



After After Stonewall

The following is an essay I wrote after attending the film showing in Brattleboro of *After Stonewall*. I found it to be an excellent, informative documentary. I also found that my response to watching the film was to feel lonely and confused about how the queer movement has shown incredible courage about fighting for the right to be out and be proud, and yet at the same time continues to display the same close minded attitudes that plague our larger society. I am requesting that it be published anonymously. I do not feel emotionally safe projecting my views on this issue at this point in time.

A wonderful film. John Scagliotti has truly touched me. To watch, to see, the birth of those who might have died alone and lonely, a movement in growth, in joy, in sadness, in community. Celebration. Solidarity. And I sit in my chair dabbing my eyes as I watch, first with joy at the power, the courage, then with sadness, at the AIDS, the neglect of the suffering, then with joy again, at the renewed battle for fairness, respect, more rights won. And I listen to the brave men and women in the film discuss how they began with shame but now stride down the street with self respect, and over and over they say, "Coming out, coming out, coming out"...in their families, in their jobs, in their churches, not afraid to be who they are any more, just fighting and fighting to be seen and still loved, and most importantly, still included.

But as I sit, in the midst of this wonderful celebration of queerness as a bisexual man, I sit in echo, I sit in shadow, the film coming through a dull gray haze, the words bouncing to me off the walls of my closet, and I think of love, saying to myself, "you must love them more, and forgive," and yet some of my tears are of anger. I do not ask the question I want to during the question and answer period, the question that enters my mind, because it would out me to them, and I have just yesterday read poll results in the *Advocate*: 48 percent of gays and lesbians polled do not believe that transgendered people should be a part of the gay rights movement.

I watch the film. I listen to the film. I think about blending. I think about winning people over with my best smile. And I am perplexed to the point of complete confusion. The gay rights movement is about society at large accepting us fully as who we are as gay men, lesbians and bisexuals: no repression, no denial, no shame. But even though a large percentage of transgendered folks are also gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and even though a whole lot more folks who are part of the gay rights movement who don't identify per se as transgendered clearly display transgender behavior — often a precursor for gay-bashing — almost half of the gays and lesbians polled for one of the most prominent gay magazines in this country support exclusion of transgendered folks from the gay rights movement.

I look around at the beautiful men and women in the audience of *After Stonewall*. All I can think of is the obviousness of the situation. These people are here tonight in abundance to laugh and cry about themselves and their battle in this world with prejudice, ignorance, and exclusion. They are truly great warriors. And yet, as they

continue to fight their way out of damp closets into freedom for adoption, marriage, the right to live without fear of emotional and bodily harm, the right to be openly homosexual without losing jobs or housing or respect on any level, they repeat history in their midst by proclaiming me and people like me as "other," because we are not exactly the same, just as they are not exactly the same as the heterosexuals they are so proud to be educating at this very moment.

It's a different issue? Is it? I see in the old film clippings of the Stonewall riots men dressed in women's clothing, women dressed in men's. If those folks who I see in the films are not transgendered, then I am completely lost. I am transsexual. I am trying to be an ordinary man in a queer, queer world, or a queer, queer man in an ordinary world, I'm not sure which. To tell the truth, I don't particularly identify with folks who feel bigendered or folks who want to do away with gender all together. But I know enough to know they are relatives of mine. Just as I feel deep love and commitment to men who love men, women who love women, and those who love both, I feel great love and commitment for those who are queer in other ways, some of which I do not, at this time, completely understand. Exclusion is an excuse that can always be rationalized quite proficiently. We have seen it explained over and over in great detail. I'm just wondering if we have the ability to move beyond the things we have accomplished in the gay movement into something much, much greater.

We are winning rights. We are saving lives. Now the true test is if we can transcend fear. Because that is all it comes down to, and you know it as well as I. The Christian Right fears us all; some of our families still fear us; our neighbors, the people who make laws about marriage and family rights, and you, my friends, fear me and I, in turn, fear you.

I sit watching the film *After Stonewall* and I am so happy at this wonderful display of accomplishment and so sad at the same time. If I stay in my little transgender closet, I am just another queer man and all is happiness and comradely here. If I open the door of my little closet too wide, then I will suddenly see something else. No matter how subtle it is, I will see it, I will feel it, and I will know the shift just as we have all known the shift in other situations.

It shouldn't have to be this hard. The fear has to end somewhere for our world to have any sort of significant change. We might win the right to marry, to adopt, to be whomever we want as homosexuals, but if we do not change deeper inside, our families will only become homosexual families with fear and dysfunction as our guides. Queer, straight, whatever...the fear is killing us all.

I guess I just believe that folks like us, who have fought so many battles for the right to live without fear, have it in us to get past this one, too. I know there are transgendered folks who do not identify as queer at all. They do not have the slightest desire to be included as part of the gay movement. I do. Please welcome me out and please welcome me in. I am one of you. Don't cause me any more suffering. You are only repeating history. And it's your own history you are repeating. ▼

Skydiving without a Parachute

by an anonymous bisexual man in Vermont

I've wondered — for far too long, I think — what it might be like to be able to 'take it all off,' to remove completely the mask of me, to reveal to another what's really inside. Since I was quite young, it's seemed clear that this is one of 'the rules' we cannot violate. We're almost required to erect walls around ourselves and, in turn, around our psyches.

I cannot, after all this time, understand why this is, just that it is. Coming out, for me, has been a long, difficult, and seem-

taking a serious toll. I began to understand that the 'odd' part of me — the strongly sexual, demanding, often wild and adventurous part; the part that at one point had burned strongly enough that I tried to act on it in silly, awkward, totally unsuccessful ways; the part that, day in and day out, had brought up crazy urges that drew no boundaries along lines of gender but instead propelled me toward feelings of sexuality centered along completely different lines — had been grinding me

To be bi is not even to be marginalized — it is simply to not be.

ingly unending process. It's been at once shrouded in mystery, enveloped in a sort of mystique, and very painful. For me, the real mechanics of coming out didn't even start until long after I had the faintest inkling of my feelings of bisexuality, long after I even had a word for what it was I felt. I knew that there was a part of me I could not reveal to anyone.

I had no one at all to talk to about it — no male friend or acquaintance, no female friend, no parent or relative. But in spite of things being so well bottled up, it didn't really seem to hurt — that is, until much later in life.

After all the girlfriends, the social acquaintances, the marriage, the kids, I began to realize that these feelings never went away. It started to sink in that all the years of hiding the outward (but very private) manifestations of those feelings were

down. These same feelings that, as a very young person, I had very nearly revealed in had begun, after so long being held in check and hidden away through a mix of shame, giddy delight, and fear, to take a serious toll on my mental persona.

I also began to recognize that I was making a big effort to try and force these feelings out of me, to quench them, to kill them completely. As one of those whose early social life was frequently marked by painful encounters, I remembered that in an awful lot of those cases, much of the hurt seemed to stem from being on the outside, of feeling different and never letting anyone know about it.



As I struggled with issues of coming out, I realized that I had to come out to myself first, that without coming clean

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