GAY SYMBOLS

THE NECESSITY, RATIONALITY, OBSURITY AND SYMBOLOGY OF THE GAY SUBCULTURE

see story on page 3
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General Interest Meeting
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GAY SYMBOLS

Sappho Speaks

December 1983

By Sharon Moxon

The pink triangle, the lambda, the color lavender, the words buildyke and faggott, key chains and colored hankies, the words bulldyke and faggott—these are just a few of the gay symbols used by members of our community to express their sexuality. Each symbol has its own meaning and significance, and together they form a rich and diverse language that allows us to communicate with each other and express our identity.

Of course, many gay people never actually display these symbols themselves, because they are closeted or view their lifestyle as a strictly private matter. However, they may use them to signal to other gay people that they don't feel the need to use this form of expression. Yet, these people still know the meaning of the symbols and can pass the message from one to another. There are also the most blatant, extrovert gays who boldly and preserve the most non-conformist of the traditions for us, reminding us of our connection to that larger rainbow-clad world of communication and understanding.

Aside from the astronomical symbols for male or female linked together, the most widely used and recognized gay symbols are the pink triangle, the lambda, and the Amazon labyrinth, which are often worn as buttons or jewelry, or used as logos. Gay symbolism also includes styles of dress, such as wearing lavender, tattoos, colored hankies, or single earrings, or capturing a certain look, such as gender ambiguity, the 'caster clone', or the 'leather queen'.

Gayness is also reflected in mannerisms and the use of slang. Says Judy Grahn, in Another Mother Tongue, "Gay people of all social strata develop intricate codes and language influences that operate on an ordinary, sounding language patterns to convey information that members of the Gay culture understand."

Slang includes such terms as "lover," or "bastard," or "girl," or "friend of Dorothy's," or "safe sex," or "gay people of all social strata". Grahn describes this culture as being known above all for its emphasis on balance and harmony, and that there is much to indicate that the spiritual heart of the ancient Indian Way was Gay leadership including both sexes.

In Gay American History, Edwin T. Denig reports that a white man wrote of the Crow Indians in 1850, "Strange country, this, where males assume the functions of females, while women turn men and make with their own sex." (p. 308).

Historian Sue-Ellen Jacobs also studied records from the last centuries for references to Gay people in American Indian tribes ("Berdache: A Brief Review of the Literature," Colorado Anthropological 1, 1968: 25-40). Out of ninety-nine tribes with recorded material, there were none that relate to Gay culture in eighteenth, with twenty including specific references to lesbian. Jacobs lists the exact offices held by Gay persons in twenty-one tribes, and cross sections of the functions, especially those of crossdressing people who take on the work, dress, and social position of the other sex while establishing sexual and even marital bonds with their own sex. In the last century, twenty-one tribes hold offices with regard to Gay functions, Gay transvestites were the medicine people or shamans of the tribe. In others, they were important in connection with the spirit and ceremonial activities, ceremonies, funerals, or served as oracle.

Edward Carpenter, author of In the Supreme Type Among Primitive Folk: A Study in Social Evolution, reports that records indicate that having a Gay nature and undertaking crossdressing created a pool of initiates from which certain priesthoods of shamans drew their apprentices. (p. 18).

Grahn examines the study of Gay Native Americans with the idea that overall, the collected accounts indicate that high status was accorded to Gays in these cultures.

Other such tribal communities providing for similar social offices for Gay people include the Celts and Faries. Grahn indicates that homosexuality was an integral part of most cultures in pre-Christian and pre-patriarchal times.

In those times, when our own culture allowed us our own set of functions and systems of values, we also developed our own cultural symbols. Many of these symbols have what we use as a list of our codes, or emblems, and they have significance remaining from those times, though, in most cases, we are unaware of their origin or meaning.

Most people who recognize these symbols as part of gay culture do not know where they came from, or what they really mean. This is due to our tradition of secrecy—of passing along information mouth-to-mouth—of the need to hide our identities. As history has progressed, our need to identify others as gay has increased and more and more pertinent due to the exclusion of gays and gay struggles from mainstream art, literature, and history books. Our folklore is hidden, the definitions are obscured, and the names of our gay ancestors are lost.

It was not until the advent of Christianity that we were forced to deny our sexuality, morality, and oppression that were brought with it that gays were forced to go underground at a time when our historians tell us. At the time when gays began to be persecuted, we brought our symbols with us, and they remain today that keep our sub-culture alive. In the future, these symbols will continue to be used to pass along information and symbolize our identities. The symbols we use can be found in our daily lives and often have a much deeper significance than to broadcast "I'm One Too."

The sub-culture

The need for a system of codes to identify other gay people is a reality. Unlike other American sub-cultures, members of the gay community are not immediately recognizable by sight. Since our culture is not one of ethnic heritage, we don't share common physical characteristics distinct in that we are not raised within our sub-culture, which limits our access to role models and people who are also different as a result of their identity, peer support, and cultural information. Because of our isolation within the mainstream society, we have a need to find and have contact with others who are like us, others who have gone through the same experiences and who who view the world in a similar way, others who have the same thoughts and desires, and face the same oppression. Since homosexuality still carries a stigma, we are often forced to do our searching in a secretive way.

