

SPECTRUM

"Lesbo Muffins & a cuppa mocha please"

I'm a fairly sociable person. I like to have fun, talk with friends and generally do social things. I don't go to bars very often, though. When I do it's because I want to be with friends, who are going. Bars are loud. They are very loud. I can't talk to my friends unless everyone knows sign-language. Sometimes my ears buzz for a whole day after I've been out. If I keep going to bars I'm going to have to sharpen up on my sign language, because I'm going to be deaf.

The only place to meet gay people in Fredericton is to go to the gay bar, Dancetrax. Now, for a bar they're pretty good about this noise thing for at least part of the evening, and they do their best to cater to non-dancers by providing a pool table - of course I don't play pool. I'm not going to criticize them for what they do. They are in business to be a bar and owe me nothing more. Besides if they weren't open there would be no place for us to dance when we want to. And no place to be ourselves in.

I want something more. I want a place that plays quieter music (most of the time, at least). A place where I can sip coffee and munch muffins. A place that is open all day. A place for friends to get together and talk. I want... a gay coffee shop!

It has to be gay, because straights would raise a fuss about gay expressions of fondness in a straight joint. Try it, you'll see. Some of them make real asses of themselves pointing and guffawing. It's quite a nuisance.

Newly out, or closet gays, might not want to walk in the door of a known gay establishment - but there are ways around that problem. A 50/50 (half straight/half gay) or gay-positive shop might be an idea, but a better one would be for the gay community to start our own. Despite what I said a few weeks back about Fredericton possibly not needing a community, I feel it does. Since then I have had a conversation with a woman who is trying to be gay in a vacuum. She doesn't know any lesbians here, and doesn't want to "pick someone up" at a bar. Information, contacts, and friendliness are all denied to her because there is no real community. A coffee shop may not be the answer for her, but it would be more than she gets now. It's amazing how much confidence you can build in yourself just by associating with other gays.

Of course, this shop needs a room set aside for women only. Not that I expect gay men to

rampage in and overwhelm a coffee shop at any time - especially if there is a bar to go to, but it is reasonable to expect some to yearn for a quiet talk, so there would likely always be men wandering through. So a special room is necessary. I know the politics on this are convoluted and, in many cases, dogmatic. My position is actually one of compromise. I don't like what is currently going

on in Halifax. A building, which is financially supported by both gay men and lesbians, is barring some of those paying members on certain nights of the month. The lesbians tell the men that they too, can have a night of their own, but the men make the valid point that since they have no interest in having one it isn't a fair deal.

Still, lesbians do need a space that is men-free (all women do).

Conned by the Condom Pushers: Alternatives to current safer sex strategies.

We have just had an important AIDS Awareness Week. One highlight was "Visual AIDS", an exhibit of 400 posters, some of which are quite graphic in detail. That graphic message aims to impress upon us the seriousness of this deadly disease.

The exhibit is intended to be educational. It presents the stark facts of AIDS, some misconceptions and the means to reduce the risk. In this regard it is quite effective, and necessary.

What is most disturbing about the exhibit, however, is what it fails to say. The message of the posters is one-sided, limited and quite misleading. It is not thorough enough in its fight against AIDS, and it does not deal with all the facts.

The posters educate us in the use of condoms. That is clear from the sheer number of them (36 out of the 120 at the UNB Art Centre) that specifically mention its use. However, if we were to follow their message a reduced, but nonetheless alarming, number of people would still become infected by the HIV virus.

Condoms reduce risk; they do not eliminate it. Condoms have a high failure rate. The exhibit does not mention this, neither do most AIDS Awareness groups. Do those dispensing condoms, particularly at UNB, give ample and clear warnings of the risks involved in their use, much like the warnings printed on cigarette packages.

Do you know if your partner is HIV positive? Dr. Everett Koops, former US Surgeon General, stated that "if you're having sex with someone, it's like having sex with everyone that they have had sex with for the past 10 years." One study showed that the rate of spreading

the HIV virus between couples (with one partner infected) using the condom was 17 percent over 18 months. That roughly translates into the following: "if you are 'fooling around' chances are you will be infected." Why be satisfied with, or conned into, merely reducing the risk?

All AIDS Awareness groups know the risks involved with the condom. Once speaking of "safe sex" they now more honestly mention only "safer sex". Nonetheless, they opt for education only along its line, and precious little else.

There is, however, a great deal of difference between safe and safer sex. That difference is a moral one. AIDS Awareness groups are preaching the condom line, but ignoring or soft-peddling the moral line. For most AIDS is solely a medical (or technical) issue.

Dare we admit that behind the increasing AIDS epidemic (in the highest percentage of instances) lies a certain lifestyle, namely a multi-partner heterosexual and homosexual one. To assert, as does Visual AIDS, that "All AIDS victims are innocent" is most certainly the case with hemophiliacs, HIV infected babies, rape and accident victims. To extend that statement to all, however, is in effect refusing to make any comment at all on, let alone warnings about, certain high-risk choices, condoms or no condoms.

But remaining relatively silent is really denying a thorough education. Out of the 120 posters, only one (yes, one) linked life-long fidelity to one partner as a means not only of reducing but of preventing, even eliminating, the spread of AIDS. Why does the display, along with all other AIDS related literature,

The Black Triangle With Tristis Baird

We've been kicked around - some of us literally - for a long while. There is a need to find peace away from the tension some of us feel near men. We also have emotions and thoughts that won't get expressed around men. And we want to support each other as women for women.

So the compromise works like this: A gay coffee shop opens,

preferably owned by the community. A room within this shop is set aside for, and maintained by lesbians as a women's only space. If there is to be a room for men I am confident they can work it out themselves.

It's a nice, cosy plan. Now all we need is for the community to get off their collective duff, and act on it.

Metanoia with John Valk

that put out by AIDS New Brunswick included, not highlight this most strongly? Why are there not 36 posters advocating this lifestyle?

Is it because of the assumption that everyone is "doing it", and therefore we must be "realistic"? Even this notion is false. Statistics indicate that abstinence (ie waiting for the right person in a lasting and committed relationship) among university students is on the increase.

That's no fun, you say. Well, ask those who have opted for a so-called "second virginity". Many single women (and even men) who felt pressured into sexual relations because "everybody was doing it", have come to the realization that they have been seriously misled. They have felt "used, abused or forgotten" by partners who, in the heat of passion, uttered some vague words of love and respect.

One poster was particularly disturbing. It read "The Catholic Church thinks that it is better for a person to die of AIDS than to use a condom." The Catholic Church (and most other churches) have too high a view of and respect for human sexuality than to cater to some low common denominator. Because of this high regard they do not opt for a condom solution.

It is unfortunate that many refuse to familiarize themselves

with the teaching of the Scriptures on human sexuality. Christianity, regardless of the aberrant behaviors of some of its advocates, understands sexuality to be most meaningful, intimate and safe within a lasting responsible relationship between two committed and consenting adults. One night stands, cruising, date rape, and even temporary living arrangements, borders more on exploitation and risk-taking than on respect, responsibility, committed love and safe sex.

Is this being puritanical, conservative, or prudish? That depends. But if we are concerned about eliminating a dreaded disease and bringing to bear the most free and creative expression and enjoyment of sex, it is rather liberating.

If one insists on a multi-partner sexual lifestyle, then by all means use a condom. But be aware of the risks, and being conned into a false security.

*Reading is
good for the
blood.*