

## HOMOPHOBIA A Weapon of Sexism

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**H**omophobia — the irrational fear and hatred of those who love and sexually desire those of the same sex. Though I intimately knew its meaning, the word homophobia was unknown to me until the late 1970s, and when I first heard it, I was struck by how difficult it is to say, what an ugly word it is, equally as ugly as its meaning. Like racism and anti-Semitism, it is a word that calls up images of loss of freedom, verbal and physical violence, death.\*

In my life I have experienced the effects of homophobia through rejection by friends, threats of loss of employment and threats upon my life; and I have witnessed far worse things happening to other lesbian and gay people: loss of children, beatings, rape, death. Its power is great enough to keep ten to twenty percent of the population living lives of fear (if their sexual identity is hidden) or lives of danger (if their sexual identity is visible) or both. And its power is great enough to keep the remaining eighty to ninety percent of the population trapped in their own fears.

Long before I had a word to describe the behavior, I was engaged in a search to discover the source of its power, the power to damage and destroy lives. The most common explanations were that to love the same sex was either abnormal (sick) or immoral (sinful).

My exploration of the sickness theory led me to understand that homosexuality is simply a matter of sexual identity, which, along with heterosexual identity, is formed in ways that no one conclusively understands. The American Psychological Association has said that it is no more abnormal to be homosexual than to be left handed. It is simply that a certain percentage of the population is. It is not healthier to be heterosexual than to be righthanded. What is unhealthy — and sometimes a source of stress and sickness so great it can lead to suicide — is homophobia, that societal disease that places such negative messages, condemnation, and violence on gay men and lesbians that we have to struggle throughout our lives for self-esteem.

### **Homosexuality and the Bible**

The sin theory is a particularly curious one because it is expressed so often and with such hateful emotion both from the pulpit and from laypeople who rely heavily upon the Bible for evidence. However, there is significant evidence that the approximately eight references to homosexuality in the Bible are frequently read incorrectly, according to Dr. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott in an essay in *Christianity in Crisis*:

Much of the discrimination against homosexual persons is justified by a common misreading of the Bible. Many English translations of the Bible contain the word homosexual in extremely negative contexts. But the fact is that the word homosexual does not occur anywhere in the Bible. No extant text, no manuscript, neither Hebrew nor Greek, Syriac, nor Aramaic, contains the word. The term homosexual and heterosexual were not developed in any language until the 1890s, when for the first time the awareness developed that there are people with a lifelong, constitutional orientation toward their own sex. Therefore the use of the word homosexuality by certain English Bible translators is an example of the extreme bias that endangers the human and civil rights of homosexual persons. (pp. 383-4, Nov. 9, 1987)

Dr. Mollenkott goes on to add that two words in I Corinthians 6:9 and one word in Timothy 1:10 have been used as evidence to damn homosexuals but that well into the 20th Century the first of these was understood by everyone to mean masturbation, and the second was known to refer to male prostitutes who were available for hire by either women or men. There are six other Biblical references that are thought by some to refer to homosexuals but each of these is disputed by contemporary scholars. For instance, the sin in the Sodom and Gommorah passage (Genesis 19:1-10) is less about homosexuality than it is about inhospitality and gang rape. The law of hospital-

ity was universally accepted and Lot was struggling to uphold it against what we assume are heterosexual townsmen threatening gang rape to the two male angels in Lot's home. While people dwell on this passage as a condemnation of homosexuality, they bypass what I believe is the central issue or, if you will, sin: Lot's offering his two virgin daughters to the men to be used as they desired for gang rape. Here is a perfectly clear example of devaluing and dehumanizing and violently brutalizing women.

The eight Biblical references (and not a single one by Jesus) to alleged homosexuality are very small indeed when compared to the several hundred references (and many by Jesus) to money and the necessity for justly distributing wealth. Yet few people go on a rampage about the issue of a just economic system, using the Bible as a base.

Finally, I came to understand that homosexuality, heterosexuality, bi-sexuality are *morally neutral*. A particular sexual identity is not an indication of either good or evil. What is important is not the gender of the two people in relationship with each other but the content of that relationship. Does that relationship contain violence, control of one person by the other? Is the relationship a growthful place for the people involved? It is clear that we must hold all relationships, whether opposite sex or same sex, to these standards. . . .

### **Homophobia and Heterosexism**

Homophobia works effectively as a weapon of sexism because it is joined with a powerful arm, heterosexism. Heterosexism creates the climate for homophobia with its assumption that the world is and must be heterosexual and its display of power and privilege as the norm. Heterosexism is the systemic display of homophobia in the institutions of society. . . .

It is not by chance that when children approach puberty and increased sexual awareness they begin to taunt each other by calling these names: "queer," "faggot," "pervert." It is at puberty that the full force of society's pressure to conform to heterosexuality and prepare for marriage is brought to bear. Children know what we have taught them, and we have given clear messages that those who deviate from standard expectations are to be made to get back in line. The best controlling tactic at puberty is to be treated as an outsider, to be ostracized at a time when it feels most vital to be accepted. Those who are different must be made to suffer loss. It is also at puberty that misogyny begins to be more apparent, and girls are pressured to conform to societal norms that do not permit them to realize their full potential. It is at this time that their academic achievements begin to decrease as they are coerced into dependency upon a man for economic survival.

There was a time when the two most condemning accusations against a woman meant to ostracize and disempower her were "whore" and "lesbian." The sexual revolution and changing attitudes about heterosexual behavior may have led to some lessening of the power of the word "whore", though it still has strength as a threat to sexual property and prostitutes are stigmatized and abused. However, the word "lesbian" is still fully charged and carries with it the full threat of loss of power and

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privilege, the threat of being cut asunder, abandoned, and left outside of society's protection.

### **Lesbians and Gay Men:**

#### **A Threat to the Heart of Sexism**

To be a lesbian is to be *perceived* as someone who has stepped out of line, who has moved out of sexual/economic dependence on a male, who is woman-identified. A lesbian is perceived as being outside the acceptable, routinized order of things. She is seen as someone who has no societal institutions to protect her and who is not privileged to the protection of individual males. Many heterosexual women see her as someone who stands in contradiction to the sacrifices they have made to conform to compulsory heterosexuality. A lesbian is perceived as a threat to the nuclear family, to male dominance and control, to the very heart of sexism.

Gay men are perceived also as a threat to male dominance and control, and the homophobia expressed against them has the same roots in sexism as does homophobia against lesbians. Visible gay men are the objects of extreme hatred and fear by heterosexual men because their breaking ranks with male heterosexual solidarity is seen as a damaging rent in the very fabric of sexism. They are seen as betrayers, as traitors who must be punished and eliminated. In the beating and killing of gay men we see clear evidence of this hatred. When we see the fierce homophobia expressed, toward gay men, we can begin to understand the ways sexism also affects males through imposing rigid, dehumanizing gender roles on them.

The two circumstances in which it is legitimate for men to be openly physically affectionate with one another are in competitive sports and in the crisis of war. For many men, these two experiences are the highlights of their lives, and they think of them again and again with nostalgia. War and sports offer a cover of all-male safety and dominance to keep away the notion of affectionate openness being identified with homosexuality. When gay men break ranks with male roles through bonding and affection outside the arenas of war and sports, they are perceived as not being "real men," that is, as being identified with women, the weaker sex that must be dominated and that over the centuries has been the object of male hatred and abuse. Misogyny gets transferred to gay men with a vengeance and is increased by the fear that their sexual identity and behavior will bring down the entire system of male dominance and compulsory heterosexuality.

### **Lesbians and Heterosexual Women:**

#### **A Measure of Social Control**

If lesbians are established as threats to the status quo, as outcasts who must be punished, homophobia can wield its power over all women through lesbian baiting. Lesbian baiting is an attempt to control women by labelling us as lesbians because our behavior is not acceptable, that is, when we are being independent, going our own way, living whole lives, fighting for our rights, demanding equal pay, saying no to violence, being self-assertive, bonding with and loving the company of women, assuming the right to our bodies, insisting upon our own authority, making changes that include us in society's decision-making. Lesbian baiting occurs when women are

called lesbians because we resist dominance and control. And this kind of baiting has little or nothing to do with one's sexual identity.

In the backlash to the gains of the women's liberation movement, there has been an increased effort to keep definitions man-centered. Therefore, to work on behalf of women must mean to work against men. To love women must mean that one hates men. A very effective attack has been made against the word feminist to make it a derogatory word. In current backlash usage, feminist equals man-hater which equals lesbian. This formula is created in the hope that women will be frightened away from their work on behalf of women. Consequently, we now have women who believe in the rights of women and work for those rights while from fear deny that they are feminists, or refuse to use the word because it is so "abrasive." When women's organizations begin doing significant social change work, they inevitably are lesbian-baited; that is, funders or institutions or community members tell us that they can't work with us because of our "man-hating attitudes" or the presence of lesbians. We are called too strident, told we are making enemies, not doing good.

To be named as lesbian threatens all women, not just lesbians, with great loss. And any woman who steps out of role risks being called a lesbian. To understand how this is a threat to all women, one must understand that any woman can be called a lesbian and there is no real way she can defend herself: there is no way to credential one's sexuality. (*The Children's Hour*, a play by Lillian Hellman, makes this point when a student asserts two teachers are lesbians and they have no way to disprove it.) She may be married or divorced, have children, dress in the most feminine manner, have sex with men, be celibate — but there are lesbians who do all of those things. Lesbians look like all women and all women look like lesbians. There is no guaranteed method of identification, and as we all know, sexual identity can be kept hidden. (The same is true for men. There is no way to prove their sexual identity, though many go to extremes to prove heterosexuality.) Also, women are not necessarily born lesbian. Some seem to be, but others become lesbians later in life after having lived heterosexual lives. Lesbian baiting of heterosexual women would not work if there were a definitive way to identify lesbians (or heterosexuals).

### **Sexual Identity**

We have yet to understand how sexual identity develops. And this is disturbing to some people, especially those who are determined to discover how lesbian and gay identity is formed so that they will know where to start in eliminating it. (Isn't it odd that there is so little concern about discovering the causes of heterosexuality?) There are many theories: genetic make up, hormones, socialization, environment, etc. But there is no conclusive evidence that indicates that heterosexuality comes from one process and homosexuality from another.

We do know, however, that sexual identity can be in flux, and we know that sexual identity means more than just the gender of people one is attracted to and has sex with. To be a lesbian has as many ramifications as for a woman to be heterosexual. It is more than sex, more than just the bedroom issue many would like to make it:

it is a woman-centered life with all the rich social interconnections that entails. Some lesbians are in long-term relationships, some in short-term ones, some remain as separate as possible from men, some have children by men, some by alternative insemination, some seem "feminine" by societal standards, some "masculine," some are doctors, lawyers and ministers, some laborers, housewives and writers: what all share in common is a sexual/affectional identity that focuses on women and its attractions and social relationships.

