

Gay Sexuality Conference

By Beth Weems

Gay women and men from all over the Midwest traveled to Normal, Ill., April 2-4, to take part in a Gay Sexuality Conference sponsored by the Gay Alliance of Illinois State University. Participants, four of whom came from Ann Arbor, attended a variety of workshops and shared in discussions.

In addition to workshops, the conference featured a non-sexist film festival and a women's coffee house. And, as a highlight, Rita Mae Brown, gay writer and poet, spoke to the group about power and gay economics.

Workshop topics included massage (for tired travelers), creative sexuality, transvestism and transsexualism, sex therapy, sadism and masochism, radical celibacy, masturbation, pre-orgasm for women, and non-monogamy and alternative life-styles.

Pat Harroun, an Ann Arbor woman who attended the conference, spoke in detail about several workshops. "Creative sexuality," she explained, "deals with ideas about places, times, and ways to be loving someone—striving towards working and living in a loving environment." This workshop included both men and women which Pat found to be detrimental to a deep discussion.

According to Pat, the transvestism and transsexualism workshop was disappointing since those involved followed traditional sex roles. Political consciousness was completely absent from the discussion, she felt.

However, the radical celibacy workshop, led by a gay woman celibate and a straight woman celibate, impressed Pat very much. The women emphasized putting "one's energies into oneself and one's work, realizing that celibacy is a choice, not just being in between relationships." Celibacy helps one "become aware of herself before she reaches out to others."

Pat also spoke highly of the non-monogamy and alternative lifestyles workshops. For this discussion the women split off from the men. They formed what became a supportive group, discussing feelings about trying out new kinds of relationships. All agreed on "the importance of having open communication, honesty, self-honesty, and trust." Women's energy and how it is spent was also discussed.

Rita Mae Brown emphasized the importance of gays talking about more than sexuality. She urged them to move on to gay economics and to think of their next conference in those terms.