

SAPPHO SPEAKS

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VOICES AND VISIONS

Women talk about lesbian culture, political awareness, femininity, and the future

by Sharon Moxon

The lesbian culture is a diverse yet unified entity; a culture not of genetic heritage, but of political mores, redefined lifestyles, and support systems. Our heritage comes from the voices of other women—painful, joyous, and strong. We are, as a culture, rooted in a continual process of growth. From Daughters of Bilitis in 1953, and NOW's "lavender menace," we have grown out of the mainstream and into a people in our own right.

These voices express a few of the many views on who we are and where we're headed. They speak from the heart about what the lesbian culture is to them, and how they feel about the current changes they see taking place.

THE COUNTER CULTURE

Lesbians, as an oppressed class, have formed large networks of support out of necessity. Because we are different from other groups of people, we have developed a mini-culture of our own that is often parallel to the mainstream, and often very different. The lesbian culture is an entity comprised of diversity and bonded in a strength that comes from the pain of oppression and the joy of self-expression.

Anne, a 26 year old health care worker, when asked about the lesbian culture, said: It's changing. I guess it will always be changing. Sometimes that's a very powerfully positive thing. And sometimes it's sad.

I wish I could say that there was something universal about lesbians other than the fact that we sleep with other women—a different sort of awareness, a certain political/social consciousness—and that we were all part of a cohesive counter-culture, but as much as I wish I could hold up the ideal and say 'this is what a lesbian is', I can't honestly do that because we are so diverse.

It doesn't matter that lesbians don't all know each other and we don't all go to the same places and do the same things, there is a lesbian counter-culture. When you come out, whether or not your life changes radically, you do have to question certain things. Just about every value you were raised with, you have to question. Because we have all come through basically that same sort of process in accepting our lesbian identity, there's a certain feeling of closeness, almost like a family tie. If I meet someone in a non-gay context and find out she's a lesbian, we have an immediate automatic closeness that we would not ordinarily have had, because we're both lesbians, and we both understand a lot



about where the other person is coming from.

Becky, a UCSD engineering student: In general, as far as a community goes, I think that people in the lesbian culture are a lot more supportive than people in the non-gay society. At least that's what my experience has been. I've just found a lot more support since I've come out than before.

Diane, a 31-year-old entrepreneur: When I go to a lesbian or woman oriented function, I see so many women that I've never seen before. It makes me wonder where they are and what they do with their lives. A good majority of them are living in suburbia and they don't necessarily go out and do anything social with big groups of people. They have their own circles of friends which are their support.

Anne: Because of having some tie, and also the need to find others like yourself, there are certain things that have developed that stand for the lesbian culture. Activities we do together, certain books we've all read, and certain social beliefs. We have customs, some of us have spiritual beliefs, we join groups, and yes, we do go to the bars. They're not something that I think is real positive, to say that lesbians culture is equivalent to lesbian bars, but the bars are the cornerstone, basically, of lesbian culture. That's the place that's most visible, where anyone can go, where a lot of people go when they first come out in order to find other lesbians and to find out what lesbian culture is.

LESBIAN BARS: THE THERMOMETER OF CHANGE

Most lesbians rarely go to bars. Yet in looking at lesbian culture, lesbian bars are the single most visible element, simply because we virtually have no other contact with most lesbians. The bars are the one place where large groups of lesbians with different lifestyles and interests are able to gather and interact. What we see in the bars is as close as we

can come to a reflection of the culture as a whole.

Diane: When women first come out, we search for all the new things about our lifestyle, which is why we go to bars, or join SDLO (San Diego Lesbian Organization), or something. But once we've incorporated some of those ideals into our lives, they become a part of us, and then we must go out and do the regular mainstream things.

People tend to go to a bar to meet other people and when they meet other people they float away from the bar and do other things. They create a new kind of social atmosphere. The bar becomes tiresome because there's only so much you can do there. People need other kinds of things in their lives.

Commonly, people get tired of the bars but they still haven't met the right people. I still don't know where to go to meet people other than the bars. There are fewer political organizations to join these days, to my knowledge.

Anne: Bars are not evil. They do have a place as part of our culture, and they can be positive. They often host benefits, and they generally have good energy. Gay bars are not bars in the same sense that non-gay bars are. Most people don't go there specifically to drink or to pick people up. I go there because it is one of the very few places where I can go and be completely comfortable with my sexuality, and where I can be with other lesbians. In San Diego, I feel like the Flame is the only public place that truly belongs to us.

Cathy, a UCSD student: I go the Flame a lot. I go there to talk to people; to meet people. I've built up a network of people there that I know that I can talk to kind of on a superficial level, but it's just for their company, just for some human company when I'm not doing anything. I also like to play pool there. I don't drink that much. Of course I go there hoping to meet someone that I could maybe have a relationship with. Part of the reason you have to stay on a superficial level is that

it's so loud. You can't have a real deep conversation. I enjoy it because I like to go there to escape.

Diane: When I first came out, I started going to Diablo's. I never had gone to a bar before I was 21 (I was an incredibly straight Christian). It was a sentimental, nostalgic time. I had a very easy coming out. I got to know several of the people who worked at the bar, and I started going down every night, because that was the only social culture that I knew of at the time. I eventually quit my job and started working at Diablo's, in September of '75, and I worked there for nine months.

I was trying to figure out what it was that was different when I came back after being gone for a while. The people who had worked there were incredibly friendly, and we always had a good time. We got to drink on the job, and it was okay for me even on a Friday or Saturday night to take a break and go out on the dance floor and dance. So it was kind of a big party atmosphere rather than so business oriented.

All the people were fairly young, with a few exceptions. I remember every night after getting off work I used to go over to someone's house and party until 3 or 4. Everybody went.

A few years ago, when I decided to 'do the bar scene' again, I went to the Club. I found it to be real similar to what Diablo's had been like when I was working there. Again, I was going every night after work, and I fell in with a group of people who were doing the same thing I was. None of us were spending much money, and we were having a real good time. We talked, played pool, danced, and usually did something afterwards. The fun depends on the group of people you're with.

Becky: I think bar culture has almost changed for the worse. Granted, the Box Office vs the Flame are two very different bars, the Box Office being almost non-existent now, but when I was at the the Box Office, I was a lot more comfortable there in the sense that I felt I could ask someone to dance and not have anyone think I was trying to pick that person up. And if I go to the Flame, I don't feel comfortable doing that. It seems a lot harder for me to meet people and get to know them at the Flame.

Anne: the popularity of the Flame has a lot to do with the appearance that the lesbian culture is changing, because it's so flashy and cold. The Flame differs from the Club in the attitude people have, and in the way people dress. I don't know if it's typical of what lesbian bars have become, if they're changing or if the Flame is just unique.

Dressing or being comfortable is discouraged there because the bartenders are the role models, especially for newly-out women, and the bartenders at the Flame have to follow a dress code; they can't wear levis and they have to wear make-up, or so I'm told.

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EDITORIALS

"You're Such a Fag!"

When I was three years old, I had a friend named Ronald who lived down the street. We were constant companions. He would come over to play at my house and I would go over to play at his house. At my house, we would climb the weeping willow tree that my Dad had planted the same year I was born. The branches hung over to the fence, which had honeysuckle vines growing on it. There we'd sit in this green garden above the ground and suck the nectar off the pistils we pulled out of the honeysuckle blossoms.

Ronald's yard was different. It was sloping and barren of grass. His father had put in citrus trees bordered by concrete wells. We would inspect the premises and play coarser games with rocks and dirtclods.

One time, when we weren't much more than three, we were going to the bathroom together (I said we were constant companions). My brothers and some of his brothers saw us through the bathroom window.

We had begun to play doctor. "I'll show you mine, if you'll show me yours." "I'll touch yours if you'll touch mine." "I'll kiss yours if you'll kiss mine."

They ran home and told his mother. I remember it caused quite a stir. I don't think my mother said anything about it, but my brothers teased me a lot.

When we walked to kindergarten together, Ronald and I would hold hands and sing "I wanna hold your hand" to each other.

It was my first romance.

Looking back now, a lot of things fall into place. When I was seven and we lived in Hawaii, we used to go to the beach a lot and I would walk through the showers so I could see the naked men. And I remember skinny-dipping in the pool, the sunlight streaming through the water and the naked bodies of my brothers.

When my brother and I fought, sometimes he would call me a little faggot. I didn't really know what that meant, but I knew he was singling me out with it, attacking me with it. And I remember one time getting mad at him and planting my hands on the back of my hips and yelling back at him, my voice raising an octave or two from its already youthful register. He made fun of me for this and teased me about it in front of the neighbors.

Most of my friends at school were girls. I felt more comfortable with them. The boys somehow made me nervous. I was very conscious of them. I was intrigued by them, I liked to be near them and perhaps talk with them for a while, but I felt apart from them.

I didn't like team ball or little league. These were too rough and violent for me. They also put you in front of everyone to see, and everyone could watch you fail. I played teather ball and four square.

Aside from rather mainstream girls, my friends were the other oddball kids. Other femmy little boys. The new kid from New York, who, to the shock of everyone, walked in on the first day wearing a blazer. Janet, with the *really* bizarre sense of humor, and Solange, a girl *way* too big for her age.

