

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

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## Alienation and your right to exist

By Conor Ryan

My homosexuality is something that will be a major part of my life until I die. In truth, it's difficult to judge how it has affected me and how it will continue to affect my future. It's not simple enough to be deemed "good" or "bad," but rather, it just is. When dealing with others in the daily course of my life I try to be upbeat and positive and perennially up front and honest because I have always felt that's the best way to help influence (straight) people's minds. Additionally, the fact is that if you're quiet and closeted, your voice never gets counted or heard. I like to think that it's harder for people to put down a group of people if they've actually met a real live member of the minority. It's easy to dismiss different people in the abstract, but my hope has always been that if they talk to me and see

that homosexuality is really not that big a deal, and certainly not a threat, they might change their mind, or at least give it a second thought. As I said, I try to be positive and outgoing, but to keep the pain I feel and the anger I often have towards straight people and the world in general in check isn't always easy. There's a difficult side to being gay that I pretty much keep to myself. Just because I keep it buried though, in no way denies its existence. Well, here goes.

Lately, I've thought about suicide a good deal more than is probably recommended. It's rarely one thing or event that sparks this notion. In fact, it's a little bit of everything. I have so many worries. Will I be fired from my job because I have a picture of my lover on my desk? Will I be fag-bashed by a gang of teenagers because I'm seen leaving a bar? Will I die of AIDS, like so many before me?

I don't know the answer to any of these questions, but I do know they scare me. Most of the time I'm pretty together and at least mildly happy. But every once in a while, it all catches up and overwhelms me. I feel like being a homosexual is the toughest card I could have been dealt. It makes life so much more infinitely complicated. Things that straights take for granted, like feeling comfortable kissing or holding someone's hands on the street, are acts of danger.

I wish I could present my angst or depression, or whatever you want to call it, with easy to understand numbers or something quantitative, but it just doesn't work that way. I honestly don't know how other gays get through the day. In a sense though, they don't. Because of the way this world is, the harsh reality is that the suicide rate for gay and

lesbian teenagers is three and four times higher than that of their straight counterparts.

Don't misunderstand me. I would never want to be straight, I love lust for and loving men and I couldn't imagine being any different. But for me every day is a test and it's terrifying to know my whole life is going to be that way. Part of it is feeling so alienated. Every time I see a guy I'm interested in, I have to wonder if he's even of my same orientation. It takes so much energy.

Imagine waking up one day and being different from everyone you love and know. Imagine becoming one of those strange, bad people that you've heard about or seen on the news, but had never actually met. All of the sudden you realize, "I'm one of them." It's life-changing, to say the least. I remember wondering who I was supposed to emulate and watch, when in the blink of an eye I felt like part of a different world than my parents and friends.

Everyday I see a simple advertisement or a straight couple together I'm confronted with the reality of being different and reminded that I'm supposed to be straight. Sure, I could live in the closet and fit in. But that would be so false. I will never forget on the inside how little I have in common with most of this world. In fact, at straight functions like weddings I can't seem to think anything except that "I'm like no one in this room."

One in four gays has a substance abuse problem. It's depressing that I don't find that awesome number surprising. The fact is that most homosexuals have major self-esteem problems at some part of their lives, normally when they have first come

out. For me, it was like I had been brainwashed for so many years that it was hard, and even today it's still hard to be comfortable with myself. One is taught that if you like men you're a woman, yet I'm not and I have no desire to be female. Where does that leave me? Most of the time I believe in myself and the way I am, but every so often I can't help but question what my place in this world is. Fortunately, I have my friends there to help me.

I see those who would and do hate me as a battering ram. In my mind I can stand it up to a point, but eventually it just gets through, by virtue of repetition and numbers if nothing else. For how long can anyone go against the flow?

Some days I'm confronting hate on a personal level, whether it's someone calling me a faggot or having one of my friends tell me that a guy was asking her if she was a "faghag?" Most of the time it's just listening to the news or opening the newspaper. Hate is everywhere. A lot of my friends can dismiss such comments. "Who cares what a breeder thinks, anyway? They're just stupid and ignorant." For better or for worse, I'm too sensitive to dismiss so much so easily.

I want to run up to Pat Buchanan, Pat Robertson, Jesse Helms, and everyone else and scream, "I'm only 18 years old, what could I possibly have done to make you hate me? Would they be able to tell me to my face how evil I am? I also wonder how the 20-year-olds we saw at the Republican Convention holding signs that read "Family Rights Forever, Gay Rights Never" can look themselves in the mirror.

I've thought a lot about having a child when I'm older. Sure, it wouldn't be "traditional," but then my very being is "non-mainstream." I feel I have so much to give to a child. At the very least, I'd be guaranteeing that one member of the next generation wouldn't grow up hating gays, blacks, or anyone who's different. I've since changed my mind. I can't in good conscience help bring anyone into a nasty world like this.

The worst is when I hit bottom. When I really get depressed or overwhelmed I can't help but think that so many people in this world think homosexuality is evil and wrong, who am I to think otherwise? Maybe I am a freak, a deviant. That's the saddest part of it all. No one should have to question their very right to exist. No one.

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