

Gay Liberation

A brief moment
in turbulent times



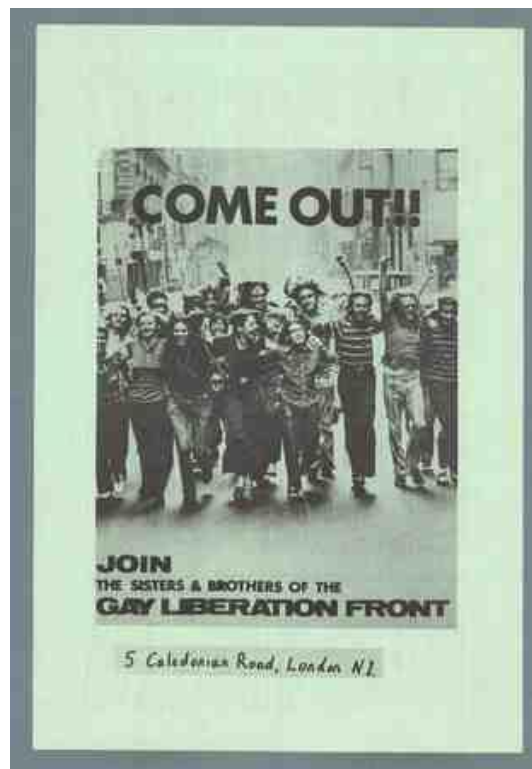
Photograph: Diane Davies

Times Square, New York 1969

An introduction with related
pamphlets & essays

by Don Milligan

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**Gay Liberation:
a brief moment in
turbulent times**

Introduction and
related essays by
Don Milligan

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Introduction

Gay Liberation: A brief moment in turbulent times

Don Milligan



Viewed from the present the gay liberation movement of the years 1969-1979 – ten years or thereabouts – is a confusing phenomenon. The lengthening alphabetic string of lgbt . . . is a much later development, as is the concern with all things trans, racial,

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and feminist. The necessity of women's liberation; the evils of male supremacy – of patriarchy – loomed large in our theory and thinking and, of course, the essence of intersectionality was grasped by GLF activists, but not the word or the fully formed concept. The emphasis of the movement was upon *liberation* rather than *identity*.

An inescapable element within the struggle for the emancipation of homosexuality, identity, was so to speak, a 'means' rather than an 'end'. Coming out, and living openly as homosexuals was key, but emancipation was the objective.

Consequently, marriage, and the regulation of sexuality within the heterosexual family (there were no other kinds of family at the time) was our focus. At the get-go we did not seek equality, but rather the overturning of all the social and legal means by which sexuality was regulated at the time. This is why so much of what the movement had to say was a confusing melange composed of sentiments and rhetoric from the 'summer of love' of 1967, and boldly revolutionary insistence upon the urgent necessity of transforming of all social and sexual mores.

Unsurprisingly, there was something unhinged, florid, extreme, about our reactions. The moment we'd gone for broke, and walked the streets slapped to the eyeballs in drag, or confronted those in authority with brazen assertions of our desire, moderation was out of the window. A boldness took over from the most mannered, creative, and cultivated amongst us, to those who were blunt, and rough-edged. In such circumstances, surrounded by condemnation, disgust, and repressive psychiatrists, magistrates, neighbours, relatives, publicans, and police, defensive aggression, and the cultural assertion of our sexuality was mightily necessary.

However, the collision between millenarian enthusiasms and practical demands rapidly appeared within the lifestyle initiatives, think-ins, zaps, and polemical interventions. Staged publicity stunts aimed at the wider public, perhaps inevitably, trended towards demands for equality as a means of explaining ourselves, both to the straight world, and to the more conservative elements amongst homosexual men and

women. The more utopian ideals of those involved in squatting, communes, and collectives or one sort or another – rejection of regular employment and of the labour market in favour of ‘creative’ unemployment – became inextricably woven together with staid reformist demands for equality.

At first, we did not demand the right to marry, or to be able to construct ersatz forms of family life in imitation of the heterosexual ones common at the time. We were, perhaps naïve concerning the abolition of the ‘age of consent’ and that rapidly morphed into the more plausible demand for equality – the ‘age of consent’ for homosexuals to be set at 16 – no more, and no less, than parity with heterosexuals.

Within a very short space of time, this demand for equality rapidly spread, overtaking our radical élan, and was certainly more in keeping with the positive steps made to found institutions and organisations that would give concrete expression to the real existence and needs of homosexuals, rather than simply framing demands and making a revolutionary noise.

So, the fragmentation of the Gay Liberation Front in central London within two or three years of the first London meeting, resulted in a plethora of radical theatre groups, collectives, and other initiatives. By 1974 Gay Switchboard was up and running. Organisation in the Marxist groupuscules was followed by activity in trade unions and eventually within the Labour Party. By the late nineteen seventies these outreach activities were developing fairly rapidly across the country.

