

Notes from the Full-Hipped Polish Dyke

Marie Robertson

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After four years of asking myself, "Where are all those women?" I've decided to change my focus and question what, if anything, the gay movement has to offer us dykes. Contrary to the belief of many lesbians who are inexperienced in working with gay men, but who nevertheless are amazingly outspoken in their criticism of gay liberation, I have done much more than make coffee and answer telephones. However, as of late, I've been looking at the large amount of energy that I expend fighting for equal power in a male-dominated struggle, educating my gay brothers about their sexism and feminism in general, and trying to recruit more women. Who gains in the amalgamation? It seems to me that men are getting quite a bit for our time. Besides the work we do, having a significant number of active women in an individual group has become a basis for credibility and status in the contest for "Most Together Gay Liberation Group of the Year". But what are lesbians gaining? A growing sense of alienation from our sisters; fatigue as we struggle as a minority to let the public know that the term "gay" also means female homosexual. This is not to underplay all the good feelings I've personally



experienced in past years. Spending one's formative years with faggots has definite advantages (I'm a great dancer). Nonetheless, it has begun to strike me as ludicrous when in seminars I expound the virtues of loving women and then upon reflection realize that I've been spending most of my time with gay men.

The problem is obviously much deeper than the superficial male chauvinism in the movement; the meatballs who insist on saying "mankind",

"him", "he" when referring to both sexes. I perceive a clear conflict of interest. Gay liberation, when we get right down to it, is the struggle for gay men to achieve approval for the only thing that separates them from the "Man" - their sexual preference. All right, all you self-proclaimed "male feminists" who are at this point desiring to bend, spindle, and mutilate my poor Polish neck. The point is that if you were not gay you would be part of the powerful, prestigious male ruling class

that oppresses women, whether you choose to face that reality or not. Your birth as males defines that; you don't. My female birth-right places me on the bottom rung - regardless of my sexual orientation and that is where I must fight from. Thanks for letting me take a step up to your rung of the ladder, but no thanks.

Should we dykes then fight alongside our straight feminist sisters? Enter lesbian pride to complicate matters even more. Some lesbians put a lot of energy into the feminist movement, committing themselves to working for the benefit and eventual liberation of all women. No one can deny the importance of this since dykes are oppressed first and foremost as women. But it has been my experience (and I know I'm not alone) that the mere mention of including gay issues in the feminist struggle arouses a complete gamut of negative responses from outright refusal to the more pseudo-liberal, but harder to detect, queerness of inner parts, characterized by a sudden tightening of the vocal chords and nausea. I refuse to kow-tow to the closetry strongly encouraged by up tight straight women concerned with the "image" of the feminist movement and also, sadly, by those paranoid gay sisters who rationalize their own closetry by viewing their lesbianism as a private personal matter, of little consequence to the liberation of women.

I want a separate dyke movement through which we can fight the women's fight openly and proudly as up-front lesbians. I want gay women to finally get credit for all the work we've been doing and presently are doing under the banners of the gay and women's movements. We need our own banner. We have nothing to lose by separating; we are already losing in movements that do not meet our needs. As feminists we're compromising ourselves in the gay movement, as lesbians we're "hushed up" in the women's movement. If we're going to educate, let us educate our lesbian sisters, not our gay brothers. If we're going to demand equality as women, let us not forget the fact that we are gay women, and that as such we must make the dyke issue a prominent one, retrieving it from the closets of feminism.

by Marie Robertson

The Lesbian Conference "We realize the need"

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by Anne Fulton

On the Victoria Day weekend, I drove, in my gorgeous hunk of rotting metal, to a lesbian conference held by the Queen's Homophile Association in Kingston, Ontario. The conference was open to both women and men, and focused on the subject of the women's position in the Gay movement. The conference was not supported by various groups, including 'Long Time Coming', a lesbian feminist paper from Montreal, who condemned it as they felt that men had no place there, as this would merely perpetuate the male dominance of the Gay movement. In spite of the poor prognosis, the conference was attended by about fifty women and fifty men.

Initially, it had been planned that the various topics be primarily discussed in mixed groups. After the opening plenary session, (which, incidentally, I was late for, being somewhere between Kingston and Toronto at that particular moment), the women and men met in separate groups to discuss the agenda of the meeting. From the moment that we women were alone, we wanted the rest of the conference to be mostly segregated. We felt that we had a great many things to discuss which did not concern the men. A great and tremendous closeness grew amongst all the women in the group. I have never felt such a strong common bond with any group of people as I began to feel with those women. They are very proud, independent women, proud of the fact that they are DYKES. (This term is greatly used in Upper Canada, and areas where the women are more politically enlightened, and doesn't refer to a greasy haired, leather jacketed creature behind the wheel of a truck, but rather, a strong independent lesbian who is proud of what she is, and doesn't give a damn what anyone thinks.)

