

In Lesbians In Canada by Joanne Doucette

I ask my friends: “Do you know there is a disabled lesbian caucus?” The reaction is: “Oh! My Goodness! How can they? What do they do? How can they have sex?”

Sexual difference, especially lesbianism, contradicts stereotypes of disabled women. Disabled women are thought to be childlike and passive, asexual and conforming. Lesbians, sexual by definition confound this narrow image. The general public, disabled people, and even non-disabled lesbians assume that disabled lesbians do not exist, rendering u.s. effectively invisible. This invisibility protects u.s. and, at the same time isolates u.s.. Some disabled lesbians directly challenge myths about disabled women by coming out, but this exposes them to the rage and anxiety of others - including too often other disabled women and other lesbians. We are seen, and see ourselves, as different, as outsiders - outside the mainstream, rejected by the disabled community, excluded by the lesbian world. We have no community of our own. We are different.

We face at least triple oppression - as disabled people, as women, and as lesbians. It is hard for disabled lesbians to separate the different types of oppression they experience. Instead, oppression is experienced as a whole, a pervasive system:

I feel oppressed as a lesbian, but I can't say it's separate from being Native or disabled. It all runs together... I find the whole system sucks.

I have heard some pretty homophobic personal remarks by disability rights leaders, remarks which were not challenged. I do not particularly want to get involved with such groups, not because I am a separatist, but because I feel wounded by such comments. Some disabled women at a DAWN (DisAbled Women's Network) conference strongly objected to a minority rights clause in our constitution which enshrined lesbian rights. An Open Letter DAWN did to the disability rights movement on homophobia received absolutely no response - nothing. It was like dropping a pebble into a dark well and hearing nothing, not even a splash. I know some people discourage family members from attending DAWN because there are lesbians here. The homophobia is very real. How are you supposed to feel when the very thing that keeps you going, your love is scorned, denied and mocked or rejected as sick or sinful? Sometimes, I just hate the people who do this to u.s.; other times I am more willing to educate them, assuming that they are just ignorant, not wilfully malicious.