

A NOTE ABOUT THIS PDF REPRINT

The continuing interest in this modest 108-page book from 1974 as a historical document of early gay and lesbian activism led to making this pdf reprint for easy, free access on the internet in early 2021.

A second printing in 1975 used a different cover stock, but without changes in the text. The original booklets were saddle-stapled with a trim size of 5.5 by 8.5 inches. This reprint was scanned from a copy of the first printing. I had edited the original collection as well as doing all the typesetting and the paste-ups for the printer.

For historical context on the inaugural Gay Academic Union conference and this record of its formal proceedings, see an essay by John D'Emilio, who had also written the introduction to this booklet, at

<https://outhistory.org/exhibits/show/gau-conference/intro> .

HINTS ON PRINTING A COPY

The original pages are single pages here and, if printed that way, you get a large, more legible text. If you use Adobe to print two pages on one, you have a replica that is close in size to the original and remains legible for most readers.

Bert Hansen

January 21, 2021

www.berthansen.com

THE UNIVERSITIES AND THE GAY EXPERIENCE

A CONFERENCE SPONSORED BY
THE WOMEN AND MEN OF THE
GAY ACADEMIC UNION

GAY ACADEMIC UNION

Statement of Purpose

As gay men and women and as scholars we believe we must work for liberation as a means for change in our own lives and in the communities in which we find ourselves. We choose to do this collectively for we know that no individual, alone, can liberate herself or himself from society's oppression.

The work of gay liberation in the scholarly and teaching community centers around five tasks which we now undertake:

1. to oppose all forms of discrimination against all women within academia,
2. to oppose all forms of discrimination against gay people within academia,
3. to support individual academics in the process of coming out,
4. to promote new approaches to the study of the gay experience,
5. to encourage the teaching of gay studies throughout the American educational system.

We assert the interconnection between personal liberation and social change. We seek simultaneously to foster our self-awareness as individuals and, by applying our professional skills, to become the agency for a critical examination of the gay experience that will challenge those generalizations supporting the current oppression. We are people with a variety of life experiences and institutional affiliations, and we represent a diversity of academic disciplines. Our hope is that by pooling our experiences and sharing our expertise, we will be able to begin the arduous job of challenging the sexist myths that now dominate public discourse and influence private association.

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AND THE
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*Proceedings
of the Conference
Sponsored by the
Women and Men of the
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Introduction



Introduction

John D'Emilio

Gay liberation, the youngest of the movements for social change to emerge in the 1960's, exploded into life on a summer evening in June, 1969. The New York City police had raided a gay bar, the Stonewall, a common enough event in the gay world. But on that night, the gays at the scene in Greenwich Village fought back. With rocks, bottles and other street weapons they forcefully challenged police intrusion into their way of life.

The Stonewall Riot, and the flurry of activity and organizing which quickly followed, caught both the gay world and straight society by surprise. A political movement appeared seemingly full-grown yet without apparent roots. In fact, however, a homophile movement had existed for almost two decades before Stonewall, and the cultural, social and political ferment of the 1960's had created a setting in which gay liberation might emerge and thrive. The current movement, and, indeed, the place of the Gay Academic Union within it, is understandable only within that context.

Among minorities gay women and men have faced a unique set of problems in confronting an oppressive society: their identity as a group has remained invisible and unknown, and the social taboos against homosexual behavior have extended even to the public discussion of it. As long as such conditions prevailed, the requisites for a viable political movement were lacking.

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These circumstances changed markedly during the 1940's and early 1950's, as homosexual behavior became a matter of public concern, no longer restricted in its discussion to the pages of medical and psychiatric journals. During World War II the Army and Navy instituted for the first time systematic psychiatric screening of inductees to weed out the mentally unfit; homosexual behavior and tendencies were, of course, categorized as undesirable. Although few members of the armed forces received exemptions or dismissals under this provision, gay men, and to an extent gay women, were made explicitly aware that their sexual preferences rendered them somehow unfit to serve their country.

Such open disapproval intensified as Cold War tensions led to the appearance of McCarthyism as a political force in America. The search for a scapegoat for our foreign policy failures pushed the more demagogic elements in national politics to an attack upon "sexual perverts" in government. Slandorous speeches on the floor of the Senate, congressional investigations into government hiring policies, security classifications, and the dismissal and blacklisting of foreign service officials by the score, highlighted the precariousness of being gay. The cloak of invisibility surrounding society's gay minority was slowly lifting, but at the cost of greater sanctions and a tightening circle of oppression.

Other social forces were, meanwhile, circumscribing the lives of lesbian women. After the disrupting effects of almost two decades of depression and war on family life, Americans in the postwar period were stampeding toward the security of marriage. The popular press, including women's magazines, extolled the virtues of childrearing and downgraded the importance, and even the appropriateness, of a career outside the home for women. Even though their participation in the labor force remained high, women worked more often than not to supplement family income rather than as a means to financial and personal freedom. As social disapproval of the independent career woman mounted, the lesbian woman whose preferences inclined her to a life-style independent of men found herself in an increasingly difficult position.

In this setting of blatant hostility and diminishing options, gay women and men began for the first time to organize. The early 1950's witnessed the tentative beginnings of three homophile organizations on the West Coast: Mattachine, Daughters of Bilitis, and One, Inc. The impulse behind their formation was not, to be sure, purely defensive, nor was it a sign of desperation. For in the midst of pervasive social condemnation, lesbian women and gay men at last possessed a weapon which had dramatically broken through the doors of silence and opened a pathway to change.

The Kinsey studies of male and female sexual behavior were both novel and startling: their method was unprecedented and their findings unanticipated. A team of highly trained natural and behavioral scientists, using the technique of face-to-face interviewing, had obtained the sexual histories of

several thousand Americans from every geographic region and along the whole spectrum of economic and social status. The reports were widely discussed in both scholarly journals and the popular press; Kinsey became a household word. His findings were significant in many respects, but nowhere more so than in the area of homosexual behavior among males and females. For Kinsey found that both in incidence and as a percentage of total sexual outlet, sexual activity between members of the same gender was far more extensive than anyone had believed. And in the rating of individuals along a heterosexual-homosexual continuum, Kinsey suggested a fluidity to human sexuality that defenders of traditional morality could only have considered shocking.

Armed with the knowledge that their sexual orientation was neither unusual nor, as Kinsey emphasized, "unnatural," the first members of the early homophile organizations embarked upon their work. Societal attitudes militated against too public a course of action, but among themselves gays discussed their common problems and began verbalizing their hopes for social change. By the early 1960's DOB and Mattachine had spread to the East Coast, and in Washington, D.C., public acts of protest were being conducted by Mattachine members against federal employment policies. The growing number of gay groups formed a loose coalition, the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations. At annual conventions, NACHO representatives shared ideas, debated tactics, and formulated goals.

Growth was slow, however, and expectations remained limited; after almost two decades, the homophile movement's impact on both the larger society and the gay subculture was hardly discernible. The Stonewall Riot and the sudden burgeoning of gay liberation thus caught everyone by surprise. What had happened to push an invisible and fragmented minority (stigmatized, harassed, and also extremely vulnerable to attack) to persistently demand recognition and acceptance?

Gay liberation offers revealing insights into the dynamics of social change, into how the struggle of an oppressed group for recognition does not occur in a vacuum but is dependent upon other forces at work in society. The 1960's was one of the most tumultuous decades in America's history: social attitudes and cultural forms were sharply criticized and the political order attacked. Without revealing themselves, gay women and men participated in and were affected by these events. As antiwar activists and student radicals, they defied the police in the streets and on the campuses. As counterculture adherents they eagerly embraced life-styles sharply at odds with the dominant mode. As Afro-Americans stigmatized by skin color, they transformed the mark of their oppression into a symbol of pride and self-assertion. And as feminists they challenged traditional sex roles and long-established notions of femininity and masculinity. Equality, justice and the freedom to be different became rallying cries for those who felt

alienated from the American mainstream. As the decade drew to a close, gay Americans joined the ranks of protest and expressed their demands for change.

That gay liberation was, to a certain extent, spawned by earlier protest movements is apparent in the rhetoric, style and tactics of its early years. The Gay Liberation Front, the first of the militant organizations, attempted to reach decisions consensually, in New Left style, after full and open debate. "The personal is political" and "Gay is good" were articles of faith. GLF adopted the tactics of confrontation while also asserting solidarity with the struggles of other oppressed groups. Never national in its structure, autonomous GLF chapters were, nonetheless, formed on college campuses and in cities across the country.

The politics of GLF were too radical, however, for it to attract many segments of the gay community; it was not long before some of its members separated to form an organization of another sort. The Gay Activists Alliance, while also militant in its espousal of confrontation tactics, eschewed involvement with other political issues and movements. It was a one-issue organization, concerned solely with attaining full acceptance for gays in American society. GAA was also local in structure. Gays in a number of cities, though they adopted the name, remained independent.

In just a few short years GLF, GAA, and a host of other gay liberation groups accomplished much. Through their public acts of protest they ended the invisibility of the nation's largest unrecognized minority and threw before a public reluctant to be disabused of its prejudices a new image of gayness. For many in the gay community, the movement offered an opportunity to discard the mask of secrecy and shed the self-hatred generated by a hostile society. Gay women and men in large numbers were for the first time taking pride in being different.

Diversity was the movement's hallmark, a crucial factor in attracting adherents and stimulating political action on a variety of fronts. Yet diverse as the gay liberation and homophile organizations were, they by and large shared one important characteristic: their membership was composed of individuals acting publicly to win acceptance of their private life-style. The gay activist of whatever persuasion was working with others on the basis of a common sexual orientation.

Herein lies the significance of the Gay Academic Union. In a real sense GAU represents a new plateau in the gay movement—gay women and men struggling together around their place of work. (I do not mean to suggest here that GAU is either the first or the only organization of this sort; merely that it is but one example of a trend discernible in several occupational areas.) If the gay activist experiences a sense of liberation through the public avowal of gayness, imagine the heightened exhilaration felt when the espousal of one's gay identity takes place within the context of one's life work, when private self and public role come together, and the relevance

and connectedness of one to the other is asserted and acted upon.

Exhilaration is, perhaps, too weak a word. It only faintly expresses the shared feelings of those who attended the initial GAU meetings. The organization came into being almost by accident; the first meeting was not really a meeting at all. On a Saturday afternoon late in March 1973, seven men and one woman—college faculty, graduate students, a writer and a director, all gay—gathered informally in a Manhattan apartment. We were mostly strangers to each other. We were all interested in discussing problems encountered in doing research. We came from a variety of academic disciplines. Some of us had done research in what might broadly be construed as gay studies while others were virtually untutored. Our conversation ranged widely. We talked in highly personal terms of the difficulties of being gay in a university setting, how we coped with being in the closet, if that were the case, or what sort of reaction coming out had engendered. A couple of people had taught or were preparing to teach gay-oriented courses and the rest of us listened with interest to their classroom experiences and the hassles involved in obtaining administration approval for such courses. Perhaps most enlightening, however, was the discovery that our academic training, regardless of discipline or particular research interests, allowed each of us to contribute something of substance, some insight, to the discussion. Ideas bounced about the room; we fed off each other intellectually. Several hours of stimulating talk—the afternoon passed quickly that Saturday—had created a quite tangible sense of kinship among us. We had encountered a large measure of commonality in our personal experiences and aspirations and an exciting complementarity in our professional skills.

We resolved to meet again in two weeks, to continue from where we had unwillingly left off. At the second gathering our numbers had doubled. Informally we had passed on to our gay academic friends a description of the first meeting that awakened interest and appealed to deeply-felt needs. Indeed, throughout the spring and summer, as our biweekly sessions continued, new faces kept appearing. By the fourth meeting there was a pervasive awareness that as gay teachers, scholars and writers, we could contribute to the gay movement and to our own liberation by organizing in a formal way.

Something very special happened that summer as the Gay Academic Union slowly took shape. My life, and the lives of many of the other active participants, changed fundamentally. We did not merely create another gay activist organization. Slowly, and at times painfully, we raised our consciousness as gays as we grappled with the inevitable political issues involved in forming GAU.

The spirit of those first months was not entirely fortuitous. It owed much to the setting in which we met, to our previous background in the gay movement, and of course to the fact that we were academics. Gathering

in the apartments of members, we avoided the rigidified atmosphere of sterile meeting halls with their straight-backed chairs. We spread ourselves in circular fashion around a living room, sprawling on the floor, sitting on window sills, leaning against walls. The physical arrangement militated against anyone being thrust, willingly or not, into a position of leadership. Few of us, moreover, had had any previous experience in gay politics. We were novices without a fixed and unbending political stance, articulating and working out for the first time the politics of being gay. Our shared ignorance saved us from one deadly peril. We ranged in status from first-year graduate students to chaired professors and department chairpersons. Surely it was an ideal setting in which to pull rank, yet it never happened. An abiding respect for the opinions of others suffused our sessions. We listened patiently for we recognized, I think, that in our untutored state we all had something to learn.

And, of course we were academics. The verbal nitpicking for which we are famous at last served us well. No statement went unquestioned; no idea escaped merciless scrutiny. GAU's statement of purpose which, when read today, seems a model of clarity and simplicity, took six weeks of prolonged discussion before it was finally approved. We debated the relative merits of the terms "homosexual" and "gay." We agonized over whether explicitly to include bisexuals in it; whether concerned heterosexuals should be made welcome; what precisely would constitute "new approaches" to the study of the gay experience; whether gay studies was, really, a valid concept.

In retrospect the earnestness with which some of these questions were considered appears somewhat excessive, but the entire process was invaluable. For the painstaking, often tedious, debate which characterized our meetings led not merely to the careful articulation of personal positions but also to a deeply-felt sharing, a sense of cooperative effort, of collective accomplishment. We learned a lot about ourselves and a lot about each other. We came to trust one another as friends of long-standing.

Nowhere was this process more fully played out than in the debates over sexism, feminism, and whether GAU could accomodate meaningfully the needs of both lesbian women and gay men. The questions were hardly new ones. One could easily write the history of the homophile/gay-liberation movement as a story of male and female separatism. Few, if any, gay organizations have witnessed the equal participation of women and men. Gay men clearly share here more with their heterosexual counterparts than they care to admit. Raised as men in a male-dominated culture they have incorporated the sexist attitudes which perpetuate the caste-like status of women in America. Rarely do gay men understand that the lesbian's oppression stems as much from her womanhood as from her gayness; rarely do they couple their expectations for lesbian cooperation in the gay movement with a commitment to women-related issues; rarely do gay men appreciate the interconnectedness of the feminist struggle against tradi-

tional sex roles and rigid gender identification and the gay male's fight for acceptance. Of all the political issues debated in GAU, feminism aroused the most passion.

From the start GAU was overwhelmingly male in membership; until August, there were never more than three women at any meeting. While proclaiming our intention to create an organization for men and women, we (the men) found ingenuous explanations for the persistent and rather glaring absence of women: women were underrepresented in the academic community; most lesbian academics were probably committing their energy to the women's movement; word-of-mouth recruitment of new members, a temporary phenomenon until we were better organized, perpetuated the numerical preponderance of males. Our rationalizations contained just the degree of plausibility to allow us to retain our illusions. But we could not banish the problem entirely. At virtually every meeting the women in GAU challenged the chauvinism of the men. And some of the men were finally confronting a most unpleasant fact: the few women who did attend a meeting rarely returned beyond a second time.

In mid-August we at last decided to devote an entire meeting to the problem of sexism among gay men and how to assure the equal participation of women in GAU. The session began with testimony from a man and a woman, the one describing the subtle ways in which his own male behavior often proved oppressive of women, the other describing the particular problems she faced as a lesbian woman. We then broke into small groups randomly chosen to discuss the issues and to devise concrete proposals for the general meeting to debate. The outcome was revealing. For while each of the groups expressed the hope that women would come to feel welcome in GAU, only one, in which three of the six participants were women, had specific recommendations. (To this day I do not know whether the statistically improbable concentration of women in one group was fortuitous or whether, as I suspect, it reflected the shrewdness which the underdog must cultivate to survive.) Their resolutions were provocative: 1) that our statement of purpose be amended to include as our *first* goal, "to oppose all forms of discrimination against all women in academia," and 2) that regardless of their numerical inferiority, women in GAU should have 50 percent of the voting power.

Debate on the first proposal took place that night. It was heated and impassioned, and carried us beyond midnight. Many of the men reacted as if their lifeblood were being tapped. GAU was being transformed, they charged, from a gay to a feminist organization. What relevance did many women's issues have to gay oppression? Why should gays support the feminist movement when many women's groups were so hostile to gays?

The women, with the support of some men, responded patiently and persuasively. The two movements were intimately connected, they argued. As long as women were relegated to a second-class position in society, the

root cause of the gay male's oppression—sexism—would remain. As long as the notion persisted that women were inferior to men, then gay men, whose love for other men was branded "womanly" or "effeminate" by the dominant culture, would remain oppressed.

The women presented their case well. It took several hours but when the resolution came to a vote enough of the men had been persuaded of its cogency for it to pass by a substantial majority. Exhaustion ruled out debate on the second recommendation; it was deferred to the following meeting.

That next meeting almost ruptured GAU irreparably. The proposal was defeated. It was too stark an assault upon the almost reflexive allegiance to democratic structures; it was asking too much to expect that forty men would diminish their voting power to equal that of six women. In its stead a compromise was adopted, acceptable to the women, which created a much-needed steering committee, empowered to plan the agenda for meetings and to make interim decisions, with equal male and female representation. Although the final outcome was satisfying, however, the tenor of the debate was appalling. Quite a few of the men in GAU had already accepted, intellectually, the women's position. But sexism goes beyond intellect. For men's commitment to feminist goals to have substance to it, we (the men) had to get in touch with those attitudes and feelings so deeply bred that they are scarcely noticed. The women could not do it for us; it had to come from ourselves.

During the evening's debate some of the men, through the flagrant sexism of their remarks, unwittingly held up a mirror in which others could glimpse themselves. It was impossible not to squirm with embarrassment at statements like "Some of my best friends are women, but I'm not going to let them take over my organization," or "I've marched for feminist causes, but this is a gay organization." It was a humbling experience! Shocked out of their sexist complacency a large group of men in GAU were now prepared to make an earnest effort in support of the women's view. They also realized that in this sensitive area men had to be willing, at times, to surrender their prerogative of independent judgment and admit that others were wiser than they.

GAU had taken a major step in the right direction. But the problem of membership remained. As long as recruitment came informally by word-of-mouth, the numerical preponderance of men would continue and with it the danger of a slipping into old ways. We expected a solution to come from a conference being planned for Thanksgiving weekend. It was advertised widely in newspapers and periodicals and publicized through gay and feminist organizations. What would be the response?

A conference! The decision to hold one had been made simultaneously with the determination to form the Gay Academic Union. We were all veterans of academic conventions, those tedious assemblages where dry scholarship is disseminated among dried-out people. How appropriate for

us to take this worn-out form and remake it into a celebration of gayness! The conference would be our coming out.

Planning began early in July; Thanksgiving weekend was the time chosen. We had but four months in which to find a place, sketch out a program, select speakers. The work was done by an open committee of volunteers, forever expanding as our tasks increased, meeting more frequently as November approached. In many ways the conference committee mirrored GAU as a whole. The same spirit permeated our meetings; a similar patience characterized our debates; every decision was painstakingly made.

We easily agreed that a university was the most suitable setting. After being rebuffed by a number of major schools in New York, we obtained the facilities of the City University's John Jay College of Criminal Justice (a precious irony). Other questions required more discussion: Should heterosexual scholars be invited to participate? Do we aim for celebrities to enhance our media appeal? Should we rely only upon our own membership for speakers?

We dismissed the idea of inviting anyone who was not gay to participate. Although there were straight scholars in a number of fields whose work lacked the biases of a heterosexual value-system, we felt strongly that it was important for us, as gays, to delineate our own critique of the prevailing wisdom and suggest our own alternatives. Rejected, too, was the celebrity path. It ran contrary to the implicit respect in which we held each other for us to grovel in search of media scholars to legitimize our endeavor. No. We would plan our program first and then select those individuals, whether renowned or not, most capable of meeting our needs. In some cases we were to draw upon our own membership; in others, we had to search elsewhere.