I didn't get actively made fun of by other kids until high school. At Mt. Carmel High School, here in beautiful San Diego, a certain group of jocks, aspiring jocks, and their sufficiently masculine "in" crowd, would sort of whisper and laugh and look over at me and I'd hear the word "fag" filter out once in a while. By high school, I had a better idea of what that meant. It didn't hurt any less, but through years of brotherly teasing, I'd learned to paper over pain with a stoic reserve—"Oh, are you refering to me?"

From time to time, they'd ask me if I was a fag. I said no.

I had no label for myself. I was intrigued by the male form. The locker room was a place to remain outwardly calm (that was a feat), but resolutely observant. My masturbation fantasies abounded with what I observed. I could not accept the label they had given me. It was full of hate and ridicule.

For a long time, I didn't know how these people knew I was different when I didn't even know what to call my difference, much less what to do with it.

It was my mannerisms. My stereotypically faggot mannerisms. My voice inflections. My high, lilting laughter. The Vera designer towel I used in P.E. (it was a lovely aqua and green print). My loose body language.

Once I figured this out, I did my best to restrain myself. I succeeded in becoming a restrained faggot, but apparently a faggot nonetheless, for they continued, in an effort to see if they could crack my resolve.

After I came out and gave myself the label "gay," I was still in the habit of restraining myself. I didn't want to be a stereotype.

There is much talk of gay stereotypes, about how destructive they are. But this is not true. We must be precise. It is the stereotyping that is the problem. It is the attaching of negative connotations to behavior considered stereotypical that is destructive. People like me, who at times approximate certain stereotypes through their bodily and attitudinal mannerisms, can internalize these negatives.

Attaching negatives to people's behavior is an insidious form of oppression, for it enlists their aid in their own oppression.

Fighting back against my high school tormentors was too hard, so I decided not to fight. But I did not stop struggling, the struggle is simply moved inside, where I did the work for them.

I've finally stopped struggling. It wasn't a conscious decision, it's just that it was too tiring and I have need of my energy for other things.

So, guess what—I've become a lot more of a fag than I used to be, and I didn't even know it. Once again, someone else had to tell me I was a fag.

One day, early in the quarter, I was extolling the virtues of my four three-ring, color-coded binders and Sharon Moxon (the woman writing beside me) yelled at me "You're Such a Fag!" (I'm a fag! You can't hurt me with that label anymore. It's mine now. You can't taunt me anymore with sad impersonations of myself. I'm so much better at being me than you are!)

"Thank you," I said to Sharon. And meant it.

Russell Lewis

Goddess in a Godless World

It happens a lot in universities. For a number of reasons, people lose their faith and stop believing in spiritual things. It happened to me. That realm, I had thought, was not for me. It went against my political, social and sexual beliefs.

In my years at UCSD, I have seen many people turn away from religion. In 'intellectual' atmospheres such as this, we have the freedom to question things around us, patterns we had taken for granted, and the social structures themselves which support these patterns. We become idealists. With expanded knowledge and awareness comes the understanding that the system we live with does not live up to our ideal.

I am one of these idealists. My questioning of society has led to its opposition. And with the denial of the system, came the denial of its religion.

Feminism is another cause of loss of religion. Many of my politically aware sisters have given up on spirituality. Like them, when my feminist consciousness was raised, I could no longer accept the definitions and limits religion has given to women.

My other beliefs are too strong to be ignored for religion, and the two are incompatible. Yet I feel that the questions we ask and the things we believe about the world and our existence are important. This is the basis of everything we do—it determines our history, our social structures, and the way we live our lives.

This creates a problem. My politics rendered me unable to accept the teachings of these religions which most of us were raised with, the religions which reinforce and are part of the existing social structure. These are religions of estrangement which separate our bodies from our spirits and our selves from the earth, and from each other. They break the world into components of good and evil, unable to see things as wholes.

They teach that there is One Truth handed down by a Great Man from the One Male God. This life is not IT, they say, we are waiting for something better and can never have true happiness here. If we are 'good,' we can leave this horrible Earth and join God in Paradise. Their doctrine tells us that time is a linear thing with a beginning and an end. And they teach us that we are powerless.

I just couldn't believe in that. Since I could not find the answers to my questions within the structure, I looked elsewhere. I looked to other radicalesbianfeminists, and I looked within myself. I found that there is an alternative, a form of religion which is apart from, and thus opposed to, those systems which I fight in every other part of my life.

I found it where womyn meet in small groups to share the knowledge that they have each discovered for themselves, from within themselves. We are working together, from the ground up, to re-discover our selves and our world. I call it Goddess worship, or womyn's religion, or paganism, or witchcraft.

It is very much something that comes from inside one's self. It is derived in part from the acknowledgement that we do have power within ourselves, and that it's okay to use this power. It involves the recognition of spiritual energy, and the acceptance that we have the capacity to connect with this energy and to influence its flow.

The practice of my religion is often ritualistic, and often comes out of my own imagination. It is joyous and powerful. It involves circles, the phases of the moon, the seasons. It is growth and healing. It comes from things of the Earth, things that are real to me.

It is collective and communal; groups of womyn gathering to share in the celebration of our gains, the joy of our beliefs. We do not come together to be told what to do or to be condemned for what we've done. We are using our power to create a better world. Love, not fear, draws me to the Goddess.

We are continually re-developing and re-defining it ourselves. It validates the importance of each individual, and the knowledge that we have the capacity to think and feel and know for ourselves, and gives us the freedom to do that.

Finally, I am allowed the spirituality, on my own terms, which I have always been denied. The network of womyn gives me strength and support, and the freedom which my religion embraces gives me unlimited options in terms of what I can do, and who I can be. This is a time for change. I learn and grow and discover what is important and what does not matter. I become myself.

I think that we have come upon something which is profound in ways that even we are not yet realizing. Through this form of spirituality, we have the potential to become what we all dream about, but that we haven't accepted as reality. We can be healers, teachers, womyn of the hills.

But I'm still living my life among the idealists at UCSD, for whom religion, in any form, is invalid. My personal emphasis has changed, and my feminist friends don't understand or accept this. I don't ask them to follow my path, only to acknowledge it.

This separation between my worlds should not happen. Witchcraft, after all, is derived from feminism. As womyn reclaim their personal power, and accept womanliness as a positive symbol, the Goddess is also re-discovered. It is religion with a focus on the feminine, on what we as womyn identify with.

The denial of womyn is so ingrained in our culture that Goddess worship seems to be an abomination. Blasphemy, even. As feminists, we face a struggle to reclaim that which is ours. We must not dismiss our spirituality with the idea that all religion is patriarchal, heirarchical, and dualistic, but we must find our own methods and stories, our ancient heritage.

Womyn's religion is completely re-owning our power as womyn. I have found this to be the deepest of all feminist struggles. My idealism is also included in my spirituality. It is congruous with my politics, and it allows me to believe that the ideal is possible.

I wish this were something I could share with my friends. Together we would weave webs of our own flesh. We would unite in our power, and our world would become our own.

Sharon Moxon

VOICES AND VISIONS

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Anyway, they're just different. Young and beautiful and they do dress stylishly.

Diane: I don't think the difference between the Club and the Flame is necessarily a reflection of lesbian culture, it's a different kind of bar. The women behind the bar sort of create the ambiance. There's a certain higher-class feeling when you walk into the Flame, because it's not quite so dimly lit, as the Club was, for instance. You can see the faces of the people around you, you can see the plants and the pictures on the walls, you can see the drink that's being served to you. The Club was more of a 'down home' kind of thing. You certainly didn't need to dress up. Jeans were perfectly acceptable. It's acceptable at the Flame, but it's not the norm. The women aren't that much different.

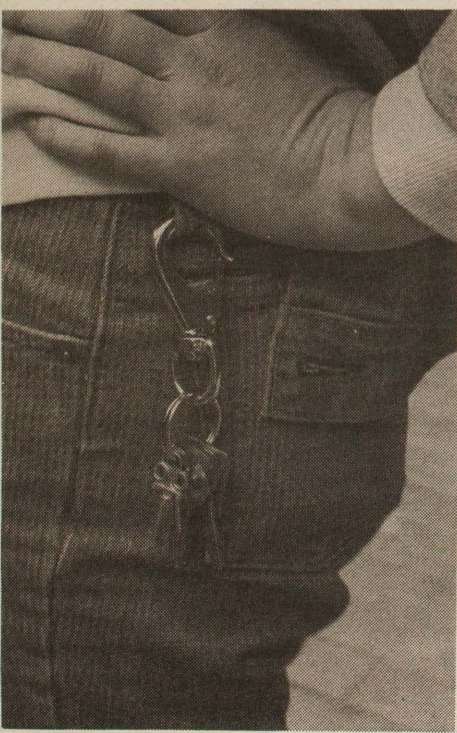
Cathy: the flame is a fantasy world. It's even decorated to be glamorous and fantasy-like, because they want to attract those kinds of people, because that's who'll spend the most money.

ROLES AND FEMINITY

What we wear, how we look, how we feel about ourselves, and how we present ourselves does make a statement to the world, especially when we are part of a minority. For lesbians, the way we dress can mean anything from playing a 'butch' to playing 'straight.'