The first step in entering the gay community is meeting another gay person, but finding this first link can be difficult. Most people living in our society know some small fact about gay life, whether it is knowing someone gay, knowing the name of a gay organization, hot-line, or publishing, reading a gay novel or being aware of a gay neighborhood bar, or coffee house. Those of us who want to know more, we are often denigrated as an invaluable source of information about our new world. From there, it is easy to discount what we have heard. In metropolitan areas, we can usually find many interest groups, respected businesses, organizations, social outlets, literature, and publications, and we can learn what to look for to identify things, places, and people gay. Our subtle ways of identifying one another are what link us together as a network, support system, and community.

Symbols as identification

With our need for secrecy, and things such as anti-gay jokes and slogans gently but constantly reminding us of this need, many gay people turn to us as sources of logos or other small items as means of communication. The use of gay symbols is a form of unspoken communication, the initial contact with other gay people within a hostile society. We learn to make ourselves constantly aware of any signal, any sign, any symbol that mean something in our worlds. Wearing the emblems, using the correct slang, and going to gay gathering places are ways of identifying others and discovering positive role models on the way toward building healthy identities for ourselves.

Identities or form underground networks. Grahn, in Another mother Tongue, and Evans, in Witch-boys and the Gay Counterculture, explore our ancient heritage and the idea that gays and lesbians were once respected members of society and used the same places in their communities held open especially for them. Even today, writes Grahn, "Because Gay people often go first, taking the risks, breaking through the veils and walls that lie in the frontier zones of ideas and ways of being, we infiltrated their worlds and more pertinent due to the exclusion of gays and gay struggles from mainstream art, literature, and history books. Our folklore is hidden, the significances are obscured, and the names of our gay ancestors are lost. It was not until the advent of Christianity that we were forced to deny our sexuality, morality, and oppression that were brought with it that gays were forced to go underground at a time when our historians tell us. At the time when gays began to be persecuted, we brought our symbols with us, and they remain today that keep our sub-culture alive. In the future, these symbols will continue to be used to pass along information and symbolize our identities. The symbols we use can be found in our daily lives and often have a much deeper significance than to broadcast "I'm One Too."

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SYMBOLS

continued from page 3

British Isles prior to 58 B.C. Green was the primary color worn by the Faris, who also frequently held pagan religious rites on Thursdays (p. 76-79).

Though tattoos are not gay symbols in the same sense that the lambda or the color lavender are, they are incorporated into our culture, especially lesbian culture, and are a symbol of something daring and strong. Tattoos were used to mark ancient lesbian witches as sacred reasons, as part of the pagan tradition. This custom was taken underground, and used as evidence of witchcraft during the witch trials. Persecutors called these body markings spots left by 'the devil.' Many tribal people believe that tattoos help the gods to claim their own children, to recognize them after death as one of their own, and to welcome the spirit into the other world (Grahm, p. 94).

A more recently acquired symbol is the pink triangle. This symbol was used, in the concentration camps in Nazi Germany to mark the homosexuals, some 250 thousand which were put to death. Gay people wear this symbol today, upside-down, to express the solidarity with those who have died in our war against the oppression of gays, or of any group of people by another.

Beyond identification

These symbols have become more than just a way to label something gay. They embody a common web of information, of myths and values and ways of living, that have themselves become part of gay culture, of what it means to be gay. Some, like the pink triangle, are continually charged with significance on their own. Perhaps somewhere in our deep subconscious, or 'race memory,' we know instinctively what they mean and have emotional ties to them. At least, we develop these ties through contact with other gay people, as part of learning what it means to be gay, by listening to gay stories, sharing gay art and literature, and coming to understand what it is that ties us together, the common experiences, insights, and philosophies that make us alike.

The gay lifestyle is more than just loving members of one's own sex. The need to find other gay people is not driven solely by the desire for sexual relationships. Gay people also have similar lifestyles, development of personal identities, ways of viewing the world, sharing values, philosophies, politics, and shared experiences which provide for similar backgrounds. It is the responsibility of people like us to realize how anything can influence us, the same emotions and thoughts, that we are part of and expand our social circles to include other gay people.

As each separate cultural item carries with it a unique symbolism, it provides for the expression of diversity among gays. Not only do they reveal homosexuality, but also political views, lifestyle differences, spirituality, personal inter-relationship preferences, group membership, hobbies, sexuality, and general interests. Wearing a logo that displays the symbol. Pink triangles and bandanas both signify gayness, but prominent figures or styles which oppress, or at least the acknowledgement of this, where the pink triangle is just plain sexual, the woman wearing an Amazon labyrinth gives a different impression from one wearing the lambda, as the labyrinth signifies a stronger sense of matriarchal heritage, the power of women, and is used in relation-first philosophy of the lambda, which signifies gayness as the upmost concern.