If lesbians are simply women with a particular sexual identity who look and act like all women, then the major difference in living out a lesbian sexual identity as opposed to a heterosexual identity is that as lesbians we live in a homophobic world that threatens and imposes damaging loss on us *for being who we are*, for choosing to live whole lives. Homophobic people often assert that homosexuals have the choice of not being homosexual; that is, we don't have to act out our sexual identity. In that case, I want to hear heterosexuals talk about their willingness not to act out their sexual identity, including not just sexual activity but heterosexual social interconnections and heterosexual privilege. It is a question of wholeness. It is very difficult for one to be denied the life of a sexual being, whether expressed in sex or in physical affection, and to feel complete, whole. For our loving relationships with humans feed the life of the spirit and enable us to overcome our basic isolation and to be interconnected with humankind. . . .

### **The Cost of Homophobia**

Being vulnerable to a homophobic world can lead to these losses:

- *Employment.* The loss of a job leads us right back to the economic connection to sexism. This fear of job loss exists for almost every lesbian except perhaps those who are self-employed or in a business that does not require societal approval. Consider how many businesses or organizations you know that will hire and protect people who are openly gay or lesbian.
- *Family.* Their approval, acceptance, love.
- *Children.* Many lesbians and gay men have children, but very, very few gain custody in court challenges, even if the other parent is a known abuser. Other children may be kept away from us as though gays and lesbians are abusers. There are written and unwritten laws prohibiting lesbians and gays from being foster parents or from adopting children. There is an irrational fear that children in contact with lesbians and gays will become homosexual through influence or that they will be sexually abused. Despite our knowing that 95 percent of those who sexually abuse children are heterosexual men, there are no policies keeping heterosexual men from teaching or working with children, yet in almost every school system in America, visible gay men and lesbians are not hired through either written or unwritten law.
- *Heterosexual privilege and protection.* No institutions . . . affirm homosexuality and offer protection. . . .

- *Safety.* There is nowhere to turn for safety from physical and verbal attacks because the norm presently in this country is that it is acceptable to be overtly homophobic. Gay men are beaten on the streets; lesbians are kidnapped and "deprogrammed". . . .
- *Mental Health.* An overtly homophobic world in which there is full permission to treat lesbians and gay men with cruelty makes it difficult for lesbians and gay men to maintain a strong sense of well-being and self-esteem. Many lesbians and gay men are beaten, raped, killed, subjected to aversion therapy, or put in mental institutions. The impact of such hatred and negativity can lead to depression and, in some cases, suicide. The toll on the gay and lesbian community is devastating.
- *Community.* There is rejection by those who live in homophobic fear, those who are afraid of association with lesbians and gay men. For many in the lesbian and gay community, there is a loss of public acceptance, a loss of allies, a loss of place and belonging.
- *Credibility.* This fear is large for many people: the fear that they will no longer be respected, listened to, honored, believed. They fear they will be social outcasts.

The list goes on and on. But any one of these essential components of a full life is large enough to make one deeply fear its loss. A black woman once said to me in a workshop, "When I fought for Civil Rights, I always had my family and community to fall back on even when they didn't fully understand or accept what I was doing. I don't if I could have borne losing them. And you people don't have either with you. It takes my breath away. . . ."

### **The Elimination of Homophobia**

Equality is more than tolerance, compassion, understanding, acceptance, benevolence, for these still come from a place of implied superiority: favors granted to those less fortunate. These attitudes suggest that there is still something wrong, something not quite right that must be overlooked or seen beyond. The elimination of homophobia requires that homosexual identity be viewed as viable and legitimate and as normal as heterosexual identity. It does not require tolerance; it requires an equal footing. Given the elimination of homophobia, sexual identity — whether homosexual, bi-sexual, or heterosexual — will not be seen as good or bad but simply as what is.

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### **Editor's Note**

\* This article was excerpted from the author's book of the same title, published in 1988 by Chardon Press, available through The Women's Project, 2224 Main, Little Rock, AR 72206. All proceeds of the book *Homophobia: Weapon of Sexism* benefit The Women's Project.

\* All of the subtitles in this article have been added and do not appear in the author's original text.

# SEXUAL ORIENTATION EDUCATION AND HOMOPHOBIA REDUCTION TRAININGS

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Lack of information about human sexuality — particularly around issues of identity — is nothing new in society. Educators, counselors, therapists and other professionals in the field have been working hard to help disseminate accurate information, challenge damaging stereotypes, and develop resources. When it comes to implementing specific education about sexual orientation, the workload has been shared by sexologists and members of the gay and lesbian community. Together, these courageous people fight for the circulation of accurate information, equal rights of gays and lesbians in public and private arenas, fair representation in the curricula, and the elimination of gay and lesbian violence and discrimination. Those of us who provide sexuality trainings and homophobia reduction workshops have much to learn from these leaders whose works often go undocumented because trainers do not identify themselves as practitioners in the sexuality education field. Fortunately, we now have access to successful programs, strategies, and resources developed by homophobia reduction educators, members of the lesbian and gay community, and other professionals.

## **Trends in Education and Training**

Although education about sexual identity is not new, the form and focus of the trainings have changed dramatically over the years. When I first started providing programs on the topic in 1972, the philosophy was fairly simple: Invite some gay and lesbian people into the classroom to talk about their lives and answer questions. Often these sessions were entitled, "Alternative Lifestyles" to make them more acceptable to the fearful. Those of us who were speakers in these programs often referred to them as "Meet the Queer" or "We're Here Because We're Queer" sessions. We used this kind of gallows humor as a way of managing our fear and anger in the face of potential danger, hostility, and resistance. For the audience, these programs were then, and still are, effective in creating a human connection between the speaker and the audience. For many participants, connecting in a public forum with a gay or lesbian person who is open to questions is a singular opportunity to confront fear and irrational sentiments. In addition, personal disclosure strategies

are invaluable for dispelling many myths, providing limited information, and making the all-important human connection.

A problem with this strategy is that it offers no concrete way to evaluate whether or not the participants have identified and will use the information and new skills in their personal and professional lives. An example of an evaluation written after a talk which I delivered to a nursing class in Columbus, Ohio in 1972 is instructive. The student observed:

... [This] talk helped me to see homosexuality in a clearer light. I see them more as individuals with needs as important as mine, but which are expressed in a different way from me. They shouldn't be required to conform to my or society's standards. Each of us has different needs and we should be able to express ourselves in our own way. Homosexuality should not be condemned. I thought Sue helped break some of the stereotypes of the 'typical' Lesbian.

It is impossible to tell if this nursing student was likely to better treat homosexual patients as a result of the training. Would she or he think to welcome a gay or lesbian patient's partner into a medical consultation? Over time, a need grew to develop more and varied strategies for providing information, assessing attitudes, and skills-building. Finally, this nursing student's last statement, which was undoubtedly intended as a compliment and an indicator that some stereotypes had been broken during my talk, is limited nonetheless. It indicates that one speaker breaking a stereotype can be translated into an exception to the rule and allows continued fear and hatred against all "other" gay men and lesbians, who look and act gay. In other words, was I acceptable to this participant because I seemed to her like a regular person, meaning a heterosexual person? The still untaught lesson is that all lesbians and gay men, no matter how they look and act, are entitled to be treated in a fair and equitable manner. In addition, some of the people attending these trainings remained very fearful, resistant to learning, and downright hostile, although the above evaluation notes were fairly typical.

## A Changing Tide

While personal disclosure trainings continued, activists and professionals disseminated accurate information and created a rationale for education and professional training. As more pressure was exerted and new resources became available, more educators began to see the need to incorporate issues involving sexual orientation into their programs. This is not to say that resistance to the issue has melted away. Indeed, we are still very familiar with the movement against multi-cultural curricula. But a mounting understanding of the need has developed from the following: the documentation of discrimination and hate crimes against lesbians, gays, and bisexuals; the overt homophobia and heterosexism involved in the slow response of the government to the HIV/AIDS epidemic; the homophobia encountered by HIV/AIDS educators in the classroom; the federal documentation of suicide rates among lesbian and gay youth; and the growing number of people working for fair treatment as diversity trainers and advocates. These, among other events, served to open some new doors for education and training.

As a result, we now have several modalities by which individuals and organizations can provide education about sexual identity, sexual orientation, heterosexism, and homophobia. In the past, most invitations to sexuality diversity speakers usually came from college campuses. Now trainers are visiting a number of venues on a variety of topics including: corporations to talk about personnel policies and work place issues; psychologist conferences to talk about providing therapy for a sexually diverse clientele; classrooms to talk to teachers about equity in the curricula, libraries to discuss balanced book acquisitions, and even the police academy to train cadets about sexual orientation and the law.

Recent opportunities to conduct education about sexual identity are expanding and must be conducted as a joint effort among professionals from various fields. Sometimes agencies find trainers from organizations within the gay and lesbian community, from broad-based sexuality education and advocacy agencies, or from trainers conducting HIV/AIDS education. Recently, "diversity" has become a buzz word within organizations and on college campuses. This trend has provided a new arena in which to teach about sexual orientation, diversity, and its connection with other forms of oppression that exist in our society.

## A Ways to Go

While some things have changed, others have not. In doing these trainings over the past twenty years, I have found that many of the uneducated questions participants ask about lesbian and gay people — i.e., "Who plays the man?" — remain the same. Information is still typically scant, and often misinformation about gays and lesbians is offered instead. For instance, gay people are often described in terms of pathology, as carriers of disease, or in terms of sin, as being against nature. It is particularly important in our trainings to understand that in every group there will be lesbian, gay, and/or bisexual participants. Our role in educating these participants is crucial to carrying messages of hope and a sense of pride.

We now have to move onto the next step in the pro-

cess of incorporating the reality of different sexual identities into all of the education we do so that we acknowledge and include everyone when we talk about contraception, HIV/AIDS, love, relationships and family. We need to move beyond talking about orientation on "gay day" only; otherwise, we will continue to marginalize gay, lesbian and bisexual people.

## Homophobia Reduction Training Menu

I have developed a general training menu that can be adapted to the specific needs of each training. Indeed, experience and research shows that the more interactive a program the more effective, even for the informational sections of the training. I also try to incorporate cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning. The following is an example of this general menu.

- *The Nature of Difference in Society:*

Establish an emotional and intellectual understanding of the personal impact of feeling "different." Illustrate that differences among people often lead to judgements in human value. Make connection between homophobia and other forms of oppression.

Example:

Participants share a time in their life when they felt different from those around them. What was the situation? What feelings did it generate? Explore the connections to difference in human sexuality.

