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As a NATIONAL MAGAZINE of gay and lesbian opinion, politics, and culture, it's important that the content of OUT/LOOK reflect the rich diversity of interests, perspectives, and life experiences of our community. To promote this goal, we've expanded our editorial board to include individuals intimately connected to segments of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community not fully represented on our original board.

With this issue, we are pleased to welcome four new editors: Dorothy Allison, who has been a writer or editor for many publications including Quest, Conditions, The New York Native, and The Village Voice; Tomás Almaguer, who teaches sociology at the University of California at Berkeley and is the author of a forthcoming comparative study of racial conflict in nineteenth century California; Jackie Goldsby, who currently works as a paralegal and occasionally writes criticism on Afro-American culture; and Meredith Maran, who is a freelance writer and editor, former editor of the Banana Republic Catalog, and mother of two sons.

We're also branching out into new literary forms with this issue. For the first time, we're publishing fiction and poetry—with the help of our new poetry editors in New York City, Jewelle Gomez and David Groff.

And the youngest voice to participate in our editorial and business deliberations is Noah Klausner Chasnoff, the three-month-old son of OUT/LOOK founding members Kim Klausner and Debra Chasnoff. There are now quite a few parents among our editors, a testament to yet another type of diversity OUT/LOOK is eager to embrace.

While we acknowledge our differences, we are also alerted to the overriding commonalities that bind us together. One of the more onerous developments that remind us of the common ground we share is legislation pending in the US Congress that would make it a crime for a bookseller or distributor to obtain an "obscene" publication shipped through interstate commerce. Title II of the Child Protection and Obscenity Enforcement Act (Senate Bill 2033, House Bill 3889) would make book and magazine sellers and distributors

personally responsible for the content of all the tens of thousands of titles they carry. In the face of that impossible task, according to the American Booksellers Association and the Council of Periodical Distributors Associations, vendors simply would not stock any books and magazines with questionable sexual content.

The effect of this legislation would be draconian. Open discussion of sexual matters would be seriously curtailed, and the stage set for other governmental assaults on the First Amendment. To demean and limit the printed discussion of sex—so central an aspect of our humanity—to call it dirty, to hide information about it, to hypocritically use it to sell products and simultaneously repress sexual expression—disables not only lesbian, gay, and bisexual culture, but the larger culture as well. We need more, not less, lively discussion on sexual matters—even when it may make some people uncomfortable.

In this third issue of OUT/LOOK, we go farther than before in allowing different voices about sex to sing through our pages—a step we take in the midst of ongoing internal debate about the appropriateness and treatment of explicit sexuality in the magazine.

The questions raised by publishing writing and art about sex are complex. Sometimes
the nature of sexually explicit material contributes to systems of inequality based on class,
race, or gender. We try to assess if the way we
write or draw about sex perpetuates these inequities—or transcends them and promotes
greater tolerance and appreciation of diversity. We struggle with deciding when sexually
explicit images or words should be published
in the name of art or intellectual discourse..

We can't take our ability to explore these issues in a public forum for granted. If the kind of obscenity legislation now pending in Congress (or any of the other bills being cooked up by the censorship advocates) were to be enacted, our options for exploration and debate—about sex and other aspects of lesbian and gay life—would be severely limited. We urge you to oppose these measures in any way you can. ▼



Neah listening to the OUT/LOOK editors discuss the Tom of Finland article in this leave

### Gladys-Without Her Tux

■ The picture you printed of Gladys Bentley [Spring 1988] takes me back to the 1940s, when [Gladys] played piano and sang at Monas on 440 Broadway in San Francisco. My lover was managing the club at that time and I came to know Gladys very well. She was, by then, very, very large, and wore tuxedos exclusively. It was amazing to suddenly see her in this [picture], having never known her at the stage where she wore feminine hats.

Doris Sinclair Benica, California



### No Guppies Here

■ As a male of color, I [find] your articles cover wide and very diverse subjects, as well as discussing and putting forth issues that do not have a "color" basis; that is something that I can enjoy and appreciate. Many gay or lesbian magazines are too specialized and frequently geared to the guppie (gay-yuppie). Your magazine is refreshing and different. We want it sitting on our reading table along with Time, Newsweck, and Black Enterprise.

Sidney Selwyn Thompson Washington, D.C.

### In Defense of 12-Step Programs

 I enjoyed the Summer 1988 issue immensely, although I strongly disagreed with Ellen Herman's perspectives on our recovery programs ("Getting to Serenity: Do Addiction Programs Sap Our Political Vitality?"). Since she herself is not recovering, she could only dabble in our groups to gain insight. I'm assuming that the rationale for this was the alleged greater objectivity of an outsider. If this is true, then perhaps we should have heterosexuals penning our magazines for a broader, better perspective. Absurd? No more so than Herman inviting addicts to "defend our right to pleasure."

I think Herman is criticizing the horse for not giving milk. Our friend Flicka was not meant to be a cow, nor are recovery programs meant to be empowered political organizations. They have, however, empowered some of us to be political by releasing us from our addictive handcuffs and enabling us to express strength in other, appropriate arenas. Congratulations though on creating this wonderful forum. It is tolerance of diversity within our own sphere that will assure our continue successful struggle.

Charlotte McCaffrey St. Louis, Missouri

■ In response to Ellen Herman's

"Getting to Serenity: Do Addiction
Programs Sap Our Political
Vitality?" I offer my experience.
It is not possible that I would have
participated in the following if I
had not been clean and sober:
March on Washington, March on
Sacramento, Die-In, Couples Inc.
Breakfast, numerous AIDS vigils
and marches, ERA marches, prochoice marches, and gay pride
celebrations. My lover and I would
not have been married in "The
Wedding" in D.C. We would not

have honored a five-and-a-half-year relationship by sending "Wedding" announcements to both our families, friends, and co-workers. I would have skipped voting and signing petitions altogether.

Rather, I would have continued to believe I was insane, worthless, and passive. I would be dead, in jail, or back at the old nut house.

I think society likes to redirect our identities through drugs and alcohol. It's the quickest way to get rid of the riff-raff. Sedate them, put them away, shut them down because if the dykes and queers got sober, they might begin to develop their individuality and god forbid, they might even go political.

Yes sobriety seems like a threat to political vitality all right. Herman just has her camps mixed up!

> Susan W.\* West Hollywood, California

As a lesbian feminist and member of Al-Anon, I take exception to numerous misrepresentations of the 12-step approach in Ellen Herman's article. She gathered "evidence" to make her case, but did she really listen?

Herman quotes an AA member who dropped out of political activity after joining the program. For this woman, at this time, personal recovery became the priority. What is wrong with that? We cannot predict that she will never return to political involvement. However, Herman seems to assume that her commitment to social change has been ruined forever and that that is what happens to others like her.

People who enter 12-step programs are just that—people. Starting a program does not miraculously turn them into politically correct angels. They do not check their racism, sexism, and homophobia at the door. However, the principles of the programs and structure of the meetings encourage equality and unconditional acceptance. I do find a lot of support from an unexpected diversity of people. Sometimes I go to a lesbian or lesbian/gay meeting, but most often I go to general meetings. The world isn't perfectly progressive, nor is it only made up of me and my kind. Al-Anon offers me tools to cope with the real world—all of it.

Nobody forces anyone into a program-or even proselytizes for it. Can the same be said of the pressure to be circumspect about one's political correctness in the lesbian community? I've heard lesbians (such as S/M advocates) argue that the stigma of being "unp.c." cuts down on their freedom to have pleasure, to have fun. They feel judged. It's ironic that Herman should accuse 12-step programs of being anti-pleasure. In 12-step programs, we do not judge one another-about our addictions. shortcomings, nor the individual roads of recovery we travel.

Eva\* New York, New York

 Ellen Herman claims the 12-step programs aim to achieve an addiction-free life "with a minimum of discomfort and a maximum of self-awareness." AA literature is very specific [on this point]: inner growth is painful. To achieve the goals of the program, one must participate in the most severe self-criticism, participate fully in the community of the program, and give of one's self to others. It requires a more intense level of commitment than any political activism I ever participated in, because it doesn't end with the next election.

Yes, we do say, "Take what you like and leave the rest." It is more than a "handy slogan" as Herman says. People who have conflicts with parts of a 12-step program can still feel at home in it, free of criticism. Far better to use a handy slogan then continue the misery of active alcoholism or drug addiction.

WHAT DID FREUD NOTHING. HE HAVE TO SAY ABOUT WAS INTO ADDICTION? COCAINE

"Principles before personalities" (part of the 12 traditions of the programs) have maintained AA for over 50 years without hierarchy or professional leadership. (And what my dear activist, is there to object to in that?) Criticism is not a part of meetings because it isn't helpful, while the sharing of experience is.

My experience is that there are two types of people who find fault in 12-step programs: mental health professionals who dislike the idea of people getting better without paying a professional for it, and those people who are personally threatened to see others recovering from the pain indicative of the life they [the critics] are still living.

It is not for me to say which category Herman falls into, as she defends pleasure without regard to the pain that pleasure might inflict. I sincerely doubt that she has experienced anything in her life like the joy I have known in my seven years of continuous sobriety. Today I live my life as a gay man fully, celebrating my sexuality; as a drunk I knew only fear, anger, and pain.

David M.\* San Francisco, California

■ I began my political involvement in the women's and civil rights movements in high school, continued in the anti-war movement, and then became highly involved in lesbian politics. For a while, drugs were my medicine; they eased the pain of constant exposure and confrontation with the straight world.

Eventually, however, I retreated into the lesbian and gay bars where I thought I was safer, and my disease progressed. I often considered suicide and failed in my attempts to overdose. My political friends could not deal with my "problem" and often asked why I didn't just cut down or control my use, or just use natural drugs, or only drink on the weekends.

Ronnie and Nancy are proposing the same ideas about willpower and control, which might work for people who are not alcoholics and addicts. Willpower did not work for me, political activity did not take away the pain, and Alcoholics Anonymous gave me a life back.

It has been my experience over the last five years, that people who are, as Herman says, just looking for friends, "unrealistic interactions," or "visibility" do not stay involved with AA. They go on to the next popular self-improvement group when these needs are not met by AA. The rest of us stick around for the long haul because we are living life on life's terms, telling the truth in our relationships, and grateful to be alive.

The program is a spiritual foundation which allows me to come out again and again, to love myself, to love my lover, to let her love me, to criticize myself and others, to risk being different, even from other lesbians. I agree with Herman when she says, "Progressive political movements should be taking notes on what is so appealing about the recovery movement."

Irene K.\* West Hollywood, California

<sup>\*</sup> These writers asked that their last names be witheld in accordance with the tradition of anonymity in 12-step programs.

### Herman responds:

I'm sure the authors of these letters will be surprised to read that I actually agree with a few of the points they make: that the pain of addiction is serious business, to restate only the most obvious. But those who actually read what I wrote know that my article was respectful in its consideration of both the political contributions and liabilities of the current 12-step movement.

I do think the programs tend to encourage the notion that no criticism is possible from people outside the programs (or inside either, apparently) and that those who are callous and irresponsible enough to commit such acts of heresy must have something really bad to recover from themselves. I couldn't disagree more with David M.'s opinion that criticism is "not helpful." We need more critical debate, not less, and we certainly need to learn how to do it better, so that it moves us all forward. Believing that yours is the only way to think, to act, to change, believing that you have all the answers figured for everybody all the time can only mean that dialogue is a pointless exercise since whoever has the most marbles at the moment will simply tell all the rest of us how to live.

One point I wish to address in particular: Charlotte M's suggestion that the only legitimate voice is the the voice of the person inside the skin of experience, that one's identity is everything and that all else is dismissable. This notion isn't new, but I had hoped it was going

Solidarity, not sameness, is the value we must nourish and promote. Charlotte M. thinks it ridiculous that anyone outside the programs could have something legitimate to say about them, or that heterosexuals might ever offer relevant thoughts to gay men and lesbians. I think exactly the opposite-that we are cutting our own throats when we block access to these and other voices. Let's face it; we have a long way to go before we get anything resembling a world we can live in joyfully, and we're not even on the road if all of those people-recovering, not recovering, gay, straight, or whatever-live and think in little bubbles with instructions never to venture outside.

### **How to Assess Gay** Leadership

 I am very heartened by OUT/ LOOK and all of its contributors. Finally, we as feel strong enough to be able to take and dish out real, constructive criticism. I have never read an article in a gay publication, anywhere, anytime, that I have been more impressed with than I was with David Jernigan's "Why Gay Leaders Don't Last: The First ten Years After Stonewall" (Summer. 1988).

I am a junior at Boston University and the president of the gay campus group here, where I've been involved in the leadership since I was a freshman. Before that, I helped run the gay youth group in Albany, New York, and was a member of the board of directors for the gay community center there.

Through my experiences I've developed a style of leadership and a certain outlook on gay politics that is often found to be "heretical" by certain factions of the community. It really hit home to me when Jernigan talked about how Boston's Gay Community News often makes it difficult for gay or lesbian leaders to arise, and survive. The paper seems to have the idea that an egalitarian gay and lesbian movement must mean a leaderless movement. I agree that the idea of collectivism it espouses is somewhat appealing on its face, but the problem is that this mentality virtually forbids our community

from having the mainstream American voice that is desperately needed-not just for change in metropolitan areas, but for real, fundamental transformations in places like Omaha, Tuscaloosa, and Altoona.

> Jeff Nickel Boston, Massachusetts

 David Jernigan states, I think correctly, that the meaning of being gay has changed during the course of the gay movement. Of course this would have an effect on the kind of leadership needed by the movement. But Jernigan first poses this question [of changing identity] to assess what sort of "role model" that leadership is, and then what kind of "job description" that leadership has. "Role models" are mediated perceptions of individuals; they are not individuals themselves. People should act and think from an inner-directed base, not through the facile emulation of media figures-whether the media figure is found in the Advocate or USA Today. "Job descriptions" are bureaucratic proscriptions of activity that have nothing to do with accomplishing a task that needs to be done. A "common sense" (á la Gramsci) sally is That's not in my job description."

Semantic nitpicking? Words can set you free; they can also be a cage. Jernigan robs himself, and us, of a fluidity and subtlety that would have helped us come to a fuller understanding of a very dynamic moment of history. One could see how Harvey Milk was powerful precisely because he fashioned his own way of being in the world; he did not have anyone to copy, he did not compose himself after an imagined newspaper ad.

Jernigan jumps into an even bigger pile when he elaborates a therapy model of politics, the worst sort of psychological reductionism. He claims that most criticism of gay leadership has been in the "language of internalized oppression."
This is chillingly summarized in the conclusion where Jernigan calls for us to "laugh off attacks from without and within, and to offer support and assistance rather than criticism and rejection to those willing to lead nationally and visibly." This could fairly, if a little more baldy, be rephrased "don't criticize your leaders!"

Nor does a therapy model offer ways of understanding broader differences such as race, gender, or class. The gay movement has been exciting, and frustrating, precisely because it has involved so many types of pople, so many different agendas.

Finally, much of the terminology and concepts in the Jernigan's article are derived from cocounseling: internalized oppression, laughing as a form of "discharge," "perceived limits," the therapy approach in general. If co-

therapy approach in general. If cocounseling wishes to offer itself as a body-of-political-thought-to-betaken-seriously, it's gonna have to do a little bit better than that.

Mark Leger San Francisco, California

■ I am very appreciative of OUT/ LOOK's effort to balance men and women's voices [especially since] other gay and mainstream publications are seemingly ignorant of lesbian culture and contributions. Of the two other national gay magazines, the Advocate rarely includes an article on lesbian issues and Christopher Street never does.

This is the eighties, separatism is dead, sexism is a concern only of the women's movement and the AIDS crisis has brought forth a new gay unity, right? If only it were that easy. But we are not a simple, well-defined community, which brings me to some specific criticisms of David Jernigan's article, "Why Gay Leaders Don't Last."

I object to the fact that Jernigan examines the political activism of twenty years and does not include an analysis of the political activites of Virginia Apuzzo, Pat Norman, Charlotte Bunch, Rita Mae Brown, Kate Millet, Karla Jay, Ginny Berson—just to name a few.

While he does mention Elaine Noble and Del Martin, his dismissal of Martin's farewell to the Gay Activists Alliance as rude underscores his blind spot about gay leadership. You cannot neatly contain the gay rights movement as something separate from the women's movement, nor from any of the social liberation movements that precede it. Del Martin's letter was angry, but the issues she raised were not "the language of gay oppression," but the words of a feminist who wasn't going to take any more shit.

Jernigan seems to have decided if you organized lesbians in the 1970s, and worked with feminists, that was a separate movement, and you don't count as a Gay Leader. Just as he's decided that the demands articulated by other liberation movements—for self-respect, equality of power, for a spiritual dimension to social transformation—don't count either compared to the need for a figure-head in the gay community.

Jernigan defines a leader as one who can "provide organizational acumen and direction...serve the needs of the disenfranchised...and spearhead impressive organizational efforts." That sounds to me like resource management, whereas a leader deals on the emotional level, and moves people to action [that has] usually been planned by an effective manager.

I don't buy the argument that we don't have a national leader because we keep destroying them. When we don't accept Jim Foster, Rick Stokes, or David Goldstein as our leaders, it's not our "stubborness" or "confusion" that's "dragging" the movement down. It's a hard leap to make from a manager to a leader. Take San Francisco

Supervisor Harry Britt, for example. He's all right at what he does, but a visionary? When people go out and scream and cheer a speech and feel tears running down their faces, and vow to make a commitment, it's the emotional articulation that makes [a leader] every time.

Barbara Tannenbaum San Francisco, California

As someone who was "there" and very involved with the early years of Gay Liberation Front and several gay groups that came after, I'd like to praise David Jernigan's well thought-out article on gay leadership.

By the time I left gay politics, in the mid-seventies, I was so used to hearing accusations, and seeing my friends fall to the wayside with so many arrows in their backs, that I simply expected it and chalked it up to the pressures; the exceedingly terrible toll of being a part of a very deviant group (the gay politico) within one of society's own deviant groups. This pressure, this ostracism, was constant. Unless you led a 24-hour-a-day gay politico life, you had to meet the disappointments and criticisms of many other people, gay and straight, who for the life of them couldn't understand why you were throwing your life away "simply for something you do in bed!"

I had to face this assault constantly. I became literally a closet politico among my artsy, apolitical gay friends, who told me the gay struggle "bored them to death," although they certainly didn't mind living off its various triumphs (like the ability to drink in a bar without it being raided). Because of these reactions, I became increasingly closer to friends in the movement.

My only qualm about Jernigan's piece was that it did not mention David Rothenberg, a New Yorker whose running for City Council coalesced so much of the gay community around him. He lost, but his running gave the political gay community of New York a necessary charge.

> Perry Brass Orangeburg, New York

In general, I am quite impressed with your magazine so far, but the article by David Jernigan was a waste of time. Unless one establishes what one means by "gays" and "leaders" one is in serious trouble. Jernigan blindly proceeds as if there were, in fact, an accepted definition.

Also, Jernigan's story of Harvey Milk presented a wildly distorted view of history. His major opponent was not Rick Stokes, but the liberal Democratic party establishment candidate, Terrence Hallinan. The particular structure of that unique election allowed Milk to win because it was the most gay district in the country; he ran against 16 other cadidates, and was able to win with 30 percent of the vote. The fact that other gay candidates like John Wahl and Pat Norman in San Francisco are unable to do the same is not because they are less able "leaders" but because the electoral mechanics are not the same today.

Jernigan's failure to point this out only reinforces the error that gays must devote their efforts to electing candidates who are gay to political offices. There is no guarantee gay politicians will be any better for gays than any other self-serving opportunist politicians.

> Jerry Jansen San Francisco, California

David Jernigan is one of the first people to mention the ridicule that those of us who advocated safer sex had to endure at the hands of those who felt "gayer than thou." This strong sense of what our lives are, a strong feeling that each of us holds of what it is and means to be gay, is detrimental in many ways. I believe it slowed down the progress of safer sex education by addressing a homogenous gay community that does not exist, even by those who designed its programs.

On a more optimistic note, I feel that the absence of leadership and organization Jernigan describes in his article was more than made up for with the economic strength the community enjoyed-including revitalizing marginal neighborhoods, creating our own social institutions, and a burgeoning gay literary and theater culture. If these gains had not been made, if the 1970s had not been so much fun, I don't believe we would have been able to organize as well as we did in the fight against AIDS-nor would volunteering now have the veneer of social correctness it did not enjoy in the 1970s.

> Allen Barnett New York, New York

### Jernigan Responds:

To those who enjoyed my article, I am glad it was useful. To my critics, I plead in part an editorial process which took a very carefully argued essay three times the length of the published version, and turned it into a much looser, less wellsupported, and, unfortunately, in some ways more provocative piece. I am in near total agreement with Barbara Tannenbaum. The original version made very clear my intent to focus solely on nationally visible male leaders (except when, as with Elaine Noble, a woman came to prominence primarily in the joint movement). The experience of women leaders is sufficiently complicated by sexism and the

events of the women's movement that it deserves separate treatment. It was not my intention to deny the importance of womens' leadership.

There have been few careful reviews of leadership in our movement. I continue to believe that it is critically important, and that we as a movement need to identify what facilitates it and what militates against it. There are many viewpoints besides the leadership issue from which to observe the prism of history; if you do not agree with mine, I encourage you to write your own and assist all of us to better understand how we can progress as a movement.

OUT/LOOK encourages your responses to articles published. Address your comments to LETTERS, OUT/LOOK, P.O. Box 460430, San Francisco, CA 94146-0430.

Correction: In Robert Patrick's play, Pouf Positive (Summer 1988), the line "With the exception of two unconfirmed reports from Bethlehem and Pennsylvania" should read "With the exception of two unconfirmed reports from Bethlehem and Transylvania."



## CAUGHT IN THE STORM

AIDS AND THE MEANING OF NATURAL DISASTER



Strong wind destroy our home
Many dead, tonight it could be you...
Somebody sings,
Somebody cries why, why, why?
— "Homeless" by Paul Simon

### by Allan Bérubé

WHEN I LOOK at the AIDS epidemic without turning away, I find myself asking questions about the meaning

of my life and my death. I remember asking these same questions in the 1950s as a devoutly Catholic adolescent. In those days, I was first coming to terms with what were to me the abstractions of war, the holocaust and Hiroshima. Now, in my early forties and no longer a practicing nor believing Catholic, I face the reality of my lover Brian's death last year, my own tentative survival, the AIDS/ARC diagnoses or positive HIV antibody statuses of most of my close male friends and the deaths of many other good friends. Where I live in San Francisco, our mayor tells us that twice as many local men have died of AIDS than were lost from this city on the combined battlefields of World War I, World War II, Korea and Vietnam.

The questions I now ask are the most profound I know: "Why was it Brian who got AIDS and died?" "Why not me?" "Why is AIDS attacking so many of us?" "Why now?"

I want to make sense of this awful tragedy. I want it somehow to be worth the suffering, to know that some good will come of it. I want to console those who are sick and comfort them, to reassure them and myself that it's going to be all right and they are not going to die. I want to make things better, to give advice, to save lives.

My deepest fears are that I cannot stop

things from getting even worse, that more harm than good will come of this epidemic, that there is no comfort or consolation, that I cannot prevent my friends from dying, that I won't be able to bear more loss. I want to salvage some good, some meaning, some hope from the wreckage of this storm. I want to know why.

Yet I'm troubled by answers I hear that try to bring the tragedy of AIDS under control. These answers explain that AIDS is attacking gay men now for a reason, that it exists to teach us a lesson, that we have created AIDS, that it chooses us or that we choose it, or that it has inherent meanings and benefits that can compensate for so much loss.

People offer these explanations and reassurances to try to rescue us from our helplessness, our fear, and our loss. "Keep busy," they say. "Cheer up!" "Get angry." "Don't mourn, organize!" They try to deny the tragedy of so many deaths by calling AIDS a "learning experience," a "golden opportunity," a "gift" or a "blessing in disguise." These attempts to protect us from our pain usually go unchallenged because they are often camouflaged with good intentions. They can lie hidden within consolations; they can be disguised by a well-meaning but patronizing desire to give us short-cuts to hope.

Allan Bérubé is completing a history of lesbian and gay Americans and the military during World War II, entitled Coming Out Under Fire, to be published in 1989 by The Free Press, a division of Macmillan.



At this year's AIDS Memorial March in San Francisco, one of the few public rituals we have created to grieve together as a community, it was as if sadness and grief themselves were our enemies, lurking in the shadows and in our hearts, threatening to destroy us as individuals and as communities. Many marchers, including myself, became totally preoccupied with the business of trying to protect our lighted candles from the cold wind. A large group in front of us kept silence at bay by singing Broadway show tunes. At the rally following the procession, hardly any speaker addressed our pain, our fear, our anger or our loss. Instead, we heard political victory speeches, upbeat songs and a jubilant litany of cities where similar AIDS memorials were being held around the world, without an acknowledgement of the tragedy that makes such marches necessary. My friends and many others I talked to that night went home early. We had the uneasy feeling that this wellmeaning rally, which was supposed to have been a memorial to those who have died, instead had ritualized our fears and had failed to "give" us hope.

Individual denial—which some hospice workers call terror management—is one important way to cope with multiple loss. But ethical issues are raised when anyone, individually or collectively, imposes their own denial on others. Ethical boundaries are crossed when people try to save rather than support those of us who, against all odds, try to face painful truths. As a surviving partner, it hurts each time someone denies the tragedy of Brian's untimely death and the depth of my own sadness by explaining that there are compensations that somehow make it all

worthwhile. Reassurances based on these compensatory benefits—whether political, moral or spiritual—deny us survivors our inconsolable loss. Attempts to rescue us from our grief deny us survivors the particular strength and hope that we gain by facing our worst fears and moving on.

FTER HE WAS DIAGNOSED, Brian and I tackled the troubling "why" questions together, struggling ourselves between hope and grief, between explanations and acceptance. Brian was a British biochemist, I'm an American historian. He had dedicated his working life to understanding how plants grow and flower; I've dedicated mine to understanding how human sexuality changes over time. We both grew up in working-class families where disasters as well as once-in-alifetime opportunities, such as scholarships to college, seemed to happen by chance, completely outside our control. Both of us mistrusted organized religions. But Brian's skepticism, his scientific questioning and his matter-of-fact approach toward his illness gave him a clarity and acceptance that seemed spiritual at times.

Why was the HIV destroying Brian's body? His science told us that viruses, like storms and plagues of locusts, are experienced by humans as natural disasters but are not evil forces intent on causing misery. If the virus had any "purpose" or "interest" at all, it was to thrive and reproduce. As a therapeutic experiment, I tried to get us both to visualize the virus as an evil enemy that we wanted to destroy, but it didn't work. The best we could do was to think of it as a rude, unwelcome intruder who we screamed at to "get out of our house!" That tapped into my anger and made me cry, which brought Brian and me even closer to each other. But we couldn't find ways to blame the virus.