To be gay is not the norm. This we all have recognized; we are different; we have all gone through a largely similar set of feelings and processes to discover and accept ourselves, and we are bonded yet by our shared experience of forming a positive sense of identity as a gay person. The realization or acceptance of "I am gay" is usually followed by "What is gay?", or a period of exploring everything that symbolizes, homosexual identity. Initially, we look for role models. We become familiar with prominent figures or styles which represent gayness. We also tend to explore our heritage. For some, exploring gay heritage means to resist, or the other way around, trying to understand the significance of the term for the sub-culture. This has happened with 'breakdancing,' which has lost its special meaning to the black youth of Harlem now that people everywhere are practicing it. It is no longer their identity, it is just another trend. For gays, this has happened with the wearing of a single earring, painter's pants, bomber jackets, and lumberjack shirts and boots. We have also lost the disco, cross-dressing (gender ambiguity or 'the androgynous look') has appeared in all the fashion magazines, and even the color lavender to mainstream, heterosexual culture.

Our heritage and history are vital sources of power. Just as we have been reclaiming words that describe us, such as Dyke and Fag, and turning the negative power they give others into a positive power for ourselves, we have a lot to gain from reclaiming our legends and ancient ways of living. We can look back to our roots and build positive identities from there. Our heritage gives a sense of isolation within a largely non-gay society, and respect are gay.

Ano ther woman, who has written a book, Another Mother Tongue: Gay Words, much of the information was drawn. I encourage you to read Another Mother Tongue (Beacon Press, Boston, 1984), which is an important asset to Gay culture, not only for reclaiming our past, but also as a tool for building a better future, one of strength, unity, knowledge, and acceptance.

Sappho Speaks

December, 1985

GAY WORDS

AZAMON: A name of a People in Northwest Africa in 3000 B.C., and a later group in the south of Europe, known as warrior-women. The Azmons have been depicted in battle by sculptors and artists with one breast showing outside their tunics. This has inspired the myth that they had to cut off one breast due to their use of weaponry intended for men.

BAD: A word derived from the Anglo-Saxon work badel, which means 'hermaphrodite.' This word, which once meant 'gay,' is now used to judge something to be acceptable or not (Grahm, p. 275).

BISEXUAL: The sexual orientation of 80% of all Americans, according to The Kinsey Report.

BULLDYE: A word used to describe strong lesbians, originating from the name of a warrior queen of the Celtic Hicca people, Boudica ("boo-dike-a") who led her people against Roman imperialists in A.D. 61 (for background, see Grahm, pp. 133-145).

BUTCHE: Having mannerisms attributed to masculinity. Derived from the French word for goat, boeuf, referring to the cross dressing of the pagan priest or shamans to take the part of the horned god or god goat.

CAMP: Indigenous Gay subculture, having a particular set of outlooks and values, and processes. These provide us with awareness of the world. We can look back to our roots and build positive identities from there. Our heritage gives a sense of isolation within a largely non-gay society, and respect are gay.

FAG: From the sacred firestick of the ancient Gay wizards, a branch of the fagus (beech) tree. Also related to the Roman faves, a bundle of sticks. Kindling for the fires of witch trials.

FAIRY: A brown-skinned tribal people of ancient Europe and the British Isles.

GAY: To be homosexual, or pertaining to homosexuality; to be happy or merry.

HERESY: From the root word haren, meaning to choose. The ability to choose one's beliefs and lifestyle. (Random House Dictionary)

HETEROSEXUAL: Non-gay.

HISTORY: A written account of what non-gay white males have done. Since men can write, they have always done that.

LAMBDA: Greek letter used to symbolize gayness. Meaning unity in the face of oppression.

LESBIAN: From the Isle of Lesbos in Greece, home of the poet Sappho, who wrote love poems to women.

QUEER: Label assigned by mainstream to groups or ideas different from their own.
In the Courts: Lesbian and Gay Custody Battles

by Sue Rochman

Homosexuals...Parents...for many these words still remain a contradiction in terms. Thus many homosexuals and heterosexuals are concerned about how homosexuality affects the legal procedures surrounding child custody and adoption. Aware of this fact, the Fifteenth Annual Conference on Women and the Law held a panel discussion specifically on Lesbian and Gay Custody and Adoption Saturday, October 27; a discussion that addressed both the personal, emotional situation along with the legal dimensions of the issue.

The panel was composed of Roberta Bennett, a private attorney in L.A. specializing in family law, particularly lesbian and gay custody suits; Stephen Lachs, a Los Angeles Superior Court Judge, head of the family division and a prominent gay activist for the past 15 years; and Roberta Bennett's ex-lawyer, a prominent professor at SDSU; and Gloria Allred, an attorney specializing in civil law who is well known for handling cases involving lesbian and gay rights. Although each panelist addressed a different aspect of custody or adoption procedures they were in agreement that all custody cases, whether involving parents who are gay or straight, have similar problems. Due to the no-fault divorce settlement in California, where no person need be placed as the person responsible for the divorce (incompatibility being enough of a reason), child custody cases are often used as ex-spouses as a form of retaliation. Thus, most judges view all custody cases as "undesirable".

For this reason much effort is made by the attorneys on both sides to have custody determined in the conciliation court— a court designed especially for this purpose. Here is the case heard by an expert in custody matters rather than a judge. Only about 5% of custody cases remain unresolved after conciliation court and go on to a judge's courtroom. The custody cases discussed by the panel involved divorces between a woman and a man, with one partner now coming out as lesbian or gay. According to Roberta Bennett, in those instances when a trial does occur, "Your chances are as good as the judge who happens to hear the case." She went on to explain, "Homosexuality is only one factor the judge will look at regarding custody or visitation rights. In California, a parent's homosexuality is not grounds in and of itself to refuse custody. But this does not mean the court cannot consider—it they will."