Diane: When I was 21, what was in were halter tops and ankle-length skirts, or mini-skirts, and style was dictated by something other than what you wanted to wear. These days, style is much more open and it's also not 'fadish,' it's more 'stylish.' There is something more universal generally. You get to be who you want to be. There is such a wide selection.

I think that reflects on the lesbian culture, because we don't have to adhere to the stereotype of 'femme' or 'butch', we can be openly who we are. The social atmosphere overall is a lot freer.



It used to be that when a lesbian walked into a bar, she wore jeans and a T-shirt with slight personal variations, and that's not at all true any more. Those women who are comfortable in that can walk into a bar in that, and yet you'll see the full gamut in a bar, anything from full leather down to the frills, and you can do it without getting any funny looks.

I was, what I call, very femme when I first came out, and that's exactly how other lesbians thought of me. It was

supposed to mean that I was never going to take control in a relationship—that was the butch's role. And that was so false!

I'm not stereotyped as much as I was. It's okay to dress femme now and not be assumed to want that role. Before, if I had walked into a bar wearing jeans and a T-shirt and leather, it would have automatically been assumed that I would be the one to ask people to dance, they wouldn't have dared to approach me, because you just didn't do it.

Jo, a UCSD graduate: I see a lot of exploring femininity now. I think this is a necessary phase on the way to an assimilation of all of what we are, a more whole and diverse lesbian culture. People used to purposely try not to be pretty in a feminine way because of the negative connotation that had in heterosexual society. Now, we are going through a time of that being okay, and dressing up and reclaiming the beauty of women. But this time it's for ourselves.

Susan: Lesbian culture is copying gay male culture. Since there seems to be less of a need for feminism, and people just come out and say 'I'm gay' and that's it, they don't go through the feminist stuff, and then they say, okay, now what's gay? So they look at gay men since they're more visible, and gay men are powerful and have fun, so why shouldn't lesbians want to be like them? I see it in the dressing up, the sleeping around, the goal-orientation, etc.

FEMININITY DOESN'T MEAN FEMINISM

Years of political action and education have allowed lesbians some degree of freedom and feelings of self-acceptance. But this is not a decade of marches or sit-ins. Maybe feminism isn't so important any more, to some people, for various reasons. Maybe we're just going about the struggle and education process in a different way. Maybe not at all.

Cathy: Most of the people I've met at the Flame don't define themselves as feminists. They'd prefer not to think about things like that. They're not especially intellectual, or at least they don't display it there. No one brings it up because they're not there to talk about serious issues, they're there to escape.

Sometimes I meet someone and discover she is interested in politics. It's just that the Flame's not conducive to that. It's suppressed. But I also know people who didn't even vote.

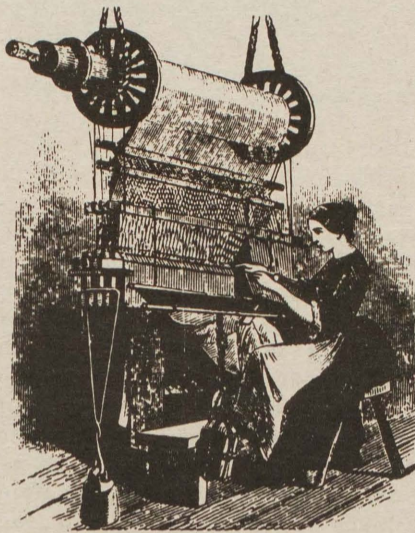
Anne: I don't have a TV so I went to the Flame to watch the election results, and they didn't even have them on. We had to practically force the bartender to turn on the elections. Once it was on, about ten people watched it, but most of the bar didn't even care.

That's the main difference between the Flame and the other bars I've gone to. At the Club, politics was a big issue, and nobody dressed up. It was so much different. Nobody seemed to be interested in high-paying careers. Sometimes I thought they had no goals, but now I know I like it better that way.

It seems to me that there used to be a lot of political awareness and political activity, and the political activity isn't happening any more. I feel that maybe the people don't have the awareness anymore either, especially the ones who are just coming out now who aren't exposed to it. People still gather, but it's not for rallies so much, it's a lot more social. I guess we've fought long enough

and this is a rest period to figure out who we are.

Diane: When I first came out, there were a lot of co-operative things going on. There was Las Hermanas, which was a wonderful women's coffee house. Feminism was really budding at that time. There was a women's art co-op, which a lot of lesbians were involved with, which was very feminist, and SDLO was more of a political organization than the mini-rap group it is now. There was a lot of political stuff going on that was just beginning to bud,



whereas now, there are enough women at least in the lesbian culture, who are feminist oriented, that those sort of things aren't as necessary, because it's already in the consciousness. There was a lot of anger about being a woman and being oppressed. There was a lot of need for separation which I don't see as much any more.

Most of the women that I'm around these days are very feminist. I didn't realize until about four months ago how feminist I'd become without realizing it. When I was confronted with sexist attitudes, I saw how feminist-oriented and how non-sexist my views were. It surprised me. That's what makes me believe that people at this point have it almost subconsciously, as opposed to being out there fighting for everything that they say they want.

So many women have already been out there fighting on the front lines that it's now becoming small skirmishes. Everyone is trying to win something in their own particular environment. There's enough of an overall consciousness that at this point people are fighting their own individual battles and not trying to win over the entire world.

Granted, there is a change in the overall world view of consciousness.

What I witness as a change is women, at least women my age, are more secure in who they are and what they are. When I first came out there was a lot of anger about being oppressed. The 70's was the time when women really started taking a stand, and that was when the ERA was most prominent in the political world, and what I seem to remember was that women thought they should be political. The only way to break free from the female role was by being political and being up front so they staged marches and stood for their rights. And that really was what worked in changing some people's thoughts—but I'm not sure that in reality anything has changed as far as women's equality. There is more awareness of women's roles and women's rights, but...at this point I don't see women as angry any more. They've been through the hard politics, the trial by fire, and they've supposedly stood strong, but they don't feel that they need to be so politically separate from men. At one point, what they felt they

needed to do in order to create their own awareness was separate off from men, put blinders on, and walk this one narrow path that was going to eventually expand into what was a woman.

There really are cultural differences happening now. It's not quite as closed as it was before to women. There isn't as much political hoopla as there was 10 or 15 years ago about it, but it's still a problem, especially for women who are trying to get into the upper ranks of, say, management. You're still fighting the same fight, but the fight has become much more personal. I think that's real healthy, because everybody is creating their own universe or world and by doing so, they're making a better universe as a whole.

THE EBB AND FLOW

Daughters of Bilitis was the first openly lesbian organization. The members "dressed in their finest from high heels to earrings." Lesbians eventually broke away from this mainstream, but, as everything is circular, we may be headed right back where we began.

Cathy: I don't think the Flame is very different from straight bars at all. I went to straight bars a lot before I came out, which was less than a year ago, and they were all pretty much the same as the Flame. A lot of money spent on drinks, when you meet someone they want to buy you a drink, and you don't talk very much above a superficial level. The only difference is you're meeting women instead of men.

I think that's kind of good because there's a tendency to be different just because you're gay when you may not be that different. Although I think conformity is unfortunate. I would rather see straight society getting more diverse, as diverse as the gay community. But instead, the gay community is getting more mainstream.

Anne: Sexual orientation didn't used to be the only difference because there was a certain political awareness and a certain level of consciousness...a different perspective on life, what I would consider a more aware perspective on all aspects of life, and it seems like what I see now is a lot of people are coming out and they're gay and that's it, and they go on with their lives as if nothing was different about them...and I think that's kind of sad because, to me, in order to change society, we have to have a strong base to work from, and a strong base that's different from the rest of society. Because why would you want to change it if you're just like it, and it seems like we're going to start backsliding if we don't have some political awareness. And I don't see it anywhere. Nobody's interested in having more acceptance for gay people. They've got their career, what do they care?

I think the entire gay culture is in the middle of a change. The whole left culture...all of the countercultures I think are changing radically right before our eyes, and most people aren't even noticing it, and nobody knows what to do about it.

Sometimes I think we're losing our gay culture. I noticed it at the last LAGO dance. Those dances used to be different from anything else, now they're not. It could have been any dance. I guess it's mainstreaming. Maybe it's okay to do that. Maybe we need it. But I like having our own culture.

Diane: I don't participate in things like the gay pride parade because I feel like that's an overstatement of who we are and what we are. I don't want anybody

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RHINO

Ruminations of the writer upon the occasion of "The AIDS Show"

by Theatre Rhinoceros, 2-14-85.

by Stephen Russell

"It is called Artists Involved with Death and Survival, which is a hideous acronym...when people first started calling it the AIDS Show, at first we were offended...Then I was quite glad because the other title is so awkward and ponderous...What better thing to call it than the AIDS Show?...It is about confrontations with AIDS."