Why did the virus get into Brian's body and not into mine? I found myself telling friends how unfair this was because Brian had never gone to the baths and I had gone often. Then I realized that by saying this, I was making the mistake of assuming that it would have made more sense or have been more just if I had gotten AIDS instead of Brian. In fact, we both had been very careful sexually beginning in 1983 when the first safe sex guidelines were issued. I lucked out, Brian didn't. Was that the only reason he was going to die? Was that it? Yes, he kept telling me. Bad luck. And the government's neglect.

Many times I sat silently next to Brian, crying, with no answers for why this was happening to him or to me. Yet I knew in my bones that we were creating an intimacy that, paradoxically, gave our lives meaning as each loss and each minute went by and as he peacefully came closer to a death that he fully expected would end his existence forever. With Brian, I learned how to live well without the answers I ached for.

Like many other disasters, this epidemic is a part of nature that devastates our lives and makes us wonder why. Yet AIDS is nothing more nor less than a disease that is killing human beings. It is a natural event that exists because it exists. While HIV itself may have no inherent meaning or purpose, the ways that Brian and I responded to its presence in his body made all the difference in the world. We realized that the power to create or destroy meaning was in us, not in the virus. While the virus had the power to kill without intent, we had the power to create meaning out of our responses.

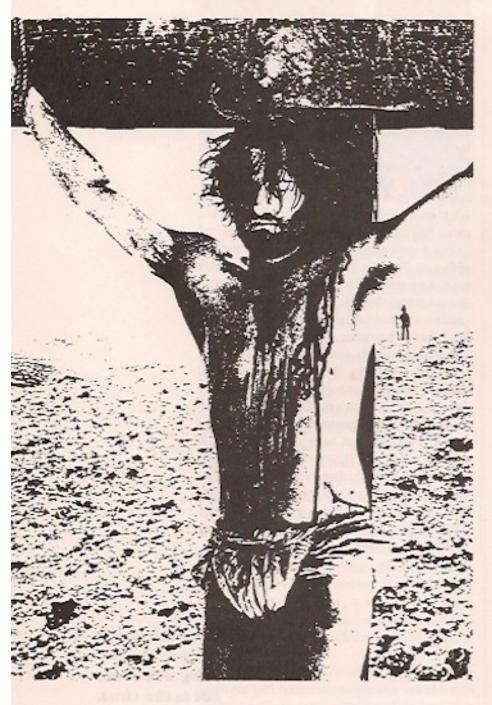
It is tempting to use AIDS the disease, like other parts of nature, as if it were an open book of blank pages on which each of us can write lessons, morals and answers. Because AIDS creates life and death situations, the statements we write in this book are about the meanings of our lives and our deaths. This task of creating meaning for ourselves is profoundly personal and its outcome is as varied as our individual lives. It's also a terrifying task during an epidemic, because no matter how many pages we fill, no matter how many explanations we create, there are always more empty pages. Each blank page, each new person dying, makes us face again, with fear and disbelief, the unjust suffering, the random deaths and the unanswered questions that this

disaster leaves in its path. It is always painful for me to open this book, put down my pen, look at its blank pages without turning away, and sit quietly or cry. But continuing to grieve in this way—letting go of my need for answers, feeling the sadness and loss, and then moving on—is one of the best ways I have learned to respond to this epidemic.

The Names Project quilt helps me go through this process within a larger community. Like the Vietnam War Memorial and the AIDS memorial marches, visiting the quilt is a ritual that allows many of us to remember and grieve together in the face of incomprehensible loss. Each panel holds unique meanings for the survivors that are intensely personal. But sewn together into a patchwork quilt, they create a work of folk art that has no center, no limit, no one meaning, and no easy answers. In fact, several panels consist solely of questions scrawled onto cloth. We can walk inside this quilt, by ourselves or holding each other, as we do each day inside this epidemic. We have created in this quilt a response, a memory and a shared intimacy that each gives meaning to what we are going through. By unfolding the quilt on the Mall during our March on Washington, our communities created a rare public ritual that joined our hope with our grief. AIDS did not empower us to do this; we empowered ourselves.

> We realized that the power to create or destroy meaning was in us, not in the virus.

OUT/LOOK 11



While some people tell us that the virus chooses people to teach us moral or spiritual lessons, others tell us that people infected with HIV choose this disease. Every few weeks I'm exasperated to hear yet another person explain that people with AIDS have created their illness, either literally or spiritually.

HERE ARE TWO DIFFERENT ways to respond to the "why" questions we ask about AIDS. Their differences are not between religious and secular, the political right and left, antigay and gay, but in the ways each assigns meaning to misfortune. One response offers answers, the other accepts uncertainties and dwells in the place between the questions and the answers. When people respond with answers, they are likely to explain why AIDS happens at particular times to particular people and what AIDS teaches us. They can cause harm when their definitive answers keep people from finding their own meanings, blame people for their illness or fill the silences in which people can face their fears and grieve. When people respond to the tragedy of AIDS without answers, they are likely to challenge moral explanations and open up the possibility of wondering, listening and being silent together. But without answers, people can feel isolated, helpless and without direction.

Each of these kinds of responses has ethical implications. The stories we tell each other about why particular people do or do not get AIDS have tremendous power. They touch real lives with real consequences and have the potential for framing some of the most profound experiences in a person's life. Even our most casual comments or reassurances-"You should have loved yourself better" or "There must be a reason why your son is suffering"can be fragments of a moral framework which, if we could see it whole, we might not condone. It is important for us, as individuals and as communities, to examine our assumptions and begin openly discussing with each other the ethics of how we ask and answer questions that assign meaning to other people's misfortune.

If we could strengthen our ability to live with unanswered questions, it would help us define such an ethical framework. This could reduce the power of this disease by deflating its overblown meanings. It could also lift from people with AIDS the weight of interpretations that reduce diverse and complex lives to moral, spiritual or political lessons. In the process, we could clear away for ourselves a

safe breathing space wherein we could find relief from the constant pressure to address the "why" questions about AIDS.

I feel the urgency of this task because the more dominant response to AIDS is to explain exactly what it means. It is difficult enough for each of us in these times to find meaning for our own lives and deaths. But some people, wishing either to comfort and advise or to blame and exploit people with AIDS, have taken on the task of assigning their own meanings to other peoples' illnesses. They give ready-made or unexamined answers to the most troubling personal question, "Why me?" by reducing it to "Why you?" "Nothing is more punitive," wrote Susan Sontag, who herself has survived cancer, "than to give disease a meaning-that meaning invariably being a moralistic one. Any important disease whose causality is murky, and for which treatment is ineffectual, tends to be awash in significance." In our communities today, AIDS means too much.

The answers we are offered cut across the boundaries of politics, religion and sexual orientation and teach us lessons about AIDS: gay men should have known better, AIDS is the inevitable result of the sexual revolution; the "gay plague," the "gay cancer," the "gay disease" was created by the "gay lifestyle;" AIDS exists to open us up to the spiritual aspects of our lives; AIDS exists because God is punishing homosexuals, drug users, prostitutes and the sexually active for their sins; AIDS is nature's revenge against those who have declared war on nature and from whom nature is exacting an awful retribution; or that AIDS exists for a host of other reasons. The implication of all these explanations, as well as the systems of meaning they represent, is that people get AIDS because they live bad or incomplete or unbalanced lives.

To make matters worse, people who use AIDS to teach us lessons use people with AIDS as their lesson books. They place on people with AIDS the unfair burden of being scapegoats, moral examples or the original "patient zeros." Others of us, sometimes without realizing it, use people with AIDS to inspire: we expect people with AIDS to serve us as models

of courage, as our spiritual teachers or moral guides, people who have the answers, or, in the words of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, "catalysts" who set in motion "wonderful world changes." People living with AIDS have enough business to take care of without being burdened involuntarily with the task of inspiring us or teaching the rest of us how to live morally or die correctly.

HILE SOME PEOPLE tell us that the virus chooses people to teach us moral or spiritual lessons, others tell us that people infected with HIV choose this disease. Every few weeks I'm exasperated to hear yet another person explain that people with AIDS have created their illness, either literally or spiritually. A gay spiritual counselor writing in the Sentinel, one of San Francisco's gay newspapers, believes that we all choose our illnesses and deaths. "Potentially fatal situations," he explains, "such as car wrecks, cancer operations, rape, food poisoning, suicide and even AIDS...are all ways in which we express our death urge."1 Louise Hay in her 1987 book You Can Heal Yourself explains that many gay men have "created a destructive lifestyle" that is "monstrous" and, as a result, have "created a disease called AIDS" which is a "monstrous disease."2 Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, in her 1987 book AIDS: The Ultimate Challenge, wonders if "our AIDS patients, children and adults alike, chose to contribute their short life spans on planet Earth to help us open our lives, to raise our consciousness, to open our hearts and minds, and to finally see the light."3 Other popular articles and books have promoted the theory that people choose AIDS because they somehow need it to give their lives purpose, balance or completion.4

An even more disturbing explanation is that "gay people" choose AIDS because we are a "chosen people." This interpretation links AIDS with the belief that all gay men and women have a unique spiritual mission. A columnist summarizing the philosophy behind a gay metaphysical spiritual center in San Francisco writes that the "gay community—as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Julian Baird, "Embracing Life: Loving Death," San Francisco Sentinel, 17 June 1988, p. 15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Louise L. Hay, You Can Heal Your Life (Santa Monica: Hay House, 1987), pp. 137-39.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, AIDS: The Ultimate Challenge (New York: Macmillan, 1987), p. 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> See Mona Charen, "Dangers of Positive Thinking: Upbeat Cruelty," San Francisco Chronicle, This World, 19 June 1988, p. 3; Michael Bronsky, "The Meaning of AIDS Explored in Four New Books," The Advocate, 24 November 1987, pp. 47-51; Dana Ullman, "Getting Beyond Wellness Macho: The Promise and Pitfalls of Holistic Health," UTNE Render, January/February 1988, pp. 68-73; Marlys Harris, "Shirley's Best Performance," Money, September 1987, pp. 160-

a collective consciousness-has chosen to experience AIDS first in this country as a learning experience to open closed hearts and fearful minds, so that we can return to our ancient roles as healers, shamans, priests and priestesses of society."5 AIDS, then, makes us into a chosen people; it is the special "path" through which gay men and women are meant to become more spiritually evolved and thus fulfill our "ancient roles" as healers of the world.

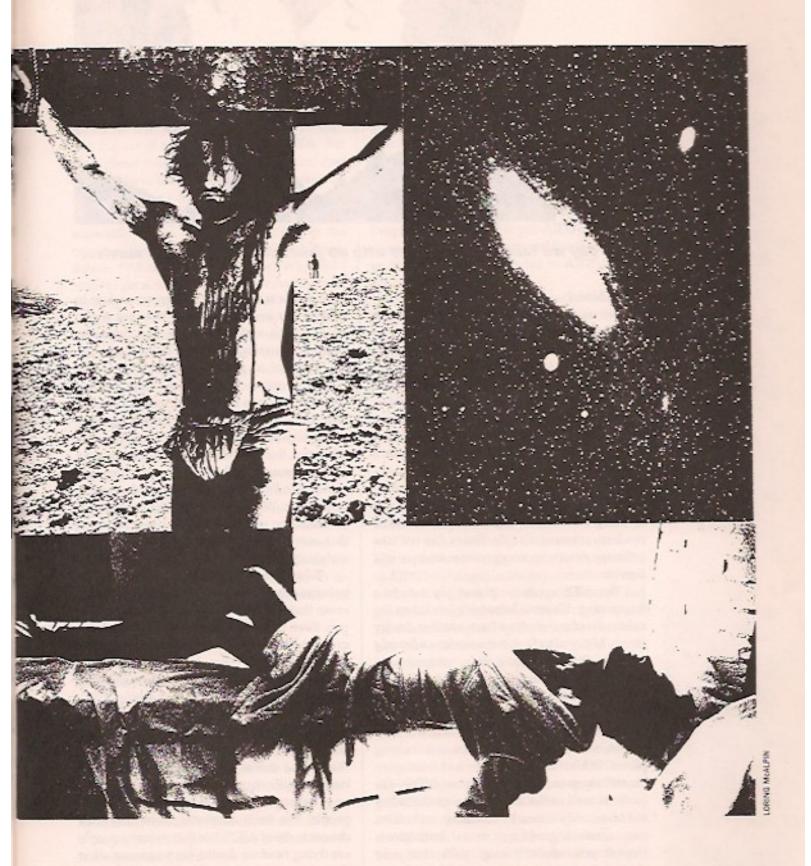
AIDS does not choose people and people don't choose AIDS. Despite the increasing popularity of what homeopathic educator Dana Ullman has called wellness macho-"the mistaken assumption that each of us has universal knowledge of the present and the future and that each of us is so strong and mighty that we can successfully avoid or defend against any stress, infection or environmental assault"-we do not choose everything that happens to us. There are some things over which we have no control. I see this most clearly when I think of AIDS as just one of many meaningless but devastating natural disasters. Ever since Brian was diagnosed, I have compared AIDS to a tornado to remind myself and my friends how the puzzling randomness of disasters can make us ask questions that don't have answers.

A tornado unexpectedly touches down on a small midwestern town. Some people find safety in a shelter or basement, while others driving in cars or without shelters are caught in the storm. Many people die. Families wonder why their homes were hit; surviving spouses question why their lives were spared. Why did the tornado hit this particular town at this particular hour and kill these particular people? How were they different from the survivors? Did they unconsciously want to die? Was it just bad luck or fate or God's will? tornado a personality and a will. Did it strike with a purpose? Did the tornado intend to teach the townspeople a lesson? What were they supposed to learn? Was it that the dead it that no one should ever live where strong

Some survivors' questions project onto the might not have had to die if they had lived differently? Was it merely that death can strike anyone at any time without warning? Or was







OUT/LOOK



Every day we take ordinary risks with no guarantee that we will survive.

winds blow?

No matter how careful we are, living in today's world means living in the path of unpredictable winds over which we have little control but which can threaten our lives. We are aware of the risks of living in cities built on earthquake faults or in the paths of tornadoes, of flying in jets, of walking on city streets at night, of making love. We take precautions, yet some of us still die. We want explanations for their deaths as much as we want to postpone our own. But the goals of leading a riskfree life, of creating a cocoon of total safety, or of being certain that one's death will not be random, are unattainable. Every day we take ordinary risks with no guarantee that we will survive.

The AIDS epidemic places gay men in a frightening dilemma because it has taken the safety out of our shelters from another deadly storm. Many of us first came out into a fiercely antigay climate of hate, fear, violence and shame that threatened us with the force of a natural disaster. We found partial refuge in our lovemaking with each other and in the shelters that made our sexuality safe: our bedrooms, our bars, our bathhouses and cruising places. While the age-old storm of homophobia still rages on, the new storm of AIDS-the panic as well as the disease-takes the safety out of our old shelters by attacking our bodies, our lovemaking and our sexual institutions. How do you rationally weigh risks when your shelters seem to threaten your life? What is

remarkable is not that gay men were slow to change our sexual behavior, but that we so quickly built and occupied a new shelter to protect us from both of these storms: safe sex.

Those of us who led sexual lives before AIDS did not know that it was transmissible until 1982. No one had safe sex guidelines until May 1983, when our gay and lesbian communities began a process of education and risk reduction that by 1987 led to virtually no new sexually-transmitted infections among gay men in San Francisco and dramatic declines in other cities. We each have developed our own methods for reducing sexual risks, knowing that some activities are safer than others, weighing them against a range of other needs.

Taking small risks, which are on the same order as other daily risks in our lives, does not mean that we want the worst outcome to happen. Even those few who knowingly took the greatest risks, or made mistakes, or were not able to make the best decisions because of alcohol or drugs and therefore increased their chances of infection, were not choosing AIDS. We all are ultimately responsible for our actions, but sometimes chance events occur that are beyond our control and which radically change the consequences of what had never been such life-threatening activities.

The tragedy of AIDS is not that so many people live such desperate lives that they choose to die of AIDS. It is that so many people are dying random deaths for no reason other than that they took the kinds of risks we all take in order to lead meaningful lives. Taking risks and losing is not the same as choosing to die.

Choice and responsibility are important issues for many people facing this epidemic. But the act of telling people with AIDS that they chose their disease-a notion that one does not have to accept in order to take responsibility for one's health and well-being-can have damaging effects. People who are sick, especially when treatments don't stop the course of their illness, unnecessarily ask themselves, "What is wrong with me? Why did I want to get sick and die? How are my attitudes creating a fertile ground for AIDS? Why can't I choose life?" And if we are convinced that most people with AIDS really choose to get this virus, then it can be argued that they alone are to blame for their illness and they, not society, must pay the price.

All people with AIDS, regardless of the risks they did or did not take, deserve our respect and our care. They have a right to determine for themselves how to respond to this disease without anyone assuming that they chose AIDS to rescue them from their bad lifestyles or to complete their lives. The burning moral issue in this epidemic is not how to judge who did or did not choose their illness so that we can separate the innocent from the guilty. It is rather how we all choose to respond to people who are living with AIDS and HIV.

ANOTHER TROUBLING response that gives excessive meaning to AIDS is gratitude. This feeling is based on the perception that AIDS is happening now because our individual or collective pasts were immature, sinful, sick or spiritually impoverished. In this scenario, AIDS is characterized as the savior. It is assigned meaning because it forces us to grow up, it is our salvation from sin, it cures us from a deeper psychological illness or it rescues us from spiritual death.

Some gay men's gratitude toward AIDS, and the larger society's perception that AIDS is making gay men grow up, relies on the "Peter Pan" stereotype of gay men. In the old days, the story goes, gay men used to be uncaring, unthinking, irresponsible and self-destructive adolescents who were obsessed with quick sex, partying, drugs, dancing, youth and beauty. The bathhouse and the disco are the current symbols for this pre-AIDS lifestyle. The Peter Pan stereotype describes our lives before AIDS as so hopelessly compulsive that only massive deaths could change us. Some people explain that this pre-AIDS lifestyle (a distorted caricature of our real lives) was itself an illness that inevitably led to AIDS or was actually cured by AIDS.

Now, thanks to AIDS, literary bookstores replace bathhouses, country-western bars replace discos, dinner parties replace cruising, commitment replaces casual encounters, community service replaces partying and monogamy replaces promiscuity. The media has been quick to report the news that AIDS finally has forced Peter Pan to act like an adult. The San Francisco Examiner publishes an article entitled "The Castro Grows Up" and the New York Times reports that AIDS has made the Castro district go through a "sort of maturation" from adolescence to adulthood. The lesson is that AIDS has improved our lives.

The press also has given prominent coverage to stories about gay men who are grateful to AIDS for changes in the gay community and in their own lives. Both the mainstream and gay media highlight their reports of gay men's gratitude with glowing superlatives that read like advertisements for AIDS. "AIDS is the most wonderful thing that has ever happened in my life..." proclaims a provocative cover of Image, the San Francisco Examiner Sunday magazine, quoting a gay "victim" of AIDS.7 "AIDS was the best thing that ever happened to me," is another quote featured in a sidebar to an interview with a person with AIDS in the Bay Area Reporter, a San Francisco gay newspaper." Shortly after Gay Games founder Tom Waddell's death, the Examiner published his thoughts on what he called "the enormous beneficial effect" that AIDS has had on the gay community. "I think that if it hadn't been AIDS, something would have happened to the movement, the way it was going was so bi-

Jayne Garrison, "The Castro Grows Up," San Francisco Examiner, 31 January 1988, p. A1; Robert Lindsey, "Where Homosexuals Found Haven, There Is None Now With AIDS," New York Times, 15 July 1987, p. 10. See also Dawn Garcia, "Straights Moving Into the Castro," San Francisco Chronicle, 1 August 1988, p. A1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Image, San Francisco Examiner, 26 June 1988.

Rex Wockner, "Michael Callen: Taking His AIDS Diagnosis to the Top 40," Bay Area Reporter, 7 July 1988, p. 26.

zarre.... It didn't know what it was doing, except that it kept talking about sexual freedom.... Something was going to happen, and it turned out to be AIDS.... AIDS has transformed the gay community."

The interest of the media in reporting the "maturing" of gay male communities reflects their disapproval of our sexual lives and is only the most recent version of a stereotype that caricatures gay men as immature boys who never grew up into responsible heterosexuals. The depth of the gratitude gay men publicly express toward AIDS may measure how much we have internalized the Peter Pan stereotype of our lives, our regrets about past years when we took each day for granted, and how desperately we want some good to come out of this senseless tragedy.

While AIDS does not exist to teach us a lesson nor to save us from ourselves, many of us have decided to respond to this epidemic by making changes in our lives. We take responsibility for our past actions and accept the consequences without self-hate. We educate each other about safer sex and other safe practices. We ask for help and offer it. We demand the services we deserve from our governments. We learn how to live well in the present. We pay more attention to our health and explore all possible treatments. We celebrate our lives together. We face each other's deaths and our own. We remember, grieve and hope. We respond to AIDS as we would to other lifethreatening situations-by reorganizing our lives and taking care of each other.

It is important to remember that when we make these changes, we are the same people we were before AIDS. Our strength and power do not originate in this disease, but grow out of who we were as individual men and women, as families, as friends and as communities before the HIV entered some of our bodies. We face a new situation and we are making new decisions every day to deal with this epidemic. But we don't have to fall into the trap of thanking AIDS for saving us from our pasts.

AIDS is a profound tragedy, not a golden opportunity. It is neither an exterminating angel who came into our lives to punish us nor a guardian angel come to offer us the chance to

be born again. If we have anyone to thank for the changes we have made, it is ourselves and each other, not AIDS. We deserve the credit. We can be proud of who we are now, and of what we are doing, without making the present seem better than it is by painting a bleak Dorian Gray portrait of our past. The caricature of our past doesn't do justice to the depth and maturity of our lives before AIDS, including the sexual creativity that has enabled us to protect ourselves and each other by eroticizing safe sex. Nor does gratitude toward AIDS take into account the physical pain, the multiple losses, the discrimination, the antigay violence, the isolation and the cruel accusations that tear us apart today.

Few of us respond to this epidemic without fear and confusion, without love, without anger and without aching to know why. It is the rough patchwork of all of our responses, not the the disease itself, that gives meaning to our lives as we weather this terrible storm.

As I WRITE THESE WORDS, I fill up blank pages in the open book of AIDS. But there are more empty pages staring back at me, the most troubling questions that still haunt me: Why did Brian have to die? Why have I survived this long? Why are my friends still dying?

I step back, take a breath and rather than look for answers, I look inside and take stock of where I am. I accept that AIDS the disease has no intent, no meaning and no purpose. I'm learning how to let go of my need to make sense of this epidemic and my need for explanations that console. I'm beginning to live with the randomness of Brian's death and the deaths of so many other good people. I'm learning that I can better face these realities by grieving the losses I feel. I learned from Brian that, without reassurances and answers, it was sufficient for me to stop talking, sit with him silently, try to make him comfortable, touch him, listen or cry. I value all of these private moments of grief, peace and acceptance.

Then I look at my relationships with other people. I am able to continue doing my history

The depth of the gratitudo gay men publicly express toward AIDS may measure how much we have internalized the Peter Pan stereotype of our lives, our regrets about past years when we took each day for granted, and how desperately we want some good to come out of this senseless tragedy.

work inside this epidemic only with the support and encouragement of others. I have my ability to remember Brian and to grieve his death with our friends and family. I have the Names Project quilt, when it is displayed, where I can go to remember Brian and everyone else I've lost. I have people with whom I can share my senses of humor, irony, silliness, camp and weird jokes, qualities that hold despair at bay and get us through the worst times. I have ways to engage in lusty, loving sex without transmitting or being exposed to the virus. I have the companionship of my bereavement support group of gay men whose lovers also have died. I have my outrage and outrageousness that allow me to transform my grief into action and to protest with others the cruel injustices. I have my friends who are living with HIV and AIDS who ask for, accept and offer me help. And I've salvaged some

These are pieces of my life which don't always fit together. But they are helping me to create who I am, to give my life meaning during this epidemic and to begin facing my death in my own way whenever it comes, even though I will never know why I was born, lived and died on this earth. ▼

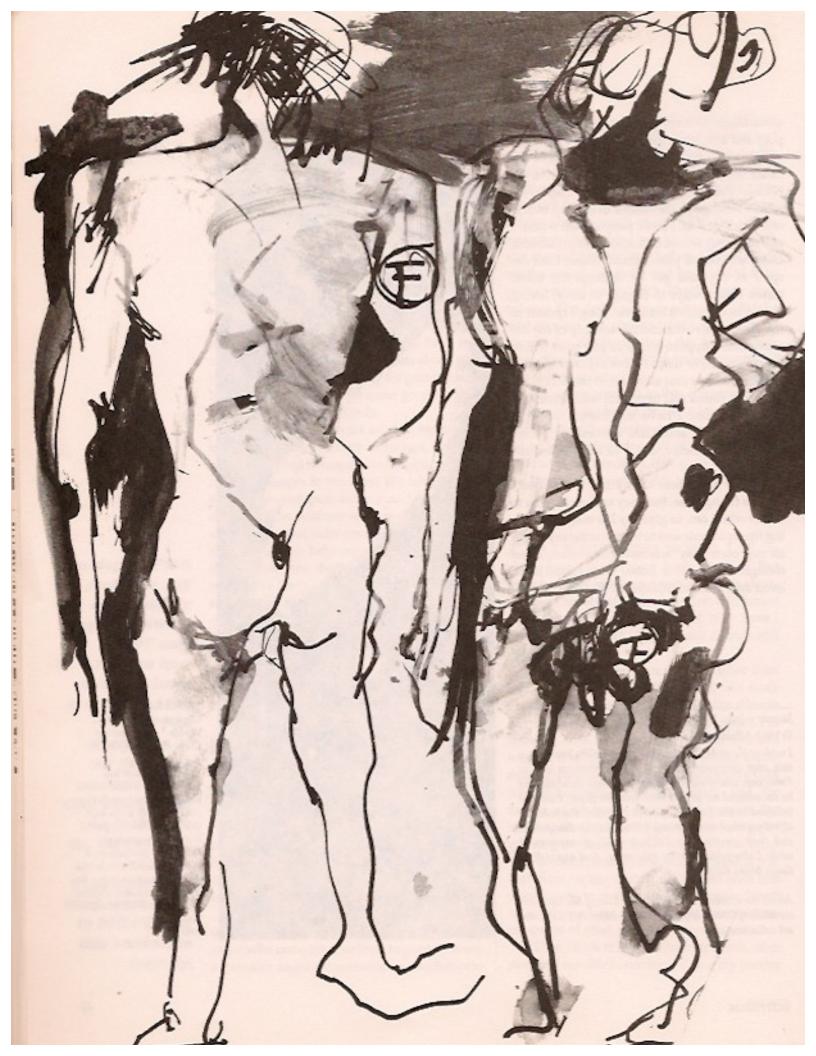
January-July 1988. © 1988 Allan Bérubé.

I wish to thank Jeffrey Escoffier for our New Year's Day talk over afternoon tea at Sweet Inspirations in San Francisco, where we shaped some of these thoughts and he encouraged me to put them down on paper. I am also indebted to the Forget-Me-Nots (my civil disobedience affinity group) and to many friends for our discussions and their constructive criticism and encouragement while I struggled to write this essay. And especially I thank Brian Keith.

