

AGENDA

"Taking the Law into Your Own Hands"
May 30, 1992 9:30 to 4:30

9:30 - 10:00 Introductory Remarks

10:00 - 10:45 Panel: "Are We Family?" A look at whether and how lesbians want to be acknowledged by the law.

Gwen Brodsky

Who benefits? A look at which "spousal benefits" are available and the arguments pro and con going after them.

Gwen Brodsky is a Vancouver lawyer who specializes in cases about lesbian rights and other equality rights issues.

Carol Allen

Family as benefit or burden from a race, sex and lesbian perspective.

Carol Allen is a Black lesbian feminist, articling student and works for LEAF.

Diana Smith

Why We Want to be "family". Union organizing for lesbian and gay rights.

Diana Smith is a member of the lesbian and gay benefits committee and is active working for lesbian and gay rights in the union context.

Lee McKay

What about the Mothers? Custody, access and maintenance issues between lesbian co-mothers.

Lee McKay is an editor and writer in Children and Feminism and active in the Lesbian and Feminist Mothers' Political Action Group. She is also married to her lesbian partner.

10:45 - 11:00 BREAK

11:00 - 11:45 Discussion Groups: Do we want to be making family claims?

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think that lesbians should have the benefit/burden of family law between ourselves.
 - should we be able to marry?
 - should we be liable for/entitled to maintenance when we break up?
 - should non biological co-mothers be able to insist on custody or access rights?

2. Should lesbian partners seek the same benefits that heterosexual partners have?
3. If we go to court for the benefits that heterosexual partners have, should we be arguing;
 - (a) that benefits available to heterosexual partnerships or families (eg. dental plans, immigration sponsorship) should be available to same sex partnerships on the same basis, or
 - (b) that the benefits available to heterosexual partnerships or families (eg. dental plans, immigration sponsorship) should be available to everyone, and everyone should be able to pick a person to whom the benefit applies, or
 - (c) either (a) or (b) depending on the nature of the benefit, or
 - (d) making some other argument
4. If we want benefits ordinarily available to same sex partnerships, what do we say to the heterosexuals who say "you can't have the benefit without also having the responsibility"?

11:45 -12:00

Caucus Formation

An opportunity for participants to meet and discuss topics of particular concern to them. Anyone can call a caucus - and she will be joined by others who might be interested. Some possible caucus groups might be:

- lesbian mothers with custody or access problems
- lesbians whose partners are citizens of other countries
- community accountability when lesbian cases go forward
- lesbians of colour
- what is the nature of our oppression as lesbians and how do we want to describe ourselves in law.
- working class lesbians
- political strategies to combat homophobia
- trade union work etc. etc. etc.

12:00 - 1:00

LUNCH

(bring your own: there are also Chinese, Vietnamese,

Italian takeout nearby)

1:00 - 1:45

Caucus

1:45 - 2:30

Panel: What Do We Need To Protect Us?

Shirley Masuda:

The Protections we need. The experience of lesbians with disabilities.

Shirley Masuda is active with DAWN, the Disabled Women's Network.

Mary Eaton:

The problems with "sexual orientation" protection under human rights legislation and the Charter.

Mary Eaton is an author, activist and teaches law at the University of Ottawa, Faculty of Law.

(TBA)

Getting there from here. Working within the framework of "sexual orientation" protection.

2:30 - 2:45

BREAK

2:45 - 3:30

Discussion Groups

Questions:

1. How has the law impacted on your life as a lesbian?
2. What is the most important inequality that needs to be addressed?
3. What legal and political strategies should we be pursuing?
4. Where do we want to be five years from now?

3:30 - 4:30

Report Back