

Journal 2
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I was scheduled to train on front desk duty last Wednesday at the William Way Community Center; having been somewhat familiar with the layout of the building from my previous orientation, I went straight up to the room. I met up with a colleague of mine from Drexel University also volunteering her services for the community center.

During orientation for the front desk we were told of the standard, “do’s” and “don’ts” of being the central point of contact. It really is being the central point of contact because all of the telephone calls get routed through the front desk, and you are the first person people see when they enter the building. In fact, one of the things that the center stresses completely is information dissemination. Many of the people calling, or walking in, are seeking information on special events, clubs, or “Queer-friendly” shops or eateries. They stress the fact that we should use every means at our disposal to find the information requested. Above all, we ought to never say “I don’t know.” Instead, if a quick answer cannot be found, request the individual’s telephone number so that the front desk person can find the answer from one of the center’s more experienced individuals and call them back. In all of my years at working for various places that stress “customer satisfaction” and “clients first” I have never come across this type of resoluteness to serve constituents.

One thing that rather scared me was the lack of security. Understandably, William Way Community Center (WWMC) cannot afford to hire full time, or even part time, security personnel. Ben, the volunteer co-ordinator, and person leading the orientation, assured us that there have not been very many problems—and even less that could not be resolved by full time staff members. An older member of our group named Dick, apparently familiar with problems that strike community based organisations like WWMC, asked many questions about problems which would have never even occurred to me.

For example, he asked about the problems involved with sex solicitors. To which, Ben suggested that we report such incidents to the staff member on duty, and *not* interfere in any way (mainly due to the seriousness of the charges involved.) Ben said that such an issue has actually come up in the past, and it was quickly resolved by the staff member on duty. The person was banned from returning to the center.

Another relevant problem was one of teenage panhandlers. How would one deal with panhandlers at WWMC, after all, panhandling is illegal? Ben recounted a story which had quickly turned into an “incident.” A young man entered WWMC and started asking for change of the people seated up front. When he approached this one woman, she exploded in anger. She started to shout epithets at the kid. It was not long before a staff member arrived and attempted to resolve the situation. The kid retorted that he had been kicked out of his home for being gay. To which, the staff member replied that the same thing had happened to her, and yet she was still able to make it without panhandling. Further, that if she could make it, so could anyone else... that no one deserved any special treatment. Ben quickly rushed to the scene when it was apparent that the shouting had increased threefold. He separated all of them, gave him some money and asked him to leave. At this point, Ben said to us, that he was sick and tired of

the *myth of meritocracy* in America. I was already beginning to raise a fuss when I heard that him recount the bit about “if i can make it, you can.” When he explicitly mentioned the myth of meritocracy, I could but hold my extreme approval for his statement. I almost started clapping! I thought to myself: “Yes! He gets it!” Someone outside of my bubble (SSJ, and professors) gets it!

I found it ironic that in a place where people have been repressed socially, that the extremist libertarian views are still upheld. Here’s a kid who’s been kicked out of his home for being gay, and we (as a community) are throwing back into his face the rhetoric of “just desserts.” That kind of depressed me too, though. A conservative Republican psychologist friend of mine (the type of friend that you love to hate, so you will fruitlessly argue politics, nature–nurture etc.; but when it’s all over, you still count that person as a friend) asked of me: “As a sociologist, gay pride–fest, and gay pride–day must be an interesting subject of study.” To which I answered after much thought: “a capitalist, is a capitalist.” Capitalism knows no borders of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, to name but a few of our social schisms. Capitalism will exploit for a profit anyone and everyone.

There’s an interesting quote from the movie called *Stonewall*. It is historical fiction of a country kid who comes to New York City several months before the Stonewall Inn gay riot on 28 June 1969 at 3:00AM. During one point of the film, the protagonist and a local civil rights group leader have invited a *Village Voice* correspondent to write an article on the unconstitutional anti–gay state laws. One of those laws was that a proprietor of a shop was forced to refuse service to any known homosexuals. So the men went around NYC and announced that they were homosexuals before requesting service. Over and over again, they kept getting served. The only thing they got was a quizzed look from the bartenders, as to say: why should I care? At one point they ask a waitress why she is continuing to serve them. Her answer: “fag money is still money.” She smiles and walks away to fulfil their order. Although non–race bias was stressed, represented as “Queer without borders.” No group has learned this better than the bourgeoisie.

Make no assumptions! That is what was told to us by Ben. Just because someone comes in looked like a man, and asks for the bathroom, it does not necessarily entail that they need the men’s room. The instruction was to direct them to all three bathrooms, unless the person explicitly said which one to go to. I thought to myself that this was simple enough. Unfortunately, when I was actually on duty, someone flew really low under my radar, and stumped me. A young man, five o’clock shadow, male jacket, male acting, male speaking, no makeup, but wearing a loose flabby dress approached me. He asked if I had seen a girl around here, who was a friend of his. I had seen no one for hours, except for a heavy–set girl sitting in the lounge area. I had told him that there had been no one except for that girl. He went away and came back without approaching the girl seated in the lounge. He reiterated, “are you sure that there hasn’t been anyone around?” I said to him that I hadn’t seen anyone except for her. I asked him, “are you sure it’s not her?” He let out a small chuckle, and replied (in a manner akin to: well, of course not, you blockhead) “um, heh, nno. That’s *not* her.” I shrugged and suggested that he wait for a bit. When he got up to leave, the girl was this older man dressed similarly to him.

I never saw *that* one coming. I guess I’ll start to get used to these inversions of

internalised roles. There are so many different combinations, with regards to sexuality, and sexual expression. I have never really thought about it before. I really only thought that it was black and white: straight, gay, bisexual, transgender. Now, it's becoming more and more apparent that there seems to be a very grey scale in between. Each gradation seems to have its own set of rules and customs; each slightly different with their own nuances; yet when not expected these slight aberrations from socially imposed norms could cause quite a bit of paradigm changes.