- *Components of Sexual Identity:*

Define important terms that are often confused and sometimes serve to reinforce stereotypes. Biological gender, Gender identity, Gender roles, Sexual orientation, Sexual identity, etc. (*See fact sheet in this issue.*)

- *Sexual Orientation:*

A. Sexuality Perspective: Provide factual information, such as the Kinsey research, diversity of gay and lesbian communities (ethnicity, culture, gender, class, disability, age, and religion), discrimination and violence, debunk myths and stereotypes. (*See fact sheet in this issue.*)

B. Psychosocial Perspective: psychological and social implications for different communities. Explore impact of discrimination on self-esteem and life style. Include discussions of:

Heterosexism  
Homophobia  
Coming Out  
Managing Fear  
HIV/AIDS and its impact  
Culture

- *Attitudes, Values, and Beliefs Assessment:*

Experiential and interactive exercises to help participants assess their feelings and discuss the impact of

## TIPS FOR TRAINERS

- *Be clear and realistic about your goals.* What is a realistic expectation of the agency, the participants, the time allotment? Are you more interested in changing the views and values of the participants or training them as a group to be more effective professionals, or both?
- *Keep informed.* research relevant laws, gain a working knowledge of the policies and practices of the organization that has requested the training as they relate to these issues. Keep informed on research, current affairs, and media representation.
- *Tailor each presentation* so that it is relevant to the lives and work of the participants.
- *Think about your own personal impact* on the training experience: If you are gay, lesbian, or bisexual, would it add to the presentation to disclose this information? If you are not, or if you choose not to disclose your identity, would it enhance the presentation to have someone who is, or to involve a panel of lesbian and gay people? What are the advantages to having a male-female team? Have you included information about transvestites, transsexuals, and transgenderists? Think about the importance of cross-cultural, cross-racial representation.
- *Keep resources handy.* Since your contact with each training group is limited, it is important to provide participants with resources which will support them in their work around these issues.
- *Maintain perspective.* Often progress is frustratingly slow in this work. Remember that change is happening just by the very existence of your presentation. However, it may be difficult to measure your impact empirically. Keep in mind those people in the audience who are hanging on to your every word because you are talking about their lives.
- *Maintain a sense of humor.* This is a tip for your own health and peace of mind, as well as for your effectiveness as a trainer.
- *Most importantly.* Include the fact of different sexual identities and orientations in all of your educational work.

these feelings in their own personal and professional lives.

Example:

Forced choice exercises are very effective in helping participants clarify their attitudes, values, and beliefs, as well as assessing knowledge. For instance, designate one side of the room as the "Agree Side" and the other as the "Disagree Side." Then read a statement and have the members of the group move to the side of the room which most closely reflects their opinion of the statement. Have participants discuss why they moved to "Agree" or "Disagree." Continue to provide information to help clarify the issues and the values expressed. The trigger statements can be geared to the particular audience you are working with such as psychologists, teachers, youth works, or police officers. Statements may include the following:

"I think there should be some restrictions on where homosexuals work, such as with children or in the military."

"I would be upset if someone in my family told me they were gay or lesbian."

"I would allow my child to stay overnight with a friend whose parents were a same-gender couple."

"Adolescents are too young to be sure of their sexual orientation."

"If an adolescent knows he or she is gay or lesbian, he or she should be encouraged to come out."

- *Personal Disclosure:*

Provide an opportunity to meet with, learn from, and ask questions of an out gay or lesbian person. Speakers can often be found through organizations such as lesbian, gay and bisexual campus groups, hotlines, or community centers in the area.

- *Professional, Organizational or Departmental Issues:*

Discuss the impact of your training on the lives and work of participants. What are the legal, medical, educational, practice and policy issues? If the training focuses on a specific sub-group (i.e., lesbian and gay youth), attention should be given to appropriate issues, like safety, peer group, adolescent development, parental responses, coming out, etc.

- *Strategies and Skill Building:*

Provide strategies for addressing issues of sexual identity and orientation as they arise. Give information and opportunity for skill building. Try to utilize strategies that are both reactive and pro-active. Often, participants need help dealing with any personal or perceived organizational resistance to change. Activities may include: role playing, strategy brainstorming, lesson plan development, material and resource reviews, exploration of personal and institutional resistance to change.

- *Resources:*

Provide as many resources as possible. Examples

## CURRICULA

1. *Opening Doors to Understanding and Acceptance: A Facilitator's Guide to Presenting Workshops on Lesbian and Gay Issues* (1990) Kathy Obear, The Human Advantage, 6 University Drive, Suite 125, Amherst, MA 01002. (413) 584-0812.

2. *Opening Doors to Understanding and Acceptance: Combatting Homophobia on College Campuses.* (1990). Kathy Obear, The Human Advantage, 6 University

Drive, Suite 125, Amherst, MA 01002. (413) 584-0812.

3. *A Guide To Leading Introductory Workshops on Homophobia.* (1990) Cooper Thompson, Campaign to End Homophobia, P.O. Box 819, Cambridge, MA 02139.

4. *Demystifying Homosexuality: A Teaching Guide About Lesbians and Gay Men.* (1984) The Human Rights Foundation, Inc. 740 Broadway, New York, NY 10003.

may be local professional or social referrals, articles and books for further learning, pamphlets and posters for display, curricula, films and videos for classroom use or further training, and ideas for follow-up problem solving.

Examples:

**The Campaign to End Homophobia.**

P.O. Box 819, Cambridge, MA 02139. (617) 868-8280. The Campaign to End Homophobia is a network of people working to end homophobia and heterosexism through education.

**Directory of Gay and Lesbian Professional Groups. GLTF Library Information Clearinghouse.** 491 Seminole Avenue, #14, Atlanta, GA (404) 577-4600.

**Equity Institute.** 600 Hollis Street, Suite 15, Emeryville, CA 94608. (510) 658-4577. Equity Institute is a multi-cultural organization committed to the elimination of racism, sexism, anti-semitism, homophobia, classism, ageism, and ableism.

**Friends of Project 10, Inc.** 11684 Ventura Blvd., Suite 348, Studio City, CA 91604. Friends of Project 10 assists schools and school districts in setting up counseling programs modeled after the program in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Project 10 is a drop-out prevention program that offers emotional support, information, and resources to young people who identify themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual.

**P-FLAG (Parent's and Friends of Lesbian and Gays).** P.O. Box 27605, Washington, DC 20038, (202) 638-4200. P-FLAG works to end the alienation and discrimination that often results when gay men and lesbians disclose their sexual orientation to family and friends. P-FLAG has more than 200 local chapters that distribute educational materials to schools, community leaders, and the general public.

**Project 21, Mid-American Region.** 5904 N.W. 66th Terrace, Kansas City, MO 64151. (816) 746-0833. A gay, lesbian and bisexual curricula advocacy alliance.

**SIECUS (Sex Information and Education Council of the United States).** 130 West 42nd Street, New York, NY 10036. (212) 819-9770. SIECUS offers a bibliography on gay and lesbian issues, additional information is available through the SIECUS library.

### Managing Resistance

Obviously, the homophobia reduction menu is not fixed. Content should be selected or deleted and organized according to the needs of the participants, time allotted, and follow-up sessions. Undoubtedly, a trainer using this menu might experience group or individual resistance. I have often been told by participants, "You are just saying that because you are a lesbian." But resistance takes many forms. Often I have heard workshop trainees say, "I agree with what you are saying, but if I tried that in my classroom (job, department, organization), I'd get fired." We need to help participants work out the difference between personal resistance and realistic barriers. This process will help to increase the probability that the new information and skills can and will be utilized.

### Conclusion

We are now uniquely positioned with new information, resources, and opportunities to teach and train about the true tapestry of the human community. With the potential to create a compelling program for changing how we think and what we assume to be true, we must provide information and skills for integrating acceptance of sexual diversity into our lives. For some of us, this work feels like the right thing to do, both personally and professionally. For others, this work is about fighting for our lives.

*Susan Vasbinder is a consultant providing national training and education on human sexuality and sexual identity, and a member of the SIECUS Board of Directors.*

### Author's Note

<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that this work was occurring prior to the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969, which is often used as the event that marked the beginning of the contemporary "Gay Liberation Movement."



# “FOR SEX: SEE LIBRARIAN” Librarians, Sexologists, and Sexuality Education

**Martha Cornog, M.A., M.S.**

Editor of *Libraries, Erotica, and Pornography*

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Independent Writer and Researcher in Sexology, Anthropology and Biology.

“For Sex: See librarian” was an actual catalog card entry in an actual library.<sup>1</sup> The entry itself is certainly ambiguous — *Playboy* magazine once published a cartoon of a hopeful young man repeating the line to a winsome librarian.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, such a catalog entry does not promise a warm acceptance of sexuality. In fact, historically, public access to sexuality materials was routinely restricted with librarians playing the role of guardian.

These restrictive policies are reminiscent of enduring stereotypes of the librarian. She is not a modern, young woman but a little old lady, austere in sensible shoes, hair in a bun. She frowns severely upon requests for sexuality information. Many readers may well believe that librarians are inhospitable to books about sexuality and restrict access rigidly if they allow such books onto the shelves at all. Other readers, perhaps on college campuses, might not embrace the stereotype, since university libraries generally stock according to faculty requests, including sexuality research and information materials. However, it is not inconceivable that some library users — even in universities — may suspect that libraries and sexuality information somehow do not mix.

Today, there can be little doubt that public, school, and academic libraries should purchase sexuality materials and should make access to information easy whenever possible. Libraries can be major sources for information about the human body, birth control and reproductive rights, sexual harassment, rape, incest, HIV/AIDS, gay and lesbian lives, abortion, censorship, and many other issues permeating radio, television, and the print media today. The question is: if not in the library, then where can people obtain sound, well-balanced information? Most commercial bookstores stock bestsellers and popular trade books and not small press titles devoted to diverse sexual perspectives. The media itself tells only a small part of the story, usually slanted by editorial bias. How often does *Time* or *Newsweek* cover lesbian feminist writings? How often do network stations air a discussion by gay or lesbian therapists working with gay or lesbian clients? When do popular radio shows slot programs about

sexual rights movements in developing nations? In the absence of alternatives to the media, public opinion and knowledge are shaped only by what can be condensed into sound bites thus perpetuating ignorance and prejudice.

## **A Tale of Two Cultures:**

### **Guardianship vs. Freedom to Read**

The positive role that librarians can play in sexuality education and information dissemination is new and not always entirely comfortable, due to a long history of restricting sexual materials. One of the first erotica collections, entitled the “Private Case,” was founded in 1860 by the British Museum. This collection, which would provide a model for later collections, specialized in erotic rarities. However, a formidable research and archival institution controlled the material, and cryptic cataloging and uncooperative librarians severely limited its access.<sup>3</sup> Neither the “Private Case” nor later collections of erotica were freely open to the public. Ironically, these restrictive policies protected the books from church and state censors as well as from thieves and vandals. However, in no sense could these collections be considered generally accessible information sources. Indeed, had the material been more readily available, much of it might have been officially seized and destroyed by the police. These libraries operated under vague exemptions from laws against obscenity, no doubt *because* they did not disseminate what they owned.