GAU's purposes reflected both personal and professional concerns: combatting discrimination, mutual support in coming out, encouraging unbiased scholarship and the teaching of gay studies. A conference program mixing sessions of the whole and small discussion groups evolved which integrated all of these goals. The first day's panel was entitled "Scholarship and the Gay Experience." Our intention was to focus on the ways in which scholarly activity had contributed to the oppression of gays and to suggest alternative avenues of thought. We were not looking for meticulously footnoted research papers; rather we sought speakers who would cover a generous chunk of intellectual territory. The sciences, religion, education, literature, and the social sciences were the scope of the panel. Following it we scheduled informal workshops led by GAU members along disciplinary lines in which gays of similar interests might meet and talk.

We deliberately oriented the first sessions around "scholarly" concerns. Attendance at the conference for many, we reasoned, would be their first public act as gays, and we ought, therefore, to usher them in on familiar

ground. We hoped to offer an atmosphere conducive enough to relaxed interaction so that by the following day personal concerns could be discussed freely. "Coming Out in the University," the second day's panel, was to be an experience of a different sort. Here we asked speakers to talk more directly about their gayness; about their decisions to come out, or the need to keep passing; about the reaction of students and colleagues, both positive and negative; about the changes which coming out effected in their lives. We assembled a panel whose members ranged from undergraduate to full professor and whose institutional affiliations ran the gamut from prestigious urban universities to rural colleges. Again, after the panel we scheduled smaller group discussions where each of us could talk about coming out.

The mood of the conference committee oscillated. Overcome with enthusiasm at times, we projected hordes of gay academics pouring out of the closet and into our conference. How would we accomodate the crowds of eager scholars? Or we quaked at the prospect of panelists speaking to an empty auditorium. Neither extreme materialized. We attracted a group of about three hundred, a perfect fit for the facilities we had available. And the conference was, by all standards, a resounding success. The ebullient spirit which made GAU and planned the conference was infectious. Three hundred gay academics, women and men, working together, sharing ideas, feeling good, and proud to be gay!

The following pages are an attempt to share that experience with you. Unfortunately we can only partially recreate it. The committee vetoed any taping of the workshops and other small groups, believing that it might inhibit free and open discussion. What follows then are transcripts of the keynote addresses, the two panels, and a summary of the women's caucus. In a sense, even these are incomplete. Characteristic of the panels was a dynamic interchange between speaker and audience. There was no way, however, to transcribe effectively outbursts of laughter and applause, or the subtle intonations of voice suggestive of irony, passion, confusion, etc. But we hope, nonetheless, that you will share through your reading some sense of the Gay Academic Union and the people who have made it what it is, and a better understanding of "the universities and the gay experience." □

Part I

The Opening Session

Welcoming Remarks

Richard Gustafson

Welcome to the first conference of gay academic people in the history of civilization. Little did those eight or so of us who met last spring in a small apartment here in New York City imagine that your response to our hope would be so overwhelming and indeed so encouraging. I trust that your experiences here today and tomorrow will be as meaningful as your presence is momentous.

Throughout history gay academics, like all gay people, have been invisible and isolated: today we are very visible and at last together. Indeed as we proceed through these two days, let us make this our theme: if what distinguishes us from all other oppressed groups is our invisibility and what distinguishes us from all other minority groups is our isolation, then we as gay academic people must seek to overcome this invisibility, both in our daily lives and in the books which ignore us, and to conquer our isolation by *working* together to change our world and its ideas so that we can *be* together. No more shall we let others annihilate us by silence; nor shall we any longer hide ourselves. No more shall we let fear divide us one from the other; nor shall we reject each other with that self-contempt we have been taught. To come out is to become human.

The universities in our world are custodians of human culture and the major factories of new knowledge: we educate the young and carry on the work of the mind. How many gay people have participated in this human endeavor throughout history we will never know, but what we do know is

Richard Gustafson, an active member and one of the founders of the Gay Academic Union, is Professor of Russian and Chairperson of the Russian Department at Barnard College. He is author of several scholarly articles and books, including The Inauguration of Spring, and is currently writing a book on Tolstoy. Gustafson has also taught a course at Barnard on homosexual themes in literature.

that today many gay people all over the world are partaking in this human and hopefully humanizing work. The world must know, as indeed we must too, what our role in culture and education has been, is, and will be. To accomplish this we must put a stop to the shoddy theories which pretend to explain us and the shady images which pretend to represent us. We must write our history and each of us tell our story. It is up to us today to begin this task of uncovering and discovering ourselves. Yet we cannot do this singly or silently. Rather we must stand together before all, before professors and administrators, publishers and editors, parents and students, legislators and legislated, saying: "We are here; we will not go away."

At this time I should like to make one point of policy. At this conference we would like to ask people to de-sex their language. You have all no doubt heard at least some of the many debates about sexist language, that is, language which makes a distinction by gender when such a distinction is irrelevant or language which generalizes references to people by the use of words referring only to one gender, usually masculine. Instead of "he," let us say "she or he," instead of "chairman" and "manpower," "chairperson" and "human resources."

As academics, we should be particularly sensitive to this question, especially prepared to understand the seriousness of this issue. Unfortunately many academics, however, have argued against changing our usage, believing that they are saving the world, thereby, from the barbarians. But language, of course, is always changing. In fact technically, as linguists, we could see any given language as a set of systems in conflict with each other; from this conflict arises change, the creation of new systems, then new conflicts, and new systems, on and on. At the present moment in modern English the established system of pronoun references, for example, is in conflict with our changing understanding of gender words in the language. The reason for this is obvious to all. But we cannot attempt to hold on to the old ways. Language simply does not work that way, and for reasons again quite clear to the linguists. A language, according to the science of semiotics, is a model of the world. Inherent in its patterns and vocabulary is a vision of reality. Yet a person uses this language to express herself or himself. The self-expression then also creates the vision of reality. Because of this dialectical relationship between the signifier and the signified, no one can claim that their words do not reflect their personal beliefs, but just traditional usage, nor can anyone claim that traditional usage does not reflect a vision of the world. To use sexist language is to be a sexist.

Now change does not occur overnight and old gods don't shake habits so easily. We all can make mistakes, because we are all still sexists, however much we might like to believe otherwise. I do not guarantee that I shall not slip myself. What we are asking of this conference is that people make a conscious effort to change their verbal ways. No one who has any knowledge of the function will believe you, if you don't. □

Keynote Address

Martin Duberman

A seemingly absurd phrase has been haunting me since I began to prepare these welcoming remarks several weeks ago. That phrase is: "Honored Rabbi, dear parents, relatives and friends . . ." It's the opening line of a speech I delivered at age 13 to the congregation of Sinai Temple gathered for my *bar mitzvah*, the ceremony in the Jewish religion that marks the rite of passage to manhood.

When the "honored rabbi" phrase first popped into my head, I laughed at it, thought it bizarre—typical of the way disaffiliated, inappropriate images continually break into the logical processes that we like to believe dominate our minds and lives. Then, at some later point, I realized that the phrase was not inappropriate, that like many "illogical" intrusions it had managed to make connective sense out of feelings and events widely separated in time.

For today, too, is a rite of passage. Not for me alone, but for us together; not into manhood or womanhood as those states have been

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traditionally defined; not sanctified by supernatural doctrine; not blue-printed by centuries of ritualized behavior; not greeted by kinship rejoicing and social acceptance; not marked by the extension of fellowship into the established adult community.

Yet today's rites of passage are of great significance—for the society at large, as well as for us. For what we're saying here today is that we do not accept standard formulas for gender identification and standard norms for sexuality. We're saying instead what Herbert Marcuse suggested some fifteen years ago in his book *Eros and Civilization*. Namely, that so-called "sexual perversion" could be the cutting edge of rebellion against "The subjugation of sexuality under the order of procreation, and against the institutions which guarantee this order." In protesting genital tyranny, in rejecting the notion that same-gender love and lust affront the laws of nature, we are placing ourselves in the forefront of the newest and, to my mind, most far-reaching revolution: the re-characterization of human sexuality.

It is in this spirit that I welcome you: not simply as fellow gay women and men, but as fellow revolutionaries.

This two-day conference inaugurates an effort to integrate the truths of our personal and professional lives. This is *not* the first time gay men and women have stood up publicly to declare themselves. It is *not* the first time they have united for common purposes. Many—like Barbara Gittings, who sits here on the platform—have for years battled against antediluvian laws and customs and worked to restore the confidence of those damaged by generations of residence in a homophobic society. And they did their work with far fewer comrades and faced with a far more hostile social climate than is currently the case.

But though we are not pioneers in the struggle to build consciousness and to win civil rights, our coming together today does nonetheless signify an historic, perhaps unique moment: the point in time when gay women and men decided, on a large scale, to organize themselves around their professional activities, to use their professional skills and identities in the fight against sexism—their skills as sociologists, biologists, historians, et cetera, their identities as scholars, educators and students. Our personal experience provides the sensitivity, our professional expertise the tools, for taking on the function of critical philosophy that Herbert Marcuse envisioned for us.

This conference, we hope, marks the beginning of the long march through those particular academic disciplines and institutions with which we find ourselves affiliated. Marching is notoriously hard work. And institutions are notoriously resistant. Neither dedication nor competence, moreover, guarantees success. In the short run, they probably guarantee heightened resistance. Because we challenge the exclusive heterosexual lifestyle by which the majority in this country all-at-once defines biologic

truth, social necessity and personal essence, our work will be difficult and frustrating. Because we are asserting our own worth and our special perspective, the work can be gratifying and joyful.

Self-worth, however, is not a function of self-congratulation. If we mean seriously to challenge sexual stereotypes, we cannot assume *any* automatic truths. If we wish to inaugurate a profound debate on sexuality, we cannot set the topics or terms, nor announce in advance the nature of the conclusions. Nor can we afford to dismiss out of hand information or arguments that might discomfit our own theoretical models—we cannot, that is, if “liberation” is to be more than a slogan, and “revolution” more than a posture.

I think particularly here of the recent findings of Dr. Ingeborg Ward, the Vanderbilt University scientist, suggesting that prenatal hormonal influences affect postnatal sexual behavior. Her hypothesis may outrage those among us who are convinced that cultural diversity is a sufficient explanation for sexual diversity. It may also outrage those among us who reject any discussion of causality as tantamount to a political betrayal.

But if we are, as we like to claim, “critical intelligences,” then we must make good our claim. We’re right to insist that heterosexuality, as well as homosexuality, needs explaining; but that means broadening the inquiry, not putting an end to it. We’re right to insist that if some day sexual behavior *is* shown to have a hormonal or genetic component, we will have gained insight only into *how* certain patterns get formed, not whether a particular pattern is “good” or “bad.” The latter is a moral judgment and reflects social mores; it hinges on cultural, not scientific, imperatives. It is up to us to make that distinction clear but not to prevent or discount the research that makes such distinctions necessary. It’s our function as students, scholars and teachers to re-evaluate current evidence and to provide new evidence, but it can never be our function to suppress evidence—not under the most severe ideological pressure nor in the name of the most sublime political advantage.

The potential role we might play as scholars and critics is the subject of this first day’s panel and workshops. But I’d like to say a few words as well about tomorrow’s topics, “Coming Out in the University.”

I realize, of course, that everyone has to decide this matter in terms of his or her own timetable and circumstances—and absolutely free from external coercion. I realize, too, that my own experience in coming out may be of limited use to others. As a tenured full professor teaching in a New York City school, I operated, as it were, out of a maximum-security situation. Knowing my experience may be untypical, I want to speak with great caution about what I take to be the risks and gains of coming out.

There *are* risks. First, there’s the risk of losing jobs or never being hired for them—a particularly potent consideration in today’s desperate job

market. I doubt very much if I would have come out if I hadn't had job security; and I can only say that I'm in awe of the courage of those students and untenured faculty who are coming out in increasing numbers. Indeed, the untenured people among us—those with the most to lose, as the world measures loss—have been setting the pace for their more privileged and protected colleagues. I know they don't like being called "courageous"; they prefer to say they're acting for themselves, that they owe it to their own integrity and peace of mind, to stand up. As I say, I'm in awe of them.

The second risk in coming out is one we all share, tenured or not. And that's the risk of laying ourselves open to simplification, of giving the straight world the opportunity it often seeks to reduce our varied personalities to a one-label category. Within every movement, moreover, the need to stress common intersections and to fight against common oppression always involved some minimizing of individual inclinations. No one likes being labeled or minimized. Sometimes we have to remind each other, as we work to forge a movement, to emphasize our commonalities, that individually we are a good deal more complicated than the sum of our sexual experiences. More often, we have to remind the straight world—eager as it is to believe that same-gender sexual attraction is symptomatic of retardation or disease.

Finally, there's the risk that a public avowal of being gay will be treated as merely confessional, as a self-indulgent, vaguely unclean bit of exhibitionism. Our culture has long told us that it's "exhibitionistic"—or worse—to discuss our private lives, and we've internalized the negative judgment. But "exhibitionism" may be the wrong word for what is in fact an impulse to end bifurcation and pretense, to understand honestly, and to share honestly. The fear of being called "exhibitionistic"—or worse—has proven a potent mechanism of social control, a device for preventing new kinds of communication that might threaten accepted definitions of humanness—and thus accepted relationships of power.

The risks of coming out are real, and only a Pollyanna would deny them. But they seem to be inescapable aspects of becoming political, risks that must be run because of the overriding necessity of openly uniting with others—no less frightened, complex and private—to end the common oppression.

Besides, the risks, at least to my mind, are far over-balanced by the gains. In coming out, in joining together, we learn that we are not singular freaks but part of an emerging community—one that includes some heterosexuals, mostly women, along with gays and bisexuals—a community willing at last to talk about what we all want to hear, to de-mystify the desperate secrets, to end the separation in ourselves, and in our culture, between the private and public voices. It's a community willing to embrace variations in sexual behavior as enrichments to be enjoyed, not shameful fantasies to be concealed.

Again, I can only speak for myself and, again, my experience may not be widely applicable because it's been unusually protected. But I do want to say *for myself* that I feel my options and opportunities have *expanded* since I came out about a year and a half ago. I mean this in terms of feeling more integrated and comfortable within myself; in terms of proliferating contacts with people I wouldn't otherwise have met, or if met, would probably have avoided—for example, bisexuals; and in terms of feeling part of an important struggle for human rights and sexual re-definition. If it's true that there are never gains without losses—and I think it is true for me personally, for whatever that's worth—the gains have unquestionably predominated.

Movements for social change reflect process as well as ideology; they're shaped as much by how fellow workers treat each other as by how they front on the world. The movement to combat homophobia and sexual stereotyping has already had its share of internal feuds and divisions. Perhaps they can't be avoided, given the diversity of our lives, our differences over tactics and goals and, above all, the fact that we, too, are products of the same set of social values against which we struggle—values that confuse maleness with machismo, femaleness with docility, bisexuality with confusion and sexuality with orgasm.

We represent a variety of lifestyles and that variety requires expression. It may not require mutual recrimination and contempt. The Gay Movement needs internal criticism and debate, but it also needs mutual assistance and respect. Within GAU, and between GAU and other gay organizations, we should aim at cooperation, at sharing resources and avoiding duplication of effort, at guarding against mistaking each other as the enemy. We can at least try to proceed as friends reinforcing each other's confidence, instead of adversaries assailing each other's deviations. The former builds community, the latter perpetuates powerlessness. The one does the work of the revolution, the other the work of the oppressor.

In saying this, I don't for a moment mean to subscribe to sappy slogans of "love, love, love." The expectation that all gay people should "love" one another seems to me as mindlessly destructive of individual impulse and choice as the larger society's insistence that no gay people can love one another.

My hope is that we can serve as a genuine alternative to the sexist models that dominate our culture; that we will refuse to talk of human beings—gay or straight—as single impulses, fixed essences, judgeable objects; that we will offer, in opposition to the current vision of homogenized humanity, our celebration of human diversity.

The right concluding words seem always to come from Emerson. "It is a mischievous notion," he wrote, "that we are come late into nature; that the world was finished a long time ago. . . . A false humility, a complaisance to reigning schools or to the wisdom of antiquity, must not defraud me of

supreme possession of this hour. . . . Say to such doctors, we are thankful to you, as we are to history, to the pyramids, and the authors; but now our day is come; we have been born out of the eternal silence; and now will we live—live for ourselves—and not as the pall-bearers of a funeral, but as the upholders and creators of *our* age. . . . Now that we are here we will put our own interpretation on things, and [offer] our own things for interpretation. Please himself with complaisance who will—for me, things must take my scale, not I theirs."

I can't think of a better set of wishes for our two days together—and for the work beyond: that we begin to take our *own* measurements, to live for *ourselves*, to create *our* age—and: to end the eternal silence. The goal is utopian, and must partly fail. But only utopian goals, I believe, will allow us partly to succeed. □

Keynote Address

Barbara Gittings

I'd like to start by sharing with you what I have been calling my "fairy tale." We all know what a fairy is. A fairy is a mythical creature, and a fairy story is an untrue story, and this is an untrue story about what life is like for the gay person in academia today:

"Every lesbian growing up finds that the signs of her sexual orientation are welcomed and encouraged by her parents and relatives. In school she gets massive peer support, and plenty of opportunities to develop a homosexual social life. Her sex-education courses teach her that being gay is positive, desirable, and valuable. Her church approves her orientation and encourages her to express it, and in her church she feels both socially comfortable and spiritually attuned.

"Again in college everyone and everything is geared to reinforcing her lesbianism and making her feel proud of it. She knows she'll never be called into the dean's office for a stern lecture, or a maudlin lecture, or a patronizing lecture, or for threats to tell her parents or to take away her scholarship. She knows that she can confidently go to the student counseling service and get constructive help for any love and sex problems that she may have. [Laughter] There is even a gay lounge on campus, which she can make her special place for meeting friends and for browsing through duplicate copies of good gay books in the main library.

Barbara Gittings has been active in the gay movement for over fifteen years. She has lectured at colleges and professional organizations across the country and has appeared on many local and national television programs. Gittings is the Coordinator of the Task Force on Gay Liberation of the American Library Association and serves on the Board of Directors of the National Gay Task Force. She was editor of the pioneer lesbian magazine The Ladder and now edits A Gay Bibliography.

"Later, as a teacher, she has no fear of a witch-hunt or malicious accusations, because she knows that the full power of the faculty senate, the administration, and the board of regents or trustees supports her right to be openly gay in just the same way and to the same extent as most people are 'known' to be straight. And there is a great variety of ways for her to meet other gay women openly in happy, civilized atmospheres.

"Throughout her life she can draw on a rich literature about her kind of life and her kind of love. And the images of gay people in the mass media give her strength and dignity in her orientation and a sense of community with other gay people. The church blesses her love relationship with another woman, the world smiles and approves, and the state rewards the couple with special legal and economic advantages. And they all live happily ever after in academia."

Now . . . we're certainly not there *yet*. But we can begin to work towards this for gay people in academia in the Gay Academic Union. For some of you who have not before taken part in a gay organization, the Gay Academic Union is a logical place to be. But beyond its being a home for some who did not have a gay home before, the GAU has some special work, I think, to contribute to the gay cause. Let me touch on some of the contributions that can be made:

Employment. First and foremost in most people's minds, of course, is *jobs*. Now our workshops will be taking up this major concern from every angle. I would just like to say this: If we don't pull together to deal with "How to come out without getting kicked out" and "If you're gay, stay away"—if we don't pull together to fight this—believe me, nobody else is going to do it for us.

I also hope that the GAU will spur the formation of another group with the same initials (which will create great confusions!): the Gay Administrators Union. Think of the difference it would make in the academic climate if gay administrators and trustees would begin to come out.

Social opportunities. Well, what can I say, seeing all of you here, except that *this* is the beginning of the most wonderful party I have ever been to!

Professional support. Gays in professional associations are getting their associations to pass pro-gay resolutions. For example, in 1971 the American Anthropological Association passed several resolutions calling, among other things, for an end to discrimination against gays in that profession, for gays to conduct studies on homosexuality, and for research on homoerophobia. That was in 1971. Now the GAU can help its members to push for similar resolutions in the professional associations in their own particular disciplines, and it can help to publicize them. And we must not let these be mere paper resolutions. Each should be a real resolve that spurs and guides action within the profession.

Gay studies. Homosexuality is a subject that has suffered from academic as well as social taboos. Now that is changing. And one purpose of the GAU can be to turn being gay from a disadvantage to an advantage, so that we, whose outlook and values and life experience differ from the majority, can explore and teach that perspective and be rewarded rather than penalized for it. Now gay studies would of course emphasize our contribution to the mainstream culture. And I just hope that somebody will start perhaps with *where* the image, the wonderful image, of the "closet" came from.