In this regard, it is common for many Gay Libbers who’d been active in central London to date the demise of GLF sometime during 1973. This surprises those of us involved in founding and working in GLF groups and societies in Lancaster, Bradford, Birmingham, Leeds, Bristol, Nottingham, Leicester, Glasgow, Edinburgh, and many other cities during the period 1973 to 1979. Radical gay groups were also spun off from GLF throughout this period in a number of different neighbourhoods in London – groups that engaged in significant agitprop and lifestyle interventions.

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The focus upon gay liberation in central London of most UK histories of the movement is perhaps inevitable, given the size of the city and its weight in the archives of documents and photographs. Though, it must be said Aubrey Walter's 1980 edited collection, *Come Together – the years of gay liberation 1970-73*, does manage to convey a fairly broad picture of events.

However, it should be remembered, of course, that camera phones did not exist, photocopies were expensive, and reliance upon, duplicators, 'telephone trees', and other ephemeral means, widespread. Consequently, records of events and initiatives outside London are patchy, to say the least. But this, merely serves to remind us that radical social movements are like 'icebergs': nine tenths of the activities, initiatives, and energy expended, remain under the historical surface, unseen and unrecorded.

This, I think, has contributed to the tendency of many observers to inscribe the memory of much GLF activity with our current concerns – concerns which have arisen in the context of legal and social changes that were more or less unimaginable during the nineteen seventies. GLF was very much a movement of its time – largely concerned with the legal and social situation of gay men and the social difficulties and challenges of relating to a rapidly evolving commercial gay scene of bars, clubs, saunas, and publications, that the fact of GLF, and of public gay campaigning, had begun to bring out into the light of day.

Commercial interests began to develop openly gay venues and enterprises focused by and large upon a male clientele to a degree unmatched by the 'underground' network of lobby groups, cafes, and pubs, of the fifties and sixties. Inevitably, cruising places and cottages began slowly to cede ground to 'personal' ad columns, and increasingly accessible public spaces in which gay men could safely meet each other. Gay entrepreneurs and the pink pound began gradually to make their appearance. Gay Pride demonstrations became more representative of the wider gay community, rather than the movement, which has culminated in today's heavily sponsored parades and beer fest celebrations of homosexuality supported, in the most

astonishing turnarounds, by the police, the emergency services, and the armed forces.

These developments are spontaneous and form part of the extraordinary legal and social changes registered by campaigns like Gays and Lesbians Support the Miners, Act Up, and lobbies like Stonewall, together with the legal reforms of 2001-2014. We have become part of the ordinary life of the society, and have been incorporated or absorbed into the mainstream. This is all a far cry from gay liberation and the world in which it sprang suddenly into existence.

Mick Jagger, David Bowie, glam rock, the Communards, together with the technical and economic innovations, which broke up the old industrial world all played a part. The forces which had forged the moral and social disciplines of traditional working-class life ebbed away along with old-style dock labour, and smokestack factories. These changes together with responses, by the ‘great and the good’ to the Aids epidemic - all these manifold forces and prompts – have resulted in tectonic shifts in social attitudes and ways of living which were rarely even glimpsed in the days of the Gay Liberation Front.



**“Are you going to be
one of those secret
married dudes from the
dinosaur age? . . .
Sneaking around.”**

**A question asked by Grizz, a gay lad
in Netflix's teen drama,
The Society, 2019**

The ten years of the gay liberation movement from 1969 to 1979, a decade, did not seem a ‘brief moment’ to those of us who lived through it. Indeed, the experience has ever since shaped and continues to influence our lives to this day. But, given that Károly Mária Kertbeny (also known as Karl-Maria Benkert) first used the term homosexuality in his path-breaking pamphlet of 1869 – exactly a century before the moment of the Gay Liberation Front – was indeed brief. Towards the end of the nineteenth century intellectuals including Havelock Ellis, Eduard Bernstein, Magnus Hirschfeld, and Edward Carpenter, engaged in positive public discussions of homosexuality. These deliberations in both Germany and the United States resulted in the foundation of the Society for Human Rights in Chicago in 1924, and in its publication, *Friendship and Freedom*. Both were suppressed by police action the following year.

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Of course, gay life continued under the carpet, so to speak, but no more attempts at the organisation of gay men and women were attempted in the US until the foundation of the Mattachine Society (1950) and the Daughters of Bilitis (1955). In Britain the Homosexual Law Reform Society and the Albany Trust were established in 1958. The North Western Homosexual Law Reform Committee (1964) was followed by the Committee for Homosexual Equality in 1969, which changed its name to the *Campaign* for Homosexual Equality two years later.



This marked the shift taking place in the year prior to 1970 between organisations established to strengthen private social relationships between gay men brought together for the express purposes of lobbying the authorities for law reform on the one hand, and open public campaigning, on the other.