About the artists: Don Moffett and Loring McAlpin are members of Gran Fury, a New York-based AIDS activist art collective.



9 Paul Moor, "Gay Olympian in His Own Words," San Francisco Chronicle, 13 July 1987, This superlative has migrated to articles about businesses that profit from AIDS. "AIDS is the best thing that ever happened to the life insurance industry," proclaimed a sidebar to an article in the Business Section of the San Francisco Chronicle entitled "Insurers See New AIDS-Test Benefits," 18 July 1988, p. C2.



### BUCKLEY

favors castration or failing that a small tattoo on the upper thigh in the thick-haired swirl by the balls hot and rank in a Bike no shower hockeysweat Buckley's upper lip fairly puckers at the thought or else a scarlet letter F I guess but cubist Buckley's in no rush he's breaking bread with Lady Couldn't-You-Di and sailing to Byzantium for the weekend moonless nights he lies on deck and dictaphones the tale of Bucko Bill countercounterspy and Company übermensch Turnbull and Assered to the tits stoically libidinous if pressed at tennis a prince and vingt-et-un how far from the terminal wing the suites are ask the doe-eyed cons in Sing Sing Buckley keeps in cigs and Nestles pleading the dago guv for Clemenceau the traitor every peace is dirty pink triangles have a nice retro feel & for quarantine there's islands off Cape Ann so bare and stony no Brahmin'd be caught dead on its lea shore a Statue of Bondage blindfold torch snuffed a whole theme park of hate monorail geek-dunk Inquisition daily 10 and 3 heigh-ho mouse-eared dwarfs in Future Perfect a mushroom cloud like spun sugar oh Buckley the thing is I agree

about Soviet wheat the Shah the Joint Chiefs can have all the toilet seats they like but somehow your pantaloons are in a froth to cheerlead the dying of my pink people covered with a condom head to toe St. Paul of the boneyard guillotining dicks bug-eyed which reminds me of who does the makeup on Firing Line Frank E Campbell how did you get to be such a lady without surgery I want my F for fag of course on the left bicep twined with a Navy anchor deck of Luckies curled in my tee sleeve just the look to sport through a minefield beating a path to smithereens arm in arm friend & friend bivouacked 2 by 2 odd men out so far out they can almost see over the wall no more drilling Latin to meathrain boys not 50 before they're 30 not skittish and not going back in Bill no matter how many cardinals sit on your face ho rest easy the spit on your grave will pool and mirror the birdless sky and your children's children kneel in the waste dump scum of you a popish rot greening their knees and their Marcos earrings and spring will maggot the clipped Connecticut yard of your secret heart ink and bleed me name and number and I will dance on you

by Paul Monette

Paul Monette's most recent books are Borrowed Time, an AIDS memoir, and Love Alone: 18 Elegies for Rog. Illustrations by Judith Lindbloom

Judith Lindbloom is a returned painter who went awry from internal and external forces and now goes pleasantly on her way.



### WHITE BALLOON

by Maureen Seaton

"To love something you know will die is holy." Kaddish, AIDS Memorial, New York, 1987

The air is gravid with life, the cloudless sky swells with souls, ascending.

I'm in charge of one young soul tied to my wrist with a string that won't break.

St. Veronica's, the end of June: You weep beside me, hold a candle steadily near the flame.

Earlier we were two ladies shopping on Broadway. I recall your wire of a body,

the delicate arc of ribs and small breast above—this as you quick-changed

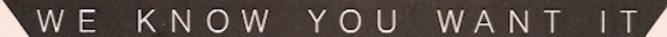
in search of something radical, feminine. Your terror of pink amused me. You said:

Don't tell anyone of this sudden reversal. I said: I will, but I'll change your name.

Linda, it's the letting go that terrifies: the night air alive with rising ghosts,

the cries of strong men grieving in each other's arms, the ease with which we love.

Maureen Seaton's poems have been published in The Iowa Review, Mississippi Review, and New Letters. She lives in New York.





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## Children Without Fathers

FOR YEARS, MANY lesbians and gay men have been creating families that include children. At first, most of these children were the offspring of heterosexual marriages. Slowly, more people turned to adoption and foster parenting, and a few lesbians went a step further and began to conceive children through donor insemination.

The experience of women with children from heterosexual marriages had a significant impact on

how these lesbians chose to conceive their children. The fear of custody battles with fathers in a homophobic court system compelled many to choose anonymous donors. Others followed the same path by Petra Liljesfraund for more overtly political reasons; they wanted to create new family structures outside the traditional patriarchal model and felt that one or more loving female parents could provide a child with as much-or more-security and stability as the mythical nuclear family of mommy and, all too often, absent daddy. As time went on, some lesbians decided that while the child was gowing up, or at least when he or she turned 18, 13 there were also good 12 reasons for 11 12 19

having known donors. Donors who were known to the family meant health histories were easier to come by; they also provided the option of having a man help with child care—as an uncle or even a father. Many gay men were willing to donate sperm to create "politically correct" families. Others were eager to play some role in the children's lives, even if they didn't assume the traditional paternal one.

At the same time, other lesbians explicitly were creating twoparent homes in which both parents were women. Sometimes the "co-parents" were not lovers; sometimes they did not even live together. But more partners who did live together in committed rela-

partners who did live together in committed relationships were choosing jointly to have children. The desire to protect and nurture the role of the non-biological mother in these families was another reason many lesbians opted for unknown donors. They felt that the relationship between the nonbiological mom and her child would be stronger if there were no "father"—no man whom our society would always deem to be more important than her. And single women were choosing to have children with unknown donors for similar reasons. They didn't wish to run the risk of potential conflict or actual custody battles with a man who might at some point be willing to excercise male privilege over the children.

Now, this trickle of a movement is more like a tidal wave. In many areas, significant numbers of children are now part of the lesbian and gay community and our institutions—from gay health centers to synagogues—increasingly reflect this development.

At the same time, a new challenge to the construction of lesbian and gay families has arisen. Some lesbians, who were adopted themselves, have begun to speak out about the psychological pain of not being able to know who their birth parents were, and of the hurt caused by adoptive parents who deny the truth about adoptees' families of origin. These adoptees, along with some lesbians who gave up children for adoption as young adults, feel strongly about the importance of knowing one's biological roots; they argue that the use of unknown donors is just as detrimental to children as closed adoptions. They say that lesbians who choose closed adoptions and anonymous sperm donors—in their zeal to create "new" families which are protected from the threats posed by specific men and homophobic society—are doing so at the expense of the long-term well-being of their children.

This controversy has become quite heated in the past year. Adoptees and birthmothers say their experiences and psychological pain are ignored when women reject the necessity of a "father" in children's lives. Lesbians who have used, or plan to use, unknown donors feel attacked as parents because they are allegedly putting their need to construct a lesbian family before the best interests of their children. It is in the context of this sometimes acrimonious debate that Petra Liljesfraund delivered a version of the following remarks at a forum sponsored by the Lesbian and Gay Parenting Project in Oakland, California this summer.

# Handling the Anonymous Donor Question

HE RECENT CONTROVERSY in the lesbian and gay community about using anonymous donors to conceive children through donor insemination has focused on whether or not this choice is in "the best interest" of the child. In these discussions, little attention has been given to how we as individual parents, and as a community deal with disclosing information about our children's conception. We also haven't examined the cultural influences on our feelings about knowledge of biological origins. Instead, there has been much debate over supposed facts-what a child "inherently" needs to know about his or her genealogy, and what conditions are necessary for healthy child development.

Some people argue against the use of anonymous donors, believing that the experience of a child conceived by insemination is similar to that of an adopted child when it comes to not knowing the biological father. There is no empirical evidence to substantiate this belief, however, so political opinions prevail over facts.

In fact, the entire controversy over donor anonymity is essentially a political debate in which people with different stakes are arguing over how to define the child's best interest, and the significance of donor anonymity. The child's "best interest," however, is an extremely vague term. Most parents believe that they have their children's best interest in mind, yet others frequently disagree with them.

One way to understand the stakes involved for gay parents is to ask what the meaning of parenthood and reproduction is for us. Some of our many reasons for wanting children include personal fulfillment or growth, satisfying some innate instinct, or wanting to create a new type of family—to change the status quo. Critics of the gay community could probably name other reasons.

Interpretations of why any particular person chooses to have children will vary depending on who you ask. Some reasons will be viewed as better and more legitimate than others, reflecting the fact that each view of parenthood is imbedded in a certain ideology. But no reason is inherently better than any other. Each serves certain interests, be they equal rights or women-controlled reproduction, carrying on the family name, or becoming assimilated into the culture at large. In other words, there is a political dimension to every personal choice.

This is also true for the methods we choose for becoming parents. When my lover and I first started talking about having a child, in 1980, the key question for us was not whether or not the donor should be anonymous, but rather how we could find a healthy donor while limiting any institutional involvement in our family. The options considered by a lesbian today are different, reflecting the changes our community has gone through in the last eight years.

As GAY PEOPLE, we are particularly sensitive when it comes to secrecy and disclosure since those are areas of our lives in which we are both vulnerable and knowledgeable. That "coming out of the closet" is a lifelong process is a painfully true cliché. The nature of that process for each of us is likely to affect our opinions about the disclosure issues involved in insemination by anonymous donor.

Outside of our community, and outside of the United States, others are grappling with these questions as well. In many countries lawmakers are concerned that insemination by donor is "shrouded in secrecy," referring to both the method of conception and to the identity of the biological father. Adoption is frequently used as an analogy, and "artificial" insemination is often described in conjunction with terms such as "lies" or "clandestine."

While there is general consensus about the need for more openness when a child has been conceived through insemination, "openness" is not an issue amenable to legislation. Donor identification, however, is more amenable, but Sweden is the only country that requires a sperm donor's identity to be made available to the child. (Sweden also limits access to insemination services at medical facilities to heterosexual couples, and self insemination by women—straight and gay—is very uncom-

Our children will watch and listen to how we convey our homosexuality and the details of their conception when we talk to others—we will provide them with a vocabulary to deal with the world.

mon.) Other countries have actually legislated the opposite—that the donor *must* remain anonymous.

In discussions of secrecy and insemination, a distinction is not always made between disclosing how a child was conceived and revealing who the donor was. This is probably because policy makers think that only heterosexual couples use donor insemination. For straight parents, the paramount concern is keeping the male partner's infertility a secret.

For gay and lesbian parents, however, the situation is different, and the distinction clearer. We have many fewer options to hide the fact that our children were not conceived the "normal" way, so we are more likely to be confronted with the question of how we conceived them. For us, the issue is not whether or not we ought to tell our children how they were conceived, but rather how best to share this information.

For our families, the more significant disclosure issue is likely to evolve around our homosexuality rather than around how our children were conceived. Furthermore, not having certain information about the donor is different from "hiding" something, so that the use of words such as "secrecy," "lies," or "clandestine" is inappropriate to describe our process.

In our community, the argument against donor anonymity is built on the premise that knowing the identity of the donor is "in the best interest" of the child. This argument is based largely on an analogy with the past practices of adoption, and relies on research about adoptees that shows that children have a need to know their biological origins. This "need" is then translated into the political vocabulary of a "right" to know the donor's identity.

While it is easy to understand why adoption lends itself to a comparison with anonymous donor conception, the differences outweigh the similarities, and the analogy between them is a false one. Both ways of bringing children into a family revolve around very different social acts (or at least they did before adoption practices began to change). In the past, adoption involved relinquishing a child,

and had connotations of charity or cruelty. However, insemination in our community has connotations of a gift. In adoption, the child usually is not conceived for the sake of the adoptive parents; with donor insemination, though, the child is conceived for the parents who originate his or her conception.

Second, if knowledge of origins is important, the donor insemination child has much more information about his or her biological and social origins than some adopted children, knowing at least one biological and perhaps two social parents. Third, explaining a child's biological origins usually is handled differently in adoption than it is likely to be by lesbians using insemination. Lesbian mothers will probably provide more straight-forward information to their children.

The similarities between adoption and anonymous donors boil down to children not knowing the identify of their biological fathers, along with possible stigmatization. What is the significance of this?

First, we need to look at cultural differences in the meaning of knowledge of one's "origins." For some people, this may mean detailed physiological information, geographic locale, ethnicity, religion, or class. For others it may extend to the ability to link personal characteristics with a name. Some may go a step further and in-

clude face-to-face contact. To say that children conceived through insemination have an inherent need to know the specific identity of their donors is simply opinion at this point. It is a moral claim based on norms of what we should do, in the way that statements such as "menstruating women should not swim" is a moral claim. It is not based on incontro-

vertible scientific

facts.



We are at an early stage in exploring these issues, and the lack of answers is likely to evoke anxiety for all of us. But a certain etiquette is developing for how to talk, ask about, and disclose donor insemination information.

Second, adoption in the past has been stigmatized and hushed up for a variety of reasons, making it virtually impossible to separate the issue of stigmatization from the conditions under which the adoption took place, and from lack of knowledge of origins. Only in a culture which emphasizes knowledge of specific origins would lack of that knowledge be devalued. In other words, we do not have an inherent need to know our biological origins. The need comes from how our culture (which is not homogeneous) constructs origins. In a patriarchal, white-dominated society like the United States, lack of that knowledge has negative connotations—a consequence as well as a symbol of its power structure.

The more important question is to what extent do we accommodate or reproduce the culture in which we live, and to what extent do we resist or attempt to change it? How do we rear our children and help them deal with whatever social pressure they may face? Their identity and how they feel about themselves will depend on the messages they receive from society and their parents.

Every family develops myths and constructs reality for its offspring. Our job as gay parents is to pay extra attention to these processes and to acknowledge our part in them. That does not mean we should invalidate the feelings of our children, or shove reality as we define it down their throats, but that we need



to be aware of ourselves as role models. Our children will watch and listen to how we convey our homosexuality and the details of their conception when we talk to others—we will provide them with a vocabulary to deal with the world.

It is important to think about the terminology we use to describe insemination with anonymous donors, because words are used to evaluate behavior and they reflect different interests. There are different connotations, for example, when we use the terms "donor" instead of "father," "mother" versus "comother," "artificial" versus "assisted," and "secrecy" or "lies" versus "privacy" and "confidentiality."

Starting early in my daughter's life, I've had to address the fact that she has two lesbian moms and deal with issues related to her conception. When her preschool friends, for example, asked if it was true that she had two mommies, I answered, "Yes," adding, "isn't she lucky!" When we registered her for kindergarten, we made sure that both my lover and I were present in order to emphasize that we both are her parents. The principal's response to us and the birth certificate (which clearly indicates donor insemination) was, "Ah, I see we have the new-age child here." That response was acceptable to us or we would have attempted to redefine the situation for her.

Granted, it will not always be this simple, but I think we need to start by giving people the benefit of the doubt, and assume that their intentions are not malicious when they say the "wrong" things. It has been my experience that many people appreciate help with how to handle the conception issue.

As gay parents, and because insemination is not the usual way of conception, we will have many opportunities to come out and discuss with our kids how "lies" and "truths" are socially constructed. We can teach them that so-called truths are always partial, that there are many things that are not what they appear to be, and that there are many things we do not understand. We can teach them to have a range of emotional responses to so-called lies.

Within our community, we have more questions than correct answers at this point. We are at an early stage in exploring these issues, and the lack of answers is likely to evoke anciety for all of us. But a certain etiquette is developing for how to talk, ask about, and disclose donor insemination information.

Many women object to questions about how they became pregnant, and whether or not they know the donor. They may resent being asked questions that straight mothers aren't asked. They may want to protect the legal status of their children or prevent them from being given a "master-status" (an engulfing label that becomes the focal point for all interaction). We also simply have lacked scripts for how to talk about our children's conception.

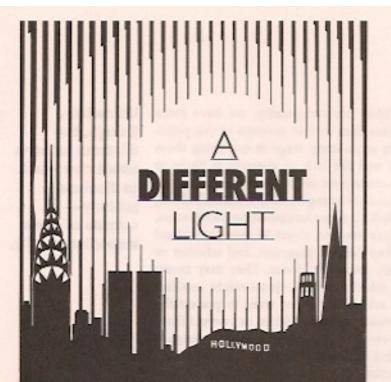
Ultimately, though, the dilemma remains about how much to disclose publicly—outside of one's immediate family. What makes this decision difficult is balancing the importance of discussing the details of our experiences with our desire to control the release of information about ourselves and our children's lives. How to talk about donor insemination is a subject full of ambiguity and tension, one in which we are continuously learning from each other, and articulating what are acceptable questions to ask.

Clearly, when it comes to creating families, the gay and lesbian community has interests that differ from those of mainstream society. We need to remember our history and be aware of the political ramifications of applying any concepts which have been used and abused by the state or by heterosexual society. While the concerns articulated in the debate about anonymous donors are important, we need to think about whether we really want to transform them into explicitly political issues. It seems that if we do that, we run the risk of extending state involvement into family activities, a sphere that has been historically limited-at least for heterosexuals. We need to remember that any time we use a terminology of "rights," we are implicitly inviting the state to become involved in our lives. We should be careful about the timing of any such involvement. V

Ultimately, though, the dilemma remains about how much to disclose publicly outside of one's immediate family.

Petra Liljesfraund is a medical sociologist doing policy research. She has a seven-year-old daughter.

About the artist: Michelle Echenique is an artist who lives and works in Berkeley, California.



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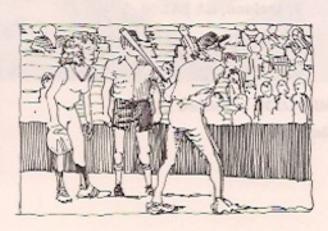
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### THE

## DOUBLE PLAY

Love On the Softball Field





THE UMFREQUESTIME OUT FOR

### by Yvonne Zipter

"Child psychologist Jean Piaget found that in childhood games boys are more concerned with the rules, while girls are more concerned with the relationships among the players, even if the game suffers in the process." — Letty Cottin Pogrebin

If the word "girls" were replaced by the word "lesbians" in the second half of the quotation above, there would be little doubt about the name of the game: dyke softball.

It's not so much that lesbians play softball expressly for the sake of forming relationships though certainly a few do. It's more that, when the women do begin playing, relationships form naturally and, once they have, they can become more Cartoons by Kris Kovick © 1988

important than the game itself. And when that happens, playing dyke softball is like walking through a minefield, with its fluctuating relationships—forming, ending, changing right before your eyes.

In the Beginning, There Was Love

Jody: Yeah. When I was playing first base at practices I flirted with her; I would've flirted with her at second base; I would've flirted with her at short center. [Pause.] I would've.

Erin: You didn't flirt with me at first.

Jody: At first? I always did. I dazzled you with my performance. I smiled every time you got the ball to me. You don't remember that, do you? I hotdogged. I did everything.

Erin: Well, I thought you were just good. I didn't know you were hotdogging. Yvonne: So did playing softball have any other significant impact on the development of your relationship?

Erin: I think the way a person plays softball has a way of showing you what they're really like inside, emotionally. And their strengths and weaknesses. And how much they believe in themselves.

The things that make each of our teams into an extended family are the very same things that create an environment that encourages other types of intimacy as well. The long hours together, practicing and playing, the shared experiences, an atmosphere allowing for few pretenses, the general camaraderie, a tradition of support and encouragement—all of these things make softball fertile ground for attractions, infatuations, and romance. In addition, while athletic lesbians tend to find other athletic women attractive, they also often pick up clues about the other's private personality in her public approach to the game and her

THE NOWAN AT BAT IS HED CURPENT EX-LOVED



IS THIS SLOW PITCH ?!



### THERE ARE FEN INJURIES IN DYKE SOPTBALL BUT NOMEN STILL SUCCUMENTO FITS OF SMOONING.

performance on the field. "She's not only cute, but she's an excellent shortshop."

Yet another reason softball dykes tend to bond to one another is that they understand each other's passion for the game. Women who aren't themselves participants on a team often find their patience and understanding strained with their ball-playing lovers. There are the one or two nights set aside for practice, plus an additional day or two a week for games (which often take precedence over any other plans), plus there are the hours of ritual socializing spent with teammates, and so on. Even women with the best of intentions for letting their lovers do their own thing find themselves getting angry after the fifth or sixth or seventh time they hear, "The game ran late," or, "I just

went to have a beer with the team."

### It's a Family Affair

While love is a personal and private thing, its demise often has a way of becoming very public. And just as divorce in heterosexual marriages tears families apart, so the end of relationships between two softball dyke teammates tears teams—and extended families—apart.

P.L.: It was during the season [when we split up]. It was real quiet—no one on the team talked to me about anything that was going on. They basically rallied around her more, I would say. I still played with them, but there wasn't that team unity anymore.... I think it brought our team down as a whole because there wasn't that unity.... Then when football started after softball, I didn't get any contact

about that at all. And then when I was contacted, they were like, well you can't bring your girlfriend—my new girlfriend—but [my ex's new girlfriend] was playing all the time, so... [But] they're starting to come around more and more now.... They called about playing softball this year... and they said, 'Go ahead and bring [your new girlfriend].' So [playing on a new team this year] was basically my own choice because I didn't want to get involved in conflict at all. I just wanted to play softball.

### A Kaleidoscope of Couples

Kate Clinton: The shortstop on my team isn't talking to the pitcher

This material is excerpted from Diamonds are a Dyke's Best Friend, Reflections, Reminiscences, and Reports from the Field on the Lesbian National Pastime, which is being published this fall by Firebrand Books.

Kris Kovick is a San Francisco cartoonist who thinks first base is a guitar in a garage band.

because they're sleeping with the same woman who is the catcher.

J.T.: What I find fascinating about 'love on the softball field' is, at the end of the season, everybody has rearranged.

Each year teams go through everything from minor changes in personnel to major upheavals as couples rearrange and reform. Not all changes in personnel, of course, are due to matters related to love-sometimes there are just differences of opinion or in philosophy of play, personality conflicts, changing allegiances, and so on. But most teams regularly add and subtract people as women bring their new lovers to the team, as one half of a former couple leaves sometimes two or three others leaving with her in a show of support-and so on. Rivalries spring up between teams on which ex-lovers are playing. Occasionally, women are able to resolve their differences between seasons (or over the years), and it's not uncommon to find a woman with a lover and an ex-lover or two playing on the same team. On

my team, for instance, the pitcher is my ex-lover. And she, in turn, has another ex-lover besides me on the team, and I can think of at least three other sets of ex's—four, if you count the two women who were together a few years ago, split up, and are back together.

This whole pattern of coupling, uncoupling, and recoupling-along with all of its effects on the team-is one of the things that sets openly lesbian teams apart from straight teams and from partly lesbian-but-closeted teams. On straight teams, when women break up with their boyfriends, though their performance on the field might be impaired, it generally doesn't have an impact on the rest of the team. Unless, of course, the boyfriend is also the coach, who is now dating another woman on the team. But the odds of that happening just aren't stacked as precariously as they are on alllesbian teams with lesbian coaches. And on teams where there are some dykes in among the straight women but the

dykes are mostly closeted, a break-up seldom affects the team as a whole because the women involved have chosen not to be (or can't be) open about the relationship they had in the first place. Though the human drama of shifting couples on lesbian teams can be nerve-wracking, it seems to me part of being a member of a family—taking the bad stuff with the good is the price one has to pay for intimacy.

But for all love's ups and downs, despite all of the complications that can arise, and even though most of us now and then forswear love, we seldom actually turn down an opportunity for "true love" when it comes our way—even and especially on the softball field. Because you just never know.... As Joan Bender of Rapid City, South Dakota, says, "If [my lover and I] hadn't played ball together we wouldn't be together now."

Yvonne Zipter, a right-fielder, is a copy editor and nationally syndicated columnist.





AN APPRECIATION

by Nayland Blake

Nayland Blake is an artist and the program coordinator of New Langton Arts in San Francisco.



Tom OF FINLAND is one of the gay world's few authentic icons. For over 30 years his drawings have appeared in gay magazines and circulated in pirate editions. His men have entered the fantasy life of thousands, and his vision has influenced such artists as Robert Mapplethorpe, Bruce Weber, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Though his popularity has waxed and waned, he has remained modest about his work and committed to the making of it. He was born in Finland where he worked as an illustrator and art director for an advertising firm. He first came to America in 1978, and now spends his time between Europe and California, where he has established a foundation to promote his work and an archive to preserve and protect it.

Tom's work is diverse. His drawings are at once a system of gay erotics, utopian documents, historical texts, formal puzzles, memories, and love letters. All of this takes place in the context of an effective pornography. This essay is an attempt to present the various ways in which Tom's work might be used to illuminate other areas of sexuality and cultural history. To do this, it is useful to use a model of several "Toms." Each might be understood to exist in separate but overlapping locations and to articulate different vantage points. Each is one-dimensional and as such, far from any final truth about who Tom is. Taken together, however, they can indicate the diverse nature of Tom's production and the many options available to the person who looks at it.

In Tom's
narratives the
sexual
permutations
recreate as
well as
disrupt the
relationships
of power.



### Tom the Pornographer

Tom's work has been left on the sidelines of any debate about gay sensibility because it is pornography. Pornography remains a taboo: we consume it but will not commit to it. Yet when the history of gay images and representations is written, it will contain a large section on our pornographers. In a milieu that has produced a new connoisseurship of sexual acts, what we arouse ourselves with speaks eloquently about who we are.

Because of the marginalization of pornographic practice, Tom's work has been pirated, his earnings stolen by booksellers and art dealers, and his impact as a producer of powerful signs ignored by the same gay community he helped to create. It is time to invert the value placed on the production and consumption of pornography, and to instead look to it to provide understanding of who we are and how we are.

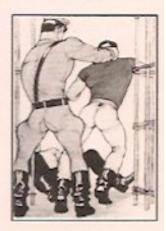
Tom draws. Most current discussion tends to focus on photographic pornography, treating all other forms as sidelights, or subsets of it. But there are important differences between a drawn and photographic image. Photographic pornography operates as evidence, the documentation that certain acts took place before the camera. Drawings, however, function in a way akin to writing: they provide the props for the viewer to hang a fantasy on rather than a specific person for the viewer to be aroused by. Tom comprehends that his drawings are not renditions of reality. His "men" are machines for fucking, like exotic sofas, and they are constructed accordingly. Unlike the subject of a photograph, their brawn is not the product of endless grooming. Their bodies are not a reproach to our own, but an opportunity for luxury.

Tom constructed his ideal gay body on paper. Because of his position as a pornographer, he was able to disseminate his ideas about that body to a sympathetic underground of gay men in Europe and America, to modify and embellish it, and finally, to see it celebrated as a central fixture of gay culture.

