

Profile

Bechdel (from preceding page)

Alison: Yes. It's interesting because my strip has gotten more political over the years. I mean, the very existence of a lesbian comic strip is political, but it's taken more of a political stance in the world, over the war recently.

It's interesting, because I know that gays and lesbians as a group do not ascribe to these politics. There's a percentage that do, but in a way I think my strip has more in common with progressives as a group than it does with gays and lesbians as a group, as an entire group. Certainly there are lesbian Republicans. I know there are women who are offended by my strip, and people who think my politics are silly.

OITM: One of the things that strikes me about your strip is that your characters live in a completely lesbian world. There's hardly ever any men, and definitely hardly ever any straight people. Is that intentional?

Alison: No, that was not intentional at all. It's just that the strip has mirrored my life, and that's pretty much what my life has been like. Since my job is in the community, I don't interact with the straight world like most people do. And it wasn't really intentional. In fact, I really want to show more of how they interact at their jobs and with their families. And I think that's going to start happening more.

OITM Really?

Alison: Yeah. In a way it's like a refuge. The strip is a kind of refuge to me. It's like women-only space, like going to a music festival. I remember the first time I went to a festival, this incredible feeling of safety and relief. And now I don't have that. I'm very jaded. I go to these festivals all the time, and I've lost my youthful innocence. But I remember that feeling and I think that's something I wanted to carry into the

strip. I'm feeling stronger and safer from having had that refuge, from having had this really supportive community. I feel like I'm ready to maybe go out in the world a little more.

OITM: Do you consider yourself a separatist? Or have you been a separatist?

Alison: No. No, I haven't. I never have called myself one. But I think I probably actually live my life similarly to women who do identify as separatist. I don't know. I mean, I'm becoming friends with men. I think it's part of that hauling myself out of the little safe subculture phenomenon, being ready to do that.

OITM: What are your biggest challenges in doing the strip?

Alison: Making myself laugh is one. Being funny is something I have zero clue about. It just happens or it doesn't happen. And so I guess for me the challenge is the anticipation of waiting to see whether or not it's going to happen with a particular strip. And then there's always the challenge of being substantive without offending anyone.

Lately the challenge has been to not become a parody of myself. I look at sitcoms on TV, for example, for guidance, like "Mary Tyler Moore." And there's a point at which "Mary Tyler Moore" just became a cartoon of itself. It's already happened in a way. Mo's anxiety has taken on these epic proportions. And I have to be careful to keep them real and not let them become simply cartoon stereotypes.

OITM: What are your satisfactions, or what makes you happiest about the strip?

Alison: I am thrilled with the reception that it's gotten. It's really become a part of this culture. When I came out 11 years ago and I saw this world that I wanted to be a

part of, I never dreamed that I would be a part of it. And I love that. I'm able to let in a little bit of it at a time. That it's really true, that I really do sell these books, and lots of them. It's totally thrilling to me. Because I think it's such a wonderful community, such a wonderful culture, and I'm just really proud and happy to be in it.

OITM: And it's a community you know so well.

Alison: Well, parts of it. I mean, it's not representative. Of course, as is continually being pointed out to me, I don't have any straight characters, I don't have any male characters, I don't have any bisexual characters. I don't have any Air Force dykes, I don't have any Christian dykes, I don't have any lesbians with children, I don't have any bar dykes. There are huge chunks of our community that you don't see in my strip.

OITM: Yes, but it's not that that I was thinking about. It's the emotional truth, the qualities of the interactions, the way they relate to each other, the kinds of things they're interested in. When I read it, I recognize parts of myself.

Alison: Well, the real motivation for doing this comic strip is my desperate hunger to see my reality reflected. I think it's such an important, nurturing thing to see yourself reflected. I mean, why do we make plays and movies and books?

Ever since people have been alive, we've created stories about ourselves and images of ourselves... And I'm desperate to see myself because I don't see it anywhere. And I draw the cartoons because I want to see pictures. I want to see myself. And probably I would do it even if no one else was looking at it.




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