The Gay Liberation Front was amongst the first signs of this shift from lobbying to campaigning. GLF was founded in London in October 1970 at the instigation of Aubrey Walters and Bob Mellors who had been inspired by events in New York the year before. It had burst out, suddenly, engaging small groups of gay men and lesbians who had little knowledge of their forebears or predecessors. Of course, Oscar Wilde was known, and maybe, Radcliffe Hall's *Well of Loneliness*; many knew of the work of Jean Genet, Gore Vidal and James Baldwin, of the movies, *Victim* and *The Killing of Sister George*, but for most of us the long struggles of homosexual men and women against oppression and isolation were obscure to say the least.

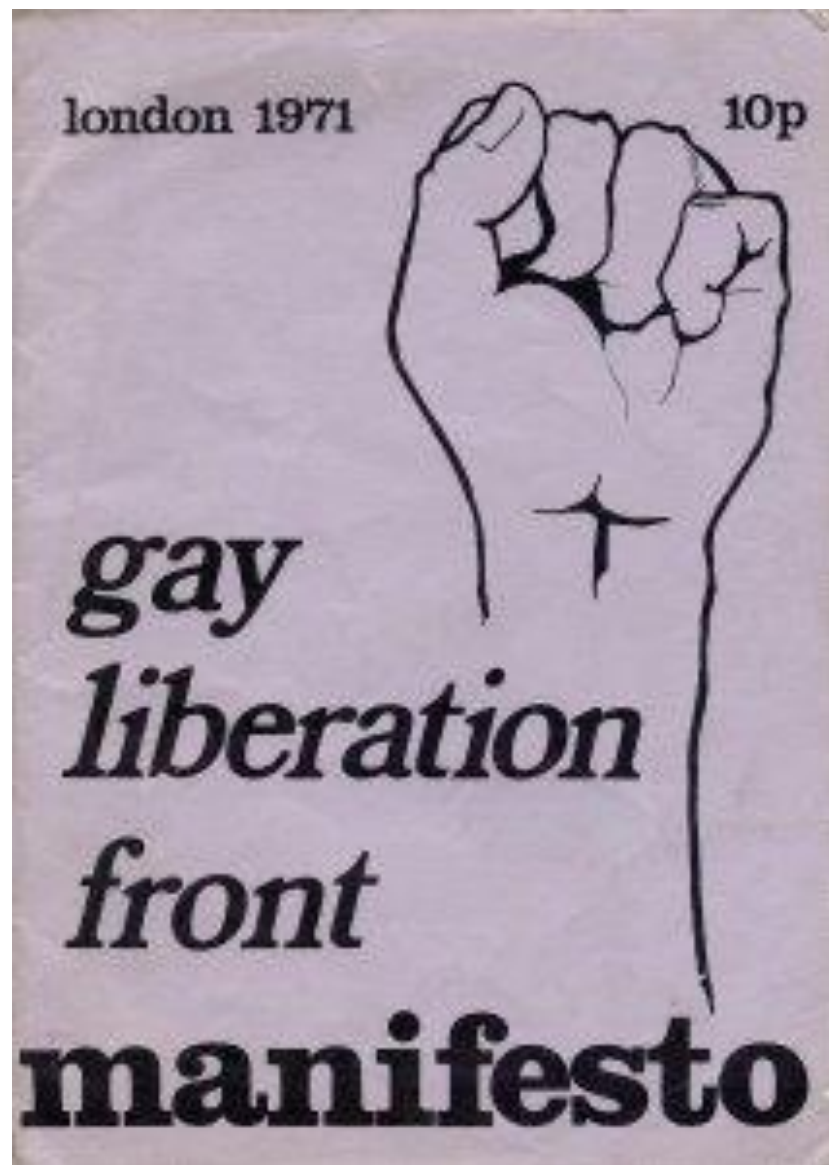
This accounts for the relatively primitive theoretical and historical resources available to us during the ten years or so of GLF. However, these short-comings have been boldly rectified over the last forty years.

The truth remains, however, that while equality has, astonishingly, been achieved, emancipation has not. For that, a much wider and deeper struggle to transform a society in which most production is sustained by private investment in search of a return on the sums outlaid. As long as commercial factors determine the shape of most economic activity, dominating and disfiguring all human relationships, the emancipation of homosexuals, along with everybody else, is simply not achievable.

The following pamphlets, essays, and articles, give some indication of this early confusion, and the subsequent developments and clarifications which have emerged; the select bibliography – *Useful Books* – also demonstrates the range of work carried out from the mid-seventies up to the present, informing and strengthening our understanding of the struggle for homosexual rights.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout recorded history, oppressed groups have organised to claim their rights and obtain their needs. Homosexuals, who have been oppressed by physical violence and by ideological and psychological attacks at every level of social interaction, are at last becoming angry.

