 40 percent of Power Up's current members came to the Beverly Hills office for the first official meeting. After a round of name-and-exploit intros, cake, and coffee, the all-female crew tossed out ideas for upcoming charity co-host events, BBQs, swim parties, round-table discussions, screenings, and sleepovers.

## FEELING COMFORTABLE WORKING WITH DYKES

Charles C. Koonos in *Daily Variety* (10/11/00) cites a "growing influence of openly gay and lesbian filmmakers, scribes, helmers, thespes, and executives in this company town." Although accurate stats on out lesbians in L.A. media are lacking, Christy Grosz of *The Hollywood Reporter* (December 2000) writes, "We've watched the number of women in high-ranking positions increase tenfold—a list that was once only peppered with presidents of film and television entities is now dominated by them. In fact, our informal survey of the rosters of the major film studios revealed that women occupy about 30 percent of the executive slots at the senior VP or higher level these days."

Some of those newly rising girl-moguls, queer or not so queer, are becoming advocates. "This woman I know from working on *Psycho Beach Party*—she's married, a straight woman. She joined this organization; she's networking with the folks. She needed a costumer," says Brown, who promptly hooked her up with one. "That's one reason we're here, to promote visibility and integration so more people work with gay women without feeling uncomfortable."

Brown, who has worked on *Gay News Network*, *Network Q*, *Dyke TV*, *WomanSide*, *Gay Fairfax*, and the PBS series *In the Life*, bore the brunt of lesbophobia while producing a queer TV show in Maryland. "The general manager of the TV station had come from a right-wing, Christian-oriented channel, and he tried to suppress my programming. There were editorials written in the papers and they tried to get subscribers to boycott a cable access station because my show was airing on it—letters to the editor back and forth for months in southern Maryland. People actually got threatened whose names were associated with it."

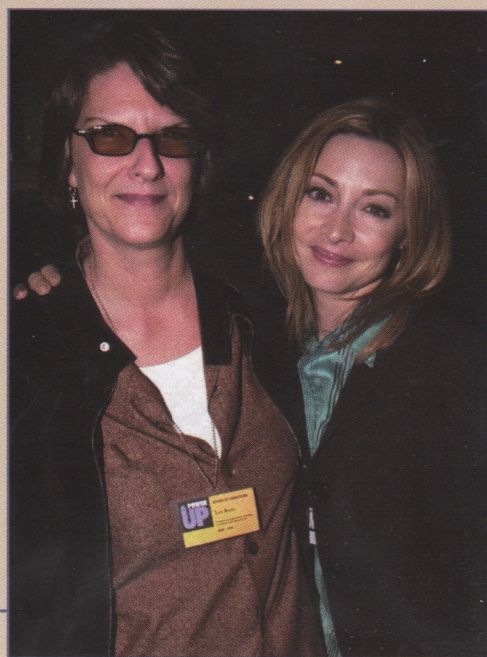
## FLASH CAMERAS, SHISH KEBABS, & SMOGLESSNESS

Ellen DeGeneres RSVP'd the Power Up launch, but her no-show at downtown L.A. eatery Ciudad didn't dampen the crowd's titting elation. "It's shocking to me to look out at the party and see 300 amazingly talented, intelligent, successful women, talking, visiting. Y'know? Impressive," shared an awed Codikow. The awe was contagious. Flash cameras constantly craned over heads to capture an undulating body of bodies dressed to the nines, reaching over one another to grab lime-tart shots.

On Ciudad's patio, blinded by camera lights, squished in among silver screen dyke cognoscenti, one couldn't see stars overhead, but a lovely, black, smogless night. Hosts Susan (*L.A. Law*) Dey, Judith (*Who's the Boss*) Light, Jan



above, top to bottom: *A Girl Thing* star Stockard Channing is surrounded by [left to right] Peta Wilson, S.E. Merckerson, Margo Martindale, and Camryn Manheim. Ellen Murth is Channing's dyke daughter in *The Truth About Jane*. below: Director Lee Rose cuddles ex-NYPD *Blue* star Sharon Lawrence

