

Document 101: Third World Lesbian/Gay Conference (1979)

On October 13, 1979, the day before the national March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, Asian American lesbian activist Tana Loy gave an address before the Third World Lesbian/Gay Conference. The excitement she felt was shared by many at this groundbreaking conference. Loy's speech is an example of the political importance of personal identification with a specific lesbian and gay community as an important basis on which to build an activist movement. Even something as simple as a gathering of like-minded people in a room can be a major inspiration for those who work for lesbian and gay rights. The feminist slogan "the personal is political" is demonstrated in Loy's speech.

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The strength that comes from being here and being out with you is... what happened to us at the Asian American caucus, what happened to us personally and politically. Somehow we felt—immediately and immensely in tune with each other.... In the context of this history making conference, we Asians, gay Asians... have for the first time, for many of us, with open hearts and minds, run toward each other. (Applause)

And we all know that for a Third World lesbian and gay man, to do something that personal is highly political. It is very much as though we had been in a wasteland....

But today we are going toward each other, and we are sharing our strength with each other, and with all our brothers and sisters here today.... [We acknowledge] the fears and frustrations that keep our own people in the closet as Asians and as lesbians and gay men. Many of us cannot even come out for fear of deportation; and yet I know there are many Asians who are going to be out on that street tomorrow, knowing that's a reality in their lives.

In our short time together, a support system has evolved from which we have drawn our strength, from each other and from all of you here. And out of this strength we have collectively decided to march together as Asians. (Applause) We come to you to share our strength, as we have come out strong with each other. We express our strength and power with all of you; with all of us. Because when we are out tomorrow it will be the Third World lesbian and gay people, side by side, as one voice, to say no to racism, no to sexism, and no to anti-gay bigotry.

Source: Tana Loy, "Who's the Barbarian?" Gay Insurgent 6 (Summer 1980): 15.