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To you, our gay sisters and brothers, we say that you are oppressed; we intend to show you examples of the hatred and fear with which straight society relegates us to the position and treatment of sub-humans, and to explain their basis. We will show you how we can use our righteous anger to uproot the present oppressive system with its decaying and constricting ideology, and how we, together with other oppressed groups, can start to form a new order, and a liberated life-style, from the alternatives which we offer.

HOW WE'RE OPPRESSED

FAMILY

The oppression of gay people starts in the most basic unit of society, the family, consisting of the man in charge, a slave as his wife, and their children on whom they force themselves as the ideal models. The very form of the family works against homosexuality.

At some point nearly all gay people have found it difficult to cope with having the restricting images of man or woman pushed on them by their parents. It may have been from very early on, when the pressures to play with the 'right' toys, and thus prove boyishness or girlishness, drove against the child's inclinations. But for all of us this is certainly a problem by the time of adolescence, when we are expected to prove ourselves socially to our parents as members of the right sex (or to bring home a boy/girl friend) and to start being a 'real' (oppressive) young man or a real' (oppressed) young woman. The tensions can be very destructive.

The fact that gay people notice they are different from other men and women in the family situation, causes them to feel ashamed, guilty and failures. How many of us have really dared to be honest with our parents?

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How many of us have been thrown out of home? How many of us have been pressured into marriage, sent to psychiatrists, frightened into sexual inertia, ostracised, banned, emotionally destroyed -- all by our parents!

SCHOOL

Family experiences may differ widely, but in their education all children confront a common situation. Schools reflect the values of society in their formal academic curriculum, and reinforce them in their morality and discipline. Boys learn competitive, ego-building sports, and have more opportunity in science, whereas girls are given emphasis on domestic subjects, needlework, etc. Again, we gays were all forced into a rigid sex role which we did not want or need. It is quite common to discipline children for behaving in any way like the opposite sex; degrading titles like 'cissy' and 'tomboy' are widely used.

In the context of education, homosexuality is generally ignored, even where we know it exists, as in history and literature. Even sex education, which has been considered a new liberal dynamic of secondary schooling, proves to be little more than an extension of Christian morality. Homosexuality is again either ignored, or attacked with moralistic warnings and condemnations. The adolescent recognising his or her homosexuality might feel totally alone in the world, or a pathologically sick wreck.

CHURCH

Formal religious education is still part of everyone's schooling, and our whole legal structure is supposedly based on Christianity, whose archaic and irrational teachings support the family and marriage as the only permitted condition for sex. Gay people have been attacked as abominable and sinful ever since the

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beginning of both Judaism and Christianity, and even if today the Church is playing down these strictures on homosexuality, its new ideology is that gay people are pathetic objects for sympathy.

THE MEDIA

The press, radio, television and advertising are used as reinforcements against us, and make possible the control of people's thoughts on an unprecedented scale. Entering everyone's home, affecting everyone's life, the media controllers, all representatives of the rich, male-controlled world, can exaggerate or suppress whatever information suits them.

Under different circumstances, the media might not be the weapon of a small minority. The present controllers are therefore dedicated defenders of things as they stand. Accordingly, the images of people which they transmit in their pictures and words do not subvert, but support society's image of 'normal' man and woman. It follows that we are characterised as scandalous, obscene perverts; as rampant, wild sex-monsters; as pathetic, doomed and compulsive degenerates; while the truth is blanketed under a conspiracy of silence.

WORDS

Antihomosexual morality and ideology, at every level of society, manifest themselves in a special vocabulary for denigrating gay people. There is abuse like 'pansy', 'fairy', 'lesbo' to hurl at men and women who can't or won't fit stereotyped preconceptions. There are words like 'sick', 'bent' and 'neurotic' for destroying the credence of gay people. But there are no positive words. The ideological intent of our language makes it very clear that the generation of words and meanings is, at the moment, in the hands of the enemy. And that so many gay people pretend to be straight, and call each other 'butch dykes' or

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'screaming queens', only makes that fact the more real.

The verbal attack on men and women who do not behave as they are supposed to, reflects the ideology of masculine superiority. A man who behaves like a woman is seen as losing something, and a woman who behaves like a man is put down for threatening men's enjoyment of their privileges.

EMPLOYMENT

If our upbringing so often produces guilt and shame, the experience of an adult gay person is oppressive in every aspect. In their work situation, gay people face the ordeal of spending up to fifty years of their lives confronted with the antihomosexual hostility of their fellow employees.

A direct consequence of the fact that virtually all employers are highly privileged heterosexual men, is that there are some fields of work which are closed to gay people, and others which they feel some compulsion to enter. A result of this control for gay women is that they are perceived as a threat in the man's world. They have none of the sexual ties of dependence to men which make most women accept men as their 'superiors'. They are less likely to have the bind of children, and so there is nothing to stop them showing that they are as capable as any man, and thus deflating the man's ego, and exposing the myth that only men can cope with important jobs.

