

Who gets to 'belong' in the lesbian community anyway?

By Bet Power

In response to the recent letter by Sarah Dreher and Lis Brook which you headlined "Visibility? Whose Visibility?" (*GCN* March 11-17, 1990), I feel moved to present another Lesbian viewpoint regarding the 1990 Northampton Lesbian/Gay Pride March. By removing the word "Bisexual" from the march title and banning Bisexuals from the decision-making Steering Committee, a small group of Lesbians has succeeded in planning and conducting this year's march with blatant and offensive discrimination against another sexual minority, Bisexuals. This has done great injury to unity and community among all sexual minorities in Western Massachusetts.

At a larger community march meeting held on March 15 in Northampton sponsored by the Valley Gay Alliance and the UMass Program for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Concerns, over 300 concerned individuals representing a wide range of sexual minorities attended. Many Lesbians at the meeting spoke of their own sense of discomfort, helplessness and exclusion from the march this year and in past years for a variety of reasons: 1. they are lovers or friends of Bisexuals; 2. they are themselves Lesbians coming out as Bisexuals; 3. they are Lesbians who are also Sadomasochists; 4. they are Lesbians who also crossdress/are transvestites; 5. they are Lesbians who are coming out as having transgender/transsexual feelings ("Feeling like a man in a woman's body" is no horror, contrary to Ms. Dreher and Ms. Brooks — it is simply a fact of life for another brave and proud group of newly-emerging oppressed people. Besides, Gertrude Stein identified most comfortably as a straight man, Radclyffe Hall's friends called her/him "John," Willa Cather was a.k.a. "William."), 6. they are friends of male-to-female transvestites (the talented drag queens who performed against the grain at last year's Northampton Pride rally); 7. they are partners/lovers of female-to-males; 8. they are friends of Gay men and straight allies who find this year's Steering Committee and march a hostile, oppressive environment to anyone without Lesbian Separatist convictions. The current dangerous trend to narrowly define who "belongs" in Lesbian community is intolerant of our differences which ought to be respected and is self-destructive to the Lesbian movement itself.

As I see it, Lesbians and Gay men have made significant progress in visibility, acceptance and "respectability" in this country over the last 20 years. The achievement of the passage of the Massachusetts Lesbian and Gay Civil Rights legislation is one indication. There are many other breakthrough signs of progress (an Academy Award granted for best documentary movie to a Names Quilt film, the support of

Elizabeth Taylor and other superstars in the fight against AIDS, the profitable women's music industry and recent popularity of Lesbian performers in mainstream music, etc.). This is not to say the struggle is over. It certainly isn't. But surely Lesbians can begin to see and take in the many advances made.

Not so for other sexual preferences. Bisexuals, Transvestites (both male-to-female and female-to-male), Transsexuals (again, both MTF and FTM), Sadomasochists and others, are just beginning to find their voices, organize support and move up from silence and invisibility into the light of day. There is often resistance, but at the same time there are significant signs that, nationwide, a Sexual Minorities Movement — or movements — is evolving from the Gay and Lesbian Movement. It's the nature of growth to be largely about change.

I am beginning to think some Lesbians in the Northampton area are stuck back in the middle '70s with no personal or political resources for generosity of spirit and grace. While we're moving toward self-definition, pride and "respectability," let's take all of us along! The sexual is personal. The personal is political. Lesbians, Gay men, Bisexuals, S/Mers, TVs and TSs have an enormously difficult life experience in common: persecution because who we love and sleep with or how we sleep with who we love (or ourselves) is different than conservative heterosexuality.

Speaking of "visibility"...at what price, and who pays? Because we do not wish to march over the bodies of other hurt, excluded and silenced sexual minorities for an exclusive (albeit tiny) place in the sun for Lesbians in Northampton this May, the New Alexandria Lesbian Library (NALL), which has been a part of the Valley Lesbian and Gay community for 11 years, will not participate in the march with our Library banner this year, for the first time ever in Northampton herstory. SHELIX (a woman-to-woman S/M support group for Lesbians and Bisexual women) and many more Lesbians, Gay men, S/Mers, TVs and TSs, will also choose to refuse the terms of this year's discriminating Northampton Lesbian/Gay March.

We'll hop on a community bus to diverse New York City Pride instead...and bask in the glow of a sun large and free enough to shine on us one and all. And while we're there, we'll remember with gratitude that a leather-jacketed, crossdressed Lesbian transvestite minority woman and her drag queen supporters began it all at Stonewall. Still cause for celebration today...even down Main Street, Northampton USA.

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