

The crazy thing is that sex is not all there is to it for homosexuals or heterosexuals. What becomes sexualized for all of us is the ideal with which we identify ourselves. What is powerful and strong and positive and appealing is naturally also sexy. As gay people, we hope that at least some of the people we admire would turn out to be gay, because every one of us grew up, and continues to live, without heroes and heroines we can identify with, except for the ones we co-opt or imagine. Gays and lesbians do without such inspiration or pleasant diversion, or make do with constant adjustments. We can not help but long for our own heroes, idols and role models. A mother who spoke to me recently about her fears that her son might be gay asked me the question, "are you happy?" After I had answered, "yes," she cried with relief as she said, "I just want to know my son can be gay and still have a good life." That is the power of role models.

In my work with glb adolescents, I am acutely aware of how we all grow up learning that everyone who has ever done anything worthwhile is, or is assumed to be, heterosexual. We also learn a host of damning myths about the perversity and dangerousness of homosexuality. Small wonder that gay youth are 2-6 times more likely to commit suicide than heterosexual youths. As they look into the void of adulthood, with the specter of losing everything they have been taught to dream about

looming over them, all they are left with are the seamy dark images of society's hate and fear.

For the lesbian women I have shared this season with, and for myself, the strong, able, self-assured women on the court have in part provided the positive role models we all long for. They embody our alternative ideals about the attractiveness of women, based on strength and self-possession. They are the heroes that none of us ever tire of cheering on. They embody our alternative ideals about the attractiveness of women, based on strength and self-possession, instead of distorted body ideals. In my life as I watched sisters and classmates and friends reduce themselves to some shadow of what they could be so that they could be less threatening to a man, it chilled me to my core. For all of us who have watched in anguish while women around us debased themselves to men for the sake of maintaining the tenuous status quo of 20th century heterosexuality, watching the UVM Cats be themselves and compete with all their hearts, without apologies for unladylike behavior or aggressiveness, was exhilarating and confirming. Here are women whose sense of purpose and personal power I can identify with, respect and admire. Whether lesbian or straight, they exemplify the value I place on striving for excellence and expressing myself as honestly and sincerely as I can.

I don't need for these women to be lesbian in order to feel inspired by them, but the need for gay and lesbian role models in our community is very real. As I work, month after month to make life easier and more promising for glb youth, I realize I face the difficult task of changing people's perceptions about homosexuality. I can't help but lapse into dreaming sometimes. What if some well-loved heroes were to publicly acknowledge their homosexuality? Would all that public adoration turn to hate, or would a whole group of people begin to question their previously rigid and hateful attitudes and beliefs? The process has begun with some already beleaguered heroes like Martina Navratilova. How long will it take before it is not one or two, but so many that a mother would not even think to cry for her son or daughter because she would have no question about the endless possibilities for happiness and accomplishment that gay people share with everyone else. The UVM Cats and other unknowing heroes of the gay and lesbian community often misunderstand our adoration and sometimes express resentment about it. What they fail to recognize is how deep it runs in the human psyche to long for an ideal to look up to, someone who shines just a little brighter than everyone else, someone who exemplifies the best that people "like me" can be. ▼

*Dot Brauer is Program Director at Outright Vermont*

## Where to Find OITM

Bennington Free Library	Bennington	Project EXCEL, Lyndon State College	Lyndonville
Brattleboro Food Coop	Brattleboro	Northshire Bookstore	Manchester Center
Cahoots	Brattleboro	Middlebury Natural Food Coop	Middlebury
Common Ground	Brattleboro	Bear Pond Books	Montpelier
Everyone's Books	Brattleboro	Horn of the Moon Cafe	Montpelier
Burlington College	Burlington	Woman Centered	Montpelier
Chassman & Bem	Burlington	Morristown Centennial Library	Morrisville
Fletcher Free Library	Burlington	Moore Free Library	Newfane
Partners in Recovery & Growth	Burlington	Northeast Kingdom AIDS Coalition	Newport
Peace & Justice Center	Burlington	Brown Public Library	Northfield
Pearls	Burlington	Social Alternatives for Gay Men	Norwich
Planned Parenthood	Burlington	Woman's Study Program	Plainfield
STEP Learning Center	Castleton	Putney Library	Putney
Craftsbury Public Library	Craftsbury	Kimball Public Library	Randolph
Rutland Area Gay/Lesbian Connection	Center Rutland	PFLAG	Rutland
Innwood Manor	East Barnet	Rutland Free Library	Rutland
Greenhope Farm	East Hardwick	LUNA/NEVGALR c/o Umbrella	St. Johnsbury
Fair Haven Free Library	Fair Haven	Natural Provisions	St. Johnsbury
Buffalo Mountain Coop	Hardwick	Regional Library	St. Johnsbury
Galaxy Books	Hardwick	St. Johnsbury Athenaeum	St. Johnsbury
Jon's Automotive	Lyndonville	Food for Thought	Stowe
		WRJ Books	White River Junction