We are excluded from many jobs in high places where being married is the respectable guarantee, but being homosexual apparently makes us unstable, unreliable security risks. Neither, for example, are we allowed the job of teaching children, because we are all reckoned to be compulsive, child-molesting maniacs.

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There are thousands of examples of people having lost their jobs due to it becoming known that they were gay, though employers usually contrive all manner of spurious 'reasons'.

There occurs, on the other hand, in certain jobs, such a concentration of gay people as to make an occupational ghetto. This happens, for women, in the forces, ambulance driving, and other uniformed occupations: and for men, in the fashion, entertainment and theatrical professions, all cases where the roles of 'man' and 'woman' can perhaps be underplayed or even reversed.

THE LAW

If you live in Scotland or Ireland; if you are under 21, or over 21 but having sex with someone under 21; if you are in the armed forces or the merchant navy; if you have sex with more than one person at the same time -- and you are a gay male, you are breaking the law.

The 1967 Sexual Offences Act gave a limited licence to adult gay men. Common law however can restrict us from talking about and publicising both male and female homosexuality by classing it as 'immoral'. Beyond this there are a whole series of specific minor offences. Although 'the act' is not illegal, asking someone to go to bed with you can be classed as 'importuning for an immoral act', and kissing in public is classed as 'public indecency'.

Even if you do not get into any trouble, you will find yourself hampered by the application of the law in your efforts to set up home together, to raise children, and to express love as freely as straight people may do.

The practice of the police in 'enforcing' the law makes sure that cottagers and cruisers will be zealously

hunted, while queer-bashers may be apprehended, half-heartedly, after the event.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

On 25 September 1969, a man walked onto Wimbledon Common. We know the common to be a popular cruising ground, and believe the man to have been one of our gay brothers. Whether or not this is the case, the man was set upon by a group of youths from a nearby housing estate, and literally battered to death with clubs and boots. Afterwards, a boy from the same estate said:

'When you're hitting a queer, you don't think you're doing wrong. You think you're doing good. If you want money off a queer, you can get it off him -- there's nothing to be scared of from the law, 'cause you know they won't go to the law'.
(*Sunday Times*, 7/2/71)

Since that time, another man has been similarly murdered on Hampstead Heath. But murder is only the most extreme form of violence to which we are exposed, not having the effective means of protection. Most frequently we are 'rolled' for our money, or just beaten up; and this happens to butch-looking women in some districts.

PSYCHIATRY

One way of oppressing people and preventing them getting too angry about it, is to convince them, and everyone else, that they are sick. There has hence arisen a body of psychiatric 'theory' and 'therapy' to deal with the 'problems' and 'treatment' of homosexuality.

Bearing in mind what we have so far described, it is quite understandable that gay people get depressed and paranoid; but it is also, of course, part of the

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scheme that gay people should retreat to psychiatrists in times of trouble.

Operating as they do on the basis of social convention and prejudice, NOT scientific truth, mainstream psychiatrists accept society's prevailing view that the male and female sex roles are 'good' and 'normal', and try to adjust people to them. If that fails, patients are told to 'accept themselves' as 'deviant'. For the psychiatrist to state that homosexuality was perfectly valid and satisfying, and that the hang-up was society's inability to accept that fact, would result in the loss of a large proportion of his patients.

Psychiatric 'treatment' can take the form either of mind-bending 'psychotherapy', or of aversion therapy which operates on the crude conditioning theory that if you hit a person hard enough, he'll do what you want. Another form of 'therapy' is chemically induced castration, and there is a further form of 'treatment' which consists in erasing part of the brain, with the intent (usually successful) of making the subject an a sexual vegetable.

This 'therapy' is not the source of the psychiatrist's power, however. Their social power stems from the facile and dangerous arguments by which they contrive to justify the prejudice that homosexuality is bad or unfortunate, and to mount this fundamental attack upon our right to do as we think best. In this respect, there is little difference between the psychiatrist who says: 'From statistics we can show that homosexuality is connected with madness', and the one who says: 'Homosexuality is unfortunate because it is socially rejected'. The former is a dangerous idiot -- he cannot see that it is society which drives gay people mad. The second is a pig because he does see this, but sides consciously with the oppressors.

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That psychiatrists command such credence and such income is surprising if we remember the hysterical disagreements of theory and practice in their field, and the fact that in formulating their opinions, they rarely consult gay people. In fact, so far as is possible, they avoid talking to them at all, because they know that such confrontation would wreck their theories.

SELF-OPPRESSION

The ultimate success of all forms of oppression is our self-oppression.