So, the conference had an unexpected twist. The

dykes took the conference into their own hands, and it began to focus seriously around the theory of dyke separatism, (see the accompanying article 'DYKES' by Marie Robertson), and the need for an autonomous lesbian organization within the country. We'd all grown tired of working behind the shadow of the men, of fighting for their aims, and of not having the guts and self confidence to fight for, let alone recognize, what we've wanted.

The following is the official statement from the conference:

"We have decided that there exists a need for an autonomous lesbian movement in Canada to fulfill our needs, and have thus formed an informal coalition. Our fight for an autonomous organization of lesbians began at this conference on Saturday morning when we women took the week-end into our own hands. We made this conference our own. However, because of the fact that a number of lesbians are isolated in small communities and feel the need for support from mixed gay movements, this autonomy will in some cases manifest itself as an independent lesbian voice from within those movements.

We realize the need to build for power as lesbian women so that we need no longer subordinate our interests to those of the straight women or the men...straight or gay; and so that our lesbian sisters who are in the majority of cases still invisible to us, will have the possibility of coming out. With the awareness that many lesbians did not attend this conference for various personal and political reasons, we have postponed the formalization of strategy proposals until we have a larger, more representative voice. To this end, two lesbian conferences will be held. Wages Due Lesbians Toronto will sponsor one this summer on lesbians and Wages for Housework, and one will take place in Ottawa next fall.

We welcome support from gay men who endorse

our stand and believe that the efforts of our autonomous movement will be a positive move in strengthening the fight against oppression."

This statement was fully supported by all the men who attended the conference.

It was very strange to return to Halifax after all this. I was on the most incredible high as a result of the conference for a week afterward. Once I crossed the N.S. border, (and got a speeding ticket), I realized that I was home. I was back in a place where there is the most terrific contrast to what I saw in Upper Canada. There is no closeness, no common bond, no sisterhood amongst the lesbians here. And, there is really nothing here for lesbians. In spite of the fact that some lesbians go to 'The Klub', it is still basically male-oriented. GAE is all male, except for myself. I can't work as enthusiastically with the men in GAE as I could with women, as I have somewhat different objectives, and often we are at cross

Ho hum. Another minority group

by Bob Isnor

Gay liberation is here and gays are here. Few people deny that we exist. Now, where do gays go from here? It's like arriving at the start of a journey when we expected to be at the end. The fate of other minority groups is clear to see, there is a benevolent tolerance of blacks, Jews, women. Are gays falling into the same pit? The usual stereotyping is appearing: Jews are cheap, women are weak, black have rhythm, gays have taste.

In theory, gays could be able to mix more easily within the social groups. We are invisible as much as we want to be and we are already present in every profession, religion, sport, etc. Our invisibility has stopped individuals from being cast out, it has also stopped gays from recognizing each other and getting together a voice of our own.

So gays make a choice of sorts, to be invisible and stay comfortable in the closet, or to come out within our straight circles and get automatic minority group status. It's hard because by doing nothing, we have the easier choice made for us. Or after much turmoil and effort, we can come out and be rewarded by demotion to "one of them".

After women, I would expect gays to be the minority group most likely to be easily assimilated back into the mainstream. Gays don't grow up in a family victimized by prejudice like Blacks or Jews may. Gays aren't likely to be poorly educated, or to smell differently or to eat funny foods. Financial ills, political strife or foreign wars are not likely to

be caused by us. We are the people all around you now. So what's the big scare? Yes, we know. The big fear of gays comes from the 'sex' in 'homosexual'. We do not live in a very liberal society, as much as we would like to think the sexual revolution was already here. The revolution was a minor rebellion and men still can't talk to their wives, mothers still blush and lie to their daughters, schools still teach reproduction of earthworms as sex education and Halifax still gets censored versions of Last Tango or Ode to Billie Joe. So if folks are kept that intimidated of the sexual activities they are expected to carry out, it's little wonder that big Butch is freaked out at the thought of someone's hairy hand on his shoulder.

So have you decided already how you are going to react to your first gay friend? If you keep your conversation laced with jokes, ridicule and threats, the gays who know you will engage in time-killing chitchat and find someone else to be honest with. You will get from gays the honesty and rapport that you are able to handle - none. No investment and no return.

If you are happy being what you are, a straight or a celibate or whatever, and you mix your happiness with yourself with a measure of liberty for others to do their own thing, then I forecast that you will find the neat people lurking out there. Only people pleased with their own lives are able to accept something or someone different.

