

Phoenix

home

what's new

features

listings

music

movies

theater

dance

books

art

food

personals

classifieds

The Boston Phoenix - 1 in 10

articles

[clubs and cafés](#) | [events](#) | [resources](#) | [articles](#) | [hot links](#) |

## Special ed

### Learning about AIDS at the Museum of Science

by R.J. Grubb

AIDS has been with us for so long that it's become a kind of background noise. But one benefit of the ho-humming of the epidemic is that a mainstream institution such as the Museum of Science, which is geared toward children, can host something like "What about AIDS?", a traveling exhibit developed in cooperation with seven other museums.

Don't be fooled into thinking this is just for kids. It's not. In fact, some of the language used to describe the immunological and epidemiological aspects of AIDS is quite sophisticated -- and probably beyond the grasp of the average 10-year-old. To make the information accessible for both children and adults, the museum enlists interactive videos, colorful graphics, and enlarged photos of cell reproductions. One of the most interesting displays consists of three "lottery cages" with dice inside. One, when spun, is calculated to show the risks you take by having sex without a condom; another gives the risks of having sex *with* a condom.



Refreshingly, the exhibit doesn't shy away from explaining how the virus is transmitted. To accommodate the diverse sensibilities of its visitors (after all, 10-year-olds will be wandering through), the museum has flagged the outside of the exhibit with a "PG-10" rating so parents and other adults can censor -- er, identify -- what's appropriate for their children to see and what's not. One portion of "What about AIDS?" displays photographs of people with AIDS, including gay men and their partners, with caption cards explaining how they contracted HIV; this section also makes it clear that heterosexual transmission of the virus has greatly contributed to the epidemic worldwide.

Perhaps the exhibit's greatest contribution, though, is its strong humanitarian and social message. One wall, titled "Living and Dying with AIDS," is replete with photographs of people who've left their courageous stories behind. The effect is similar, though somewhat less dramatic, to that of the NAMES Quilt. And before you leave, you're given the opportunity to view and add to the "Remembering Book," where young and old have left messages to mothers, friends, and children who've died from AIDS.

*"What about AIDS?" is at the Museum of Science through January 11. Tickets \$9. Call (617) 723-2500.*

---

[Respond](#) to this article.

---



| [home page](#) | [what's new](#) | [search](#) | [about the phoenix](#) | [feedback](#) |  
Copyright © 1997 The Phoenix Media/Communications Group. All rights reserved.

**Phoenix**

home

what's new

features

listings

music

movies

theater

dance

books

art

food

personals

classifieds

**The Boston Phoenix - 1 in 10**

May 1998

**articles**[clubs and cafés](#) | [events](#) | [resources](#) | [articles](#) | [hot links](#) |**A different drummer****Torn by controversy and struggling for survival, the Dyke March still strikes a blow against assimilationism**

by R.J. Grubb

*Shirts off!* That's what countless dykes across America will be shouting next month as they get ready to march in unison down such celebrated city streets as San Francisco's Castro and New York's Fifth Avenue. Yet in Boston, the planned walk down Boylston Street almost didn't happen. Last month, an emergency e-mail bulletin was sent to a popular local listserv, alerting all who cared that Boston's fourth annual Dyke March would be canceled if more women didn't get involved. Frustrated by the lack of community involvement, past organizers seriously considered abandoning the march. After all, if no one was interested, why have one?

The emergency bulletin generated enough of a response that organizers decided to go ahead -- at first glance, a narrow victory of community solidarity over activist apathy. Nevertheless, the fragile state of the march underlines the general trend in the gay and lesbian movement toward assimilation and demonstrates the need for lesbian visibility.

Today, if you ask people to describe the Dyke March -- and those who march in it -- you're likely to receive responses ranging from "a group of misguided women" to "a band of rebel dykes out to scare puritan Boston" to the "best thing that's ever happened to Pride."

Which raises the question: what *are* the goals of the Dyke March?

Sarah Shreeves, a founder and current march organizer, says the point is to "have a huge group of women walking down the street together who are dykes in a politically charged way." In other words, lesbian visibility.

In working toward that seemingly simple goal, however, march organizers have opened a Pandora's box. "I just think that the Dyke March might have

tapped into larger conflicts in the community that are very far-reaching," explains Beth Hastie, another founding organizer and an adviser to this year's organizers.

Back in 1979, Charlotte Bunch predicted that "lesbian feminist separatism will continue in some form as long as there is heterosexual domination." Bunch's prophecy does not seem in danger of becoming obsolete anytime soon. It's still a man's, man's world, and lesbians still occupy that unenviable place as a minority within a minority.

In fact, one of the reasons the Dyke March came into being was to address the needs of dykes who felt they were being excluded from the broader gay community. If you need evidence that these women had a point, just pick up one of the gay glossies and see how much editorial space is given to gay men's issues and how little is devoted to lesbian issues.

Still, many lesbians were angry about the march organizers' decision last year to separate from Pride and hold the march a week after the big event. There was a much smaller turnout for the '97 march, and for some, the negative feelings still linger. "Having last year's march a week later turned a lot of people off," says Shreeves.