Leland Moss, Director, "The Aids Show"

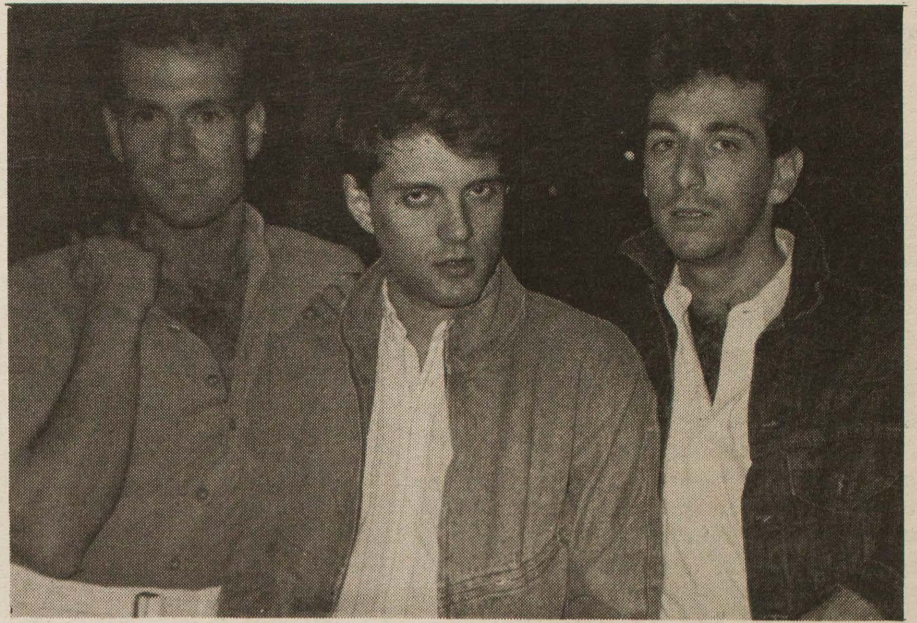
Second only to the physical toll of the epidemic (and perhaps greater to the greater number of us) is the moral toll AIDS has taken. We have fought, and fought bravely, over the past decades for the right to be ourselves. We have fought knowing that we were right, knowing that in a systematic fashion we had been denied certain social rights to basic needs. Our relationships were furtive and fraught with peril, emotions had to be sublimated, and our self-esteem as social beings was categorically denied.

Our people fought, and made progress. We shouted out loud and clear that we were here; we made it known to

them that we existed; more importantly, we let ourselves know that we were here, that we as individuals were not alone. So, we found that we were not alone: but what were we?

The drag queens spoke out against gender traps with their clothes; radicals spoke about class relationships in communiques, position papers, and consensus statements; everyone spoke out against society's restraints by being promiscuous. Promiscuity, especially, rose to the forefront of our revolution. The radical said it was revolutionary, the idealist said it was free love, the hedonist said it was great fun. Sex became more than just a part of the thing, it became the thing itself. Among non-gays as well as ourselves the word gay meant nothing so much as sex, lots of it, with many people. We never denied it; if anything, we affirmed it—proudly.

So having taken a mere aspect of being gay, a banal aspect no less, and proudly shown it to the world as a badge of our very nature, now we find that it is a deadly device indeed. Oops! Some have



Actors/Writers

Bob Stone, Doug Holsclaw, Randy Wiegand of Theatre Rhinoceros

refused to respond to this revelation; they continue business as usual. So did many Jews lend money to the Nazis. Most, however, have paused for contemplation.

We in San Diego are relatively fortunate in that here AIDS is more a subject in the newspapers than it is in our lives. We, most of us, have never seen the reality of this epidemic, only its report. This is fortunate, yes, but unfortunately this also means we have been reluctant, as a whole, to respond to the epidemic as something real. This is in part because such a response forces us to reexamine

many of the things that we have been taught that it means to be gay.

"I want to be touched. But not by strangers..."

From "The AIDS Show"

Sex and love.

One is not the other.

They are unrelated.

Only at the level of pure sensation are they involved: the glow of sensual pleasure, the electricity of touch, they simulate or stimulate feelings of love. But it is the touch one loves, not the one

SAN DIEGO'S
HOT
WOMEN'S BAR

Open Daily 3pm-2am DANCING NIGHTLY
\$2 Cover Friday and Saturday

3780 Park Boulevard
295-4163



who touches, when one is in bed with a stranger.
It is fun.
It can be physically satisfying.
And now it is potentially lethal.

"Limiting Our Sexual Smorgasbord?"
S. D. Gazette headline on AIDS op-ed piece, 2-28-85

Sex sells. And like anything else that can be sold, our society presents it to us as a commodity. We are encouraged to get it, and all of the status that it confers. It becomes like all things that cease to be merely themselves, all things that become instead tokens of power, accomplishment, and success. We gorge ourselves in such things far beyond our desire for the thing itself; we consume ourselves in our passion for what it represents.

Cars, cigarettes and sex = America's passions.



Writer/Actor Matthew McQueen
with actress Stacey Cole

In Classical Greek drama, there stands in the orchestra the chorus. It speaks for the community of people within the world created on stage. They respond to the events on stage, offering a human response to the larger than human occurrences. Thus they offer the viewer, as a participant in the drama, a way of responding to these events.

The performers in the AIDS Show are our chorus, and we are both audience and event. The epidemic is bigger than any of us. We view it even as we are (all) a part of it. We watch, we see what is happening, we know not what it means to us or what to do. They, the actors, confront, they act, they show us human ways to live in the face of an inhuman threat.

"I was hoping that by dealing head-on with the subject and many of its angles that people would feel relieved that somebody has said something direct about it that related to their experience... I wanted the show both to enlighten and empower."
"...Perhaps one or two people a night who see the show will feel reinforced, if they are practicing safe sex, that it's ok to do it ...Others may not have heard about the concept and will be exposed to it for the first time..."

Leland Moss

Safe sex.
No exchange of body fluids.
Nor rimming.
No swallowing semen.
No anal penetration without a condom.
No...
No sex?
No, not that.

Forget the exclusions...what is left?

Kissing
Caressing
Holding
Hugging
Wrestling
Rolling
Loving

Loving....

So what are we to do?
Rhino says—Live!—
Rhino asks—Is a life measured in ejaculations?
—Penetrations?—
Rhino says—Live with your friends, enjoy your life;
—don't kill your lovers.—

"One of the original influences for the show was the Living Newspaper of the 30's, which was a project which grew up in the Depression. They were doing theatrical pieces based on topics of the day..."

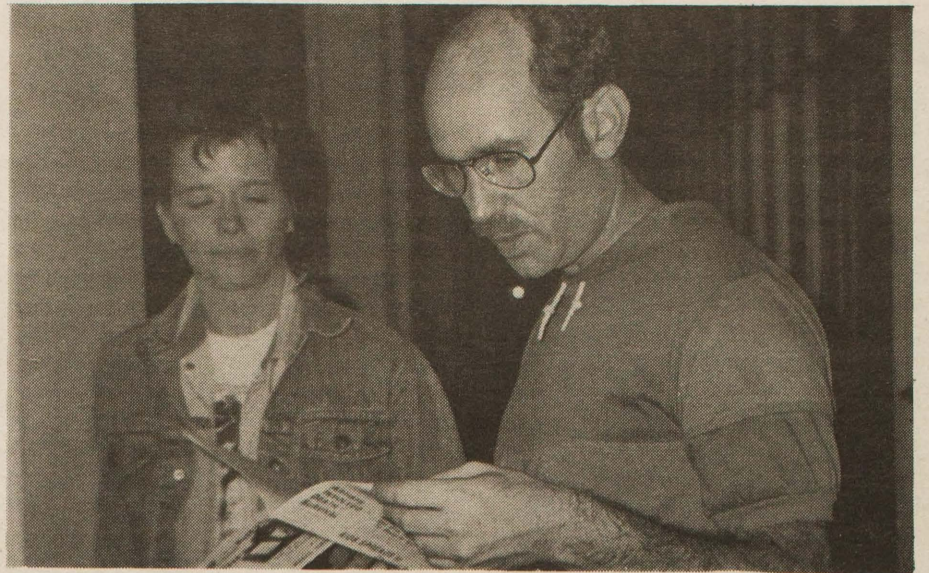
Leland Moss

People talk about what's in the newspaper, and even more so about things they have seen themselves. Among my friends who have seen it, this show has served as a wedge to open the subject of AIDS. We speak first of what we saw and felt there in the theatre. It leads us, though, to speak of our own fears, our own concerns. Perhaps this is the most vital function of the show: it opens a dialogue among its viewers.



Writer/Actress
Ellen Brook Davis

Let's talk
AIDS seems to be in bad taste—the subject, that is. This is unfortunate. We need to talk, we need not to be ashamed. In shame lies fear and unwillingness to act; in shame we are defenseless. The future is by no means bleak. Our community is responding in its own slow ponderous way to the challenge before us. Now it seems that every community paper columnist signs off with a word to "Be Careful." An ad campaign,



Theatre Rhinoceros Stage Manager Cayenne Woods
confers with Director Leland Moss

presented by Los Angeles Cooperative AIDS Reduction Education Service (LA Cares), admonishes us to "Play Safely" (in the *LA Times*, no less!) A recent column in the *Update* explored the re-eroticism of masturbation. Baths advertise JO nights; bars offer health seminars. In this time when instant gratification, never reasonable, is now unthinkable, we must cultivate those relationships which are emotionally gratifying rather than merely sensually addictive; we must pursue those activities which enhance and enrich our physical and emotional well-being, rather than challenging it. We must stop this self-destructive chain that has been given to us as our heritage by society; we must

forge a new self-image which answers our needs.