When we recall that as late as 1963 a U.S. bookstore owner could be jailed for distributing William Burroughs’ *The Naked Lunch*, it is no wonder that librarians dealt carefully and even timorously with sexuality materials. In post-World War I America, when reading customs had already begun to change, a survey about “questionable books” in public libraries showed that most U.S. libraries tightly restricted access to the sparse sexuality-related materials they did possess. Sometimes these libraries stocked only expurgations of such classics as Boccaccio’s *The Decameron* or *The Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night*.<sup>4</sup> Fear of anti-obscenity laws was not the only

issue. Librarianly adherence to social customs of silence about sexuality was at least as powerful as fear of legal action. In particular, a moral and ethical mandate, which the work of library historian Evelyn Geller (1984) leads us to call the "Guardianship of Society Ethos," motivated American libraries to purchase and disseminate only the highest and best fruits of Civilization (with a capital "C").<sup>5</sup> By the same token, any books likely to "corrupt" susceptible readers were carefully restricted for the good of society.

This guardianship ideology is embodied in the nearly 3,000 Greek-style, marble-fronted American library buildings, funded by industrialist Andrew Carnegie at the turn of the century. In these classical temples of knowledge, there was no place for dissent or rebellion, for hedonism, or for works that challenged late Victorian customs of silence about sexuality. These libraries sheltered only "Good Books," tested and proven by time, tradition, and ideals of marriage, family, and religion. These ideals prohibited and deemed illegal information about sexually transmitted diseases, birth control, and anything resembling sexual pleasure.

But the times, as they say, were a-changing. Millions of American boys, home from World War I, had seen horrors far exceeding the alleged horrors produced by masturbation. Sexuality had started on a journey toward enlightened understanding in Sigmund Freud, Margaret Sanger, Bertrand Russell, Margaret Mead, in the post-suffrage woman's movement, in the discovery of salvarsan and other anti-syphilitic agents, and in physiological understanding of the role of hormones in reproduction. The Great Depression had cast traditional values into grave doubt. Hollywood starlets and scantily-clad Follies bounced and wriggled and danced in carefree sensuality. Reading habits shifted from the solemn "Good Books" toward escape reading and the gritty realism of Steinbeck, Hemingway, and Faulkner. In the darkening years foretelling a Nazi-controlled Europe, it was becoming harder to believe that reading about sexuality was the worst of all possible sins.

In 1939, the American Library Association adopted a readers' bill of rights, formalizing a newer ethos, today called the "Freedom to Read." Fundamental to this ethos is the principle that "all sides of questions on which differences of opinion exist should be represented fairly and adequately" in library holdings.<sup>6</sup> During the next fifty years, the "Freedom to Read" ethic catalyzed many changes in librarianship, some far exceeding the democratic impulse to resist Nazi book-burning. Describing the year 1948, one librarian spoke of the impact of the "K-bomb," meaning the Kinsey Report.<sup>7</sup> These studies described and analyzed the range and fluidity of American sexual behavior across people's life-times, including heterosexual, bisexual and homosexual behavior. Immensely popular and widely controversial, how could a library, then or now, not have its copy of the Kinsey reports? And yet Kinsey and his colleagues were only the start of post-World War II publication of sexuality materials.

For traditional librarians, the quandary posed by sexuality books worsened during the 1960s and especially after landmark Supreme Court decisions rendered licit many works that hitherto had been subject to unquestioned ob-

scenity laws. Tensions between older traditions of silence and newer "Freedom to Read" models of librarianship increased further when baby-boomer Americans sought college educations, and university libraries grew larger and larger. Not like the old Greek-style temples, these libraries sought modernity with steel, concrete, and glass construction. They were symbols of a new era. Suddenly, women could buy prescription oral contraceptives at neighborhood drugstores. Older librarianly traditions of discreet silence and restricted access to sexuality materials were being challenged by history.

### Homophobia and Sexphobia in the Stacks

Librarianship as a profession (and many librarians individually) have made valiant efforts to weather this half century of change and to reconcile older traditions of social guardianship with new ideals of information availability. But the newer democracy of ideas has not completely supplanted the older monarchy of social guardianship and the older traditions of discreet silence about sex, either in public expectations or among librarians. A respondent to a survey about AIDS information in libraries wrote:

I feel there is still a reluctance for public libraries to secure important materials [on AIDS] because of the link to homosexuality.<sup>8</sup>

In 1992, another librarian wrote in a homophobic letter to *Reference Quarterly*, "The best [library] service for homosexuals is a recognition that repentance, not bibliography, will satisfy their needs."<sup>9</sup>

Sometimes, librarianly unease about sexuality materials masquerades behind more subtle rationalizations. A survey of public and academic libraries subscribing to *Playboy*<sup>10</sup> found that although many librarians powerfully defended subscriptions against censorship, some 20% of responding libraries had or were planning to cancel subscriptions because of vandalism, budget cuts, or low usage. This may sound reasonable; however, canceling libraries reported nearly twice the rate of patron and staff complaints about *Playboy*. It seems that factors other than mere vandalism influenced these decisions to cancel. Moreover, canceling libraries reported far less protection of the magazine, despite the vandalism, perhaps indicating a reluctance to solve the problem, except by eliminating the magazine.

Several librarians posed the quandary very neatly:

Much as I hate the sexist rag, it is censorship not to renew *Playboy*, no matter what reasons our librarians give.

It would certainly be hard to distinguish between censorship and fear of mutilation or theft in our not placing [sexually] explicit material on the open shelves. For example, we already face heavy theft and mutilation in our sections on Marilyn Monroe, gays, and Nazism.<sup>11</sup>

*Playboy* magazine represents an excellent litmus test of librarians' attitudes because libraries operate under a broad rubric of public and patron service. Unlike private

## Tips for Sexologists\*

- Librarians are among the most service-oriented professionals and so deserve to be approached in a respectful manner. Waving a list of books at a librarian and demanding they be purchased is not a constructive approach.
- Understanding how libraries operate is often enlightening to sexologists. Meet with library department heads and the director to try to arrange a friendly discussion of the library's overall situation.
- For public libraries — which are crucial to public education programs — sexologists might wish to involve themselves more broadly, for example, by joining Friends of the Library groups, by participating in community-library events, and by meeting and listening to the library director and heads of reference and cataloging departments.
- Attending a library board meeting can be an eye-opener. One quickly learns that libraries have severe budget restrictions, are chronically understaffed (and existing staff underpaid), have too few reading areas and too little shelf space. In brief, libraries suffer from tight economics. It may be literally impossible for a library to buy those 60 "excellent" sexuality books.
- Remember librarians are trained professionals, many with a master's degree in librarianship and a master's degree in a subject area. One should work with librarians as equals and seek genuinely to understand the world in which they function.
- It will be helpful to discover library coverage of, and general attitudes towards, such topics as HIV/AIDS, gay/lesbian/homosexuality, abortion, erotica/pornography, and rape/sexual harassment, etc.
- Understanding the library's major clientele is important. Academic libraries cater to students and faculty, but community public libraries have many distinct and — for the most part — known clients whom they serve. A library might in the past have received someone's personal collection of books on rose gardening, and therefore attract a large number of rose aficionados. Other libraries may have primarily older patrons who read mostly leisure fiction.
- Learn the principle that, "Those who come to the library are served by the library." Of course, librarians may not perceive "hidden" clients such as gay and lesbian readers. "We have no gay or lesbian people in our community," some may say, and sexologists may need to point out that this is not likely to be true.
- All libraries today are subject to intense and contradictory pressures, especially about sexuality works. On the other hand, no library likes censorship, even if librarians personally experience some deep twinges of doubt about certain books.
- Sexologists should *not* suggest getting rid of books that seem offensive (or inaccurate) to them. Instead, titles of books with other viewpoints should be suggested. Sexologists must not themselves be censors or too aggressive with a particular agenda. If sexologists are perceived as genuinely concerned, and aware of what libraries strive to do, then the librarians themselves will be the best allies in locating titles that will balance the collection.
- Sexologists may consider themselves experts in particular areas, but a skilled reference librarian with a computer terminal can turn up new or unexpected material. The point is to enlist the help of librarians both for one's own professional work and for the purpose of comparing what is available with what the library already possesses. A search done in the library itself may be quite useful in showing that its sexuality collection is, in fact, out-of-date and unbalanced.
- Essential reference works, prepared by librarians for librarians, are Gough's and Greenblatt's *Gay and Lesbian Library Service*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1990), and Cornog's *Libraries, Erotica, and Pornography* (Phoenix: Oryx, 1991), which contains many essays on sexuality collections and their development and protection. These two books make it impossible for a library director to say there is "nothing" on the subject of libraries and sexuality.
- It is extraordinarily valuable to understand how the Library of Congress and Dewey Decimal classification systems handle sexuality materials. Although both have "sex" sections within sociology, many sexuality works are classed within psychology or medicine or criminology or even travel. Additionally, the library's own catalog of holdings should be liberally peppered with "see" and "see also," cross-references, such as from the "Gay" or "Lesbian" to the "Homosexuality" headings.

\* The library and sexological communities have recently begun two cooperative relationships at the highest levels. The ALA has joined the National Coalition to Support Sexuality Education, a group founded by SIECUS with over 50 member organizations. SIECUS in turn has endorsed ALA's "Freedom to Read" statement.

individuals who subscribe to *Playboy* (or not) on the basis of personal preference, taste, and desire, libraries serve clientele with many preferences, tastes, and desires. Nazism may horrify us, but would we admire a library that refused to shelve *Mein Kempf* merely for that reason? The answer is crucial for understanding the role of libraries as information service institutions. Many individuals would feel that it is the duty of a library to make available books like *Mein Kempf* solely because libraries are repositories of all human writing: good, bad, and horrifying. As institutions, libraries are judged not by standards of personal taste but by their value as repositories for books of all sorts. Yet when it comes to sexuality rather than fascism, both librarians and patrons may feel a twinge of doubt. Among many librarians there lingers a desire for a kind of sexual guardianship of society — a hope, perhaps, that the library need not stock every “piece of junk” dressed up in sexy four-color publishers’ brochures. In this implicit desire to stock the library with only “high quality” books, we detect a tense compromise between older traditions of discreet silence and newer, more clamorous ideals of “Freedom to Read.” History and public discussions of sexuality issues have made it increasingly difficult for librarians to eschew sexuality materials, sequester those few purchased, or to purchase only expurgations — and to excuse doing so by claiming that “most” works on sexuality are junk.

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***Today, there can be little doubt that public, school, and academic libraries should purchase sexuality materials and should make access to information easy whenever possible.***

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Librarianship faces a quietly challenging question: today, how can librarians possibly escape the conclusion that the “Freedom to Read” ethic mandates the inclusion of sexuality materials representing all sides of opinion? Indeed, librarians seem to have one foot in the old days of silence about sex and the other in today’s clamor. Probably few public libraries systematically acquire books on sexuality in a focussed acquisition program, as does the New York Public Library. Best-sellers like Camille Paglia’s *Sexual Personae* or Madonna’s *Sex* might make it onto the shelves, but lesser known, excellent works are not likely to be available in smaller libraries. Some of the lesser known works include *Period* from Volcano Press, for adolescent girls about menstruation, or *Signs for Sexuality* from Planned Parenthood of Seattle-King County (Washington) a guide to sex-related vocabulary in American Sign Language. Nowadays, however, this lack of balance in holdings is not a minor issue. It is crucial for educating all Americans that libraries adopt policies of acquiring and openly disseminating all types of work on sexuality.