Leigh Kempinski, a queer-rights activist and organizer from last year, remembers: "We're marching and we have this path, which is great. But our audience was random tourists in Boston or anyone who happened to be out that Saturday. And that's great because people need to have their eyes opened, but in terms of political statements and political goals, where was it going?"

That's something even those involved in the march don't always agree on. For instance, who can forget the upheaval over "Bedgate," when a Dyke March float consisting of a bed on which women simulated sex crashed the 1996 Pride parade?

In retrospect, Shreeves argues that the larger gay and lesbian community's response to "Bedgate" revealed a double standard about sex. "There are floats with men hardly wearing anything and grinding each other, but when women do it, it's: 'Oh my God, what will the straight community think?'" Shreeves says. " 'We're sending the wrong message.' 'Look how far we've gotten, and you're setting us back.' Personally, I don't give a fuck what the straight community thinks of us, and I find it sad that we're pandering to the idea that we are just like everybody else."

Beyond arguments like these, there's the question of whether our community makes up a market or a movement.

"We have had issues with the growing commercialization of Pride over the years and wanted to get back to grassroots," Hastie says. And though the

focus of the event is lesbian visibility, Shreeves acknowledges that "at some point you need to focus on real, tangible issues." Addressing this concern last year, organizers presented a forum on health care issues after the march. During a "speak out" segment, women walked up to a podium and shared personal stories about how lack of health care affected them as lesbians. Shreeves remembers it as "empowering and satisfying."

Yet this year, due to a lack of volunteers -- in part, a consequence of last year's separatist stance -- there will be no focus on a single issue other than visibility. There simply isn't the time or energy to pull off something like last year's forum. "It's always a struggle for activists and organizations to keep people actively involved in planning things," Shreeves notes. "Even Pride is having problems getting [the community] involved."

Of course, to some people, Pride is more a day of fun than an occasion for activism. Hastie says that the Dyke March has had "a very positive effect on Pride," which began using the term *march* rather than *parade* last year, but people who see Pride as an excuse to throw one heck of a party think calling it a march is a bit strong.

"There's always that conflict," says Sara Wolfson, a new organizer of the Dyke March. "Are we going to have social events or are we going to have political events? [Some] people whine and they just want to have fun, flirt, cruise, whatever. But I think anybody's life is made up of things that are fun and [things that are] political. Everybody lives in both arenas. The Dyke March is just part of the scene. The fact that Pride is more commercial does not make it bad; it just makes it limited."

In truth, the Dyke March crisis -- whether you want to call it disorganization or apathy -- reflects the crisis facing queer activism in general. Groups like ACT UP and the Lesbian Avengers have seen their membership dwindle to the point where they, too, have had to beg their communities for involvement and support. Meanwhile, the Human Rights Campaign, which focuses on mainstream issues like marriage, continues to garner support nationwide. Most likely, HRC will be out in force at the Pride parade on June 13. I remember being tapped on the shoulder by so many HRC representatives last year that I was forced to wear one of their stickers so I wouldn't be asked again. (I guess we're all fighting for visibility -- perhaps some of us are just better at marketing than others.)

Clearly, the perception of the Dyke March as being, in Wolfson's words, "anti-Pride" or "anti-mainstream" reflects a preference in today's gay community for assimilationist activism, as opposed to in-your-face political theater. In that context, the Dyke March is crucial. Yes, it is, as Wolfson says, "something radical and grassroots." But it's also "something that is part of everyone . . . it's important that it happens in Boston, so we can have a diversity of experience. So you can say, 'I went to Pride and bought a flag' and 'I went to the Dyke March and yelled really loud.' "

We can argue till we're blue in the face about whether the Dyke March's politics are effective. As a community, we still do not present a single united political front. But that's okay. It's been argued that the gay and lesbian movement will most likely draw strength from a range of organizations containing more than a handful of token dykes. As Urvashi Vaid has said, "Diversity in leadership, not a single leader, is what the gay-rights movement needs."

Whether or not the Dyke March can continue to provide that diversity is uncertain. For now, we might just have to be content with the certainty that on Friday, June 12, at 7 p.m., a bunch of dykes will get together in Copley Square and work toward figuring that out.

---

*R.J. Grubb writes the "[Grrr! Talk](#)" column; she can be reached at [rjgrubb@aol.com](mailto:rjgrubb@aol.com).*

---

[Respond](#) to this article.

---



| [home page](#) | [what's new](#) | [search](#) | [about the phoenix](#) | [feedback](#) |  
Copyright © 1998 The Phoenix Media/Communications Group. All rights reserved.

Phoenix

home

what's new

features

listings

music

movies

theater

dance

books

art

food

personals

classifieds

The Boston Phoenix

June 1999

## articles

| [articles](#) | [events](#) | [clubs & cafés](#) | [resources](#) | [hot links](#) |

## Fueling up

## The owners of Diesel Café talk shop

by R.J. Grubb

Judging from all appearances, **Diesel Café** is charmed. (Diesel, of course, is the queer-woman-owned and -operated java joint that just opened in Boston's hip spot to the north,

**Davis Square**.) For starters, newly elected Somerville mayor **Dorothy Kelly Gay**, who is known for her strong support of gay rights, stopped by Diesel on its opening day last month for a prime pundit moment. Picture it: there's the pink-pantsuited Gay in one of her first official acts as mayor, flanked by the tattooed, nose-ringed, wallet-chained Diesel owners, **Tucker Lewis**, **Jen Park**, and **Jenn Poole**. Gay proudly cuts the ribbon, gives the ladies a firm handshake, and warmly welcomes the new brewsters to the 'hood amid a hooting and clapping crowd. A Kodak moment, to be sure.