There is little question but that we are undergoing a radical reorientation in our attitudes toward what it means to be gay. AIDS is not merely a public health matter, it is a question of our identity.

We have reached the end of our adolescence. No longer can we define ourselves or act merely through the rejection of traditional constraints. We must as individuals and as gay people assert our own version of our own identity—it is time to create ourselves anew from the ashes of our old conceptions.

FRAMING
&
MATTING

grove gallery

UC Crafts Center
Revelle Campus

Carlyn and Michael

An interracial couple talks about their relationship, family, friends, UCSD, and society.

Interviewed by Russell Lewis

Russell: So, how did you meet?

Carlyn: I always start. I'm always the talkative one. You go ahead and do it.

Michael: How we met? Carlyn was a friend of my roommate's. They had a math class together. She came over to my place, my apartment at Third College, to study math with my roommate. I was upstairs and I'd come downstairs. I'd make some hot chocolate or tea and I'd ask her if she wanted any because she looked nice and she was easy to talk to. And her roommate was there as well. Both her roommate and she had a math class with my roommate. So, I'd go down there and I'd be as hospitable as possible because they looked like real nice women. Easy to talk to. So, I'd go down there and talk to them. And I started seeing her around campus more, like usual, since this is a small campus.

C: Well, it's not that small, but it's small.

M: Well, it's small for the Black population anyhow.

R: So, it wasn't hard to run into her. She wasn't lost in the sea of faces.

C: Exactly.

M: Especially that face.

R: Of course. Beautiful.

M: That's right. So, I kept seeing her. I started asking her out, not really worrying about the color difference.

C: Well, you forgot the interesting part.

M: What interesting part?

(Laughter)

C: Oh, that was so low! That was low and you're just laughing.

R: What was the interesting part?

C: Michael was given a surprise birthday party. He found out there was going to be a birthday party, so he said 'Why don't you come on over' and I said 'Delighted' because I started to become more attracted to him, but what was preventing me from getting really involved was that I was seeing someone at the time and it was going on three years. I didn't know where I was with him. You know, I was breaking out. And then Michael comes along and he was really nice and everything. I had no intention of getting involved. I just had a nice friend. So, when he invited me over to the party, we never saw the dance floor.

M: We didn't?

C: No.

R: You never saw the dance floor?

C: Did we see the dance floor a couple of times, Michael?

M: I don't know.

C: How many times? We were upstairs talking in his room.

M: We had a good conversation I guess. It was right near Winter break. I asked her where she lived and she said Los Angeles, Baldwin Hills. I was from the San Fernando Valley, in LA, too. I said 'how nice, maybe you could come over to my house on Christmas Day.' And she said 'No, what would your dad say, what would your parents say?' I said 'Oh, they won't care.' She was meaning about the color. So, right from the start we were talking about the color difference.

R: What kind of issues did you discuss?

C: It was basically what the parents would say.

M: Yeah, for some reason we were

worried about what the parents would say, where it really didn't matter to us. Right from the start we were trying to be safe. But, really, who cares what the parents think?

C: The parents really didn't care. Ironically, we thought the parents would care. They didn't care. It was everybody else who cared. And that's who we thought would never mind.

R: Like?

C: The people around us, you know, at school. I grew up in an atmosphere where my mother said 'Everyone will treat you the way you treat them. And if you treat them nice and with respect, they will also.' I had that intention all through school, even when I hit college. It wasn't until Michael and I really started going out that I finally came to my naive self that it doesn't work like that.

R: You mean it had sort of worked before?

C: Um...I just never knew there was that much racism in the world. Period. Until I started going out with him.

R: Until you crossed the line?



C: Right. And I could really see that this world isn't the way that my Mom taught me. It wasn't like that at all.

M: I had neighbors, good friends of my mother, the woman was white and the man was Black. So, that's the only interracial couple I had ever known closely. But I never had a close Black woman friend before, or lover for that matter. I don't know. I didn't really worry about her mother too much, because I didn't want to judge her personality until I actually talked frankly with her. But when I finally did go over to her house, her mother was only interested in whether I treated her daughter nicely.

So, I talked to my dad when I thought I was becoming involved...

C: I'm sorry to interrupt. They didn't think we were going to be involved. They thought it was a phase. They really did. It's been three years now.

M: My dad said 'I don't mind if you date and everything, but if you get serious, I might start to worry.'

R: About what?

M: I said to him, 'You mean, if we think about getting married?' He said 'Yeah,



then I might start to feel uncomfortable, or 'things might start to get uncomfortable.' That meaning every time we came over to visit them, they would have to say 'Michael and his wife are coming over. She's black.' It's like...in parenthesis. That kind of shit. They're pretty white. Their ideas are pretty whitish.

R: What do you mean by whitish?

C: They're pretty...they're pretty...they're not bad at all, Russell. There's a lot who would just say 'Look, you date her, we don't want you in the family any longer.' I mean, it can get that bad.

R: Now? Still?

C: Oh, yeah. As a matter of fact, a friend of mine had to make the choice between his family and his girlfriend. He chose his girlfriend. It's still like that, it's just a little more subtle.

M: They're just uneducated, or uninformed about Blacks, Black culture, you know, Chinese culture, Mexican culture, gay culture. They just don't know about it. So, there's not much they can say about it.

R: You mean they go with what they know?

M: They go with what they know. But they're semi-open-minded. It's like Carlyn said. They didn't say 'No, you can't bring her in the house.' It was fine to just meet her. It was the same type of thing as at her house. If she's not a nice woman, they might say 'she's a bitch,' but she's a nice woman.

R: How are things going with your parents now? You've been together for three years. Have things changed? Have their attitudes changed?

C: I think they think it's a little bit more than they thought it was.

M: I think they know more about Black culture now. Their stereotypes, what they think about Black people, just aren't the same. Sometimes on the holidays we'd go over to Carlyn's area, Baldwin Hills, mainly a Black section of town. Where I lived is mainly a white section of town. They'd go over there and have some wine and talk and they could relax and see how it is so the stereotypes all of a sudden disappeared. They're like kids, they're learning the whole thing about cultural differences. So, as soon as they learned and accepted it, they don't seem to care. If we ever got married, I don't think they'd mind.

C: I get the other impression from Michael's family. Because they're such a hospitable family, they're very cordial, you never know. I still don't know at this point where I stand with them. I don't know where I stand with his mother and I don't know where I stand with his father. So, I just be as nice as possible.

R: But, do you feel relaxed?

C: No, I don't. When I'm at my house do I act differently from when I'm at your house, Michael?

M: Yes.

C: Much differently. I act myself. I feel I must repress certain things when I'm at his house, because the slightest thing is judged wrongly—

M: The way you talk, the way you—

C: Exactly. If I say something that is frequently heard, that—shit I don't know—just something that makes us feel bonded—like maybe verbal or physical mannerisms from Black culture—it's a feeling of solidarity in my house. But others, like Michael's family, expect me to act the way they feel Black people act. Period. They wanted me to act one way all the time, but, just like anyone else, I don't act only one way. And, also, they wouldn't understand the cultural context.

M: You don't want to talk that way at my house because it will make them say 'Oh, see, it's typical. They all talk like that.'

C: 'We know you're just like the rest, you're just trying to be like you're not.'

M: 'You're just as dumb.' That kind of stuff. 'You still don't know how to speak.'

R: So, it's hard for you to make the transition to being more yourself around them.

C: Yeah. Because I'm not that different from the way I speak to you now. I don't understand those comments like 'Well, she doesn't sound Black.' What is sounding Black? I feel like people make distinctions and that's where these cultural expectations come in. Also, when I first went over to his home, there was this one guy who said, 'But your hair is not—it's straight.' Actually, my hair's not straight. He was obviously not exposed to many Black people. He's white, living in Woodland Hills, where very few Blacks live. I said, 'I don't wear my hair in an afro, is that what you're trying to say?' We don't all wear afros. This is what you call a perm. I roll up my hair, comb it, and it's average length.

The expectation when I first came over to his house, when his friends and family were over, I'm sure it was like 'Let's see how she looks.' I don't think I met any of their expectations.

It's just ignorance. Ignorance doesn't have to be meant in a derogatory way. You just don't know. I think Michael was pretty pissed off.

M: Well, every time Carlyn came over to my house in the early stages on holidays and celebrations, there would always be a house full of people—young women, young men, older—all kinds of white people there. Especially young women who would be there would look at her and there would just be stares. I don't know what they were thinking. Maybe it was 'Her hair isn't curly and she dresses nicely and she talks well.' There were just stares and they were afraid to even talk to her. So, the way I retaliated was to go

to where people were talking to us. I was upset.

C: They tested me. The girls actually tested me, you know. They would dance a lot at Michael's house. Girls would come up to Michael and just act very promiscuous, like I didn't even exist. I said—I felt like saying—'This is my boyfriend and because I'm Black I'm not lower than any one of you here.' I always maintained my composure. And it's only because, like I told you, they would say 'Yep, this is typical,' you know, throw my hands up in the air, cuss them out. If Michael went for it, it would almost justify why they did it, right? But Michael didn't do it. It's almost like I was subordinated or something because of my color.