I offer one caution with regard to research in medicine and in the social sciences: It's a very welcome shift from our being always studied by nongay people to having at least some gay people doing research on homosexuality. But we should not make the mistake that almost all straight researchers have made, and focus only on ourselves. Of course we are a fascinating study! And we certainly do need to build up a body of sensible information on homosexuals and homosexuality. But in the existing literature in medicine and the social sciences—a literature of several thousand items—there are barely a handful of studies on such topics as the nature and cause of antigay prejudice, and how heterosexuals develop and maintain discrimination against us. Now it's a time to turn the microscope around and start studying *them* instead of *us*! I strongly recommend studies of homophobia and related topics involving the nongay world.

Literature. Because the written word has such a long-range effect, the literature on homosexuality has been crucial in shaping the images that we have of ourselves and the images that others have of us, images that we live by or that we have to live with. Until just a few years ago we either were completely left out of the "official" picture of life (for example, in the children's books that we all grew up with) or found ourselves assaulted and demoralized and undermined by almost everything that we read about ourselves. Now the tide has turned, and recently publishers have welcomed positive materials by our own people about the gay experience. But we must not let our subject be merely a passing publishing fashion. We have to continue to generate and encourage worthwhile materials so that we are not a *new* topic but a *pervasive* topic.

Bringing together students and faculty. By "students" here I mean undergraduate students. Students have talked to me about the distance faculty keep outside the classroom. They say that faculty are uncomfortable dealing socially with students, except graduate students, who are viewed as probationary faculty. Yet faculty and students share a common concern for the academic process, and in the GAU gay students and faculty can meet on common ground. I feel that the GAU will benefit enormously from participation by undergraduate students.

As just one particular example of the things that could be done in joint endeavor: reviewing texts and supplementary readings to see what they

say—and, more important, what they don't say—about homosexuality, and recommending changes. Certainly this is something that students as well as faculty need to be involved in.

Now some gay faculty may go out of their way, beyond what straight faculty do, to avoid social contact with students because they fear scandal or trouble. We need to change the climate of opinion on this particular subject. We must claim for ourselves the same right of association, including association between younger and older people, that straight society exercises. Naturally students have to be involved in this form of combatting the aura of undesirability that surrounds homosexuality.

Images and visibility. While the GAU cannot expect to have as members more than a small fraction of the gay academic community, the organization's very existence makes our people stand taller. As living images and role models, we make it impossible for straight people to continue talking about us as though we were some exotic tribe of three hundred on some Polynesian island thousands of miles away. And our visibility is an especially important message to those who feel they cannot yet be visible. It says, "Have courage, because those of us who are out are oiling the closet-door hinges as fast as we can!" [*Laughter*]

Basically the GAU can be a liberating force so that gay people in academia will no longer have to dissemble or misrepresent ourselves when we would rather be direct. It should free us from the pain of wearing the mask, and free us from the many big and little compromises and accommodations that hurt the spirit. As Robert Frost said in another connection: "Something we were withholding made us weak, until we found it was ourselves we were withholding, and forthwith found salvation in surrender."

Let's make this first conference not only a lively forum for the exchange of ideas and solutions to problems but also a celebration—a celebration of gay pride and gay health and gay happiness. □

Part II

Scholarship and the Gay Experience: A Panel

Science and Homosexuality

Elizabeth Fee

One part of the still-to-be-written history of homosexuality will be the history of homophobia. Here the history of science provides a relatively accessible starting point; for at least the last hundred years, science and medicine have articulated and rationalized the wider social and cultural attitudes towards homosexuals. Prior to the early nineteenth century, in the Christian countries, sexuality and its control had been the province of priests and clergymen, aided by the law courts. But as science replaced religion as the arbiter of higher truth, homosexuality changed its image: now, not so much a sin or vice as a biological maladaptation or a disease. Competing scientific explanations of homosexuality abounded; at any one period, several have held the stage concurrently. Today, for example, you can choose between the Freudian model, the sociological (homosexuals and blacks can trace their problems to domineering mothers) and the hormonal. As one theory dies out, another simply arises to take its place. By understanding the broad perceptions common to all these theories, it should be possible to articulate a political position that deals not only with a specific form of oppression (e.g. Freudian psychoanalysis) but with the underlying psychodynamics of homophobia in general.

My research has mainly been in the period 1860-1920. Two dominant themes run throughout the scientific literature on homosexuality during this time. First, a generalized fear of sexuality as tending to undermine

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civilization and promote anarchy. According to this view, the family is the basis of social order and stability; for social survival sexuality *must* be channelled into the only permissible outlet, the monogamous nuclear family. From the Victorian doctors to Richard Nixon, men in power have believed that social control depended on sexual control. In other words, homosexuality was seen as revolutionary.

The second, and closely related theme, was that homosexuality threatened rigid sex-role definitions. A constantly reiterated fear was that men would become effeminate and women, masculinized. Homosexuality in the male was synonymous with loss of masculinity. This became most frightening when homosexuality was defined as a disease, for diseases are contagious: the land becomes infected with creeping effeminacy. This is why male homosexuality has always been so much more a subject of concern to scientists and law-makers than has lesbianism, for creeping effeminism is more threatening to civilization than is creeping masculinity. (Very "masculine" women may gain the grudging admiration of powerful men; effeminate men do not.)

To illustrate the perceived connection between male homosexuality and effeminacy, let us take some biochemical experiments published in 1970. How would a biochemist attempt to identify a chemical substance responsible for homosexuality? Simple. One hormone has already gained the mythological status of being the determiner of masculinity—testosterone. Thus, it was of course suggested that homosexual men would have *less* testosterone than "normal" men. The results of blood plasma tests? Most experiments were inconclusive, but one series succeeded in finding that 25% of the homosexual test group had less testosterone than the norm. Should this result be later disproved, there will be many other attempts to find a chemical analogue of masculinity. The masculinity series is already established: heterosexual men, homosexual men, transsexuals, lesbians, heterosexual women; all that is required is to find some chemical which correlates with this series, and we shall have another scientific theory of sexuality which will incidentally reinforce the traditional stereotypes.

But let us return to a period before the word "homosexual" was even invented. In the mid-nineteenth century, activities now termed homosexual fell into two possible categories: sodomy and mutual masturbation. Sodomy was the sin of Sodom alluded to in the old Testament; it was considered a crime against God and nature and was tried in the courts. Masturbation, however, was not a criminal offense, but a medical problem—considered to be the cause of a wide variety of ailments: blindness, insanity and acne, among others. (Men were told masturbation would make them blind; women were also warned it would ruin their complexions.) Initially, little distinction was drawn between masturbation and mutual masturbation; later it was suggested that masturbation led to the greater evil, mutual masturbation, through a progressive degeneration of the moral sense. When

mutual masturbation was re-defined as homosexuality, a disease entity, masturbation was re-defined as the cause of the disease of homosexuality. Here we have a nice example of the progress of scientific ideas. (In turn, this developed into a theoretic dispute: was masturbation really the cause of homosexuality, or was it perhaps the other way around?)

Gradually, we find in the medical literature that masturbation has become the cause of many degenerative diseases, of which homosexuality was only one example. "Degeneration" could be interpreted in several ways: degeneration of the moral sense, degeneration of the brain, or evolutionary degeneration. This last concept requires some clarification. It was believed that the process of biological evolution had been one of increasing differentiation of the sexes: men had been becoming more and more masculine, while women had been becoming more and more feminine. Degenerative homosexuality was clearly an evolutionary regression since it made men more and more feminine and women more and more masculine: "The more indistinct the psychical and physical sexual characters appear in the individual, the deeper it is below the present level of perfect homologous monosexuality obtained in the evolution of manifold thousands of years."

In 1886 Richard von Krafft-Ebing explained the stages of psychosexual degeneration in the individual:

- Stage 1. A man feels himself attracted to a member of the same sex. At this stage he is still masculine and feels himself in the active role; he is capable of recognizing his aberration and will seek the help of a doctor.

- Stage 2. If he degenerates further, a deep and lasting transformation of his mind takes place. He now desires a passive sexual role; his feelings and sexual impulses have become feminine. The doctor can do little to help once the degeneration has reached this stage.

- Stage 3. Our patient's physical sensations are being transformed into the feminine. He dislikes being on top in sex; he begins to perspire in a female way; he now wants to ride side-saddle.

- Stage 4. Delusional. He believes he has become female; his behavior completely effeminate.

Krafft-Ebing had provided the first clear nosology of homosexuality as a disease. Like syphilis, it progressed by stages, but could be cured if detected sufficiently early. Doctors were supplied with a tool for diagnosis and prognosis, if not yet with a cure. The degenerative process in women was defined in behavioral terms, beginning with kissing, through masturbation and mutual masturbation, then cunnilingus and leading to the use of an artificial phallus. Passive lesbians were considered relatively normal, while sexually active women were clearly highly degenerate.

Opposed to the degeneracy model was the theory that homosexuality was congenital or inherited rather than acquired. Congenital theories were gaining popularity towards the turn of the century and were used to argue that homosexuality was incurable. Surely it would be unreasonable to

punish or attempt to cure a person who was inverted because of abnormal inheritance? The congenital theories were progressive in the context of the times and were used in support of less repressive legislation and to argue for more social tolerance. The main advocates of the congenital theory were Karl Heinrichs Ulrichs and Magnus Hirschfeld, themselves homosexual, and Havelock Ellis, a man sympathetic to homosexuality and married to a lesbian.

Congenital theorists explained that homosexuality was an inherited trait. The analogy with color-blindness was used; then, when that seemed prejudicial, an analogy with left-handedness. Sometimes these intended analogies were misunderstood, resulting in popular ideas that all homosexuals were left-handed or color-blind.

Yet despite their break with previous tradition, the authors of the congenital theories still defined homosexuality as a form of sex-role confusion. Ulrichs, for example, said that homosexuality was not a sin, not a crime, not contagious, not evil; a homosexual man was simply an individual with a female soul in a male body. Hirschfeld argued for a more scientific, physiological theory; anticipating hormonal concepts, he suggested that there were two chemical substances which determined gender and sexual orientation. Both were present in the body in different ratios, producing a continuum of sexual types of which the masculine male and the feminine female were merely two extreme forms.

While Havelock Ellis also expected a chemical theory would eventually solve the problem, he contented himself with a Baconian fact-gathering approach; his book *Sexual Inversion* (1897) was a compendium of then current research. Perhaps the most interesting sections of Ellis' work were those taken from correspondence and interviews with homosexual people. Ellis tried to test many of the then popular conceptions of homosexuals: that their favorite color was green, that they had feminine hands and feet, that they could not spit or whistle and that they came from families with a marked degree of mental abnormality. A surprisingly large number of his correspondents were prepared to accept these designations; the one current myth which they rejected with determination was that the genitals of homosexuals were infantile. An identification of homosexuality with sex-role confusion runs throughout Ellis' writings. He found that lesbians could whistle and spit, had short hair, smoked, drank and were interested in philosophy. He also suggested that the more normal homosexual men preferred boys; boys, after all, were more like women and a preference for older men must therefore indicate a greater degree of perversion. For all his ambiguities and confusions, Ellis provided a strong argument that homosexuality could not be cured and that previously attempted cures—castration, hypnotism, and drunken sorties to brothels—had all proved completely ineffective.

Just as the incurability of homosexuality was becoming widely accepted, Freud's work began to have public impact. Psychoanalysis reintroduced the belief in a "cure." Freud also gave the concept of the "normal" a much clearer definition than had previously been available and analysis was often touted as the way to achieve normality. Yet I think we should view the emphasis of psychoanalysis on curing homosexuality as largely an extraneous development and not essential to Freudian theory. We must admit that it becomes extremely difficult to separate Freud's insights into sexuality from the sexual politics of Victorianism but the attempt should prove rewarding. In particular, the concepts of bisexuality, of the repression of homosexual impulses in heterosexuals, and of the family-centered and culturally reinforced sexual norms *could* potentially provide the basis for a new and more viable sexual theory.

I do not believe that a rational theory of sexuality will be developed until homosexuality can be discussed without nervous or hysterical reaction. As we have noted, the fear of homosexuality is linked to fears of sexual anarchy, the breakdown of the family and the disappearance of defined sex-roles. A recent book, George Gilder's *Sexual Suicide*, expresses all of these concerns, so familiar in the history of homophobia. Two possible responses seem to be available for the Gay Movement: the first is that homosexuality can be dissociated from the threat of anarchic sexuality and sex-role confusion and thus become assimilated into the dominant heterosexual culture without too much disruption. For this to occur, homosexuals would have to dissociate themselves from transvestism, transsexualism and from many of the more colorful aspects of gay culture. They would also have to dissociate themselves from feminism or any other revolutionary ideology, instead to emphasize their community of interest with the respectable heterosexual males and the power elite. Whether such tactics could be successful is at present difficult to determine but the indications are that our society might find such a compromise acceptable.

The second possibility is the more radical one and is identified with many politically conscious lesbians and with an increasing number of homosexual men. This involves accepting and embracing the socially threatening ideas which the heterosexual establishment has always attributed to homosexuals: that homosexuality does indeed threaten the nuclear family and the sexual respectability which it implies, that it does threaten and will eventually destroy the ordering of people into masculine and feminine roles and that it intends to demolish the cultural worship of masculinity. □

Homophobic Society

Edgar Z. Friedenberg

I'd like to start out by pointing out what seems to me to be a logical contradiction in two of the assumptions that I believe have gone through the thread of discourse of several of the speakers I've heard so far. One is the idea that homosexuality is associated with an unusual degree of self-oppression, self-abnegation—that homosexual people. . . (Somehow the word "gay" still rather bothers me, mainly because I'm almost the only person in this room old enough to remember Norma Shearer's movie *Let Us Be Gay*.) [Laughter] At any rate it seems that, if you look at the condition of the total society now and attribute it primarily to the delusions and self-image of straight people, you would really have to agree that there is a good deal more self-abnegation in the straight position than in the homosexual position—that it is in fact the people who constitute the Establishment of the straight society who have done most to deny and whittle away their own sense of their own being, and who have in effect saved the leadership of this society from the necessity of oppressing them by the very fact that they were not and never would be part of any revolutionary movement, either internal or external.

I don't think either, when you think about homophobia (and this gets to the second assumption I believe has been mistakenly stated here—at least I wouldn't agree with it), that it has really been neglected as a subject of study. It hasn't been isolated; that is, it hasn't been pulled out of other contexts,

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other psychological phenomena, per se, because by definition the heterosexual position is not deviant and therefore doesn't become the victim of the stigmatizing apparatus that you know about and that has been alluded to—and very effectively—by Ms. Fee and the previous presentations. But I don't think that the straight society's situation and personality characteristics, including its homophobia, have been neglected either in the arts or in scientific literature. . . .

INTERRUPTION BY CHAIRPERSON: *I'm sure that this is going to come as a big shock to everyone here, but apparently there is someone out there in New York City who doesn't like gay people. So they called up 911 and said, "Hey, guess what! I got in there last night and put a bomb up on the third floor." So . . . I know you're all used to it. The cops are outside. What we have to do is go outside and stand across the street. It's nice and cool out there! Don't panic: they think we're going to panic when we hear there's a bomb.* [Laughter]

. . . I was really trying to lay the groundwork for a short logical chain and not just a desultory observation. I don't know whether I can get all of the ideas back together now or not, but I'll do what I can in the time remaining.

If, as I was saying, it is true that the people in the straight society, or dominant culture or whatever you want to call it, do in fact have more complicity in their own oppression than gay people do even, and consent to more cutting away of their self-image and of what there is in their personality, then it seems to me that the explanation of homophobia becomes perfectly manifest and should be familiar to you.

I think I was just on the point of citing a reference when we were so rudely interrupted, and the reference was the not-inappropriate one of *The Authoritarian Personality*. [Laughter] Everything that I've ever encountered about homophobia is really just an elaboration of that particular theme. If you think back to the way the "F-scale" was finally validated [by Adorno *et al.*], it was by putting in a number of authoritarian-type statements that people agreed with, which correlated very highly with homophobia, with explicit references, of course, to sex perverts and homosexuality. But these were indeed the homophobic—that is, the same people who agreed with statements like "It is no coincidence that on the anniversary of Pearl Harbor Japan was subjected to the worst earthquake in its history" (a datum that the research team had made up—there was no such earthquake) and a number of things of that sort.

What this implies, though, is . . . well, just let me say what I think it is. It does seem to be ironical on a number of different levels. First, if it is indeed true that homophobia is a sign, an indication, of self-denial of one's own developmental potential, so that no tenderness for people of the same

sex can be admitted or experienced, then certainly you would expect this to flourish in exactly the kind of society in which it does flourish—that is, one that is dependent on this kind of self-mutilation to keep itself going and to keep people self-oppressing in the roles that they need to stay in if the society is to keep going. To ask for a major change in this, it seems to me, in a society like ours—like ours has been—is to ask in effect that people become liberated enough to notice, if they are men, that a boy may be beautiful and, if they are women, that a girl may be beautiful (I hope that meets Mr. Gustafson's specifications for neutrality) . . . to expect them to be able to notice that, and still somehow not notice that the assembly line is not very beautiful and that the tanks in Vietnam are not very beautiful. Do you really expect this kind of breakthrough in terms of humane relations for people, among people who nonetheless, in order to keep body and whatever else it is that they have together, have got to get through the rest of their daily lives without noticing or without really objecting to what their lives are like?

In a way, you see, the extreme homophobic life is perhaps better than just the plain liberal—is in better health (if I may use that term)—in the same way a paranoid schizophrenic is better off than a catatonic schizophrenic, who's not easy to live with . . . but at least while there is life there is hope and there may conceivably be chance for growth. But I think that's about as far as you can hope to be able to go.

Now I'm concerned too with how the tolerance that I expect we would all like to see very much increased is to be distinguished from what Herbert Marcuse so familiarly calls "repressive tolerance." I've heard with pleasure Mr. Marcuse quoted favorably several times so far, but I do think one of the central implications of his more familiar theses is that probably one reason things seem to be getting a little better has very little to do with the gay liberation movement, and very little to do with an intentional change of heart among the American people, and a great deal to do with the familiar shift from a production-oriented to a consumer-oriented society, which is precisely the source of the "repressive tolerance" kind of thing. I imagine that is the reason we are able to meet here today with the assistance of New York's public servants—who, after all, did not always come to gatherings of this sort with purposes as benign as those which presumably brought them here today [*Laughter*] nor have they always left as soon.

Then in general the character type which hates gays, or blacks, or whatever, is going out of production; and it's going out of production because it's economically unfeasible. Even Mr. Nixon, I'm afraid, is a combination of a dinosaur and a populist, and one which I trust is unworkable, but still he probably could have made it if he had been just a bit more of a swinger. Otherwise, how would one free oneself of him if he really allowed himself to enjoy football?

On the one hand, repressive tolerance is my favorite kind of repression—although not my favorite kind of tolerance!—and I hope that

we won't knock it too much. On the other hand, it isn't a sign of quite as much social growth as one would like the lessened oppression to mean, and for the reasons that Marcuse made clear. And that's why, although this is perhaps a somewhat minor key, if not an ironic note, to end a presentation at this conference on, I couldn't help but think, with all the times that I've heard here (and of course the times I've read before) the references that are made to coming out, a process I very much honor—nevertheless I still have a small voice somewhere in me which continues to inquire, "Out where?" □

The Lesbian in Literature: Or, Is There Life on Mars?

Bertha Harris

When I was invited to participate on a panel entitled "Scholarship and the Gay Experience," I promptly accepted, then promptly relaxed. It was, after all, a subject which had been privately—gradually publicly—obsessing me for years, and one to which I am luckily able to devote some measure of my professional life these days. Therefore, leaving my particular lamp untrimmed, I rejoiced in my anticipation of the time when I and some highly literate others would sit around with cigarettes and water glasses on nothing more elevated than a platform; and I would ramble on about Natalie Clifford Barney and Renee Vivien and my new novel, and we would all tell the stories of our lives; and if someone talked about psychology, I would keep my mouth discreetly shut; and a handful of like-minded pedants would be there, occasionally interrupting with stimulating remarks.

What hard-won political acumen I had, had obviously abandoned me for greener pastures: there were mobs. There were terrifying television cameras. In the audience, there were Brownies and Instamatics and famous intellectuals—and on the panel, each of my fellow and sister participants had in hand long, double-spaced papers to speak from. Spontaneous inventiveness—apart from the intimate event—has never been my strong point. So it was in a welter of sweat and on chattering kneecaps that I had

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finally to stand and disgrace myself (God did not strike everyone else dead—my turn to speak inevitably came).