Self-oppression is achieved when the gay person has adopted and internalised straight people's definition of what is good and bad. Self-oppression is saying: 'When you come down to it, we are abnormal'. Or doing what you most need and want to do, but with a sense of shame and loathing, or in a state of disassociation, pretending it isn't happening; cruising or cottaging not because you enjoy it, but because you're afraid of anything less anonymous. Self-oppression is saying: 'I accept what I am', and meaning: 'I accept that what I am is second-best and rather pathetic'. Self-oppression is any other kind of apology: 'We've been living together for ten years and all our married friends know about us and think we're just the same as them'. Why? You're not.

Self-oppression is the dolly lesbian who says: 'I can't stand those butch types who look like truck drivers'; the virile gay man who shakes his head at the thought of 'those pathetic queens'. This is self-oppression because it's just another way of saying: 'I'm a nice normal gay, just like an attractive heterosexual'.

The ultimate in self-oppression is to avoid confronting straight society, and thereby provoking further hostility. Self-oppression is saying, and believing: 'I am not oppressed'.

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WHY WE'RE OPPRESSED

Gay people are oppressed. As we've just shown, we face the prejudice, hostility and violence of straight society, and the opportunities open to us in work and leisure are restricted, compared with those of straight people. Shouldn't we demand reforms that will give us tolerance and equality? Certainly we should -- in a liberal-democratic society, legal equality and protection from attack are the very least we should ask for. They are our civil rights.

But gay liberation does not just mean reforms. It means a revolutionary change in our whole society. Is this really necessary? Isn't it hard enough for us to win reforms within the present society, and how will we engage the support of straight people if we get ourselves branded as revolutionaries?

Reforms may make things better for a while: changes in the law can make straight people a little less hostile, a little more tolerant -- but reform cannot change the deep-down attitude of straight people that homosexuality is at best inferior to their own way of life, at worst a sickening perversion. It will take more than reforms to change this attitude, because it is rooted in our society's most basic institution - the Patriarchal family.

We've all been brought up to believe that the family is the source of our happiness and comfort. But look at the family more closely. Within the small family unit, in which the dominant man and submissive woman bring up their children in their own image, all our attitudes towards sexuality are learned at a very early age. Almost before we can talk, certainly before we can think for ourselves, we are taught that there are certain attributes that are 'feminine' and others that are 'masculine' and that they are God-given and unchangeable. Beliefs learned so young are very hard

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to change; but in fact these are false beliefs. What we are taught about the differences between man and woman is propaganda, not truth.

The truth is that there are no proven systematic differences between male and female, apart from the obvious biological ones. Male and female genitals and reproductive systems are different, and so are certain other physical characteristics, but all differences of temperament, aptitudes and so on, are the result of upbringing and social pressures. They are not inborn.

Human beings could be much more various than our constricted patterns of 'masculine' and 'feminine' permit -- we should be free to develop with greater individuality. But as things are at present, there are only these two stereotyped roles into which everyone is supposed to fit, and most people -- including gay people too -- are apt to be alarmed when they hear these stereotypes or gender roles attacked, fearing that children 'won't know how to grow up if they have no-one to identify with', or that 'everyone will be the same', i.e. that there will be either utter chaos or total conformity. There would in fact be a greater variety of models and more freedom for experimentation, but there is no reason to suppose this will lead to chaos.

By our very existence as gay people, we challenge these roles. It can easily be seen that homosexuals don't fit into the stereotypes of masculine and feminine, and this is one of the main reasons why we become the object of suspicion, since everyone is taught that these and only these two roles are appropriate.

Our entire system is built around the patriarchal family and its enshrinement of these masculine and feminine roles. Religion, popular morality, art, literature and sport all reinforce these stereotypes. In other words, this society is a sexist society, in which one's biological

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sex determines almost all of what one does and how one does it; a situation in which men are privileged, and women are mere adjuncts of men and objects for their use, both sexually and otherwise.

Since all children are taught so young that boys should be aggressive and adventurous, girls passive and pliant, most people do tend to behave in these ways as they get older, and to believe that other people should do so too.

So sexism does not just oppress gay people, but all women as well. It is assumed that because women bear children they should and must rear them, and be simultaneously excluded from all other spheres of achievement.

However, if the indoctrination of the small child with these attitudes is not always entirely successful (if it were, there would be no gay people for a start), the ideas taken in by the young child almost unconsciously must be reinforced in the older child and teenager by a consciously expressed male chauvinism: the ideological expression of masculine superiority. Male chauvinism is not hatred of women, but male chauvinists accept women only on the basis that they are in fact lesser beings. It is an expression of male power and male privilege, and while it's quite possible for a gay man to be a male chauvinist, his very existence does also challenge male chauvinism in so far as he rejects his male supremacist role over women, and perhaps particularly if he rejects 'masculine' qualities.

