

LESBIANS ON THE LOOSE

MAY 1991 ISSUE 17

FREE

ANTI-GAY VIOLENCE

Is it a lesbian issue?

It seems like everywhere you look lately the media (both straight and gay) is full of articles about the "Gay Killing Fields". According to the Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby's Education Policy Statement "Attacks against lesbians and gay men have reached crisis levels with bashings becoming a daily occurrence in the Oxford Street, Darlinghurst area alone, with at least five gay related murders committed during the past twelve months"

What strikes me about all of these articles is the absence of information about lesbians. The reports of bashings are all by men. The Lobby says "lesbians and gay men" but their only statistics on anti-lesbian violence come from the USA.

Is it just another case of lesbian invisibility or do lesbians not get bashed for being lesbians? If the latter is true, why is there such an increase in lesbians attending self-defence classes? Why is it that an increasing number of lesbians will tell you stories about friends who were bashed but there are not official statistics?

Some of the suggestions that I have heard are:

- *there is no geographical part of the city which is well known to straight people as a place where lesbians can be found ie no lesbian equivalent of Oxford Street.*
- *as gays become more visible the level of violence increases, so if lesbians were more visible more would be victims of violent crimes.*

LOBBY WANTS ACTION

A TIME FOR ACTION... the appropriately titled Education Policy Statement written by the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby was released April 7. It's a six page document outlining the extent of bashings against lesbians and gay men and the action they would like the Department of School education to take: specific homophobic confrontation in the form of workshops and seminars, Violence Prevention Officers, teacher awareness and training, curriculum initiatives to deal with homosexuality and anti-gay / lesbian violence. The Lobby is awaiting response from the Minister of Education, Virginia Chadwick to call a meeting of relevant groups to discuss implementing the proposed policy document.

• *violence against women is something that we have all lived with for so long that we don't have the same reaction as gay men who suddenly wake up to find themselves victims of violence.*

• *lesbians may be unsure about whether they were bashed because they are lesbians or simply because they are women.*

According to Carole Ruthchild from the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, attempts to find out about anti-lesbian violence have had little response:

"We prepared a survey called 'Off Our Backs' which was distributed through LOTL and the Star and was available at many venues. We received 25 responses. Maybe we are using the wrong approach, maybe lesbians don't want to fill in questionnaires. But then they didn't respond to 'Streetwatch' either."

Carole said that the Lobby is considering approaching women for personal interviews at the Lesbian Conference in July but she would be glad to hear from any women who may have ideas on how to get more lesbians involved.

"I am convinced that there is a high level of anti-lesbian violence but it is impossible for us to know what to do if lesbians won't come forward and tell us what is happening and what they want us to do about it."

If you are tired of being scared to walk the streets at night, if you have had enough of violence being directed towards you for being a lesbian and if you want to be part of the solution, contact:

The Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby, Anti-Violence Project
PO Box 9, DARLINGHURST NSW 2010 or phone 360 6650 (answering machine)

Stevie



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