

SAPPHO SPEAKS

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GAY SYMBOLS

THE NECESSITY,
RATIONALITY,
OBSCURITY AND
SYMBOLOLOGY
OF THE GAY
SUBCULTURE

see story on
page 3

INSIDE

Gays and Adoption...page 5

Love and Lust...page 6

Fill these pages!

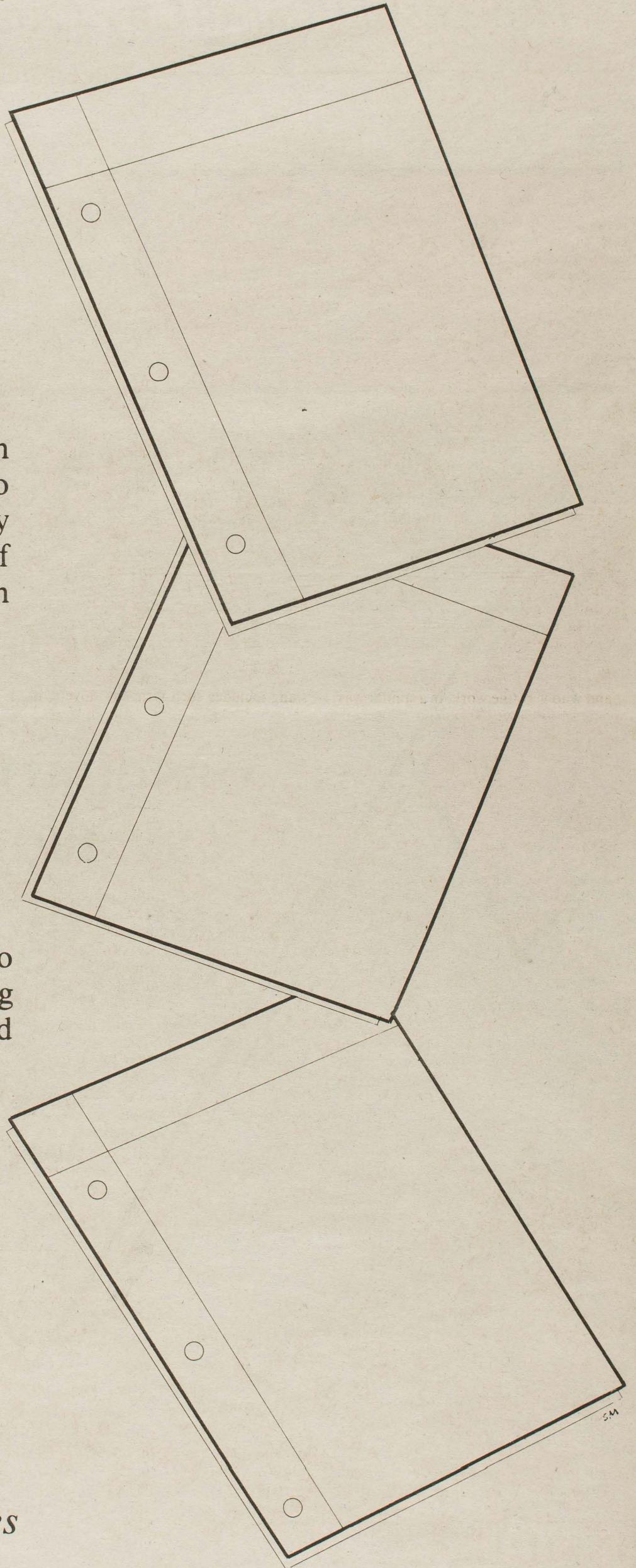
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GAY SYMBOLS

by Sharon Moxon

The pink triangle, the lambda, the color lavender, the words bulldyke and faggott, key chains and colored hankies...these are all symbols of the gay lifestyle. They transmit a myriad of meanings from one gay person to another, relaying information which is a part of the underground gay network that keeps our sub-culture alive. We use them as a kind of code language, a way of passing along information and symbolizing our identities. The symbols we use often come from the ancient past, 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. We are also different in that we are not raised within our sub-culture, which limits our access to role models, positive feelings about our identity, peer support, and cultural information. Because of our isolation within the non-gay world, we have a need to find and have contact with others who are like us, others who have gone through the same 'coming out' process and 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 publication, reading a gay novel, or being aware of a gay neighborhood, bar, or coffee house. Those of us who want to know more look further into what we know. Our first friend or lover usually acts as an invaluable source of information about our new world. From there, it is easy to discover the resources that are available.

In metropolitan areas, we can usually find many interest groups, respected business organizations, social outlets, literature, and publications, and we soon learn what to look for to identify things, places, and people as 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 gays have resorted to the use of logos or other small items as means of communication. The use of gay symbols is a subtle way of making that needed initial contact with other gay people within a hostile society. We learn to make ourselves constantly aware of any signals or suggestions of gayness 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.

Of course, many gay people never actually display these symbols themselves, because they are closeted or view their lifestyle as a strictly private matter, or for some other reason they don't feel the need to use this form of expression. Yet, these people still know the meaning of the signals and pick up the message from others. There are also the most blatant, extremist gays who hold and preserve the most non-conformist of the traditions for us, reminding us of our connection to that large underground network of communication and understanding.

Aside from the astrological symbols for male or female linked together, the most widely used and recognized gay symbols are the pink triangle, the lambda, and the Amazon labrynth, 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 'castro 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 inflections that operate within ordinary-sounding language patterns to convey information that members of the Gay culture can understand" (p. 24). Our slang includes such terms as "lover," or "forward" instead of "straight" when giving directions in a car, or phrases like "a friend of Dorothy's," "safe sex," or "one of the family," or the revelation of the knowledge of gay literature, art, locations, public figures, or current events. Different sectors of the gay community also include additional symbols in their culture, such as goddess imagery, women's music, sports, politics, or high fashion, and exclude others.

The use of one symbol alone does not reveal much about the wearer. Rather, it is the whole composition of dress, manner, action, and attitude that lets the object carry its meaning. The most telling of signals is that certain eye contact—held just a moment too long—that lets us know we have found one of our own kind.

The origin of gay symbols

According to gay historians, such as Judy Grahn and Arthur Evans, gay people were not always outcasts from society and did not need to hide their

a particular social role, and sometimes it is a dangerous and despised one" (p. 279).

In pre-Christian times, philosophical and spiritual aspects of life were commonly the charge of the gay people who functioned as shamans, healers, and advisors. Says Albert Bell, San Diego gay activist, "Where heterosexuals were the raisers of crops and children, homosexuals were the raisers of culture."