It is because of the patriarchal family that reforms are not enough. Freedom for gay people will never be permanently won until everyone is freed from sexist role-playing and the straight-jacket of sexist rules about our sexuality. And we will not be freed from these so long as each succeeding generation is

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brought up in the same old sexist way in the patriarchal family.

But why can't we just change the way in which children are brought up without attempting to transform the whole fabric of society?

Because sexism is not just an accident -- it is an essential part of our present society, and cannot be changed without the whole society changing with it. In the first place, our society is dominated at every level by men, who have an interest in preserving the status quo; secondly, the present system of work and production depends on the existence of the patriarchal society. Conservative sociologists have pointed out that the small family unit of two parents and their children is essential in our contemporary advanced industrial family where work is minutely subdivided and highly regulated -- in other words, for the majority very boring. A man would not work at the assembly line if he had no wife and family to support; he would not give himself fully to his work without the supportive and reassuring little group ready to follow him about and gear itself to his needs, to put up with his ill temper when he is frustrated or put down by the boss at work.

Were it not also for the captive wife, educated by advertising and everything she reads into believing that she needs ever more new goodies for the home, for her own beautification and for the children's well-being, our economic system could not function properly, depending as it does on people buying far more manufactured goods than they need. The housewife, obsessed with the ownership of as many material goods as possible, is the agent of this high level of spending. None of these goods will ever satisfy her, since there is always something better to be had, and the surplus of these pseudo 'necessities' goes hand in hand with the absence of genuinely

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necessary goods and services, such as adequate housing and schools.

The ethic and ideology of our culture has been conveniently summed up by the enemy. Here is a quotation, intended quite seriously, from an American psychiatric primer. The author, Dr. Fred Brown, states:

Our values in Western civilisation are founded upon the sanctity of the family, the right to property, and the worthwhileness of 'getting ahead'. The family can be established only through heterosexual intercourse, and this gives the woman a high value. [Note the way in which woman is appraised as a form of property.] Property acquisition and worldly success are viewed as distinctly masculine aims. The individual who is outwardly masculine but appears to fall into the feminine class by reason ... of his preference for other men denies these values of our civilisation. In denying them he belittles those goals which carry weight and much emotional colouring in our society and thereby earns the hostility of those to whom these values are of great importance.

We agree with his description of our society and its values -- but we reach a different conclusion. We gay men and gay women do deny these values of our civilisation. We believe that work in an advanced industrial society could be organised on more humane lines, with each job more varied and more pleasurable, and that the way society is at present organised operates in the interests of a small ruling group of straight men who claim most of the status and money, and not in the interests of the people as a whole. We also believe that our economic resources could be used in a much more valuable and constructive way than they are at the moment -- but

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that will not happen until the present pattern of male dominance in our society changes too.

That is why any reforms we might painfully extract from our rulers would only be fragile and vulnerable; that is why we, along with the women's movement, must fight for something more than reform. We must aim at the abolition of the family, so that the sexist, male supremacist system can no longer be nurtured there.

WE CAN DO IT

Yet although this struggle will be hard, and our victories not easily won, we are not in fact being idealistic to aim at abolishing the family and the cultural distinctions between men and women. True, these have been with us throughout history, yet humanity is at last in a position where we can progress beyond this.

Only reactionaries and conservatives believe in the idea of 'natural man'. Just what is so different in human beings from the rest of the animal kingdom is their 'unnaturalness'. Civilisation is in fact our evolution away from the limitations of the natural environment and towards its ever more complex control. It is not 'natural' to travel in planes. It is not 'natural' to take medicines and perform operations. Clothing and shoes do not grow on trees. Animals do not cook their food. This evolution is made possible by the development of technology -- i.e. all those tools and skills which help us to control the natural environment.

We have now reached a stage at which the human body itself, and even the reproduction of the species, is being 'unnaturally' interfered with (i.e. improved) by technology. Reproduction used to be left completely to the uncontrolled biological processes inherited from our animal ancestors, but modern science, by

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drastically lowering infant mortality, has made it unnecessary for women to have more than two or three babies, while contraceptives have made possible the conscious control of pregnancy and the freeing of sexuality from reproduction. Today, further advances are on the point of making it possible for women to be completely liberated from their biology by means of the development of artificial wombs. Women need no longer be burdened with the production of children as their main task in life, and need be still less in the future.

The present gender-role system of 'masculine' and 'feminine' is based on the way that reproduction was originally organised. Men's freedom from the prolonged physical burden of bearing children gave them a privileged position which was then reinforced by an ideology of male superiority. But technology has now advanced to a stage at which the gender-role system is no longer necessary.

However, social evolution does not automatically take place with the steady advance of technology. The gender-role system and the family unit built around it will not disappear just because they have ceased to be necessary. The sexist culture gives straight men privileges which, like those of any privileged class, will not be surrendered without a struggle, so that all of us who are oppressed by this culture (women and gay people), must band together to fight it. The end of the sexist culture and of the family will benefit all women, and all gay people. We must work together with women, since their oppression is our oppression, and by working together we can advance the day of our common liberation.