Everyone who has enjoyed a nonpermissive education (those of us lumbering across the industrial wastes of middle age) has had the same dream: we arrive absolutely unprepared and/or naked for the wrong examination, and the professor exposes our every attempt to explain as a bald-faced lie. I stuttered something that made everyone laugh ("I became a lesbian and a writer at about the same time; and, later, a teacher in order to support both habits"); then, that I had come out at Richmond College (C.U.N.Y.) *before* I had got the job; then, something about "lesbianism-feminism"—which I now secretly call "lemming-ism," an inside-Harris joke biologists at least may find accessible. Afterwards, my friends led me to the nearest bar, walking, at my suggestion, a block ahead of me. That academic dream-of-failure had come dreadfully true for me that morning.

In the harsh year of 1955, when I was joyfully discovering both sexuality and scholarship (and the process of punishment-and-reward each could stimulate), if some visionary had promised me a future opportunity to speak on how the two might be made a highly visible one, I would have been the first campus cynic to bark him out of town. I would have been that comic-strip peasant who peeks at da Vinci's design for a flying-machine and announces, "Da guy's a *nut*—he thinks we can *fly*!" In other words: If God had meant us queers to hold hands in public and get tenure, he would have made us straight!

Perhaps it was such lingering old-time pessimism (despite the years of Christopher Stret marches) that unconsciously blocked me from preparing for the first GAU conference. For it appears that we are taking off; we *are* flying. At least I sometimes experience the sensation of the world falling away beneath me, getting smaller. Is that the same thing, I wonder?

Fifteen years, after all, is a long way in both time and space from that night when the dean of students unlocked my dormitory room, then sent my lover to live with her parents, then sent me to live in the infirmary, then called in a psychiatrist to save my brain from the depravity of my body, then wondered why I withdrew from the Fulbright and Woodrow Wilson competitions to speed as fast as my eighty dollars would allow to the anonymity of New York City bars and typing jobs. Fifteen years is a long time—even longer for many. And the love that dared not speak its name is shouting it now all over the place—has even, through the labor of so many, from street fairy to full professor, a laminated-plastic I.D. card to carry in its hip pocket.

"*Ma soeur*," the boy in the Paris bar whispered; "*Mon frère*," Stephen Gordon at last replied, against her better judgment. And I, too, with equal hesitation—but for entirely different reasons—respond, in this instance of unified gayness: *mon frère*. But it is the hesitation, not the kinship, I want to talk about, becoming, if I must, the skull intruding upon the feast of love.

An exemplary tale: A friend of mine once acquired a very young and naive lover from behind the cash register at the market. He happily brought him out, and, in the course of their affair, took him to visit his friends, two elderly lesbians. Shortly after the boy met these women, one of them died. Hearing the news, the young man began to sob with a grief that seemed to my friend unwarranted for a mere acquaintance. But the real reason for his heartbreak finally emerged; it was not grief that had stunned him but shock: "Gay people!" he said; "I thought gay people *never died!*"

Neither, though in a different sense, do I—nor, I hope, do we—like ninety-star generals, just pass away . . . into a custard pie of ecumenicalism with our straitg colleagues—which seems to me a hidden but very potent danger in the present struggle for equal professional treatment. I know from personal experience (of course) how incredibly tempting it is, when asking for one's human due, to out-straight the straights, to disarm their fear of us by hammer-locking our legitimate difference into an ulcerated stomach or into a migraine head—wearing a dress, keeping the wrist rigorously starched, whatever the case may be. And this is a dilemma which has nothing to do with being in or out of the closet. One can be as "out" as the sun at noon, and then sell that freedom by pretending to be the only queer in the world who is not queer. The transition from closet to acceptance, in such an instance, becomes that of field nigger to house nigger: Yes, master, I am—to your great relief—exactly like you. What we do behind locked doors with consenting adults (never a whiff of it reaching the big house) is utterly inconsequential. The apple cart is securely upright still.

Which is the message such model respectability unequivocally delivers: that our eroticism is utterly inconsequential; that we will barter, in exchange for ticky-tacky just like theirs, our erotically engendered sense of specialness—the prime energy source that has kept our souls in comfort when all other support has failed (our "immortality," as the kid would have it). The gay imagination—that impulse producing all our culture, work, and art—must not be the compromise we offer for the dross of acceptance. But I am, by no means, a preacher of the suffering-into-art school. We must have all they have, including an old-age pension; including, if the cost would be counted, reparations dating back to Sappho. It's nice to be liked, I mean to say, but let's not zip our gorilla selves into cocker spaniel suits to panhandle a nickle; we wouldn't be fooling them, anyway, not for a second.

But to return now to those golden days of yesteryear, from professor back into student. And most of my remarks henceforth will be in regard to *ma soeur*. I've said about all I even pretend to understand about *mon frère*, although I hope he will find what comes next useful.

The night with the dean of students was as awful as she had hoped it would be, and an extracurricular afternoon followed equally as gruesome. My best friend, who sneaked, with my gracious help, in and out of dormitory windows in order to go off and commit fornication with some young lord on

the English faculty, came to me directly from her psychology course that day to warm me off my path to hell with her newly minted learning about penis envy, infantilism, mother-fixations, and a host of other Freudian specialties, throwing in, as a sop to pragmatism, a few pointed remarks about the state's criminal code.

Then, while I was still reeling from that blow, she went on to apply her argument to an examination of that other stuff I was in love with, literature. Why, she asked, if homosexuality was not unhealthy did not its practitioners produce *great works of art*? Look, dear, at those we have learned and loved: all, all heterosexual and proud of it—sexy Chaucer, patriarchal Milton, lascivious Donne, just to hit a few high spots. And surely there can be no question at all about the psychic soundness of Mr. Joyce, Mr. Hemingway, Mr. Fitzgerald, Mr. Thomas, and the rest of the modern company. Regarding Shakespeare, we had heard only of the dark mistress (whoever he was) and Anne Hathaway; but I have long since forgiven my friend—and almost forgiven her teachers, who were also mine.

But that afternoon, and thousands to follow, were devastating, and still leave their marks: homosexuals were not great workers of art—and that is what I wanted most to be, *besides* a homosexual. One step of the proof led logically to the next. Even the trail of woman-hating—that path leading straight to the door of the witch's cottage—through the work we studied had been thoroughly blazed with explanation to guide us safely home: it was simply another manifestation of the beneficent tension, the great paradox pulsing beneath great heterosexual art-in-action (a punch in the jaw, a knife in the belly, and barefoot-and-pregnant). That there were hardly any women writers in the curriculum also had an answer designed to turn away wrath: frustrated spinsters, bereft of regular injections of semen, could not produce masterpieces. Lesbians? Miss Stein was Mr. Heminway's *teacher*; her work is unreadable, and there are no other lesbian authors we can begin to take seriously. Well, then, homosexual men? (My mind grabbing at even the distant relationship.) Surely they enjoyed double doses of the precious fluid. Not healthy, not serious, not *heterosexual*. And I was back full circle. I and my kind were invisible. Masterpieces: master . . . pieces. Long, thick, heavy. Virile. Seminal. . . .

I am speaking, of course, about my four years at a girls' school, The Woman's College of the University of North Carolina, now deliciously coed and still staffed by many of the same teachers who used to lead us old girls into light through the Founder's motto: "Educate a man and you educate an individual; educate a woman and you educate a family."

It's a long way from there to here—I hope; and every educated queer can tell his/her own story. But again, like that dream of failure, the story goes double for the lesbian. The homosexual, though viciously denied, is still male, still the individual with the potential masterpiece (once it straightens out) beneath the belt. And my teachers were very sorry that Mr. Wilde

degenerated into a jailbird; they liked *The Importance of Being Earnest*—a very nice thing to read in the month of May, when it was too hot for serious work. And I couldn't help but notice that the known homosexual faculty frequently received professional blessings few women on the staff were offered—not even those women who strove aggressively with lipstick and ruffle to mask their scholarship and who declared themselves ready for immediate heterosexual coupling if only some male would assist.

It was all most confusing to my poor head, already bent double in the effort to become a man so that I could also become an intellectual and an artist. Especially confusing when I observed my intellectual and artistic betters laughing quite openly at the lipstick-and-ruffle lady's pursuit of the normal—and simultaneously chuckling over my attentions to the abnormal. I had not yet understood that the lady professor was not allowed to be *both* brilliant and sexy; that neither of us could be sexual at all. Sexuality, like art, was active, therefore male; and no matter how many times the lady professor zipped herself into the spaniel suit, she was ignored—at least from the neck down. Presumably her intellect (for which she had only herself to blame) kept her warm at night.

Separately, but equally, the ruffle lady and I were punished, and with all the subtlety patriarchy has had the leisure to devise; and I learned, finally, through suffering (hers and my own) that no matter how hard I tried, I would never be more than a woman—and the laughing-stock of the creative universe, the only universe, as far as I was concerned, that counted.

But, weirdly enough, there was something slightly in my favor, something that gave me a tiny edge over the lady professor: because I was a lesbian, I was *not quite* a woman. They didn't have to try to fuck me; they could relax and let me show my wit, instead of my breast. By virtue of a sexuality which both authority and book-learning condemned as monstrous and unfruitful, I reached paradise: I was one of the boys. I was accorded favor never given my straight sisters who were fixedly trying to curry privilege from (so to speak) the bottom up. While they were getting their behinds pinched, I was getting significant looks: Aren't they cute? But silly—not like *us*.

But that was being *us* with the straight faculty. From the gays, it was an invitation to a dinner party or a nip of bourbon in the classics office along with extra tutoring in Greek. There, I was more sensitive, smarter than *them*—which meant I appreciated the tragedy of Socrates.

So I was, upon graduation in 1959, such a collection of identities I could have put the casebooks on split personality to shame. I was a faggot (not actually, but she loves the opera and resists the vulgar); I was a lesbian (no threat—she can't *really*, you know); I was a straight man (my sentences could sometimes shoot straight as Hemingway's, and I did not mince when I walked); and I was just a girl, just one of "a gaggle of girls," which is what the famous poet (who called me brilliant to my face) called me behind my back.

I have come dangerously close, I realize, to making this statement, which should be "gay," into an example of man-hating feminism; and that is not my intention—here, at any rate. One cannot speak intelligently of the lesbian experience any longer, however, without recognizing the effects of contemporary feminist philosophy upon it. And, in terms of my own personal salvation, it was the Women's Movement which at last squeezed all my disparate selves into an operable coherence. More often than not, admittedly, with severe discomfort, and causing me (us) to feel that we had abandoned the privacy of the well of loneliness to become standees in a broken-down campaign bus one hundred miles from nowhere.

So politically I am yet a feminist; and, as a *good* feminist, I still strive to make my politics personal—from bed to street to the classroom to the fiction I write. And it takes such a little bit of this to arouse anger—even in those who are almost as damaged by the politics of heterosexism as the lesbian is. As I was taking my hasty leave of the Thanksgiving conference, a young man trembling with rage stopped me to deliver accusations of "divisiveness and parochialism"—horrors which the GAU presumably meant to stamp out beneath one united Florsheimed foot. His language and his cause were distinctly homosexual—but his outrage was *no* different from that of the ordinary straight-on-the-street: You man-hating libbies are trying to take our women away from us!

Not exactly. Frequently, I too am simply unreconstructed queer, especially when I wind up teaching *Patience and Sarah* (because of "feminist content") and bypassing my beloved *Nightwood* because it "emphasizes role-playing." And it is distinctly unnerving for me to watch a young woman (who last week had a hippie boyfriend) rip poor old Radclyffe limb from limb because she was "male-identified." To satisfy myself as a teacher of literature—to find a book that presents an acceptable image of lesbians uncloyed by straight nonsense but which is also *literature*—is almost impossible: because there is no lesbian literature: because there is no lesbian prime culture, only a series of tangential subcultures, having no continuity of discourse, having no macrocosmic point of view. What fiction exists which includes the lesbian experience as either a major or minor theme almost never has resonances that reach beyond the microcosm of the bed to the larger world. And too often such fiction is only an account of a lesbian "experience," a moment of more-or-less guilty passion in the context of basic commitment to the heterosexual society—either to a man or to the culture he represents. For the wholehearted dyke, this is no literature at all. Although there are a few notable exceptions to this general rule—from *The Ladies Almanack* to *This Is Not for You* (by Jane Rule) to the *S.C.U.M. Manifesto* (which is a novel)—these are only isolated phenomena which, like the dyke herself, have no impact on the mainstream.

I have finally resolved myself into two reasonably compatible creatures, dyke and woman; and the woman is no longer grateful for small favors in either life or literature, and the dyke is no longer willing to generalize from

either straight or homosexual literature her own system of authentic modes and symbols—an impossible task in any event. And that is what I meant when, at the conference, I muttered something about the development of a “lesbian-feminist aesthetic” that would eventually make sense to the artist/scholar self of the dyke—and that is what so enraged the young man at the front door. Without reality in life, we are yet without reality in the arts.

It used to surprise me that the homosexual male would choose to side, in the long run, with the heterosexual myth of things-as-they-are rather than with us. But now that I know we are beginning at zero (and may explode at ground zero) it is hard to blame him. Hatred of woman exists even in the hearts of women. It would be foolish to expect a man, because he loves men, to be free of that hate. When Christopher Isherwood, in *A Single Man*, has his character George recall the woman with whom his lover has had an affair, he remembers her this way:

... With that body which sprawled stark naked, gaping wide in shameless demand. . . . Gross insucking vulva, sly ruthless greedy flesh, in all the bloom and gloss and arrogant resilience of youth, demanding that George shall step aside, bow down and yield to the female prerogative, hide his unnatural head in shame. I am Doris. I am woman. I am Bitch-Mother Nature. The Church and the Law and the State exist to support me. I claim my biological rights. I demand Jim.

It is not simple sexual jealousy sounding off here. If I had not known the author, I would have guessed Henry Miller. But lucky George finds absolution for his hatred in pity, as Mr. Isherwood has him watch the “greedy flesh” die agonizingly of cancer—and yet another woman is sacrificed to the cause of male spiritual ennoblement. It would be folly for me to believe that homosexual men will like me any more than they like Doris: I, too, own one of those awful vulvas which, as Mr. Isherwood naively is persuaded, the church, law, and state exist to support. But the terrible hitch—my message in a capsule—is that I don’t really give a damn for Doris either. I know whose side she’s on when the chips are down.

Some of us—we are just beginning to find one another—have toiled over the years to collect some bibliography, to acquire some “freed” critical sense about what exists as the literature of our experience. It may not be much, as I’ve already said, but it’s better than nothing. Needless to say, there have been no grand-level models, such as the homosexual has enjoyed, either in or out of the university. In the fifties and early sixties (pre-sexual revolution) I fell with pathetic relief into my discovery of those paperback lesbian romances (surprisingly well written; certainly authentic slices-of-life) that flourished, for some reason, then. Now, I find nothing but lesbian pornography (by men, for men) in which the guy comes along to get the girl in her (of course) happy ending.

What we have had in the way of "seriousness" has been made well-nigh inaccessible not only to the casual reader but to the scholar as well. Jeannette H. Foster, in her pioneering *Sex Variant Women in Literature* (a near-comprehensive work almost impossible to locate), writes:

No class of printed matter except outright pornography has suffered more critical neglect, exclusion from libraries, or omission from collected works than variant belles-lettres. Even items by recognized masters, such as Henry James' *The Bostonians* and Maupassant's "Paul's Mistress," have been omitted from inclusive editions. . . . When owned by libraries such titles are often catalogued obscurely.

But especially "sex variant" work by women, by lesbians, has suffered this deliberate neglect. After my typical introduction to the genre via Radclyffe Hall, and after finding the important (when you are starving, a soda cracker will do) newsstand fiction, it was years before I found the genuine article again—and me with all the resources of a good English major tucked in my head. For a long time only some (usually bizarre) renditions by the straight and gay male writers: the bull-dyke, the poisonous flower, the frivolous, the suicide, the embittered-because-unfulfilled.

It was only through the happy accident of friendship with a gay man (who had the information when I did not) that I was able to gather some more information on where to hunt the necessities of life. And few explorers of the unknown have had a crazier time of it: worming my way through the Sing Sing security system of the New York Public Library Rare Book Room, for instance, with borrowed credentials in order to have lunch-hour reads of *The Ladies Almanack*. Afterwards, years of detective work tracking down the associations, references, the shoots of secret literature from that Paris group. Then what to do with it (beyond the pleasure of feeling myself legitimized, finding ancestors) when I had it. And reading *Orlando*, then teaching *Orlando*, and *knowing* that such a book could have sprung only from the erotic—but unable to "prove" it: we queers must think the whole world is a little queer. Thank you, Mr. Nicolson—how very kind of you—at last.

But despite the warming climate, I still won't leave home without a coat. The end is nowhere in sight for the dyke; we are still—culturally, historically, artistically—in the deep-freeze. It is my own unusual privilege to be out in the profession and even more to be teaching at a college where courses can be explicitly designed to include what exists in the way of lesbian literature. But my complaint—and my warning to those approaching such courses either as student or teacher—is that too often their nature is "sociological" rather than literary—resulting in happier "self-image," but only for those disinterested in the rich variousness and complexity that informs both life and literature. In the service of political articulation, in the

great rush for a piece of the action, our deathblow, if we are not careful, will be oversimplification in our work, and in our selves.

My own novels (my complaint increases) are at least as good chronicles of the dyke consciousness and world as (for instance) Mr. Purdy's or Mr. Isherwood's—or Mr. Mailer's or Miss McCarthy's—are of theirs. But the endless circle of no-demand-no-attention-no-paperbacks is seemingly unbreakable; and my novels, like those of many others, are denied the most accessible way to readership fiction has these days—through the classroom. And the Women's Movement has been of little help in this respect. If the young lesbian student attacks *Nightwood* as "un-positive," she will probably judge my work in the same manner, and with the same critical tools. And the straight woman shies away from the taint of teaching such fiction: guilt by association.

Everything, it seems, must happen all at once. Libraries must employ their tremendous resources to acquire and then catalogue such work as exists. Publishers must ferret out those small-edition belles-lettres and reminiscences and then make money talk to those trusteeships who await "the year 2000," and must resurrect the out-of-print. And they must conscientiously search out the new about us—then market it as assiduously as they do the young male's masturbatory fantasy. A readership who spends more money on books than on movies awaits them. In academe, specifically lesbian consciousness-raising must become a priority; and the lesbian scholar must be awarded time and money to gather and evaluate—not another note on the *Faerie Queene* but the essential chronicles of her civilization-to-come.

And in the midst of all this effort on our behalf, our "specialness" must be both preserved and celebrated. And not as though it were some alien thrill-a-minute Godzilla from the deep, stomping down the Long Island Expressway—but as another honorable something that is human, specializing itself as art. But such a task will require, from everyone, great humor, spirit, and resilience. No one is more profoundly hated, deep in the heart of everywhere, than woman. (When the male homosexual is hated, it is because he seems, to them, *like* a woman.) And of all women—because with unmitigated seriousness, with unmixed joy she *loves* women, she loves what is despised—none is more hated and feared than the lesbian.

The social sciences are zigzagging their way toward the light. The student and practitioner of literature must get there first. For, as we know, it is that art which holds all the transfiguring answers: which breaks the back of silence, which wipes away the distress of ignorance, which confirms and makes radiant the real. We cannot settle for anything less; we need all of it we can get—not vertigo, but flight. □

Demythologizing Sodom and Gomorrah

John J. McNeill

I want to address myself to one of the themes of the Gay Academic Union, *viz.*, the intention to combat myths about homosexuality by means of scholarship. I am very much aware both from my academic experience as a professor of moral theology and also from my pastoral work with Dignity, the organization for gay Catholic men and women, that there is a very peculiar sort of love-hate relationship between the gay community and religion, especially organized religion, and for some very good reasons. However, I am also aware that gay liberation means different things for different people. There are some people in the gay community for whom the religious inheritance they have received from our society personally presents no hang-up, no problem. There are others who because of their gayness feel oppressed by their religious background and training. There are still others who are striving to integrate their gay life-style with commitments to the moral and spiritual values of religion. So there are many different people in different places concerning this matter.

But basically most gay people, I believe, think that the whole religious tradition is a trap in which gay people and their activities and relationships are necessarily condemned. Thus they believe they are in a dilemma where to affirm their gayness necessarily implies a denial of religious faith, values

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and commitment, while to affirm religious faith and values necessarily involves some form of self-condemnation of their gayness. This is *not* necessarily true. I personally believe it would be a tragedy for the gay liberation movement to accept uncritically the idea that religious faith and values are for the straights alone. Real gay liberation can only occur for a religious believer when he or she knows that he/she is accepted in his/her gayness not just by society but also by God.

