

ATLANTA CONFERENCE ARTICLE BY A DRASTIC DYKE

I have kept putting off my impressions of the Conference because they are confusing to me, but mostly painful. As a member of Drastic Dykes, a lesbian separatist collective here in Charlotte, I headed down there nervously wondering how lesbians felt about making decisions to separate themselves from male social controls --which includes straight women and straight-identified lesbians.

I went to the Class and Feminism workshop and felt good about the obvious energy Lesbians have used to understand what class really means to their lives and each other. Feeling kind of hopeful from that, I headed over to Laurel's spirituality thing and couldn't handle her brotherly love--love is all--incredibly traditional male spirituality rap. I was getting discouraged. That night I went to Red Dyke Theatre's production, which disappointingly turned out to be song pantomiming in good old drag style. It seemed like such a male show. I was feeling even funnier now. My mind was saying things like: Is this what lesbians want? More male bullshit? More cunt, more pussy? (The show had strong sexual overtones.) I was now feeling an intense isolation from other lesbians at the Conference. I did not feel like anyone except my group could identify with my personal beliefs of analyzing the "prick" out of one's head and life.

Okay. In our innocence, Drastic Dykes had accepted doing a workshop on Lesbian Separatism (focusing on the CLIT papers). Our hope was to speak to other lesbian separatists, not for the issue. Our mistake, as we ended up having debates about our political decisions. We eventually split up into those who unabashedly defined themselves as lesbian separatists, and those who questioned it. The separatist discussion largely concerned intercommunication, as we were all a bit rattled by our real isolation. Lesbian Connection assured us of room for written material. We also discussed the fact that so many so-called "women's" newsletters, centers, etc., are run largely if not exclusively by Lesbians. (Drastic Dyke members have been a large part of the energy at Charlotte's Women's Center.) We all

agreed that it's time for Lesbians to acknowledge their energy for themselves--to stop being the "mothers" of straight women and straight-identified lesbians. To stop being co-opted under terms like "feminist" and "women" which mean straight.

Drastic Dykes have now decided to stop working with the Women's Center. In retaliation, a lot of long lost straight women have come around to take their "rightful" responsibility--the responsibilities they so easily let us shoulder. We will not be used anymore.

I felt from the Lesbians at the Conference in general, an ignorance of the choices, commitments and difficulties lesbian separatism encompasses. The generalized political tones Lesbians adopt are bland and uncommitting. But safe, very safe. What is a Feminist anyway? Who are Lesbians? Not "all" women--no matter how political anyone is. We've got to stop ignoring our own self-interest--sacrificing for all those other women.

I now know I and Drastic Dykes are in a vulnerable position--dangerously outrageous to men, straight women and Lesbians, too. Yet we are determined to continue exploring where we are as lesbian separatists, where that will lead us, what new worlds we can find.

--Claire Ellington, Member of Drastic Dykes

Charlotte, N.C.