

# The Power of the Gay Dollar

## Harnessing a Different Kind of L-Word: Lucrative

Last month I had the opportunity to speak on a panel at an international conference for women bloggers about issues relating to being queer on the Internet. We discussed a variety of topics, including reaching other queer bloggers, dealing with negative commenters, and the visibility of our community. Attending the session were Trish Bendix from afterellen.com and chicagonow.com, which features the L-Blog; Liza Barry-Kessler, one of the founders of lesbianfamily.org; Sara Dopp of genderfork.com; author and blogger Deb Rox of debontherox.com; and Polly Pagenhart from lesbiandad.net.

Each woman had rich and relevant information to contribute, support to lend and provided amazing conversation for the rest of the weekend. In a group of over 1,500 mostly straight, mostly mommyblogging women—that is, women who blog about being a mommy—it was refreshing to find a group of people to whom I could relate and feel comfortable around.

Being forced to interact with the straight/mommyblogger women was difficult at best; each time I introduced myself, she would ask for the name of my blog, which immediately



LIVING OUT LOUD

by Kathryn Martini

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outed me. "The name of my blog is recoveringstraightgirl.com," I would say, watching for the expression on her face. Her smile would freeze and she would just look at me, the ill-at-ease feeling setting in.

These were women from all over the world, from places unlike Portland, some of whom had never been around an out lesbian before. I tried to view it as an educational experience—an educational experience for them, that was. I'm not shy and was never in the closet, but being in that situation was very uncomfortable. It was just another example of how much privilege I took for granted when I

was living a hetero life. It also made me realize how glad I am to live in the northwest.

The second day of the conference featured Ilene Chaiken, creator and executive producer of *The L Word*. I worried that the fact she was a successful, out lesbian would be lost on the audience, or as Deb Rox put it, "I wonder if the big pink elephant in the room will be addressed?" I was pleasantly surprised to find that it was addressed; the moderator brought it up often. Chaiken was an interesting and compelling speaker, and the queer bloggers cheered every time she said something we liked—especially when she told us that Jenny's killer would be revealed in *The L-Word* movie, a script she is currently penning.

She spoke about product placement and targeting the gay dollar and how that type of marketing was non-existent when she was first writing the series, which debuted in 2004. It was non-existent because we were invisible. We are still invisible to many companies that market to women, a fact completely lost on me. Why wouldn't companies market to us? Most queer couples are DINKs (Dual Income No Kids) and we spend money.

When Chaiken spoke about how difficult it was to find a corporate sponsor for Dana, the professional tennis-playing character on the program, the ladies at my table knew that it was Subaru. According to Chaiken, Subaru

was the only car company to even consider being featured on a lesbian television show at the time. Hopefully, this is changing.

Certainly the fight for marriage equality has increased the visibility of the queer community, as well as shown us who are friends and allies and who aren't. We all have the opportunity each and every day to vote with our dollars and choose to frequent friendly and family-owned businesses. We can choose our doctors and dentists and what kind of car we drive or which realtor to select when buying a new home.

*Just Out* is filled with advertisements for businesses that won't take our money and use it against us. The gay dollar is real, and I believe it is imperative that we show companies and small businesses that we are a force with which to be reckoned. This can only be accomplished if we as a community demand it; it's time.

The queer blogging panel and a lesbian keynote speaker helped me to not feel invisible at the conference, despite being in the midst of 1,500 straight mommybloggers. We are not invisible, and it's our responsibility to stand up and be counted as a group that makes things happen! **JO**

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