An example of tribal communities in which gays held special offices is in the cultures of Native Americans. Grahn explores these at length in her book (p. 51-72), discussing tribal values, customs, roles, and the offices and realities of Gay Native Americans.

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 dress and perform the duties of females, while women turn men and mate with their own sex" (p. 308).

Historian Sue-Ellen Jacobs also studied written records from the last few centuries for references to Gay people in American Indian tribes ("Berdache: A Brief Review of the Literature," *Colorado Anthropologist* 1 (1968): 25-40). Out of ninety-nine tribes with recorded material, there were references to Gay culture in eighty-eight, with twenty including specific references to lesbianism.

Jacobs lists the exact offices held by Gay persons in twenty-one tribes, presenting a cross section of the functions, especially those of cross-dressing people who take on the work, dress, and social position of the opposite sex while establishing sexual and even marital bonds with their own sex. In twelve of the twenty-one tribes Jacobs sites with regard to Gay functions, Gay transvestites were the medicine people or shamans of the tribe. In others, they were essential for high spiritual ceremonies, funerals, or served as oracle.

Edward Carpenter, author of *Intermediate Types Among Primitive Folk: A Study in Social Evolution*, reports that records indicate that having a Gay nature and undertaking cross-dressing created a pool of initiates from which certain priesthoods of shamans drew their apprentices (p. 18).

Grahn summarizes 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 gays 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 are what we use today as our codes or emblems, and they have significance remaining from those ancient times, though we are often unaware of their origination or meaning.

Most people who recognize these symbols as part of gay culture do not know why we use them, 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 become 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 and the witch-hunts, forced morality, and oppression that were brought with it that gays were forced to go underground and live in secret, our historians tell us. At the time when gays began to be persecuted, we brought our symbols into the closet with us, and they still remain, giving us a link to our ancient heritage, just as Christians



adopted the symbol of the fish during religious persecution.

In *Another Mother Tongue*, Judy Grahn examines the gay symbols and words which are in use today, and traces them back through history. The roots of these symbols were often spiritual and powerful.

Lavender, or purple, is a special color for gay culture. It has often been used as an identification in titles and slogans, such as "The Lavender Menace," a group of lesbians during the early women's rights movement, and "Lavender Jane Loves Women," the title of an Alix Dobkin album, and used as a color for jackets of gay-oriented books and for T-shirts bearing other gay slogans.

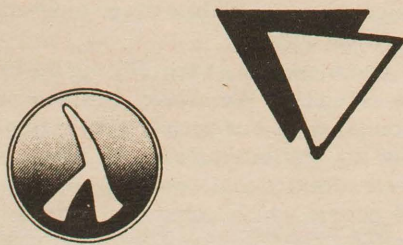
Says Grahn, "The connections between purple and ancient Gay stories and traditions indicate that it has considerably more significance than simply a mixture of 'female red' and 'male blue' colors," she says, "It has meaning from the tribal civilizations that preceded and underlie our modern world and has a place in the shamanic sciences and arts that prevailed in the long, woman-centered ages of human history before this primarily patriarchal era.

"Purple represents, brings about, and is present during radical transformation from one state of being to another. Purple appears at twilight and at predawn. It stands at the gate between the land of the material flesh in one world and the land of the spirit soul in another and is present in the envelope of energy that surrounds the body, usually called the 'aura' (p.6-7).

In the modern witchcraft tradition, purple represents power. It is also a color used in religious ceremonies, and has been associated with ancient royalty. Adds Grahn, "The claim Gay culture has to the color purple is not a recent innovation. In truth, it is of remotest antiquity, with connections reaching back as far as human memory can recall, into times before recorded history, even into the shamanistic times of so-called Stone Age People with their occult interpretations of the color spectrum. And even if no other Gay trait has lasted through the ages of history to identify Gayness, purple alone would be a clear statement of the antiquity of Gay culture" (p. 7).

Another color used as an identifying mark for gays, especially during the late '50s, was green. Derived from a children's often repeated saying, anyone who wore green on Thursday was automatically a 'queer' or a 'fairy.' Grahn traces this combination back to the early Fairies which inhabited the

continued on page 4



identities or form underground networks. Grahn, in *Another Mother Tongue*, and Evans, in *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture*, explore our ancient heritage and the idea that gays and lesbians were once respected members of society and that there were 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 zone of ideas and ways of being, we fulfill

SYMBOLS

continued from page 3

British Isles prior to 58 B.C.. Green was the primary color worn by the Faries, 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 lesbians and witches for 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 domain (Grahns, 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 among all gay people 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 consciously 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 share similar lifestyles, development of personal identities, ways of viewing the world and its values, philosophies, and politics, and shared experiences which provide for similar backgrounds. It is the need to relate with people who can understand us, people who experience the same emotions and thoughts, that urges us to expand our social circles to include other gay people.

As each separate cultural item carries with it its own symbolism, a means is provided 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 from an organization, for example, implies a whole set of philosophies which come from the activities of the group that displays the symbol. Pink triangles and bandanas both signify gayness, but the triangle shows a desire to fight oppression, or at least the acknowledgement of this, where the bandana is just plain sexuality. A woman wearing an Amazon labrynth gives a different impression from one wearing a lambda, as the labrynth signifies a stronger sense of matriarchal heritage, the power of women, and is more of a feminist-first philosophy than the lambda, which signifies gayness as the utmost concern.

To be gay is not the norm. This we all have in common: 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 very closely by our shared process 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 homosexuality. 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, especially for women, this exploration extends back into pre-patriarchal times. For others, discovering gay people and gay accomplishments in the last few centuries, or even decades, is enough.

In our search for identity, we come to share activities, literature, role models, and processes. These provide us with similar backgrounds and sets of experiences. This sets the precedent for similar ways of viewing the world. Our connection to one another reinforces this, as we share information and learn from each other. We develop a common awareness surrounding issues which affect us, often leading to sociological or political activism.

Our views are set apart by our position in society. We have crossed the boundary of our society's definition of our sex and broken a major taboo. We have admitted that we are part of a group of people which American culture has called "queer, perverted, fags, dykes, lezzies, pansies, dieseldykes, homos," all terms with negative connotations. Doing this, we have examined and questioned one of the strongest, most deeply ingrained assumptions: that we will be heterosexual, that we will get married. When we found that this was not true for us, it was easy to also question every other assumption and decide its validity for ourselves: what is masculine or feminine, what is appropriate behavior, what makes someone a 'good person', what is fair and just in society, etc. Questioning each belief we hold causes a

change in how we see ourselves and our relationship to the world.

