

The Fag Hag Manifesto

BY SKY DEMURO-MILLER

Sexuality is not a choice between A or B. Nor do I accept the sexuality-as-continuum theory. Its linearity doesn't allow for, say, a pre-op, synthetically-hormoned male-to-female who was a bisexual considering going lesbian. Nor does the continuum leave room for me: an honorary gay woman who is coming out straight.

I used to think I was biologically destined to relate better with gay men than straight men. While I happened to be in a heterosexual link of the sexuality helix (I like to think of sexuality as a double helix with so many interlocking parts that it is virtually unfath-

omable and infinitely exciting), I sometimes tell people I am a quarter gay. When they cock their heads bewildered, I explain that my father was gay, or at least bisexual, hence my existence. And assuming he was at least bisexual enough to fall in love with my mother and help create me, we could say he was half gay, making me one quarter gay.

I thought this reasoning explained my natural propensity for connecting with and befriending gay men. It was in my genes, I thought. Recently, though, I began rethinking that explanation. That rethinking began when I acquired yet another gay male friend, Bob. We connected almost instantly,

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and the discovery that his partner was an acquaintance of mine certified our friendship. In no time, we were sharing secrets of love affairs and traumatic events. I told Jason, my dear friend and soulmate, all about Bob. "If only meeting straight men were this easy," I whined, realizing the stupidity of the statement as I voiced it. There must have been a reason, I thought, why I felt so comfortable with gay men who can say out loud, "I love myself", as Bob had that day, as Jason can. My biology argument just didn't fit. No one could be biologically programmed to relate best with gay men, could they? I didn't think so.

If it's not by nature, I thought, it must be nurture. My mother did have a number of gay friends who I grew up thinking of as uncles and mentors. While I may not have known what "gay" or "straight" was as a child, I did have role models of both and everything in between. I remember my first drag ball at age fourteen. I descended the stairs by the hostess's estate to see a huge rubber cock floating in the pool. I accepted the teeming queens with ease, but the five-foot dick was a source of discomfort that only a fourteen year old could really understand.

And my dad was half gay. He didn't live with my mother and me. He visited us in New Jersey, and I visited him in Texas. I didn't know he was gay until years after he died of AIDS. It was 1986; I wasn't quite eight. At that time, in the dawn of AIDS, his death was called "cancer." When my mother died of real cancer when I was 13, I was convinced that I was destined to die young like my parents. That, however, is another essay entirely.

Maybe, considering my exposure to my half-gay Dad and all my adult gay friends as a child, I became familiar with gay men and that is why I had a propensity for attracting new gay friends.

Problem. I had just as many straight mentors growing up, so why would the gay men in my life have had such an influ-

ence? My mother did have boyfriends after my father died, and even now I still have supportive male role models who are un-gay.

Perhaps my comfort and unself-consciousness with gay men was due to the fact that I didn't feel any sexual tension between us? You know, the old no-risk argument. A gay man usually doesn't fluff his feathers in a testosterone-induced mating dance upon meeting a woman. Therefore, a woman doesn't have to defensively thwart his advances or try to entice him, depending on her own hormonal response. No chance for romance means: no need for acting, no possibility of rejection, no falling out of control and into love, no being dumped or breaking his heart, no threat of STDs, no awkward dates, no commitment issues . . . sounds good, eh?

This no-risk theory and the previous exposure theory, however, are no more satisfying than the biological one. They both depended upon me being abnormally threatened by straight men. While I was not an avid dater, I had had my share of playmates and had fallen in and out of love with men. I was a healthy, sexy, hetero woman. I liked men just as much as my Mom and Dad did. My neuroses were relatively benign; in fact, on most days I really liked myself.

Then it hit me. All my gay male friends were out. Becoming close with gay men meant hearing their stories of coming out. That's because coming out is a cathartic milestone in any out person's life, and usually came after years of self-reproach, denial, and repression. Coming out meant finally forgiving themselves for being who they were and feeling how they felt. They tried denial, avoidance, hetero sex and guilt, then finally accepted themselves as themselves. Only when they let go of the blame and guilt could they love themselves. Despite familial and social anathema, they trusted themselves and refused to pretend to be something they were not. It was freeing to be one's self. How simple, yet seemingly rare.

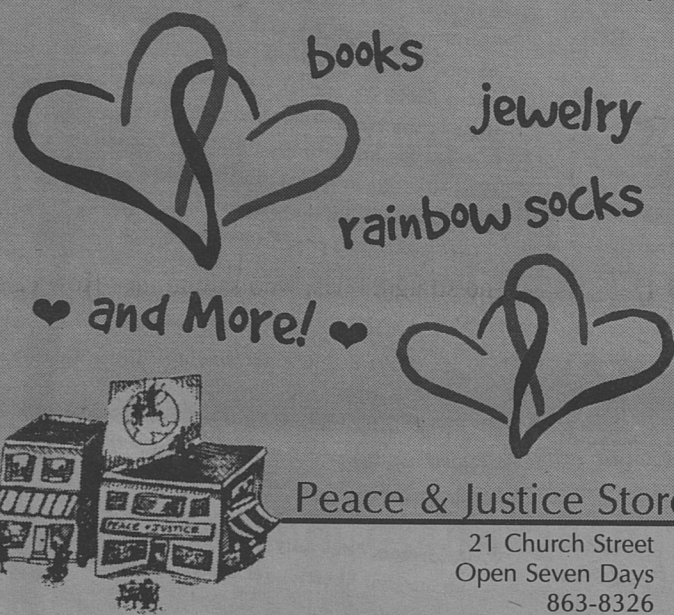
Coming out, however, meant more than accepting oneself. It required dropping the social heterosexual façade and being one's self, all the time, in public. Coming out meant making a conscious decision to live as a unique individual with infinite good and bad parts. It also showed that the person had a desire to grow. While it would be small-minded to say that all out people are completely comfortable with themselves, the process of coming out inherently contained a willingness to begin the process of self acceptance and self love. It was facing the fearful truth and learning from it.

Eureka! I was not attracted to gayness, I was attracted to people who accepted themselves as however they really were and who presented that self to the world. I liked people who refused to mold themselves according to other people's opinions of what they should be. Gee, I thought, that sounded like me. Then, with furrowed brow, I thought, but I'm not gay.

Re-Eureka! My brain became excited with the accelerating rhythms of epiphany. Coming out was not about being gay or straight; it was about self-acceptance and a willingness to maintain faith in self in every situation. Coming out went beyond therapist's-office-acceptance or secret-journal-acceptance. It was climbing the scaffold, bearing the mark, and shouting to the Puritans, "This is I!" It was trusting yourself enough to survive the vulnerability of being exposed to the masses.

Well, then, I thought, had I come out? This one really knocked me on my bum. Had I really come out as myself? Before that thought, it had never occurred to me that I needed to come out. Sure, I accepted that I was a good person, albeit weird and bipolar in an endearing way, but had I really publicly accepted myself and truly come out? Although my self-loving ego hated to admit it, I did not think I really had come out.

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