

DYKE



PSYCHE

## Being lesbian, gay, bi, questioning—and young: *A conversation with VT teens*

BY ESTHER ROTHBLUM

I recently talked with a group of five young women in a Vermont high school about what it means to be lesbian, bi, or questioning. These women students—and a teacher—have been meeting weekly in their school after hours. Hard as it may be for us older lesbians to believe, but such groups are a part of all high schools in the Burlington, Vermont area.

The women were proud that their classmates had just voted in (500 in favor, 100 against) a club to be called the “Gay and Straight Alliance.” As one woman said “what was so good about the process was that it was so out there, and an explanation went along with it, so people knew it wasn’t just a gay thing.” In fact, one of the club’s organizers received a school medal for her efforts.

But school life is not without harassment. One student said: “Yesterday, a kid came up to me

and said ‘I would really appreciate it if you didn’t make out with other girls in the hallways.’ I’ve never done anything like that in school.” Another woman, who is bisexual, has been called a “dyke” by another student. Also, students in their high school will refer to something they don’t like as “gay,” as in “that dress is so gay.”

The women I interviewed were aware of internalized homophobia as well. One woman said: “In eighth grade there was this kid that everyone said he was gay. He had a very hard time with harassment. Then when I came out my freshman year, he started making fun of me! I said to him: ‘Don’t you remember how bad it felt when everyone made fun of you?’ He said: ‘But I wasn’t and you are.’ In some ways, I was his revenge.

Another woman was concerned about how her heterosexual friend would be viewed. She said: “I think my being fairly out in school affected her. We used to sit together in class and spend

a lot of time together. We’ve been friends since kindergarten. I think the fact that we were so close actually negatively affected her, with people assuming that she was gay as well. I found myself pulling away from her so that she wouldn’t be stereotyped. I wanted her to be able to find a boyfriend and by happy; I didn’t want her harassed.”

In some ways, being gay is viewed as trendy in their school, but only when it refers to female students, mostly those who are bisexual. But the women I interviewed felt that trends are viewed as a phase, and their classmates wonder when this particular trend will finally be over. “My friends thought I was a ‘poser’ because I told them that I was bi,” said one woman.

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