Difference as Power

A problem with having most of our cultural communication occur underground or through symbolism is that we are not visible as a community to people who are not part of that community. We basically don't look any different, so we go unnoticed. Non-gays may think there are none or few of us in their environment, or that we all fit into a stereotypical description, while walking right past us without even noticing. Invisibility is interpreted as non-existence. This also inhibits some gay people from locating others like them, or from identifying role models. It also gives a sense of isolation within a largely unaware mainstream culture. Lesbian comedian Ivy Bottini relates that if one day all gay people woke up with a lavender dot on their foreheads, homophobia would virtually disappear because there are so many of us. Non-gays would find that people they love and respect are gay.

However, when some gays discover gay oppression and the need for secrecy, they attempt to just fit in with mainstream society rather than the gay sub-culture. Yet, if one truly does identify with aspects of gay culture and gives these things up, then giving up a part of one's identity, or of a group's, is a loss of power, both in terms of self-worth and in the struggle to be free of oppression.

Another phenomenon is that aspects or symbols of a sub-culture are often adopted by the mainstream culture, which dilutes the significance of the item for the sub-culture. This has happened with 'breakdancing,' which has lost its special meaning to the black youths of harlem now that people everywhere are practicing it. It is no longer their specialty; 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 for ourselves from the knowledge of strong role models and of the significant contributions gays have made to the world, as individuals and as a group.

Once we have done this and can establish peace and balance within ourselves, we can work toward creating an environment where we don't have to hide, where our differences are recognized and valued, where its not quite so painful to accept and share our identities as lesbians and gay men.

This article was inspired by the work of Judy Grahns, from whose book, *Another Mother Tongue: Gay Words, Gay Worlds*, 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.

GAY WORDS

AMAZON: 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 Amazons 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 *baedell*, which means 'hermaphrodite.' This word, which once meant 'gay,' is now used to judge something to be acceptable or not (Grahns, p. 275).

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

BULLDYKE: 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 Grahns, pp. 133-145).

BUTCH: Having mannerisms attributed to masculinity. Derived from the French word for goat, *bouch*, referring to the cross dressing of the pagan priest or shaman to take the part of the horned god or goat god.

CAMP: Indigenous Gay theatrical/satirical qualities of dress, speech, and attitude. From English *camping*, young men wearing women's clothing in a play; from French *campagne*, out-door area where medieval minstrels and players performed. Camp operates by allowing a characteristic to continue so far in a single direction that it becomes its own opposite; "so bad it's good" (From *Gay Talk*, by Bruce Rodgers).

DRAG: To cross-dress, from *drag*, or *dray*, meaning 'cart.' Gay men and women cross-dressed to imitate the gods and rode in carts or *drags* in pagan festivals. (Grahns, p.306).

FAGGOT: From the sacred firestick of the ancient Gay wizards, a branch of the *fagus* (beech) tree. Also related to the Roman *fascies*, 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 *hairen*, 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.

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; Sharon Young, a psychologist and 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 by 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 the case is 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 "educate 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, summer, 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 judicial 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 perhaps is 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 stressed 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."



Lesbian and Gay Child Custody and Adoption

Resources

Lesbian Rights Project

1370 Mission Street, 4th Floor
San Francisco, Cal. 94103
(415) 621-0674

Legal representation, briefs and nationwide referrals.

Lesbian Mothers National Defense Fund

P.O. Box 21567
Seattle, Washington 98111
(206) 325-2643

Financial assistance, expert-witness and legal referrals.

Books and Pamphlets

Gay Parent Support Packet

National Gay Task Force
80 Fifth Ave. number 1601
New York, New York 10011
(212) 741-5800

Includes questions for gay and lesbian parents considering custody, checklist for lawyers, preparation for expert witnesses.

Lesbian Mother Litigation Manual

Donna J. Hitchens, 1982.

Includes bibliography for lesbian mothers and gay fathers. Available through the Lesbian Rights Project.

Lesbian Mothers and Their Children: An Annotated Bibliography of Legal and Psychological Materials

2nd edition; D. Hitchens and A. Thomas, Eds. June 1982

Available through the Lesbian Rights Project.

Mothers on Trial: Women and Child Custody

Phyllis Chesler, 1985

Comprehensive historical analysis with case histories.

Considering Parenthood; A Workbook for Lesbians

Cheri Pies, Spinsters Ink 1985

Includes a section on legal issues in donor insemination.

Custody Cases and Expert Witnesses: a manual for attorneys

Melvin G. Goldzband, Law & Business, Inc., Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980.



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Love and Lust

...in the age of AIDS

Compiled by Russell Lewis

Sex and AIDS are both things that gay men have to deal with in their lives. In addition to going against societally prescribed sex roles, gay men have to deal with the same basic complicated issues surrounding sex, love, lust, and relationships that everyone has to deal with.

AIDS and sex between men are not in the same category. AIDS is a disease. Homosexuality is not. Sex is something men do together for reasons of intimacy, love, lust, compulsiveness and fun. AIDS is a disease whose probable viral agent, HTLV-III, can unfortunately be transmitted through the exchange of bodily fluids during sex.

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

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 HTLV-III 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.

The gay men on these pages talk of their histories, their relationships, their sex lives, their fears and ideals. In doing so, they give us insight into the complicated factors at work in the lives of gay men living at risk in the age of AIDS.

Tom

Tom is a 21 year-old Communication major at UCSD. He grew up in Orange County, which he describes as 'lifeless.' Tom is interested in pursuing a creative career, perhaps in live theatre. He 'would rather not be stuck in an office building in downtown San Diego.'

Okay, they list the categories: safe sex, possibly safe sex, unsafe sex. I've read the pamphlets and things. I feel my sexual practices fall between safe sex to possibly safe sex. Generally I don't have anal sex. Usually, I basically practice safe sex. I don't exchange body fluids. I enjoy touching. I really get off on that. I really enjoy touching, hugging, kissing. That, almost in itself—that's really satisfying to me. I pretty much fall into the safe sex category, anyway. It's not a conscious decision on my part. You know, I don't say to myself 'you're going to practice safe sexual habits this evening when you're with this person.' You