N S Human Rights (C)ommission

by Bob Stout

On May 4, 1976, Robin Metcalfe and Bob Stout of the Gay Alliance for Equality met with two officers of the N.S. Human Rights Commission to discuss media discrimination. The following media were not allowing our advertising: CBH radio, CHNS, Halifax Herald, and CFDR radio. In the course of the discussions, the Human Rights Commission's attitude to any kind of discrimination against gays was brought out.

In the past, gay people have approached members of the different provincial legislatures for legal protection against discrimination on the basis of sexual preference. Some legislators have said that gay people are already protected by the word "sex" in Human Rights Acts. In Saskatchewan, the Human Rights Commission decided to take on the case of Doug Wilson, interpreting the word "sex" in their Human Rights Act to include sexual preference. The case was taken by the Saskatchewan Commission to a judicial board to gain a satisfactory solution for Doug Wilson. The judicial board ruled that Doug Wilson was not protected under the Human Rights Act, as "sex" referred only to gender and not to sexual preference. The N.S. Human Rights Commission said that the N.S. Human Rights Act is much the same as Saskatchewan's, and it would be useless for the Commission to take our case of discrimination to a judicial board.

The Human Rights Commission can act as a mediator between two parties in cases of

discrimination to achieve a successful solution without the use of the courts. Because the case of media discrimination against the Gay Alliance had already received a large amount of publicity - it was the subject of two television shows - and because the media would have reviewed their legal positions, the Commission refused to sue the powers of a mediator in this case. Both members from the Gay Alliance expressed the view that mediation at this stage by the Commission would certainly do no harm and might do some good. However, the Commission said it believed that such efforts would be useless. The Commission did offer to mediate in future cases of discrimination if there had been no publicity.

Instead of taking the case to a judicial board or mediating the case of discrimination against gays, the N.S. Human Rights Commission agreed to help the Gay Alliance document any cases of discrimination. Because many gay people fear publicity involving their homosexuality, due to fears of job security and adverse reactions from friends and family, the Commission agreed to let us use false name in all our reports. The correct names will be placed in confidential files of the Commission after the Commission has documented the case. The Gay Alliance can then take these documented cases to the legislators to press for laws protecting gays.

Gays are discriminated against in diverse ways. Gay men and women are victims of employment discrimination if the employer is homophobic. If a

gay couple try to get housing in the city, they may be discriminated against by the landlord who can refuse to rent a one-bedroom apartment to two people of the same sex. The landlord can say s/he only rents to married couples and gay marriages are not legal in Canada. Gays are permitted to drink in nearly all establishments in N.S., but if they dance with a same-sex partner, they will be told to sit down, or more likely, leave. Gays have to pay for more expensive insurance because they are refused the lower 'married' rates. Similarly, a gay person cannot claim his/her lover on an income tax form. A lesbian mother will generally lose custody of her children to the husband in divorce courts, because a lesbian mother is considered to provide an unhealthy environment for her children. Consequently, lesbian mothers are in constant fear that they will have their children taken away.

The Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission has the power to recommend on its own initiative to the minister responsible for the Human Rights Act, any changes felt desirable in strengthening its act. The Commission can do this at any time and does not need documented cases. If it wants documented cases, there are many across Canada that are well known. By refusing to suggest changes in the Human Rights Act, which would provide protection for gays, the Commission is ignoring the due rights of 10% of Nova Scotians.

The Gay Alliance will continue to document cases of discrimination and to press the government of Nova Scotia to protect gay people.

Shrinking the gay head

by Bob Isnor

With a dimishing faith in the family doctor or the kindly clergyman for advice, we're turning en masse in the Western world towards psychiatrists and psychologists for the answer to our unfulfilled lives. Gays can be shafted easily by shrinks, who have traditionally tried to solve problems by encouraging and enforcing conformity.

One illusionary laymen may have is expecting that there is one good way for living, and illusion two is expecting someone who has spent 4 to 10 years studying sick people to know that way.

If you are gay and are considering spending time and money in getting professional help, I'll share some experiences and some insights with you.

Act one was in 2nd year Dal. I was hiding away from the world because I was uptight about being homosexual (e.g. I slept 10-18 hours a day). Finally I got recommended to a student health shrink, whom I saw one hour a week from October til April. Despite my deliberately presenting what I thought was a typical gay-producing background, the doctor never even vaguely made a single reference to homosexuality. I coughed and he chain-smoked through the year, going around my lack of sexual interest in women, and ignoring my discomfort when pushed towards dating. I kept hoping he would show some knowledge of the existence of gay people, but no such luck.

Act one and one-half was overseas. I went to Europe to find myself, but I wasn't there.