GRRRL TALK



From there, people of all ages, styles, and (presumably) sexualities poured into the café. A few weeks later, people keep coming. Can't say I'm amazed. Cheap eats. Excellent coffee. Cool ice-cream drinks. Lots of cozy corners to hang your hat. And pool tables. Plus, for a coffeehouse, it's quite a looker. High ceilings, exposed pipes, shiny hardwood floors. Diesel has a laid-back West Coast energy along with a relaxed al fresco air, thanks to its flashy garage-door façade --

which exposes the entire front so that folks can leisurely sip liquorless elixirs while enjoying the long days of summer. What more could you want?

But don't be fooled by the easygoing atmosphere. Things haven't always been so smooth in Diesel-land. To hear the owners talk about their three-year-long trial of getting the place up and running, it wasn't easy.

Sure, things started out simple enough. At Herrell's ice-cream store in Harvard Square, three young queer gals met, hung out, even dated. Before long, they noticed that Boston is a wee bit short on places to hang. "Building Diesel made a lot of sense to me for different reasons," says co-owner Lewis, 29, a Cambridge native. "I can't see

myself as a suit or in any sort of corporate world. Plus, there's a unique energy in coffee shops, and an eclectic mix of people working behind the counter and hanging out. It seemed perfect to me. We just didn't know what we were getting ourselves into."

So what took 'em so long to get up and running? According to Park, 21, who dropped out of Harvard two years ago to work on Diesel full-time, the delay was caused by "a mix of money, location, luck, and getting majorly screwed over once." The screwing came from a shady deal involving a now-defunct Central Square coffeehouse that was known as much for its secondhand smoke as for its weekly poetry readings. Initially, Park, Lewis, and Poole, 27, envisioned Diesel in Central. The deal fell through after a six-month-long ordeal, but the setback didn't last. "The very day we found out we didn't get the [coffee shop] was the day I read the ad for the space we did get," Lewis remembers. "So, one door closed and one door immediately opened."

In many ways, the move to Somerville was ideal for Poole, who's lived there for a number of years. "I like walking down the street here. I feel at home," she says. "There's just so much happening here and lots of new developments taking place. In a lot of ways, I think we lucked out."

But once they got to Davis, the real work began: the trek through the mire of municipal licensing. "We didn't know how or where to begin," explains Lewis. "There's so much. I've always been serious since that first second, but there's just so much that you can easily lose yourself." Like obtaining electricity permits, zoning permits, finding parking spots where there are none, writing and rewriting a 100-page business plan, and attending seemingly endless public hearings. "You feel like you're always proving yourself. After a while, you question or doubt the process and wonder if it's ever going to work," says Park.

Believe it or not, in Diesel's case, what ultimately worried Somerville residents was that the café's pool tables would encourage neighborhood ne'er-do-wells.

"People thought we were trying to sneak in with pool tables and ruin the neighborhood," explains Lewis. "But we thought we were trying to create a positive space for the neighborhood. Something that's unique." After participating in numerous hearings that often turned into heated shouting matches, they were prepared to open without the tables and apply for a license a year later. Yet, in a two-fold victory, they got both their coveted parking variance and a billiards license. Immediately, they started the arduous task of converting the space from an eyeglass store into a coffeehouse. To speed things up (and to save some cash), they worked as laborers along with the contractors. On weekends, they painted the ceiling and walls and built the cabinets. Construction lasted four months.

Now it's payoff time. Even if working 16-hour days every day seems a bit like Diesel boot camp, they don't mind. Diesel is taking off like a rocket, frequented by everyone from folks on the fringe to bookish types to grandmas and grandpas to, of course, your pick of dykes. Customers fuel up in the morning, grab hummus and avocado sandwiches in the afternoon, and cool off with a frosty mocha slide or a game of pool until closing. "That was our primary goal from the beginning," explains Park. "We want to be diverse and different and inclusive. That's very important to us. We're creating this place and want it to be what people want it to be." Right now, one thing's for sure: people just want it.

*Diesel Café, located at 257 Elm Street, in Davis Square, is open Sunday through*



*Thursday from 7 a.m. to midnight, and Friday and Saturday from 8 a.m. to 1 a.m. Call (617) 629-8717.*

*R.J. Grubb is a writer living in Somerville. Got news? Let her know about it at [rjgrubb@earthlink.net](mailto:rjgrubb@earthlink.net).*

---

**Respond to this article.**

---



| [home page](#) | [what's new](#) | [search](#) | [about the phoenix](#) | [feedback](#) |  
Copyright © 1999 The Phoenix Media/Communications Group. All rights reserved.