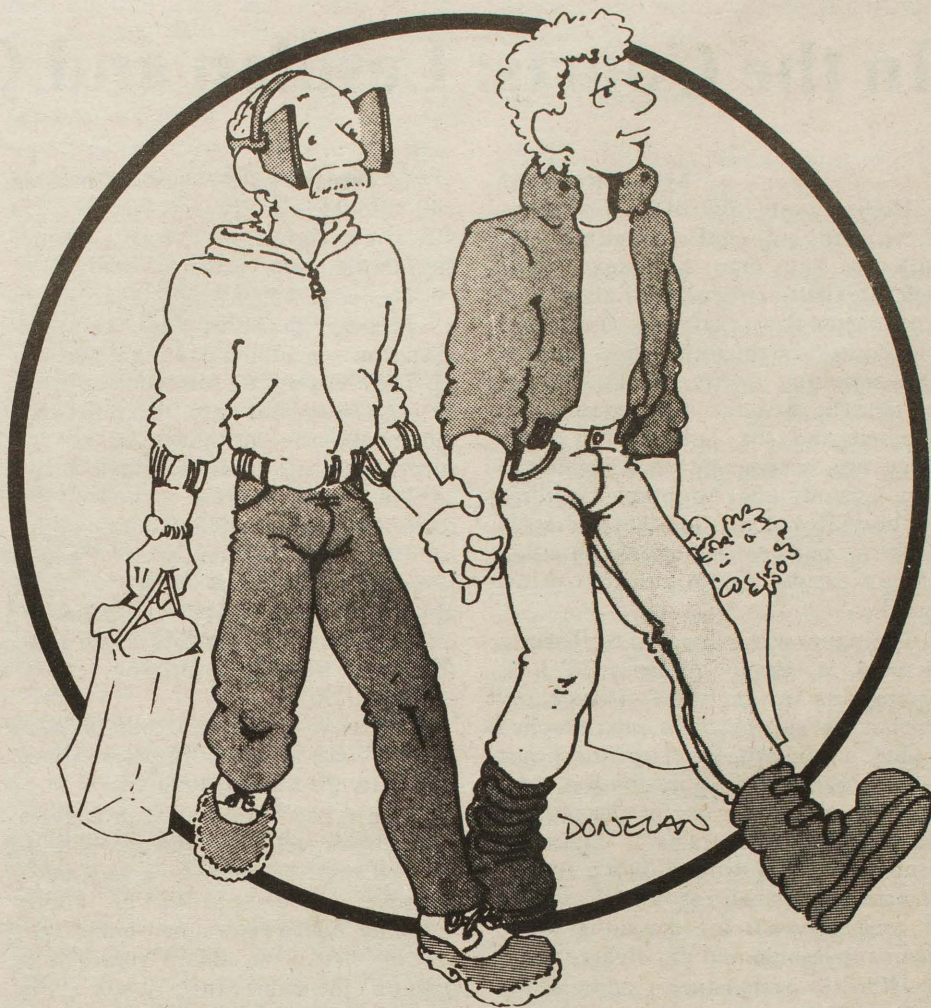
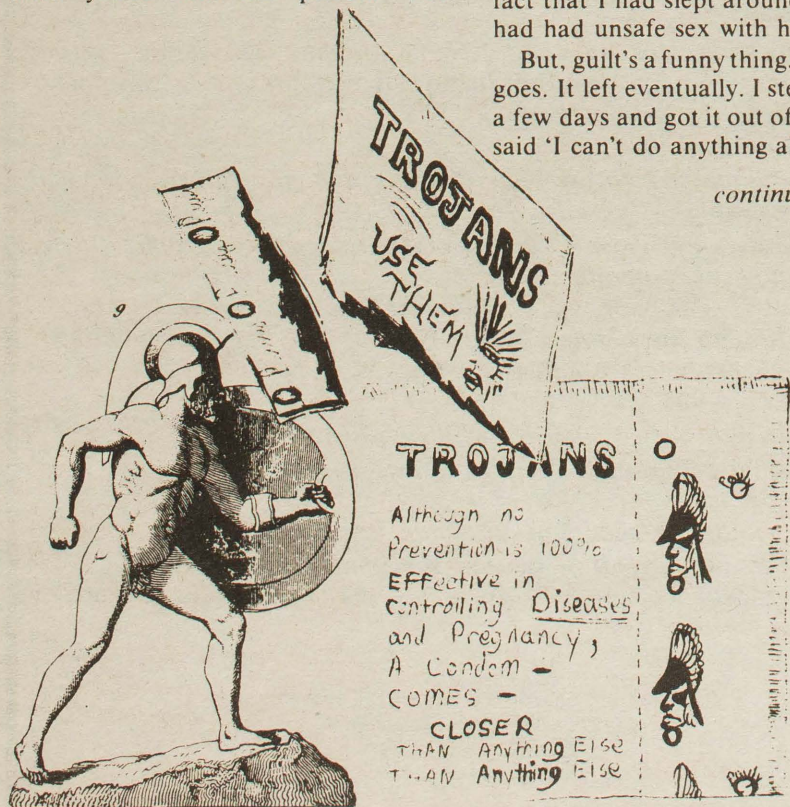
know, it's not really in the forefront of my mind.

It has happened where I've come across a person who wanted to do unsafe stuff. I went to Michael's down in La Jolla, and these two men came over and started talking to me, and so we ended up going back to their hotel. They were from Chicago. This guy John, he would have wanted to have anal sex with me, me being the passive partner. I said 'no, I would rather not.' In turn, I had anal sex with him, him being the passive partner. At the time, I didn't really think about it, you know. So, in that instance, yes, we exchanged bodily fluids. So, I guess...OK, let me put it this way. I've had relatively few partners. In the past year I've been more safe; it's been more in my mind to be safe since the AIDS scare really started.

The next day after I had sex with that guy, I just felt shitty. You know, the basic guilt: I'm a sleaze. I sleep around. I didn't know this person; I slept with this person. All I did that day was sleep. I slept like five hours during the middle of the day. The guilt was more about the fact that I had slept around, than that I had had unsafe sex with him.

But, guilt's a funny thing. It comes and goes. It left eventually. I stewed on it for a few days and got it out of my system. I said 'I can't do anything about it.' That

continued on page 8



David

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 uptight 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—they'd been 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. It was just too weird. I didn't know what I was doing. 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 ago. I stopped 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 I felt it 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 shitty, 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 that less than I used to.

continued on page 8

Steve

Steve, 22, an occasional media student at UCSD, grew up in the San Diego area. He has aspirations to bohemianism and, not surprisingly, his dream is to own a coffee house/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 sensual experience of sex rather than just on the genital experience.

It would have been easier 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, along with genital fixation, constant promiscuity as a way of life, strong emphasis on looks and youth and beauty and your partner as an object rather than 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. These attitudes coming to the forefront basically meant a gay man could be a thirteen year old boy in a world of thirteen year old boys. Just bigger boys with bigger toys.

