

Gay People's alliance newsLetter

INTRODUCTION

The Bryn Mawr-Haverford Gay People's Alliance was founded in the fall of 1975 in order to promote a supportive social environment for the gay community on campus, to educate the college communities as to the nature of homosexuality in contrast to the prevailing misconceptions and prejudices against it, and to create a political climate in which oppression of gay people might be effectively combatted. In the two years we have been in existence, we have sponsored a number of speakers on gay issues, held three successful open dances, and worked to raise the consciousness of the student community. We are issuing this newsletter to provide the community with general information on the subject of homosexuality and to remind our readers that we are eager to promote an open and intelligent atmosphere for the discussion and understanding of homosexuality. Our meetings are held every Thursday at 8:30 P.M. on the second floor of the Bryn Mawr College Inn. Our office is located in the basement of Jones Hall at Haverford; office hours are posted on the door.

HAVERFORD

Never did I see so much lovely dogwood
tamed on lawns as yesterday at Haverford
both pink and white, and also Peter Bevin
proud of his pitching and very wide
his grin
like the youngster's on the cornflakes box.
To meet "a real writer who wrote books"
he sought me out.

He was a troubled boy
late last night among his friends
when I
long hours leveled my attention
at him,
at only him. And all the time
we kept looking into each other's
eyes,
not catching each other at it by
surprise
but as if endlessly drinking, in
spite of
himself in love, I willingly in
love.

Paul Goodman, poet,
novelist, playwright and critic,
is best known for his book, Growing Up Absurd.

--Reprinted from The Male Muse,
published by the Crossing Press.
Ian Young, editor.

ON BEING GAY

To be a gay person in our society is to be almost constantly aware of pressures, subtle and not-so subtle, to conceal or to alter one's identity. Most of us have adjusted to this fact, and are accustomed to the daily decisions we must face, weighing factors of convenience, security or friendship, with our desire to be honest about ourselves. Each time we decide to be honest, we are taking a risk. It may be as minor as someone staring at us in the street, or as major as a jail sentence, or the loss of custody of a child.

In our society, one major risk we take is a legal one: in many states, sexual acts between members of the same sex are illegal. Of course, people are rarely prosecuted under these laws. I suspect that, if they were, it would be easier to change them. It is hard to imagine, though, the effect of such laws on people who, because of them, are subject to intimidation, blackmail, and coercion by private citizens, government officials, and the police. In addition to these laws are laws like the one presently being debated in the Pennsylvania State Senate, which would prohibit the hiring of homosexuals for some state jobs, such as state police, and nurses and staff in state institutions dealing with the handicapped, the mentally ill, or juveniles.

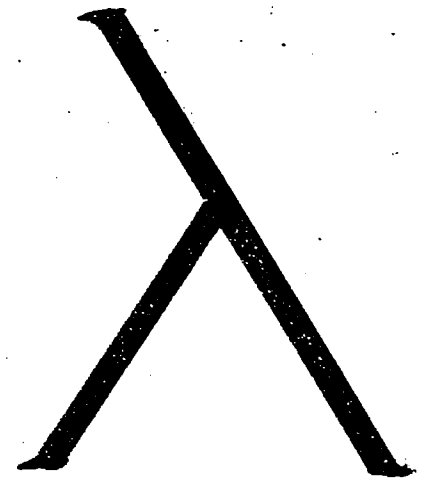
Removing these legal barriers to equality is a crucial step; it is only the first step, however, since discrimination on an extra-legal basis is prevalent throughout our society. Gay people who choose to acknowledge their sexuality, or those who simply fail to conceal it "properly," are subject to discrimination in housing, in employment, in educational opportunities, in child custody cases, and in legal protection. When this discrimination is not legally sanctioned, it is often ignored by authorities.

These practical risks often make it very difficult for a gay person to live openly, especially when added to such practical deterrents are emotional ones, such as the pain of one's parents, the loss of friendships, or the ridicule of acquaintances. All these aspects combine to make the simple statement, "I am gay" a very risky business. So why do we do it?

I think we have several reasons for refusing to be invisible any longer. One of the primary ones is very personal: it's painful to pretend to be something you're not. It's inconvenient, and it makes it hard to get close to people. Secondly, although at this point it is risky to our careers and to our personal lives to be openly gay, we feel that one good way to change this situation is to refuse to hide. By becoming visible we demonstrate our numbers, our solidarity, and our humanity. People faced with us are forced to re-evaluate their prejudices and to think of us as human. By refusing to hide, we also show that we do not accept society's definition of ourselves as sick or inferior people who are only fit for hiding.

We want to be visible as gay people, finally, because we like who we are, because we are proud of being gay, and because we feel that ours is a valid, valuable, healthy way of living.

Dona Brown



POETRY

Poetry
on the morning
of my departure from Fantasyland--

This half-life I've been living--
The frail existence
between
the stars of eternity
and the beating of my heart--

The splendor of self-discovery!
The pain of self-disclosure!