There is a role for scholarship here, especially for biblical scholarship. I would like to illustrate that need by one point. If there is any myth that lies at the very source of Western Christian society's condemnation and persecution of the homosexual, it is the myth of Sodom and Gomorrah. In fact the very word *sodomy*, used to signify homosexual activity in general and anal penetration in particular, comes from the historical myth that the sin for which God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities of the plain, with fire and brimstone was the sin of homosexual activity. Western society has assumed for centuries that it was clearly revealed in Scripture, particularly in the Sodom and Gomorrah episode (Genesis 19: 4-11), that homosexuality is contrary to the will of God and that at least on one occasion he punished those cities where such activity was rampant by destroying them with fire and brimstone.

As a result of this interpretation of Genesis a whole legal tradition sprang up which is still operative today. The Christian Roman emperor Justinian saw homosexual practices as endangering the state because they were liable to provoke the vengeance of God in the form of earthquakes, famine, and pestilence. (Cf. Codex Justinianus, Novella 77: "For we are taught by the Holy Scriptures that because of like impious conduct cities have indeed perished, together with the men in them. . . . For because of such crimes there are famines, earthquakes, and pestilence. . . .") A plague in 543 was the occasion of Justinian issuing Novella 141, condemning those found guilty of homosexual conduct to death by fire, saying: "For, instructed by Holy Scripture, we know that God brought a just judgment upon those who lived in Sodom on account of this very madness of intercourse, so that to this day that land burns with an inextinguishable fire." Justinian's legal treatment of homosexuals became the *locus classicus* for civil legislation in this matter. We find his position reiterated almost identically as late as Blackstone's *Commentary on the Law of England*: "The crime against nature . . . is one which . . . the voice of nature and of reason, and the express law of God, determined to be capital. Of which we have a special instance, long before the Jewish dispensation, by the destruction of two cities by fire from heaven; so that this is a universal, not merely a provincial precept" (vol. IV, p. 215). Sodom and Gomorrah continues to be a central justification for the retention of legal restrictions on homosexuality. It is interesting to note that when the civil-rights bill was being debated before the New York City Council, one of the councilmen had the Sodom and Gomorrah episode from Genesis read into the minutes.

Now the amazing truth that modern biblical scholars have to tell us about the Sodom and Gomorrah episode is that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah in the mind of the author of that passage in Genesis had in all probability nothing to do directly with homosexual activity. The sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, biblical scholars tell us, was inhospitality—a refusal to accept the stranger and treat him well after you have brought him under your tent. This is so obviously the case that the entire previous passage in Genesis established the goodness of Abraham and Lot in contrast to the Sodomites because of their hospitality. And in the seventeen references to Sodom and Gomorrah in the Old Testament, in every case the sin is positively identified with pride and inhospitality; never once is there any mention of a sexual sin, never mind homosexual activity. In Luke 10: 10-13, for example, Jesus is reported as saying to his disciples: "But whenever you come to a town and they do not welcome you, go out into the open streets and say, 'The very dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off in protest. But understand this: The kingdom of God is at hand!' I tell you, on that day Sodom will fare better than that town!" Obviously inhospitality toward the stranger was in Jesus' understanding the sin of Sodom.

Where, then, did this entire tradition of associating Sodom and Gomorrah with homosexuality spring up? There is a very interesting piece of detective work still to be done here through history to understand how this association grew. The first element we have to deal with is that there is reference to some sort of sexual orgy in the Sodom and Gomorrah passage (contrary to the position of D. Sherwin Bailey in *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*). Biblical scholars tell us that the Genesis narrative is composed of several different layers or traditions. For example, there are two accounts, quite different, of man's creation in Genesis; the first, which scholars identify as the priestly tradition, mentions that God created man and woman in his own image and on an equal basis. The second, the Yahwist tradition, insists that man was created first and then God created woman as man's helpmate. There is a strong emphasis in the Yahwist tradition on the inferiority of woman and the superiority of man. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah belongs to this same Yahwist tradition. Lot, for example, readily agrees to releasing his virgin daughters to the mob in place of his male visitors.

One of the primary themes of the Yahwist writer, which runs through all the passages of Genesis of which he is the author, is an attack against pagan fertility worship. In an earlier passage of Genesis the Yahwist author argues that, because of the sacred orgies of the fertility rites seeking rain, a great flood was sent by God that wiped out all life; so, too, in Sodom a rain follows the fertility-rite orgies, a rain of fire and brimstone that wipes out all life and leaves both the land and the people sterile and barren to the end of time. So there is a subplot in the Sodom and Gomorrah story; underneath the tale of inhospitality to the stranger there is the story of a Canaanite fertility-worship orgy.

When the two angelic-appearing young strangers appear during the process of a fertility rite, the people of Sodom want to have sex with them because they think of them as sacred prostitutes. The essential belief of Canaanite fertility worship was that somehow the gods of fertility could be contacted and their favor won by sexual orgies in the fields and by ritual contact with sacred prostitutes. (Cf. Peter Ellis's book *The Yahwist: The Bible's First Theologian*.) An attempt was made by the Yahwist author to desacralize human sexuality by removing it from the realm of the mysterious impersonal forces of nature and placing it in human hands.

The central message of the Old Testament regarding human sexuality is that sexual activity which expresses respect and constructive personal concern for the other is morally good sexuality. Any use of sex that is depersonalized and disrespectful or destructive of the other is morally bad sexuality. Granting the belief at that time of the inferior status of women, the Levitical law "If any man uses another man as if he were a woman, let him be put to death!" makes perfect sense in context. For to use any man "as a woman" would necessarily involve hatred, contempt, disrespect in the extreme in the mind of the biblical author.

One can go to any biblical text that supposedly deals with homosexuality and perform a similar critical task of discovering what was meant in context and what the author intended. The end result of that process is the discovery that there is no clear message at all in Scripture concerning what it means to be a homosexual or what are the moral norms for judging homosexual activity that are applicable to the situations and problems that face the gay person today. There is no clearly revealed judgment of God in Scripture. Consequently, we are free, positively free to face the problems of gay life and deal with them and resolve them with God's help today—as Emerson so well said in the essay alluded to by Martin Duberman. □

Part III

*Coming Out in the
Universities: A Panel*

July 10, 1900
Dear Mr. [illegible]

Coming Out

Howard Brown

Seven weeks ago I got up one morning and, as usual, shut my closet door. Twenty-four hours later I had no closet door to shut; in fact the closet had been ripped away from around me, and thanks to the *New York Times* I was the best-known homosexual in the East.

I've wondered what I could possibly say about my coming out to a scholarly group which certainly reads the *New York Times*, but I'll see what I can do. I might tell you I've been on an almost permanent high since I came out seven weeks ago. [Applause]

It's really very hard for me, I think, to give you the scholarly evaluation of it you'd like. People ask me why I decided to announce my homosexuality. Well I did it for political purposes. My goal was entirely political. I had watched with great interest, and had helped a little behind the scenes, the activities of the Gay Activist Alliance. I admired very much what they had done, and felt that freedom was coming through their activities. I was particularly helped by my friend Martin Duberman, whose announcement impressed me a great deal.

I had a heart attack about eight months before I really decided to announce, and for about two days, as a physician, I knew it was possible and

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perhaps even probable that I might die. And I thought a great deal about the fact that you can't wait endlessly to do things. And certainly if I were going to leave some legacy to the gay cause I had to act as soon as I could. So it was really during that period that I decided it might be useful if a physician announced his homosexuality. There had been at that time no physician who had, and no physician who had been the Commissioner of Health of a large city, as I had been.

Physicians are big in the Midwest. Commissioners are big in New York City.

Now I should mention that I also had some safety, though I don't think this was a central factor in my announcing. I had tenure, actually as of this fall (—yes, I guess I announced after I had tenure). The thing that was more important to me, that gave me a greater sense of security was that I knew the student evaluations of me were very good; and if the University were going to fire me I thought most certainly the students would strike—if that's security! And probably a sense of security that not everyone can have.

Well okay, I decided that I was going to announce my homosexuality. You can't just call up the *New York Times* and say, "Hey, I'm gay; send a reporter." So I looked around for an occasion. I got real brave and marched in the Christopher Street Day parade—and I didn't see anyone I knew!

I then decided that I'd ask the Public Health Association of New York City (that's an organization of public health people of which I was a member) whether they would appoint a committee to fight discrimination against homosexuals in public health. So I spoke to the president, and went to the Board of Directors, and I told them that I thought they should pass an antidiscrimination resolution, and listed a number of other things they could do. And then I said, "Really we should appoint a chairman of the committee who's a homosexual, and I'd like to be chairman."

Well there was a long pause, and there were a few conservatives in the room that suggested a committee and a study, but the majority came right out and said, "No, we'll pass the resolution, and you can be chairman of the committee." But nothing much happened from that.

Meanwhile I had heard through a friend that the New Jersey Medical Society was having an all-day conference on homosexuality, and they were looking for a gay physician who would speak as a gay physician. So I called them up and said, "I'm gay, and I'm a physician, and I will come down and speak." Well, at any rate, I went down, and before seven hundred doctors, in the middle of the speech I said, "Really I was invited here not as a medical scientist but as a street homosexual. And from now on in I'm going to tell you what the real problems of homosexuality are."

I want to spend a moment on the reactions to my announcement because I think it has some importance. As many of you may know, the announcement appeared on the front page of the *New York Times* and was followed by some other stories in the *Times*. I appeared on every television

network in the city; and across the country I'm still getting clippings from little towns—from front pages of little town newspapers.

Now I don't think the reaction was to me really. And I think that's the important point I want to develop. I think what it was was the press of America saying, "We want to say something nice about gay people." The stories that were written in the *New York Times* . . . I'm sure it was a deliberate editorial decision to put my story on the front page of the *Times*. The stories that were written were kind stories, were up-front stories. Across the country the headlines weren't, you know, "Doctor Caught as Homosexual" and "Doctor Announces He's Pervert," but they were "Homosexual Doctor Praised for His Candor" or "Colleagues Praise Homosexual Doctor." In other words the press was picking up positive words and saying "Now is the time of homosexuality as a valid human-rights cause, and we're going to help fight the battle."

As a former chief health officer I'm used to being interviewed by television reporters who are adversaries, and you certainly know that even when they're friendly there's a kind of adversary relationship. On this go-around of television reports I sensed only friendly support from the people that interviewed me, and this was very clear afterwards. Again, in other words, I think the television stations were saying, "We want to support this as a human-rights cause, and this is a good occasion to let people know that we do support it."

Meanwhile back at the University, of course everyone in the University had to face the fact that they had a gay professor in their midst. And the reaction from the University has been uniformly positive. And I thought it might be useful if I read the letter that the Dean wrote me, which is in his own handwriting. He says:

"Dear Howard,

"The article in the *New York Times* came as no surprise to me." [Laughter] It isn't what you think—I had told the Associate Dean. (As a matter of interest, I am told that the Dean did think I was homosexual before tenure was voted.) At any rate, he writes: "Your sense of relief, no really elation comes across clearly. I am delighted for your sake that you were able to do this, and it's a great pleasure to share vicariously your ease of mind and spirit. Only one thing bothers me. The fact that you might have been haunted by the idea that a disclosure would"—and here he's paraphrasing the *Times*—"ruin your professional career, destroy your reputation, and wreck many friendships. Insofar as I and this school are concerned there has never been any danger of this, and I grieve to think that you might have believed otherwise. In any event you will see soon enough that any such apprehension was groundless."

That's from the Dean.

I want to quote one brief letter from a student. This student actually came in to see me and then after we'd finished talking about his

dissertation, he said he read the *New York Times* and he typed out his reactions and he wanted to give them to me—and I'll read them.

"I grew up in a middle-class Flushing neighborhood. Somewhere in my childhood I became, and have remained, incurably heterosexual. I also established typical attitudes toward homosexuality. Throughout my high-school career we simply said 'homo' as a disparaging term. These attitudes remained unchanged through college, a master's program, and partially through a doctoral degree in Public Health Administration, in which I am currently enrolled at New York University. My faculty advisor is Dr. Howard Brown, who recently admitted being a homosexual. At first the *New York Times* article in which Dr. Brown's admission appeared upset me, but I could give no specific reason for my feelings; I have only the highest respect for Dr. Brown as a man of outstanding academic and professional accomplishments. I apparently re-evaluated my attitudes, and found that my encounters with Dr. Brown as an advisor and professor and my respect for him as a man had precipitated a change. I, for one, will no longer look down upon homosexuals. My children will not be restricted to the old intolerant morals and attitudes. I am just beginning to realize my ignorance."

The rest of the students' letters were much like that. I've received about three hundred very, very positive letters. Congressman Badillo called and talked for about half an hour, saying, really homosexuality is only an Anglo-Saxon problem, and if we had a Latin mayor it wouldn't be a problem because . . . [Laughter] in Latin countries it's never been illegal.

I started out saying that I announced my homosexuality for political reasons, and that was clearly the reason. I would now do it for personal reasons, because it has just been great. First of all I have found that I can associate much more honestly and clearly with the straight faculty members. I had not realized how many things about myself I really hid, and how many times during the day I was still programmed to be a shadow of the way I am. I have found that when I go to public health meetings I've become the token homosexual and everyone goes out of their way to prove they're not going to discriminate against me.

Secondly there's something that's really very surprising to me. I thought that I knew a great deal about homosexuality. After all I've lived it for thirty years, and I've done the bar scene, and some other places. I've certainly known all sorts of people, and I thought—there's really very little about homosexuality that I didn't know. I've found that not to be the case since I came out. I found that in some ways I was living in a ghetto of exclusive gayness. For one thing I had no idea how many bisexuals there are. It's getting so, some of these people I now meet with—they talk about their children for a while—and then we'll talk about being gay. I had no idea of how many bisexuals there are, and this is something that apparently I'd shut out. I also unfortunately had not gotten to know the fine radical women, and

getting to know them has been one of the finest experiences that I have had. I've also found that spending a lot of time with the activists has made me a little restive with my old friends. All of them are fine. They are professional people, they've succeeded, they're properly square, but they are still oppressed in many ways as I had been over the thirty years; and I find more and more as I look at the activists that we've got a major job of raising the consciousness of most gays.

For me coming out has been a grand experience, and I certainly would do it over again. □

Coming Out

Janet Cooper

Dedicated to Kay Tobin and Barbara Gittings

In May I shall start working as a second cook in a Mexican restaurant in Harvard Square.

I have received a national award for having the best elementary-school media center in the country. The program I established in Andover, Massachusetts, to provide mongoloid and brain-damaged children with library service is an international attraction. I catalogued for a year at the major research library in the State University of New York system and worked with one of the top rare-book collections in the country. My entries have been collected in catalogues for the James Joyce Collection and for twentieth-century American and English poetry. I was a reference librarian at one of America's foremost museums and at one of the foremost theology schools. I have enough credits for graduate degrees in history, art history, English, and classics.

For the past four years I have taught at a state teachers college in

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Appalachia. I have never taught the school media course; I have never taught the cataloguing course; I have never supervised student teaching; I have never taught research. I have not been given the same opportunities for summer employment as other members of the faculty. I did not get tenure.

For the eight thousand people in the town where I live there are fifty-two churches, primarily fundamentalist. The writing on the wall includes: "I have nothing against niggers / Everyone should own one," and "Flush twice / The niggers are hungry." That last graffito can be found in the college library. There is little conflict between town and gown. There are swastikas. Sissies are beaten up, raped, and harassed. It is the kind of town where ministers still preach that homosexuality is sinful, where guidance professors teach that homosexuals should be treated with aversion therapy, and where the law-enforcement representatives would just as soon run gays out of town as lock them up. The college automatically sets aside the applications of unmarried male job applicants over thirty, since, as one staff members so succinctly put it, "They might be homosexuals, and this gives the administration problems."

We know that at all our colleges there are gays on the faculty who have gotten tenure, department chairpersonships, and administrative positions by remaining in the closet, by placating rather than embarrassing the people who make decisions about their careers, by becoming so respected in their discipline that they have not been handicapped professionally by being gay. I, on the other hand, was embarrassing. I helped found the Task Force for Gay Liberation of the American Library Association and actively worked with it. I participated in gay political activities. I wrote gay articles. I was not discreet. I did not use the body language and dress which females are expected to use in conducting business with male colleagues.

In Appalachia my professional life has not been like that of my colleagues in New Haven, Cambridge, or New York. I have had a heavy course load and no teaching assistants. Nevertheless, I am a teacher. I have had neither time nor energy to write the book that would have given me critical respect and professional prestige. Nevertheless I am a scholar. I have not had the power to be gay within the system. But I came out. And I anticipate the day when we won't have people walking around on our campuses so angry or depressed by being persecuted every day for being gay in every way that they can't possibly fulfill their academic potential.

At the end of my first semester I gave a female student a D. She went to the dean and accused me of having attacked her in my office. The school's administration kept a file in which any material such as this could be placed, with the accused person having no recourse. The student was free to make any accusation at all, but I was unable to reply.

I came out. . . . To testify to such conditions.

The harassment I have put up with descends even to such petty and unprofessional levels as that of interdepartmental mailings, which invari-

ably reach me late, or not at all. The putative reason for my being kept out of the communication chain is deceptively simple—my office and classroom are in another building.

I came out, and my openness was met with furtiveness and evasion.

Last summer a graduate library student invited me to be a professional consultant at her library. After she heard that I was to give a speech on gay liberation on the college campus, she withdrew the offer.

I came out and I took the consequences.

In explaining to my Jewish students what it means to live with the need to hide, to live with denial of self, to live with the fear of discovery, I remind them of the time the Nazis marched into Denmark and demanded that all the Jews wear the yellow Star of David so that they could more easily be exterminated—of how the king of Denmark was the first to wear the yellow star, and the rest of the country followed. I challenge my students to wear gay buttons for twenty-four hours without denying that they are gay.

I came out to bear witness.

Within the last year there has been great racial tension on my campus. In spite of censure by my colleagues, I teach *Inner City Mother Goose*, one of the most widely banned books in the country, even at the college level. It has been accused of perverting elementary-education majors against the moral workings of good Christian communities. I tell my rural and suburban students about a friend of mine, an inner-city black, who enjoyed the book, and who was stabbed to death: when we called the police, we were told, "Let the nigger faggots kill each other off."

I came out. . . . To teach.

When, during my coming-out speech on campus, I gave a gay reading of Ruth and Naomi's friendship, and of Jonathan and David's. I ruined the books of Ruth and Samuel forever for some listeners. But others came to acknowledge that there were indeed tender and moving homosexual overtones in these passages. Their shock at my reading had an impact that I would not have predicted. Many were resentful that gay interpretations had been censored from them for so long.

I came out. . . . To increase awareness.

I had another student to whom I had given a D. After not seeing him for several weeks, I received a phone call one morning at seven. "Miss Cooper! Miss Cooper! I've got to see you immediately." After saying I was asleep, I didn't want to see anyone, I wanted to go back to sleep, I gave way to his urgency. I said I would put on coffee and he could come over. When he arrived dramatically in my kitchen, he burst out: "I'm gay. What do you think of that?" I answered, "I need a cup of coffee." As I drank my coffee, I gathered my wits and said, "I have a houseguest who is in between a series of gay speaking engagements who can counsel you." Barbara Gittings came down the stairs with a migraine headache and counseled him with that tender, attentive manner most of us who know her admire so much.

But for some students there is no Barbara Gittings. They don't know who she is. They have never met . . . *us*. For them, for these students in Appalachia who never once in their lives met a person whom they knew to be gay, I came out.

For the most part, my encounters with gay students have been like running an underground railway out of there. I was sitting for office hours one day when a student came in requesting information on the gay movement for a paper he was doing. Because there was a queue of students, I asked him to return with a list of questions. When he did, the only question he really wanted answered was, "Can you show me a picture of a happy homosexual?" When I reminded him last month of that question, he said he didn't remember being that unhappy.

I came out and I was shut out.

I don't have a job. I don't have my book. I don't have my doctorate. I do have an ethical obligation that transcends my role as a professor: to come out so that my gay brothers and sisters don't go around small towns shuddering. At the Homophiles of Penn State we received a letter from a thirteen-year-old boy:

"I heard about your organization. I would like to join. But as the case is, I don't know where State College is. Could you send me some pamphlets or flyers about the gay movement and there [*sic*] members? My sexual drives are so great that I am often bored with nobody to love. I'm probably committing a sin in God's eyes, but I'm gay and that's it. There is nothing I can do. Because I'm a homosexual doesn't mean I'm insane. I don't consider myself that. So that's why I need your help. I don't want my parents to know about this. Thank you. P.S. Write back."