In the eighties, we're concerned with restraint on the part of a person, of dealing with the person as a person rather than as an object, because not all of the satisfaction that we'll derive from that person is simply going to be the physical sensations that their body as an object can provide. In lieu of an intense physical sensation, you might have to fill it in with maybe some emotions. So, what has happened generally is that I'm not inclined to go out and just look for someone to have sex with.

If I were to add up all the men that I've dated, as well as the ones that I've fucked, or vice versa, then I've probably had more men this year than I've had in previous years, except that they've been more personal relationships. In the past, I've found myself in bed with a good number of strangers. I remember finding out the last name of one of my 'friends' on a letter I saw on his desk as I was leaving the second time we'd dated—the second time we'd been to bed, of course. Whereas I used to kind of proudly state that I always went to bed on the first date, that I was just selective about whom I dated, nowadays I've gone out on dates and courted men that I've never even been to bed with.

I've been least satisfied in those situations where there was an intense focus on orgasm as a goal. The sheer

mechanics of organizing an orgasm or ejaculation sometimes overwhelms the experience itself. Quite frankly, I can manipulate my penis better than anyone else I know because I've had more experience with it than anyone else. The one thing I absolutely cannot provide for myself is companionship and the warmth that another human body and another person can provide. I've had some wonderful orgasmic sex. It's the exception, and if I had to choose one or the other, I would rather have the companionable sort. In fact, to me absolute heaven is to lie there with an erection all night pressed against my love and sleep ever so peacefully. Some of my best experiences have been like that.

One thing that bothered me about doing one night stands is that you are incredibly intimate in 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 that physically intimate 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 society has provided for intimacy, that intimacy is physical ownership as shown by penile entry. That's basically what the societal definition is—it's a possessive sort of thing.

There's a connection that I feel between the power aspect of sex and genital fixation—the penis as tool, sex as an act rather than an experience. An act is something that can be bought or sold or negotiated for after some fashion in some currency, whereas pure experience can only exist as a product of interaction—it's a synergistic sort of thing. We've been raised in this culture in general to seek after the bought experience: the relationship as merchandise, as goods. We're not capitalists, we're consumerists more than anything else. Our sense of values is based entirely on the massive consumption of goods.

In a lot of cases, the relationships that you see in pornography, gay pornography as well, portray humiliation and submission as a part of the sexual experience, and, on the flip side, domination and hostility or degradation.

If I'm honest in analyzing my roles and my positions, and what goes on in my mind and where the pleasures are derived in sexual situations, they all

continued on page 8

Chuck

Chuck is a 23-year-old Sociology major at UCSD who grew up in the Los Angeles area. He describes himself as an aspiring guppie (gay yuppie), but has doubts that his income will 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, like we accept nuclear weapons. It's one more danger in my life. When the epidemic first started, it was a hard thing for me to get used to, that this was going to be something 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, more than just 'this mysterious 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 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 know now that we didn't know then. 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. I mean, I really 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 from 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 revolves around, 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 happen 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 or wants you to fuck them—a lot of times they really don't understand and take it as an insult 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 sort of cools down the whole experience.

I think that safe sex techniques are the

answer, but I think there are a lot of people in the gay community—at least I've encountered a lot—who don't necessarily know anything about safe sex techniques or don't seem to care. I think it really requires a lot of effort to implement safe sex, but I think it's important.

I think I've come to a turning point, though, in regards to safe sex. I think Rock Hudson has something to do with it. Because, really, I never have known anyone who has come down with AIDS. All of a sudden seeing a face, thinking 'that person has AIDS,' and then having him die brings a lot of thought into it. I think it will bring a lot of thought into it for a lot of people who have sort of been ignoring the problem in their own lives, who've been saying, 'Well, maybe I'll take the chance this once.' I mean, I think that's sort of what I've been saying. I look back on it later and find myself saying, 'My god, why did I take that risk?'

One thing that really pisses the hell out of me is being in a bar and hearing someone say, 'Oh, he's a slut. I see him walk out of here three or four times a week. I wouldn't do anything with him, god knows he's probably got AIDS.' He might be having safe sex seven times a week. As far as I'm concerned, the person having unsafe sex once a week is in more danger. Likewise, someone who says, 'Oh, he goes to the baths.' Big deal! He may have safe sex in the baths all the time. That's the number one thing that really burns me up about all this, that we have the sluts and they're going to come down with AIDS, and then there are us the angels over here and we don't really have sex with that many people, so we're going to be OK. Of course, they don't really know how many people their partner has had sex with or is having sex with.

I have a lot of problem with the one night stand and yet that seems such a product of our culture. Everyone seems to say, 'I don't want that,' and yet

continued on page 8

DAVID MARTIN



cont. from page 6

night I had set out with the thought in my mind, 'I'm going to go home with someone, to have sex with someone.' And I achieved my goal. I guess that in itself kind of scared me. If I want to do that, I can. Any night of the week I can say, 'Well, I want to go out and have sex with someone.' That bothers me because I feel that the sexual side of my personality is not that pervasive. It bothers me that in the gay community sex becomes such a major part of the lifestyle. I have a big 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'—coming out was finally acting on those impulses, finally having sex with a man. I walked around for so long thinking 'I'm the only gay person in the entire world,' thinking I'm relatively alone. But after a while I got past that and realized 'Wow, there's a lot of us out there.' Just finally fessing up to myself and saying this is the way it is. I used to walk around thinking, 'Wow, this is really weird; I'm a freak.' You know, you listen to what everyone has told you all these years about homosexuals and you think 'Wow, I must be weird and I can't live my whole life like this because it's really scary and I'll never get married and have children and Oh, my god, and na na na...' But then you figure, 'Hey, this is me and I can live with myself this way, because this is who I am.'

I would like a relationship with someone. For me, something like a soulmate—someone you just know so well that you feel just so totally comfortable with that you can share the rest of your life with—seems ideal. I feel like there's someone out there, you know. But I don't know if that's realistic or not. That's the big question.

Sex is great. It's pretty fun: it's enjoyable. I repressed my sexuality for so long that once I discovered it, it was wonderful—'Wow, it would be great to do this all the time!' But other things get in the way, like AIDS and guilt. For myself, even though having sex all the time would be ideal, I can't live that way.

It's ideal in one sense, but the other ideal—of the person you're going to meet and have a stable relationship with—also gets in the way. I guess the ultimate ideal would be to be in a long term relationship with someone that you're so satisfied with in all aspects that you don't have to go outside. I guess otherwise it's like trying to go out and fill those empty spaces. And it doesn't work, but if you had all of that in one person that you felt all these emotions about, that's the ultimate ideal. That would be just incredible. That would be great! OK, where do we buy this person? You know? It's confusing, man. I don't sit around all the time and think about all these things because it's so confusing. But I think you've got to kind of decipher them sometime in your life to have a semblance of order and sanity.