R: What about your friends, not just your family.

C: Well, let me tell you one thing. Michael and I together do not have a lot of friends. We may have a lot of associates, but friends we don't have at campus. I had a difficult time with the Black community on campus when I was starting out with Michael. Before, I had some friends, I was developing friendships with some Black people on campus. Immediately when they saw Michael and I, they just dropped off like fleas off a dog with a flea collar. I went 'What's going on?' It was because of us. They figured because I was going out with Michael I was rejecting the Black race. But I wasn't. Or, they see me as an Oreo, which I'm sure that I don't have to explain. Black on the outside, white on the inside. Period.

With Michael I've become pretty strong. I've learned to accept things, people don't have to do shit for me, you know what I mean, because I've learned to be happy without them. I have. It was difficult in the beginning, but I have learned. If they don't want to associate with me due to my white lover or whatever, they don't have to. My mom's concerned about that. Her main concern was not that I was dating Michael, but what about the other people that are

M: He was my friend's friend. He was kind of forced.

They treat Carlyn as if she's sub-human, as they still believe. As they don't think she can talk like another person. They could say 'Hi, howya doing. Did you have fun skin diving?' There was none of that going on, because

*"This world
isn't the way
my Mom
taught me."*

they thought that because Carlyn was a different color, she was a different person.

C: They wanted a particular script. There are no scripts. I was going to say that Michael does not like to inform people I'm Black. He says that if they haven't learned thus far, there's no reason to prepare them. He doesn't do it.

M: I've never prepared anyone.

C: So, when I came over—'Hey man, is she cute man, does she got blond hair man.' They're like, 'Whew, I'll bet she's fine.' Then I come over, it's like, 'What, but you didn't...'

M: If they ask me what she looks like, I tell them she's got black hair and brown eyes. She's got dark skin.

C: And they think tan skin.

M: Then, they see her, and it's like 'What the fuck, you didn't tell me she's, you know, she's a nigger.'

R: Do people ever...

C: Oh, come on—

M: A lot of times, people think because

friends. Also, he did not take into account that people do date other people not of their color. He didn't even know Michael dated me. You have to watch what you say.

M: Well, he might have known, but he might have just said that because it's funny. It's easy to pick on Blacks, Gays, Mexicans, Asians. I felt really really bad that I walked away without saying anything.

C: He did.

M: So, I don't think I will anymore. I hope not.

When the man said that joke there were five other people around who laughed at the joke. I wasn't laughing and I left as soon as possible, because you don't want anymore. It's like there was one Black joke, there could be more. And it's like—

C: I got another one for you and another one for you...

M: And five is a big group. You don't want to try to change all five of their ways at once. It's very nice to have it one on one. I get all kinds of racist remarks all the time all kinds, not just racist remarks toward Black people, but any non-normal person. You know, if you're not heterosexual or if you're not dating a person of your color, you're just not right. People that are handicapped, gay, people of color, anything like that I don't like. It's not just Black jokes, but people seem to be particularly ignorant about Black culture. They know I date a Black person, and you'd think they'd think twice, but I guess they don't. I know my boss knows who you are, but he does it just for a joke, he'll get a laugh.

A good friend of mine had a party at his house, and I didn't find out about in until it was much too late.

C: And this guy had invited Michael's brother, because he really wanted Michael's brother's girlfriend to meet his parents. We've been going out for three years.

M: Yeah. This is how it was. We've been going out for three years, and he said 'John, my parents want to meet your girlfriend Wendy.' They've been going out for maybe a year. They never wanted to meet Carlyn. That hurts.

C: It did. I was really upset.

M: I don't care if I've been a friend of his for a long time, which I have—at least fifteen years—if they're racist, their friendship is no more. I don't care how long it is. I don't care if it's my parents. If their views are prejudiced to any people who speak their own mind and have their own feelings, like me dating a Black person or you being gay, if they can't respect me even after I've spoken to them individually and said 'This is where I'm coming from. Just respect me, accept me.' If they can't respect me, then I don't care if they're parents or brothers or sisters, I don't have to deal with them anymore.

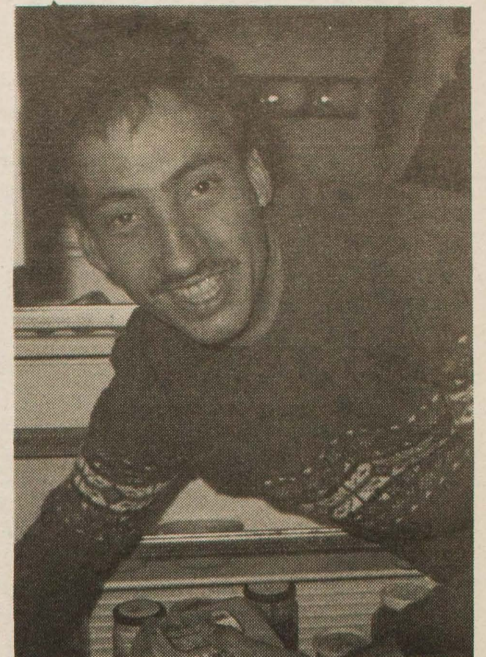
R: Do you feel like people are looking at you when you go out?

M: In Black areas in LA really a lot. And they've said things like 'Whatta you white boy lookin' at?' They would never call me honkey or anything like that, but they want to see if I'm going to be all tough or something. I just ignore it. In San Diego, the students look a lot, the kids look a lot.

C: The white people will look very briefly. The Black people stare. I've taken a little study of my own. The Asians mind their own business. They don't say shit. They don't look. The Mexicans, they don't look either, but if you're out with a Mexican, they would, you know what I mean? Blacks stare the most.

R: Why?

C: I have no idea. The Black men stare



the most. I think they feel intimidated. The Black women stare in curiosity. You know, like 'there's a change going on'.

M: I think the Black men think 'She's good looking, why didn't I get her?'

R: Or, 'Why did you take her away from the Black men?'

C: Right. Exactly. It's like 'You should be with me, baby'. Oh, in San Francisco, one of the most liberated cities of all, right? Fuck San Francisco, it's like any other big city. We went up there and I was walking and this dude, this Black guy on a bicycle looked at me and said 'How ya' doin'?' I said 'Hello, how are you?'. I do that because I'm just that type of person. And he knew I was with Michael. And he says to me 'Where you goin'?' I says, 'I gotta catch up with my boyfriend.' He says, 'Oh, that's your boyfriend?' I says, 'Sure is.' He says, 'That white man is yur boyfriend?' all loud in the financial district. He says, 'That white boy is your boyfriend?' I says, 'Yes, he is.' 'That white man goin' do nothin' for you.' I go, 'Oh shit, let me go back.' Michael's like, 'Stay back. Let's go.' I said, 'Man, you should take a look in the mirror.' I was going to tell him that, because, if anything, he had mixed blood all in his ass.

M: A lot of Black people might say 'Look, we're having a hard enough time getting a name for our own culture, our own race. You're not helping at all. You know, why are you dating some white person?'. There's going to be some other people saying 'Uh huh. She's Black. She doesn't like her race, she likes the white race.'

C: I think they're thinking about the struggle of getting the Black race together.

R: So, there's separatism thoughts.

C: Oh, right, right.

R: Is that what it's like at UCSD?

C: Yeah. It's like that at UCSD with the BSU. Period. I'm not in the BSU, though. I do have a couple of friends who have slowly understood me to be Carlyn and not Oreo cookie. It took me two years to develop a friendship with one of them. Two years to develop a friendship with him, because he knew I was dating Michael. They only judge me to be real, the real person, until after they've checked me out. Before that point, they put me in a category. I'm not a part of the BSU, period. I felt very unaccepted, but I don't feel a need to be accepted by them anymore.

M: The Black men, when I'm by myself, don't usually acknowledge me.

C: Like my friends don't acknowledge him.

M: They do when we're together. They have to. I don't know why that happens.



ruthless that are going to hurt us.

M: Once my friends knew that I had a woman friend who I liked to hang out with who was Black—I didn't get invited much anymore. Especially back in LA in the summertime.

R: Well, I can imagine in the Valley.

M: Yeah. In the Valley forget it. We went on a skin diving trip once and Carlyn was the only Black person on the boat and she happened to be my date, about only two people talked to her.

C: And one was your friend who came with you.

M: He's my roommate now.

R: So, what was this other person like who talked to you?

I'm white, they can say nigger all the time.

C: Tell him that incident that just happened, please.

M: I was at work the other day at the Ken with my so-called boss. He said, 'I need a cigarette right now!' I said, 'What, you want to relax?' He said, 'They don't make me relax, they stimulate me a little bit.' He goes, 'You know what I do when I smoke two or three cigarettes at a time? I like to go out and kill niggers.'

R: What did you do?

M: I just walked away. I should have said something, but it's hard.

