

SPECTRUM

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IN THE PINK AIDS

by James Gill

AIDS is not a gay disease - everyone should care. This point cannot be stressed enough. Everyone must take possession of the problem because anyone can come in contact with the AIDS virus, and all people must protect themselves.

There is an unfortunate implication, however, that some people have drawn from this statement, that if AIDS were a gay disease then people would not have to care. Are we an expendable element of the population? I like to think that this is not typical of society's attitude, but when I see t-shirts with slogans like "AIDS . . . kills fags dead" I wonder.

AIDS has provided homophobics with a rationale for their bigotry, but like all bigotry it is based on misinformation. Gay men do not cause AIDS, a virus causes AIDS. The gay lifestyle does not cause AIDS, unsafe practices make us all vulnerable. Prostitutes do not cause AIDS, either. It is gay men and prostitutes who are protecting themselves and spearheading the campaign for AIDS education. Those who are endangering themselves and their partners are the people - gay or straight - who are not practising safer sex, who share needles or who ignore the issue and the risk.

A large effort is being made to destroy the connection between AIDS and gay men so that the community at large will take possession of the crisis. The majority of PWA's (People with AIDS) are still gay men, though. The AIDS crisis has forced the gay community to look inward and take stock of itself. In the ten years after the Stonewall Riots of 1969 the lesbian and gay community went through a period of celebration. Just as individual gay men and lesbians who come out of the closet often feel a tremendous sense of liberation so too did the entire community in the seventies. This liberation was the hallmark of the "Stonewall generation." The advent of AIDS in 1981 spelled the end of that period.

My generation of gay men and lesbians are people who were born around the time of Stonewall of later. We are the generation of AIDS. I was fourteen when the first cases of AIDS were reported in Los Angeles and I was just beginning to recognize my sexuality. At that time the medical profession was referring to the disease as GRID - for Gay Related Immuno-deficiency. I am lucky, by the time I was beginning to express my sexuality we were already aware of the virus and the protection that safer sex gives. I have never put myself at risk, but I still act under the assumption that my partner and I both could have the virus.

The gay community responded to the AIDS crisis. It is important to note that the incidence of chlamydia - a sexually transmitted disease - is rising among every sector of the population except the gay community. AIDS Education programs often use these incidence figures as an indication of the effectiveness of the program. If the chlamydia rate goes down, it indicates that people are practising safer sex. So we see that on the whole gay men are taking responsibility for their health.

AIDS has created other problems for the gay community. The majority of People with AIDS are still gay men. Many of us are the Worried Well, we have friends and lovers who are living with AIDS on a daily basis.

There are thousands of gay and straight people who are carrying the HIV but do not know it. It has become vital for everyone to act on the assumption that everyone carries the virus, and we all must protect ourselves from infection. During AIDS Awareness Month, take the time to find out about safer sex practices. If you have never used a condom, find out how, and practice by yourself first. If you already have the information, find out again! If you are not sure if something is risky or not - ASK. If you are still not sure - DO NOT TAKE CHANCES! - it is your health.

Next GALA meeting Tuesday, January 30, at 8:00 PM in Room 203 of the SUB.

COHABITATING COUPLES

A couple are said to be cohabitating when they are involved in a living arrangement similar to that of husband and wife, but are not in fact legally married to one another. These informal marriage relationships are often referred to as "common-law" marriages.

If my partner and I cohabit for a certain number of years, will we be considered legally married?

No, this is not the case, although it is a common assumption. Cohabiting couples never become legally married unless they obtain a marriage licence and go through a civil or religious marriage ceremony.

Will I be held liable for the bad debts of my partner?

One party in a cohabitation arrangement is not responsible for the debts of his or her partner. Such obligations arise only in the event of joint loans or similar situations in which you and your partner act together.

What are my property rights in a cohabitation arrangement?

The law views cohabitating couples differently than it does married couples with respect to property rights. The provisions of the Marital Property Act do not apply to cohabitation, so you do not enjoy the protection which that Act offers husbands and wives. Both you and your partner retain full ownership of whatever you individually brought into your relationship. If you have purchased an item together, such as a television set or a piece of furniture, it is the property of you both. You are entitled to one half of the value of the item in question should your cohabitation end.

Do any obligations arise out of cohabitation arrangements?

Deciding to live in a cohabitation arrangement as opposed to a legal marriage does not free you from certain responsibilities. The body of family law relating to child support, access and custody applies equally to any parent, regardless of his or her marital status. As well, after you and your partner have been together for an extended period of time, the issue of maintenance may arise should your relationship end.