We did.



Coming Out

Bert Hansen

I'd like to talk about my experiences in coming out, and then make a few general comments about how this fits into gay liberation as a whole.

Often, when I'm talking to people about coming out and trying to encourage them, they seem to misunderstand the point and see it as a demand in some way *for the "movement"*—that it's an act of duty or sacrifice or martyrdom. I don't think it's that at all. I think we have to, as individuals, in our personal situations, come to the point where we see this action as something very positive in *our own* lives—certainly with a lot more positive than negative in it—a thing we do for our own individual reasons at the time in our life when it's best for us. It's an important thing for all of us to do and to encourage other people to do, but it's not something done out of duty to some abstract cause. I think those of us who have come out in various public ways have discovered a number of very positive things in it, and I want to share that with you.

My own situation seems to be rather uncommon, in that I thought I was straight until the age of twenty-seven. Thus it was very sudden when I sort of came out in both senses of the phrase: to discover that I was gay and then to let people know it. I use the term "discover" intentionally because I really think that it wasn't a new thing, that I probably had been gay all along, but I was almost the last person to know it. I'm glad I found out. [Laughter] It's

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been a good couple of years. The situation was such that when I first tried it, the simple physicality of it was so positive and on a gut level seemed so terribly natural that this triumphed over any doubts I might have had. It seemed to me that this was a very natural, a very right-on thing, *and* it was where I was at, it was good, *and* there shouldn't be any reason not to tell people. And I've been going out of my way for the last two years telling people about it. Friends often remark that it seems to be the only thing I want to talk about, and maybe it is some sort of compulsive thing. We shouldn't think of coming out as a thing we do once. I would like to use coming out in the sense of every time we tell somebody about being gay, especially telling our students and telling our colleagues about it, making it known again and again and again. We have to see the impact that this has on people and discover the very positive impact it has on us.

I may have been slightly naive in rushing around to tell people and to tell my parents. Most all of my friends counselled me not to tell my parents; I went ahead and did, and there was absolutely no problem at all. And it was not a mere tolerance but a very genuine acceptance. All of us are not in that same situation, but I think we should consider this carefully and not so readily pick up on the advice that says it's going to be too hard. And quite often the argument is: "Why hurt them? It's hard on them. Sure they can handle it, but why hassle them?" Without going into all the counter-arguments, I think we can each consider for ourselves what reasoning like that really means, what living in situations where we can't be honest and open about who we are means, what we are telling ourselves implicitly every minute that we are living in one closet or another, what it says implicitly to people we relate to. I felt the strongest reason for telling my parents was that if I went home with a woman to visit them I would have a certain kind of reception, and they would respect my love for her. I feel strongly that when I go home with a man I want to have that same reception and respect, but I could only have that if I first told them where I was at. And it's worked out the way I expected—I'm really glad to say that.

But I really want to emphasize that it's a repeated thing, this coming out to numerous people, especially for those of us who are teaching. Within the schools and universities there are a lot of individuals whom we encounter in a variety of situations. Teachers encounter people in a status hierarchy. Now we may try to get around that, you know; we may be freaky and we may be radicals in some ways; but because of the situation we're in, we're in positions of power over people. No matter how much we try to run our classrooms differently or advise students differently, we have to recognize the realities of power relationships, and especially as they're perceived and expected on the part of students. I think it's very important for people—especially for the straight world, the people who get their knowledge of homosexuality out of *Time* magazine—to encounter lots of homosexuals, not simply homosexuals that might give a different image or

change a stereotype, but those who are in a position of authority or power. It's important because people who are not in gay communities tend to run into homosexuals, known homosexuals, in service capacities—whether that's as hairdressers, or window dressers, or entertainers. Some of these may make a lot of money, but homosexuals are not seen in positions of authority, in positions of responsibility. Now that's one thing we have as college faculty; implicitly, by that job, we have authority. We may not want to exercise it in old-fashioned ways, but let's keep in mind that we have it. In my own situation I teach mostly policemen; I teach at Fordham in a program that gets a lot of cops, so most of the students in my classes are cops. I feel that it's very important that policemen who tend to encounter homosexuals in other contexts have encountered at least one who has power over them!

Now I would like to shift perspective a little and make some general comments. Something about the political significance. The welcoming speech yesterday by Richard Gustafson mentioned invisibility as one of the important problems gay people in the gay movement face. I'd like to focus on that. I think most of us recognize that liberation is not an individual thing: *you can't liberate yourself by yourself—it's a collective thing*. But a collective struggle requires that we recognize each other, that we know who we're struggling with and who we're struggling against. We've got to recognize each other in lots of way and lots of contexts, not only at dances and at movement meetings and in cruising scenes. We've got to know the common links we have with all sorts of people, and that can only happen by more and more people coming out.

But let me say also that in coming out of our closets and especially in terms of the panelists' encouraging people to come out, we have to avoid the danger of forcing others out when they don't yet feel it. I really think people have to feel it from within and deal with the challenge, the pluses and minuses in terms of their own life at that point. My own prejudice is that if people look at it clearly they'll see the positive things, but we can't put down people who, at this time, are unready, unable to come out. Howard Brown spoke about his experience with GAA, of working behind the scenes there for quite a while and the importance this had in helping him see the situation for himself. Working at the registration table yesterday, I was aware—surprised at first—of a small number of people, but still a significant number, who came in but did not want to put down a name and address on the registration sheet, did not want a name tag or wanted one with a first name only. I think that it's a shame, *but* it's really important from my point of view that these people *are here*. It's much more important they they're here than whether they can put their names down today. I think they'll be putting their names down at the next meeting, and I want to welcome those people specifically. [Applause]

Part of the importance of coming out so we can recognize each other, the problem of invisibility, is that unlike other oppressed groups (racial minorities, for example) we tend to be separated from our families. The problem that a black person has is largely the same problem that his or her brothers and sisters and parents have. Emotional support in facing the oppression is available within the family. The oppression we face is not the same our families or friends face, and often part of our oppression comes through our families' attitudes. For this reason it's much more important both that we come out to our families, helping them to deal with it, and that we recognize each other for the support we can get from each other, the kind of support other minorities may get in family situations.

The invisibility of gays also allows the negative evaluations and attitudes to circulate above ground in the polite and liberal media, the kinds of things that couldn't any more be said publicly about blacks or Jews or other visible minorities. In the other cases, the struggle for acceptance is not over yet by any means, but the attitudes have to be in graffiti and in gossip and in certain localized situations. Negative attitudes toward gays can be public, broadcast in the media, and they are not opposed because of our invisibility. Many of the myths that are now projected as if they are really scientific observation of gay people are not countered in the experience of straight people. They are countered daily in our experience because of the gay people we know and associate with. We see it simply as impossible, distorted, outrageous bullshit. We know we can whistle and we can spit, and that our friends can spit; but the invisibility, the closet, prevents people who *could* think otherwise from seeing the true situation. People who could be more critical and read and hear more critically are deprived of first-hand experience, and I think that this is an important problem.

Coming out, for all these reasons, seems to me the very crucial first step in liberating ourselves. But I must say that I think it's only a *first step*. My guess—the way things have been going the last three or four years—is that in the next five years, maybe ten, gays in American society will have achieved about the same level of acceptance that Jews have. Which is not to say that today there is no anti-Semitism—people still have job problems, housing problems, and many more—but the *New York Times*, for example, decides that anti-Semitic rubbish is not “fit to print,” while antigay rubbish is. But even if we get that—and I think for now we do have to work for that level of tolerance, for that kind of status—we have to keep in mind that it's only a first level and a first step, that such a status, though no small gain (we would have a wider latitude of actions, both sexual and political), *would not be liberation*. We can see this from black and women's liberation—that visibility, the ability to identify the oppressor and the oppressed, is no guarantee that the struggle is short or easy. But overcoming invisibility is a necessary beginning for us and is one of the things that makes our liberation

movement different, an essential first stage that a women's movement, a black movement, does not have to go through. I think it is by each of us coming out, and coming out again and again (especially those of us who are in positions to do that without sacrifice), and doing this in as many situations as possible, we help ourselves and we help each other to begin that second stage, the tougher and more fundamental struggle for liberation. □

Coming Out

Leah Parman

I hesitated for a while about whether I should speak on this panel because I'm not really out at my university, but I was assured that we shouldn't all have positive stories, so I'm here.

Despite my belief in the importance of coming out, I'm making an attempt, although it is very contrary to my personality, not to come out at my university, at least for long enough to get the degree. I'm a graduate student in my third year of clinical psychology. Unfortunately, my school hasn't learned yet that we're no longer a disease category; they still view homosexuality in the same way that they've been viewing it for years and that the whole psychiatric profession has been viewing it. Given this negative position, it seems wisest for me to try to be careful despite my inclinations to the contrary.

There is one faculty member that I've told, however. He's my master's thesis advisor, the most radical member of the department and the one who is closest to the students. His wife is an active feminist; she and I were both members of a group which opened a women's center in our town. It seemed safe to tell him, so I did; but his immediate reaction was to assure me repeatedly that I shouldn't tell anyone in the clinical faculty that I'm gay. He's not in clinical, of course; he's a social psychologist. He keeps assuring me that I shouldn't tell them, because he knows how I am about feminist issues: I've been very open about my feminism in the department and I've spoken in some of his classes on women's issues. He figures that if he doesn't keep reminding me I'll probably blurt something out to a member of the clinical faculty which would be disastrous. In other ways his reaction really amazed me. He was tolerant rather than accepting, and not

"Leah Parman" is a pseudonym. As a graduate student in clinical psychology at a conservative southern university, her position is too vulnerable to use her real name.

totally comfortable with the thought of me treating straight women in therapy. As I remember it, his comment was, "I really don't see anything wrong with it, but when you're working with a woman client who's unhappy in her marriage you really shouldn't encourage her to become a lesbian." This from the most together member of the department! Actually, he made a big mistake suggesting this idea to me, because the more experience I have working with unhappily married women the better his idea sounds! [*Cheers and applause*]

In some ways it's fortunate that I didn't come out until about ten months ago, because I don't think I would have lasted these three years in the department otherwise. Even so, I've found it very difficult to survive in the program as a lesbian because the subject matter is not something that's separated in any way from one's life. If I were studying physics, which was my undergraduate major, it would be easy; but since I'm studying clinical psychology I've had some experiences in relation to my efforts not to come out which have been very difficult. Some of the worst occurred in a course in group therapy which I took last year during spring quarter. It was an impossible situation in many ways: I was assigned to a group with three cotherapists. The other two therapists were both superstraight, Southern, rather conservative. In addition the group meetings were recorded on videotape, with the professor watching at the time, and then we'd go over the whole session again later. It amounted to doing therapy in a fishbowl with cotherapists and group members all espousing values contrary to mine and with the knowledge that I was not to reveal my values because they were considered irrelevant to the purposes of the group. Even my feminism was to be left outside the door somehow, so that when men in the group referred to women as chicks and made other equally sexist remarks I was expected not to react. Well I made an attempt to do that even though I knew the dishonesty involved had to detract from my efficacy as a therapist.

There were also a couple of specific incidents, one minor and the other quite serious, which occurred in the group. The minor one concerned an attractive female group member who always wore sexy clothes, makeup, etc. to the group meetings and then would sit there telling us that she thought she was ugly, that no one could possibly be interested in her, and that she couldn't even stand to see herself in the mirror because she looked so awful. So one time I told her that the way she looked didn't jibe with the things she was saying, and her response was, "Well, you're only a girl, you wouldn't know!" Somehow I made it through that meeting, but then I had to face the after-group going-over-the-tape session. The professor and cotherapists found the incident most amusing. One of them suggested jokingly that I should have told her I was a lesbian; but when the laughter subsided the professor added that that would really have been terrible for her because it would frighten her so much. It seems that her homophobia was not to be challenged. Of course, I did not dare to question his remark.

At that point I was still managing pretty well in the group and even continued to be enthusiastic about this experience as I had been about previous therapy experiences. The enthusiasm did not survive long, however. The more serious incident concerned a young man in the group, call him "Jim," who thought he might be a homosexual and with great trepidation was able to tell us that he was attracted to men but hastened to add that that was out, it was totally unacceptable to him. He then proceeded to ignore the subject entirely and would talk instead about all his efforts to make it with women, for which he was greatly encouraged by the group. The situation was driving me crazy because I felt that the group was going to do him the opposite of any good, and there was no way that I could help him, given the circumstances. I don't take therapy lightly even if I'm doing it as a student, so I found this situation very upsetting. I did attempt to do something, however. Using my reputation as a radical feminist and a crazy New York liberal, I tried to raise the gay consciousness of my cotherapists a little bit; but this effort didn't work very well; they resisted it tremendously. Meanwhile, everyone in the group was busy assuring Jim that he was "OK," and the women assured him that he was attractive to them, which wasn't his problem in the first place! One of the women even went into a long discussion of her studies in sex education, culminating in the assertion that Jim shouldn't worry because "Just because you can't make it with women, maybe you're impotent, but that doesn't mean you're a homosexual!" Even the other woman cotherapist one time after a group session said with great emotion, "Oh, I'm just sure Jim couldn't be a homosexual!" Well, I was just about dying, because as I saw it there was only one way I could help Jim, which was by coming out; but since I couldn't do that in the situation, I was caught. I was supposed to be one of his therapists, yet there was nothing I could do to help him, and it seemed that anything I might try to do would have backfired because of the nature of the group. At that point I was starting to freak out entirely. It was early July, the quarter was over, so I decided it was time to get away from Carolina for a while. The alternative seemed to be to get away from the program entirely, but I hoped not to have to do that. So I left for the summer, which was very good for me. I got active in Lesbian Feminist Liberation and GAU, and I met a woman here and fell in love; everything was beautiful.

Then I returned to Carolina and fortunately my lover came with me. Inspired by our good experiences in New York, the two of us decided to start Lesbian Feminist Liberation in Carolina. We'd had a fair amount of success with women's movement activities in Carolina before; we'd started a women's center, and we had a radical feminist conference which was a big success. One of the first differences I discovered about starting Lesbian Feminist Liberation was that I could no longer use the psychology department as my source of a mimeograph machine. I couldn't afford to get caught mimeographing in the middle of the department, running off the

literature. Then the next thing I discovered was that it was going to be a problem distributing the literature or getting notices put up because so many people in the area know me, especially around campus. The university has something called a free-speech bulletin board (one!), so we decided to try using that as a way of communicating with lesbians on campus. The board is covered by glass so that you have to put the material you want to go on the board in a special box, with your name and student number—which is your social security number—on the back. The box is labeled “free-speech board” and claims that material will be posted within twenty-four hours. My lover suggested that it would not be wise to use my real name on the literature, so we made up a name to be the student representative of LFL; we called her Dora Sappho, and we gave her a student number, which I recorded so that we would be consistent on future leaflets. We put our first flyer in the box, and waited. Not only was it not up twenty-four hours later, but two and three days later it still wasn’t on the board, and since the date of the meeting it was announcing was coming close, I was really getting angry. A couple of days before the meeting I walked into the building, didn’t see it on the board, and in anger rushed over to the desk—with my lover about five steps behind me, saying, “Are you sure you should be doing this?”—and complained that I had put something in the box several days earlier and it wasn’t up. They sent me to the student government office, and as I rushed off to it I had time to realize that I shouldn’t say I had put it in the box. My lover was very hesitant about the whole thing, but I assured her that I didn’t know anyone in student government since they’re all undergraduates. So I walked in, and the first person I saw was someone I knew! She’s in the administration, hired to work on women’s programming but not a feminist, so I had had dealings with her before! Not being used to lying, I hemmed and hawed quite a bit and wound up telling her that a friend of mine had put something in the free-speech box and had asked me to check up on it. She took Dora’s name, said she would look into it, and she did; it went up eventually, I think on the same day as the meeting or the day after.

The next time, Dora’s notice was ignored again. This time we went into the small women’s center on campus and tried asking one of the women there whom we liked if the women’s center could sponsor our group in the future for the purpose of free-speech-board announcements. She was sure that Dora was not being discriminated against because she knew the students in charge of the board, so she went into the office and checked up on it. The results were interesting. She reported that of course they would post the notice, but they would need another copy. What happened to the first copy she didn’t know—but we could guess. Any way, we gave her another copy and it did get posted.

Of course if I was really trying to be careful I wouldn’t walk into the women’s center on campus openly as a lesbian as I have. In fact if I was really going to be careful I wouldn’t do half the things I do; it’s a small

enough community that word could easily get around. Essentially I'm careful while I'm in the building where the psychology department is, and that's all. It's a gamble but I'm not willing to give up any more of my freedom than that to stay in the program.

My major problem with the program now is the selection of a dissertation topic which is acceptable to both me and the department. I had an awful time finding a topic for my master's thesis because I wanted to do it in women's studies, but the department is so sexist that they haven't hired any women! I finally found a man I thought I could work with and started on about five different topics when he fell out of grace with the department and was fired. Since he left immediately, I was again in search of an advisor and a topic, and chose the social psychologist I mentioned earlier. He picked the topic, and while I was only vaguely interested I agreed to do it. Now the problem is to find a topic for my dissertation, one that will be at least somewhat more interesting to me so that I'll be motivated enough to get through it. The problem is complicated now by the fact that I have to choose a topic and work with a professor in the clinical area for departmental political reasons. Of course I'd love to do a dissertation on lesbians, but I've been assured (and I do think it's correct) that there's no way I could do this topic without at some point getting furious with the neanderthal attitudes I'd encounter and blurting something out; and that would be the end of my career in the department. So I can't do that—yet. I'll have to wait until after I get the degree.

Sometimes the program feels like an indefinite sentence which I have to serve in order to get that magical document, the Ph.D. Every other day I consider dropping out of the program altogether, but my lover keeps reminding me of my goal of becoming a lesbian feminist therapist. So I hang on; and all the while I keep the image in my mind that the day they hand me the degree, that's the day I'm coming out! □

Coming Out

Morty Manford

Greetings! It's really a very tough thing to get up before a group this size and talk about coming out, because thinking of my experiences coming out brings to mind all the very tough times of being in the closet. My time in the closet was a period of tremendous emotional turmoil, as I'm sure it was for many people who are here.

My experiences reinforce the critical importance of emotions in the coming-out process and in the process of gay liberation. Indeed, the process of gay liberation *is* the process of coming out, and these processes reflect tremendous emotional rather than intellectual growth.

When I was deeply in the closet, I was chronically depressed. I was trying to conform. At Columbia College, where I spent several years as an undergraduate (those who know me know that I have fluctuated between studies and full-time work in the gay liberation movement), I knew what I genuinely felt; yet I also knew what I was "supposed to feel," and this dissonance between my own true feelings and accepted social values produced great tension and anxiety. I didn't have many friends as a freshman. It was a heterosexual environment, despite the fact that Columbia has a high percentage of gay people. I lived in the dormitories and yet hardly associated with other students. When I wanted to be with friends, talk to people, socialize, I would have to go downtown to Greenwich Village or to the East Side to one or another of the gay bars in those neighborhoods.

Morty Manford is president of New York City's Gay Activists Alliance. He has worked in the gay rights movement since his student years, when he helped found Gay People at Columbia-Barnard. He has held a number of offices in gay organizations (he was co-chairperson of The National Coalition of Gay Persons) and lectures and helps organize gay groups nationally. He founded Parents of Gays.

I was in hiding. I was afraid. I was afraid of being treated differently by professors, being ostracized by students; and it was almost a self-fulfilling prophecy, because in effect I allowed myself to be ostracized and alienated from the people around me. Well we all know what it's like to be alienated from our own feelings, by hiding, by creating a barrage of falsehoods and living a lie, and this reinforced my alienation from academic life and the entire campus community.

It wasn't until I was sitting in a coffee shop on Greenwich Avenue in early 1970 that I was hit with an emotional slap in the face about my homosexuality. I was sitting there, and suddenly there were maybe three hundred, four hundred, five hundred sisters and brothers marching by, protesting the police raid on the Snake Pit bar, which many of you may remember or have read about. Returning from the vigil at St. Vincent's Hospital, the demonstrators went over to the House of Detention and then on to Sheridan Square. I felt very strange; a surge of emotion came to the surface. There before me an example had been set by several hundred sisters and brothers who said, "We are marching, we are standing up *as gays*." It wasn't an intellectual thing at all; I had been going to bars for over a year and associating with gay friends. It was an emotional experience. It was their anger at the harassment and mistreatment and brutality at the hands of the police, which resulted in the Snake Pit raid, where 167 gay people were arrested and one brother was nearly killed.