She went on to explain that these cases usually involve a high number of expert witnesses, due to the need to explain your judge on homosexuality and a homosexual lifestyle." Some points she stressed were:

1. In preparing for a custody hearing you should also prepare a case for visitation rights (weekends, summers, etc.) in the event custody is denied.
2. The judge will have to find more than a parent's homosexuality to deny visitation— including overnight stays.
3. The client must inform their attorney of everything that took place between the ex-spouses so that there are no surprises during cross-examination.
4. The lawyer must know the relationship of the child to both parents.
5. If the client currently has a live-in lover the lawyer must know everything about the lover's lifestyle and politics—once again so that there are no surprises for the attorney during cross-examination.
6. The lawyer must know if the children know about, and how they feel about, their parent's homosexuality.

Stephen Lachs was able to provide the lawyer's perspective in these matters. He stressed that the courts role was not to approve or disapprove of homosexuality, but to determine what is in the best interest of the child. Overall, in his opinion, the courts in L.A. are acting responsibly in this position and are not weighing homosexuality as a larger factor than any other.

Sharon Young, who has herself been involved as an expert witness in many custody cases, spoke on the need for there to be three expert witnesses in these types of cases. Firstly, a therapist is required for the lesbian or gay person seeking custody as it can be an emotionally draining situation that turns into a personal attack on their homosexuality by their ex-spouse and her/his attorney. Secondly, an academician or research person aligned with lesbian and gay rights is necessary to relate the history of homosexuality. In addition, this expert should discuss a study conducted by Richard Green that compared children raised by homosexual parents and heterosexual parents which shows that there is no difference between the groups in their academic or emotional development or in their perceptions of their own sexuality.

Thirdly, an evaluator is needed to evaluate the child's relationship to both parents. This should be an individual who is not aligned with lesbian and gay issues and who is perhaps not gay. Their interest should be in discovering what is best for the child.

Gloria Allred, in relating experiences of some of the trials she has been involved in, emphasized that as a prospective work field lesbian and gay rights is one of great interest. But she raised the question that attorneys who take on such cases “better do them right.” For ultimately they are affecting the entire homosexual community and not just the individuals involved. She, as did Roberta Bennett, pointed out that to a large extent the outcome is based on the judge and that a judge's personal convictions can, in the end, decide whether you win or lose. Questions from the audience following the panel discussion showed personal concern for how the courts perceive single women, single lesbians, and lesbian couples when the issue is adoption. On the issue of single women adopting, it was discussed that when women give up their children for adoption they also choose what type of family they would like their child to go to. Thus it is difficult for women who are themselves single mothers to rationalize giving their child to a single parent. They perceive a stable home as one with a mother and a father.

Panelists seemed to agree that there are pros and cons to the idea of two women presenting themselves as a couple desiring to adopt. Whether it can be a positive or negative factor depends on the judge's attitude and on how the case is progressing. While in some instances it could be a sign of permanence and stability, it could work against the case, for, as Gloria Allred pointed out, "probably nothing is seen as more radical than two women together."

Sappho Speaks
December, 1985
Love and Lust
...in the age of AIDS

Compiled by Russell Lewis

Gay men are at more or less risk depending on what sexual practices they engage in. Low-risk sexual practices, those which do not involve the exchange of body fluids, are a means of reducing the risk of HIV transmission. But AIDS is obviously not the only factor in having sex. In expressing himself sexually, a gay man not only takes into consideration his risk level, but also what kind of sex he wants, how much he wants, and what the overall role of sex is in his life. Each person finds his own balance of maximum gratification, minimum risk.

AIDS fits into the equation of sex and love because of the epidemiological fact that gay men are in the highest risk group.

David is a 38-year-old writer and intellectual who came out of the New Left.

As gay liberation was picking up steam, there was the sense that to enjoy your sexuality was a liberatory move, that this was an upright society, a work ethic society, and one of the advantages gay people had is that since we were outside of it in some ways, we could sort of enjoy ourselves more. Hedonism was almost a political imperative. At the beginning of gay liberation, I think a lot of people really felt that. There was something very positive about that feeling, but it did tend to degenerate into compulsive behavior.

When I first started going to the baths, I felt very positive about it. I think this is a common experience for gay men—their being alienated growing up, they'd been kind of estranged from people— and here was this situation where you were almost operating on an animal level, of just getting warmth and contact from other people, which was in direct opposition to what you felt about yourself, that you couldn't touch anyone else, that you were this weirdo. There was something very positive about being able to do that. It was a way of really overcoming a basic level of alienation. I didn't like sex for years when I first started having it. I was too much in my head. I was too alienated from my body, and I was probably too guilty. One of the ways that I finally sort of overcame all of that was just by doing it enough, so that it just became more comfortable and more pleasurable. I mean, it took me a long time to enjoy sex. That was true of a lot of people too. I think people grow up alienated anyway, and then if they were gay before gay liberation they couldn't talk about it and they were super-alienated.