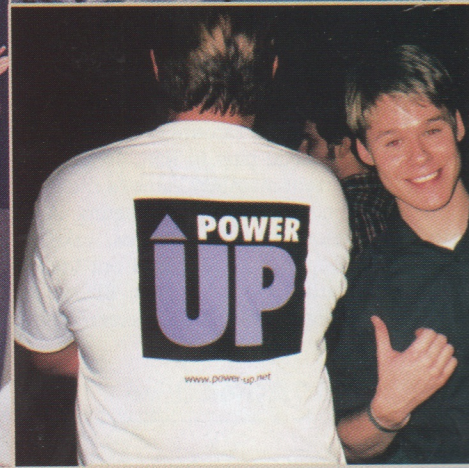






this page [clockwise from top]: Clea Duvall and cheerleader Natasha Lyonne; director Jamie Babbit; Randy Harrison at the premiere of *Queer As Folk*; the cast of *Popular*: Carly Pope, Leslie Bibb, Alley Mills, Leslie Grossman, Bryce Johnson, Tamara Mello, Sara Rue

opposite page: Sharon Stone, Ellen DeGeneres, and Anne Heche on the set of *Walls*; *Under the Hula Moon*, produced by Stacy Codikow; and producer Jan Oxenberg



BUT I'M A CHEERLEADER, JAMIE BABBIT, MARK LIPSON, POPULAR: MITCHELL HASETH/THE WB



Oxenberger, and the founders gleamed out at the crowd from a makeshift stage, which emcee Suzanne Westenhoefer artfully dissed. "What is it, like \$180,000 to join this fucking group? And this is where your money did not go. I am standing on chairs, talking into a Mr. Microphone."

Susan Dey followed with a more down-to-business take on the stakes. "It is an understatement to say we are in a competitive field. It is naïve to say that there is no favoritism in this business. And although the entertainment industry considers itself a communications business, it lacks the skill of communication." Girls of all types, careers, and pocketbooks—rowdy in cowboy hats and boots, glitzy in Armani and Prada, baby butch with their much pomaded spikes and studded belts—cheered on the pretty and well-meant propaganda, and stayed to mingle and feast on shish kebabs.

## NETWORKING: THE LATERAL MOVE

Hollywood lives by the clichés disseminated through a multitude of self-help books about how to break in to the industry. This town of lattes, cells, SUVs, and Barbie bodies with their *noir* underbellies is pervaded with a seething need to be on top. And yet, most locals will tell you there's a lot more to the sprawling media metropolis than an extravagant surface. One of the quirky courtesies in the land of making it is the notion of payback: helping newbies learn the ropes. In the Hollywood tradition of apprenticeship, *Power Up* offers gay women career-boosting community in a traditionally masculinist, linear-laddered industry.

"The whole idea of networking—the lateral move—is you start someplace and then, you never know, it comes back around." Codikow grasps her glass of mineral water with one hand, and with the other pushes a few long strands of dark hair behind her ear. Charismatic, she gives the impression she's levelling with you: a necessary trait for a producer. This is the part of the lunch where you hear confessions. "My first job was on the TV show *Cagney and Lacey*. I was the runner P.A. [production assistant], so I'd deliver scripts to the actors at their houses if they weren't working that day. I'd go over to Sharon Gless's house and hand her her script for the week. I did that for a couple of years and obviously moved my way up. I'm at a different level of the business now."

*Power Up* intends to provide mentorship without requiring flunkies to prove their stuff working the mailroom. In 2001, that means funding three short film ideas, and utilizing membership talents on all stages of production. The group hopes to showcase flicks at year's end, and fund showings on the festival circuits. As their proposed half-a-million budget increases, so will the film grants, with an eventual goal of providing lesbian filmmakers, actresses, and writers a chance to craft first features.

"Along with our board of directors, we will be mentoring every single aspect of film," says

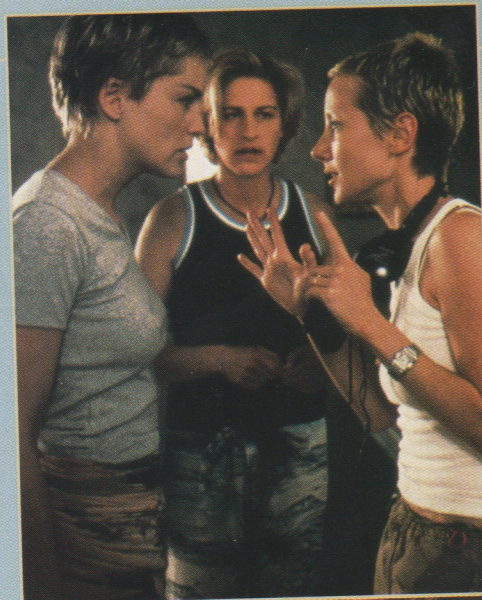
An informal  
survey  
of the  
MAJOR  
film studios  
revealed that  
WOMEN  
occupy about  
30 PERCENT  
of the  
executive  
slots.

