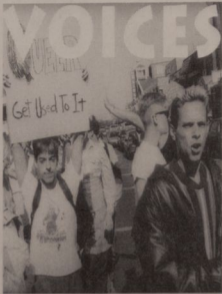


QUEER VOICES

Interviews by
Steve Cosson

JUSTIN BOND

I think the power that Queer Nation has is in the name because it's so inclusive. But even in its first month, so many people in Queer Nation really worked their fucking asses off to be exclusive. When they begin to exclude people they lose their power. I find that there are a lot of people within the queer movement



who are really intent on defining for other people what they are and that's the same fucking bullshit we've gotten from the straight population. It's

completely the antithesis of what we're fighting for: *You can be gay but only if you're gay in a way that is not threatening us.* Well, I'm sorry, I *am* threatening—you're fucked up, not me. There's room for everyone. And that's what I hope will happen with Queer Nation. Right now everyone's there, but it's awfully uncomfortable, and I hope that trend doesn't continue.

MIGUEL GUTIERREZ

Queerness means nonassimilationist to me, but even so, there is a sense of conforming to being queer. It's still a privileged thing to be queer. I don't feel it's inclusive—there are race



and class issues around this. There are people who cannot afford to be nonassimilationist; they are fighting just to live and eat. As an employed, somewhat educated person I can imagine not identifying with the white gay male movement.

I worry that being queer right now is more about nose-rings than about how you feel about yourself. Then I

see *Newsweek's* article on "Today's Youth," with its token white gay boy who's decided that he's not into promiscuity, wants a husband, kids, a house, and I know that I'm not represented by him, and that I don't identify with his priorities. In that sense, I am queer.

JASON BISHOP

I don't identify with the older generation of lesbian and gay men. Very cushy—brunch on Sunday and credit-card shopping all week long. I'm not a part of that all and never have been. *Queer* is much more inclusive of my family. I know gay men



who are my age who don't want anything to do with AIDS activism, don't want to know about HIV, don't want to know transsexuals, transvestites. It's not part of their world and it's not accepted. And frankly, I wouldn't want to be part of their society.

REBECCA HENSLER

A lot of what the "queer generation"



is arguing for is the same stuff that was being fought for by gay liberation. So it's not "lesbian/gay" vs. "queer." It's liberationist vs. assimilationist. It's not that there are young queers and older lesbians and gays. Younger queers are following in the footsteps, and a lot of them don't know they're following, and I think they should learn their own history. The reason we don't know our own

history is that our history isn't taught to us in school. A lot of what I see from older lesbians, especially toward bisexuals and women who don't go by their rules, is, "You don't see how important all the fighting we did was." Well, if they're willing to put up with us for a little while and talk to us, if that communication starts, we can learn. And there's so much to learn about our history that's invisible to us now. I see myself as trying to learn from them, but it has to go both ways.

PEGGY SUE

I think we have much more free-

dom to do what we want to do if we use *queer* to describe ourselves vs. *gay* or *lesbian*. Because already the movement is still—what? 20 years old?—and there's already the established gays and lesbians like the Harvey Milk Club and the Quilt people. It's very establishment. *Queer* implies to me, new and nonestablishment and different, nonassimilationist. They want to work from within and I just want to crash in from the outside and say "Hey! Hello, I'm queer. I can make out with my girlfriend. Ha Ha. Live with it. Deal with it. Out of my

way." That kind of stuff. I favor the direct approach.


As far as being in opposition to lesbian feminism—No. It's just a different time. I'm coming out in a



completely different world where I have more freedom in certain areas than women did fifteen years ago and less freedom in some areas.

The problem I have with older lesbians is they really hate me for the way I express myself through how I dress and I behave. Other lesbians are really angry that I have such a camaraderie with men. They tell me I'm objectifying myself. They need to get over it. Fuck em. They don't understand that the gay and lesbian movement, the queer movement, the dyke movement is about doing what feels right to you without catching any flak ever.

INGRID NELSON

I've always called myself a  PAGE 20



lesbian or a dyke. But lately there's a purist movement to define lesbianism in a negative way—to say that lesbians are women who don't sleep with men and if you do sleep with men, you're not a lesbian. That is not what being a lesbian is about for me, and if that's what's being perceived when I say I'm a lesbian, that's not what I mean by it. So, I just want to

say "I'm queer." That's the only term that matters—I'm a sexual minority, I'm not straight, and my relationships are not legitimized by the straight world. I'm an outsider; I'm queer; I'm different.

LAURA THOMAS

I'm not quite sure what the political priorities of the queer movement are, other than some sort of *we're-here-we're-queer* identity and putting ourselves out there. I don't see the queer movement as being organized to do anything beyond issues of anti-assimilation and being who we want to be. It's

more on the level of accepting anyone who shows up than on the level of understanding differences and understanding why people wouldn't show up or not want to be a part of things.

There's not a lot of sophisticated political analysis and understanding about racism and classism and sexism and how they affect any political



movement. I perceive the queer movement as willing to deal with these things, but not going out of its way to deal with them.

ADELE MORRISON

Queer is not an “instead of,” it’s an “inclusive of.” I’d never want to lose the terms that specifically identify me. It’s like the whole issue of “people of color”—well, yeah, there are people of color, but I am a Black person or African-American, depending on who you talk to. Yes, I am part of the community of people of color too,

and there are those similarities we all have—being marginalized as a Black person.

Working in a very mixed or integrated group is a positive sort of thing. You have to come to coalition or you’re just going to end up killing each other. I believe that’s true. At the same time, I’ve come to a point



where I’ve been doing it for so long that I’m tired of fighting with people who are supposed to be on my side, people who should get it and don’t. But on the other hand, I see working in groups that are coalescing with all different kinds of people together is the only real chance we all have as gays, lesbians, people of color, women. I do wonder personally how much more energy I can put into it because men who don’t get their sexism and white people who don’t get their racism are very dangerous to me. And how effective can I be in an organization where I do not feel

safe, literally, physically not feel safe? What happens when male rage or white rage blows up and I happen to be in the way of it?

GERARD KOSKOVICH

I think *queer* has been adopted here in San Francisco by people who are using their experience of marginalization to produce an aggressive critique of the prevailing social system. Those people form networks in certain clubs, certain public places, certain intellectual territories like magazines or discourse. I think



we're seeing in its early stages a reorganization of some of those forces into a new community of people where the range of defining factors is rather fluid. People's limits have shifted significantly from the traditional urban gay community of the 1970s. It's not a reaction—that would be too easy a statement. As

someone in the scene who is somewhat older (I'm thirty-two), I date back to the high heyday of San Francisco clone lifestyle. I have always been aware that there were people who sought to transvalue and try life on the edge rather than trying to purchase the right goods at Macy's to demonstrate they are just like everybody else except for what they wear to nightclubs.

There are class issues in being queer. I came from a working-class background to Stanford as a graduate student on full scholarship. A lot of people that are the mainstays of

the queer social groups in San Francisco are from class positions that marginalize them: working-class, or race, or geographic discrimination. I don't want you to think I am devaluing the experience of those smaller numbers of people I have seen who have a middle-class or upper-class background and who have deliberately left behind the privilege that represents, who felt they were born on Mars and left on their own terms. It's the land of lost boys and lost girls who woke up one day and realized that not to have heterosexual privilege was in fact the highest privilege.

Steve Cossen, who conducted these interviews, was *OUT/LOOK's* editorial intern during summer 1990. He is currently attending drama school in London.