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In Depth Piece

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### The Drama That Comes With Coming Out

“Crazy bitches,” was the first thing that came out of Abbie Tripp’s mouth when I asked her about lesbians. Tripp, 19, knew she was a lesbian in third grade. With her first same-sex relationship in the seventh grade, she repressed those feelings with a slew of straight partners for the first part of high school. Until she met Anna. Since coming out the year before, Tripp had had her share of controversy. But at least hers was public. Anna, on the other hand, was deep in the closet. “I didn’t think my friends and family would accept me,” Anna Stitely, 21 said. Although their story is unique in its own right, sadly, it is typical of many lesbian relationships.

For every young lesbian that has come out, there are ten more behind her who are terrified to come out of the closet. In one way or another after coming out, there seems to be a trail of drama that follows. As a bisexual woman myself, and living with a lesbian and her girlfriend, I have witnessed enough “dyke drama” to last a lifetime. As “half” an outsider looking in, I can honestly say I’ve been trapped in the best of both worlds for some time. Although I identify many similarities between gay and straight relationships, there are the quirks I have noticed in a lesbian relationship that you rarely find between man and woman.

In previous generations, to be gay was considered taboo, and more often than not, a sin. If you wanted to be openly gay, there were little options. But in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that we live in now, being gay is becoming more and more the status quo. While there are still hate crimes and discrimination based on ones sexuality, the liberation for gays is still fully charged.

On June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1969, one of Greenwich Village's gay bars was subject to a random police raid which ignited a series of riots. The Stonewall Inn became a meeting place that weekend for gay men and lesbians to protest the police. This was the beginning of what we know today as Gay Liberation. Gay rights activists came together to form the Gay Liberation Front (GLF). Caught up in the other radical movements of the 60's, members of the GLF set out to change to the world's views of their Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (GLBT) peers. With this movement they hoped to change the ideas of marriage, racism, sexism and more. The GLF spread around the United States and then world wide. While many radical causes were being thrown around, the GLF took their part in other movements such as women's liberationists, The Black Panthers and anti-war groups. The lesbians in the groups brought a new light to radical feminism and they produced new philosophies. The end of the GLF came quickly, due mostly to internal conflict between the members. Because they could not work out their differences for the better of the organization, the group dispersed. Ex-members continued to work on hot political issues, but the Gay Liberation Front itself was no more. While the organization itself may have been short lived, the idea of the GLF lives on. The GLF offered gays and lesbians an alternative to silence. They encouraged homosexuals to come out and be

prideful. Many groups after the GLF such as Queer Nation and ACT UP either had members from GLF or shared the core values and teachings as the GLF.

Still, it is a hard task to come out to your friends and family, no matter what decade you are living in. There is the usual school trauma where many students are picked on, but while we may be progressing in thought towards the GLBTs, we have progressed in technology as well. "Cyber-bullying is the new big thing," says Laura Sorensen of Affirmations Lesbian and Gay Community Center in Ferndale, Mich. "Kids are getting hate mail and taunts on MySpace or Facebook." On the other hand, the internet also provides many support groups for teens and young adults.

On the up side, while kids are coming out younger and younger these days, more help is being provided. "Schools are more likely than in the past to have openly gay staff members who can help young people," says Anthony D'Augelli, an associate dean at Pennsylvania State University. According to USA Today, the mid-1990s showed only a few Gay-Straight Alliance clubs in the U.S. high schools. But now, nearly 3,200 are registered. About.com: Lesbian Life, states that "teen lesbians and bisexual girls, on average, have their first same-sex attraction at age twelve and their first sexual encounter at sixteen."

In a world where Ellen Degeneres is one of the highest rated TV talk show hosts, and shows like "Will and Grace" and "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy" are some of the most watched, we as Americans are more pro gay than ever. Everywhere you look, there is a gay mark. Even in politics, a place politicians swore it would never lie; there are many members of government across the United States braving their audiences and

coming out of the closet, though it is still legal in thirty-one states to fire someone for being gay. America is taking baby steps but we're not quite there yet.