Codikow. "For instance, if you are a costume designer on our film and you need support, some big costume designer might spend an afternoon and overlook what your ideas are, or help you get something for free. So there's those kinds of connections happening, and that's a starting place."

Everybody has to start somewhere. Shomer remembers a mentor she met at age 17 who ultimately offered her a job. "And I went from being a P.A. to being a producer. We now work together, kick around ideas, bring each other into projects, and I think it's wonderful."

Brown is more shy about delivering her rising-through-the-ranks tale, which includes a move from the East Coast. "Officially, I came to town last November. I didn't have a permanent place to live or a job. I didn't know anybody. I followed up with some connections made through working on films in D.C., and ended up living in the guest house of a woman—actually, the producer of *Claire of the Moon* and *Waiting for Guffman*. I finally got a job, volunteered for GLAAD, met these guys . . . I think alliances are built [here] in general, but in the gay community there's a little more familiarity. You meet someone and you have this instant thing in common with them. *Power Up* is just a way to make that more of an official forum for people to meet and network."

Candace Moore reviews videos for *Girlfriends*.



IF THESE WALLS COULD TALK 2 LORRY BEASTON/HBO



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## video

## Directing Women

Indie filmmakers show us their worlds.

BY CANDACE MOORE

"I make my films for what Hollywood spends on lipstick," the late great Maya Deren wisecracked in the 1940s. Fiesty foremother of feminist filmmakers to come, Deren showed how to embrace artistic audacity in a patriarch-heavy medium. With little financial backing, subsequent upstarts have portrayed their intimate altercations with the objects of daily life. Like Deren, Chantal Akerman and Miranda July star in their own complex tug-of-wars between interiority and exteriority. And a new anthology of lesbian shorts brings us arty quickies from rising directors around the globe.

### Meshes of the Afternoon

(Mystic Fire Video, 1943)

Dancer, actress, director Maya Deren—the first woman to win Cannes' Grand Prix International for avant-garde film—was obsessed with the choreography of the subconscious. Her vastly influential *Meshes of the Afternoon*, made when she was 26, unhinges unwary audiences to this day. *Meshes* exhibits a breathtaking use of sharp incisions and interpositions, making the viewer feel as if she were inside an Escher conundrum, a moving architectural dream. In a technically brilliant scene, Deren's autoerotic dreamer materializes in triplicate. Phallic knives crack open a man's skull to reveal ocean. Keys, flowers, walkways, stairwells, and mirror-faced gowns become rudimentary to solving a distressful mystery of identity multiplication. Recalling the surrealistic imagery and fragmentation of Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), Deren's sensual urgency is a source of pungent arousal. Grade: **A**

### Nest of Tens

(Big Miss Moviola, 2000)

Miranda July, a performance artist with a fine sense of the pleasure of narrative and its rupture, is captivating to watch in any capacity. In this, her first ensemble cast film, a soundtrack of airport loudspeakers, heavy-metal fuzz, business shop talk, and a cappella pop frames a reverie on the unreality of the everyday. Normally mundane utterances and sterile spaces are imbued with an unpinpointable something both fearful and titillating. In July's universe, everything has stakes. Prepubescent visionaries act as decoders of the bizarre: a boy swabs a naked baby with Ajax in an empty mansion, a bored daughter sees an enhanced world through mirrors and TV that her preoccupied mother misses, and a sassy youngster stops a career lady (July) dead in her tracks with absurd "private" manipulations of her headband and body. Waiting for the horror that comes but never penetrates, the viewer acquires a sense of an exquisiteness ordinarily passed over. Grade: **A**



Auteur Akerman rolling with her ex in *Je, Tu, Il, Elle*

### Je, Tu, Il, Elle

(Video World Artists, 1974)

More personal than her French New Wave precursors, Belgian-born Chantal Akerman offers up her own physique as spectacle and the focal site of meditative deliberation. In a messily minimalist apartment, a woman (Akerman) tracks a numerology of days through letters addressed to an offscreen *you*, compulsively spoons sugar into her mouth as a medication of sorts, and has all kinds of interior decoration revelations with her nude body and a mattress. After a haphazard lapse of time, she sets off hitchhiking to her estranged lover's (Claire Wauthion) apartment. There follows a ravenously eaten meal and a 20-minute, medium close-up of equally ravenous sex. They roll like jaguar playmates, and Akerman receives realistically intense head. The unflinchingness of this film's nearly plotless portraiture is thrilling to behold. Grade: **A**