## Tom the Artist

Every work of cultural criticism has its own project. For years gay cultural critics have been locked into a project of assimilation into the dominant culture. They expect the gay com-







THE PLEET'S IN PAUL CADMUS, 1934 NAVAL HISTORY PHOTOGRAPH

Cadmus' paintings are either social commentaries peppered with a series of grotesque homosexual "types," or sentimentalized hymns to a gay middlebrow heaven.

munity to produce figures that will stand alongside the masters by satisfying criteria of impact, technique, or seriousness of purpose. We are constantly presented with a parade of gay artists raised to mastery or snatched from the mainstream canon by their critics or publicists. In recent years we have seen this project attempted with such artists as David Hockney, George Platte Lynnes, and Carravaggio. But the urge to "take someone seriously" and to confer respectability through placement in art history can easily be a disservice to the artist. Paul Cadmus, for instance, is an artist whose rehabilitation is complete, whose work has been successfully termed both gay and high art.

Cadmus began his career in the 1930s. He was a student of Reginald Marsh and worked on several projects for the Works Progress Administration (WPA). His most famous moment came when he was commissioned to produce a painting for the US Navy and presented them with a portrait of boozy sailors whoring on leave. The resulting scandal thrust him into the mainstream until the schools of

postwar abstraction eclipsed his own, representational, style. In the late 1970s, his reputation was revived by increased interest in the WPA period, and by his lionization in the gay press. But Cadmus' work can only be described as tangential to the entire thrust of modern art. Its overwhelming characteristic is the desire to be taken seriously, to be high art. It attempts to convince us by displaying all the signifiers of mastery: coy allusion to other paintings, meticulous rendering, a tendency to caricature divorced form any real perception, and a slavish devotion to antique craftsmanship (in his case egg tempera-which was supposed to show that the painting took a long time and wasn't easy to make). But the result of such labors is kitsch. Kitsch reassures the bourgeois audience that they are receiving their proper dosage of culture. A progressive politics cannot arise from a conservative aesthetics, and to promote Cadmus to a place within the world of museum art is to win a hollow victory for gay politics.

For Cadmus depicts gay people in an ambivalent fashion. In his early work, gay sexuality is slipped in on the sidelines, often with the artist as a knowing spectator winking at the audience. Later, history allowed him the luxury of painting beefcake. Cadmus' paintings are either social commentaries peppered with a series of grotesque homosexual "types," or in a painting like his What I Believe, sentimentalized hymns to a gay middlebrow heaven.

Tom cites Cadmus as an influence, but his work is different in tone and intent. He is skeptical of attempts to classify his work as high art, preferring the terms "fantasy drawings" or "dirty pictures." His images relate to the man in the street far more than to the pantheon of great artists. His work is not an apologia for homosexuality, but a direct document of it. With Tom there are no great themes, no highblown rhetoric, but great communication. The fact that his work is utilitarian, that its aim is sexual arousal, means that it cannot make claims to distance or a transhistorical resonance. Tom sacrifices the grand for the immediate. It is his success at this that makes him a much more interesting figure in discussions of gay identity.

### Tom the Craftsman

"I wanted to develop a photorealist style."

One of the most striking and transgressive features of Tom's drawings are their polish, the obsessive way in which they are rendered. The viewer's attention is shifted away from considering the quality of the line (in the way that we would speak of Matisse's line) to the object or activity that is being depicted. Rendering strives to be seamless, obscuring the process of its own making. In the twentieth century, work that has attempted to hide the process of its making has almost always been allied with extreme aesthetic and political conservatism.

Two examples of this would be Soviet socialist realism and the paintings of Norman Rockwell. They share the same concern as Tom's work does with the fetishized representation of things "as they really are." This last phrase is the most important because it is the project of this work to construct the reality it purports to depict. Such work revives the time-worn metaphor of painting as a mirror to create a fantasy reality and make us believe it as well.

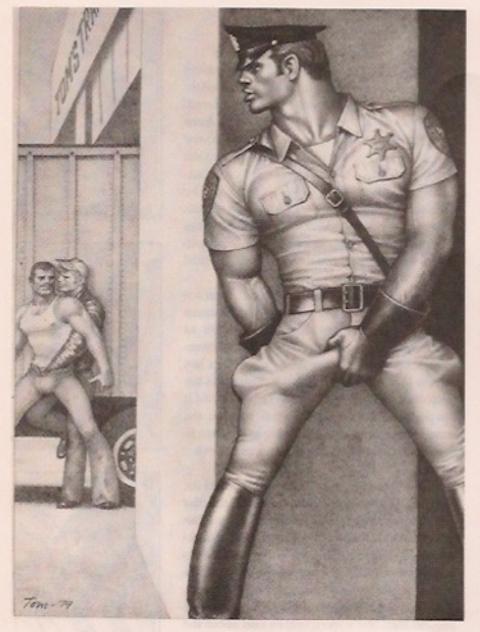
Like Tom, Norman Rockwell worked for years as an illustrator and commercial artist before anyone ever claimed his work was fine art. If you tour the Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, you will be treated to endless reminders of how long the paintings took to execute, how exacting Rockwell was, how his models were drawn from the people around him. Not a word will be said about the real agenda of Rockwell's work, which is the construction of a phantom America, where people have disagreements but not differences, where social issues are the occasion for damp sympathy or sly chuckles but not action, and where every thing "feels like home." Rockwell supports a type of anti-historicism in the name of American ideals: a bumbling clerk or American soldier looks exactly like his colonial forebears; children commune with the spirit of George Washington; a young man giving a speech bears uncanny resemblance to Abraham Lincoln. His work achieves its effect by its obsessive rendering (which panders to







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our wish to see ourselves in the mirror it proffers) without saying it is not our image we see, but only its own distorted editorializing.

Socialist realism (the art movement promoted by Stalin in the early 1930s) has a similar goal. Its aim is the creation, through their depiction, of attitudes proper to the ideal communist state. Its style is a hybrid of nineteenth century salon painting with the neoclassicism of late art deco. As the official government style, it succeeded in silencing some of the most important art of the twentieth century. Soviet artists moved from the vanguard of ideas in painting, filmmaking and architecture to become obscure state functionaries. Works that treated the viewer as anything other than a passive receptor for the "correct attitudes" of the propagandists were driven underground. Like Rockwell, the Soviet artists were using arguments of naturalism and realism as a cover for their own political program, and like Rockwell, they relied on the technique of scrupulous depiction to seduce and convince the viewer. It is telling that the works produced under socialist realism began to look like those produced in Nazi Germany.

The burly workers and farmers that stride through socialist realism's paintings and sculptures are not too distant relatives of the sailors and cops whose orgies Tom lovingly depicts. Tom too, is constructing a fantasy world, but with different aims. He is calling into being a world suffused with gay sexuality, using the power of his craft to validate his fantasies.

No longer interested in desire and its implied lack, Tom substitutes a pleasure of looking and being looked at, equating the cruising look with the sexual act.

#### Tom the Narrator

Tom says, "I wanted to show a world where gays could be freer, not so afraid." He draws an idealized world of sexual courtship and activity that is at once a projection of his own private fantasies about gay behavior and a public articulation of possibilities within the gay community.

The rules of this utopia are spelled out through narrative. Tom uses narrative in two ways. The first is within the individual drawing. We see figures gesture to one another while in the background, a third is enticed towards the scene. A knot of flesh reveals itself to be a series of sexual acts, the individual articulations of which rest like beads on a strand: here a crotch is being grabbed, here a neck bitten.

Often when we feel we have solved this sexual puzzle there is an unexpected conjunction: a body is given a half twist, a foot is wedged to stroke an asshole. Such moments in the drawings are like turns in the plot. A new erotic site is revealed and the drawings move from sexual excitement to repletion.

The second use of narrative is the linking up of various drawings into a series. In this, they begin to resemble novels or films more than photographs, displaying the possibilities for sexual conjunction between characters. We anticipate combinations—what if Kake (one of Tom's heroes) fucks this cop who is arriving? Or, if the situation reverses, is that cock sucked later on? The erotic is displaced from an object to a terrain of figures and their possible interactions. Narrative opens up the image; it denies it an authority of hierarchy.

A narrative exists throughout Tom's work as a whole. This is because certain characters have continued to appear in his work for 30 years—not only the heroes Kake and Pekka, but the bit players as well. Tom's figures are as generalized in their appearance as they are particularized in their acts. Their similarity makes us feel at home. This is a world we recognize, but without the boundaries on our desires.

#### Tom the Sensualist

Tom is the poet of texture. Notice the characteristics of flesh in his work. Flesh as it is compacted into springy mass, as it pushes from between fingers, as it is ridged during fucking. Tom's men are massive and it is this sense of the impact of flesh upon flesh that provides erotic charge. His bodies are pneumatic and well upholstered, and at the same time, pouty.

In western art, the pout is a potent sexual signifier. It is a fullness (the skin is near to bursting with the flesh that lies beneath it) and at the same time a slackening, a slight droop that connotes a leisure, a gentle lassitude. In



GLORY TO THE RED ARMYT LEONID GOLOVANOV, 1948

Like Rockwell, the Soviet artists were using arguments of naturalism and realism as a cover for their own political program. Tom too, is constructing a fantasy world, but with different aims.



After the experience of Nazi Germany, it is impossible to claim that its symbols are neutral. However, it is equally wrong to say that once symbols acquire a meaning, that that meaning is fixed forever.

Tom, not only the lips, but the eyes, the bellies, even the cocks seem to pout, to be packed with a sexual energy that expresses itself in a slight but significant bulging. It is this flesh that pouts, through clothes and across streets, that produces the heavy air of sex in Tom's world.

Tom is adept at portraying the texture of leather boots and jackets, the starch of uniforms, the tension and give of denim. He admits that it was the British who first drew his attention to the world of leather, and he is perhaps its most faithful depicter. His leather is shiny and beautifully heavy, draping the men of his drawings with a sort of solemnity. This drapery frames the erotic object; clothing is often retained far into the sex act. The textures and bits of uniform are the variables that allow us to sort out who is who among Tom's generalized figures.

Tom the Voyeur

Most pornography of the image is constructed around the framework of the gaze. The gaze can be understood as the eye as phallus, a powerful and penetrative organ. In most pornography, the object presents itself to the gaze, welcomes its penetration and is rendered passive by it. In Tom's work there is suprisingly little of the singular, phallic gaze. Instead, he presents a network of looks. Often he inserts figures observing the activities into the margins of his drawings. There is a heightened sense of people putting themselves on display.

Two fully clothed men lean against a tree. They look out onto a street where other men cruise and make gestures of sexual enticement. After a while we realize that the men are fucking. This drawing is not an invitation to us, the viewer, but it is powerfully erotic because of the combination of the men's casual looks and their position as part of an entire world of fucking. Like those of the men, our eyes are invited to roam. This allows for a double current of attraction/participation rather than the single current of gazer/object of the gaze. No longer interested in desire and its implied lack, Tom substitutes a pleasure of looking and being looked at, equating the cruising look with the sexual act.

#### Tom the Fascist

"Whoever designed the Nazi uniforms had to be gay. Those were the sexiest men I have ever seen in my life...."

Tom's earliest sexual experiences were with German soldiers during the occupation of Helsinki. He talked about this romantic involvement in an interview with David Reed in Christopher Street. His first drawings were attempts to recreate those experiences and fantasies.

The first time I read the above quote two things came to mind: first, the debate then raging over the meaning of the fashion of leather and uniforms for gay men, and second, the visual similarity between Tom's drawings and the heroic neo-classicism that had been the court style under the fascist regimes of the 1920s through 1940s.

Can Tom's work be said to provide a direct link between the übermensch ideals of Nazi Germany and the so-called fascist undercurrents in the gay uniform craze? And by extension, can Tom's work be called fascist?

In Tom's utopian world, roles exist, but power is fluid. He is the keenest depicter of the erotics of lubricious power. Cops may have authority, a uniformed man may begin to flog his prisoner, but these situations will soon reverse themselves as the cop bends over to be fucked, and the man in the uniform allows himself to be bound. Tom understands that the pleasure of S/M is the successful fulfillment of a role while maintaining the understanding that it is a role. "It is more playful, like acting" he says. There is also a high degree of humor in the drawings, and even when there are scenes of beating or bondage, they are suffused with an avuncular attitude that is difficult to resolve with the notion of fascism.

Some maintain that the symbol itself holds power, that to use it is to invoke all that it has stood for. At the opposite extreme are those who claim that a symbol, like the swastika, is utterly neutral and that it is the viewer's responsibility to get past any negative connotations that it may have had. Both positions contain a certain amount of self-willed naiveté. By itself, a symbol is a neutral arrangement of lines, but symbols are never by themselves. Like all signifiers, they are the product of specific historical circumstances.

After the experience of Nazi Germany, it is impossible to claim that its symbols are neutral. However, it is equally wrong to say that once symbols acquire a meaning, that that meaning is fixed forever. The meaning of phrases and images does shift depending on who uses them. While Tom's drawings utilize a style of representation popular under fascism, it would be a mistake to say that even those that contain Nazi imagery are fascist in intent or effect.

Tom himself expresses misgivings about drawings he made early in his career. "People saw them in a political way because they had Nazis in them. They thought I was a Nazi. I would not do them today because I do not want people to see them that way-they are my fantasies." Through an understanding of the traumatic effect that they have on people, Tom has removed the drawings that contain Nazi figures from circulation. This is a case in which his private fantasies were not shared by a larger public. Tom also talks about subjects that are too violent for him. "They (people with commissions) asked me to do pictures like of balls being cut off or stomaches opened with all the organs... I could not do them."

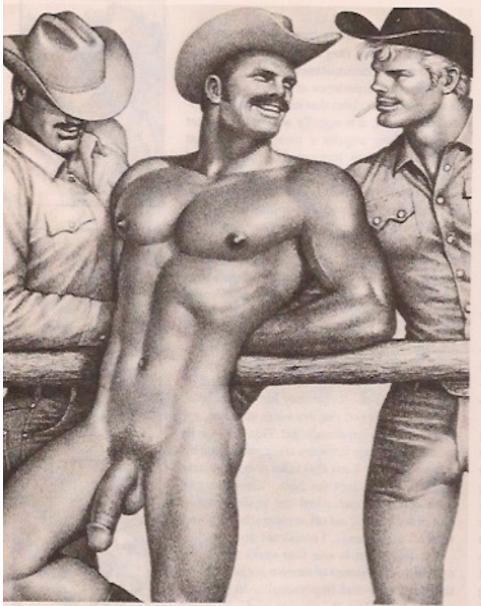
A fascist art is one that seeks to silence opposition by means of its own authority, one that uses scale and impersonality to produce power. It renders the viewer mute, denying any voice other than the state. From the first, Tom has been inclusive in his work, incorporating suggestions from others, and through dialogue, coming to an understanding of its various political implications. His art does not glorify power, being all too eager to upset the balance in favor of erotic connection. It is impossible to imagine Kake as some sort of übermensch. He is too often on the receiving end of Tom's jokes, losing his clothes, or having his cock handcuffed to another man. Tom is too obviously delighted with the possibilities for erotic display to not invite us to join in.







OUT/LOOK



The physique magazines should be seen not as cute precursors to today's hard core porn, but as an underground press equal in importance to the first gay political magazines.

#### Tom the Sadist

In speaking of sadism, it is important to differentiate between a garden variety of brute and someone whose work is inspired by the Marquis de Sade. Tom is a sadist, not because of any perceived violence in his work, but because he shares similar obsessions with Sade. He is a careful constructor of sexual tableaus. He is concerned with full use of the erotic zones of the body, with saturation. It is important that all orifices be filled, that figures be connected, disrupted and connected again. In one narrative a man is pissing in a public toilet. A sailor wanders in and starts fucking him, a blond comes in and starts fucking him, and so on until there are eight people in a row. This is a typical Sadean trope; an asshole is fucked because it is there and it is important to complete the tableau. The formal demands of sexual positioning overwhelm the ideas of power relationships.

Like Sade's, Tom's work operates by an overlapping and subsequent disruption of codes. In Tom's case this is the tension between the drawn image and the photograph. His best drawings bounce between the deadpan style of the camera and the sly exaggerations of his pencil. Without the meticulous rendering, his exaggerations would fail to arouse. There is a sense of outrage with the notion of the painstaking approach to such a low aim; that one should labor so hard to produce images of men fucking.

Sade uses beautifully crafted French prose to describe the most perfidious activities. In our society, the expected result of superlative craft is the sublime. Tom, with his devotion to his fantasy, stands this expectation about highmindedness and craft on its head. His intense devotion to a pornographic labor is anti-establishment; it is a "waste" of time and talent. It disrupts society's ideas about what pornography is: cheap, thrown together, and without redeeming value. Tom the Physique Artist

Looking at a copy of Fizeek Art Quarterly, it is remarkable how Tom's work stands out from the rest of the drawings that surround it—as much for what it doesn't do as for what it does. The majority of early gay pornography is dominated by a desire to return to a mythical past. Images of fauns playing lyres, gladiators, medieval knights and pages, and other nevernever lands of gay desire. Tom's drawings, on the other hand, are always of contemporary subjects. Even when they portray cowboys, you know there is a pickup truck or motorcycle lurking around the corner.

This is a world of today, a world of constantly intersecting erotic gazes and gestures, where sexual activity is always a possibility. Over the years, Tom has adopted different styles of dress and hair length to maintain a contemporary look. Tom also abandons the gay figure of the ephebe, the slender hairless teen whose purity and fawn-like bearing presage the sensitive and willowy man. Tom's men are lugs, and the closest he comes to the ephebe are drawings of robust teens who ride around on motorcycles looking to get fucked.

Tom has always drawn images from his

own experiences and the world around him; but as his work began to appear in the pages of America's physique magazines he began to receive suggestions for subject matter and commissions from his publishers and readers. These magazines functioned not only as a source for pin-up pictures, but also as a ground for the exchange of ideas for fantasies and types of identities. They began to form the image reservoirs from which gay men were able to construct new codes for dress and behavior. They began to constitute a placeless community for gay men before physical communities existed.

The physique magazines should be seen not as cute precursors to today's hard core porn, but as an underground press equal in importance to the first gay political magazines. Tom's drawings passed from the private fantasies of a man in Europe to the underground images that would shape a generation's ideas of how a gay man could look and act. Tom has drawn not only on the paper in front of him but on the consciousness of the men who viewed and continue to view his work.

Nayland Blake would like to thank Mark Leger for his editorial insight and guidance, and Tom of Finland and Dirk Dehner for their time and patience.



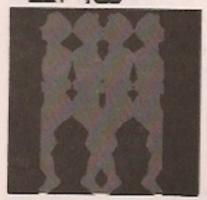




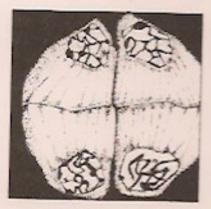




# Nature vs. Nurture & the Politics of AIDS Organizing







Illustrations by E.G. Crichton

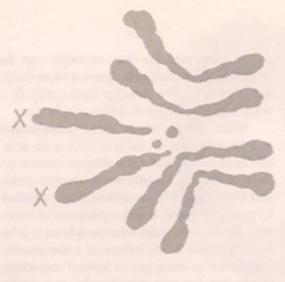
by Steven Epstein

NTHE SPRING OF 1986 a 15-year-old black teenager, whom I'll call Marcus Robinson, came to the attention of the juvenile court in a medium-size town in the southern United States. Marcus had run away from his aunt and uncle whom he'd been living with, and was arrested for petty theft. When his relatives refused to take him back in, the judge declared Marcus a ward of the court. The judge also sent him to a psychiatric hospital for a month's observation, in part because he thought Marcus was depressed, but also because he was disturbed by the boy's "homosexual-type characteristics."

The hospital psychiatrist, noticing Marcus' effeminate mannerisms, immediately decided to administer an HIV antibody test. And in fact, the boy tested positive. Instantly he became a pariah. When it became known that Marcus was currently sexually active, the professionals and officials began a steady campaign to get him out of town or locked up in a hospital or reformatory.

The terms of Marcus' life became the object of decisions by the web of professionals who now assumed control over him: his case worker and his mental health worker, his probation officer and his medical doctor. These authority figures did little to help Marcus ad-

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All lesbians and gay men hold beliefs about their identity, and those beliefs have consequences in the real world.

just to the new realities confronting him. The doctor told him bluntly, "You are going to die," and left it at that. The others told him simply: "You have to stop having sex." They constructed an image of him as a sexual menace, a monster who represented, in the words of his case worker, a "clear and present danger to the community." Each expert conclusion entered into his swelling file was read as evidence for the next conclusion, until the file took on more reality than the boy himself.

This story has a surprisingly happy ending. Marcus was not simply put on a bus and kicked out of town, as his case worker had actually proposed. Instead, a foster parent was found for him in a new town in the same state, and Marcus now lives there, in much better circumstances. But Marcus's story demonstrates in an extreme fashion

what happens when one's identity is directed and prescribed by others, even when their intentions are benevolent, even when the outcome proves better than the worst-case scenario."

The professionals created an image of who Marcus was—they invented him, in a sense and that image propelled their actions and guided their decisions. In a more general way, I want to argue that all ideas about identity have political consequences. And I want to look at how our own ideas about our identities as gay men and lesbians affect our political responses to the AIDS epidemic.

ALL LESBIANS AND GAY MEN hold beliefs about their identity, and those beliefs have consequences in the real world. But our ideas about identity are not straightforward. Quite often they are contentious and contra-

> dictory. Fundamental disagreements about the nature of gay and lesbian identities have been at the crux of an ongoing academic debate between essentialism and constructionism. I want to take this terminology and apply it to AIDS organizing efforts. I want to look at how essentialist and constructionist beliefs about gay and lesbian identi-

ties affect the gay community's understanding of, and response to, AIDS; and conversely, how the AIDS crisis is transforming those identities and our beliefs about them.

To briefly sum up the debate: essentialists treat sexuality as a biological force and believe that sexual-identity labels represent genuine, underlying, more-or-less fixed differences among groups of people. Constructionists, on the other hand, stress that sexual identities are \*This story is drawn from a chapter of: David L. Kirp with Steven Epstein, Marlene Strong Franks, Jonathan Simon, Doug Conaway, and John Lewis, Learning By Heart: AIDS and America's Schoolchildren (Rutgers University Press, forthcoming in 1989). Constructionism is an important ingredient in any philosophy of safe sex. social constructions—that sexuality can be more fluid and malleable than we often think, and that identities develop historically in a wide variety of ways in different cultures.

When people argue about essentialism and constructionism, different things are actually at stake. At times the dispute centers on how much a gay identity is a product of choice and how much it is something fixed, whether by genes, early childhood experience, or whatever. But at other times what people seem to be arguing about is the nature of a community experience: is being gay or lesbian something that makes the group members fundamentally different from heterosexuals, or not?

Because the opposing views are so extreme and the extreme positions so unconvincing, the debate has become increasingly unproductive. Most of the people debating these terms pledge a general allegiance to constructionism (considered to be intellectually chic), though in fact many of them adopt some position more toward the middle-or perhaps fluctuate between various positions without even noticing. Probably every lesbian and gay man-and not just those who are conversant with terms like essentialism and constructionism-experiences these contradictions, though often in quite different and highly personal ways. But what is important about the debate-what makes it worth talking about-is not so much the question of who's right, but rather the political implications of adopting either viewpoint.

Essentialist and constructionist visions constitute different legitimation strategies, or ways of responding to political pressures and advancing political agendas. When I say these beliefs are "strategic," I don't mean to imply that people consciously select their beliefs in some pragmatic way. But often the ways in which we conceive of gay and lesbian identities do influence our political arguments.

At various times in recent history gay men and lesbians have relied on an essentialist selfunderstanding to refute the challenge: Why are you people gay? Why don't you just become straight? Typically, we argue that this is simply the way we are; at times some go further and claim that homosexuality is encoded

in our genes or fixed inalterably by early childhood experiences. This essentialist legitimation strategy argues, in effect, that it is illogical for straight people to expect us to change our sexuality. But at other times (or even simultaneously) lesbians and gay men have wielded a far more constructionist perspective. For example, the gay liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s argued that all sexual categories are confining, and that, in the absence of social strictures, everyone would be happily bisexual or "polymorphously perverse." This argument denied difference between gays and straights by locating gay liberation within a larger project of human liberation and cultural revolution. It fit in well, in other words, with the climate of the times.

What identity strategies are being advanced to confront the AIDS epidemic? In fact, some of the biggest disagreements about how we should confront AIDS involve (at least on one level) the playing out of these identity debates.

Perhaps because it is considered politically correct, many people have taken a stance toward AIDS that is explicitly constructionist. For the recent conference in Stockholm on "Homosexual Identity During, Before, and After HIV" (a conference that immediately preceded the scientific conference sponsered by the World Health Organization), the Swedish organizers wrote: "Human beings are active creators of their lives. We are not doomed by societal structures or by our drives. We are also subjects and can create our own future." The conference brochure went on to explain how we can create a new concept of homosexual identity incorporating safer sexual pleasures. In this view, sexual practices and sexual identity are seen as equally malleable: we can adopt new sexual practices and in the process redefine who we are.

This is what you might call constructionist-inspired AIDS politics. Constructionism is an important ingredient in any philosophy of safe sex, and it stands as a rebuke to those essentialists who, confronted with AIDS, have said, in effect, "I don't feel like I'm really gay anymore, if I'm not allowed to do such and such." But I want to deliberately complicate things by exploring the advantages of essentialist politics for confronting AIDS, and also by discussing the disadvantages of both positions.

It is important to underscore the striking effectiveness of an essentialist vision for gay communities confronting AIDS. By the late 1970s in the United States, gay men and lesbians were being perceived—and were seeing themselves—as a distinct group in society, having an almost ethnic status. Being gay, as Dennis Altman has argued, became a fundamental marker of difference, something like being "Japanese-American" or "Jewish." This development was particularly important in a country where people are far more likely to define themselves by ethnic identity than by social class or other markers.

This essentialist idea—that individuals who happen to have a particular sexual preference somehow constitute a "gay people"—is basic to most thinking about AIDS in the United States. For example, when gay activists describe the Reagan administration's refusal to address the AIDS crisis as a form of genocide directed against gay people, they presuppose that gays are a people. You would never think to talk about the genocide of hemophiliacs, even though hemophiliacs also are victims of Reagan's AIDS policies.

As a result of this essentialist, "ethnic" identity, lesbian and gay communities have been able to mobilize to confront what they take to be a community crisis. Wherever the essentialist identity was strongest, the community has organized most effectively and with the highest degree of solidarity to meet the challenge of the disease. Pre-existing community structures became the springboards for developing a huge network of AIDS-related organizations. Moreover, the growing legitimacy of gays and lesbians as a distinct interest group, on a par with other voting blocs, gave them the capacity to mobilize in the state arena and to receive, however begrudgingly, a response in the form of funding. This is what Altman has called "legitimation through disaster," which is marked by the paradox of increasing homophobia while there is also increasing legitimation of the gay movement.



HE GREAT IRONY, though, is that an essentialist political response to AIDS helps to solidify the conception of AIDS as a "gay disease," as a marker of gay identity. In fact, this essentialism—this ethnic identity—was partly responsible for the peculiar way in which AIDS has come to be understood in the United States and elsewhere as an intrinsically gay disease. It was in part because gay communities had become highly developed and visible that the health problems that began affecting gay men in the late 1970s and early 1980s attracted medical attention. IV drug users were developing AIDS at the very same time, especially in New York City, but these drug users, largely black and Latino, died unno-

ticed, just as many of their neighbors died unnoticed from an assortment of other illnesses. The deaths of middle-class, white, gay men attracted more medical attention, and because of that, and because gays were seen as a sort of ethnic group, AIDS first became known as a "gay disease."