Act two was 4th year at Dal. I took myself to student counselling and told a psychologist of my fear of being homosexual and my hope of changing. At this point, I had never had any social or sexual contact with gay people, and thought they existed only on Fire Island. The counsellor spent many hours on desensitizing me from discomfort at intimate contact with women (which I used to cool my fear of male-male contact!) but interest on my part was lacking. At the same time, I had met my first gay friends. I found men who thought I was beautiful and for the first time, I realized I was already O.K. The counsellor was a guy I liked and I made the mistake of never telling him that I was no longer interested in what I had first come for: how to play straight. He did not suggest during the six months that there was no need for a gay person to try not to be gay, no need for living a life that would suit other people and leave me frustrated til the end of my days. He did not say and maybe did not know that there is no known cure for being gay, any more than there is a cure for being straight. What I needed and did not get was his approval of gay being a valid existence. I left at the end of the school year still wondering if there was something wrong with me, and if so, why had the therapy done so little.

For the next two years, I had a social life almost entirely gay. I kept questioning my existence and decided to do two things: get involved in gay activities beyond social, and learn more about myself. I joined the Halifax homophile group and found that gay could be action, could be thought and could be philosophy. I found gay history, gay problems and gay pride all existed.

To learn about myself, I read Eric Berne, Fritz Perls (both homophobes unfortunately) and others, on Transactional Analysis and Gestalt. I joined a T.A. group and found how to get more life into myself and more of myself into my life. In the group, I was accepted as gay with no hassle, and I achieved many things for myself that I hadn't expected (tolerance, more enjoyment, less guilt). I avoided bringing up gay-related anxieties in case there was confusion over what the actual problem was. That may have been my mistake - it turns out that most problems are only gay or straight on the surface and just human underneath.

When I decide to get into more personal growth, I will find a gay encounter group, or maybe start my own. The positive reinforcement from emotional sharing with a group is a natural high, I recommend it.

- On to tips for shrinkees, I suggest:
- honesty with the counsellor. Holding things back is unfair to both of you. You keep hoping s/he will guess it out of you and you will likely end up unhelped.
 - definition of a goal and a time span. At the end of the time span, a review to see what has happened, a decision on whether to continue for another period with the same goal or;
 - redefinition of goal. The first one is likely to need some revamping, and often plain rejection in favour of something else.
 - stop proceedings when necessary. At any time when you are not sure what the shrink is up to, if you have lost direction for the moment or if you are unnerved by anything said or not said, or especially felt, hold everything until you are satisfied that you are working together. What this doesn't mean is changing the subject every

- time you get uncomfortable, instead it means checking out what the uncomfortable feeling is.
- like your shrink's opinions. First visit, you ask him/her what s/he thinks of your goals to make sure you can work in the same direction. If s/he thinks that women should be barefoot and pregnant, and you're coming to him/her for strength in leaving your husband, you may not get much accomplished. Make sure s/he thinks gay is O.K. If s/he's uptight, you will suffer.
 - like your shrink. If any negative feelings, then stay away. Yes, it may take several tries before you find your shrink, but when you do, you will open yourself up. Gut reactions are very accurate, have no hesitation about making the first session the last. I wasted a year with a doctor that made me uncomfortable when I first saw him. If I had had myself to listen to back then, I might have searched further and put huge amounts of extra living into my life.

And now Gays' Rights And the Police

by Bob Isnor

It's obvious from many encounters that gays have had with the Halifax Police Dept. that the latter are not very friendly toward us. There appear to be occasional directives from the upper echelons for crackdowns on street people, and this is made worse by the homophobia of individual members. The one attempt of the gay Alliance to develop contact with the force was politely rejected, they have no wish for us to present talks to members or trainees.

However, nowhere is it written that homosexuality in itself is a crime. It's up to us to make the law work for us.

Harassment is often by intimidation of people in the cruising areas. Rude cops will drive up, bark out "c'mere", demand identification, tell us to move on, ask why we are where we are, etc.

But we have rights. For example, it is not required to show identification to a police officer if you are walking. It is not at all necessary to give a name and address. And particularly, there is no 'going down to the station for questioning'. A person must be arrested and informed of her/his crime before she/he may be ordered or forcibly

taken to the police station.

So, if you are approached by the police in a manner that is offensive, do not be intimidated into giving i.d. If the policeman is rude, request his/her badge number and name. Then complain!

We get many misconceptions about our legal system from watching American television. For example, we do not have the right to a telephone call when arrested, and we are not informed of our rights. If we don't know them, we are in shit. Anything at all said or urged out of us can be used against us, whether obtained legally or illegally. Don't indulge in chats with police when they suddenly decide to become friendly.

Drivers, of course, are obliged to show their driver's licence when requested. But still none of the taking-you-down-for-questioning foolishness.

What you can do through the Gay Alliance: Get that badge number. If you do not want to lodge a complaint yourself, send us the story, with or without your name. Minor cases not worth pursuing alone get important when we receive several on the same officer. One has been fired due to gay action already.

