

Lesbian oppression is...

Lesbian oppression is having to spend all your time dealing with other women's anti-lesbian attitudes when you really want to talk about other topics like youth oppression, imperialism, racism, as well as sexism.

Being a gay woman in this time and place is very confusing, and don't let anybody tell you different. First of all, there's your mother telling you that good old Sally down the street just got married and her husband is so good looking, and your younger sister is almost engaged to Fred, and what about you dear, well I suppose you're just particular, you'll find the right man yet. And she talks about her future grandchildren, and assumes that you are just going to follow right along. You have visions of saying, "Well, mum, I think you'd better give the bassinet and the silver christening cup to Sally, and the monogrammed linen to my sister, because I'm never getting married, I'm in love with my roommate and we love each other very much and we're going to live together for the rest of our lives." But then you imagine her face after you've said that, so you go along nodding and letting her believe that the right man will come along.

Suppose you live in a dormitory, with hundreds of other girls who are talking incessantly about John and Richard and Charlie, and getting pinned and lavaliered and engaged, and who they went out with Saturday night, which movie they went to see, and whether they went to his apartment afterwards. Unless you pretend to be very unfriendly they ask you about all those things, and what can you say about going to the movies with your girlfriends, what can you say when they nicely try to fix you up with their handsome brother in town for the weekend? So you go out with their brother and try to figure out how to avoid kissing him goodnight without being unfriendly, or else you make up all this school work you have to do.

Every once in a while somebody will say something about the two girls down the hall, and your stomach drops down to your feet, but you can't let your facial ex-

pression change the slightest bit, you just pretend to be naive, or not very interested. Sometimes you have a good friend but she has a boyfriend, so on Saturday night, she goes off with him, and when they've had a fight you have to listen to how it was and how upset she is, when you want to say, well break up with him, and come away with me. But that's impossible to say. Sometimes you put your arm around her and she looks at you as if to tell you to stop being sick.

sexuals. Or they think that homosexual marriages are okay, but they can't stand those blatant fags and dykes. I mean that's really sick you can't deny that. (And Norman Mailer is healthy.)

Or maybe you have a job typing or waiting tables. With a boss who comes and looks over your shoulder, maybe he doesn't even pinch your ass, but one of the ways he keeps from being bored is to flirt with you, ask you if you have a boyfriend, buys you coffee, wink at you every

Then in the evenings you're afraid that someone will see you with your butchy friends and guess. You kind of wish they would, but you hope they don't. And it's so nice to be around other gay women that you go drinking a lot, and dancing, and partying, trying to forget about going back to work. Which means that your life is divided neatly into two parts, neither of which acknowledges the other. Some days you feel like you might go into work and flirt with the other secretary by mistake, before you realized where you were. When you have hangovers you wish you could settle down and live an integrated life. But all the time you have to hitch up your skirt or pants (depending on whether it's daytime or nighttime) and go off to get through with it.

If you work in a factory maybe there are other lesbians around.

Wow! Other lesbians! But there's also a lot of straight women around, sitting next to you, talking about their husbands and boyfriends. Every time a gay woman walks by your head doesn't move but your eyes follow her down the aisle. When the woman next to you asks "Is that a man or a woman?" you answer "Woman," and drop the subject. You can sit and do your job and not talk to anybody about anything personal. You can lie through your teeth, hoping you can remember to be consistent. Or when anyone looks at you they think you're weird, you can look back like "Sure I'm weird, you wanna make anything of it?" and go on talking about the weather. You'll be accepted as a weird person. One thing you cannot do is forget that you are a strong worthwhile person. Nobody's going to give you any support for being gay. They can dig it if it looks like you're enjoying yourself, but how can you expect them to encourage you when it gets hard?

That's it - we have to be invulnerable. In the dorm, in the classroom, at work, at gay parties. It's not like being gay is recognized as a worthy path, and we should be supported on it. We have to be schizophrenic, we have to be master actors, we have to be stage directors and the person who pulls the curtain when we make a dramatic (albeit necessary) exit. We have to give ourselves our own support. Pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. Most of the time it seems like it's worth it.



So you start talking about her boyfriend again.

You go to classes and try to keep from looking at the beautiful girl who sits across from you. You flirt with the professor because he expects it. You look in the index of your sociology book under homosexuality and find a lot about male homosexuality and hardly anything about lesbians, maybe a paragraph that says that lesbians haven't been studied very much. Big help. May Gay Liberation comes to talk to the class, your stomach drops down to your feet again, you sit and take very objective looking notes, staring at your notebook and wondering if anybody's being fooled. Afterwards people make comments about how they knew one gay guy in high school who was really sick, or how they think that homosexuality should be legalized, but they wouldn't want their children to know any homo-

once in a while. And naturally he expects you to play right along. You're sitting there at the typewriter, trying to smile, trying to answer noncommittally, when what you want to do is stare him down and announce "Mr. Smith, I am not available. I am not a member of that group of females that you feel you can play games with. Get fucked." However, if he didn't fire you immediately he could make your life hell, by threatening to fire you, by waiting for the morning when you have just had a fight with your lover, and yelling about how you're the worst typist he's ever hired, and ugly to boot. He can invite you to his apartment, leering and with a look that says, "I know you hate men, but you can't complain about me to anyone, can you? At least I'm normal." So you pretend to be dumb, or very much in love, or busy. Not letting any crack show in the veneer.

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