A range of forces, including the medical profession, straight and gay,
and the media, straight and gay, contributed
in different ways to an essentialist conception
of the "gay plague." Not only did AIDS become inextricably bound up with gay identity,
but the disease itself was presumed to possess
some essential core, some kernel of transcendental truth. A furious search ensued for the
hidden meaning presumed to lurk within the
epidemic Some propsed that AIDS was God's
revenge on the sinful. Others, even some gay
men with AIDS, claimed that AIDS stemmed
from a faulty lifestyle, from an oversexualized
identity.

In these ways, an essentialist conception of a diesase became wedded to an essentialist conception of gay men. Although most doctors, public health officials, and reporters have long renounced the explicit claim that AIDS is a "gay disease," that understanding has taken a deep root in the popular imagination. When

Senator Jesse Helms declared on the floor of the US Senate last fall that "every case of AIDS can be traced back to a homosexual act," no doubt many Americans felt he was belaboring the obvious.

The shared experience of AIDS has further increased the "ethnic" identification inside of gay communities. But as these communities have restructured themselves to combat AIDS, they have found themselves in the peculiar and contradictory position of claiming a special need for government funding and medical resources while simultaneously having to combat the notion that AIDS is a gay disease. How to say that gay men are "at greater risk" without having homosexuality itself described as a "risk factor?" The contradiction is

easily exploited by opponents of the gay movement. A southern evangelist named Moody Adams, in his horrific book, AIDS: You Just Think You're Safe (which I understand is very popular in parts of the South), attacks the gay community by making exactly this point: "Homosexuals, in endless press statements, labor their denials of any re-

sponsibility for the epidemic. Homosexuals have reacted furiously over statements linking AIDS with their sexual practices.... But even homosexuals themselves have given their prime organization the name 'Gay Men's Health Crisis.' This is an honest name in these days, even if it is a slip."

So one of the biggest debates in gay communities and AIDs organizations in the United States has been whether—and how—to "de-gay" AIDs; or, to put it more concretely, how to exert maximum control over a fight against a disease that largely affects gay men, while at the same time countering the ideological linkage that portrays gay identity as inherently diseased.

The strategy to oppose the linkage has been fundamentally constructionist, and the slogan in the gay movement has been: It's not who you are, it's what you do, that puts you at risk for AIDS. This slogan challenges the medical/ideological notion of the "risk group." And at the same time, by insisting that anyone who engages in unsafe sex is at risk of infection, the constructionist strategy opposes the whole psychology of paranoid projection that saturates most thinking about AIDS in the United States. In this psychology, the world is divided into "Us" and "Them;" "their" disease has put "us" at risk, so "they" must be kept out of "our" lives, perhaps by testing and isolating "them."

But this strategy, which links AIDS with practices rather than with group identity, poses an assortment of new dilemmas. For tremendously difficult to be responsible to, and accountable to, so many different constituencies, some of whom may have their own distinct cultures and speak their own languages. In addition, the question of priorities rises quickly to the surface. If AIDS organizations are serving everyone, then they necessarily must be spending a lot of time educating groups of people who are at relatively low risk. What this means is they have correspondingly less time to devote to the specific needs of, say, gay men who are HIV-positive.

As this uncertain transition proceeds, it is little wonder that some people within AIDS organizations have come to resent the diversion of attention away from the gay community. What might be called an essentialist back-





AIDS organizations, it has meant a shift in stated goals over the past few years, to serving entire cities or metropolitan areas—serving gays and straights, men and women, blacks and whites, and Latinos and Asians. Since AIDS isn't a gay disease, the argument runs, AIDS organizations can't just be gay organizations. The problem is that, having moved in this direction, the most prominent AIDS organizations (originally staffed largely by gay men) are ambivalent about whether it is really what they want to be doing. The shift in emphasis has left many AIDS organizations uncertain, not only about their mission but about their very organizational identity.

The conflict can be felt on various levels: practical, strategic, and ideological. On the one hand, when AIDS organizations announce they are serving the entire community, their funding prospects suddenly become significantly brighter. But on the other hand, it can be





lash position has emerged: We are a gay organization after all. Some go even further, having a vision of bringing back what they see as the good old days of the early 1980s, when AIDS organizations served middle-class, gay white men. In a sense what is at stake here is not just the mission of the AIDS organizations but contested definitions of "the gay community" itself. Whose gay community should the gay AIDS organizations serve? The essentialist backlash highlights the way in which any rigid conception of identity tends to deny internal differences by superimposing the image of the dominant subgroup.

What has made the "de-gaying" of AIDS especially problematic is the play of external political forces. While AIDS organizers within the gay community have been advancing a particular set of agendas, others have embarked on their own attempts to mainstream the epidemic. Health officials and experts,

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efforts.

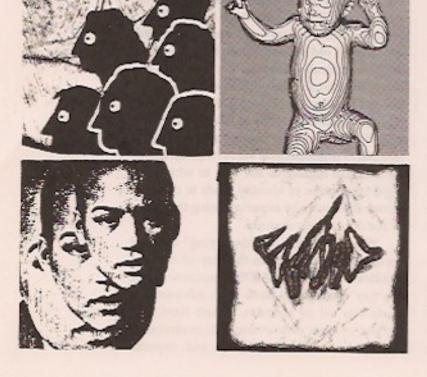
concerned primarily about the threat to what they like to call the "general population," spent much of 1986 and 1987 sounding the alarm about the risk to the average heterosexual. The AIDS organizations' careful message—It's not who you are but what you do—was drowned out by a louder chorus: "Now No One Is Safe From AIDS" (as Life magazine declared in blood-red letters on its cover, above side-by-side photos of a young boy, a white, middle-class family, and a saluting soldier).

This dehomosexualizing of AIDS, supported by gay activists in the hope that it would destigmatize the disease, seems instead to be resulting in the increasing marginalization of gays and lesbians within anti-AIDS efforts. Now that AIDS has become a "national" (or heterosexual) concern, the voice of the gay community is being muzzled by the mainstream experts, the media, and the politicians.

The campaign of fear promoted by those experts has had several additional consequences. First, it produced a lot of hysteria, often about transmission through casual contact, resulting in an increased aversion to

being around people with AIDS in the workplace or the classroom. Second, the us/ them psychology was reinforced: How dare "they" spread it to "us"! Third, a nasty stereotyping of both prostitutes and bisexuals, seen as the conduits of infection to the general population, has been conducted in the mainstream press. Fourth, because of the obsessive preoccupation with the threat to white heterosexuals, there has been a tendency to completely ignore the genuinely higher health risks in communities of color, even though in the United States a nonwhite person, having less access to health services and education, is far more likely to contract AIDS than a white person. Finally, and most ironically of all, in many quarters the conception of AIDS as a gay disease became even more hegemonic, sparking a homophobic backlash. This fear-inducement campaign backfired so thoroughly that by mid-1987 the experts had abandoned it and now criticize those who, like Masters and Johnson, proclaim that heterosexuals are at great risk of infection.

What seems to have happened is that a gay constructionist strategy of generalizing the notion of who is at risk became a tool inside of a misguided public health campaign designed to wake up the people of the United States to the dangers of AIDS. And now in some quarters the gay community is being blamed for having over-broadcasted those dangers. In a recent article in the neo-conservative journal Commentary (November 1987), Michael Fumento argues that gay activists deliberately exaggerated the dangers of heterosexual transmission to get more sympathy and funding directed at the gay community. It is conceivable that this argument may have an element of truth behind it, which makes it all the more imperative to reflect on why the strategy has failed.



HAVE EXPLORED some of the ways in which our conceptions of who we are, individually and collectively, can find expression in a spectrum of AIDS politics—in actions and decisions that may stand in sharp opposition

to one another. But while ideas can alter the course of events, events reshape those ideas. I have hinted at this other side of the equation: the ways in which the realities of AIDS, and the political battles that are being fought out around it, necessarily are forcing gay men and lesbians to rethink questions of identity. This is happening in part because some of the dangers are so glaring. There is the risk, for example, of consolidating an identity based on disease, or (somewhat more insidiously) of dividing our communities on the basis of what Cindy Patton has called "risk-based identities," with the "negatives" set against the "positives."

What is distinctive about many of the current threats is that they require us to move beyond the simple either/or of essentialist and constructionist politics. These dilemmas seem to demand a more nuanced and, in some sense, dialectical approach.

We should acknowledge the strategic importance of an essentialist vision of community in confronting something like AIDS, while also adopting a constructionist insistence that identity is something open to change, and that it can mean different things to different people within the community. This means being open to diversity and not letting the gay community come to mean the particular experiences of white, middle-class gay men. It means clearly asserting our own group priorities, but also recognizing the possibilities of alliances with others who are disproportionately confronting AIDS and its stigma, including heterosexual men and women of color, IV drug users, prostitutes, and bisexuals.

We need to maintain a creative tension between essentialism and constructionism. Because these ideas have real consequences and people's lives are at stake, we tend to become overly invested in the position of the moment. In fact it may be necessary to adopt both essentialist and constructionist politics and play them off against each other in the struggle against AIDS. We should accept that constructionism and essentialism both speak to certain aspects of truth in our experiences, and use the contradiction to our own best advantage. 

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About the artist: E.G. Crichton's artistic outlook is nurtured by nature.

This article is based on a talk presented at the "Homosexual Identity During, Before, and After HIV" Conference in Stockholm, June 9-11, 1988, sponsored by the Swedish Federation for Lesbian and Gay Rights (RFSL). I want to thank the conference participants for their comments, and also thank Jeffrey Escoffier and the OUT/LOOK editors for help with revisions.

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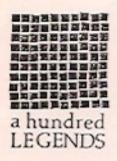
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## Alive With AIDS: Artwork from a hundred LEGENDS



We have listened to what religious and governmental leaders, medical experts, journalists, and others have to say about AIDS. But little has been seen or heard from those who are actually living with AIDS or ARC. A hundred LEGENDS, a forthcoming collection of artwork, provides a rare opportunity to showcase the creative expression of these individuals. The collection of work integrates the creative and healing processes, and will help ensure a cultural legacy of the experience of living with this disease.

The portfolio on these pages is a sample of the visual work included in the LEGENDS collection—which ultimately will be a clothbound box containing color reproductions of artwork on loose sheets, along with an audio cassette for voice and music pieces. A hundred LEGENDS also contains photos of theater performances, poetry, fiction, and essays. The proceeds from the sale of a hundred LEGENDS will go to AIDS organizations to use for artsrelated projects.

The majority of the artwork for LEGENDS was solicited through AIDS organizations, and passing the word through "buddies" who are directly in contact with people with AIDS (PWAs). Art therapists also were contacted and their clients have submitted pieces. Some of the contributors were found by contacting individuals who were profiled in news stories about PWAs.

Funds are still being raised to complete the

production of the book. A hundred LEGENDS is a project of Northern Lights Alternatives, a tax-exempt organization. To purchase a book, make a tax-deductible donation, or apply for funds as beneficiaries, contact a hundred LEGENDS, 257 West 19th Street, New York, New York 10011, (212) 255-9467.

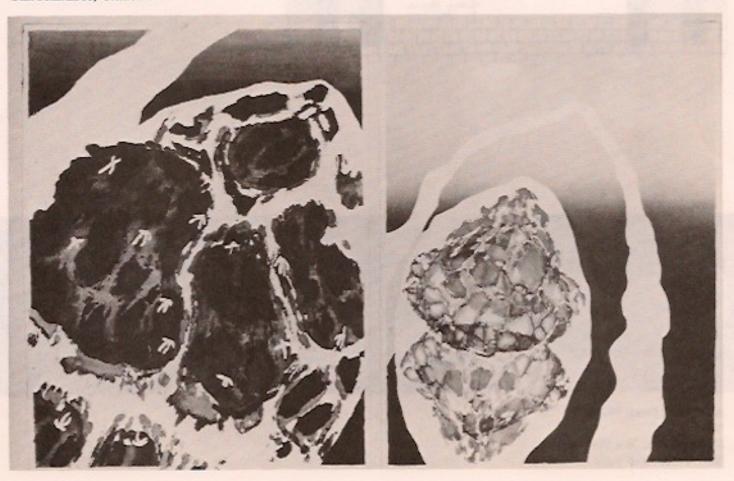


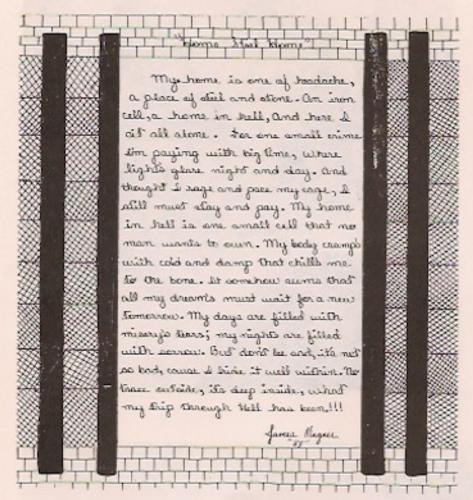
Donald Tarantino (born 1962)
"Hospital Bed"—1987
Hand-colored dry point, 3×4 inches
Huntington, New York

Martin Stock (born 1951) "Social Reality"—1985 Black and white painting Buffalo, New York



Ed Aulerich-Sugai (born 1950) "Cell: Hiroshige's Veil"—1987 Mixed media, 30 × 45.5 inches San Francisco, California





James Magner "Home Steel Home"—1988 Ink on paper Talledega, Alabama

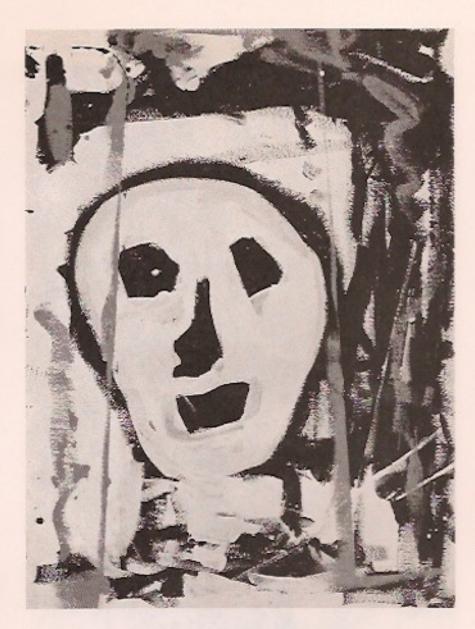
"Mom, I received this note from a hundred LEGENDS. A photostat copy of my poem I sent might be nice. What do you think? The poem with the 'jail bars'...Luv, Jimmy"

"Enclosed, letter from James Magner. Delay in answering due to James being transferred abruptly from Talledega, AL. I enclose the poem he wishes you to look at for possible enclosure. Thank you, Mrs. Magner"

James was originally contacted by a hundred LEGENDS after he wrote a letter in the PWA Coalition Newsline asking for pen pals to write to him in jail.



Alan Long (born 1938)
"Surrender"
Mixed media, 36 × 144 inches
New York, New York



John Bommer Murphy (born 1957) Untitled—1986 Acrylic, 22 × 32 inches Santa Barbara, California

Gary Falk (born 1954)
"Red Dawn"—1986
Enamel and acrylic on plexiglas,
86 × 120 inches
New York, New York



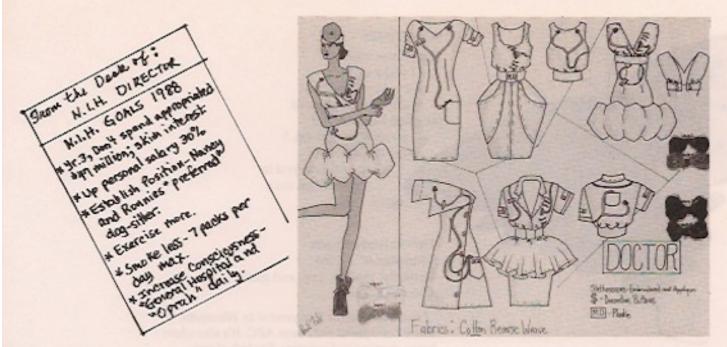




Yadira Davila (born 1954)
"Breaking Away"—1987
Black and white illustration
Cagnas, Puerto Rico



Jack Carroll (born 1957)
"Self Portrait"—1987
Black and white photograph
Buffalo, New York

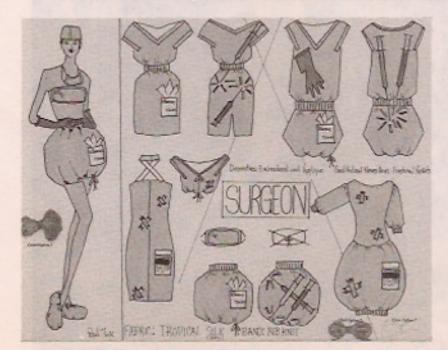




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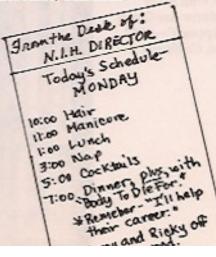
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3:00 Golf
5:30 Boy more cysters
7:30 Bondage Class ##
9:00 # Lucy & Ethel
meet william He blen
et Brown Derby



Paul Felix (born 1961)

"The Medical Incompetence Collection"—1987 Eight panels, multi-colored, pen, marker and fabric Los Altos, California



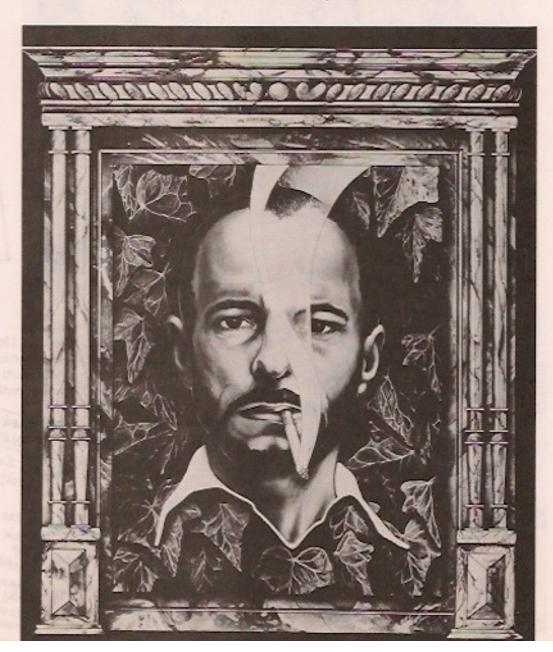


SOMETIMES

Sometimes when
I wake up in
the morning and see
all the faces around
me—but I cannot find
yours among them, I
want to go back to
sleep and find you in
my dreams once
again.

Debbie Frederickson "Sometimes"—1985 Butterfly: marker, pen, and glitter Chicago, Illinois

"I wrote these while incarcerated in Wisconsin, where I also found out I have ARC. It's also where I began drawing and painting. For lack of more sophisticated supplies, I started using crayons and nail pencils. So that's what the pictures are done in."



Stephen Chapot (born 1951)
"Self Portrait with AIDS
(Objects in Mirror Are Closer
Than They Appear)"—1987
San Francisco, California



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# Her Thighs

by Dorothy Allison

WAS THINKING about
Bobby, remembering her sitting,
smoking, squint-eyed, and me
looking down at the way her
thighs shaped in her jeans. I
have always loved women in
blue jeans, worn jeans, worn
particularly in that way that
makes the inseam fray, and
Bobby's seams had that fine
white sheen that only comes
after long restless evenings
spent jiggling one's thighs one
against the other, the other
against the bar stool.

After a year as my sometimes lover, Bobby's nerves were wearing as thin as her seams. She always seemed to be looking to the other women in the bar, checking out their eyes to see if, in fact, they thought

her as pussy-whipped as she thought herself, for the way she could not seem to finally settle me down to playing the wife I was supposed to be. Bobby was a wild-eyed woman, proud of her fame for running women ragged-all the women who had fallen in love with her and followed her around long after she had lost all interest in them. Hanging out at softball games on lazy spring afternoons, Bobby would look over at me tossing my head and talking to some other woman and grind her thighs together in impatience. The woman was as profoundly uncomfortable with my sexual desire as my determined independence. But nothing so disturbed her as the idea other people could see both my lust and my independence

in the way I tossed my hair, swung my hips, and would not always come when she called. Bobby believed lust was a trashy lower-class impulse, and she wanted so to be nothing like that. It meant the one tool she could have used to control me was the very one she could not let herself use.

Oh, Bobby loved to fuck me. Bobby loved to beat my ass, but it bothered her that we both enjoyed it so much. Early on in our relationship, she established a pattern of having me over for the evening and strictly enforcing a rule against sex outside the bedroom. Bobby wanted dinner-preferably Greek or Chinese take-out-and at least two hours of television. Then there had to be a bath, bath powder and toothbrushing, though she knew I preferred her unbathed and gritty, tasting the

Dorothy Allison is a southerner in exile on the West Coast. She is also an editor of OUT/LOOK. tequila she sipped through dinner. I was not supposed to touch her until we entered the sanctuary of her bedroom, that bedroom lit only by the arc lamp in the alley outside. Only in that darkness could I bite and scratch and call her name. Only in that darkness would Bobby let herself open to passion.

Let me set the scene for you, me in my hunger for her great strong hands and perfect thighs, and her in her deliberate disregard. When feeling particularly cruel, Bobby would even insist on doing her full twenty-minute workout while I lay on the bed tearing at the sheets with my nails. I was young, unsure of myself, and so I put up with it, sometimes even enjoyed it, though what I truly wanted was her in a rage, under spotlights in a stadium, fucking to the cadence of a lesbian rock-androll band.

But it was years ago, and if I were too aggressive she wouldn't let me touch her. So I waited, and watched her, and calculated. I'd start my efforts on the couch, finding excuses to play with her thighs. Rolling joints and reaching over to drop a few shreds on her lap, I scrambled for every leaf on her jeans.

"Don't want to waste any," I told her, and licked my fingers to catch the fine grains that caught in her seams. I progressed to stroking her crotch. "For the grass," I said, going on to her inseam, her knees, the backs of her thighs.

"Perhaps some slipped under here, honey. Let me see."

I got her used to the feel of my hands legitimately wandering, while her eyes never left the TV screen. I got her used to the heat of my palms, the slight scent of the sweat on my upper lip, the firm pressure of my wrists sliding past her hips. I was as calculated as any woman who knows what she wants, but I cannot tell you what magic I used to finally get her to sit still for me going down on my knees and licking that denim.

It wasn't through begging.
Bobby recognized begging as a
sexual practice, therefore to be
discouraged outside the darkened bedroom. I didn't wrestle
her for it. That, too, was allowed
only in the bedroom. Bobby was
the perfect withholding butch, I
tell you, so I played the perfect
compromising femme. I think
what finally got to her was the

Keeping my hands on her, I stared at her thighs intently until she started that sawing motion—crossing and recrossing her legs. My impudence made her want to grab and shake me, but that, too, might have been sex, so she couldn't. Bobby shifted and cleared her throat and watched me while I kept my mouth open slightly and stared intently at the exact spot where I wanted to put my tongue. My eyes were full of moisture. I imagined touching the denim above her



labia with my lips. I saw it so clearly, her taste and texture were full in my mouth. I got wet and wetter. Bobby kept shifting on the couch. I felt my cheeks dampen and heard myself making soft moaning noises—like a child in great hunger. That strong, dark musk odor rose between us, the smell that comes up from my cunt when I am swollen and wet from my clit to my asshole.

Bobby smelled it. She looked at my face, and her cheeks turned the brightest pink. I felt momentarily like a snake who has finally trapped a rabbit. Caught like that, on the living room couch, all her rules were momentarily suspended. Bobby held herself perfectly still, except for one moment when she put her blunt fingers on my left cheek. I leaned over and licked delicately at the seam on first the left and then the right inner thigh. Her couch was one of those swollen chintz monsters, and my nose would bump the fabric each time I moved from right to left. I kept bumping it, moving steadily, persistently, not touching her with any other part of my body except my tongue. Under her jeans, her muscles rippled and strained as if she were holding off a great response or reaching for one. I felt an extraordinary power. I had her. I knew absolutely that I was in control.

Oh, but it was control at a cost, of course, or I would be there still. I could hold her only by calculation, indirection, distraction. It was dear, that cost, and too dangerous. I had to keep a distance in my head, an icy control on my desire to lose control. I wanted to lay the whole length of my tongue on her, to dribble over my chin, to flatten my cheeks to that fabric and shake my head on her seams like a dog on a fine white bone. But that would have been too real, too raw. Bobby would never have sat still for that. I held her by the unreality of my hunger, my slow nibbling civilized tongue.

Oh, Bobby loved that part of it, like she loved her chintz sofa, the antique armoire with the fold-down shelf she used for a desk, the carefully balanced display of appropriate liquors she never touched—unlike the bottles on the kitchen shelves she emptied and replaced weekly. Bobby loved the aura of acceptability, the possibility of finally being bourgeois, civilized, and respectable.

I was the uncivilized thing in Bobby's life, reminding her of the taste of hunger, the remembered stink of her mother's sweat, her own desire. I became sex for her. I held it in me, in the pulse of my thighs against hers when she finally grabbed me and dragged me off into the citadel of her bedroom. I held myself up, back and off her. I did what I had to do to get her, to get myself what we both wanted. But what a price we paid for what I did.

What I did.

What I was.

What I do.

What I am.

I paid a high price to become who I am. Her contempt, her terror, was the least of it. My contempt, my terror, took over my life, became the first thing I felt when I looked at myself, until I became unable to see my true self at all. "You're an animal," she used to say to me, in the dark with her teeth against my thigh, and I believed her, growled back at her, and swallowed all the poison she could pour into my soul.

Now I sit and think about Bobby's thighs, her legs opening in the dark where no one could see, certainly not herself. My own legs opening. That was so long ago and far away, but not so far as she finally ran when she could not stand it anymore, when the lust I made her feel got too wild, too uncivilized, too dangerous. Now I think about what I did.

What I did.

What I was.

What I do.

What I am.

"Sex." I told her. "I will be sex for you."

Never asked, "You. What will you be for me?"

Now I make sure to ask. I keep Bobby in mind when I stare at women's thighs. I finger my seams, flash my teeth, and put it right out there.

"You. What will you let yourself be for me?" ▼

From Trash, Stories by Dorothy Allison, to be published by Firebrand Books this fall.