### Short Shorts

(Picture This!, 2000)

This quirky sampling of lesbian-protagonist flicks is doused in personal revelation about everything from Dr. Seuss to bank heists. *Short Shorts* is akin to renting a film festival: highly watchable pieces share screen with filler that's like the bitter pieces of purple stuff in yuppie salads. "Two Women & A Baby" is a cute Australian comedy featuring a believably in-love couple who wax poetic about parenthood. "KoKo" is the moto-riding, toy gun-obsessed, bleached blonde French dyke who proclaims herself a superhero and wears wigs as part of the albino Mafia. Both lead one to wonder: why do foreign girls make better clothes horses? "Maid of Honor" is a bit of a U.S. tearjerker as it details the pains of pledging commitment. The collection as a whole has enough aesthetic high hopes, varied content, and hot girls to sate the attention deficient. Grade: **B**

Candace Moore, coeditor of the small press *Runcible Spoon*, lives in Los Angeles.





BEVERLY PAET

Movie maven Jenni Olson and I point out some good films

*Desert Hearts* was one of the reasons I came out.

At the time, I was going through a serious Madonna phase, and because I wore dresses and makeup and dated boys, nobody at my college's Women's Center believed I was gay. (Imagine that!) I flirted, I listened to Ferron, I dropped hints during retreats. But clearly I was having difficulty telling even myself I wasn't straight.

I may not have had a clue, but I did have a car. So when I got wind of this new lesbian movie called *Desert Hearts*, I organized a handful of my dyke friends for a road trip all the way to Boston, Massachusetts, to see the movie. (This was 1985, and they didn't show lesbian movies in Rhode Island then.) I scored many lavender brownie points, and I made sure to invite this cute sophomore, Cate, I was trying to seduce. But I had no idea the movie—not just the company—would result in the Moral Reconstruction of Ms. Heather Ann Findlay.

Watching Donna Deitch's groundbreaking movie, I identified so eagerly with Vivian Bell (Helen Shaver) and fell so hard for Cay Rivers (Patricia Charbonneau) that *Desert Hearts* will always be a personal classic. I still cherish details, like that big-haired bisexual casino worker who is Cay's part-time lover. I still remember which seat I was in—probably because I had to be peeled off it after the 10-minute love scene.

Mind you, there have been a number of books—*The Well of Loneliness*, *Zami*—that told me less about their characters than they did about myself. But there's something special about film, perhaps its visual nature. (Seeing is always, if sometimes unfairly, believing.) Perhaps it's the social nature of going to the theater. In any case, lesbian movies have always functioned like a mirror, reflecting back to me in acute detail the Sapphic face I can't see.

Jenni Olson, author of *The Complete Guide to Lesbian and Gay Video*, founder of the online resource PopcornQ, and winner of a 1998 Sappho for Special Achievement, assures me I'm not alone.

"The simple fact of having the culture reflect back to you your reality will always be a critical validating experience," says Olson. "That's true whether it's *The Children's Hour*, where the lesbian commits suicide, or *But I'm a Cheerleader*, where she gets the girl. The whole range from negative to positive is still a validation of our reality."

Although lesbian film has become more commercially viable, according to Olson, it's still "treading water." That's why she started The Queer First Weekend Club two years ago. Knowing that studios and distributors judge the worth of a film by its box office returns during the first weekend of its release, the club encourages us to go see lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender films on—you guessed it—the first weekend.

The importance of lesbian films to our personal sense of self is also why *Girlfriends* founded the Sappho Awards in 1998. So far, we've given 49 awards to lesbian films and filmmakers who have helped us see who we are. (This year we've added a new category, Desperately Seeking Distribution, to help dyke filmmakers get their work out.) The Sappho Awards are now one of our most popular annual features.

So grab your popcorn, take a seat, and enjoy the show.

Heather Findlay, Editor in Chief

# Girlfriends

CULTURE • POLITICS • ENTERTAINMENT  
VOLUME 7, ISSUE 10

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for advertising rates call 415-648-9464  
e-mail: [sales@girlfriendsmag.com](mailto:sales@girlfriendsmag.com)  
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H.A.F. Enterprises  
publisher of *Girlfriends*, *On Our Backs*, and  
*Inside Pride Guides*  
3415 César Chávez, Ste. 101  
San Francisco, CA 94110  
415-648-9464 (phone)  
415-648-4705 (fax)  
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