C: It's very hard. If he could say that to Michael, it must be accepted by his

CHRISTIANITY AND MORAL JUDGEMENT

by Anne M. Duddy

Most articles in campus newspapers which deal with homosexuals tend to lean on strong stereotypical dramatizations to prove the author's points. (For example, see "Accept me for what I am...don't reject me for what I am not" by Stephonie Krieger, *UCSD Guardian*, Oct. 22, 1984; and "Casting Pearls" by James D. Sponiaus, *California Review*, Jan./Feb. 1985.) These authors are completely unqualified to write about the topic because they haven't had the courage to open their eyes and actually research the truth. They cite Scripture and tell us how immoral gays are, but if they really had the courage of their convictions, they would find that gays are not hissing demons or butch new-wave punks, but real, normal people and they would try to prove their point with a more representative sample. Where are the doctors, lawyers, teachers, computer engineers, and other professionals in their analysis? They would be shocked to find that they are not any different from heterosexual professionals. I wonder how they reconcile this with their beliefs.

Throughout history, ignorance has caused the imaginations of the ignorant and superstitious to conjure up wild fantasy caricatures of things they couldn't understand, attributing their origins to mythical demons. At times we are all guilty of taking the most salient, outstanding or dramatic example and

erroneously designating these as representatives of a given group.

It has been my intent during the last three years to educate myself about the gays in our community, and to try to encourage other heterosexuals to do the same. We must not make the foolish mistake of being prejudiced when we know little or nothing about the group in question. I'm a senior at UCSD now, and in the last three years, since my best friend came out, I have come to know many gays here on campus. I have found them to be delightful people, and, I'm pleased to say, just as normal as anyone else. I have also been exploring my spirituality, and I have striven to reconcile my beliefs with those of the people around me. I seem to hold a middle ground between mainstream Christians and my gay friends. This is a trying position, and I have faced some alienation from both sides, but I still feel I have something worthwhile to share with those friends who are open to the idea.

In our society we are faced with an ugly battle. People waving Bibles are behaving violently, persecuting various groups and individuals around the country, picketing Women's Centers and gay community neighborhoods. Some individuals extend this hatred to bombing and unorganized acts of terrorism. Unfortunately, many of these groups are self-proclaimed Christians, whose misguided professions of faith are repelling many people from churches

and Christian communities around the country. They are a visible group. Let us not take these extreme examples of radical activist behavior as representative of Christians on the whole. This is just as biased a sample as the other authors' biased sample of gay people.

Speaking with many gay people on campus, it is apparent that these

*"...decide
for yourself
what 'sin'
really means."*

Christians' message is loud and clear: "Go away, we don't want you in our churches, we don't want to deal with sinners like you. When you've decided to give up your evil ways and live like us, come back. Until then, may you burn in hell." Christianity today demands a lot more love than many of these people are expressing. They seem to be so concerned with finding the loopholes with which they can justify hatred that they miss the message of love that is inherent in Christ's words. I'm not advocating "sappy love for all," but we can at least try to spend more time learning how to love one another.

Don't let these intolerant, ignorant people convince you that God won't have anything to do with you. Read the Bible yourself. There is a lot of wisdom in those pages which you can apply to your life. No one should be forced into the existential hell that the expulsion from churches has caused for many people, simply because one's lifestyle does not fit the mainstream concept of "normal" and therefore "good." There is more to this existence than the day-to-day living, partying on weekends, work, family, beer and personal friends with whom we fill our time. I believe that there is a spiritual force which binds mankind together, and that it can be studied from a number of varied religious philosophies: Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Moslem, et. al. Each culture and religion has remarkably similar ideas about spirituality, but they express them in a number of different dogmatic applications. Reflecting on this, I have chosen to study Christianity. I am still a novice in the study, but I have learned a lot from reading the Bible myself.

In the study of Christianity, there are several things to keep in mind. The Bible, being the main source of guidance for the many, varied Christian religions, is a wonderful source rich in historical information, parables, spiritual guidance, and other forms of wisdom. People have found hundreds of different interpretations for the same words, each proclaiming his or her interpretation as solid truth. The more individuals there are who subscribe to the same interpretation, the more it is perceived by all as the correct one. Some choose to emphasize the fearsome aspects of the punishments prescribed in the Bible, and some prefer to concentrate on the humanitarian principle therein. Each group feels the other is incorrect in its emphasis. Dissenting opinions are discounted as ignorant or as attempts to twist Scripture to suit one's own point of

view. It is interesting to note that religion's philosophers seldom agree on the fine points of carrying out a religion. Some passages are selected as directly applicable to our lives, and others by the same author are written off as era-bound, not applicable to modern times. I've found almost all the lessons in the Bible to be valid, but we must keep in mind that parts of it were written over 2000 years ago and have been interpreted many times by different individuals in different eras. Application of these lessons to modern life may be done, but it must be done cautiously, and it is still open to interpretation.

There are many people in the gay community who have been turned off by Christianity for various reasons. Some exclaim: "Why should I follow a religion that condemns my lifestyle to hell? Why do they encourage me to lie to myself and others about the truth, to live a closeted, lonely existence wherein I'm required to wear a mask so other Christians will approve of my behavior? After all, God knows what's going on inside me. I can't fool Him." Christians don't feel that they are asking you to be a hypocrite. Rather, they feel that you are lying to yourselves now and that accepting religion will reveal the truth to you. I differ with this point of view. I believe that it was based on a few examples of individuals who manifested a situation with homosexual behavior and then, when they left the situation, "changed back to normal." I doubt they were really homosexual in the first place.

Needless to say, this point of view contends that you are not living right. The issue here seems to be "nature vs. nurture." If it is natural to you, I suggest you take the position that you are created by God as you are. The Bible condemns unnatural sexual behavior; I believe that just as it would be unnatural for me to be gay, it may be unnatural for gays to be straight.

Regarding homosexuality, the Bible is at times clear and at times ambiguous in its definitions and punishments. I read five translations of the Bible, and I found the wording differed in each one. For example, the King James version refers to "abusers of themselves with mankind" in I Cor. 6:10. The same phrase is translated as "sexual perverts" in the Revised Standard translation, and as "homosexuals" in the Living Bible, the most recent translation.

Likewise, I Kings 14:24 has four different translations which describe condemned men: in the King James it's "Sodomites," "male prostitutes" in the Modern Language, "male cult prostitutes" in the Revised Standard version, and in the most recent translation, the Living Bible, the same phrase is "homosexuals." Each one means something very different to me, and it seems wrong to condemn a group simply because someone came up with a very different translation. If anything, I have become very aware of the ambiguities in the Bible and how open it is to individual interpretation.

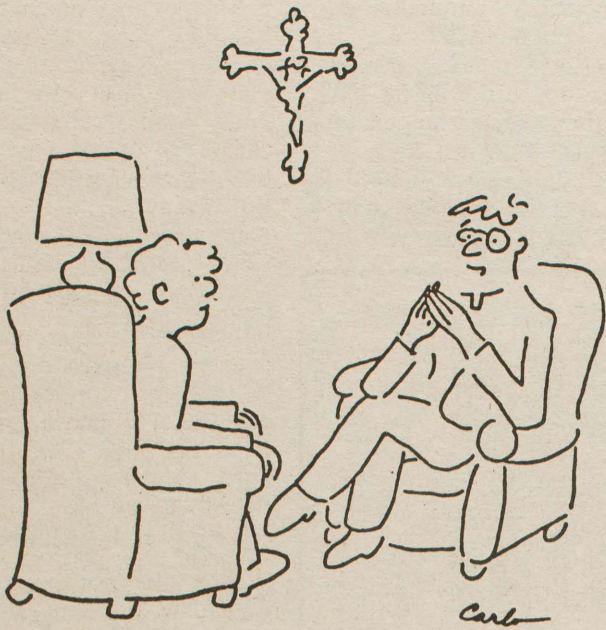
One passage in particular refers directly in all the translations to homosexual behavior. Christians have used this to prove how wrong homosexuality is, but I realized after reading it that they may, actually be drawing an inverse causal inference by switching the chronology of the passages in Paul's letter to the Romans, Rom. 1:21,24,26,27. Paul says in Rom. 1:21 that God forsakes the sinful Gentile "Because, although they had the knowledge of God, they failed to render Him the praises and thanks due to God."

18 and up Welcome

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"I respect your choice of lifestyle, Tony; but won't it be terribly lonely without wife or children?"

In the following verses he explains how they gradually declined into lifestyles of ill-repute, and homosexual behavior was among the other sins in which they participated. It was immediately apparent to me that their acts were not natural to them, but adopted in the situation in which they found themselves. We have seen this reported about modern-day prisoners who have very different behaviors in prison, none of which could be argued to be natural to the individuals involved.

I wonder if there can be an exclusion for those who continue to render God their thanks and praise but are by nature homosexual. This is another hot point of controversy because no one agrees on this nature vs. nurture approach to interpreting the Bible for oneself. If it is nature, homosexuality won't just go away when you accept religion. If it is

"We must be true to ourselves and examine our concept of what following Christ's example really means."

nurture, or environmentally induced as in a prison, homosexual behavior could vanish as argued by the theologians when one adopts the alternative lifestyle and escapes the so-called "unnatural one." They also contend that you cannot accept Christ until you change your lifestyle. Catch 22.

In the New Testament, Paul is the one who begins laying down the dogmatic application of behavior. To keep his criticisms in perspective, we must keep in mind that he refers to all sexual "sin" when he lays down the laws regarding sex and when he offers marriage as the alternative.