I became involved in a couple of meetings of gay liberation groups, and again it was the example. You know, I understood and appreciated a lot of rhetoric intellectually; but to see somebody get up—an Arthur Evans or a Marty Robinson—and shout with all their might that we were tired of oppression and were going to retaliate placed a perspective on so much of what I felt. I had repressed an enormous amount of guilt and anger and in fact had turned it inward. But the gay movement defined a target. It targeted the emotions towards the source of the oppression; and each time something dramatic happens in the course of the gay movement, it's an emotional experience which speaks to my gut.

Everybody in this room has gone through some phase of academia and has read many contemporary books about gay liberation. But there's still that deep-rooted fear and guilt that we all have to some degree. To refrain from standing up and saying, "I'm gay," when one hears a story about brutality against sisters and brothers only reflects those deeper feelings. I think many of the statements like "I'm staying in the closet because I may lose my job" are really rooted in these deeper feelings of guilt by which we've all been conditioned to hold in check our dignity and our anger. The anger is there; it *has* to be there. We've all gone through so many years of being told that we're sinners, we're criminals, hearing stories of torture and abuse of effeminate men and masculine women, that there *has* to be that anger; there

has to be that anger resulting from forced hiding from family, friends, and our peers. It's there, and we too often hold it back . . . for a job?

The cost of staying in the closet is enormous. The psychic torture we allow ourselves to be subjected to day in and day out is severe. Coming out is the process of releasing our feelings, flowing with our feelings as we start to become more aware of them. To stay in the closet, each time one refrains from saying, "I'm gay," or hides, or deliberately avoids embracing gayness when it comes up in conversation, only reinforces the belief that there is a valid reason to stay in the closet; and that can be very harmful.

We've come a long way in the movement in the past four years. I know what it was like for me to first tell my parents I was gay. It was total torture; I was afraid—I wasn't quite sure of what—but it was on that level. I knew they wouldn't disinherit me; I knew they wouldn't disown me; and as was the case, they were very positive about it and very supportive. As a sign of the kind of impact the movement has had on people, there was a phone call we received at the Firehouse the other afternoon. It was a mother who said, "My son is gay, and I'd like him to meet other young gay men." [Applause] As a matter of fact at this moment there is a meeting of Gay Youth at the Firehouse. When asked how old her son was, she said, "He's nine years old." At first I thought this woman was a put-on; then I realized she was sincere. She had her son speak to me on the phone—he wanted to communicate, he wanted to lay the groundwork, he wanted to feel more comfortable before coming to the meeting. To see someone be so open about his gayness that young is a very gratifying experience.

Just coming to this conference, for many people, has been a daring thing, which only points out how far we have yet to go. Howard Brown has said that it was just *astounding* to him that his coming out would make national news. Well, can you imagine that? I mean really, for someone to say publicly, "I'm gay," and then be featured on the front page of the *New York Times*! It is incredible to think of the depth of oppression something like that symbolizes. In the face of such deep-rooted oppression, examples such as Howard Brown's, and a lot of other people's, serve to further encourage still others to come out and join in gay liberation by reaching them on that emotional level. □

Coming Out

Julia P. Stanley

My own present political position I know now to be what is called a "radical lesbian feminist" position, although I had no name for my analysis when I arrived at it. What I hope to trace here are the realizations that grew out of my own experiences which led me to commit myself to gay activism. Out of the processes of my own professional experiences came the conviction that none of us (gays, women, Blacks) will ever be free until we've stood up and declared ourselves free. It is also a truism that one does not become radicalized until it is a cause that touches one's own life. As a Lesbian, both feminism and gay liberation have a lot to do with my life, and it was these two movements that gradually moved me toward the position I hold today. But it is also true today that a majority of the women and the gay people in this country *still* have not realized that either of these movements touches on their lives in any way. There are also those who are fully aware that feminism and gay liberation are central to their lives, but even they have not completely come out front. With these two realities in mind, I am convinced that there are only two reasons for a lesbian to remain "in the closet" politically: fear and ignorance.

Julia Stanley has been a lesbian feminist activist since the early sixties, when her essays appeared in The Ladder. She has been a co-coordinator of the Southern Gay Coalition, and active in the New York Chapter of the Daughters of Bilitis and the gay student organizations at the University of Georgia. She has participated in several gay conferences and has contributed articles to One magazine, College English, American Speech, and a number of other publications, including several international journals of linguistics. She spoke in November 1974 at the annual conference of the American Anthropological Association in Mexico City on the relationship between gay culture and gay slang.

First, let me deal with ignorance. Unfortunately, many of the gay people in this country have yet to realize that Gay Liberation *does* have something to do with their lives. They're still carrying around a lot of the old ghosts: that everything would be fine if they were only straight; that everything will go well if they just keep pretending they're straight; that in this era of liberation it's ridiculous to go around wearing a label; that those people out in the street yelling about Gay Pride are the sort who would jump on just *any* bandwagon to get attention. This failure of realization within the larger community of gays is a measure of the degree of our oppression, and the degree to which we have been trained to perpetuate our own oppression. We are so conditioned to *reject* our identities as *gay* people that many of us cannot identify with a Gay Rights Movement.

However, once I realized that I was oppressed, had been oppressed, and would continue to be oppressed if I didn't break the tacit silence surrounding my existence, I began to realize other things about the "system" that we call "culture." Once I connected the fact that the silence came from external disapproval with my own code of "discretion," handed down to me by older gays, it dawned on me that it was the straights who wanted me to be silent, to continue discrediting myself through that silence, because they were actually *afraid* of all that my existence really means. And so I banished my own ignorance about what being gay means in a "straight" society, and I came to gay pride.

The most profound realization, however, is the fact that the guilt and/or shame that most of us feel toward ourselves as gay people is largely *self-generated*. We grow up in a society that does not provide us with positive images, nor have any of us ever heard of gay life as an alternative lifestyle to that perpetuated by the larger society. Instead, we have accepted the religious declarations that we are "sinful," we have accepted the psychiatrists' prognosis that we are "sick," and we have accepted the word of our parents that we are "shameful." And we have been trained to accept these terms of existence endorsed by our society through its legal machinery: the only "natural" and "possible" love is that between one man and one woman; anything else is "illegitimate." Further, we have internalized the definitions of these terms: there are men and there are women; men can be "masculine," but women must be "feminine"; men are dominant, aggressive, independent, but women must be subordinate, passive, and dependent (on men, of course); men do all the talking, women must listen attentively and try not to look bored; men can be enraged, angry, rebellious; women can only be resentful, irritable, manipulative. These adjectives represent the definitions of human existence that our society teaches and inculcates in each of us, and the rules that determine one's "success" in our society draw directly on these definitions. And if we want to be successful, we learn to play "the rules of the game," and make ourselves over accordingly.

What are the "rules of the game"? In our society, the kinds of behavior that are rewarded with money and status are just those characteristics associated with "masculinity": a "logical" mind, rationality, critical acumen, a refusal to give in to or overtly express one's emotions, reserve, even "coolness," and all of these attributes lead one directly to acceptance of the ideas that some people (usually men) must necessarily be dominant over other people, that someone else must control others, that hierarchies are somehow "natural" manifestations of how people *must* relate to each other, that power will always remain in the hands of those who seize it, that whoever has claimed authority is necessarily the one who is "right." And all of these assumptions are revealed explicitly in the clichés we learn as children: "It's a dog-eat-dog world," "Get them before they get you," "Do unto others before they do unto you," and "The early bird gets the worm."

But I had these other sayings rattling around in my mind as I listened to the people around me talk about power and control. I kept hearing other voices saying, "Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely" and "To thine own self be true." All these half-forgotten, half-remembered phrases jangling there at the back of my mind, and I wavered back and forth, torn by what I believed, and by what I saw happening around me. (It's going to be hard to be coherent from this point on.) But there I was, standing in front of that classroom, and I was teaching "To thine own self be true," and asking "What self am I?" My students and I, together in those classrooms, for the last six years, asking "Who *are* we?" And I had to ask, "What have I become?" My students taught me well. I listened closely to their questions, *too* closely, my colleagues assured me. And I no longer knew what I was doing up there in front of a classroom. All I could teach was what I believed, and I knew that I was going to have to give up believing or stop teaching. I was going to "work within the system," or I was going to get out, and I didn't know which it was going to be. And my colleagues were saying, think of what you have to lose, think of what we have to lose, think of *all* that we have to lose.

At this point, a little personal history will be helpful, if boring; but it's pertinent. Once I realized that I was going to go to graduate school, I accepted for my lifestyle a pattern, outlined for me by professors; I was going to be a graduate student, then an assistant professor, then an associate professor, and then, someday, a *full* professor! Maybe even a dean! I had my script neatly tucked under my arm. And I understood, perfectly well, that all of this would come to pass as long as I "published lest I perish." And so I began to write, and I wrote a lot, and I still am writing. But there was one little twist that made it different; I had promised myself, on the day that I realized that I was, in fact, a Doctor of Philosophy, that everything that I published would be consonant with my own beliefs. And that meant that I would never write anything that condoned or perpetuated the *status quo*; all of my work would be directed toward revealing the system

of oppression that we please to call our society. And you have to remember through all of this that I went to graduate school with only one purpose: to get into the system, to become a part of the power structure, in order to change the system. Not at all original; I would wager that virtually every person in this country with a Ph.D. got the degree with just that purpose in mind. But then, I got my first, and only job, in academia, at the University of Georgia. And there I discovered, over the past six years, what becomes of the dreams, the hopes, the aspirations. I discovered the disillusioned ruins of what had once been "people." And these people, who walked down the halls looking at the floor, with their shoulders hunched over, who had forgotten how to stand up straight, who shuffled instead of walking, whose faces were vacant and empty, whose eyes had the look of the lost, no dreams shining there, were telling me that we had to be silent because of all we had to lose. But I couldn't see that we had anything at all to lose. In fact, we had everything to gain! Because everything had already been lost, but I didn't know quite where or how. It was all gone before I arrived.

Through conversations with my older colleagues, I came to see how it had all been lost: they had bargained away their dreams, their ideals, their hopes for a better world, for power, comfort, security, tenure, a full professorship, a deanship, a \$20,000 mortgage on a home. They had paid the price for their security, *silence*. And I thought, "Ah ha!" so that's how it happens, they got sucked into the economics of the system, and to the sex-role stereotyping. Since most of them were men, they had wives and kids at home, and because they had wives dependent on them for support, and because they had bought homes for that wife and those kids, they were stuck. Yes, literally, *stuck*! And that's how the administrators of universities all over this country are keeping their faculties in line, and one sentence echoes in the corridors and faculty coffee rooms across the nation: "Think of all we have to lose!"

And as long as I identified myself with *them*, I had something to lose, too. And this is where we return concretely to the problem of "coming out front" as a professional person, to the logic of experience. I was a lesbian. I was a gay woman. I wasn't like them at all. I didn't *have* anything to lose. The system isn't *my* system. It belongs to white, heterosexual males, not to lesbians. More generally, the system doesn't belong to Gay People. This system was made to glorify heterosexuality, not homosexuality. I had nothing to lose! Gay people have nothing to lose. Nothing belongs to us.

I asked myself, "What have I got to lose by coming out front?" Answer: "I'll lose my job." Why do I need a job? I need my job to pay rent to the landlord who owns the land. I need my job to make my car payments to the bankers, who own everything the landlord doesn't own. I need my job to buy clothes to wear to work. But who told me I had to wear clothes? I need my job to buy food to keep myself alive so I can go to work for the system. I had nothing whatsoever to lose because nothing was *mine*. Whatever it is

that most of us, as gay people, carry around inside of us, the belief that we do have some kind of "vested" interest in maintaining this system, is simply erroneous. That belief is fallacious, and based entirely on the values that this system puts forth as worthy of living by. And those values do *not* include the positive worth of living as a gay person. If anything, the efforts of 10,000 years of Western culture have been devoted to defining gay people *out of existence*.

Once I began to ask myself all of these questions, and began to look for my own answers, my whole perspective of the world changed, and I realized that I was free. I do not use the term lightly. I think this is what we mean when we say that we're "liberated." It's what I mean when I say that I'm liberated. I don't mean that someone else changed a law somewhere, or a court ruled in favor of gay people, setting a precedent. I don't mean that someone else decided that it was OK for me to go on breathing. That would mean that *my* freedom was *a condition of someone else's power*—that someone else had "liberated" me by exercising their control!

I set myself free. I liberated myself from the terms of my society, the definitions of my society, and the "rules of the game" that my society teaches us to play. On the day that I realized that the very fact that I am a lesbian makes lies of everything that our culture endorses, I became a free woman. If I exist, and if my society says that I don't exist, then it's all lies. And I typed up what I now call my Declaration of Independence, put it in the mailboxes of my colleagues, and waited. The Head of my Department called me in and wanted to know what, exactly, were my specific complaints against him, the department, my colleagues, the University. And I told him, quite honestly, that I had no specific complaints. That I didn't like the system in general, that I was a free agent, not an agent of the system, that I was going to live by my terms, my definitions, and I was going to make my own rules, and that those rules included committing myself to the destruction of the system that he represented. I told him, furthermore, that I would remain at the University of Georgia for two more unforgettable years and that he was going to protect me for those two years because he was committed to the ideals of humanism as I was, and that I was going to live my life in accordance with those ideals. And I'm still at the University of Georgia. The two years will be over in June, 1974.

From here on out, I'd like to address myself to the real conditions and problems that surround coming out front as a gay activist in the world of academia. As with any job situation, no easy generalizations can be made, but I'd like to contrast different professional situations of medical doctors and lawyers with those of teachers. In general, we all still observe the rule that we're better off if no one knows that we're gay, thus endorsing the silence that surrounds our existence. Again, in general, the situations for M.D.'s, lawyers, and professors vary depending on the position of the individual, and the degree to which that individual is *not controlled* by

members of the "power elite." But power and control in this society are exercised in many different ways by different types of people. The really insidious fact about our system is the fact that it's a bureaucracy, and in a bureaucracy it's impossible to fix blame or responsibility when there's no way of tracing the lines of control. And so we miss seeing that there's a pattern to the control, and we're tricked into believing that we're already free.

But back to specifics, the risks involved, what we have to lose. Both the doctor and the lawyer run the risk of losing their intimidated, homophobic, straight clientele should they find out that she's a lesbian. On the other hand, it's also true that many doctors become "gay doctors," catering only to gay patients, and lawyers are beginning to advertise themselves as available to gays and other minorities, thus building their practices around civil liberties litigation establishing legal rights for oppressed people. To some extent, then, both the medical and legal professions have somewhat less to lose because both can choose their clientele; they can choose the people that they'll serve in their professional capacities.

The academic profession does not *choose* the people it serves, nor do they choose us, except insofar as students have the right to decide which courses they'll take and who they want to teach them those courses. Thus, to some extent, it can be argued that the academic gay activist harms herself professionally because students will no longer sign up for her courses, and when no one signs up for your courses, the administration has a reason for firing you other than the fact that you're gay. What is crucial here, what sets the professor apart from the M.D.'s and lawyers, is the fact that we are controlled, directly and indirectly, by the politicians and bureaucrats who control both state and private universities. Just as we do not select our students, neither can we choose the administrators and politicians who control our lives, sometimes subtly, and often brutally.

Given these variables that operate in our lives, one might assert, and many do, that it isn't possible to come out front in our capacities as teachers. But as soon as we phrase this assertion, surely it's obvious that the premises on which it's based reveal the extent of our oppression as gays. If colleagues and students are "disturbed" by the gay activist in the classroom, shouldn't we see that as *their* problem, not ours? And of course at this point one could say, "Well, of course it's their problem, but in the *real* world it's the gays who have to *pay* for the feelings of straight people toward us." What we're talking about here is the *source* of our oppression in a straight world. Straights are afraid of us. Quite simply, they oppress us because of their own fear. Why else would they have invested all of the tremendous energies of 10,000 years telling us that gay people are sick, disturbed, maladjusted, misfits, sinners, and shameful? Why else would we have all of these laws declaring us "unnatural," why all these "holy" books declaring us "sinful," why else would we inhabit the masturbatory fantasies of heterosexuals? Why else would a male heterosexual, in a letter to the

University of Georgia's student newspaper, *The Red and Black*, say that "Homosexuality is a perversion and a threat to heterosexuality"? An interesting conjunction of concepts. Why else would the minister tell his gay son, in an angry outburst of self-revelation, if he could have *heard* himself, that "Being heterosexual takes moral courage"? Why else would the mother have told her lesbian daughter that "Of course I've had those feelings myself, but I learned to repress them, so I could live a normal life." And they say these things with a "straight" face, pardon the pun. And we could all add countless other stories and quotations, all with the same moral: Straights are afraid of us! We're all of their fantasies made real, alive, and breathing. We are! And *if* we are, then *what* are they? Further, and more dangerously, more cripplingly, they're afraid to find out that we're people. And they can't afford that. Those in power, all of them, know that if everyone realizes that we're just people, then the whole game is over. All of the stereotypes of gays that have been used to frighten people will be exposed as lies, and the power structure in this country can't afford to have its stereotypes exposed. And so they trivialize us in the media, *when* they mention us at all. And it's that silence that we have to break through. We *have* to come out front and declare that we are *real*, especially to ourselves.

If gay professionals don't come out front, if we continue to remain in the closet as gay people, we are not only damaging ourselves, but generations of gays who will follow us. It's one thing to invalidate your own existence; it's one thing to go on making your own life a lie. Surely we do have the right to oppress ourselves, to cripple ourselves mentally by allowing ourselves to deny a very real part of our personalities. We all know the worn-out phrases with which we comfort ourselves: "Why should I wear a label?" "Why should I categorize myself?" "My sexual preference is only one facet of my personality!" And we go so far as to declare that labeling ourselves as gay people "limits" us, narrows the meaning of our lives. Surely if one enjoys living with externally validated and enforced guilt and shame, that's the individual's prerogative. Of course. But to go on living this way also denies the validity of the lives of other gay people, especially the students and other colleagues with whom we come in contact.

And there I was in the classroom, teaching the glories of heterosexuality, of male domination, the triviality of women, the nastiness of gay people. And I couldn't go on doing that to myself, to my students, my gay colleagues. I'm a lesbian; and my continued silence perpetuated our oppression, and helped to destroy those gay students who came to believe, *through me*, that *that* must be the only way to live. Of course, we pretend we're straight, get into the power structure, and *then* things will change. But that's a lie. Things will not change until we say, *out loud*, "I'm gay. I'm good, and I'm strong!" *Then*, and only then, will things change. As gay academics, surely we understand that there is only *one* way to live, and that's with pride, and it's a heritage of pride that we must pass on to other gay people. □

Part IV

The Women's Caucus

The Women's Caucus

Leah Parman and Hannah Bat-Lena

Background of the Women's Caucus

The inception of the women's caucus at the first Gay Academic Union conference was a direct result of early meetings of the GAU, which were overwhelmingly male dominated. General meetings would include only two or three women out of fifty persons present. Factors for this were mainly two: (1) the lack of acquaintance of the founders of the GAU with gay women and their neglecting to contact gay women through lesbian and women's groups; and (2), more importantly, the painful experience of many gay women in the early gay movements, which were totally dominated by their male counterparts, and the belief that GAU would not be any different in that regard from organizations like the Gay Activists Alliance and other gay groups.

A few of the founders of GAU were cognizant of the connection between discrimination against women and discrimination against gay men, and were eager to attract women to the group. Without the support of these men the few women members in the early days of the GAU would most likely have dropped out from the group. We certainly were not inclined to participate in yet another male-dominated, sexist organization which would ignore our interests as women and continue to treat us as second-class members.

The general meeting of September 4, 1973, was momentous for the organization, both for the men and for the women. The meeting was led by Bert Hansen and "Leah Parman," who spoke concerning the connection

"Hannah Bat-Lena" and "Leah Parman" are pseudonyms. Unfortunately, since we are both still quite vulnerable—both jobless and Ph.D.-less—we are still partially closeted. We hope to get both feet out of the closet in the near future.

between discrimination against women and discrimination against gay men. As long as the present society remains patriarchal, neither women nor gays will be free. This society defines strict roles in accordance with sex. For example, men are supposed to be strong, aggressive, independent, logical, and unemotional; women are described as weak, dependent, emotional, intuitive, and nurturant. Gay men are a threat to the system because their very existence challenges the myth of male supremacy. They dare to take on characteristics ascribed to the inferior sex; any man who takes the female role is and must be degraded. The women at the meetings pointed out to the men that, besides the direct relationship between discrimination against women and against gay men, gay women feel solidarity with their straight sisters because the system oppresses all women, and that we could not be a part of a group that would not subscribe to feminism and fight for the rights of all women in academia.

