

DAWN TORONTO
122 GALT AVE.
TORONTO, ONT. M4M2Z3

October 19, 1986

Dear friends:

Attached please find an Open Letter to the Disabled Consumer Movement, the latest copy of our DAWN brochure (please note our change of address), our DAWN NOTES newsletter and a brochure about our upcoming provincial conference of disabled women.

We would ask that you give the Open Letter to the Disabled Consumer Movement the attention that it deserves as this is critical to the women involved. For more information on the issue, we suggest that you contact:

The Coalition for Gay Rights in Ontario
Box 822, Station A
Toronto, Ontario
M5W 1G3

or:

The NAC Lesbian Issues Committee
344 Bloor St. W., Suite 505
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 1W9

Of course, we would be very pleased to discuss this further with you.

We thank you for your support.

Yours truly,

The DisAbled Women's Network,
DAWN Toronto

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Encl.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE DISABLED CONSUMER MOVEMENT FROM
THE DISABLED WOMEN'S NETWORK, DAWN TORONTO

On Oct. 11, DAWN Toronto held an all day event, entitled FIGHTING THE AMAZON IMAGE: DISABILITY, CHRONIC ILLNESS, BODY IMAGE AND LESBIAN IDENTITY. The turn-out was excellent. Lesbians came, but so did straight or heterosexual women, bisexual women and women who preferred not to label their sexuality in any way. Disabled lesbians strongly felt that they faced negative, oppressive attitudes and actions from not only the general public, but also from WITHIN THE DISABLED CONSUMER MOVEMENT. They asked DAWN Toronto to send you this Open Letter.

DAWN was formed last year to promote the full equality of disabled women. From the beginning of DAWN, minority women have been welcome including native women, black women, other women of colour, immigrant women, older women and lesbians. In fact, a clause protecting minority rights is in our Constitution.

We feel that it is very important that those who are treated unequally organize to fight for their rights. This is the very heart of the disabled consumer movement. We don't want charity. We don't want sub-human status. We want our rights. We want equality.

Unfortunately, disabled people are not necessarily free of prejudice. Homophobia, the irrational fear and hatred of homosexuals, is deeply rooted in our society and widely

accepted among disabled people.

Thousands of gays and lesbians were murdered by the same Nazi butchers that slaughtered millions of Jews, gypsies and disabled people. Yet even in Toronto now, as the recent murder of a gay teacher in High Park shows, "queer bashers" feel they have the God-given right to beat gays and lesbians, even to death. And many disabled people share the same prejudice, or, at least, do not question it. Disabled lesbians need to know that such behaviour and attitudes are not OK in disabled consumer groups, that sly jokes and comments are not funny to the people who are publicly representing the disabled, and that discrimination because of sexual orientation (our choice as women to love women, or men to love men) will not be tolerated.

Disabled women find often that disabled consumer groups are even more conservative than the rest of society. Perhaps disabled people sometimes try to earn human status and the approval of the mainstream by becoming super-conventional. Many disabled people seem to adopt a rigid set of rules: a man smokes a pipe, leads the group, and does not cry; a woman stays at home, looks after her money, and leaves him in the limelight; and a family is a man, his woman and their children. Period. No exceptions. Sexism then becomes even admired among some disabled people who mistake machismo, or bullying, for assertiveness or leadership. Even a woman who "goes out on the town" with casual male dates may find herself snubbed or criticized in a community where gossip

travels faster than Wheeltrans.

Some women refuse to come to DAWN meetings because "there are lesbians there". One well known writer spreads lies that "lesbians rape disabled women" (over 50 per cent of disabled women have been sexually assaulted according to a recent Manitoba survey. Their assailants were male).

Although some of our members, a small minority, are lesbian, all of us feel that it is essential that every woman, especially every disabled woman, has a right to control her body. That means she has the right to choose whom she will love and whom she will sleep with.

We ask the disabled consumer movement first of all to print this letter in your newspapers, to put it on your bulletin boards, to reproduce it for your members, and to discuss it at your Board meetings and Annual General Meeting. We ask you to re-examine your attitudes towards gays and lesbians and to support the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation under the Ontario Human Rights Code. We ask you to write your provincial Member of Parliament and let her know that you support such a move and write Mr. Ian Scott, the Attorney-General, and tell him that you support the full protection of gays and lesbians under the Ontario Human Right Code.

DAWN Toronto looks forward to working closely with the disabled consumer movement on this and other issues of mutual concern and we thank you for your support.