Not just for lesbians, but any gay person, faces serious consequences by coming out. Beatings, verbal abuse and even murder are frequently and sadly the cost for coming out. Some studies have suggested that the suicide rate among GLBT teenagers is grossly larger than that of straight teenagers but according to Tori DeAngelis with *Monitor on Psychology*, "they are only slightly more likely than heterosexual youth to attempt suicide." With more openly gay idols on the rise, the frequencies of gay-hate situations are declining. But these repercussions can be enough to keep any girl in the closet. To stay quiet may stave off any unwanted consequences like bullying etc. Many studies have been conducted in reference to GLBT lifestyles, but a lot of the results are inconclusive due to the fact that the gay population is such a minority. University of Vermont psychologists Esther D. Rothblum and Rhonda Factor, did a study and found that lesbians are "as likely to report being as mentally healthy as their heterosexual sisters and have report higher self-esteem." Though they have no real evidence on why the lesbians in the study came to have a higher self-esteem than that of their straight counterparts, Rothblum and Factor speculated that the lesbians may be more educated and as a result of that are more willing to join supportive groups that boost their self-esteem. Bisexual women were included in the same study and produced significantly lower results; they proved to have much poorer mental health in comparison to the lesbian and straight women. It is hypothesized bisexual women suffer rejection from both the gay and straight communities, hence the results of the study. One more study worth mentioning, conducted by the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* at the University of California,

San Francisco Center for AIDS Prevention Studies and AIDS Research Institute has concluded, “the more "out" lesbians and bisexual women were--as measured by self-identification as a gay or lesbian, number of years out and level of involvement in the lesbian or bisexual community--the less psychological distress they reported.” This was the case for many ethnic backgrounds of women. This study is the largest one to date focusing on lesbian’s mental health.

Looking around me there is only hope and progress for the gay mindset in the U.S. But from personal experience and those of my peers, I can see that we are still at a standstill in the coming out department. It is hard on a young girl, especially those who do not know what to expect. Which can only lead me to question: why the drama that comes with coming out?

After Anna and Abbie came out in high school and chose to be together, drama was the last thing on their minds. But as they came more acquainted with their public sexuality and the trials and tribulations that come along with being a minority, drama seemed to be the only thing surrounding them. Over a period of three years, they have fought through the stigma that follows the ‘typical lesbian.’

Anna decided to drop out of high school her senior year. She still continued to date Abbie, who at that time was a junior. Dating seriously up to Abbie’s senior year, prom was just around the corner and emotions were high. Anna had rented and paid for the limo and purchased a promise ring to give to Abbie. A lot of thought, love, (not to mention money) had gone into that special night on Anna’s part. It was then that their first taste of the dyke drama presented itself. One of Anna’s most dramatic stories from

that period in their relationship deals with an old friend, Ashley\* and Abbie. After a lovers tryst gone wrong, Abbie turned to Ashley for comfort.

Now, it should be said that Ashley is the type of lesbian you don't befriend on any higher level than an occasional "Hey, how's it going?" Not only is she crazy, but she lies until she can't lie anymore. And then she lies some more. Finding excitement and gratification in ruining others lives, Ashley had a plan to break Anna and Abbie up. She had a plan all along to make her way into Anna's life, and her warped way of thinking told her if she could get Abbie to cheat on her girlfriend, then Ashley herself could jump in and begin dating Anna. At least, that's one version of the story. Ashley can't keep it straight herself anymore. And this is just the high school lesbian drama. Imagine what could be had with licenses, a stable bank account, their own house or purchasing alcohol legally. The possibilities are endless.

Anyhow, one thing led to another and...the results were inevitable. Once Anna learned of the new relationship budding between her girlfriend and a mutual friend the heat was on. Not only did she lose all of her money on the ring and the prom plans, but she lost her girlfriend. Weeks of vicious chatter and back stabbing led up to one big finale involving a few police officers and one girls head slammed into a car windshield. Needless to say, it was not a welcoming sight to her father, Mike, just two days after Anna had come out to him. To this day Anna and Abbie are still "friends" with Ashley. They are the prime example of the old saying "keep your friends close but your enemies closer."

Abbie decided to move to Kansas after this incident; the drama had begun to cover her like a blanket and she felt she needed to get out. Spending practically two years

more than a thousand miles away from her home, she went to school and worked towards her cosmetology license. After passing her state board test, Abbie was back in Maryland, and more importantly: back with Anna. The correspondence over the two years she was gone was strong and the feelings were blatantly still there, even while Anna's new girlfriend moved in and Abbie dated around. Of course, the jealousy over those two issues was astronomical, but one would never admit it to the other, and neither relationship worked out. When Abbie came home just a few short weeks ago, she came to Anna's house first. And that is where she has been ever since. I would know; they are both my roommates.