#### **Book Selection and Defense of Quality**

Librarians and sexuality experts have a great deal to offer each other to achieve their mutual goals of public education. The breadth and richness of sexological endeavor,

especially in the past two decades, may surprise librarians — who, after all, may be experts in other areas — but it provides particularly great advantages for collaboration among librarians and sexologists. Foremost, perhaps, is the issue of quality, so often raised by librarians who doubt the value or importance of any given book, periodical, or video on sexuality. What criteria exist for library acquisition of sexuality materials?

Many librarians use book and audio-visual reviews — especially those published in library acquisitions journals such as *Library Journal*, *Choice*, *Kirkus*, and *Publishers’ Weekly* — as a primary guide to the quality of potential purchases. Yet these sources cover very few sexological publications and are especially weak in their coverage of small press materials. Accordingly, librarians wishing to expand their sexuality collections all too often lack the tools to do so. How might a librarian know if a new book on HIV/AIDS represents accurate, current information or hysterical propounding of myth — or, worse, a mixture of the two? How may a collection be balanced to represent different religious denominations’ views on sex? Knowledge of specialized sources of sexuality materials and evaluations of those sources is — or should be — part of the tool kit of any sexologist. With the reciprocal assistance of a skilled librarian, such individuals can readily compile lists of publishers, authors, and reviews for a variety of sexological topics. High among these specialized sources are the *SIECUS Report* and bibliographies from SIECUS and the Kinsey Institute for Sex, Gender and Reproduction (Indiana University). Sexological research journals also carry reviews, heavily focussed on academic quality, such as *The Journal of Sex Research*, *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy*, *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, and *Journal of Homosexuality*, among others.

Reviews are valuable to librarians for an additional reason. When patrons complain about a “dirty book” on the shelves, librarians find it extremely useful to cite published reviews as justifying retention. Indeed, one librarian explained that her library was not purchasing Madonna’s *Sex* partly because it received poor reviews. Although other reasons might exist not to buy *Sex*, librarians in fact place considerable weight on published reviews as indices of quality.

Nonetheless, sexologists must understand that their sources — professional journals and the like — are extremely spotty in what they review, a problem that has existed for a while.<sup>12</sup> Despite efforts of concerned sexologists to publish a book review periodical, financial considerations have so far prohibited the effort. All too many sexologists treat book reviews as trivial ephemera or as entertainment, and fail to understand how reviews play a crucial role for library purchases and hence for public education.

A good case can be made for expanding, not restricting, sexological reviewing. At present many valuable works are left unreviewed and therefore vulnerable to the “Guardianship of Society” accusation of being “junk.” Here, individual sexologists can offer concerned librarians a great deal by making professional evaluations of books on an *ad hoc* basis or by illustrating their value in other ways, e.g., inclusion in bibliographies from SIECUS,

Kinsey, and others.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the major sexological organizations — the Society for the Scientific Study of Sex, the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors, and Therapists, and SIECUS — will provide referrals to experts in various locations. Such people can supply librarians with lists of “best” or “favorite” books and audiovisuals, syllabi for courses, reading lists for clients, and a sympathetic ear for war stories about censorship. Librarians should not feel shy about making such contacts and taking full advantage of the experts’ knowledge.

### Controversy and Censorship

Because the “Guardianship of Society” ethos remains alive among conservative and traditional Americans, libraries are often seen as the last bastion of what is considered good and right and proper. In a complicated political and social world, factions seek to have their books on the library’s shelves, as if by doing so they have won a significant moral victory. Such agendas are legitimate, provided no one seeks to remove the books containing other viewpoints. When that occurs, controversy and censorship reign supreme.

In such situations, a controversial library book needs more than a good review or two. A principle itself needs defending: it is the library’s right to have all books on all topics. For the censor, sexuality books are perceived as dangerous because they are said to create evil and lust and are paradigms for social and moral breakdown. How can sexologists assist librarians in a public censorship battle? Above all, sexologists can help by pointing to the value of books on sexuality. For many censors, modern works on sex are merely “smut” peddled as academic truth or harmless entertainment. But this an educated sexologist can refute, by drawing calming parallels between sexuality education programs and the library’s holdings. It is not a single book that counts but the total-ity of all views on all topics that educates. Only pluralism and democracy, not a monarchy of viewpoints, allow and stimulate responsible sexual education.

### Whatever Interests, Disturbs, or Enchants

“What every librarian should advocate is information seeking, about whatever interests, disturbs, or enchants people,” write Gough and Greenblatt, authors of *Gay and Lesbian Library Service*.<sup>14</sup> Once librarians served the tiny minority of the literate, a culturally homogeneous group with homogeneous needs, but no longer. “What every librarian must acknowledge,” the authors continue, “is the diversity of users’ background and interests.” Today every member of that diverse multitude needs sexuality information: the helping professions, businesses, parents, children, older people, gay men and lesbians, singles, liberals, conservatives. The agendas may be different, but everyone needs information. Librarians must provide that information, supplementing their expertise with that of sexologists. Both groups have an interest in maintaining open access to sexuality information against those who would ban it, censor it, thrust it back into hidden secrecy.

The old Victorian silence is gone, and sex is out of the closet. Both sides on every sexual issue openly exchange their views loudly, daily, and on television. A front-page-

headline reports that “The world has sex 100 million times daily.”<sup>15</sup> And with 100 million sexual encounters come 100 million viewpoints, opinions, questions. As then President-elect Clinton remarked after being notified of his electoral victory:

We have become a diverse people of many colors and languages and beliefs. Now we have the obligation to insure that our diversity is a source of strength and pride to all of us here at home and around the world. . . . Now we have the opportunity, the duty, and the imperative to see that we do not leave even one of [our diverse citizens] behind as we move toward the next century.<sup>16</sup>

So it is for librarians and sexologists. Together we can ensure that none is left behind in the quest for sexual knowledge. In this way, “For Sex: See Librarian” can be made into a *positive* reality.

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# TRANSEXUALITY, IDENTITY, AND EMPOWERMENT

## A View from the Front Lines

**Barbara E. Warren, Psy.D.**

Director of Mental Health and Social Services, Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center of New York

**I**t is a Thursday night support group. Luis<sup>1</sup> is talking about adjusting to being back in school. He is anxious about passing exams and making new friends. A survivor of foster homes, psychiatric institutions, and drug addiction, Luis — at the age of nineteen — is turning his life around. He's clean and sober, in a good relationship with his girlfriend, and getting his GED. The group gives him encouragement and support to stay in school.

At thirty-six, Karen\* is also back in school. In her Wednesday night support group she shares fears about succeeding in her new career while juggling school and family responsibilities. Here again, the group provides support and encouragement for her coping with stress and hanging on to her aspirations.

In addition to dealing with life transitions and stresses — the kind with which anyone might identify — Luis and Karen share another, less-common experience. They are transsexuals who participate in support groups at the Gender Identity Project (GIP) of New York City's Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center. Luis is a female-to-male transsexual man and Karen is a male-to-female transsexual woman.

### **A Rose By Any Other Name**

Transsexuality and gender dysphoria (discomfort with one's identity as male or female) are not modern experiences. Instead they are modern terms for experiences that have existed and been recorded cross-culturally throughout history. For example, Native Americans of the Northern Plains described those with both male and female characteristics as "the people-in-between" and revered them as shamans.<sup>1</sup> In Ancient Rome, there was social acceptance for males who castrated themselves to adopt female identities. Despite its long history and place in other cultures, transsexuality has received a great deal of publicity in recent years but very little real understanding.

Transsexuals are people who find their gender identity (the inner sense of self as male or female) in conflict with their sexual anatomy. Transsexuality is part of a spectrum of experience related to gender dysphoria. Manifestations

across this spectrum can range from occasional cross-dressing (wearing clothes that are socially designated as belonging to the opposite gender); to living part- or full-time in the gender "opposite" of one's sexual anatomy; to taking hormone therapy and ultimately undergoing sex reassignment surgery. Transsexuality is differentiated from transvestitism (the Latin word for cross-dressing) in that transvestites maintain an inner identity that is consistent with their sexual anatomy. For them, cross-dressing is related to fantasy fulfillment, erotic stimulation, and stress release.

Technically, once sex reassignment surgery has been accomplished, and a person's sexual anatomy has been surgically corrected to match his or her gender identity, he or she is no longer transsexual. However, many who have had the transsexual experience, male and female, use the term on a continuing basis as a way to own and to describe their unique experience. Sometimes the abbreviation "TS" is used as a noun. Additionally, the dropping of one of the second "s" from the traditional spelling of the word "transsexual" was initiated by some members of the transsexual community to articulate the concept of an ongoing identity beyond the transition phase. As a member of a transsexual women's support group describes it:

Many of us came into [the support group] with what we have come to view as a skewed vocabulary. We referred to non-transsexual women as "real." If they were "real", what did that make us — "unreal women?" So we tried "biological women." That didn't work much better. Again, what did it make us? "Unbiological woman?" [And] "Genetic women" left us as "non-genetic women." We always seemed to be stuck as "non-somethings" when we wanted to affirm our identity and experience. So we tried to turn it around. Suppose we, being us, defined ourselves as us, and defined them as not-us. This yielded immediate and practical results. They simply became "non-transsexuals!"<sup>2</sup>

## Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual

Transexuality is often confused with homosexuality. Sexual orientation, a separate aspect of identity from transexuality, refers to one's sexual, romantic, and affectional attraction to others. Although gay men and lesbians may challenge traditional, socially-accepted gender roles by exhibiting dress and behaviors that are associated with their "opposite" gender, their gender identities remain congruent with their sexual anatomy. Contrary to the belief that all true male-to-female transexual women are sexually attracted to men,<sup>3</sup> approximately fifty percent of male-to-female transexual women who participate in the Center's GIP report an affectional, sexual attraction to women. These transexuals then describe themselves as lesbians. Male-to-female transexual women who are attracted to men see themselves as heterosexual in sexual orientation and describe themselves as heterosexual women. There are also female-to-male transexual men who in their sexual attraction to men, identify as gay men, as well as female-to-male transexuals who are attracted to women and identify as heterosexual men. Sexual orientation then is accurately described in relation to one's gender identity and not in relation to one's sexual anatomy.

For many transexuals it is part of the evolution of understanding their transexuality to have attempted to resolve gender dysphoria by trying on a gay or lesbian identity. For example, many female-to-male transexuals attracted to women go through a period of identifying as lesbians, but the inner sense of themselves as men persists. Sandy,\* a female-to-male transexual man, went into a lesbian support group at age fifteen. His counselors saw Sandy's gender dysphoria as an inability to accept being lesbian. Unfortunately, his experience in the group was probably similar to that of any adolescent heterosexual boy put into a group of homosexual adolescent girls. He could not and did not fit in. This increased his sense of isolation and despair. After leaving the lesbian youth program, his drug use escalated. In contrast, four years later, Sandy's initial experience in the GIP support group for transexual men was one of intense identification and feelings of relief and hope.