When I came out, I didn't know AIDS existed. Through the media, I began to hear about 'this mysterious disease that is killing homosexual men.' It was like, 'Whoa, gotta find out more about this.' Most of what I know I've read and I've heard from others, from the media. You know, I read *Life* magazine. Right now, all I can say is I'm aware of it. It creeps up now and then, it's in the back of my mind. I can't live in mortal fear of it. It's not healthy to live in such fear of things. I mean, I could get freaked out that I might get tuberculosis, or something. AIDS is like any other disease; it just happens to live and breed in my community.

David

cont. from page 6

What I found out from the Navy men was that I had to have more in common with these people than just us liking each other. That was what I found out from the guy I was with for two years, a younger Black guy. I was very close to him. I was his first lover. We had very good times together, we had very good sex. But, it just became very clear that our needs were just too different to sustain ourselves. His 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 there aren't that many exceptional people around. And the ones that are around, I don't tend to be that sexually attracted to.

In this situation, you compartmentalize your needs. You look to your friends for intellectual needs, you look to some people for affection needs, some people for sexual needs. You just sort of don't expect one lover to fulfill that spectrum of needs. I think that's the way I used to be, and I got out of it to some extent, but then I got back to the point where it didn't seem possible to find that one person.

I have a feeling I would probably test positive on that test. I assume most gay men of my generation would who were at all sexually active for the last ten years. In some senses, I engage in safe sex. I don't get fucked. I haven't maybe for a year. But, I don't totally engage in safe sex. I swallow cum. If my partner is worried about it or talks about AIDS I suggest to them to assume I'm positive and act accordingly. In fact, they should assume that everybody's positive, which I think is what you really have to do. I try to eat well and take various vitamins that are good for the immune system. But, what can you do? I mean, you just have to try to keep yourself in reasonable health.

But, I like oral sex too much to give it up. I feel like if I have to give it up, it's sort of not worth it. I think I made the decision that this was the level of risk that I was willing to live with. I think I live with a lot less risk than a lot of gay men live with, probably somewhere in the middle. I was glad when I found out about AIDS that I had stopped going to the baths. I don't do poppers anymore, which I used to like, although I had sort of stopped that before AIDS too.

Obviously I don't want to die, or I wouldn't be taking any precautions. I like being alive. It's pleasant and all that, but it's also a real drag. I mean, it takes an enormous amount of energy to live with any sort of dignity in this society. There are a lot of pressures to compromise what you want to do with your time, what you want to say. The assumption that people have is that everyone is straight and the same. They lay that assumption on you all the time and you have the choice of asserting yourself against it or acquiescing to it. The kinds of jobs this society has to offer suck. It's very hard to do anything creative and get paid for it. Even within the realm of creative work, there's a narrow range of what commodities sell and what's acceptable, and to go against that is very hard. Another twenty or thirty years of it doesn't seem like the greatest prospect in the world. I just want to be able to keep writing for as long as possible.

Steve

cont. from page 7

somehow touch on those issues. As far as the thrust into another man, when sexual frenzy begins to take over and I begin

pounding away, sometimes the expression of joy or pleasure on this other man's face is so akin to pain that I don't really know what I'm doing and I don't care. It registers, but I don't really think of it in the judgement sense: 'Is this man in pain?' It's just the experience of frenzy that goes on and it becomes an impetus to drive even further and get deeper and want to be longer and bigger. It's just this real strange trip.

On the flip side, the first time I ever got fucked, it was a significant milestone. When I got into bed with this man, he wasted very little time in throwing me on my back and making his penetration. Having been the first time, it was in some ways very frightening, but at the same time the fear was exciting. It was certainly an incomparable experience, and the sense of being pinned on my back was very...there's something about the absolute release of not being able to act, and therefore not having the responsibility for any actions...it was very gratifying. Maybe there's that sense of being a victim of circumstance that was being played out in a great intensity that was satisfying.

I'm dating someone now that I've been seeing on and off for the past eleven months. Sexual activity came slowly. It was really kind of nice, because we'd walk along in public and just be kind of thrilled when we'd hold hands...something new. As we've gotten to know each other, each time we've seen each other, we've gotten more sexual. So, right now he seems to really want me to—and I would very much like to—fuck him. We haven't gone that far yet, we've had some wonderful experiences together, and I feel very good sexually with him. It's the synergy of our desire—you know, you can read the signals and the ways the bodies press together. It excites me to push toward that a little bit more each time.

My real awareness of AIDS increased so dramatically when I saw Theater Rhinoceros do their *AIDS Show* in San Diego earlier this year. I wrote a piece on it for *Sappho Speaks* ("Rhino," March, 1985, p 4). At the same time, a public figure in the local gay community, someone that I knew by sight, John Ciaccio, was diagnosed with AIDS. I was scared because it didn't seem impossible anymore. It's a really frightening thing to really consider the number of men who have actually been exposed to the virus they believe is responsible for causing AIDS. Maybe I've only had twenty-five or thirty partners, but of those thirty I can think of one who used to go to the baths quite often maybe two years before I knew him. I can think of another who used to go occasionally and probably had on the order of one to two hundred partners. I can think of another...I mean it goes on and on. I started figuring that the chances of my having been exposed were so good that I have a responsibility to myself for my own physical well-being, to any partners I encounter not to transmit what I may have, and to encourage their good health and well-being. That's what safe sex is, saying 'We are all potential carriers and we have to realize that,' and not 'We want to have safe sex so that we don't get AIDS.' I own condoms now.

When I get sick now, it can scare the hell out of me, when I think of 'what does this mean?' During periods of well-being, I think, 'How nice, how very nice.'

Chuck

cont. from page 7

everybody's doing it, including me. I feel that there's a trap there. I feel, without being so vague and nebulous and 1960s, that 'it's in the system.' It's the way the gay scene is set up. I mean, our leading social outlet is bars. That's been my social outlet for the last couple of years. That's something I'm looking at changing.

There are things I like about the scene. I like meeting men who are a few years older than I am, for example. But, I've found that no real relationships have developed for me out of people I've met at the bars. A relationship is in the front of my mind, so why do I still go?

