

Lesbian group cites sexism, splits from GALA

By Daralyn Trappe
Emerald Reporter

Many women who have been active in the University's Gay and Lesbian Alliance recently formed a separate group that will focus specifically on lesbian issues.

Several women who are active in the new group, called the Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Association, said it was organized because of sexist attitudes from some gay men in GALA and the need for a separate space to focus solely on women's issues.

"I felt like lesbians were feeling dis-empowered," said GALA Co-director Sue Dockstader. "I certainly was and even though I was in a position of power, I heard comments every single day that really were invalidating. Nasty, anti-woman things were being said."

"And I later found out the ones who had already been through anti-sexism workshops."

Dockstader said she will stay on as co-director of GALA until the end of the school year. Although most women have decided either to become members of the new group alone or remain active in both groups, a few have decided to remain solely with GALA.

"As far as I know, the other ones who are with GALA feel that they need to work with gay men on issues," she said. "Also they have made a com-

mitment to GALA and they can't rearrange their schedule" for a new group.

"By being inside GALA, I can help support the women there."

Many men who are GALA members have expressed a concern over whether this group will work with GALA, Dockstader said.

"I've told them that, from what I can tell, the principle of the group is that women need to empower each other," she said. "I think, as far as I can tell, that these people are probably amenable to working with gay men but they need to have their own space to feel empowered and to be around women."

One of the male members of GALA said he was concerned about seeing GALA divided.

"I think if women need their own space they should be able to have it, they should be comfortable. If they're not comfortable in a gay and lesbian situation, then they should move into their own situation," said GALA member Brant Mitchell.

"As far as the gay and lesbian movement, I think it's certainly not going to be helpful toward it," he said. "It will be a dividing force. I don't think it's going to help us to achieve equal rights ... I think we need to stick together."

Mitchell said the charges of sexism are valid, but believes that gays and lesbians should continue to work together.

GALA member Kristen

Inmann-Wilson, who plans to be active in both GALA and the new group, said she does not think all women should have to take on the responsibility of educating men about sexism.

"So many women have been beaten down for so long (in society) that they're not willing to wait around to educate men," she said. "Some of us are, and I think that it's important for those of us who are willing to educate men to do that."

"But those of us who don't feel that we can, don't have the energy to and don't feel safe doing it, don't have that obliga-

tion."

Steen Mitchell, one of the women who has organized the new group, said she believes both groups will be able to work together.

"In creating a safe space, I think it will be easier for lesbians to work with gay men," she said. "I don't see it as a problem. The more groups we have going that are strong, the more we can do outreach and education."

Dockstader, Inmann-Wilson and Steen Mitchell all said the gay and lesbian cultures are very different from each other

and separate groups makes sense.

"Really, there was never a connection between gays and lesbians, except that we're oppressed by the same oppressors," Inmann-Wilson said. "It's nice to be able to come together and work together in coalition-building, but to share office space isn't necessary. It's a nice addition for those of us who want to be around gay men and bisexuals, but for lesbians who don't need that, don't want that and don't feel safe with that, it's unnecessary."

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