

just out

The IN publication for the OUT population

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COMMENTARY

The opposite sex

Why are gay men the only ones who get to have uninhibited sex with strangers?

Penis envy. It happens. How do I know? Well, because it happened to me earlier this very week.

Imagine my surprise! Thus stated, I'll now clarify with the more precise explanation that it's not so much the actual dangly apparatus that I found myself envying as it was the accompanying freedoms and celebrations of usage that come along with this particular, um, nonfemalelike body part.

So where is all this coming from, you ask?

My epiphany unveiled herself as I was being given a guided tour of Steam, the new gay men's bathhouse that recently opened in Portland. This was my first behind-the-scenes look at a sexual playhouse, and darned if I didn't find myself momentarily being envious of what the fellas get to do. I couldn't help but wish that I could play—with appropriate playmates of my own preferred gender, of course.

Lesbians, of which I am one, have potlucks and garden clubs. Gay men, on the other hand, get to have sex with strangers in showers and cute little rooms with clean sheets and windows overlooking the spa. And it's a perfectly acceptable part of "their" culture. What a wide Y in the road our sexual identities took on that particular path. So close, and yet so far away.

Bazillions of words have been written, and will continue to be, on the differences in values, mores, behaviors and attitudes between gay men and gay women. Trust me, I have nothing new to add; 30 minutes in a bathhouse does not a legitimate researcher make. But I gotta tell you, I was impressed with the attitudes and culture represented in this bathhouse. There is no deceit. There is no pretense. It is a place to have sex. Sex with people you probably won't be inviting out for dinner. Dessert, maybe. And it is, of course, all safe sex, mind you. Steam is all so very clean. It's attractive and it's institutionally sexy. And the hands-down best attraction is that it beats the hell out of men having sex with men in public parks.

Of this latter behavior I am not a fan. Far from it. I seldom go any longer to my favorite park because I fear my own behavior and reaction toward the constant presence of scurrilous sexual activity in places where only dogs should be doing the sniffing.

Tell me, e-mail me, write me a letter, please, and explain to me

how it can be justified in this day and age for any person to prowling around a public park, in the middle of the day, for any and all to see, for the purpose of engaging in sexual activity with strangers. Just explain it to me. How is this behavior acceptable? It happens in rest areas, public bathrooms, parks, hallways, stores, culverts, gullies and crevices. My gosh, is there no place that men won't use for public sex? Why don't you just go to the nice bathhouse? Too safe? Not enough risk? Don't wanna spend the bucks? Place too damn clean? No thrill of discovery as a family complete with small children stumbles upon you in the midst of your little frolic? Voyeurism is a specialty at bathhouses—can't that satisfy your little need-to-be-seen urges?

Lesbians, of which I am one, have potlucks and garden clubs. Gay men, on the other hand, get to have sex with strangers in showers and cute little rooms with clean sheets and windows overlooking the spa. And it's a perfectly acceptable part of "their" culture. What a wide Y in the road our sexual identities took on that particular path. So close, and yet so far away.

OK, out of the woods and back to the bathhouse. At least 98 percent of the time I am the embodiment of proper behavior for the "middle-aged single professional woman." I cherish proscribed dating standards and rituals. I believe in and adhere to a set of rules, structures, mores and values. I am appropriate and boringly proper. Apparently, though, there's this other tiny little 2 percent, or perhaps even less, part of me that envies gay men who have a cultural background that allows their sexual behaviors that require no conversations, no dinners out and no walking on the beach. And before you start writing, yes, of course, I believe also that gay men are guided by strong and viable value systems—again, with that big ole Y in the path on sexual behaviors.

So now I'm wondering, what if there were Dyke Night at Steam? The men are banished for the evening. The ambiance, the sexuality remain. All traditional rules are set aside for the night. Is it sensual—or is it just too damn weird even to think about? Would the 2 percent inquisitive factor in any other lesbians be sufficient to motivate anyone to go along and check it out? A night of gay sex—for women. Clean, consensual, playful, bold—whatever. How about it? How about you? You in?

Not me.

Nope, while the notion of free-for-all frolicking might be ever-so-momentarily entraining my own 98 percent rules. I'll happily be sticking with flowers, dinners out and walks on the beach. I am entrenched.

Penis envy.

That's one thing.

Penis behavior—that's another. ☐

REFLECTIONS

5 years ago in just out...



• The Portland City Council passed two measures Feb. 11 that increase protections for sexual minorities. An ordinance co-sponsored by Mayor Vera Katz and Commissioner Erik Sten requires companies to formally agree that they will not discriminate against workers based on sexual orientation.

• The state's largest daily newspaper declined Feb. 9 to endorse either of the two openly gay candidates running for Multnomah County Commission posts in the March 10 special election. In the District 1 race *The Oregonian* opted for Diane Linn over George Eighmey, and in the District 3 race it went with Lisa Naito over Barbara Willer.

• *The Oregonian* ran an informative spread on the front page of its Feb. 2 Money section called "Straight Financial Advice for Those Who Aren't." The column, authored

by Julie Tripp, featured an interview with Portlander David A. Woosley of American Express Financial Advisors.

• Civil rights advocate Coretta Scott King will deliver the keynote speech at Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund's 25th anniversary event March 31 in Chicago.

• By a vote of 52 percent to 48 percent, Maine became first state to repeal its gay rights law Feb. 10.

• Washington became the 27th state to ban same-sex marriages Feb. 6, when the Legislature overrode Democratic Gov. Gary Locke's veto. It was his first veto override.

• First Tuesday Coffeehouse celebrates its 10th anniversary March 3 at Cup and Saucer with performances by Mary Rose, Galloway and Luckett, Musica Femina and Nan Collie.

PUBLISHER AND MANAGING EDITOR • Marty Davis
NEWS EDITOR • Jim Radosta
ARTS AND CULTURE EDITOR • Lisa Bradshaw
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT • Marie Fleischmann
CONTRIBUTORS • Marc Acito, Meryl Cohn, Jodi Darby, Anthony Davis, Timothy Krause,

Gary Morris, Floyd Sklaver, Rex Wockner
ADVERTISING DIRECTOR • Larry Lewis
ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVE • Markie Acevedo
ADVERTISING ASSISTANT • Erin Sexton
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