Something that happens to me is I decide to go somewhere 'to have a drink or two,' and pretty soon there's someone who looks interesting and pretty soon we get to talking and one thing leads to another. There are very seldom nights when I say, 'I'm going out and meet someone for sex,' or 'I'm going to go out and meet someone as Mr. Right.' But, there must be that sort of expectation somewhere that that's going to happen.

I would like to have a lover, but how does one go about doing that? If you want an education, you go to school. If you want to get a job, you look at the want ads. If you want to get an apartment, you check the listings. If you want to buy a car, you go to a car dealership. Where do you go to get a lover? There isn't some lover dealership somewhere. Maybe it's because of the kind of world we live in, where there's supposedly someplace to go to get anything, you know, that we think that 'a lover' is going to come from the same kind of source.

Two people that I know met at a bar and have been together for four years. You know, you think maybe that could happen to me. Maybe it could. Maybe it will. Maybe it won't. But, there's always the thought in the back of my mind, 'maybe it could.' And, it's funny, you can always trick yourself, especially after a few drinks. I think on occasion I have tricked myself into saying, 'Well, maybe this is the right one,' or 'This one has that possibility.'

I was in love once, and the person I was in love with was just coming out. He cared about me a great deal. I don't know whether he could understand the idea of being in love at that point. I mean, we did have a relationship. We had a relationship that basically lasted a whole summer. It was a very special time, and very special for both of us. We cried a lot when he had to leave. It wasn't as if he didn't care for me. He would come down to San Diego every chance he had. I guess that's the only time I can look back in retrospect and say I was in love. I don't ever think I ever felt I was head over heels in love and in retrospect said I wasn't. I don't fool myself to that degree, and therefore I do have this idea, I don't know how founded it is, but I do have this idea that I'll know when the right person comes along within a couple of weeks of being with him.

When AIDS was first happening, everyone said that it would make everyone re-think their sexual attitudes and romance and all of this stuff, and I don't think that's happened. I think there was a brief period of time when this thing first came about when everyone grabbed the first person in sight and made them their lover. There was a lot of that going on. And about six months later there were a lot of divorces. That's not a re-examination of your sexual attitudes. That's panic and wanting someone at home with you every night not worrying about diseases. AIDS is not something to base a relationship on.



SCREENING PROGRAM FOR GAY MALES

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.

The BACC offers its services to help eliminate sexually transmitted diseases within the San Diego gay community. This clinic has had a sexually transmitted disease program in operation for many years, and has seen many gay males. As a result, it has developed an honest and sensitive rapport with the gay male population in this community. The BACC is staffed with a professional group of doctors, nurse practitioners, screeners and counselors experienced in working with gay males.

This is a comprehensive and low cost screening program, conducted by persons sensitive to the needs of the gay male community.

Call 488-0644 for an appointment.



3705 MISSION BLVD.
SAN DIEGO, CA. 92109

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.

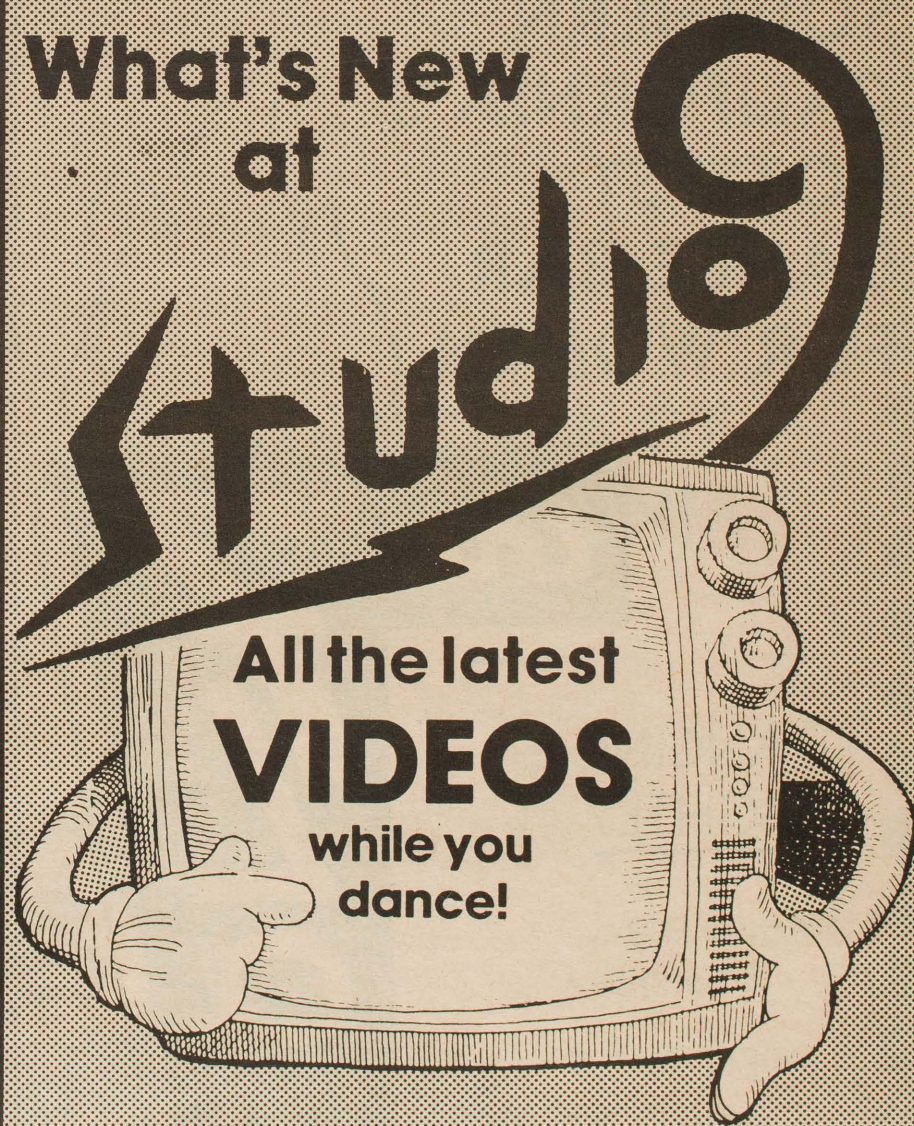
Dr. Daigneault, a physician at the Health Center, discussed the Health Center's role. Besides the education programs they have put into effect, they are also attempting to deal with various student needs. Much of this need is met simply by increasing the sensitivity of the Health Center's staff, and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

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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 corner of 5th and Robinson between 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 uplifting and unifying force within the lesbian and gay

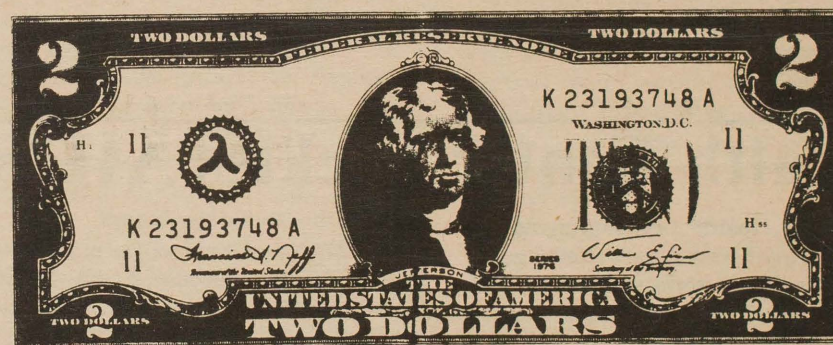
community, as well as being a positive contribution to the San Diego community at large.