Do pension plans recognize common-law relationships?

Many pension and superannuation plans do recognize common-law relationships and enable cohabitating partners to receive the same benefits as those enjoyed by spouses in a marriage. Under certain pieces of federal legislation such as the Canada Pension Plan Act and the Old Age Security Act, common-law partners are included after one year of cohabitation, provided that the couple have represented themselves as being married. If the couple is barred from legal marriage, as would be the case if one or both partners were already married to someone else, the time requirement increases to three years. It should be noted that merely living together does not in and of itself make parties to such arrangements eligible for the rights held by common-law partners.

Does the law recognize cohabitation arrangements between persons of the same sex?

At the present time, common-law relationships can exist only between persons of the opposite sex. However, this area of the law is being questioned and continues to develop.

NOTE: THIS LEGAL COLUMN IS WRITTEN FOR INFORMATION PURPOSES ONLY. IT IS NOT INTENDED TO BE A REPLACEMENT FOR PROFESSIONAL LEGAL ADVICE.

FEMINISM

THE WOMANS ROOM

by Alexandra Fremont

Feminism. Is there a word which invites more impassioned debates? Everyone has a point of view about feminism, especially if they believe that feminism is unwarranted. The word 'feminism' means so many different things to so many different people; and chances are better than average that if one hundred people were asked to define feminism, one hundred different responses would be given. But what exactly, is feminism?

I believe that feminism is a state of mind. Two years ago, if anyone had implied that I was a feminist, I would have been utterly insulted. I, too, subscribed to the thought that women who labelled themselves as 'feminist' were "one of those." I perceived feminists as being radical, outspoken, and men-haters. I did not characterize myself in any of those ways. But I have learned that these qualities are not a prerequisite to being labelled a feminist.

Personally, I have grown into feminism. Experiences in my life have led me to recognize the oppression that women must endure, simply because they are born a woman. "What experiences?" you may ask. There have been many incidents in my life where I felt that I was being discriminated against as a woman. I, like so many others, was a victim of sexual abuse in my childhood, beginning with the time when I was twelve and the boy down the street pinned me down in the back field to cop a feel, and told me he would come back to get me if I told anyone. Or the time when I was fourteen and dating an 'older' boy - he pinned me down one night at a party and raped me. Or the times, in my early twenties, when I would drink too much and a 'friend' would see me home safely, and jump on top of me as we walked in the door. In each of these instances, I was made a victim because I did not possess the physical strength required to escape. My control was taken away by men who felt it was their right to do so.

There have been other incidents as well. The most recent in my life concerns the birth of my son, little more than a year ago. His father has never met him--nor has he asked to--believing that his son is not his responsibility given that he did not ask for him. A court appearance five months ago secured my child financial support in the amount of \$250 (barely half

the monthly babysitting expense), only his father has yet to be informed of this decision by the court. By the time it is contested and blood tests prove paternity, it could well be another year before he is made to pay; that is if he decides to adhere to the court's ruling!

These are only a few examples of discrimination in my life; however, I feel that they will offer you a glimpse of where I am coming from. Because of the support I have received over the last few years from family, friends, and counsellors, I am able to assert myself and not allow this type of oppression to continue in my own life.

I hope that by sharing some of my struggles, I might plant the seed of feminism in someone who is searching for some direction in his/her life and at the same time show how you do not have to hate men to be a feminist. It is not men that feminists hate, it is the society which has socialized them to believe that it is normal to exert power over women in all areas of their lives. I strongly believe that men and women will reach new heights of intimacy in their relationships if men allow women to be their equals - equals at work, at church, at school, at home, and in the bedroom!

Feminism does not simply imply asserting yourself in your personal life. It signifies educating yourself and others about the mechanisms of discrimination and oppression that women must tolerate in their lives. Heather Murray, a professor at Queen's University, believes that women suffer "systematic discrimination...that the discrimination is a deep part of the culture and is perpetuated by the organization of that culture."

But, what is feminism?

To define feminism one could begin by gathering women from all over the world and asking them what their goals are in life. However, by studying what the feminist movement has advocated, a clearer definition of feminism can be conceived. Feminists believe that women deserve economic, legal and sexual equality with men. We believe that women should be regarded as valuable resources in employment, in religion, in education, in family, and treated as such. Feminism means possessing the right to speak, from a woman's perspective, of who you are and where you come from.



Dear Editor

The inter- not to offe problems holding alc on campus ates the accompany Students liv well aware associated Perhaps thi a greater a campus stu fully realiz problems.

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