## 7

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# Bill T. Jones: Dancer

by Burt Supree

DILL T. JONES and Arnie Zane were an unlikely pair if you think couples are supposed to match. Their long-term relationship—as men working together-was central to the duets they first became noted for, that so oddly and uncompromisingly balanced challenge and cooperation. Zane was abrupt in moving, outspoken, a note taker, a business head, a photographer; Jones was a fierce, silky, natural dancer, a warrior, an intuitive force. Both could be physically explosive, though onstage Jones was more emotionally volatile, and, like some people who are astonishingly beautiful, was comfortable with the power his charm ex-

When Zane got sick, they kept working and touring, and he participated as much as he was able to. A year ago, Zane made The Gift/No God Logic. When he choreographed it he was feeling rotten and thinking it might be the last dance he'd ever make. "I felt I was living in a devastating world I wasn't able to control," he told me last January. Countering that, The Gift is a sober, eloquent work, full of strangeness and mutual support.

Jones insists, "Arnie never felt he had made any piece about AIDS," and Zane would have hated having The Gift seen narrowly as a reaction to his illness. But in The Gift he made a piece that, without ever getting literal or preachy, consciously tried to set the world aright, to restore the values and balance that were missing.

Wrestling with Zane's illness forced them to reassess their work as well as their lives. "Our whole chemistry was changed," says Jones. Suddenly, there was no time for doing things you don't mean. "I'd thought I wanted a very sleek, modern dance company," said Zane. But having achieved that, they



Bill T. Jones

found themselves looking back to rediscover what had given a piece like Blauvelt Mountain the 1979 duet that was their favorite—its substance and emotional resonance.

"We'd gotten involved in large spectacles with incredible energy, glittering, smashing to the eye," says Jones. "Then economy and directness became important. We wanted the company to feel what we had felt when we had nothing to lose and did things close to the bone. We asked for more of themselves. And I wanted to reassure myself of community—not just to be part of a high-powered, high-finance, high-visibility dance world.

"We knew we couldn't go home again, like when I was doing those early talking solos or we rolled around on the floor. We were working with people different from us, and now there was more at stake. There's the company and the pressure of maintaining it. If the company doesn't make money, you lose the company, you lose the health insurance. The company gives us life: I like that thought."

The last work they did together, The History of Collage, started out as a rumination on

Reprinted from the Village Voice feature, "The New Gay Arts," June 28, 1988. Burt Supree is a staff writer for the Village Voice.

From Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane & Company: Fever Swamp





on sexuality just by virtue of the way we costumed the piece. We gave the men and women in the company the freedom to dress themselves as flamboyantly as they wanted."

What Jones and Zane brought to their duets was the full roominess and flexibility of their relationship: their daring, skill, playfulness; their willingness to pit themselves against each other, to attack or support each other; their ability to share. Without proclaiming intimacies, the facts of their relationship were put onstage in the play of weight and balance, of aggression and dependency. As gay men, they didn't flaunt a lifestyle, they didn't make a programmatic call to arms or plea for understanding, they didn't yearn for romance. They simply refused to pretend or apologize. Their private lives remained nobody's business. But they built their dances on the differences of character and physicality inherent in their relationship. That was right up front. Some audiences were flustered, but most responded to the immediacy and authority of the work. Dance-theirs and

deeply care about each other is permanently in our consciousness.

In his short solo Red Room, made last summer while Zane was still living, Jones "tried to encapsulate where I was at then. It's a kind of anthem to loneliness, struggle, beauty." A strong, puzzling piece, Red Room is full of strange flashes and contradictions: Jones meant it to contain everything of that moment in his life when it was made.

"I never make overtly dramatic movement. My concerns in my own dancing are about a kind of neoclassical plastiqueto explore my physicality, to sculpt my body as an object. But the movement had feeling to me and I let my heart and anger color it from performance to performance. Doing it, I never felt so close to jazz before. Sing the melody deep within you and go someplace you've never gone before. The timelessness of love and grief—that's what I charge it with."

Now Jones is preparing a piece called Absence, set to the Berlioz song from his cycle Les Nuits d'eté. It's full of the

imagery of loss, but, says Jones, "I was working on it long before Arnie died. The dancers are topless, dressed in sheets, with their backs to the audience. We had all these sheets we took from Roosevelt Hospital-the nurses encouraged us. We had enough for a month, but Arnie died four days later. Not a lot happens, but it's quite grand. Maybe its something metaphysical. I don't know. I'm thinking, what if there's another world? Who are his companions now?"

After long illness and the indignities of physical deterioration, the death of one's companion from AIDS doesn't come as a surprise. The shared battle draws a couple closer and closer-and then one partner

exits. Nothing prepares one for the daily fact of that absence for all things that are absolutely missing, for all the questions that find no response, for the reams of confusing paperwork—mysterious medical bills, tax returns—that continue to miraculously proliferate, for the erratic bouts of rage and misery.

In dancing, "I'm trying to look at my personal style, to fill my work with all my passion and feeling," but, at the same time to let it be "abstract enough so people can get into it.

It's got to include all aspects of
my experience—grief, loss, the
bitterness of premature death."

But, almost by definition, the
things that make life precious
must be there too in force.

"I look closely at my body and its energy. I've been making long sequences of movements that refer to or are drawn from emotional states—though an outsider probably couldn't tell—and I dance them to many kinds of music, to learn all they can tell me about feeling and movement.

"There's no morality in the universe; there is no fairness. I've always tried to address the ugliest feelings—like feelings of oppression—and tried to transform them. I'm filled with anger and awareness of mortality and I want that to show.

"How much time do any of us have left? I don't know. The stakes have been raised in our rush to the finish line." ▼

## Isaac Julien: Filmmaker

Interview by B. Ruby Rich

SAAC JULIEN is a founding member of Sankofa, a film and video collective established in London in 1983 to make works dealing with black subjects. He directed Sankofa's feature film, Passion of Remembrance, and recently finished a videotape, This Is Not an AIDS Advertisement. He's now at work on two projects: Looking for Langston, a "search" for Langston Hughes, and Young Soul Rebels, which is concerned with color differences, interracial couples, and homosexuality.

Rich: How have you defined your filmmaking agenda?

Julien: I've wanted to bring to the surface images of black gay men, but to keep that project within a black cultural context. I suppose I want to transgress identity, to blur the lines a lot more. Identity has become more complicated. Subjectivity has become an important arena. We can be more specific now about where we're talking from rather than for. Our work transgresses



Isaac Julien

the notion of identity, which doesn't fit neatly into compartments: you know, this is black, this is gay, this is a lesbian, this is a black woman, this is politics, this is culture. Identity-based politics have been very important, but at the same time, these identities can't be held onto in a precious way. We somehow have to enter into our own kind of complex modernity.

Rich: Passion of Remembrance is very daring in combining critiques of the state, police repression, emigration, etc., with your exploration of lesbian and gay male sexuality in the black communities. Were there reactions you didn't anticipate?

Julien: Some transgressions are accepted and others are not. We really tried to take this resistance into account, for example, by having the scene in which Maggie shows some tapes to a guy who then says, "Maggie, is it true that you're a lesbian? You had images of gays and lesbians in your footage, so you must be one." We anticipated that we'd be confronted with this kind of conversation, so we wanted to create a space for it. But what we really didn't anticipate was the immense reaction black audiences have had to the scene where two men kiss. Even very progressive people say: well, it's all right that you're talking about it, but you don't have to show it. We really didn't anticipate that one.

Rich: This Is Not an AIDS Advertisement is clearly a very urgent, personal response to the crisis. How has AIDS affected your work?

Julien: You can see how different myths of sexuality and race intertwine with a colonial fantasy to fabricate the whole notion of the Third World and Africa being the den of disease. So, if I'm going to talk about AIDS and representation, I have to confront how the targeting of Africa leads very quickly to antibody testing of black people trying to enter Britain, and questions of immigration become central to any discussion of AIDS and representation.

At the same time, you can see how discussions of race and sexuality are already being articulated around people's fears, to a level in the black communities that leads people to say: "There ain't any black gay people here." Because of how the colonial mentality has constructed black bodies, in terms of fetishization and myths of sexuality, it's led to a very reactionary position by the black communities: We don't talk about it.

On the other hand, if you look at the gay community, then you find that Gay Men's Health Crisis is predominantly white. So what happens when AIDS becomes a representation of race as well? You become conscious of the ambivalent relationship between access and information, of who gets the money to do this kind of work. The issues surrounding AIDS, race, and representation force us to confront these questions, to bring them out into the open



From The Passion of Remembrance.

somehow. I think it's imperative that debates around sexuality be anchored in the black communities, and that issues around race be taken up by the white gay communities.

Rich: How do you feel about gay visibility and how black people have "paid" for it?

Julien: I think it's a question of different punishments. In a sense, that's what Passion was all about. Who will punish? Who is to be punished? Will you punish me? I think these are serious questions. We appropriated them from June Jordan's Civil Wars: A nation of violence and private property has every reason to dread the violated and deprived. But then, is it the state that will punish you? Or will you be punished by "your own people" for making those statements (about sexuality, in my case).

Now, with AIDS, the closet really doesn't work. It doesn't serve a function anymore, especially with the amount of bisexuality that exists in black communities. AIDS has made issues of sexuality paramount, yet it could also have the opposite effect of making people more silent. This ground really must be struggled over by us now. It's a terrain we have to try to win somehow and to change.

Rich: Lately, you've been criticizing both a postmodernism that ignores history and a single-issue politics that ignores complexity. Where do you position yourself culturally? Are you between the devil and the deep blue sea? Julien: I believe, and I think someone like Toni Morrison believes, that this whole project of postmodernism has been experienced by black people-in terms of being "decentered subjects"-for a very long time. Yet, as it's been deployed, postmodernism denies any questions regarding race, or sexuality. Why is there this kind of cultural apartheid reflected in all the discourse around art and theory? It's as though there are two different things happening in utterly different spaces. There needs to be an attempt to make things less binaristic. I'm interested in having those dichotomies break down. I suppose that's the kind of "difference" that I'd like, the kind of postmodernism I'd be interested in. ▼

All of Isaac Julien's films are available from Third World Newsreel, 335 West 38th Street, New York, New York 10018, (212) 947-9277.

B. Ruby Rich is director of the film program at the New York State Council on the Arts.

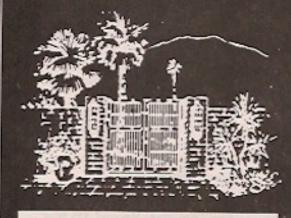


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## THE CUM SHOT

# TAKES ON LESBIAN AND GAY SEXUALITY

### by Cindy Patton

1

I'm walking out of the incredibly lush, Dolby-stereo-enhanced lesbian film Anne Trister. A woman in front of me says, "I hate it when they don't have sex."

Her friend says, "But they did!"

We had all suffered with the characters through their torturous rejection of their boyfriends, through the younger woman's confession of her homo-love, to their final embrace and long, hot kiss.

It was like an old forties movie, except that the train didn't go through the tunnel. There was no post-coital cigarette. Nothing happened to give me a sign that, indeed, they had "done it" off screen.

Should I care? Perhaps it's politically incorrect to want to see it, but I felt robbed.

Lesbians argue about whether women depicted in recent films are really lesbians or are just special friends. Most are inclined to agree with New Yorker magazine critic Pauline Kael that Entre Nous, for example, lacked clear signs that the women had a sexual relationship. Their special entre nous looks and touches weren't enough to symbolize sexuality to lesbian moviegoers.

Lesbians have a great stake in media rep-

resentation. According to a recent study of lesbian and gay male teenagers by Dr. Vickie M. Mays, professor of clinical psychology at the University of California at Los Angeles, 96 percent of the boys said they learned about gay life and sexuality through sexual encounters, while 88 percent of the girls said they acquired this knowledge through television and other media. In other words, young lesbians form a sense of lesbian identity from media representations, before they even enter the lesbian community, before they even have sex with another woman.

What are they seeing in this media world?
Lesbians have been singularly underrepresented, appearing primarily as predatory icons (Cat People, Windows, From Russia
With Love) or stunted spinsters (Children's
Hour, Rachael, Rachael). We were nonexistent
in the hip male bonding films of the sixties,
and uneasy symbols of rhetoric gone awry in
the films depicting "feminists" (Unmarried
Woman, Manhattan).

Cindy Patton is currently a doctoral candidate in communications at the University of Massachussetts, Amherst. She is the author of Sex and Gerrus: The Politics of AIDS, South End Press, 1985 and of Making It: A Woman's Guide to Sex in the Age of AIDS, Firebrand, 1987. There is more at stake than a simple quest for equal time on celluloid. How we are portrayed on film not only affects our ability to affirm a lesbian existence, but reflects and shapes our concept of lesbian sexuality as well.

Recent film theory suggests that there are three types of looks or "gazes" in the movies: the characters looking at each other; the characters looking at the camera (and audience); and the camera/audience looking at the characters. Theorists of pornography suggest a fourth gaze: the audience's sense of being watched by the judgmental eyes of society while viewing the illicit.

Much has been made of this multiplicity of voyeurisms. The real and symbolic object of all this looking is said to be Woman, with a presumed Male viewer. Some theorists suggest that this strong gender bias in the positioning of men and women in the filmic code causes women and men to experience film differently: men are more affected by the symbols and structure of a film (whose experience they represent), while women perceive film more literally.

Although gay men may have more fluid experiences as viewers—alternately identifying with male and female characters—depictions of gay men do not shatter this basic format. When the lustful look meant to be di-

rected toward Woman is directed toward a man, there is a clear denotation of homosexuality. This malemale gaze creates new meaning within the old structure: a man can be situated as the object of the gaze—feminized.

But this gender calculus doesn't yield satisfactory results when a woman is the gazer in the film. Movies have long used a sort of deflected, envious gaze—one woman's longing look at another—to indicate one woman's desire to replace another as the object of a man's attention. Only a vicious, predatory look indicates something outside the bounds of good

friends, and this symbolic gesture is generally overridden in the film by the correct gaze of a man, who "saves" the object-woman.

Recent lesbian narratives have grappled with breaking the established rules for how women perceive each other within films. But, while the plots and characters of those films are different from those of heterosexual films, their basic symbolic structure hardly varies. Desert Hearts, for example, using a conventional love story format, provided substantial reinforcement for the pursuit plot by including a sex scene. Although this display of youthful lust was entertaining, many lesbians perceived the narrative structure as "too male," not different enough from the traditional boy-gets-girl plot to amount to more than the in-

sertion of lesbians into someone else's story.

Personal Best, too, confirmed the nature of the athletes' relationship with a steamy sex scene. But Mariel Hemingway runs off with the boy in the end, apparently unaware of having made any choice. Instead of offering a challenge to cinematic codes, she is still the quintessential love object, the girl everyone wants. Instead of disrupting the gender hegemony of

> the "male (possessive) gaze," the lesbian character (played by Patrice Donnelly) is simply constructed as a failed competitor—and therefore, structurally equivalent to a man.

> > Yet, both Desert
> > Hearts and Personal
> > Best have generated
> > huge home video
> > markets among lesbians. There are
> > women who are obsessed with seing
> > the two films. Despite the simpleminded plots, some
> > report viewing
> > Desert Hearts 50

How we are
portrayed on film
not only affects
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affirm a lesbian
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reflects and
shapes our
concept of
lesbian sexuality
as well.

Personal Bes



Laundrotte is
popular because
its characters
have become
cultural icons,
not because gay
men are hungry
for sex scenes.

times, because they enjoy the explicit sex scene and the insistent narrative drive towards the scene.

For many lesbians, these films function as a sort of pornography or ritualistic exercise that provokes desire distinct from pleasure produced by the visual beauty or cathartic effect of the film. The context created by the hour plus of romantic pursuit for the few minutes of not-too-graphic sex seems to meet the criteria of sexual material for these women.

The inclusion of these films into lesbian lives is markedly different from the role films like My Beautiful Laundrette play for the gay male cult film audience. Laundrette is popular

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because its characters have become cultural icons, not because gay men are hungry for sex scenes. While one can find personal ads for Laundrette's "Johnnie" in gay male magazines, we never see the boys have sex in the film, yet we assume they do, and assume they are gay because of visual cues rather than direct reference to male-male sex.

This difference in spectatorship and in the way these films are absorbed into our cultures is related to the greater availability of images of gay men and their sexual practices than of lesbians and theirs. Because there is a wealth of gay male pornography, the trend in new gay

male independent film is to work against pornography conventions. The new gay male films function within an assumed gay male culture, with characters developed "postcoming out." Most significantly, gay men are working against the primacy of orgasm as an organizing feature, while in lesbian films, the structural climax occurs when the characters ultimately find each other through the course of their coming-out process in the straight world.

Lesbians have yet to make a body of films in which out lesbians seek and find each other in a lesbian world. Lianna comes closest, and here the lesbian community is portrayed as a capsule world totally separate from anything else in the film.

2

Jim and I are watching a bisexual porn video—various couplings of people attending a dinner party, scenes with something for everyone. It is boring, but educational. In the first scene, two of the men are in the garage discussing a problem with a

car. Things quickly progress to sex.

"So, is that guy cut or uncut?"

"Shush! This is a solemn moment...."

I watch the erect penis and taut balls shudder. Perplexed, I ask: "Is that a normal amount?"

"Yeah, and there'll be a little more." Squirt. "There!"

"Don't you think they use yogurt or something to make it look like more?"

"No, that looks real."

In the next scene, two punk lasses are going hot and heavy with their fingers.

"Now, did she just come?"

"Uh, yeah. Well, I'm not sure. I think it meant that she came, but she's probably just faking it for the movie."

"Why would she do that?"

In traditional male porn the visually spectacular male cum shot is the inevitable consequence of male sexual arousal. What a relief for the male viewer who knows this is not necessarily the way it is in real life!

The symbolic power of the male cum shot rests not in its accuracy, however, but in its very dissonance with the primary social model of fucking: the mock procreative insistence on "coming inside," regardless of orifice. The cum shot—essential to heterosexual porn produced by men and to much gay male porn—is an attempt to symbolically reconcile the social confusion between the goals and pursuit of procreative versus recreational sex.

The cum shot serves as a structural end point, a "solemn moment" in the process of achieving male orgasm, which becomes synonymous with pleasure. On the one hand, this lavish display of misspent seed smashes the Victorian insistence on denying pleasure and on continence. On the other hand, depicting the release of sperm as the "end" of the sex act implicitly reinforces the notion that sex is foremost about depositing active sperm into the receptive vagina. The spilled juices, copiously photographed, serve as proof of pleasure/ orgasm and of reproductive potency.

If male sex is signified in the cum shot, how is female orgasm signified in a world where women have little circulating sexual culture and are trained and encouraged to simulate orgasm? Achieving orgasm as we want it has been problematic for women in our culture. Indeed, claiming the right and possibility of women to have orgasms as we preferred, calling patriarchal and repressive the Freudian notion that the vaginal orgasm is the "real one," superior to the "immature" clitoral orgasm, was a major component and victory of 1970s feminism. Feminists promoted clitoral play as political and subversive, and having discovered the pleasure of orgasm, we thought few women would willingly continue to submit to sexual practices organized around male pleasure.

In straight porn, though, female sexual pleasure is still included primarily as evidence of male prowess. This film genre is not too con-

cerned with exploring the breadth or complexities of female sexual desire or orgasm, nor in broadening the possible scenarios for producing male pleasure. Men's curiosity about what it is like to be penetrated, to be, by definition, object, to be controlled, seduced, or taken, must usually be satisfied through the conventions of sado/masochism, pedophilia (boy with mother or older female), or homosexuality. Any gender role asymmetry must be accomplished through unusual practices-women taking charge as they do in real life does not translate

into the porn codes. At best, a women's libber brings her boardroom manners to bed, but even this kind of script may be as much about male anxiety about women's increasing participation in the economic world as it is about a secret male wish to be dominated by a woman.

There is great confusion in straight porn about women's sexual powers. Much of this genre implies that women must be tamed and overcome in order to harness their great desires in pursuit of the man's orgasm.

3

A friend of mine, who says she is against pornography, invited a few friends over to see her video digest of lesbian sex scenes from movies, including those from The Hunger, Once Is Not Enough, Personal Best, and Desert Hearts.

"You cut out all the good parts," said one woman, who wanted more of a "build up" to the sex. "It is objectifying if you just start from when they go to bed."

Two camps of lesbians are on a collision course in the debates about representation of female sexuality (and, though not as often discussed, the representation of female orgasm). Lesbians active in the antipornography movement claim lesbian-feminist pornographers dabbling in the genre are "pimps for the por-

nography industry." In their critique, they also include gay male porn makers, who have a small industry, but a more direct and organic connection with their market and with gay politics, as well. The feminist sex radicals, meanwhile, produce porn and erotica in print and video, lecture at universities, hold forums to discuss the nuances of meaning in different production styles, and accuse the radical antiporn feminists of being in league with moral majoritarian antiporn, profamily antiabortionists. A third, much larger group A third, much larger group of lesbians just want to see and get turned on by seeing lesbians having sex, and are bored by the intellectual hat tricks.

of lesbians just want to see and get turned on by seeing lesbians having sex, and are bored by the intellectual hat tricks.

A recent traveling art show produced by feminist students at Bryn Mawr College, attempted to differentiate between erotica and porn. While the group could not agree on where—or whether—to draw the line, discussion about the show produced interesting results. Some women felt hurt or offended by documentary pictures showing women grimacing in sexual ecstasy. They said they preferred gentle smiling pictures, which were posed and artsy, because they felt these better represented their experience of sex. Lesbians disagree on whether the "authentic"

representation of our sexuality is cinema verité, or carefully constructed scenes that are airbrushed or stylized. While pretending to be risqué, the latter style insists on shaved and bleached body hair and avoids any appearance of moisture that might remind the viewer of smells female and coital.

The feminist concern with objectification of women, with using bodies to sell products, has created a schism over how desire is constructed: is sex a natural extension of getting in tune with our true essence as women? Does its political dimension come in purging

any remnants of what radical feminists call "hetero-reality"? Or is sex unnatural, perverse, and confrontational, political in its role as a daily subversion of patriarchal capitalism's demands for order? Does sexual expression have a natural narrative structure of a beginning, middle, and end, and clear boundaries between the erotic and the public or secular? Or is it fragmented, spilling out and around daily life, montage-like, erotic precisely because it brings into contact unexpected desires and strange objects?

Pornography retains qualities of both views of the real and the natural, occupying an uncomfortable position between documentary and art. Our cultural hang-ups about our bodies and the basic grittiness of sex are writ large: we want to see what we really look like, but we don't want it to be too messy. People who are just beginning to examine whether they like pornography—a by-product of the home video boom—are shocked by the rawness of most porn. They find oppressive the "Johnny Wad"—style films that use none-to-beautiful models under harsh lights. What they mean is that scrawny models who obviously aren't having a good time don't turn them on. They demand a more aesthetic porn, and are willing to pay for it.

The raw slime that once made porn seem

exotic and illicit must now compete with a consumer culture that sells products with bodies, and demands taste above all. Newer gay and yuppy-aimed straight porn is much glitzier and presents sex in a broader context. Ferraris and ferns in real House and Garden condos replace dental chairs hauled into a flimsy set for a half-day shoot. Today's viewers equate cinematic style with the quality-even morality-of the sex. In fact, production values seem more important than the gender of the participants.

At a recent Lesbian and Gay

Health Conference workshop on sex, it turned out that lesbians who liked raunchier lesbian porn also liked raunchy gay male porn. The lousy production values spelled "illicit," and that was exciting to these women. A number of gay men who did not like gay porn, said they enjoyed the lyrical lesbian porn film Erotic in Nature and conceded some interest in the new gay male safe sex film, Inevitable Love.

The ability of lesbians and gay men to identify with characters across sex lines—though perhaps not across gender roles—suggests that porn may work in a more complicated way than the porn-causes—(or at least re-inforces)-violence-against-women argument indicates. Perhaps cinematic depictions of

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desire work on a more compelling level than desire constructed around gender. Or, perhaps desire has little to do directly with gender or what's natural, but rather is mediated by a person who intercedes between the desiring subject and artifacts (a penis, vagina, leg, lip, shoe, violin case) or narratives (fantasy, hazy orderings of events, spaces, places, or positions).

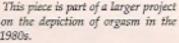
At bottom, pornography is a crude attempt to document the subjective experience of sex: in pornography, the viewer is seeking to validate his or her experience, and possibly develop a fantasy-based, material-oriented

sexual practice (not a bad "safe sex" choice!). Lesbian porn and gay male non-cum-shot-centered porn are attempts to reassure ourselves against the cultural paradigm of cum worship that our sex is real, is hot. As viewers of the film, we can say, "Look, there we are in all our explicitness." As subjects of the film, we can assess "truth" by our sexual response (what Chris Berchall, writing in the now-defunct Canadian Body Politic, called "the wet test").

Gay male porn is attempting to rework old codes to demonstrate the erotic power of safe sex, to find new images for the bodypleasure tie that binds the urban gay male community in the age of AIDS. Lesbian porn is trying out an initial visual vocabulary subject to debate, cathexis, and transformation as we begin articulating our experience and commenting on female-centered sex.

As we make our own pornography and narrative films about our lives, we are at once subject and viewer, potentially freed from the old codes that continue to equate sex with gender, sexual identity with sexual practice. We must pay attention to our real historical conditions—our oppression as well as our capacity for oppressing—and our

vision of the future. Both
the sleek style of the Hollywood that knows no
queers and the crude pornography of our outlaw
past have created the
terms of the cinema we
make today. It is our challenge to continually remake ourselves in our own
image, not to settle for images of seduction that tell
someone else's story.



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# Quieting Our Fears: Tesbians and Aging

by Marcy Adelman

N MY PRACTICE as a therapist, younger lesbians-especially those who are just ending a relationship—often express dread and horror at the prospect of growing old as a gay woman. Most of us probably share their fears that old lesbians are asexual and have no family or stable lover relationships. We assume these women have little in common with heterosexual women their age, are isolated from their peers, and are reluctant to use senior social services. We end up with

the commonly held profile of an aging lesbian: lonely, bored, and depressed.

The facts paint a far brighter picture.

While some information about lesbian and gay aging has been published in professional and academic journals, much of it is still unfamiliar in the lesbian and gay community itself. In 1975, I co-directed a National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) study of 97 people over the age of 60—lesbians, gay men, and heterosexual men and women. We compared the life satisfaction, physical and psychological well-being of the four groups.

While significant, the NIMH study was limited in terms of the racial diversity and number of participants. Today, for a variety of reasons, old lesbians are reluctant to participate in psychological or social research; 10 years ago it was even harder to find respondents. When we



"Although I live alone, that does not mean that I'm alone all the time. I miss [my lover of 28 years] and mourned her death, but life goes on. I'm much more social now and very active. I don't have time to be lonely!"

-Rusty Brown, left

#### Barbara Tymbirs

advertised for the study, for example, we were deluged with calls from old gay men; not a single old lesbian responded. So we found our lesbian respondents mostly through word of mouth—through friendship networks and support groups.

From 1984 to 1986, I also conducted interviews with hundreds of old lesbians for an anthology of their stories called Long Time Passing. The portraits that emerged from both the study and the interviews contradict the fears about what lesbian life over 60 is all about.

Old lesbians are active, vibrant women with supportive friendship networks and passionate lover relationships. The myths turned out to be just that.

FEAR: Lesbians grow old alone.