Lonely.
Steady rhythms
counting the seconds--
pain rushing through
the secret places of night--

I don't believe
I've taken myself this far--
this soon--

OH! to free the chains of Destiny!
To escape the throes of Determinism!

The utter emptiness--
The aching for fulfillment

And the determination
to voice this love
that has for so long been silent.

Strength.
The wasteland of my soul
filled by the warmth of a friend--

Accepting me,
Holding me.

Mary Lou Soczek

RELIGION AND HOMOSEXUALITY IN AMERICA

The Judeo-Christian heritage is undoubtedly the major source of repression of homosexuality in America today (as well as of any form of sexual behavior other than intercourse between man and wife for the purpose of procreation). The so-called "sodomy laws" and other forms of legal codes and social taboos which deal with "unnatural" sex all have their roots in this tradition. What I would like to do here is to examine briefly the biblical sources from which these repressive attitudes arose and to note their effects upon the religious heterosexual's view of homosexuality and the religious homosexual's view of him- or herself.

There are three main references to homosexuality in the Bible, two in the Old Testament and one in the New. The first is the tale of Lot and his adventures with the two angels of the Lord in Sodom (Genesis 19), which was destroyed by God after the men of the city tried to

pressure Lot into handing over to them said angels, "that we may know them." (Thus the word "sodomy" was coined, and came to be a sin.) The second is Jehovah's own words to the people of Israel (later to become known as the "Mosaic Code"), and is very clear and straightforward: "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination" (Leviticus 18: 22). (Note that only male homosexuality was forbidden; lesbianism, while frowned upon, was rather common amongst the Israelites.) The third reference is from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, verse 9, where he warns that certain types of people are not likely to inherit the kingdom of God; among these are included the malakoi, a Greek word meaning "effeminate men" or "male prostitutes" but quite often translated as "homosexuals."

Now, there are many, many straight people living between New York and San Francisco who take the Scriptures
(continued on page four)

quite seriously, not to mention literally. Not surprisingly, many of them hate queers. Others, who are somewhat more enlightened, pity them. My cousin Carol is one of these compassionate types, and the way she chooses to deal with my "problem" is characteristic of their general attitude towards homosexuality: it is obviously wrong and sinful and unnatural--the Bible makes that perfectly clear, and you can't argue with the Bible--and it has led me from the true path that God has set for me. It is indicative of the depravity of our times ("if only Christ would come again!"). Yet she has hope that I will some day turn back to God; in fact, she prays every day that God will make me miserable, so that I will forsake my evil ways and allow Him to change me.

Not being Jewish or Christian, it is easy for me to be cynical about such things, to question the morality, if not the validity, of a God who destroyed the men of Sodom, who wished to rape His agents, while saving Lot, who offered them his two virgin daughters instead. There are countless gay men and women, however, who are also Jews or Christians, and have to deal not only with the oppression from without but also from within. Many are able to reconcile their sexual orientation with their religious convictions by reinterpreting certain passages of the Bible. Such interpretations range from the rational (for instance, parts of the Mosaic Code can be seen as rules for survival meant for a nomadic tribal existence which are hence inapplicable in today's society), to the questionable (there have been attempts to show that the Sodomites wanted to "know" the angels in the literal, rather than the "biblical," sense of the word), to the patently absurd (one radical European priest actually tried to prove that Christ was gay, in order to intensify His identification with the downtrodden

masses). At any rate, gay churches and synagogues have sprung up and grown rapidly in recent years in most major cities of the nation; many of them, in particular the evangelical Metropolitan Community Church, are attempting to do for the gay rights movement what Martin Luther King, Jr., did for civil rights.

However, there are probably just as many religious gays who cannot reconcile their beliefs with their lifestyles, who spend their lives in the closet plagued with guilt, because they firmly believe that they are sinners. A recent sociological survey of male homosexuals (Weinberg and Williams, 1974) has found that "among those who regard religion as very important, those who perceive homosexuality as more in violation of religion score lower in stability of self-concept (and, in the United States, self-acceptance) and higher in depression than do those who do not perceive such a violation...."

For the true believers who are reading this, I urge you to pray for your gay brothers and sisters who are in this dilemma. And, while you're at it, maybe you could offer a counter-prayer for me--it never hurts to play it safe.

Bill Reynolds



—Really, Mom, there's no need to worry because the dorm's gone coed...

GLOSSARY

Androgyny--a state combining the characteristics of both sexes. Increasingly thought of as a state toward which all individuals must strive to overcome mutual oppression and misunderstanding.

Bisexual--a person who is sexually attracted to both sexes, not necessarily equally.

Butch & Femme--used to describe male/female roles in a lesbian relationship. These words are rejected by many lesbians as offensive and inaccurate in describing relationships.

Closet (in the)--a term used for gay people who conceal their sexual preference.