There were two major periods when I went to the baths. I went to the baths for a couple of years, then I stopped for a couple of years, then I went back for a couple of years, and then I stopped for good five or six years, then the first time because I kept getting venereal diseases. It was just too sleazy, although I also think that feeling was connected with the sense that it was an escape and that it was too easy. It was easy to avoid trying to relate to people. You just kind of have sex instead.

But, I've had a series of relationships for most of the seventies. None of them were monogamous. The first one lasted for a number of years, then the next one lasted for a year. Then there were shorter ones, a few months at a time. Then there were a couple that lasted about a year again. During those times I wasn't that promiscuous. If I had someone I liked who I was seeing regularly, that made a big difference.

The second time I stopped going to the baths, I more clearly felt I had gotten to the point where it was escape from involvement. I forced myself to look for people more in other places and to sort of try to get involved with those people.

It's hard for me to really remember all this chronology, but I think it was after my second bathhouse era that I started hanging out with different Black sailors and going out with them. Although I didn't go out with any of them for more than a few months, they were very, very likeable for the most part, and it was exciting to feel I could relate to people who were so different from me. I had a tremendous admiration for them in a lot of ways, because their lives were so shifty, but at least they didn't complain. I always felt I complained too much, when in fact I had a lot of advantages which these people didn't have. They may have complained to each other, and there may have been some kind of weird macho reasons why they didn't complain to me, but basically they just seemed determined to have a good time, you know, to just maximize their pleasures and do the shit work they had to do and get it over with. At the time, it seemed very admirable that people could be that way, because most intellectuals tend to inflict self-torture and be morose and dwell on various unsatisfied aspects of their lives. I do think less than I used to.
Steve

Steve, 22, an occasional media student at UCSD, grew up in the San Diego area. He has aspirations to hortenism and, not surprisingly, his dream is to own a coffeehouse/performance/gallery space.

What has happened in recent times is that since my awareness of AIDS has increased, my sexual behaviors have changed. There's been a real shift in this calendar year—I couldn't exactly date it to any incident or anything—to a greater emphasis on the whole body sexual experience of sex rather than just on the genital experience.

It could have easily been to fall into the traditional trap—I think it's almost a juvenile trap—of genital fixation if it were not for AIDS. It's something that is one of many juvenile characteristics that were formerly in the forefront of gay male life. Those characteristics include, among others, initial fixation, constant promiscuity as a way of life, strong emphasis on looks and youth and beauty and your partner as an object rather than as a person. All these things are pretty much the logical result of the attitudes of the gays in the seventies—of coming out, of liberation, of sex as being an end unto itself, of the emphasis on looks and youth and beauty. There's been a real shift in this experience of sex, of the satisfaction that we'll derive from it in with maybe some emotions. So, I've had some wonderful orgasmic sex. It's the intimacy, the physical intimacy without knowing them.

For a lot of people I know, the one night stand is the rule, because once they've been to bed with each other, that awkward strange intimacy is there and they'd rather not deal with it because it is uncomfortable. I've done that myself, where I no longer see the person I might have genuinely grown to like if I ever had a chance to know them.

I'm redefining intimacy for myself. I hope I can break away from those definitions that I've had and that's defined as simply intimate the physical sense with a person who is virtually a stranger when you wake up in the morning. It's very awkward to have been physically intimate without knowing them.

There have been exceptions to my general to seek after the bought experience: the relationship as aconsumption of goods. If I'm honest in analyzing my roles and my positions, and what goes on in my mind and where the pleasures are and modify my behavior than not be doing too carefully. I don't know. Part of the power aspect of sex and modify my behavior than not be doing too carefully. I don't know. Part of the power aspect of sex and modify my behavior than not be doing too carefully. I don't know. Part of the power aspect of sex and modify my behavior than not be doing too carefully. I don't know. Part of the power aspect of sex and modify my behavior than not be doing too carefully. I don't know. Part of the power aspect of sex and modify my behavior than not be doing too carefully. I don't know. Part of the power aspect of sex and modify my behavior than not be doing too carefully. I don't know. Part of the power aspect of sex and modify my behavior than not be doing too carefully. I don't know. Part of

Chuck

Chuck is a 23-year-old Sociologist major at UCSD who grew up in the Los Angeles area. He describes himself as an aspiring gaypie (gay yuppy), but has had more than his initial stigmas match his aspirations. His dream is to own a 'condo with a white picket fence'.

I take AIDS very seriously. It's something that I've accepted as something that's going to exist—you know, we accept AIDS. It's one more danger in my life. When the epidemic first started, it was a hard thing to just let go of that and try to do something to be that I was going to have to worry about, that friends were going to have to worry about. It threw a big scare into me.

When I initially discovered what AIDS was all about, that's the time that the mystical cancer gay people had come up with,' when they finally began to realize that it was sexually transmitted, it just struck me so hard that I could go out and possibly accidentally have sex with someone who was in the incubation period. It was a really scary thought that I would die from it.