Anna and Abbie thought that being together and being happy would be all that mattered in a relationship, but the backlash from their friends at times was unbearable. "It was one thing for both of us to take the heat, but Abbie got out. I had to stay and hear all of our friends trash talk her for months. I was hurt by what she had done, but I got over it. They kept bringing it up and when she got home they switched sides," Anna said.

For Abbie, the backstabbing was what stood out the most; "I'd have friends who hadn't met Anna before we dated and yet they always talked negatively about her. Once we got together and everyone had met her, they started to say hateful things about me to Anna." The cycle is never ending and vicious. Popular shows such as Showtime's "The L Word" portray what the lesbian world seems to be like. While "The L Word" tends to exaggerate many things, such as the copious amounts of sex, the writers have almost hit the nail right on the head.

I'm not the first one to embark on the long journey of discovering the heart of dyke drama. In fact, author and lesbian Leslie Lange took a hiatus from her Ph.D. studies

to observe the phenomena. Publishing the book “Dyke Drama: Your Guide To Getting Out Alive,” Lange covers it all: the relationship drama, the lesbian sex drama, the drunk drama...you get the idea. Its two-hundred and thirty-five pages dedicated to the drama that is the lesbian. Her cast of characters is very humorous and all too true. Just to name a few, she identifies The Amnesiac Lesbian: the one who swears you never told her certain things, The Angry Girl, The Cheater, The Closet Case and my personal favorite, The Compulsive Liar.

The Compulsive Liar, in my experience, is the kind of lesbian that causes the most drama, especially to those who are just coming out. Constantly changing her story and spinning tall tales is her M.O. and you can never truly know who you are talking to. From this, someone who has just come out can get the wrong idea of how things work in the “world of lesbians.” By listening to stories and rumors that this kind of girl creates, one can draw her own (untrue) conclusions, which can only lead to more and more drama.

Lange also categorized the “Six Degrees of Drama,” which are Mild Drama, Entertaining Drama, Moderate Drama, High Drama, Extreme Drama and lastly, Off the Charts. While Lange takes a funny spin to each level of craziness, they are all too recognizable. Again, all of these things can be seen in a straight relationship, but they are normally taken in a completely different direction when it comes to a gay relationship. The Entertaining Drama, for example, is explained as starting something huge out of nothing. Mild Drama is just your every day, run of the mill exchange between women, which with enough estrogen in a room, lesbian or not, can drive a person insane. Then there are the more serious aspects of it, the Extreme Drama. This would include

something like a suicide attempt or heavy violence. I've witnessed everything in the lesbian drama world, from the funniest little tiffs to watching one girl run over her ex's foot with her car. It's brutal out there. In the "straight world," when something with such dramatics occurs, once it has been resolved the perpetrators are cut off and ignored from that point on.

Another common misconception before coming out is that you have to slut yourself up once you've stepped onto the scene. And, honestly, this isn't so far from the truth. Once fresh meat is on the market, the lesbians come running like hungry lions. "Ring ring ring!" will be the only noise a newly single girl hears once the news is circulated. They all want their go at the "new girl." It's just an unspoken formality. Same goes for those who have recently gotten out of a relationship; they are sought out faster than an army recruiter at an all boy's high school. Ever wondered why a lesbian is never single for long? There's your answer.

Then there is what many lesbians refer to as "college gay." This is when a girl is confused and goes through a stage where she convinces herself she is gay. This normally entails a lot of drunken nights and other "college gay" girls. This is not to be confused with the girls just discovering their sexuality. College gay can also be labeled as the recreational lesbian; someone who, shall we say, test drives the car but never buys. Anne Heche can be an example of this, or even Britney Spears, with her infamous Madonna lip lock. And then there are the women who consider themselves gay for one person and that person only. They feel they are straight and always have been but somehow one woman works her way in and suddenly someone's world is turned upside down. With so many different aspects to the lesbian, it would be virtually impossible to square them all away

(no pun intended.) Karen Williamsen-Garvey, director of the Gender and Sexuality Center at Carleton College in Minnesota said, "Sexuality is not black and white, it's along a spectrum. Sometimes it appears that students flirt with bisexuality and retreat."

Lange sums it all up when she says, "Show me a lesbian who says she hasn't been affected by dyke drama and I'll show you a damn liar." I've noticed among lesbians that initially everyone is hurt and acts out of anger, but in the end the compassionate part of the woman comes out and forgives. She never forgets, but she will always forgive.