Cruising--the term used for the process through which some gay people seek out a sexual partner, usually in a place known to be frequented by gay people (such as a library or park, restaurant, bar, dining center).

Chicken--adolescent or younger male homosexual.

Dyke--originally a derogatory epithet, now used with pride by some lesbians.

Faggot (also Fairy, Pansy, Homo, Queer, Nelly, etc.)--derogatory epithets for male homosexuals. The hostile use of these labels is vicious and oppressive.

Gay--the most widely used term for homosexuals; approved of by the homosexual and enlightened straight communities.

Gay Bar--(There are many in Philadelphia--call GPA if you're interested)--bars, often with dancing, frequented almost exclusively by homosexuals. Bars range from very cruisy to conversational.

Hermaphrodite--a person who possesses the physical characteristics of both sexes (a genetic trait).

Lambda (λ)--the eleventh letter of the Greek alphabet; originally used to denote oppressed minorities. It has since evolved into the symbol for gay liberation.

Lesbian--female homosexual.

Lezzie--derogatory term for lesbian.

Pederasty--sexual relations between an older male and a young boy.

Sodomy--(a) a legal term: any "unnatural sex act," (b) a biblical term: sex between two men, or a man and an animal.

Straight--a heterosexual; a person whose sexual interests are for members of the opposite sex.

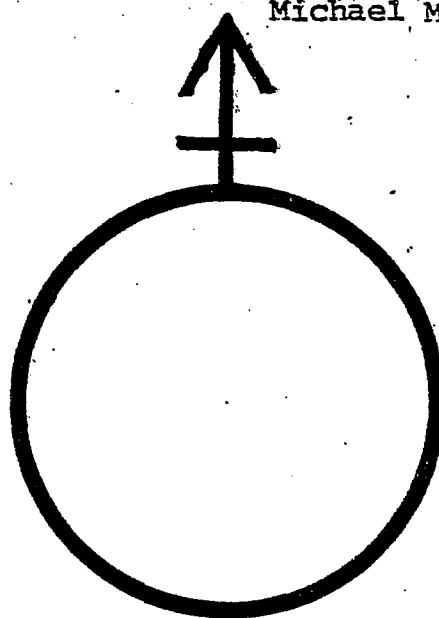
Transsexual--a person who has physically altered (usually surgically) his or her body in order to acquire the physical characteristics of the opposite sex. Most transsexuals do not consider themselves homosexuals.

Transvestite--a person who dresses in the clothing of the opposite sex. They are not necessarily homosexuals.

Trick--a sexual encounter, usually casual.

It is important to realize that words are not neutral things, and that they carry with them associations which render some acceptable and others oppressive. Our choice of words has an effect both on our own attitudes and on the people around us. It should therefore be the concern of every person to choose his/her words with regard to the sensibilities of all individuals with whom he/she comes into contact.

Tom Fischer and
Michael McDonald



GAY QUIZ

SECTION I: MULTIPLE CHOICE

1. Christopher Street is (a) a gay book-store in Philadelphia (b) a psychiatric expert on homosexual issues (c) a street in New York City where people in gay bars resisted harassment and arrest (d) a gay journalist
2. D.O.B. stands for (a) Dykes on Bikes (b) Daughters of Bilitis (c) date of birth (d) Defense of Bisexuality
3. Leonard Matlovitch is (a) a dishonorably discharged Air Force sergeant (b) a civil rights worker (c) a California State legislator (d) Chairman of the National Gay Task Force
4. Which of the following was heterosexual? (a) Andre Gide (b) Leonardo da Vinci (c) Elizabeth Cady Stanton (d) Vita Sackville-West

SECTION II: FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. Name three gay novelists (of either sex).
2. Name two states in which homosexuality between consenting adults is legal.
3. Who wrote The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas?
4. Name one characteristic which identifies a person as gay.

*****ANSWERS*****

SECTION I: Score one point for each correct answer.

1. (c) On June 29, 1969, police began a normal routine of harassment of a gay bar, Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village. The customers resisted this harassment, however, creating headlines and inspiring gay people to resist discrimination.
2. (b) Daughters of Bilitis is a lesbian organization founded in the 50's to protect the civil rights of lesbian women.
3. (a) Leonard Matlovitch was given a dishonorable discharge because of his sexual preference. He publicized the issue of gay rights and fought the ruling in the civil courts.
4. (b) Elizabeth Cady Stanton was heterosexual, or at least married.

SECTION II:

1. Give yourself one point for each answer, and an extra point if you have included both sexes.
2. Any two of the following, for one point each: Illinois, Connecticut, Colorado, Hawaii, Delaware, Ohio, New Mexico, California, Maine, South Dakota, Washington, North Dakota, Oregon, Arkansas.
3. Gertrude Stein (one point).
4. If you answered sexual or affectional preference for members of the same sex, give yourself one point. If you answered anything else, take off five points.

Possible Score: 12