At the point when I really got to know about AIDS, I said, 'Oh, my god, I'll never have sex with another human being again.' For about five months after that I didn't have sex. Sex wasn't worth it, death, and having sex to me meant a strong possibility of death. It was almost like an equation: Sex equals death. It was easy enough to abstain with that kind of information.

There were a lot of things we knew, now that we didn't need to do. We didn't know anything about safe sex techniques. We thought everyone who had sex with a carrier would get it. Now they're saying that 10 to 20 percent of those who are exposed to the virus will go on to develop the full syndrome. This is a huge difference from thinking that if you had sex with someone who had been exposed then you were going to die—'the bullet's been fired, I'm gone.' And, after it became known that blood and semen were the carriers of this and that you probably didn't get it by kissing someone, it became a lot easier for me to accept, 'Okay, they're like kissing and cuddling and would find that hard to give up. I would much rather have the opportunity to be intimate with someone and modify my behavior than not be intimate at all.

I don't say I'm perfect in this regard. There have been exceptions to my having safe sex. Looking back, that was stupid. It's happened more recently, as well. It's usually been a situation when I've had a little too much to drink or when I haven't thought about what I'm doing too carefully. I don't know. Part of it is that pressure form other people that I run into. I very definitely still find people who want to do things that aren't safe.

But, my problem really came, and still remains, revealing to a partner that I'm 'into safe sex' and 'yes, I'm willing to do this and not that.' If you meet someone or you're having dinner with someone, it's not something that you want to talk about. And then when things spontaneously come up later on, you don't want to stop in the middle and say, 'Well, I'm going to do this, here's why, and all that.' It's a really difficult thing. Someone wants to fuck you—that you tell, a lot of times they really don't understand and take it as that if you're in the middle of sex and say, 'Well, I don't want to fuck you because I might get AIDS, or give you AIDS.' It's sort of common down the whole experience.

I think that safe sex techniques are the...
night I had set out with the thought in my mind, 'I'm going to go home with someone.' And I achieved my goal. I guess that in itself kind of scared me. If I want to do that, I have to take the plunge. I say, 'Well, I want to go out and have sex with someone.' That bothers me because I feel our personal identity is not that pervasive. It bothers me that in the gay community sex is the main function of life, and we're all cut out the same. Sex is what makes me have a conflict with that, because I don't feel that's like me.

I came out about a year and a half ago. All this time I'm sitting there thinking, 'Wow, I'm really attracted to men'-with someone.' That bothers me because I got past that and realized 'Wow, I must be weird and I can't live my whole life like this because it's so scary and I'll never get married and have children and that.' But I grew out of that. When you figure, 'Hey, this is me and I can be who I am.'

In this situation, you compartmentalize your needs. You look to your friends for the things you need. For people for affection needs, some people for sexual needs. You just sort of don't make the connection between the two. My needs had a lot to do with financial security, and my needs have a lot to do with intellectual advancement. I don't do what most people do. I don't like to go to bars. I don't like to socialize that much, except with my own friends, who I just sort of talk to a lot. I'm very concerned with being a writer, which is a solitary occupation. I think it's unlikely that I'll find someone I'm compatible with on all levels and kind of settle down. Frankly, I just think I'm an exceptional person, and I need to find someone who's going to be weird and I can live with around. And the ones that are around, I don't tend to be that sexually attracted to.

I would like a relationship with someone. For me, something like a marriage is not that important. I care very much about sharing spaces. Where do we buy this person? You know? Do we buy this person? We get our chances.
The Beach Area Community Clinic provides a screening program for gay males which tests for sexually transmitted diseases. The screening program also incorporates screening questions and examinations designed to uncover any signs of AIDS. The screening session provides a opportunity for discussion of the issue of AIDS and the relative risks of sexual practices. In addition, Gay Male Screening personnel can provide clear explanations of the present state of knowledge on AIDS. Examinations and tests consist of the following:

1. A genital exam
2. A rectal and prostate exam
3. Urinalysis
4. Gonorrhea cultures
5. Syphilis blood test
6. Hepatitis B Vaccination Screen
7. Complete blood count
8. Medical history
9. Stool culture for ova and parasites
10. Rectal gram stain
11. Lymphadenopathy (enlarged lymph nodes) exam

The cost is $55. In most medical settings, the lab costs alone would be well over $100, plus the cost of an office visit. Thus, this is an inexpensive screening program.

Health Center Tackles AIDS

UCSD's Health Center started the academic year with a new challenge—to deal with the hysteria surrounding the AIDS crisis. They have chosen a novel approach, an approach which has largely been ignored by many other health and government officials, yet one which is perhaps the most effective. The Health Center has decided to initiate an education program designed to dispel many of the myths and fears about AIDS, as well as to inform the "high risk" groups on how they can minimize their chances of contracting AIDS. They presented one of their first projects on Oct. 22 by sponsoring a "Symposium on AIDS", which was attended by approximately fifty people. The purpose of this initial program was to inform the general student population about AIDS: how it is being dealt with in San Diego and at UCSD, and to inform students about how the disease is transmitted and, perhaps more importantly, how it is not transmitted. Present at the symposium were representatives from the San Diego AIDS Project, The UCSD Health Center, UCSD's Counseling and Psychological Services, and the Owen Clinic, which provides medical services for AIDS patients.