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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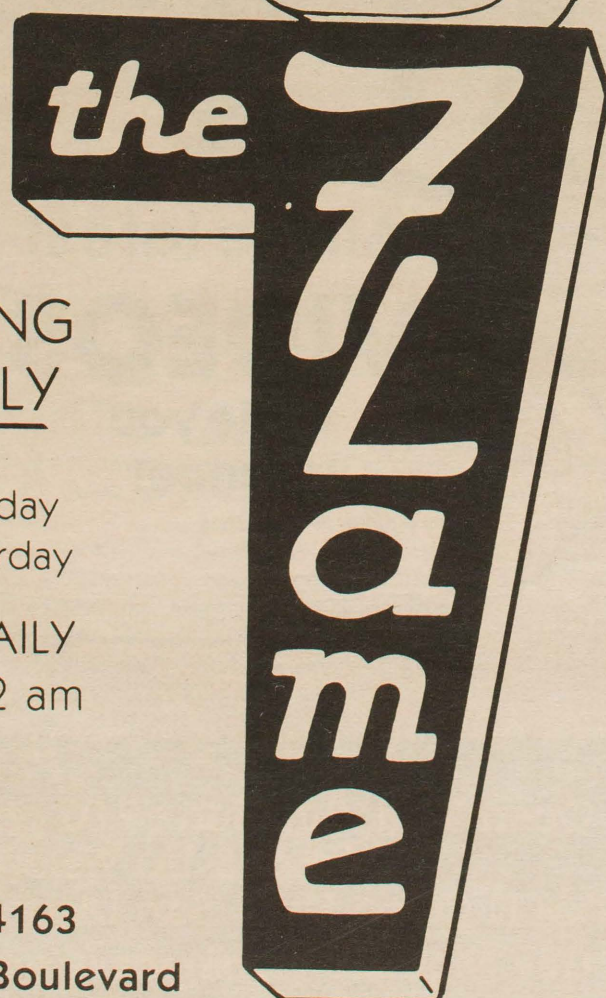
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LETTERS

*"Witches"
and Women*

Dear Editor:

"Bitchy Witch Power," Debbie Mikuteit'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 resented the violent tone in that one exquisitely worded passage.

Why are people so scared of words? Mikuteit, 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, but we don't feel them. We analyze when we should live and empathize. We define when we should create.

Mikuteit's mystical language shadows her message. She forces the reader to look beyond mere words and understand the message as one potential witch to another, for although she claims to be

one, I wonder how successful she is. Doesn't she 'bond' as much as men?

Don't we all? As a political scientist, I speak social scientist-ese. As a feminist, I speak feminist-ese. As a radical, I speak Marxist-ese. Aren't these as exclusionary as sports talk and jargon employed among lesbians and gays? Where do we draw the line between criticizing bonding for its patriarchal nature and justifying it out of self-defense?

At one point Mikuteit steps out on a limb and states "lesbian witchery is the height of lesbianism and is completely not involved in male bonding that is in wanting to be men. So it is not the lesbians who want to be men but the straight and other non-witch women who do (where 'witch' implies feminist)." Does she believe that Phyllis Schlafely wants to be a man? That woman is the most non-witch, and the least male woman I can imagine. Not that her aggressive femininity makes her any less masculine; rather, her obvious homophobia drives away any tendencies she might have toward being a man. Yet Schlafely is uniquely involved in the male bonding process, by not only condoning it, but also engendering and nurturing it. Without it, she is lost.

Perhaps Mikuteit implies that only a life void of male influences will be completely free from male bonding and patriarchy. I have no problem with gender isolation, but is that a solution to the problem, or an ignorance of it? Will witchery bring about change? Mikuteit suggests areas in which we can work for change, mostly from within ourselves. In addition to certain holistic methods, she suggests reading and discussing issues which face us as feminists and as people. She encourages us to overcome our fears of words which connote different lifestyles, to redefine them and to understand them. I agree. As we destroy

barriers and draw-out isolationists we learn more about ourselves, as well as about others. Maybe in that way we will all move closer to being witches, and we will learn the right spell to cast on patriarchy and those 'inoffensive blobs' known as men.

Tess Colby

*"Witches"
and Men*

Dear Editor:

Your June issue of *Sappho Speaks* caught me by surprise. Information about my gender, that I had never known before, confronted me in Debbie Mikuteit's piece, "Bitchy Witch Power."

Until now, I have never known that simply by accident of birth, I am genetically inferior, a pervert, emotionally limited, an unresponsive lump and a bore. Nor did I realize that Ms. Mikuteit had a notion as to my body cleanliness. I can assure her that I smell fresh as a daisy. Furthermore, it is written that males are "walking abortions". Well, I suppose the "Great Mother" must be keeping us around for some reason.

It really is not fair to target a part of humanity for all the sins of our fathers and mothers. Perhaps it could be suggested that *Sappho Speaks* readers read the horrid lethargy of words that struck the Jewish folk prior to World War II. Lurid accounts of the physical, emotional, and intellectual deficiencies of a people are the characteristics of sadly distorted minds. Let's not sink into an abyss of hatred. Let's work together for a better world. Do your best and I (a straight male) will do mine.

Sincerely,

James Tackett

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 conservatism) 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 Study in Sociology, 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 lesbian and gay 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 gay men. Your 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.

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

Bisexual
Acceptance

Dear Editor,

I am from Richmond, VA, which is the only Democratic city in Virginia. 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 a large percentage of bisexuals (mostly female). There were also people who called themselves gay, but sometimes you saw them go home with someone of the opposite sex as well.

In my short term of acquaintance with San Diego, I have noticed a general lack of bisexuals here. There seems to be a sharp line of division between the 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 wierd, "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

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