



Marriage Equality: Take 2

A guest writer rallies the radical and mainstream around marriage equality

By Tim Stallman

On March 24, a coalition of local LGBT organizations held a town meeting in Raleigh to discuss same-gender marriage and civil unions. St. John's Metropolitan Community Church in downtown Raleigh was packed beyond capacity with all sorts of LGBTIQ folk and allies, from two Durham County men who had filed for a marriage license two days prior, to mothers with their middle-aged LGBTIQ daughters and sons.

In the midst of hundreds of sexual and gender minorities were about 50 men from the Upper Room Church of God in Christ, a local conservative Pentecostal congregation. Sitting together as a bloc, the men had clearly come with the intention of disrupting the meeting. By yelling Scripture verses, firing off violent homophobic slurs and using video cameras to intimidate others in attendance, they succeeded in changing the meeting into a tense and hateful confrontation.

Organizing against the proposed Federal Marriage Amendment, existing LGBTIQ organizations around the country are joining with ad hoc groups to mobilize LGBTIQ folk with a new intensity in this fledgling movement. Last summer, the Supreme Court, in *Lawrence v. Texas*, brought us the beginnings of legal equality, but legalities should never be our ultimate goal. From San Francisco to New Paltz, N.Y., we've sprung into the next phase – a vision of real equality for “acceptable” same-gender couples and families, which is inspiring, radical and new. People throughout the country on May 17 are going to wake up to front-page photos of happy same-gender couples from Massachusetts – this will be a big step toward our relationships becoming commonplace.

However, as monogamous, child-raising middle-aged suburban gays, lesbians and bisexuals gain legal and cultural equality, those of us with different identities feel more and more strongly marginalized. It seems that in order to gain these new rights, we sometimes silence other folks and fragment our communities.


For that reason many have decided to sit this one out. But like it or not, these days the struggle for marriage equality is the focus of the LGBTIQ movement on a national and local scale. It's not too late for us to do it right. Here's how:

•Make the debate about *love*. The Human Rights

Campaign and others are pushing a strategy of separating *civil* marriage from *religious* marriage and arguing that all we really deserve, legally, is the first. Is anyone going to be happy when we can go to a courthouse and get a marriage license but our relationships are still viewed as illegitimate by dominant U.S. culture? Our message should be that the love that exists within same-gender relationships is just as valid as that in different-gender relationships.

•Broaden the issue to *freedom of relationships*. Plenty of people who identify as queer, especially on college campuses, aren't interested in ever getting married. But the laws regulating relationships also interfere with young, radical queers in plenty of ways so let's start talking about changing cohabitation laws, adoption rights, domestic partner benefits (for straight and non-straight folk) and heterosexual age-of-consent laws. Let's legalize the rights of people in alternative relationships and living structures.

•Build a *real grassroots movement of our own*. Larger, national organizations are overshadowing local groups and keeping the focus on traditional middle-of-the-road tactics. While this is certainly one strategy among many, we won't be equal until Americans of all sorts change their heterosexist behavior, and no amount of legislative lobbying (or check-writing) is going to accomplish that. Let's reach out to new folks and start building connections within our movements across lines of race, age, cultural background and more. Young radical queers need to stop thinking that marriage is not their problem, just as much as older mainstream activists need to stop writing off “spiky-haired anarchist kids.”

For better or for worse, we're all stuck with it together. When something as simple as kissing another boy or another girl in public is a radical act, each and every LGBTIQ person, just by being visible, is an activist for change – and for good or ill, marriage equality will be a powerful tool in our struggles. 

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