REALITY: Denied access to societal support for our lover relationships, and often alienated from our families of origin, lesbians create extended families from friends and ex-lovers. These support networks serve us well as we grow old. Lesbians in our study had been in an average of six relationships,

lasting a total average of 31 years—which means that as adults, we are rarely without a partner. Sixty-four percent of the lesbians in our study reported that ex-lovers were their oldest and dearest friends, their "families of choice" with whom they celebrate holidays and anniversaries. By comparison, none of the heterosexual women reported ongoing relationships with ex-lovers or ex-husbands.

"Life can lead to a miserable old age if you let it. I feel happier, though, now than when I was younger. I had a miserable marriage and three kids to raise, so now I'm having my freedom in the lesbian summer of my life." —Valerie Taylor



LL COTTRELL



"I'm not afraid of old age, nor of loneliness. I thoroughly expect the next great love to be flopping along at any moment now. Human relationships and sexuality [have] become more exquisite—refined, delicate, not so assertive." —Judith Lindbloom

For heterosexual women, physical and emotional intimacy often disappears when their husbands die. Lesbians' chosen families are a resource for maintaining intimacy—with or without a surviving spouse throughout our later years.

FEAR: Lesbian relationships don't last (so old lesbians don't have lovers).

REALITY: For most heterosexuals, creating an economic unit and having children are important factors that motivate and sustain marriage. Lesbians, however, do not establish longterm relationships for these reasons (even though we may pool incomes or decide to raise children together). Our bonding is based on needs for affection and intimacy.

Of the lesbians in our study, the average length of time of their longest lover relationships was 13.2 years. In another national study, conducted in 1980 by Cheryl Goldberg, lesbians reported an average longest relationship of 15 years.

Given the current median duration of 20 years for heterosexual marriages, and the difficulties of maintaining a lesbian relationship within a hostile culture, what is amazing is not that lesbian relationships are so short-lived—but that they are so long-lasting!

FEAR: Old lesbians are asexual.

REALITY: In our study, 52 percent of the lesbians were sexually active, compared to 24 women. Sixty-eight percent of lesbians masturbated, compared to 36 percent of heterosexual women. For all four groups in the study, the average frequency of sexual contact was three and a half times per month. This is consistent with JoAnn Loulan's 1987 study of lesbian sexual frequency, which also reported an average of three and a half times per month after age 60.

FEAR: Lesbianism leads to a miserable old age.

REALITY: Much has been written about the mid-life crisis of heterosexual women: the empty nest syndrome, the breakup of long-term marriages (often after a husband gets involved with a younger woman), and the displaced homemaker entering the paid work force for the first time.

For lesbians, aging is less of a radical rupture. There is no sudden shift from family to work world; we often have been

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"It takes a lot of consciousness and effort for older lesbians to build and maintain support networks so [we don't become] lonely, bored, and depressed. We learn to build our relationships without the same kind of passionate intimacy that we had when younger."

—Ruth Morales

financially self-sufficient for much of our adult lives. For those who have lived closeted gay lives, retirement may bring liberation from the need to pass, along with the freedom to participate in the lesbian community. Unlike the heterosexual husbands, the lesbians in our study preferred partners similar in age-which means lesbians are less at risk for being left for a younger partner. And, without the heterosexual expectation of one partner "til death do us part," old lesbians are better prepared to begin new lover relationships at any age.

FEAR: Old lesbians are powerless.

REALITY: Last year in Los
Angeles, lesbians over 60 held
their first national conference.
The next one is planned for the
summer of 1989. There are now
service programs providing
social, legal, and in-home
assistance to old lesbians in San
Francisco (GLOE) and in New
York (SAGE). Everywhere I
traveled in the course of writing
and promoting Long Time
Passing, I met middle-aged and
old lesbians who were talking

about creating senior housing for lesbians. Some have already established communal or shared housing.

Our NIMH study, which predated the "gay gray" movement, was one of the first to assess the well-being of old lesbians and gay men. One can only assume that today's more visible old gay culture and political organizing mean that the prospects for aging in our community have improved.

Contrary to popular mythology, we lesbians have unique and creative ways to deal with aging, just as we creatively cope with other aspects of life. As the lesbian community grows in numbers, strength, and in its consciousness about aging, the movement of old lesbians grows more powerful as well. In the process of dispelling those myths, we gain understanding about our own homophobia and ageismand hope for our individual and collective futures. ▼

Marcy Adelman, PhD., is a lesbian therapist in San Francisco, and the editor of Long Time Passing (Alyson), 1986.



Jeannette Foster

H.L. COTTRELL

# Heartthrobs Heartbreaks

A GUIDE TO YOUNG ADULT BOOKS WITH GAY THEMES

### by Christine Jenkins

OHN DONOVAN's I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip, published in 1969, was the first young adult novel to specifically address the issue of homosexuality. In the book, thirteenyear-old Davy describes his growing friendship with a classmate, Doug. One afternoon the two wrestle and end up kissing. This one kiss makes Davy feel so uncomfortable he considers ending the friendship. During a conversation in which Davy resolves never to do it (whatever "it" was) again, Davy and Doug both agree to continue being friends. Although the treatment of the sexual encounter is vague and brief, some reviewers in 1969 found the book remarkable and ground-breaking. Other reviewers worried that "it might arouse in the unconcerned unnecessary interest or alarm or both."

Between 1969 and 1986, approximately 37 young adult novels with gay characters or themes were published in the United States. The explicit and implicit messages about homosexuality conveyed in young adult books are important to examine because reading is one of the few ways for adolescents to gather information privately about the subject.

The gay people in young adult novels confirm many of the American stereotypes of the generic gay person: a good-looking, white male in his twenties or thirties who is single, lives in a big city on the East or West Coast, and has a large disposable income. He is probably involved in some way with the arts or is an opera devotee, a classical music fan, or art appreciator. He comes from a troubled family, is sexually promiscuous, and probably has AIDS.

Another stereotype that is confirmed by these novels is that most gay people are white. Ruby (Guy, 1976) is the only book in which the main characters are black. After their brief affair they both appear to "go straight." There are no Asian, Hispanic, or Native American gay people, and the few people of color who appear at all are minor characters.

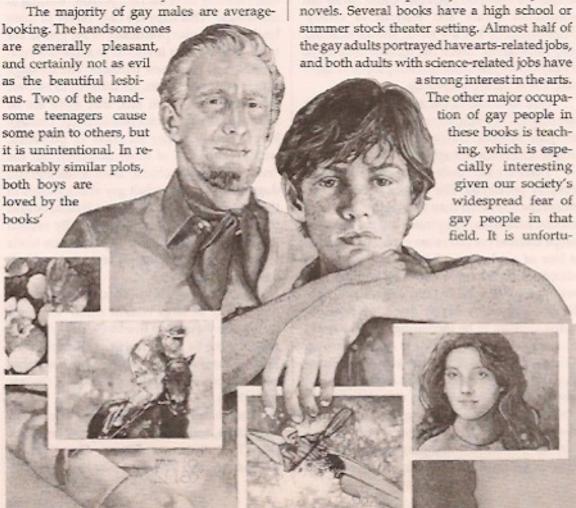
There are also very few poor or workingclass gay characters. Although some books feature low-income major characters, in only a few are those characters gay. Of these, two appear in books by David Rees, a British author published only by small presses in this country.

One of the most obvious trends in the young adult portrayal of gay people is the predominance of males. Despite increased visibility of lesbians within the gay movement, the 
large number of female authors of these books, 
and the perceived majority of female teenage 
readers, there are few books with lesbian 
themes. The lesbian characters who are portrayed fall into two groups. The first group 
consists of females who act to seduce an inexperienced (but usually willing) girl, only to lose 
interest once the conquest is made. The women

Christine Jenkins is a school librarian who has worked with children and young adults since 1976. She is also a columnist for Ferninist Bookstore News. in the other group are also charismatic and also attempt seduction, but these attempts are unsuccessful, and are seen as aberrations rather than behavior patterns. The other books with lesbian content contain average-looking girls or women and only one of these characters creates the kind of danger to other characters that the beautiful girls or women do. The conclusion could be drawn that a lesbian can be beautiful or a lesbian can be good, but she cannot possibly be both. And, therefore, all beautiful and good females must also be heterosexual.

Gay men being particularly good-looking does not come up often in these books, although few are described as physically unattractive. The two who are, unfortunately, are both disabled, which in turn compounds the stereotype of the ugliness of the handicapped. Both characters have their appealing moments, but both are primarily withdrawn and critical, and their emotional coldness is directly attributed to their disability.

CONTR ART: CAROLYN MEYER'S ELLIOFT AND WIN



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female narrators. The boy finally comes out to

the girl, and she reacts with dismay and anger.

Part of the anger is directed towards the "injus-

tice" of a gay male being so attractive but unat-

tainable. Eventually, both relationships re-

cover and turn into strong friendships, but the

idea that good looks are wasted if the person

possessing them isn't heterosexual is rein-

forced. The only evil gay male portrayed is the

sleazy, ugly and ultimately murderous sheriff

in Just the Right Amount of Wrong (Hulse, 1982) who is so homophobic he ends up killing the

only other gay man in town. It is also worth

noting that our society's assumptions are again

mirrored in young adult fiction, as both gay

and straight men are allowed more latitude

than women in their appearance. Women are shown falling for gay men, but men are never

shown falling for lesbians. Again, a man without a woman is attractive and valued, but a

The assumption of gay people's involvement in the arts is partially confirmed by these

woman without a man is not.

nate that two-thirds of the teachers portrayed lose their jobs in the course of the book. There is only one teacher who keeps his job, has a long-term relationship, and is generally admired. This novel is the most recent of those including gay teachers, and offers welcome relief from the gloom and doom projected in the other books. In reality, both the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers take strong positions on teachers' privacy rights; both have successfully defended teachers whose employment has been challenged on grounds of sexual preference. It is time that young adult novels reflect this reality.

Since young adult novels are about young adults, it is not surprising that most of the gay people portrayed are youthful, thereby confirming the common view of gay people as relatively young. In nearly two-thirds of the books the teenagers are the only characters who deal with gay issues. Most of the gay adults are under 60 years old. Older adults are sometimes aware and tolerant of others' homosexuality but are never shown as being gay themselves. Given the societal stereotype of gays as hypersexual and old people as asexual, this is hardly surprising.

Less than half of the adult gay characters are single. They range from extremely troubled to quite content. Unfortunately, most of the single adults are unhappy.

There are four male and four female adult couples portrayed. The people in these relationships fare better than the singles in terms of mental health and happiness, but the relationships themselves can cause problems, such as a loss of a job. Five of the relationships are simply good for those involved in them. The willingness of authors (and editors and publishers) to portray happy gay adult relationships appears to be increasing. But the trend toward happier gay adults is still not strong. Certainly it is easier for a person to be a member of the dominant culture in our society. But novels in which there are strong messages about the difficulties of being a minority without equally strong messages about the rewards, or about the strengths required to survive as a member of that minority, would not

be recommended for teenagers of either the minority or the majority group.

Most of the novels have teenagers who have (or are interested in having) same-sex love relationships. Of these relationships, onethird last to the end of the book. The rest break up during the course of the book, either by one person ending the relationship, one person dying or moving, or because the understanding was that this encounter would happen only once. A few self-identified gay teenagers have no sexual relationships at all during the book. The couples who do survive are all fairly happy within their relationships, but often have problems when they face the world as a couple. They are harassed by their peers, and several of them are physically injured by their harassers. Only a few couples carry on relatively untraumatic romances.

Ordinarily, when a teenage couple breaks up, both people begin (after some period of mourning) looking for someone else, if they don't already have the next person "waiting in the wings." This happens only rarely in these books. The reader practically never gets to see teenagers who get involved in same-sex relationships go on to new partners. The message is that same-sex affairs are difficult to recover from-so difficult, in fact, that there are no future loves after such a relationship. Teenage love certainly brings its share of problems, whatever the sex of those involved, but the "relationship as problem" issue is one that still dogs both teen and adult gay relationships in these books. This being the case, it must be said that despite occasional (and usually recent) bright spots, young adult gay literature tends to confirm the stereotype of gay people as basically single.

Most gay people are thought to live predominantly in large coastal cities. Few gay people are thought to live in the suburbs, and almost none in small towns and rural areas. These young adult novels have settings that reflect these assumptions, but also deviate from them in some interesting ways.

Less than a quarter of the novels are set in large cities, and of these most are in New York City. The others are Albany, Phoenix, and Kansas City. San Francisco may be the gay city

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in the minds of many Americans, but the closest these books get to San Francisco is Pasadena. Nearly half of the books are set in small towns, and the rest are set in the isolated realms of boarding school and summer camp. Given the assumed (and often actual) course of gay people's lives, at first this may seem logical. Wherever he or she was raised, when a teenager in a rural area realizes he or she is gay, they often move to an urban area with a gay community. Therefore, to have small town teenagers with same-sex attractions discover their feelings, deal with whatever difficulties may arise because of isolation and others' prejudices, and finally make a move to end their isolation by moving to a city seems to be a natural progression. But in young adult books, fictional gay teenagers and adults tend to remain fairly isolated. Those living in small towns may or may not have lovers, but they almost never find even one other gay person and establish a kind of gay friendship network. The three books by British author David Rees are notable for their consistent inclusion of a gay community. Most of the other novels fail to even hint at the existence of a larger community of gay people outside of the particular town or milieu in which the story takes place.

Another persistent stereotype about gay people is that their sexual orientation originated in a troubled home. A significant number of gay teenagers in young adult novels have parents who are psychologically or physically absent. This pattern of missing parents is not as pervasive now as it was several years ago, but it has not entirely disappeared. Questions of causality aside, the main message of the negative parenting in these books is to reinforce the likelihood that bad things happen to gay characters, either in the story itself, or in the characters' pasts.

The final aspect of societal stereotyping of gay people is that of sexual experience. This stereotype has two sides and often breaks down along male/female lines. One side says that gay people are very promiscuous, and think about sex constantly. This is usually applied to males. The other side says that since gay people are physically similar, there is little they can actually do together sexually, and so

their sexual activity is confined to hugging and kissing. This is usually applied to females. Young adult novels in general tend to tread a fine line between general and specific when describing sexual activity, and details are often foggy beyond the first kiss. Lack of sexual detail is evident throughout all young adult literature. But fictional gay people have very little sex at all. For example, Davy and Doug kiss, but the rest of their activity is merely alluded to as "it" and "that" when the boys talk, and the reader never does learn what they did beyond kissing. The effect of these books is to either trivialize or mystify gay sexuality for

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their readers. If readers are looking for sexual information, they get very little.

These 38 young adult books with gay characters or themes can be examined as a group to show not only what has been available in the past, but also what may be available in the future. Eighteen years have passed since the publication of I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip. This publishing trend may have peaked in 1981-83 in terms of number of titles per year, but new books continue to be published. Since 1985, publishers have slightly changed their perspective on homosexuality. In most of the earlier novels, the main issue was that of homosexuality. Central characters had same-sex experiences, wondered about their sexual orientation, or faced problems brought on by their gay identity. The move in mainstream publishing has been away from homosexuality-as-main-issue, and toward treating gay issues as either a subplot or a fact that is stated but not commented upon at any length. Perhaps there will come a time when a novel appears containing a protagonist who is gay in a plot which is not chiefly dealing with gay problems.

A major subject of young adult books is

teen-parent relationships. Gay parents are no longer thought of as a contradiction in terms, but there are still too few novels that include them—particularly lesbian mothers.

AIDS has become a societal concern in the last five years, and young adult books are beginning to reflect this. Over ten young adult books about AIDS have been published since 1985. Two of these are novels. In one, the person with AIDS is straight; in the other, the person with AIDS is gay, but both suffer cruel and continual discrimination from nearly everyone around them. The people who persecute them are portrayed as ignorant and the unlikeliness of casual AIDS transmission is stated. but in both books it is ignorance that prevails. Given the very real discrimination that people with AIDS face, this is not unrealistic, but it is important to balance out ignorance with knowledge.

Young adults read fiction for many reasons, and one of these reasons is to get information. The information they gather helps to form their world view. Perpetuating stereotypes does a grave disservice to teenage readers. Realistic, balanced, and diverse portrayals of gay people and issues are important criteria in evaluating these—and future—young adult novels.

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#### THE BIBLIOGRAPHY

Donovan, John. I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip. New York: Harper and Row, 1969. 189 pages.

Davy is a troubled thirteen-year-old who lives in New York City with his erratic, alcoholic mother, and occasionally visits his aloof father. The only bright spots in his life are his relationships with his dog and his best friend, Altschuler. When the two boys have a sleepover and end up kissing, Davy's guilty feelings nearly ruin their friendship. They finally reconcile and the book ends with the boys agreeing to continue to respect each other. This ground-breaking book is short on detail as to just what the boys did sexually, and is firmly entrenched in the same-sex-encounters-as-youthful-experimentation school of assumptions, but is nonetheless a pioneering work that should be included in all young adult collections. (age 11-up)

Holland, Isabelle. The Man Without a Face. New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1972.

Charles is an unhappy tecnager in serious academic trouble. In order to be accepted into the prep school his family wants him to attend, he must be tutored over the summer. The tutor he finds is Justin, a reclusive retired teacher with a mysterious past and the scarred face that inspires the novel's title. Justin's house becomes a haven for Charles in his struggle with his dysfunctional family, and Charles gains self-confidence and self-knowledge with Justin's help. Unfortunately, Justin's Mr. Rochester-like persona reinforces the gayness-as-tragic-flaw stereotype, but the reader will find him as intriguing as Charles does. (age 11-up)

Scoppettone, Sandra. Trying Hard to Hear You. New York: Harper and Row, 1974. 264 pages.

Camilla tells the story of her close-knit summer stock theater crowd, and of Jeff and Phil, who are part of that crowd-until they fall in love. Most of the young men's peers react with confusion and outright hostility. Camilla shares in these reactions, but eventually progresses from shock and disbelief to acceptance of her friends' sexual preference-and the reader is educated along with her. This book has been justly criticized for its superficial portrayal of blacks and for the stereotypic ending (Phil dies in a car accident while on a date trying to "prove" his straightness). However, there are several positive messages as well. The reader sees that ordinary, boy-nextdoor-type friends can be gay, and that homophobia is a sickness that can destroy lives, both from within and without. This novel continues to be a popular book with teenagers, and, considering the non-existence of gay people in 99 percent of young adult fiction, this is remarkable in itself. (age 12-up)

Guy, Rosa. Ruby. New York: Viking, 1976.

A West Indian family moves to Harlem. The youngest daughter, Ruby, is isolated in this strange culture and is drawn to Daphne, who is self-confident, attractive, and upwardly mobile. Ruby and Daphne's romance is vaguely drawn and short-lived, but Daphne's influence on Ruby is ultimately positive, and Ruby faces her own future with growing self-esteem. This is a well-written novel of first love and the adolescent journey out of the family and into the world of peers. It is also the only gay young adult novel to feature main characters who are black. (Second book of the Cathy family trilogy) (age 13-

#### Sullivan, Mary W. What's This About Pete? Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1976. 125 pages.

Pete Hanson is 15 years old, but at 4'11" he is by far the smallest boy in his class. His size and lack of musculature cause Pete to worry about his masculinity. His worries are compounded by his mother's dressmaking business. He helps her sew and his father, a mechanic, is sure there must be something wrong with him for being good at "girl's work." After a lot more worry (and a pick-up attempt from a man driving by), Pete goes to an understanding counselor and has his mind put at ease on the confusing differences between sex role behavior and sexual behavior. Pete decides he's probably straight (though he also can see that the man in the car was perfectly happy being gay), and begins to accept his abilities as not merely "sissy stuff," but work he enjoys and is good at. (age 11-up)

#### Hall, Lynn. Sticks and Stones. Chicago: Follett, 1977. 188 pages.

Tom is a newcomer at a high school in rural Iowa. One of his new friends may or may not be gay, but their association marks Tom in the eyes of his classmates. Although this novel is marred by the unnecessarily dramatic car accident which seriously injures Tom's friend, it is a good book for discussion. This novel deals with the motivation and destructiveness of gossip and vividly portrays the intense paranoia that homophobia can cause. Hall creates a stark picture of homophobia and the ignorance it stems from. (age 11-up)

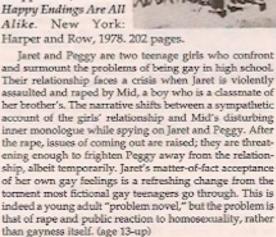
#### Kerr, M.E. I'll Love You When You're More Like Me. New York: Harper and Row, 1977.

A novel about the problems young people face when they confront parental and societal expectations. Wally Witherspoon is at odds with his father because he loathes his family's business. Sabra St. Amour is a television soap opera star who is trying to differentiate her own career goals from those of her mother. And Charlie Gilhooley is the town outcast for telling his family and friends he "believed he preferred boys to girls." Although Charlie is a likeable character and self-accepting in the face of social ostracism, he is a loner. Despite his Greek-god good looks, he never inspires attraction in anyone else thoughout the course of the book. By the end of the novel, Wally and Sabra separate more from their parents and Charlie gains acceptance by happily taking Wally's place as junior partner in the family business.

#### Hautzig, Deborah. Hey, Dollface. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1978. 151 pages.

Fifteen-year-old Val Hoffman meets Chloe Fox at an exclusive private high school in New York City. Both new students, they feel like outsiders in a world of debutantes and status-conscious classmates, and their outcast status draws them together. Val's constant observation and questioning of the world around her is a finelydrawn portrait of adolescence. It is also refreshing that Val is clearly identified as Jewish throughout the book; this is not an issue, but simply a fact. A funny and tender narrative of Val and Chloe's friendship and the difficult process of growing up. (age 12-up)

### Scoppettone, Sandra. Alike. New York:

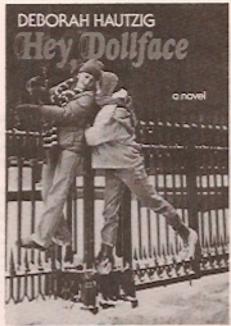


### Rees, David. In the Tent. Boston: Alyson Press,

Tim has been attracted to his friend Aaron for a long time, but his strict religious upbringing makes it hard for him to even think about his feelings, let alone act on them. Then the two of them plan a holiday back-packing trip with two other boys, Roy and John. The trip turns from pleasure to adventure as they get lost in the wilderness. This adversity helps Tim accept both himself and Aaron as having different preferences that will keep them from being lovers, but won't keep them from being friends. Tim's resourcefulness on the trip also contributes to his growing self-confidence, and the novel ends with Tim looking forward to adulthood and an end to his isolation as a gay teenager. (age 13-up)

#### Klein, Norma. Breaking Up. New York: Pantheon/ Random House, 1980. 207 pages.

Ali Rose lives in New York City with her mother, her brother Martin, and her mother's lover, Peggy. While spending the summer in California with her father and his new wife, Ali is confronted with the fact that her mother and Peggy are more than "just good friends." Her father's resulting hysteria is both alarming and realistic. A custody battle is brewing and people-pleaser Ali is caught in the middle. The outcome is unexpectedly tame, as Ali tells her father she'd prefer living with her mother and her father acquiesces with little objection (quite surprising, given his earlier vehement disapproval). This is the only young adult book available that includes a lesbian mother. (age 13-up)





Reading, J. P. Bouquets for Brimbal. New York: Harper and Row, 1980. 186 pages.

Macy Beacon and Annie Brimbal have been best friends for years, but when they go off to summer stock theater together after high school graduation, their lives begin to separate. Macy becomes attracted to Don, another actor, and is pleased and excited at this development. However, when Annie becomes involved with another actress, Macy denies what she sees. The resultant confusion and jealousy must be resolved if Macy and Annie's friend-

ship is to continue. While the heterosexual relationship is described in detail, the lesbian relationship is quite vague. This is not surprising, given that Macy is the narrator, but it makes the gay relationship unnecessarily mysterious. This is primarily a novel about the importance of friendship. (age 13-up)

#### Tolan, Stephanie S. The Last of Eden. New York: Bantam, 1980. 136 pages.

Michelle comes to Turnbull School with a vision of it as an Eden, a paradise. Here she will make permanent friends and escape the isolating effects that the accidental deaths of her father and brother have had on her and her mother. She does make good friends, and her best friend Marty, an unstable but artistically talented girl from a rich family, gives her support for her own writing talent. Priscilla Kincaid, a well-known artist, comes to teach at Turnbull and Marty becomes her prize pupil. Her feelings about art and Priscilla become confusing to her, and when Sylva, another unstable girl, develops a crush on Marty, the gossip begins and the relationships eventually come to a crisis. Sylva makes an unsuccessful suicide attempt, Priscilla goes back to her husband, and Marty leaves Turnbull in disgrace. Michelle mourns the loss of a friendship, and is reassured by her writing teacher that same-sex relationships are just a stage that many teens go through on their way to maturity. This is an unfortunate soap opera of a novel. Tolan is a fine writer, but the characters and motivation are inconsistent and unrealisitic. She also perpetuates the cliches of gay-as-lonely, gay-as-sickness, and gay-as-only-a-stage all in one book. (age 13-up)

#### Bargar, Gary. What Happened to Mr. Forster? New York: Clarion/Houghton Mifflin, 1981. 169 pages.

Louis Lamb is determined to make changes in his life. Now that he is a sixth-grader he will no longer answer to "Billy Lou," he will try to learn to play softball, and he will do his best to become a Somebody with his classmates. Mr. Forster, Louis' new teacher, provides him with the encouragement he needs to shine, but new problems arise when parents discover that Mr. Forster is gay and his housemate is also his partner. The setting is Kansas City, Missouri, 1958, so the outcome is predictably pessimistic for gay teachers, but Mr. Forster's character and influence are extremely positive. (age 10-14) Futcher, Jane. Crush. Boston: Little, Brown, 1981. 255 pages.

Jinx Tuckwell is a senior (class of '65) at an exclusive girls' boarding school. She is unsure of her future after graduation, though she has an interest in art. She is also attracted to the wild and beautiful Lexie Yves, an unpredictable classmate with a lovely singing voice and a taste for crazy escapades. Lexie becomes interested in Jinx for unclear reasons, and Jinx responds whole-heartedly. She wonders if her attraction to Lexie is sexual, or just a fascination, but she gets no answers from Lexie or from anyone else. Eventually Lexie gets both girls kicked out of school, and Jinx leaves, still confused and still questioning her feelings for Lexie. The old myth of gay-relationships-as-prelude-to-disaster is in evidence here, as well as the cruel, controlling, and flawed character of that temptress, Lexie. (age 12-up)

#### Hanlon, Emily. The Wing and the Flame. New York: Bradbury, 1981. 151 pages.

During his fourteenth summer, Eric spends his days with his long-time friend Chris and his new friend Owen, a reclusive 71-year-old sculptor who lives nearby. Owen in turn is drawn to Eric by his resemblence to Owen's son, who died at sixteen. As their friendship develops, Eric's parents become suspicious of Owen's interest in Eric, but are finally able to see and appreciate the positive effect they have on each other. Eric and Chris are also drawn closer as the summer progresses, and their attraction first disrupts, but then strengthens, their friendship. This is a well-written novel about the complexities of love.