Evident in the discussion were the variety of roles played by the various speakers. Dr. Steve Brady, a staff psychologist with Counseling and Psychological Services, discussed the impact that AIDS has had on the gay community, both in the form of the greater amount of stigmatism that gay people face because of the initial fallacious assumption that AIDS was a gay disease, and with the ways gay people have learned to deal with the fear of AIDS among themselves. One of Dr. Brady's key roles at UCSD has been to work with gay and lesbian students. He noted that AIDS has become a greater concern for gay students who are attempting to integrate their sexuality within a homophobic culture.

Dr. Daigneault, a physician at the Health Center, discussed the Health Center's role. Besides the education programs they have put into effect, they are also attempting to deal with various student needs. Much of this need is met simply by increasing the sensitivity of the Health Center's staff, and by providing a source of reliable information for students.

Dr. Daigneault indicated that those students who have personal health concerns about AIDS, yet are concerned with issues of confidentiality, need not worry. He strongly emphasized that all medical records are strictly confidential, and he noted the harsh legal ramifications of breaking that confidentiality. Furthermore, no notation will be indicated in the student's file regarding AIDS if that student is seeking advice or has questions regarding AIDS. It seemed of great importance to Dr. Daigneault, and the rest of the Health Center staff, that they create a comfortable and confidential atmosphere where students can openly discuss their health concerns without being stigmatized, categorized, or morally judged by the Health Center Staff.

Although the Health Center has decided not to provide the HTLV-III antibody test, they are prepared to discuss the pros and cons for those who are thinking of having the test done. Those who want the antibody test will be referred to San Diego County Public Health Clinic, where the testing is provided with strict confidentiality.

The Health Center has made available educational pamphlets about AIDS. There are also a variety of resources available both on campus and in San Diego. For more information, students can call the Health Center, the Lesbian and Gay Organization at UCSD (452-4297), or the San Diego AIDS Project (543-0300).
Gay Youth Alliance

Many gay youths in San Diego may ask the question, "What is there to do in San Diego for those under 21?" Most of the gay organizations, clubs, and activities are geared toward the 21 and older crowd. Studio 9 and Trax, both 18 and over dance clubs, may satisfy the interests of those who can fit into the Cliche scene, but what other alternatives are there for gay youth? Gay Youth Alliance has answered this question for many gay youth in San Diego.

After two years of growing pains, the Gay Youth Alliance is now becoming a very active part of San Diego's gay community. Phil Rector, PhD, and Frank Shine, a longtime facilitator at the Men's Center, are the original adult coordinators of the group. They are now becoming less involved, while encouraging members of the group to take on greater leadership roles. With its new steering committee and implementation of more specific committees, GYA is now making good progress. GYA attracts youth from many different areas and backgrounds such as local high schools, colleges, and the Navy. The ages range anywhere from 16 to 24. The group has its meetings every other Friday, which begin at 7:30 p.m. They are held at the Lesbian and Gay Community Center located at the Brass Rail and Video Plus. The meeting usually begins with general announcements followed by a discussion dealing with gay related issues. After the discussion there usually is an informal social, which may meet at the beach, Denny's, a member's house, a movie, or at Studio 9.

GYA has a 24-hour information line, which is (619) 233-9309. The recorded message may run a little long, but it provides access to a great resource of information on current gay related activities and organizations in San Diego. GYA also now owns one of the largest collections of gay literature in San Diego. For those who have questions and may want to write, the address is:

GYA P.O. Box 83022 San Diego, Ca. 92138

Gay Men's Chorus

The San Diego Men's Chorus, having begun as an idea among friends and lovers last spring, is now a reality. The first performance by the chorus will be late January 1986, with details to be announced.

The sound of a men's chorus is certainly nothing new to American audiences. It was part of the standard musical fare of the first decades of this century. Opportunities to participate in men's choruses came not only from colleges and universities, but also from businesses, civic organizations, and ethnic societies, such as the mannerchor of the German Turnvereins, which flourished in this country in the last half of the 19th Century.

Although men's choruses later suffered a decline in popularity, there has been a revival going on in America for several years, with some exciting results. Not the least of these has been the formation of several gay men's choruses around the country. The earliest organizations were founded in San Francisco and New York, followed by others in most major cities coast to coast.

With the support of the San Diego lesbian and gay community and some extra special help from the Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles, the dream of a men's chorus in San Diego is now a reality. A group of friends and lovers has worked hard since last spring to bring this organization into being. Those involved had felt very strongly for some time that the talent was here in San Diego for a superb choral ensemble. The result of these efforts is now the San Diego Men's Chorus.

The San Diego Men's Chorus has established itself primarily as a musical organization with the goal of challenging the musical potential of its members. However, the chorus recognized the potential for being an uplift and unifying force within the lesbian and gay community, as well as being a positive contribution to the San Diego community at large.

In a most generous gesture, the Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles staged a benefit kickoff concert on behalf of the new San Diego group in August, in Balboa Park's Casa del Prado Theater. The presentation of portions of their spring concert, "In The Mood," was met with overwhelming approval by an enthusiastic audience, and audition lists were nearly filled that night with the names of those interested in joining the local chorus. In the end, 57 men were accepted into membership, and rehearsals began soon thereafter.