Paul chooses celibacy and wishes it for all other men (1. Cor. 7:7). His opinion for men in the church is found in 1 Cor. 7:9, "But if you can't control yourselves, go ahead and marry. It is better to marry than to burn with lust." This would

indeed get in the way of one's undivided attention to God in prayer, but Paul doesn't paint a pretty picture of marriage, and his concept of it is disputed by our peers.

Likewise, his opinion of women's roles in life and in the church is also disputed in contemporary theological debates. Keep in mind that his statements on the various sins are selectively disputed and accepted by a number of groups. You should read the Bible and decide for yourself what "sin" really is, be it abstract or concrete.

I am not trying to explain away "sin" by choosing selective passages from the Bible. Nor do I intend to condemn others by criticizing the Bible. People must read the Bible for themselves to judge if it is the spiritual path they wish to follow. Don't be turned off by judgemental Christians. Although well-meaning, we may be in error. For us, Jesus cautions in Matt. 7:21-23;

"Not all who sound religious are really godly people. They may refer to me as 'Lord,' but still won't get to heaven. For the decisive question is whether they obey my Father in heaven. At the judgement many will tell me, 'Lord, Lord, we told others about you and used your name to cast out demons and to do many other great miracles.' But I will reply, 'You have never been mine. Go away, for your deeds are evil.'"

All who call ourselves Christians must keep this in mind, before we act in judgement of others. We must be true to ourselves and examine our concept of what following Christ's example really means.

In Matt. 6:31-33, Jesus warns us of our pride and of our obsession with worldly goods such as food and clothing. Christ offers a gift: the Lord will take care of those who follow him. "...and he will give them to you if you give him first place in your life and live as he wants you to." (Matt. 6:33) You must think about this one. You are no doubt aware that other people say that you are not living your life the way God wants you to. Read into the first four books of the New Testament and examine Christ's words, then decide for yourself if you need to make any changes.

Many other Christians have accused me of casting pearls before the swine, or wasting evangelism on ungrateful heathens as referred to in Matt. 7:6,7. Sharing my beliefs, however, is my right, and if one person can be enlightened and/or helped by this particular religious philosophy, then no effort is wasted.

Those of us who choose to evangelize or to criticize others must read Matt.

7:30, where Jesus wisely advises, "and why worry about a speck in the eye of a brother when you have a board in your own?" and Matt. 7:5, "Hypocrite! First get rid of the board then you can see to help your brother." We all have faults, so we must deal with those before we criticize others. Who are we to judge others, anyway? We're not perfect. If we were, we wouldn't need any metaphysical philosophy to guide our lives.

Keeping the above passage in mind, we can better understand what Jesus said to the adulteress when her accusers, none free of sin themselves, could not cast the stones in condemnation. This is a powerful example. We are not qualified to judge others on moral issues. Thus, when Christ tells her in John 8:11; "Go and sin no more," He does not imply that if she returns to sin, mankind may then feel free to cast stones. Likewise, in Rom. 2:1-3 Paul remarks that God will judge those who sit in judgement of others. We're still not free of faults ourselves, even if we are forgiven. For this reason I am wary of those who judge my morality.

I recommend that you study other ideologies as well, but for those interested in the Christian ideology, there is a lot of promise. Jesus says, "For everyone who asks, receives. Anyone who seeks finds. If only you knock, the door will open." (Matt. 7:8) He promises, "...There is forgiveness of sins for all who turn to me." (Luke 24:47) By seeking spirituality, we can attain a higher understanding of our lives. This is a lot of work. Jesus does not expect perfection, but he does expect a responsibility to make an effort to strive for excellence.

Current mainstream theology categorically denies that homosexuality is natural even in the face of evidence that gays may constitute as much as 10% of the population of the Earth cross-culturally. The current seat of debate centers on causality: If homosexuality is God's creation, therefore natural, how can it be sinful? Mainstream theologians contend that homosexuality may "feel natural" to the homosexual, but in fact is

not, that people "turn gay" and can "turn back" just as easily. They discourage trusting your feelings because they can be controlled by Satan. In effect, they deny that homosexuality could be natural to you.

I have reconciled this issue for myself. My gay friends have so much love to share that it is impossible for me to condemn them to hell because of their sexuality. They help others and live by exemplary moral standards. You can't tell them apart from any other student at UCSD. Even without reading the Bible, the principles by which they live resemble the ideology which Christ represents. How can I condemn them when we believe some of the same things?

In addition, I distinguish love from lust, and sexual love from lustful sex. These are fine lines, all subjectively defined. According to Moses and Paul, sexual love is permitted in marriage. In modern society the concept of marriage has changed from proprietary law to a union based on emotional ties. It seems that it would be possible to extend the concept of emotional ties to include gay relationships.

I know other Christians staunchly disapprove of this possibility. The definition of "marriage" does seem to be quite pliable these days, however. I recommend consulting with a qualified theologian on this matter because I have not spent much time thinking about this issue. For those interested in pursuing Christianity or discussing the numerous issues involved with homosexuals and Christianity, two organizations which may help you are:

Dignity of San Diego
P.O. Box 33367
San Diego, Ca 92103

Metropolitan Community Church of San Diego
P.O. Box 33291
San Diego, Ca 92103

I hope that maybe some of the existentialists out there will open their minds and give it a try. It could be worth the effort, especially if they're not existentialists by choice.

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LETTERS

Judging by appearance

Dear Editor,

You had an interesting interview with Micki Archuleta in the December issue of *Sappho Speaks*. In it, Micki concluded, "If I could have one wish, it would be that everybody would think about other people's rights and needs." Yet she had just really hurt my feelings in an earlier paragraph by putting down "girls who were fat, dumpy and ugly." "I

have taste," said Micki.

Ouch! Being gay may have its problems, but being fat, dumpy and ugly isn't a bed of roses either! I happen to weigh—I hate to admit it—more than 190, have red hair, freckles, and, to quote Micki, "Zits." Acne happens to be a disease without a cure, or hasn't anyone told Micki? And I didn't ask to be born with red hair and freckles any more than she asked to be gay. As far as being fat and ugly—I hate it! It kills me to face people, wondering if they are thinking what Micki came right out and said. I know what people think about fat and ugly—and how I wish I had the option of staying in the closet sometimes! Everyone knows what I look like before they even speak to me. Micki has the

choice, being "120 pounds, and not bad looking," to at least speak to people casually or even get to know someone before telling them that she is gay. I can't even walk past someone without their seeing that I am a fat ugly redhead with freckles and zits. And if they happen to have "taste" like Micki, where does that leave me? I've never told anyone but there is a bumper sticker that says, "No Fat Chicks." When I see it, it hurts me more than I can say.

Can people be truly aware of the hurt that others may be carrying inside? Micki was right when she said that "we're all different—we need more understanding and consideration." A little consciousness raising is good for all of us.

Sappho Speaks is doing just that. Thanks.

-Jeanen Monteleone

Bisexuality

Dear Karen Pickens,

Thank you for your article on Bisexuality in the December issue. As a radical lesbian, bisexuality is something that I have had a hard time understanding. I'm glad to see the channels of communication opening up on our way to a more accepting and united world. I appreciate your bravery.

In sisterhood,
Ann Ballard

I AM WHITE

I am white
And was protected from embracing reality
By Victorian fantasy.

I was raised in
A jar of opaque glass
Where spoiled little girls
Become snobbish, narrow women.

I have been raised
Blind and speechless,
With restricting roles to girdle
Me in prejudicial style.

I am white
And now see the
Black and white racist mime
That I won't make mine.

Through the curiosity
Of my mind,
I have discovered worldly
Interactions beyond my lacey fan.

I know the difference
Between clinched hard teeth
Saying "yes, sir" and a
Petite smiling Christian people
Saying "Yes, of course."

I am white—
And see the contrast between
Women gawking at women
And womyn loving womyn;
Between false godspell gossip
And the truth of loyal friendship;
Between unofficial, "official" lines
And a heroic humane act.

I am a Renaissance woman
Who has left her Victorian mansion,
And her utopian, small town
To live and struggle towards
Universal understanding.

I am white—
And am shaped spiritually,
sully by
My woman's carresses—
My husband's advice
My six-year old daughter's
discoveries—
By those who believe in
uniting humanity.

I. Lillian

Contest Results

In the December issue of *Sappho Speaks*, we ran a "Do you know your stereotypes?" contest. We asked our readers to identify stereotypical modes of dress and mannerism by matching pictures with the appropriate labels. The purpose of the contest was to point out how pervasive stereotypes are. Our portrayals embraced the silliness of such labels (using the same two models for every role), yet they were also based in reality.

The winning entry, chosen by a random drawing from all correct entries, was from Carlos and Jennifer Nelson, of

Casa Del Mar. They received a gift certificate from Groundwork Book Store (UCSD Student Center).

Answer key: "Real me," 10, 11; Straight man, 7, 1; Straight woman, 4, 9; Butch Gay male, 12, 3; Femme Gay male, 2, 13; Butch Lesbian, 14, 5; Femme Lesbian, 8, 6.

With out humorous approach, we hoped to take some of the believability out of stereotypes and their implications in general. We welcome your comments on this and other issues. Our thanks to all those who participated in the contest.

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