Transexuals who identify as lesbian or gay often face a double stigma. They may find themselves being rejected by gay and lesbian society as illegitimate or unauthentic. At the same time they may be reviled by heterosexual society for being both transexual *and* gay. One of the most visible and well known female-to-male transexuals in recent times was the late Louis Sullivan, journalist and author. As a female-to-male who identified as a *gay* transexual man and an activist on behalf of sexual diversity, he spoke poignantly of his struggle for acceptance as a gay man:

In my experience of living as a homosexual man, I have found the gay men's community very accepting and have enjoyed the companionship of two long-term male lovers. However, along with the good comes the bad. Ironically, I have been diagnosed with AIDS, still seen as a gay man's disease. But somehow it seems like just one more hassle with a body that's never cooperated with me much anyhow. I took a certain pleasure in informing the gender clinic that even though their

program told me I could never live as a gay man, it looks like I'm going to die like one.<sup>4</sup>

## Community Building

Many gays and lesbians recognize the commonality of experience between transexuals and homosexuals in the prejudice and exclusion that both face in the larger society. In this respect the Gender Identity Project (GIP) fits in with Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center's overall mission to protect and preserve lesbian and gay rights and culture. The GIP mirrors the Center's mission in its efforts to enable transexuals to develop a positive, affirmed identity in an environment of support and self-acceptance. To this end, the GIP has developed as primarily a peer-support, peer-driven project that relies on transexuals to help other transexuals to articulate and to then meet the needs of the transexual population.

Transexual volunteers, some of whom are human services professionals, and non-transexual Center staff and volunteers work together to deliver relevant services. The GIP offers individual short-term peer-counseling which for many recipients, is the first time they encounter a peer, someone who not only shares their experience but is also a role model for the successful resolution of the gender identity crisis.

## Barriers and Issues

However, even with acceptance and support from the lesbian and gay community, transexuals still face many barriers in the society at large in their quest for dignity and an integrated identity. The prevailing assumption that the understanding of anatomy is unambiguous — either wholly male or wholly female — is challenged by transexuality and raises a primal anxiety in most people and in our society. Society's message serves to produce shame, secrecy, depression, and fear in many transexuals. The result of this societal prejudice is increased isolation and for some, even suicide.

In addition, the reluctance of most physicians and mental health professionals to treat transexuals contributes to the sense of hopelessness many transexuals feel about ever finding help for gender identity conflict. To date, medicine lacks valid and reliable, detectable biological markers for transexuality. Subsequently there are controversies about proper diagnosis upon which to base treatment decisions. Many professionals lack training and experience in this area as it not a routine part of graduate education. Therefore, many professionals do not approve or implement irreversible sex reassignment surgeries. The incredibly high cost of hormone therapy, psychological evaluation, and sex reassignment surgery — not to mention the costs of related cosmetic surgeries, electrolysis, and legal fees — also serve to prevent many transexuals from access to the medical, psychological, and legal resources that do exist. Insurance companies and Medicaid generally refuse to pay for these services. An ongoing frustration for the peer counselors at the GIP is the difficulty in securing any competent and affordable treatment services for many of their counselees.

The predominant psychological model of transexuality also serves to further the societal view of transexuals, and subsequently transexuals' views of themselves, as sick

people for whom there is no "cure." Derived from psychoanalytic and object relations theory, this model views transsexuality as psychopathology related to insufficient identification with the same gender parent and/or over-identification with the "opposite" gender parent, during infancy and early childhood.<sup>5</sup> This model advocates psychotherapy to remediate transsexuality by "restoring" congruency with sexual anatomy. This theory fails to explain: all of the people with similar childhood histories who are not and never have been gender dysphoric; the many transsexuals whose childhood experiences do not fit this model; why gender dysphoria is notoriously impervious to psychotherapy and therefore has a poor prognosis for change through psychotherapy.

### Empowerment

Even when transsexuals receive professional support to live fully in their gender identities as men or women, a common experience for many is the persistence of internalized shame and feelings of unauthenticity that can haunt their attempts to affirm themselves. The emphasis of the community-based, peer support model serves to move transsexuals, regardless of their stage of development, away from a shame-based or pathological self-concept and toward a sense of empowerment within a unique identity. This necessary support is well illustrated in the response to the issue of *passing* written by transsexual women who are members of a self-help support group called Survivors of Transsexuality Anonymous (Passing refers to transsexuals being perceived of by others as "real" men and women.):

... It's not about passing. "Passing" entails attempting to fool non-transsexuals into believing we are something we are not. Often we want to pass as non-transsexuals because of an unexpressed conviction that only non-transsexual women define femaleness, and, therefore, the best we can do is imitate them and work for their acceptance. For many of us this meant that our transsexual femaleness, in its own God-given form was somehow not enough, "less-than". . . [As one of our members described it] I used to say, "Well sometimes I still sound like a man. And then it occurred to me. I don't sound like a man. I sound just exactly and precisely like a transsexual woman . . . I used to feel embarrassed because I had "man's hands" or a "man's build." But I don't. I have the hands and build of a transsexual woman. I stopped defining myself in terms of other people's categories and started defining myself in terms of me.

Gains and losses in social power based on gender is an issue that confronts many transsexuals. For male-to-female transsexual women, it is adjusting to the loss of social power that occurs when they move from being perceived of as male to being perceived of as female. It often comes as a shock to male-to-female transsexual women to be sexually harassed by men, or to find that their earning power as women in the same occupations they held as "men" has decreased drastically. Giving up male power, even if it was not particularly valued in the first place, is often experienced as loss.

Female-to-male transsexual men often express feelings

of wanting to act, or more often being expected to act, somewhat macho; to be perceived as masculine; and to fit in with the guys. For many, these feelings conflict with sensibilities and sensitivities developed over a lifetime of being perceived of and socialized as women. Many transsexual men value the qualities associated with being female in our culture and seek to integrate such qualities into their identities as heterosexual men.

The emphasis that the Gender Identity Project puts on empowerment counters the conventional advice given to transsexuals by many professionals, and some other transsexuals, on the best way to achieve post-transition adjustment. The traditional approach was to start over, in the "new" identity, and to somehow forget or close off one's former existence and thereby be reborn. This not only proves impossible for most transsexuals to achieve but undermines attempts to develop an integrated and affirmative sense of identity. The need to heal from internalized shame demands coming to terms with one's past, including the transsexual experience, and incorporating it as meaningful and special. Elaine,\* a peer counselor for GIP, expresses her experience with this process as follows:

I am not a man who became a woman. I was never a man. I was always a woman. My experience of developing my identity as a woman differs, of course, from the experiences of non-transsexual women but is just as female and just as valid. Today, after surgery and with lots of support, I look back on all of my experiences as being part of who I am including my transsexuality. The problems I faced made me stronger and I am sensitive to the issues that all of us face, as men, as women, gay and straight. Because of my transsexuality I feel I am a better person, a more whole person and life, although not perfect, is pretty good.

There has been an overwhelming response to the Gender Identity Project in its two years of existence as part of the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center, not only in the New York metropolitan area, but via telephone and written requests for information and assistance from around the country. This outpouring confirms that there is a tremendous need for a non-judgemental, educated, affirming and *community-based* response to the needs of so many people in our society who are experiencing gender identity conflict.

*Barbara Warren is a psychologist, a consultant, and diversity trainer. She specializes in issues of addiction.*

### Author's Notes

\* Most of the names in this article are fictionalized, as indicated by an asterisk.

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# WHERE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE RAINBOW NOW?

**Carolyn Patierno**

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In 1989, the New York City Central School Board unanimously voted to create a teacher's guide outlining multicultural education in response primarily to racial unrest in the area. However, the original intention of creating this teacher's guide has become obscured by a fire storm of controversy fueled by homophobia and sexism. While a media spectacle has ensued concerning the teacher's guide, which three years after the original vote was distributed to the school community as the "Children of the Rainbow" guide, the city-wide dispute has raised some important questions about when (and to some people, *if*) children should receive information concerning sexuality in the classroom.

## **Racial Hatred Leads to "Children of the Rainbow"**

The first incident leading to the board's unanimous decision to write a multicultural education guide was the racially-motivated murder of a black man in Howard Beach, Queens. The Howard Beach Incident was the result of hatred and suspicion based in racism. A young black man was murdered by a horde of bat-wielding white youth. The second incident was similarly hate- and racially motivated and led to the death of another young black man at the hands of white youth in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. At the same time, then Chancellor Richard Green was being made aware of the escalating gay-related violence in schools, especially in New York City junior high schools. Students, perceived to be gay or lesbian, were being attacked and beaten at an alarming rate by their classmates.

A lack of mutual compassion and peaceful co-existence among young people in most New York City communities was quite evident to the school board representatives. The realization moved the central school board to request the development of a teacher's guide. Unfortunately, such honorable intentions have not stood up against the ensuing response which has ranged from parental concern, to political maneuvering, to a backlash of hatred and bigotry. The introduction of "Children of the Rainbow" backfired with fighting and faction rather than achieving a peaceful coming-together.

## **The Controversy**

The guide addressed a number of important issues toward debunking racism, sexism, and homophobia. For instance, the teacher's guide made a concerted effort to deconstruct gender stereotyping. On the suggested read-

ing list, the following titles were included: *Girls Can Be Anything*, *Mothers Can Do Anything*, *My Dad Takes Care of Me*, and *My Daddy Is a Nurse*. Interestingly, parents at various community forums objected to providing students with examples of gender representation that strayed from traditional female roles. At one particular meeting, a woman was shouted down when she expressed her hope that with the implementation of the teacher's guide her niece might receive a balanced message about career options for women.

But not surprisingly – and not unrelated to the sexist responses (see Suzanne Pharr's article in this issue) – the most volatile part of the controversy was the presentation of information about the existence of gay and lesbian lives in a lesson on families at the first grade level. The lesson was limited to encouraging teachers to respect all configurations of families, including those that are headed by gay and lesbian parents. The suggested reading list for this lesson included books like *Heather has Two Mom-mies*. Obviously, nothing sexually explicit in nature was intended. However, parents who opposed the implementation of these guidelines accused then Chancellor Joseph Fernandez of teaching their children the "how-to's of sodomy." Tactics by these opponents ranged from handing out gay pornography at community meetings as if they were components of the lesson plan to demonstration chants of "Sodomy Joe" aimed at Chancellor Fernandez. In fact, since the writing of this article, Joseph Fernandez's contract as chancellor was not renewed.

Unfortunately, not only did opponents of the Rainbow Curricula resort to such mis-guided tactics, but proponents and advocates also fell prey to fearful resistance. In fact, quite often, the defense given on behalf of "Children of the Rainbow" guide was, "This is not a sex education program!" Unfortunately, what was lost to all in these rabid debates was the fact that this guide offers learning opportunities for young people concerning human development, relationships, personal skills, health, communities, and culture. These topics are the key components of the *Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education*, published by SIECUS.