Music Director Ken Caton has chosen an ambitious program for the opening concert, scheduled for the end of January 1986. Selections run the spectrum from classical to Americana, pop, and show tunes. This diversity of musical styles indicates the intent of the group to explore all facets of the choral repertoire.

Prior to the January concert, the chorus may be heard caroling at the new Horton Plaza Shopping Center from 7-8 pm. December 5 and 19, and on Sunday, December 15, from 4-5 pm. Further information on the date and location of the first concert will be published in upcoming issues of the local gay press.

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LETTERS

"Witches" and Women

Dear Editor:

"Bitchy Witch Power..." Debbie Mukuteit's article of last June is one of the more original approaches to feminism I've ever read. When I first read it, I didn't take it seriously. Who could? She seemed to rant about witches and feelings and nonsensical, impossible notions about men—both gay and straight—and women—"witches," lesbians and straight. But then I shared some passages with some friends, particularly Valerie Solanas' definition of a man, "a biological accident...an incomplete female, a walking abortion." This was a quote I had particularly enjoyed, yet my friends found no humor in it at all (nor, needless to say, any truth).

A male friend was offended by the whole idea, and scoffed at the concept of "male bonding." A female friend agreed with the overall message, but she mentined the violent tone in that one exquisitely worded passage.

Why are people so scared of words? Mukuteit, I believe, answers that question perfectly throughout her article. We are all too busy doing "business" or structuring our lives so as to leave a mark in history. We read words, some passages with some friends, but though our lips touch, and you turn away, but though our spark meets...usually it was...usually it was...usually it was a male, but sometimes it was a female. In the crowd I associated with, there were large numbers of bisexuals (mostly female). There were also people who called themselves gay, but sometimes you were liable to go home with someone of the opposite sex as well.

We touch, and feel a spark of joy, but though our skin meets our eyes do not and you turn away.

We kiss, and feel a surge of love but though our lips touch, our souls do not and you turn away.

Karen Lynn Pickens

Bisexual Acceptance

Dear Editor,

I am a liberal—quite close to radical—person. I am and have been pretty well acquainted with the gay crowd in Richmond, and I have friends in the gay crowd in San Diego. My friends in Richmond are liberal too. When I went to a bar, unattached as I was, I didn't really think about which sex I might go home with. Usually it was a male, but sometimes it was a female. In the crowd I associated with, there were large numbers of bisexuals (mostly female). There were also people who called themselves gay, but sometimes you were liable to go home with someone of the opposite sex as well.

In my short term of acquaintance with Sappho Speaks, I have noticed a general lack of bisexuals here. There seems to be a sharp line of division between heterosexuals and homosexuals. They don't often interrelate, and to a newcomer like me, this appears to be a mild form of mutual phobia. When this situation exists, bisexuals are outsiders. They occupy the line of division that is so rarely crossed by the other two groups. They might be looked upon as weird, "not knowing their sexual preference." The truth is, bisexuals are the most open-minded of the three groups. They accept the beauty of both sexes, and also recognize the right of people to make a sexual preference or not to have one at all.

I'd like to see the sharp line of division between homosexuals and heterosexuals (which I attribute to the general San Diego conservativism) broken down. I'd like to see bisexuality more widely recognized, and more widely accepted by both groups.

M. E. H.

Gay Study

As part of a President's Undergraduate Fellowship project and a Special Studies course, Russell Lewis and Sharon Moxon are conducting research on Gay Organizations on California college campuses.

Through interviews, observations, surveys, and other data, we will study how lesbians and gay men work together, the role of gay/lesbian student organizations in students' lives and in the university community, and the structure and politics of these organizations.

The goal of the project is to prepare a descriptive analysis of gay and lesbian student organizations which we plan to distribute to state colleges and universities as an academic and informational resource and as a networking tool.

We feel that this project is valuable not only from an academic standpoint, but also in terms of self-definition by lesbians and gays. Participation is extremely important for an accurate representation of gay student life.

If you are a gay/lesbian student, faculty or alumnus, please call us at (619) 452-2023, 235-6558, or write to Gay Student Groups as a Social and Political Force, Sappho Publications, B-023-H6, La Jolla, CA, 92037. We will be glad to send you a copy of our initial survey, or further discuss the project with you. Your input is absolutely essential.

SAPPHO STAFF

Editors: Russell Lewis, Sharon Moxon-Benton
Contributors and Production Staff: Rick Pollock, Sue Rochman, Janet Benton, Wendy Todd, Milford Chang, Karen Pickens, Carol Morales, John Russell Lewis, Wayne Fabert, Elisa Soboa

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Send submissions to: Sappho Speaks B-023-H6 La Jolla, Calif. 92037

Ladies' Night At The Whistle Stop

You smile, and I feel a ray of hope but though your mouth smiles, your eyes do not and you turn away.

We touch, and I feel a spark of joy, but though our skin meets our eyes do not and you turn away.

We kiss, and I feel a surge of love but though our lips touch, our souls do not and you turn away.

Karen Lynn Pickens

Sappho Speaks

December 1985