#### Levy, Elizabeth. Come Out Smiling. New York: Delacorte, 1981.

Jenny is a teenager who goes to summer camp to escape from her oppressive family. While there she is delighted to be friends with Peggy, her riding counselor, but then is shocked and dismayed to learn that Peggy has a lesbian relationship with another woman counselor. Jenny returns home with ambivalence about their relationship, and about same-sex relationships in general. She ends up wondering if she, too, will become a lesbian, given the intensity of her crush on Peggy. This prospect does not appeal to her, but she thinks of times when her father sent her to her room when she's been upset and ordered her to "come out smiling," and she hopes that she will be able to do the same if she is attracted to women in the future. This is not a particularly positive view of gayness, as the stereotype of "a gay life is a sad life" is reinforced with the chin-up-in-adversity peptalk more suitable for dealing with terminal disease than sexual orientation. (age 13-up).

#### Snyder, Ann and Louis Pelletier. The Truth About Alex. (originally titled Counterplay) New York: New American Library, 1981. 166 pages.

A novel about male friendship set in the world of high school football. Brad is straight and Alex is gay, but their shared interests and sports ability have created a bond between them. When Alex's gayness becomes general knowledge, Brad is pressured by his family and teammates to give up the friendship. Although Brad decides that his relationship with Alex is worth the price, the small-town atmosphere and attitudes play up the high cost of being gay. A good sports/friendship story, but the

viewpoint is tinged with "gayness as tragic flaw". (age 13-up)

St. George, Judith. Call Me Margo. New York: G.P. Putnam's, 1981. 173 pages.

Margo Allinger is at boarding school for the first time, and is hoping to make lasting friends, since her family has moved a lot in the past. Most of her classmates are unfriendly, if not cruel, to the newcomer, but she gets support and encouragement from Miss Frye, the tennis coach. Margo's tennis game and self-confidence blossom. Miss Frye, however, has been labelled a lesbian by the students, and Margo becomes (temporarily) tainted by association. Margo finally learns the truth from Miss Frye herself, and accepts the fact of her past relationship with Miss Durrett, Margo's unpleasant and disabled English teacher. Margo decides to distance herself from Miss Frye to quell gossip and fit in with her peers. Although Miss Frye is an attractive character, women are portrayed as dishonest, conniving, and extremely competitive. Both lesbian teachers are leading isolated lives, and Miss Durrett embodies some of the worst stereotypes of women becoming lesbians because they are unattractive and can't get a man. (age 13-

#### Bunn, Scott. Just Hold On. New York: Delacorte, 1982. 151 pages.

Stephen and Charlotte have been classmates since junior high, but early in their senior year they are drawn together in a relationship of mutual support in dealing with their dysfunctional families—Stephen's father is an active alcoholic and Charlotte is an incest victim. They become part of a tight group of friends, and Stephen becomes aware of his attraction to Rolf, another group member. Stephen and Rolf's relationship is important to both of them, and their friends accept them (and occasionally tease them) as they would any heterosexual couple. This novel is a fine portrait of the warmth of teenage friendship groups. (age 14-up)

#### Chambers, Aidan. Dance On My Grave. New York: Harper and Row, 1982. 253 pages.

When sixteen-year-old Hal first meets Barry he is amazed by the immediate attraction he feels. Unfortunately, their relationship ends prematurely when Barry dies in a motorcycle accident. The stereotypically tragic end (traffic fatalities are remarkably common in the lives of fictional gay characters) mars an otherwise fine coming-of-age story with a sharply humorous narrative voice. (age 14-up)

#### Garden, Nancy. Annie On My Mind. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1982. 234 pages.

Liza and Annie are two New York City high school students who meet by chance at a museum. Their freindship grows into attraction and love. Both girls are vividly drawn, and the relationship between working-class/ public school Annie and upper-middle-class/private school Liza is immediately interesting. The reader also meets two lesbians who teach at Liza's school; they have lived together for many years, and they provide Annie and Liza with the assurance that their love is indeed possible. The teachers lose their jobs (unfortunately reinforcing the stereotype of "gay life is a bleak life"), but they face adversity with strength, and act as role models for Annie and Liza. Although both young women face conflicts in accepting their feelings for each other, this is a positive story that captures the magic and intensity of first love. (age 12-up)

#### Hulse, Larry. Just the Right Amount of Wrong. New York: Harper and Row, 1982. 215 pages.

Jerry B. Blankenship has traveled around with his gypsyish family for most of his 13 years. The family arrives in Farleigh, Kentucky, and Jerry hopes to settle down and make real friends. Mr. Wilkes is the new principal, a bachelor who many in town "wonder about." Nate Lemur, the good old boy sheriff, seems particularly suspicious of Wilkes, but then Jerry and a friend happen to see the two men together at Wilkes' house. They say nothing, but (untrue) rumors of Wilkes' sexual interest in boys start to circulate. The principal is finally found dead, shot by the sheriff who says he was resisting arrest, but in fact murdered by the sheriff to keep the secret of their relationship from being revealed. This is a disturbing story about the inevitable downfall of gay people, the dangers of internalized homophobia, and the deadly power of rumor. It also says that being gay will literally kill you. (age 14-up)

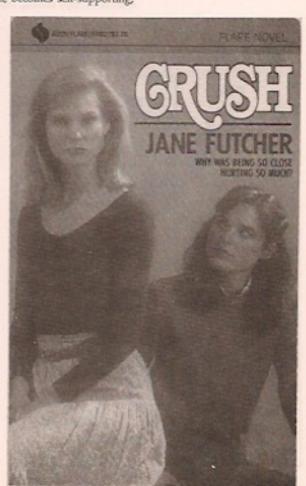
#### Rees, David. The Milkman's On His Way. London: Gay Men's Press, 1982 (distributed by Alyson Press). 118 pages.

This is an excellent coming-out, coming-of-age story told by Ewen, a working-class teenager living in an isolated English town. At fifteen he becomes aware of his sexual preference through his attraction to his straight best friend, the first in a long series of steps he must go through on his way to maturity and self-acceptance. Ewen eventually moves to London, becomes self-supporting,

and moves into a mature long-term relationship with another man. The author does a fine job of exploring the fears, the excitement, and the tedium of the years spent waiting to grow up as an adolescent gay man or lesbian. (age 14-up)

#### Ecker, B. A. Independence Day. New York: Avon, 1983. 203 pages.

Sixteen-year-old Mike feels attracted to his best friend, Todd. Mike doesn't act on his feelings, but in time begins to accept himself as gay. The turning point comes when he tells Todd of his attraction, and Todd not only reaffirms their (platonic) friendship, but offers to help Mike tell his parents. Although Mike runs into the usual teenage homophobic name-calling common among high school students, he also gets a great deal of support from nearly everyone he comes out to. Mike's friends are a re-



markably (perhaps unrealistically) enlightened bunch, but Mike is a thoughtful narrator and his path to selfknowledge makes absorbing reading. (age 13-up)

Kesselman, Janice. Flick. New York: Harper and Row, 1983. 136 pages.

Nana is a shy loner who decides to attend her school's riding ranch in Wyoming for the summer. There she meets Flick, an older girl who is attractive and mysterious, and appears to like Nana. The two begin spending time together; Nana is thrilled and infatuated. Their relationship develops into a physical one, but Flick remains erratic and can treat Nana very cruelly. Although Nana's friends warn her that Flick is not to be counted on, she ignores their warnings and continues her involvement. Finally, Flick breaks up with her and Nana is heartbroken. Taken by itself, this novel is a well-written account of the pain of first love. Taken with other gay young adult novels, particularly those with female main characters, this is a rehash of the same evil-and-crazy-lesbian-temptress theme.

Mosca, Frank. All-American Boys. Boston: Alyson Press, 1963. 116 pages.

Seventeen-year-old Neil tells the dramatic, though unlikely, story of the first months of his relationship with Paul. They meet and are immediately attracted to each other. Homophobic classmates target them and Paul is badly beaten and hospitalized. Neil uses his kung-fu expertise to get revenge. This is a poorly-written melodrama of first love, (ag-bashing, and parental anguish, but (on the bright side) the wooden characters and simplistic plot are no worse than television soap opera fare, and there is a happy ending. (age 13-up)

> Singer, Marilyn. The Course of True Love Never Did Run Smooth. New York: Harper and Row, 1983. 246 pages.

Becky is sixteen and so is her best friend Nemi. Both are acting in a school play. During the production Becky becomes infatuated with Blake, a handsome new student, and Nemi is attracted to Leila, Blake's sister. However, as the show progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that Becky and Nemi's friendship has turned to love, and by the end of the book (and the show opening) they are together. The group dynamics involved within the company of a high school show are well-drawn. In the midst of various old and new relationships, both romantic and friendly, are Richie and Craig, two secondary characters who fall in love with each other. There are various "true loves" in this novel, and though none of their paths run smooth, they and the reader are certain that their love is right for them. Singer does an excellent job of integrating gay and straight teenagers in a believable way. I recommend this book unreservedly. (age 12-up)

L'Engle, Madeleine. A House Like a Lotus. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984. 308 pages.

Polly O'Keefe is the sixteen-year-old daughter of Meg and Calvin O'Keefe, who readers may have met as main characters in A Wrinkle in Time. Although intelligent and mature, Polly is suffering the pangs of adolescent gawki-ness and feels "out of it" with her high school peers. Then along comes a talented artist friend of the O'Keefes, Max, who lives nearby with Ursula, her companion of 30 years. Max takes Polly under her wing, and her friendship gives Polly confidence and self-appreciation. But Max appears ill and is in fact dying. She has kept her condition a secret, but Polly guesses the truth. And Max has another secret as well-she and Ursula are lovers. The plot takes several soap opera twists, and Polly is finally able to accept Max as the flawed-but-beautiful person she is. The author appears to have good intentions here, but her portrayal of gayness, even in two well-respected, "happily married" women, verges on tragedy, and the message is that gayness is OK only as long as it is kept secret. This is an extremely self-righteous and aggravating book. (age 14-

Rees, David. Out of the Winter Gardens. London: Olive Press, 1984. 119 pages.

Mike has lived with his mother, aunt, and cousin nearly all his life, but suddenly his long-absent father gets in touch with him, and he goes to spend three weeks with him to get reacquainted. Mike learns almost immediately that his father, a children's book author, is gay, and this is why his mother has kept Mike away from him. The three weeks with his father change the sixteen-year-old's lifenot in "turning him gay" (which is what his mother feared), but in opening him up to the world outside his provincial town and in establishing a warm and friendly relationship with his father. While the father is seen as essentially single-Mike's visit precipitates the end of his father's six year relationship with a tempermental musician-he is a charming and multi-faceted person who counters many stereotypes of gay men. He educates Mike about gayness without being preachy, and Mike accepts him with a minimum of sturm and drang. A refreshing father and son story, and the only one I've found that includes a gay father as a central character. (age 13-up)

#### Bess, Clayton. Big Man and the Burn-Out. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1985. 197 pages.

Thirteen-year-old Jess Judd is a bright and rather lonely boy who lives on a farm with his grandmother and her husband. When Jess strikes up a friendship with Meechum, the school trouble-maker, he enlists the help of Mr. Goodban, his English teacher, to keep Meechum from failing eighth grade for the third time. Through his teacher Jess gains an appreciation for both literature and his grandparents. Mr. Goodban's warm relationship with his male lover is portrayed, but not commented upon, and their friendliness to Jess and Meechum underscores the theme of the valuable support that non-familial love can provide. (age 12-up)



Colman, Hila. Happily Ever After. New York: Scholastic, 1986. 154 pages.

Melanie has been in love with Paul since they were children. Their friendship grows throughout their teenage years, and she dreams of living "happily ever after" with him. Paul, however, becomes elusive and distant, and Melanie wonders why he doesn't return the romatic love she feels for him. When Paul finally tells her that he is gay, she is angry and dismayed, but slowly comes to accept him, and their friendship is eventually reestablished. This is a well-intentioned "problem novel" with some serious flaws. The writing is dull, the plot is predictable, and the characters are undistinguished and vaguely-drawn. Even Paul and Melanie are memorable only in that he is gay, and she wishes he weren't. There is also the stereotypic assumption on everyone's part that Paul will inevitably have a sad life. Paul educates Melanie about gayness (it isn't a sickness, it isn't because he doesn't like women, it isn't her fault...) through a series of speeches at the end of the book. Perhaps some of this information will rub off on readers. Perhaps. (age 13-up)

#### Kerr, M.E. Nightkites. New York: Harper and Row, 1986. 216 pages.

Erick's older brother, Peter, has come home to tell his family some important, and devastating, news-Peter is gay, and Peter has AIDS. The impact on Erick's life is considerable. His parents are determined to keep this news from their friends and neighbors, and, when Peter's condition becomes public knowledge, the family is universally shunned. Erick's girlfriend, Nicki, deserts him, and he is plunged back into intimate family life just when his other high school firends are leaving home. Peter is a likable character, and he and Erick have a good relationship, but his illness brings such unrelieved tragedy to everyone in his family that the reader is left with an unnecessarily grim picture of gay life in the current AIDS crisis. This is the first young adult novel to deal with this subject. One hopes there will be others in the future that contain more information about the lives that people with AIDS can still lead. (age 14-up)

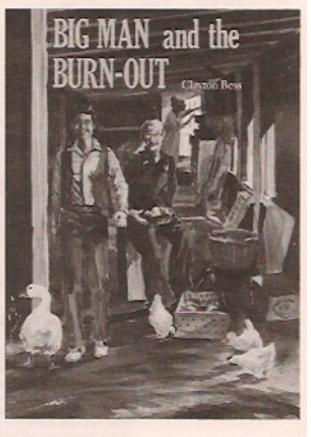
#### Meyer, Carolyn. Elliott and Win. New York: Atheneum, 1986. 193 pages.

From the moment Win first walks into Elliott's house, he is certain that their relationship as Amigos (a Big Brother-type organization) is going to be a disaster. Elliott cares nothing for team sports, serves Win gazpacho for lunch, and doesn't even own a television. Win and his mother and brother have recently moved to Santa Fe, and the adjustment isn't easy, but Elliott provides Win with unexpected support and understanding. And Win learns that listening to opera and preparing gournet food can actually be pretty interesting. Although Elliott fits a number of gay male streetypes, his sexual orientation is never made explicit, and Win finds that friendship is more important than fitting the traditional masculine mold. (age 12-up)

#### Wersba, Barbara. Crazy Vanilla. New York: Harper and Row, 1986. 184 pages.

At fourteen Tyler Woodruff has one passion in his life—nature photography. He is a lonely boy, estranged from his father (who believes photographing birds is for sissies), his mother (who is an alcoholic), and his older

brother Cameron (who has been banished from the family for being gay and becoming an interior decorator). When Tyler first meets Mitzi Gerrard, he is immediately put off by her brash manner and loud mouth, but their mutual interest in photography draws them together, and Tyler is finally able to talk to someone about his feelings about his dysfunctional family. Tyler's relationship with his brother is particularly difficult for him, as he has confused Cam's sexual preference with his non-availability, and has ceased making an effort to stay in contact with him. This is a comingof-age novel of sorts, and one of the better ones I've read, with the characters changing slowly enough to be realistic, but quickly enough to give the reader hope for the character's future.

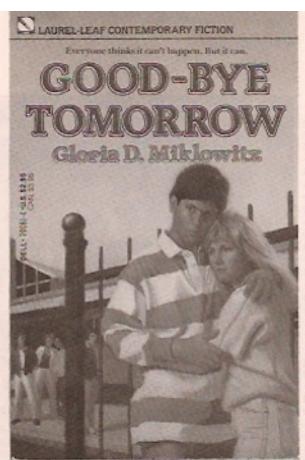


#### Ure, Jean. The Other Side of the Fence. New York: Delacorte, 1986. 164 pages

Eighteen-year-old Richard leaves home after a quarrel with his parents and almost immediately picks up hitchhiker Bonny, a tart-tongued, working class been who is also running away. It quickly becomes obvious to the reader (though not to Bonny) that Richard is running from his upper middle class family's homophobic response to his declaration of love for his male lover, Jan. Richard and Bonny's friendship deepens and they help each other broaden their outlook and appreciate their differences. Richard's problem is not his gayness but his difficulty in facing parental and societal disapproval. Fortunately, love and common sense win out and Richard returns to Jan, Bonny to her (incidentally lesbian) foster parents, and both have grown in the process. An encouraging look at the ways people of different backgrounds-both sexual orientation and class-can enrich each others' lives.

#### Klein, Norma. My Life As A Body. New York: Knopf, 1987.

Augie is a shy, intelligent girl who falls in love with Sam, a wheelchair-bound classmate, during their senior year of high school. Claudia, Augie's best friend, has "known since she was five that she was gay." When they go off to college, Augie and Sam drift apart and Claudia establishes her first serious relationship with another woman. Through the course of the novel all of them continue on their journey toward maturity and adulthood. As is the case in several more recent young adult novels with gay or lesbian characters, Claudia, and those around her, are aware of her sexual orientation, but it is treated as a fact rather than an issue.



Miklowitz, Gloria D. Good-bye Tomorrow. New York: Delacorte, 1987. 150 pages.

Although there are no gay or lesbian characters in this novel, its theme of the impact of AIDS on people's life makes it relevant to this bibliography. The story is told in three voices-17-year-old Alex, his 15-year-old sister Christy, and his girlfriend Shannon. A year earlier Alex was a passenger in a drunk driving accident and received blood transfusions. The blood was unscreened, and from it he contracted the AIDS virus. He recovers from his injuries, but later becomes run down, and is diagnosed with ARC. The news gets out and he and his family become pariahs. After

educating the ignorant school and town officials, Alex returns to school with the support of his family and his girlfriend. This novel contains valuable information about ARC and AIDS in a readable format, but is definitely a "problem novel" with the flatness of character and plot that plagues this genre. There is also almost no mention of gay people in a book about a disease for which gay men account for 70 percent of the cases. (age 13-up)

Rinaldi, Ann. The Good Side of My Heart. New York: Holiday House, 1987. 284 pages.

Brie, the narrator, meets Josh, the new boy in town. Josh has a slightly mysterious past (rumor has it he was kicked out of military school for having an affair with the colonel's daughter), but is extremely good-looking, witty, and intelligent, and Brie falls for him hard. They become constant companions, but Josh offers only friendship, while Brie longs for romance. Finally, Josh tells Brie that he's a homosexual. Brie is upset, and shuns Josh for some time before she finally decides that they can indeed be friends. Her understanding of his "condition" has its homophobic side, as she laments his "wasted maculinity." Unfortunately, the stereotype of gay person as lonely outsider doomed to a life of isolation and pity was still alive and well in 1987.

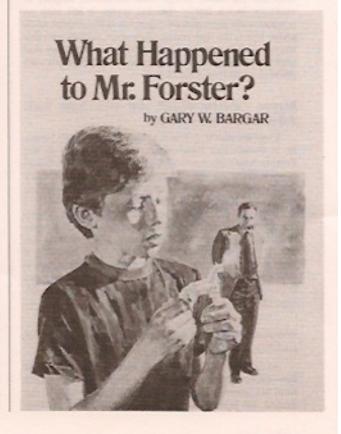
Klein, Norma. Now That I Know. New York: Bantam, 1988. 165 pages

Nina is a ninth-grader living in New York City whose divorced parents have joint custody. Shared custody is fine with Nina until her father tells her that he is gay and his lover is moving in with him. Both Nina and her mother react negatively. Nina worries about sharing her father's attention and the social stigma of having a gay parent, and her mother sees her ex-husband's homosexuality as one more rejection. After a two month separation from her father, Nina is able to sort out her own feelings and finally reconciles with her father. This novel explores a situation that has seldom been dealt with in young adult novels that of children coming to terms with their gay parents.

Koertge, Ron. The Arizona Kid. Boston: Joy Street/ Little, Brown, 1988. 228 pages.

Billy Kennedy is sixteen years old and has rarely been away from his small town home in Missouri. He goes to spend the summer with Uncle Wes in Tuscon, who has lined up a job for him at a nearby stable and racetrack. Wes is gay and out to family and community. The summer strengthens the relationship between uncle and nephew, and helps Billy further his understanding of stereotyping and sexual identity. Billy also has his first romantic relationship with Cara Mae, a horse exerciser at the track. Uncle Wes' complete acceptance of his own gay identity and his warm regard for his nephew come through strongly, as does life in a gay community that is facing the AIDS crisis. The book contains a delightful amount of gay 'camp" humor, and is one of the only young adult books that places a gay character in the context of the network of friends that makes up the gay community.

1988



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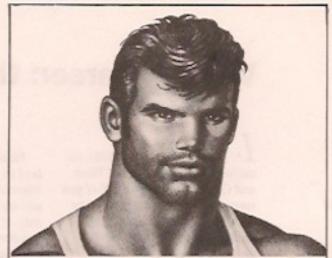
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### Work & Career: the Results

IN ISSUE #1 (Spring 1988), the subject of the Queery was "Work and Career." More than 500 of you responded and valiant volunteers Beth Miller and Chris Idzik of Jamaica Plain Massachussetts, analyzed the data.

We were delighted to learn what the survey told us about our readers. You are not only surviving, but thriving, within a wide range of work environments and career situations. Most of you have managed to land in workplaces that are gay tolerant and/or gay owned; most of you are out to the people you work with. A significant percentage of you don't suspect your sexual orientation of blocking your career paths. Acceptance does not extend to complete equality, though—very few work places extend health insurance to your partners.

Almost half of you bring your same-sex sweeties to office soirées. Over one-third of you have felt comfortable enough (or overwhelmed by lust? Or desperate enough for a little on-the-job intrigue?) to engage in a little whoopie by the water cooler.

Suprisingly, there was not much difference between the different age groups—as many people in their forties were out at their workplaces as those in their twenties.

Here are the details of your responses to some of the questions:

#### THE RESPONDENTS

SEA	
Men	42%
Women	58%
AGE	
under 30	32%
30 to 39	42%
40 to 49	19%
over 50	7%

#### INCOME

CEV

	Men	Women
< \$10,000	4%	10%
\$10-14,000	9%	12%
\$15-19,000	12%	12%
\$20-24,000	16%	18%
\$25-29,000	11%	16%
\$30-34,000	15%	10%
\$35-39,000	8%	8%
\$40,000 +	26%	13%

#### TYPE OF WORK

	Men	Women
Professional	52%	56%
Office	15%	15%
Managerial	14%	10%
Technical	9%	7%
Manual	1%	6%
Other	9%	6%

#### WORK & SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

If you have a lover, and there's

- a party at work, you:
   bring your lover 46%
- go alone 30%

- plead a headache 10%
- bring a date of the opposite sex 3%
   find another solution 13%

#### HOMOPHOBIA AT WORK

Where you work is:

• gay-tolerant	46%
• gay-hostile	20%
<ul> <li>gay-sensitive</li> </ul>	18%
• gay-owned	11%
· blind to gavs	2%

#### At work, you are out to:

	Men	Wom
· some co-workers	58%	61%
• all co-workers	34%	22%
• no one	8%	17%

#### OCCUPATIONAL ROMANCE

Have you ever had sex with a coworker?

	Men	women
• Yes	24%	37%
• No	76%	63%

#### IMPACT ON CAREERS

Has your sexual preference stood in the way of your career advancement?

		INTELES.	avomen
•	yes	21%	16%
	no	38%	43%
•	don't know	41%	41%

Some of the specific ways you said being gay has affected your vocational choices include:

- avoiding jobs requiring security clearances
- worrying about harassment when you teach or work with children
- making it a priority to work on AIDS or with PWAs.

#### BEST ASPECT OF YOUR JOBS

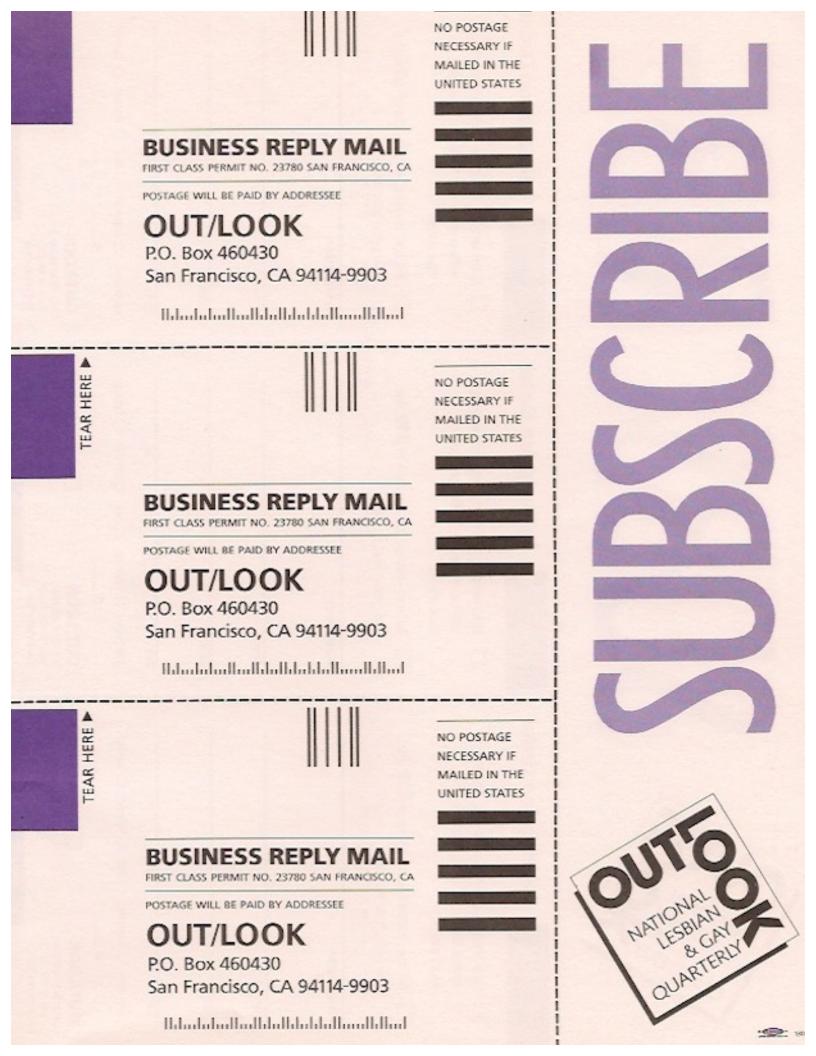
Creativity and flexibility were some of the positive points mentioned, along with:

- \* independence \* co-workers
- teaching
   challenges
- · interaction with people
- · being out to co-workers
- rewarding work

#### WORST ASPECT OF YOUR JOBS

Rampant heterosexism and not being out was mentioned, but just as much as:

- stress
   office politics
- •"too straight" gossip
- · too much work · boredom
- lack of control
   AIDS burnout





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INSIDE ...

A HUNDRED LEGENDS THE ART OF

PEOPLE WITH AIDS AND ARC

Greg Thompson (born 1953) Untitled—1985 Binghampton, New York