## **Missing the Vital Connections**

The most disheartening part of these event is that the vital connection between multicultural education and comprehensive sexuality education was missed by all. The

*Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education* directly address the topic of diversity. The ill effects of discrimination that result from difference are described at length. For example, developmental messages at all levels, include:

- "Discrimination can lead to lower self-esteem, unequal opportunities, and physical and emotional problems."
- "Discrimination limits a society's ability to use the full capabilities of its members."
- "People should speak up when they encounter discrimination."
- "People should try to understand and celebrate diversity."

These simple statements apply directly to multicultural education.

SIECUS staff have heard the echoes of the Rainbow conflict from different cities across the country. We have assisted communities in every part of the United States who are fighting this same battle, most often in the name of comprehensive sexuality education, but some in the name of multiculturalism, as well. Unfortunately, resistance to both kinds of education is based in fear of difference.

### **Lessons Learned**

Nonetheless, there are strategic lessons to be re-learned from this situation. It is not an insignificant reminder that homophobia, racism, and sexism are all alive and well in America. Secondly, the New York City Board of Education erred gravely by not initially including in the planning process for the guides the community of parents, teachers, students, and administrators. In presenting a new and progressive program such as the "Children of the Rainbow" guide, as is the case for comprehensive sexuality education, community involvement is imperative. In fact, it seemed the process of sharing the guidelines was not well coordinated. It was nearly impossible to obtain a copy of the 463-paged "Children of the Rainbow" teacher's guide.

In one sense the controversy was hurtful and demoralizing for advocates of multicultural education, sexuality education, and the gay and lesbian communities alike. In another sense – as is ideally the case with challenging situations – the controversy brought people of diverse backgrounds with common interests to band together in support of a principle. An organization called People About Changing Education (PACE) spear-headed an effort to rally support for the guidelines. Over 1,000 organizations and individuals signed on to a statement in support of multicultural education. These collective voices would have made a resounding impact on the fate of the Rainbow guide had they been heard prior to the guideline's release and over the din of controversy. The statement urged the Board of Education to:

involve parents and teachers in a joint comprehensive effort to promote acceptance of diversity

in every school, classroom, and language; provide teachers with training materials and ongoing support to deal sensitively with issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation; reach out to our city's many communities to explain the facts and purpose of implementing a fully inclusive multicultural program in all schools for all children; and infuse the entire curriculum with appropriate instruction to foster greater appreciation for the diversity which makes us a strong city, nation, and world.

These organizations and individuals supported the principle that all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, disability, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation deserve to be treated with respect. All individuals deserve to be safe from physical or verbal abuse based on who they are or who members of their family may be.

### **Call for a Powerful Partnership**

Certainly the proponents of comprehensive sexuality education and multicultural education could and should create a powerful partnership. Since both movements are based on the value and dignity owed to every individual, the strategies for implementing important education programs can and must be shared and strengthened.

## **CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS!!!**

Following is a schedule of upcoming themes for the *SIECUS Report*, to be published in the coming year (Volume 21). If you are interested in submitting an article, related book or video review, or a critical analysis of the issues, send a draft manuscript, by the dates specified, to SIECUS Editorial Office, 130 West 42nd Street, New York, NY 10036.

SIECUS Report, Jun/Jul 1993  
Sexuality and Aging  
*Deadline: 3/25*

SIECUS Report, Aug/Sep 1993  
Workplace Issues, including sexual harassment, gender roles and HIV/AIDS  
*Deadline: 5/1*

## **NEW STAFF**

SIECUS welcomes Mary Beth Caschetta, the new Editor-in-Chief of the *SIECUS Report*. Mary Beth, formerly the editor of *Treatment Issues*, the experimental HIV/AIDS therapies newsletter, published by Gay Men's Health Crisis, joined the staff in January. A health activist and writer and a graduate student of medical sociology and feminist theory, Mary Beth brings to the *SIECUS Report* a range of experience and view points. We look forward to having her aboard.

# ***SIECUS Fact Sheet*** ***On Comprehensive Sexuality Education***

## **SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND IDENTITY**

**S**IECUS believes that an individual's sexual orientation — whether bisexual, homosexual, or heterosexual — is an essential part of sexual health and personality. SIECUS strongly supports the right of each individual to accept, acknowledge, and live in accordance with his or her orientation. SIECUS advocates laws guaranteeing civil rights and protection to all people of all sexual orientations and

deplores all forms of prejudice and discrimination against people based on sexual orientation.

*Recent public debates on homosexuality have been distorted by homophobia, misinformation, and stereotypes about sexual orientation and identity. This fact sheet has been prepared by SIECUS staff to provide current, accurate facts to inform a more intelligent debate.*

### **Definitions of Sexuality**

- Sexual orientation is one's erotic, romantic, and affectional attraction to the same gender (sex), to the opposite gender (sex), or to both.
- Sexual identity is an inner-sense of oneself as a sexual being, including how one identifies in terms of gender and sexual orientation.
- Sexual preference is a term once used to describe sexual orientation — bisexuality, homosexuality and heterosexuality — which is now outdated because sexual orientation is no longer commonly considered to be one's conscious individual preference or choice, but is instead thought to be formed by a complicated network of social, cultural, biological, economic, and political factors.
- Homophobia is the irrational hatred and fear of lesbian and gay people that is produced by institutionalized biases in a society or culture.
- Several studies indicate that exposure to truthful information about lesbians and gay men often leads to a reduction in homophobia.<sup>1</sup>
- Heterosexism is the institutional and societal reinforcement of heterosexuality as the privileged and powerful norm.
- Neither the term heterosexuality nor the term homosexuality existed before 1890.

### **Origins and Characteristics of Sexual Orientation**

- No single scientific theory about what causes sexual orientation has been suitably substantiated. Studies to associate sexual orientation with genetic, hormonal, and environmental factors have so far been inconclusive.<sup>2</sup>
- Many interventions aimed at changing the sexual orientation of lesbians and gay men have succeeded only in reducing sexual behavior and self-esteem rather than in creating or increasing attractions to the other gender (sex).<sup>3</sup>
- It is considered ethically questionable by the professional psychological community to seek to alter through therapy a trait that is not a disorder and is

extremely important to individual identity and sexual health.<sup>4</sup>

- The American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of disorders in 1973.
- There are no current U.S. population research studies on sexual behavior, identity or orientation.
- A common false allegation leveled against many gay men and lesbians is that they are child-molesters. In fact, 95% of all reported incidents of child sexual abuse are committed by heterosexual men.<sup>5</sup>

### **Civil Liberties & Discrimination**

- Only six states in the U.S. have legislation protecting lesbian and gay people against discrimination based on sexual orientation.
- In 1992, Colorado voters approved a constitutional amendment prohibiting civil rights protection on the basis of sexual orientation, a measure which effectively invalidated the laws in several Colorado cities that did extend equal rights to lesbian and gay citizens.
- Seven states have laws banning the practice of certain sexual acts between adults of the same gender.<sup>6</sup>
- Sixteen other states plus the District of Columbia have laws banning the practice of certain sexual acts by homosexual and heterosexual couples.<sup>7</sup>
- Lesbians and gay men are the most frequent victims of hate crimes and are at least seven times more likely to be crime victims than heterosexual people.<sup>8</sup>
- At least 75% of crimes against lesbians and gay men are not reported to anyone.<sup>9</sup>
- In a 1991 study of five metropolitan areas including Boston, Chicago, Minneapolis/St. Paul, New York City, and San Francisco, there were 1,833 incidents of anti-gay and anti-lesbian crimes, which is a 31% increase over the previous year.<sup>10</sup>
- According to a 1986 survey conducted in Seattle, Washington, 40% of homeless youth identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual.<sup>11</sup>
- Half of all lesbian and gay youth report that their parents reject them due to their sexual orientation.<sup>12</sup>

- Gay adolescents are two to three times more likely to attempt suicide than male heterosexual adolescents. It is estimated that up to 30% of reported youth suicides each year are committed by lesbian and gay young people.<sup>13</sup>

### Lesbians and Gay Men in the Military

- The ban against homosexuals in the military was codified into law in 1982 by a directive of the Reagan Administration, which reads: "Homosexuality is incompatible with military service. The presence in the military environment of persons who engage in homosexual conduct or who, by their statements, demonstrate a propensity to engage in homosexual conduct, seriously impairs the accomplishment of the military mission."
- As a result of this Department of Defense (DOD) Directive (1332.14 section H.1), military personnel found to be homosexual or suspected of homosexual behavior are dismissed or discharged from their post.
- The Uniform Code of Military Justice criminalize private oral and anal sexual acts — both homosexual and heterosexual — among consenting adult members of the U.S. armed forces.
- The Pentagon estimates that from 1980 to 1990, it spent \$500 million alone replacing discharged gay and lesbian members of the armed forces. The total amount spent — including investigation, out-processing and court costs — has not been released.
- The military dismisses approximately 1,500 members each year because they are lesbian or gay.<sup>14</sup>
- Women are eight times more likely than men to be dismissed from the Marine Corps for being homosexual.<sup>15</sup>
- A 1989 military study concluded that gay men and lesbians demonstrated "preservice suitability-related adjustment that is as good or better than the average heterosexual."<sup>16</sup>
- A Gallup survey of a cross section of the American population of adults aged 18 and over showed that 57% of those interviewed felt that homosexuals should be allowed to serve in the armed forces.<sup>17</sup>
- According to a Los Angeles Times poll, 45% of Americans approve of allowing openly homosexual men and women in the armed forces.<sup>18</sup>
- According to a Yankelovich Partners, Inc. study, 57% of people polled thought that gay men and lesbians should not be banned from the military.<sup>19</sup>

### Heterosexual Men in the Military

- As many as 50 female Navy and Marine personnel were sexually assaulted in public by a dozen male officers at a convention of the Tailhook Association, an official military gathering.
- Two senior Navy admirals were forced into early retirement and one was reassigned when it was discovered that they had deliberately undermined the initial investigation of the Tailhook assaults to protect fellow Navy officers from embarrassment and criminal

charges. In addition, the Navy Secretary, H. Lawrence Garrett, resigned his position.

- Sexual harassment in the military is prohibited and regulated by codes of conduct.
- The Pentagon has not raised efforts to investigate or discharge male sexual harassers. The Pentagon has not made public the number and cost of male military personnel who are yearly discharged for sexual assault or harassment of female military personnel.

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## **GIVE BIRTH AGAIN TO THE DREAM**

**Debra Haffner, MPH**

Executive Director, SIECUS

I have been thinking a lot about symbols lately. I am joyfully expecting a second child, and in the past few weeks have begun to look undeniably pregnant. I've noticed that pregnant women seem to have a special meaning for many people. Strangers smile at me, strike up conversations, and — on a few disconcerting occasions — lean over to touch my burgeoning stomach. To some, I have become a visible symbol for motherhood, fertility, renewal, and life.