A number of feminist resolutions, introduced by Andrea Dworkin, were proposed at the meeting, including the addition of a feminist plank to the GAU statement of purposes, the inclusion of an equal number of women and men on the steering committee, and an equal vote for women at meetings. The first resolution engendered so much debate that the meeting was never able to discuss the other two resolutions. The lines of the debate essentially were drawn between those who saw that the oppression of gays was intimately related to the patriarchal society and those who could see no relationship between feminism and the gay movement. The positive vote in favor of the resolution led to the agreement of the women already active in the GAU to stay in the organization, and also influenced other women to join the organization. The recommendation for equal representation of women and men on GAU's steering committee was eventually reintroduced and passed at a later meeting.

The relationship between feminism and the gay movement is especially salient for lesbians in academia because of the widespread and well-documented bias against all women in academia. just a few relevant statistics will be cited here. Astin and Bayer, in a thorough study of people employed in academic institutions, found a significant relationship between sex and academic rank even after the effects of thirty other variables, including highest degree, number of publications, years employed in academe, and the nature of the institution of employment, were statistically removed.[†] In a similar study, Simon, Clark, and Galway found the greatest differences between single women Ph.D.s and all men Ph.D.s (almost all

[†] H. S. Astin and A. E. Bayer, "Sex Discrimination in Academe," *Educational Record*, LIII, 2 (1972), 101-118. The partial correlation between sex and rank was -.17, which was significant at the .05 level, with the effects of the thirty other variables partialled out.

were married) in the ranks of associate professor (with more men at this rank) and instructor, lecturer, or research associate (with more women). An intriguing sidelight to this study was the tremendous difference in marital status: 95% of the men but only 50% of the women were married.‡ Given the estimate that 10% of the adult population is gay, it seems that many of our gay brothers in academia must be married! The 50% figure makes us curious as to whether there are more lesbians in academia than in the general population.

The Women's Caucus at the GAU Conference

The need to find each other and to meet together as women led the women on the conference committee to insist that provision be made for the women to meet together as a women's caucus. The women's caucus met throughout the conference. There were three general meetings—on Friday afternoon, Saturday morning, and Saturday afternoon—as well as many informal discussions. Our major concerns were, first, should we remain within GAU or form a separate organization; and, second, if we remain within GAU, how can we structure the organization to assure a major and equal role for women and continuing support for feminist issues? The first meetings, chaired by Lucie Arbuthnot, was concerned totally with the first question.

Some women thought we should form a separate organization to work specifically for lesbian-feminist issues. many of these women had participated in mixed gay liberation groups in the past in which the men dominated, paying no attention to lesbian issues and making no attempt to rid themselves of their own sexist attitudes. Afraid that the same thing would happen in GAU, these women argued that we could avoid much pain and misspent energy by forming a separated organization immediately which would work with the GAU on mutual interests. Jean O'Leary, a leader and founder of the Lesbian Feminist Liberation (LFL), pointed out the tremendous growth in membership of LFL following its separation from the Gay Activists Alliance and suggested that a separate organization would be similarly beneficial for gay academic women. On the other side, it was argued that GAU did have a feminist plank in its statement of purposes and that we should try to work within the organization, at least for a trial period. In addition, we could benefit from the organizational work that had already been done by GAU by remaining a part of it. We decided to take a straw vote at the first meeting, but to delay making any binding decision until our last meeting, hoping to reach consensus by that time. The straw vote showed a small majority in favor of remaining within GAU.

‡ B. J. Simon, S. M. Clark, K. Galway, "The Woman Ph.D.: A Recent Profile," *Social Problems*, XV (1967), 221-236.

The second meeting occurred during the task-oriented workshops on Saturday morning at the workshop on women in the GAU led by Dolores Noll. Both this meeting and the one which followed it were primarily concerned with the second question above: how we could structure GAU to insure a major role for women and a feminist orientation. Suggestions and countersuggestions from members of both sides on the first question led to the formulation of a number of resolutions on which we voted at our third meeting. The major resolution, which was accepted unanimously, was that the GAU should be composed of two caucuses, a women's caucus and a men's caucus, which would meet at the same time (especially at conventions) and that no other GAU events would be scheduled to conflict with caucus meetings. The scheduling provision was deemed necessary because at the convention the women's caucus meetings conflicted with other workshops so that women were forced to choose between participation in the workshops or in the women's caucus. It was proposed that the purpose of the men's caucus should be to devote time and effort to consciousness-raising activities, discussing sexism, the relationship between gay liberation and women's liberation, and methods for implementing GAU's first goal of opposition to discrimination against all women in academia. This was also passed unanimously.

At the third meeting, chaired by "Leah Parman," we also considered alternatives to the three-woman—three-man steering committee, but the alternatives were rejected by a majority vote. The alternatives were (1) that the steering committee consist of four women and three men, and (2) that a tie vote between the women and men on the steering committee always be decided in favor of the women. After this vote elections were held for the three women's positions on the steering committee. There were five nominees: Lucie Arbuthnot, Elizabeth Diggs, Joan Nestle, Sahli Pollak, and Donella Stanley. Lucie Arbuthnot, Joan Nestle, and Donella Stanley were elected, and Elizabeth Diggs and Sahli Pollak were named as alternates.

The third meeting also dealt with some other organizational matters. We decided unanimously that if GAU were to have a newsletter, it should be a combined newsletter of the women's and men's caucuses together with any general news of interest to both caucuses. In addition, GAU conferences should be chaired alternately by women and men and part of the GAU dues should go to the women's caucus. We also decided to advertise the women's caucus as widely as possible, and to distribute the names and addresses of the women at the conference (which we had been collecting during our meetings) to all the women on the list. Finally, a date and time were scheduled for the first meeting of the women's caucus after the conference.

Although there was little time left after the organizational discussion, Jean O'Leary proposed that we spend some time talking about some of the issues with which the women's caucus may be concerned. Jean had some suggestions which she brought before the group. They were discussed briefly

and some modifications, additions, and additional suggestions were made. The suggestions include:

- 1) Fifty per cent of university and high-school administrators should be feminist women.
- 2) More feminist teachers should be hired.
- 3) Each high school and college should have a women's studies program, and in every college a major in women's studies should be offered.
- 4) In gay studies courses half of the course should deal with lesbianism and that half should be taught by a lesbian.
- 5) Universities and colleges should recruit more feminist and lesbian-feminist counsellors, and women students should be encouraged to go into nontraditional fields.
- 6) Definitions and guidelines for feminism and feminists should be formulated by the women's caucus.
- 7) Continuous effort should be made to combat the degradation of women and gays in classes.

One of the most gratifying aspects of the women's caucus meetings was the movement toward consensus which occurred from the first to the third meeting. By the time of the final vote on remaining within GAU, the vote was unanimous. At the same time women who originally favored this position gained understanding of the possible difficulties involved. Although votes were taken, the opinions of the minority were not ignored. As a result the group moved toward consensus decisions rather than simple majority votes. For the two of us, and we believe for many other women also, the women's caucus meetings were a very positive experience. The atmosphere of these meetings contrasted greatly with the few predominantly male workshops we were able to attend. We hope that with scheduling changes to avoid conflicts between the women's caucus and other meetings, increased participation by women, and the raised consciousnesses of the men participating in the men's caucus, workshops at future conferences will be as rewarding to women as the women's caucus.

Finally we wish to say that the unanimous adoption of the women's caucus resolutions by the entire conference in a spirit of good will and enthusiasm made us hopeful that the men and women of GAU may be able to create a nonsexist organization in which all members will respect one another and work together, without prejudicial regard to sex. □

Afterword



I Heard a Promise

Arnie Kantrowitz

Going to the November 1973 conference of the Gay Academic Union began as a duty—a duty to academe and to gay liberation—but it turned into the most pleasantly exciting promise I'd heard in a long time. I had been active in the movement for several years and was in the midst of teaching a course called "Homosexuals and Literature," so I was accustomed to that special sort of happiness that blossoms when gay people find a new sense of community with each other, marking for many the end of long years of painfully silent solitude. But this was even more. The air seemed permeated for two full days with one long sigh of relief, that sound made by long-closed doors when they are opened at last.

Polite cordiality is traditional at academic gatherings. Artifice and objectification at bars, rhetoric and riot at political meetings—all are traditional at many gay gatherings. But genuine joy and inspiration were sustained at John Jay by the exuberant release of twice-pent emotions. Academics labor under a sometimes rigid, often even stultifying system that rarely allows for the expression of intimate emotion. The role of teacher is a demanding one and, unfortunately, sometimes actually a depersonalizing one in spite of all its human potential, which gets lost in the obedient quest for rehiring, tenure, and promotion. Many gay academics live behind that door as well as the gay closet door imposed by the fear of societal retribution, which is especially justified in jobs relating to young people.

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Putting together areas of our lives that had seemed irreconcilable was for everyone present a form of putting ourselves together. If we can be gay in academe and if we can be academic in the gay world, we can grow more whole as individuals by erasing the artificial compartmentalization of our identities, each of us becoming the same person all day, wherever we may go.

It seemed difficult to remain a stranger to anyone for long at the conference. People were glad to talk to each other and made themselves easily accessible. Everyone seemed genuinely interested in each other's experiences, almost as if they were long-lost friends filling each other in on lapsed time rather than people at their first encounter. I found frequent fascination with the gay course I was teaching, others anxious to know how it had been accepted by administration, faculty, and students, with a light in the questioners' eyes that suggested that perhaps they would be able to do something similar at their schools. And everywhere there were the wonderful ironies common at such gay coming-out festivals: teachers encountering amazed students, surprised colleagues embracing in relief, all a testament to the needless success of our artifice.

When we gathered at the general meetings, all of the exuberance was concentrated in one large room and took form in waves of affirmation. No one in that audience was alone; we were each part of some larger whole which had been denied to most only through their own silence, and the silence was over. Martin Duberman said he felt like a *bar mitzvah* boy addressing such an expectant crowd, which relaxed whatever we had been anticipating into an easy joy. And when Barbara Gittings reflected her statement at the previous June's Gay Pride march by saying that we were doing all we could to oil the hinges on the closet doors of those less fortunate than we, she earned our thunderous approval and our unspoken assurance that our sense of purpose could continue long after the conference disbanded.

The first panel, "Scholarship and the Gay Experience," threatened to be a little too formal for my taste, but only the title was formidable. It was a gleeful episode of learning and sharing. Among the highlights was Elizabeth Fee's quietly hilarious recounting of the absurd medical theories of sexuality, deftly putting in their place those who would be the arbiters of morals in the name of science by pointing out their own foibles. Bertha Harris's tale of making books and mothering a child was loudly underscored by her parenthetical "I was a heterosexual for fifteen minutes once!" And Wilson Carey McWilliams proved a delight in his deceptively droll acerbity as he chided the straight world's distorted vision of us. Our laughter showed not only our new-found self-approval but a newborn refusal to acquiesce any longer in the superstitions surrounding our lives.

The second panel, called "Coming Out," consisted of several descriptions of opening closet doors. Outstanding among them was Julia

Stanley's delicious account of revealing her lesbianism in Athens, Georgia, told from the perspective of remarkable success, whence it proved to be not her own problems but those of the people and structures around her which she had revealed. She sounded one of the most significant themes of the conference by pointing out that what we do is not only for ourselves but for those who come after us, and as teachers it is our special responsibility to act *in loco parentis* for our gay students, educating them, encouraging their own natures, since their physical parents as well as their educations are likely to be heterosexually oriented. Janet Cooper reached the podium quietly and, in uncertain tones that gained in strength as her story unfolded, told a tale of perseverance and integrity in the face of defeat, ostracism, and discrimination in Shippensburg, Pennsylvania. I was proud to weep for her tribulation and proud to join a standing ovation for her. It is easy for those of us who meet little resistance to our disclosures to be glib about the process of coming out, but doing it without easy acceptance, doing it because it is the right thing to do, no matter the consequences, is an act of true heroism that made each of us feel as much pride as it did pain. The key theme of all the coming-out experiences emerged as the message that no one can be forced to come out, whatever the surrounding circumstances, until he or she is ready to do so. Coming out is a matter of professing an attitude about oneself, not merely confessing homosexuality, and until the individual is ready to speak with genuine pride, there is little point in saying words that without that pride are rendered into meaningless apologies.

The film *Some of Your Best Friends* proved to be an interesting portrait of confrontation tactics with a spectrum of gay stances ranging from sunlit defiance to shadow-faced obsequiousness. Otherwise it seemed a somewhat dated essay on lifestyles and dreams that belong more to the sixties than the seventies. But they are the principles on which current, more pragmatic concepts are being based, the idealistic progenitors of a new, practical struggle.

I attended three workshops. The first, on literature, seemed more a classroom than workshop since there seemed a clear sense of hierarchy. Scholarship threatened to obscure teaching as the subject matter grew more esoteric while we heard question and answer about specific critiques of individual writers rather than mutually examining the principles of teaching the expression of homosexual themes in literature. Somehow it became more important to prove Walt Whitman's homosexuality than to enjoy the expression of male love in his poems, and that seemed beside the point to me. The second workshop, on the strategy and tactics of gay studies, revealed the wide diversity of approaches and structures possible in dealing with the subject. The school, the subject, and, more important, the attitude of the teacher and the orientation of the students go a long way toward determining what any specific course will turn out to be.

The third workshop was on the relationship between gay teachers and gay students. Somehow, for me, it helped the rest of the conference form a coherent pattern. After discussion of sex between teacher and student, which all agreed was strictly an individual matter, the subject of the relationship between liberation as a homosexual from the definitions of the culture and liberation as an instructor from the traditional definitions of educational institutions was discussed. Those who had been through the process called "liberation"—the affirmation of internal, subjective values—approached literature, gay studies, and teaching styles on a person-to-person basis. Traditionalists related to subject matter and class via the predefined roles of teacher and student, seeking objective validation of theory in factual data rather than subjective affirmation of experience. For me, this was the primary underlying issue of the entire conference, more than the political problems of job discrimination, more even than the mutual emotional reinforcement we can offer each other. It is the fulcrum on which the gay experience and the academic experience can pivot, the point at which our fragmented lives can be joined, the most significant offering of our gay identities to our academic work.

The final meeting was more celebration than work. Every motion was passed by acclamation, because nothing could dampen the high we all felt, and we were anxious to approve of any program that could further the work we had begun. From it emerged the men's and women's caucuses, which will go a long way toward avoiding conflict between the needs of women and of men by creating a bicameral structure. But from it there also emerged an age-old organizational problem: passing the buck. No one seemed to want a leader, most of us having had enough of the charismatic manipulation of command, but everyone seemed too glad to allow a Steering Committee to be responsible for handling everything from writing letters to planning programs. The strength of group liberation is individual liberation, in learning that each of us can do it for himself or herself. Harry Truman said, "The buck stops here," but it is a strong people who never pass the buck upward at all.

Each of us came away from the conference with a discovery, a stronger identity, its gay and academic facets shining brightly in new light. What we do with that discovery is up to us individually and collectively. It would be a shame to watch that luster dim through lack of effort. The conference produced a purpose, but a direction is still lacking. Now we know where to go, but the practical question that remains is how to get there. Yet as long as there is a dream, there is a promise that can be kept. The 1973 conference is now history. It was the birth of a new hope, and each of us must be responsible for nurturing it into fulfillment. □

Impressions and Hopes

Dolores Noll

From the reports I hear about the Gay Academic Union Conference, many people who attended gained a real high from the experience. It was dark and rainy when I took my flight out of New York City that Saturday evening, and I felt tired and rather depressed. This is not to say that the conference itself was a depressing experience for me, or that I do not understand why many gays in academia would feel high after attending it. I left with a sense that we had accomplished something significant; but I guess I was also struck with the enormousness of the task before us.

Two clear impressions emerge from the conference: one arising from the general meetings and speeches; the other from the women's caucus workshops. In general, I was impressed and moved by the speeches. Certain comments stand out in my mind: Martin Duberman's remarks about the rites of passage for the homosexual; Barbara Gittings' fantasy about the lesbian who is given support and encouragement through her childhood and adolescence; Elizabeth Fee's description of pre-Freudian views of homosexuality; John McNeill's exposition about the Biblical views of homosexuality (a subject which almost invariably arises in my part of the country when we give talks on gay liberation); Wilson Carey McWilliams' argument that what is normal for a society should come from the best that society knows, not from the average or mediocre; Janet Cooper's very moving description of the

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oppression she has suffered in a Pennsylvania state college; Richard Gustafson's statement that to use sexist language is to be sexist; Howard Brown's explanation that his coming out resulted from a heart attack and the consequent realization that he could not wait forever to fight for liberation; and Julia Stanley's reference to those lines from "Bobby McGee": "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose. / And nothing ain't nothing if it ain't free."

The second impression was one of combined disappointment and satisfaction in conjunction with the workshops. I was disappointed that I was able to attend only one of the workshops other than those of the women's caucus. The problem was one that I had anticipated, having attended other gay conferences; it arose from the fact that two of the women's workshops were scheduled at the same time as the scholarship and task-oriented workshops, so that each woman by necessity had to choose between her identity as a gay woman and as a gay academic. To have to make such a choice was constantly frustrating. I am happy that in the closing session the GAU adopted the women's caucus recommendation that in the future there would be no such scheduling conflicts, and that the women's and men's caucuses would meet at the same time, though separately, to discuss the issue of sexism.

As for the women's workshops themselves, I was discouraged with the first one but became increasingly encouraged with the next two, as problems were slowly worked out and agreements were reached. The principal issue at the first meeting was that of separatism: should women join the GAU or should they form a separate organization? I'm afraid we lost some of the sisters at that meeting; one sitting next to me kept muttering to herself: "They're all bananas. So what am I doing wasting my time sitting here?" Still, that issue—and the problem of sexism which prompted it—had to be met. I think that at that first meeting the essential decision was reached (though it was not formally confirmed until the last meeting) that for the time, at least, women would remain in the organization, provided that the GAU would take certain steps to combat sexism in a meaningful way. Between the first women's caucus meeting and the second, I attended a gay scholarship workshop and, like some of the other women there, was struck again by the deeply engrained, if unconscious, chauvinism of some of the males there. But I still felt—as apparently a majority of the other women did also—that our oppression both as gays and as women could best be fought by our remaining in (or joining) the GAU. In the remaining meetings we worked out the recommendations we would present to the general session, as well as the basic organizational structure of the women's caucus itself.

I should add that I appreciated and enjoyed the dinner and party down in the Village which the women in the GAU had planned for the sisters who attended the conference. It was pleasant and relaxing, after a long day

which had started at 5:30 a.m. in Kent, Ohio, to talk and drink wine and dance with other gay women from different places in the country; I feel I made some friends there.

Later that evening, on my way with some others to a women's bar, I walked down Christopher Street for the first time since it had acquired symbolic significance for the Movement. In one way, that was the high point of the trip for me. Finally, I met some beautiful people at the conference. Perhaps the greatest contribution of such a conference lies in the contacts made among gay people around the country. We are all strengthened as the web binding us together grows larger.

I returned to Ohio to face again the problems and rewards of being the faculty advisor of the Kent Gay Liberation Front. The problems are many: how to help hold together a group of people with diverse ambitions and goals; how to guide students without dictating to them; how to minister to the needs of homosexuals who are in various stages of liberation; how to speak to the straight society; how to help a gay mother retain custody of her children; how to advise a gay woman who has remarried and now regrets the decision; how to meet my responsibilities as a teacher and scholar (and lover). But I could see my problems in a larger perspective: at least I, unlike Janet Cooper, will not have to support myself as a second cook in a Mexican restaurant when this school year is over. And the problems are in themselves rewarding, for they are all part of the greater struggle for liberation—a struggle which springs from the pride and inner integrity of gay women and men and which is, in itself, the most exhilarating experience of my life.

I am convinced more than ever of the need for gay faculty members and administrators (especially those of us who are tenured) to come out. How can we sit back and allow our students, who have even less job security or freedom from parental restrictions than we, to fight the battle of liberation for us? How can we, remembering our own lonely struggles for self-identity, turn from our students who are desperately seeking role models for their lives? Shortly after the killings at Kent, a poster appeared in the office of a teacher here: "We publish while our students perish." Surely those of us who are teachers have a special responsibility to live lives of honesty and courage. Hopefully, the GAU, now and in the future, will help more and more of us lead such lives. □





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