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PUBLISHER

Renée LaChance

EDITOR

Ariel Waterwoman

CALENDAR EDITOR

Meroe Elahi

FEATURE WRITER

Grant Michael Menzies

PHOTOGRAPHER

Linda Kliewer

ADVERTISING

Meg Grace
E. Ann Hinds
Jewel Robinson

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

E. Ann Hinds

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Rupert Kinnard

PROOFREADER

Thomas Lauderdale

TYPESETTER

Dee StarDancer Fultz

OFFICE MANAGER

Fred Allemann

DISTRIBUTION

Up Front Distribution

CONTRIBUTORS

Bob Roehr
Howard N. Dana
Lee Lynch
Jamakaya
Lee Norwood
Pamela Lyons
Kelly M. Bryan
Louise Rafkin
Dr. Tantalus

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steppin' out



The Lesbian Avengers staged a march on the bus mall in downtown Portland, to draw attention to the increase in gay bashing on Tri-met buses.

PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

editorial

We're not straight, yet some of us are narrow

To become more comfortable with individuals and communities that make up the sexual minority population, we must own that we're all in this together.

by Ariel Waterwoman

The majority of people in the United States are uncomfortable, at best, with gays and lesbians. A hefty 20 percent of people in the U.S. believe that the Holocaust was a lie. I'm just guessing that a poll would also reveal a majority of people who are willing to invalidate the struggles of other minority populations as well.

Surveys are funny things. The key point for understanding the findings of any survey is knowing who is paying for it. Surveys are easy to stack by asking questions like: Do you believe that a militant homosexual agenda should control Congress? Which of the following two sentences reflects most accurately your beliefs: I believe that people should strive to live up to certain values; or I feel condoms should be freely available to children, in all levels of education. Answer true or false to the following: People get AIDS by indulging in certain behaviors.

Are you getting how these things work? These surveys and polls reflect the thinking and wishes of the organization that is paying to have them done. It's one of the more creative tools available for manipulating public opinion.

One thing that seems pretty consistent is that most heterosexual people are uncomfortable with gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgenders. Just look at our own communities. How many of you winced at the inclusion of bisexual people? transgendered people? lesbians? gay men? We're certainly not a laid-back welcome wagon for sexual "others," ready to embrace each other at the drop of a hat. The realities we each live in are very different.

It seems there is a concerted attempt to create the image of a "mainstream queer." Some activists are distancing themselves from queers that are too out, queers that are too flamboy-

ant (is it possible to be too flamboyant?), SM queers, queers that "flaunt it," bare-assed leather dudes in chaps and topless dykes who are alive with personal power. Diety-forbid that any of us would exchange more than the most platonic kisses in public. The whole concept of a mainstream queer would be funny if it weren't such a tragic reflection of how desperate too many of us feel as we watch homophobia sweeping the nation and passing itself off as publicly sanctioned "religious doctrine" or an ABC News poll. The continual barrage of negative energy focused on our daily lives is taking its toll. Mainstream gay men and lesbians seem to be forgetting an important piece of this picture.

The people who are targeting our civil rights and our human dignity are people who have chosen to be abusers. They are invested in abuse on every level: financial, spiritual, cultural, emotional, social and intellectual. They are the only ones who can stop attacking us. We think we can control their abuse by cooperating with their demands, internalizing their hatred of us. We can not. Collusion with our oppressors makes us feel more shame and a sense that we are less worthy of human dignity and respect, which often results in peer oppression. This only encourages the abusers because they see how well their strategy is working.

Turning our backs on some queers and calling them "fringe elements" kicks a solid foundation out from under us and plays right into the hands of our oppressors. As we appear to swallow the "we're not those 'other' queers, we're in the mainstream" hook that would be an inevitable result. Think how many hearts would break and how fractionalized we would become if we continued to squeeze our movement into straight-laced clothes because we thought it would get us civil rights.

We're all queer, we're all here and we're all fabulous.

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