Recently I was invited to speak in a community that is struggling with a sexuality education controversy. A man who opposes sexuality education in schools said to me, "I am surprised to see that you are pregnant." I was stunned. His implication was that pro-choice women do not have children or families. I choked out a response, "I suppose you'd be surprised to know that I go to church every Sunday, too."

For too long, the far right has appropriated such important cultural symbols as motherhood, families, religion, and the Bible. It is time for progressives to vociferously take these symbols back.

As I have written in these pages before, we need to speak out for the true version of family values. We need to celebrate our own families and the wonderful diversity of families in this country. We need to support and dignify all families. We need to make it our goal that all children grow up in communities that educate, affirm, and nurture them.

It is time for us to reclaim God, religion, and the Bible. I still cringe every time I hear a representative from the Far Right say that he or she represents "God's will." I resent the names of such organizations as the Christian Coalition and the National Coalition of Christian Educators because I know they do not speak on behalf of the Christian community. Jesus' teachings in such parables as the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan are clarion calls for understanding, charity, and tolerance. Those of us who belong to an organized religion or who practice our faith individually must be willing to proclaim our faith and talk about how our religion and spirituality positively informs our understanding of human sexuality. We need to claim that right for our own integrity in the name of acceptance for all people.

I participate in a Bible study group and am just beginning to understand that many of the stories in the Bible are — as my minister says — "about us today." The Bible is a type of Rorschach test for our own issues and concerns. It is also clear to me that the fundamentalists who

claim that the Bible is to be taken literally in today's world must have a great deal of difficulty reconciling the contradictions in the text. For instance, which of the two creation stories should be taught as true? Should men with infertile wives have a child by another woman as Abraham preached? Is it preferable to give one's young daughter to a hoard of men instead of turning out two male visitors? Should we take seriously the law that "anyone who curses his father or mother must die?" Progressive people who understand metaphors and parables can take the messages and translate them into today's world.

I am optimistic that we are reclaiming America. On January 20, we closed the SIECUS office for several hours in order to watch the inauguration together as a staff. Many of us felt a renewed sense of optimism, patriotism, and pride in being a part of America. We cheered and became teary-eyed as President Clinton talked about the need to renew America, and Maya Angelou asked us to "lift up your eyes upon this day breaking for you. Give birth again to the dream." It felt to us like so many steps toward a new commitment to pluralism and diversity.

Nonetheless, the last few weeks of public debates about gays and lesbian in the military have dramatically illustrated how far we have to go. I am stunned each time I hear a public figure spew hatred and bigotry. Homosexuality may be the last bastion of this kind of blatant bigotry in American life. Misinformation and stereotypes of gay and lesbian people abound even in the liberal press. *The New York Times*, for instance, talks about sexual preference, rather than identity or orientation, and "avowed homosexuals." (Can someone be an avowed heterosexual?) During the next several months as the lifting of the ban is debated, SIECUS is committed to educating the public about sexual orientation and identity. This issue of the *SIECUS Report* is just one step in a long educational process.

President Clinton ended his inaugural address with these words:

From this joyful mountaintop of celebration, we hear a call to service in the valley. We have heard the trumpets. We have changed the guard. An now, each in our own way, and with God's help, we must answer the call.

We must reclaim America, families, and religion, as we stand and work together for tolerance, respect, diversity, and pluralism.

# PUBLIC POLICY UPDATE

## “Change is in the Air”

**Betsy Wacker and Alan E. Gambrell**

Director of Public Policy and Washington, DC Representative, SIECUS

### EXECUTIVE ORDERS

Within the first few days of his administration, President Bill Clinton issued the following key executive orders:

- *Repeal of the Gag Rule*, which prohibited pregnancy counseling from including abortion as an option for patients in federally-funded clinics.
- *Repeal of the ban on fetal tissue research from elective abortions*, which had effectively halted important scientific research.
- *Repeal of the ban on U.S. funds for international family planning programs*.
- *Repeal of the prohibition on abortions conducted in military hospitals*.
- *Repeal the ban on allowing RU-486*, the abortion pill, from being imported into the U.S.

These orders, handed down on the twentieth anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court Decision that made abortion legal in the United States, essentially restore women's rights to doctor-patient confidentiality, open the door to life-saving medical research, enable the U.S. to resume leadership in international family planning arenas, and demonstrate respect for the personal and medical needs of U.S. military families and individuals in this country and abroad.

### TRIAL BY FIRE

The volatile issue of lifting the ban on gays and lesbians in the military is proving to be a trial by fire for the new administration. While the initial questioning of recruits as to whether or not they are homosexual has now been officially prohibited, Clinton has yet to put an official end to on-going and new investigations of gay and lesbian soldiers. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have claimed that

Only one openly gay member of the military has ever been buried in an official military ceremony — Air Force Sergeant Leonard Matlovich whose headstone in the Congressional Cemetery reads: “When I was in the military they gave me a medal for killing two men and a discharge for loving one.”

President Clinton's recommendation to lift the ban completely on gay men and lesbians in the armed forces may undermine “discipline and morale,” making recruitment more difficult. Therefore, Clinton has decided to suspend his repeal of the ban for six months. During this time, he will consult with high-ranking officials in the Pentagon and the 103rd Congress. If consensus on the policy is reached, an order lifting the ban will be issued from the Oval Office. Meanwhile both support and opposition to lifting the ban has come from members of both political parties. Democrats are scrambling to put a bill together that would effectively lift the ban by congressional measure.

The entire controversy has brought into focus several false issues, and SIECUS has put together a question/answer segment to help illuminate the matter:

**Do gays and lesbians in the armed forces put a potential strain on military spending?** No. In fact, prohibiting investigations that hunt down gay and lesbian soldiers (mostly women, who are more likely to be discharged for being homosexual) would cut spending significantly. The Pentagon estimates that last decade it spent nearly \$500 million replacing gay and lesbian armed forces personnel who had been dismissed. The sad fact is that records show that many of the gay and lesbian soldiers discharged had stellar military records and were known to be excellent at their jobs.

**Do gays and lesbians in the armed forces threaten sexual ethics of the military?** No. Much of the unethical sexual behavior in the military involves the harassment, violence, and rape of female military personnel and suspected gay and lesbian soldiers. An equal code of sexual ethics for all people in the military — heterosexual and homosexual — would be extremely beneficial. Much of the debate around this issue is based on the false assumption that a gay or lesbian identity can be reduced to sexual activity only and that gay and lesbian people are interested in “recruiting” heterosexuals to a gay lifestyle.

**Do gays and lesbians in the armed forces endanger the lives of heterosexual soldiers because they carry HIV, the virus that can cause AIDS?** The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a virus that affects all human beings. People become infected with the virus through unprotected anal and vaginal intercourse or by

sharing unclean needles, in other words, by behaviors that can be modified, and not by virtue of sexual identity or orientation. People do not become HIV-positive by being gay or lesbian or by sharing a military quarters with someone who is gay or lesbian.

**What do Americans think about gays and lesbians in the military?** According to a Los Angeles Times poll, 45% of Americans approved of allowing openly homosexual men and women in the armed forces. According to a Yankelovich survey a majority, in fact, fifty-seven percent of those polled, thought that gays should not be banned from the military.

On December 10, SIECUS sent a letter to then President-elect Bill Clinton urging a repeal of the ban on gay and lesbian people and the establishment of an anti-discrimination educational program for armed services personnel. SIECUS also joined the Military Freedom Project a coalition of national organizations calling for a repeal of the ban, education of service personnel on sexual diversity, the repeal of all uniform Code of Military Justice Laws which criminalize some private sexual behaviors, like oral-genital and anal contact, among consenting adults in the military.

#### **MOBILIZING FOR CHANGE**

While the Far Right is mobilizing against the very first winds of change, progressive leaders have kicked into action with a strong commitment toward coalition and collaboration. On January 14, the People for the American Way convened over one-hundred progressive representatives to assess the political climate, including an in-depth examination of the defeats and victories of both sides. Sexuality education, gay and lesbian rights, reproductive choice and other important topics were placed high on the agenda. A campaign to "shine the light" on the Far Right to beat extremism and tolerance emerged triumphantly. Strategies that exemplify such exposure include the efforts to uncover the Far Right's "San Diego Model," a plan by fundamentalist church voters in which candidates for the school board were instructed to hide their extremist affiliation in order to be elected. The meeting also revealed that the mainstream faction of the Republican Party seems to be fighting back for power. One representative of the Republican Party claimed that many were eager to take back the party which had become embraced by the Religious Right, Moral Majority, and Jerry Falwell after the 1970 Watergate Scandal. The meeting expressed a renewed energy and faith in a long future of powerful organizing.

**Anti-Gay Scout Policy:** The Boy Scouts of America has an unacceptable national policy which bans gay men from being Scout leaders and gay youth from becoming scouts. The discriminatory statement claims that the organization exists "to meet the needs of mainstream American Families, to provide leadership skills, self-determination, and all the values and qualities that people have come to expect of the Boy Scouts." SIECUS and some members of the National Coalition to Support Sexuality Education will be forwarding letters to the Boy Scouts' na-

tional office to express disapproval of their discriminatory stance. Write to the following address to register your disapproval:

Mr. Jere B. Ratcliffe  
Chief Scout Executive  
Boy Scouts Of America  
P.O. Box 152079  
Irving, TX 75015-2079.

**The Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA) (H.R. 25, s. 25):** The first day of Congress, Representative Don Edwards (D-CA) and 15 co-sponsors reintroduced a measure to codify the core principles of Roe V. Wade by establishing fundamental constitutional protection for a woman's right to choose abortion. The following week Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-ME) and 39 co-sponsors introduced the same measure in the Senate. Both bills are scheduled to move quickly. SIECUS has joined the National Pro-Choice Coalition to mobilize support for these measures.

**The Reproductive Health Equity Act (H.R. 26):** This bill, introduced by Representative Vic Fazio (D-CA), will ensure that women can obtain abortion services and care in a number of federally-funded programs, including: Medicaid, Health Care Programs for federal government and military personnel; District of Columbia residents; the Peace Corps; Programs for federal penal and correctional institutions; and Native Americans under federal medical care. Since the bill essential overturns federal funding restrictions on abortion, a long appropriations process for each is likely to ensue.

#### **HELP LIFT THE BAN!**

SIECUS urges a complete lifting of the ban against gay men and lesbians in the military. The Uniform Code of Military Justice Laws must be written to emphasize that military are expected to engage in private consensual, non-exploitative, equitable, and responsible sexual acts only. Anti-discrimination training and technical support must be available throughout the military after the ban is lifted.

Individuals can register support for the lifting of the ban and disapproval of homophobic policies by calling the following committees and people:

Senate Switchboard	(202) 224-3207
House of Representatives Switchboard	(202) 225-6514
Pentagon Opinion Line	(202) 697-5737
White House Switchboard	(202) 456-1414
House Armed Services Committee	(202) 225-4151
Senate Armed Services Committee	(202) 224-3871