A NEW LIFE-STYLE

In the final section we shall outline some of the practical steps gay liberation will take to make this

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revolution. But linked with this struggle to change society there is an important aspect of gay liberation that we can begin to build here and now -- a NEW, LIBERATED LIFE-STYLE which will anticipate, as far as possible, the free society of the future.

Gay shows the way. In some ways we are already more advanced than straight people. We are already outside the family and we have already, in part at least, rejected the 'masculine' or 'feminine' roles society has designed for us. In a society dominated by the sexist culture it is very difficult, if not impossible, for heterosexual men and women to escape their rigid gender-role structuring and the roles of oppressor and oppressed. But gay men don't need to oppress women in order to fulfil their own psycho-sexual needs, and gay women don't have to relate sexually to the male oppressor, so that at this moment in time, the freest and most equal relationships are most likely to be between homosexuals.

But because the sexist culture has oppressed and distorted our lives too, this is not always achieved. In our mistaken, placating efforts to be accepted and tolerated, we've too often submitted to the pressures to conform to the straight-jacket of society's rules and hang-ups about sex.

Particularly oppressive aspects of gay society are the Youth Cult, Butch and Femme role-playing, and Compulsive Monogamy.

THE YOUTH CULT

Straight women are the most exposed in our society to the commercially manipulated (because very profitable) cult of youth and 'beauty' -- i.e. the conformity to an ideal of 'sexiness' and 'femininity' imposed from without, not chosen by women themselves. Women are encouraged to look into the

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mirror and love themselves because an obsession with clothes and cosmetics dulls their appreciation of where they're really at ... until it's too late. The sight of an old woman bedizened with layers of make-up, her hair tortured into artificial turrets, provokes ridicule on all sides. Yet this grotesque denial of physical aging is merely the logical conclusion to the life of a woman who has been taught that her value lies primarily in her degree of sexual attractiveness.

Gay women, like straight men, are rather less into the compulsive search for youth, perhaps because part of their rebellion has been the rejection of themselves as sex objects -- like men they see themselves as people; as subjects rather than objects. But gay men are very apt to fall victim to the cult of youth -- those sexual parades in the 'glamorous' meat-rack bars of London and New York, those gay beaches of the South of France and Los Angeles haven't anything to do with liberation. Those are the hang-outs of the plastic gays who are obsessed with image and appearance. In love with their own bodies, these gay men dread the approach of age, because to be old is to be 'ugly', and with their youth they lose also the right to love and be loved, and are valued only if they can pay. This obsession with youth is destructive. We must all get away from the false commercial standards of 'beauty' imposed on us by movie moguls and advertising firms, because the youth/beauty hang-up sets us against one another in a frenzied competition for attention, and leads in the end to an obsession with self which is death to real affection or real sensual love. Some gay men have spent so much time staring at themselves in the mirror that they've become hypnotised by their own magnificence and have ended up by being unable to see anyone else.

BUTCH AND FEMME

Many gay men and women needlessly restrict their lives by compulsive role playing. They may restrict their own sexual behaviour by feeling that they must always take either a butch or a femme role, and worse, these roles are transposed to make even more distorting patterns in general social relationships. We gay men and women are outside the gender-role system anyway, and therefore it isn't surprising if some of us --of either sex-- are more 'masculine' and others more 'feminine'. There is nothing wrong with this. What is bad is when gay people try to impose on themselves and on one another the masculine and feminine stereotypes of straight society, the butch seeking to expand his ego by dominating his/her partner's life and freedom, and the femme seeking protection by submitting to the butch. Butch really is bad -- the oppression of others is an essential part of the masculine gender role. We must make gay men and women who lay claim to the privileges of straight males understand what they are doing; and those gay men and women who are caught up in the femme role must realise, as straight women increasingly do, that any security this brings is more than offset by their loss of freedom.

COMPULSIVE MONOGAMY

We do not deny that it is possible for gay couples as for some straight couples to live happily and constructively together. We question however as an ideal, the finding and settling down eternally with one 'right' partner. This is the blueprint of the straight world which gay people have taken over. It is inevitably a parody, since they haven't even the justification of straight couples -- the need to provide a stable environment for their children (though in any case we believe that the suffocating small family unit is by no means the best atmosphere for bringing up children).

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Monogamy is usually based on ownership -- the woman sells her services to the man in return for security for herself and her children - and is entirely bound up in the man's idea of property; furthermore in our society the monogamous couple, with or without children, is an isolated, shut-in, up-tight unit, suspicious of and hostile to outsiders. And though we don't lay down rules or tell gay people how they should behave in bed or in their relationships, we do want them to question society's blueprint for the couple. The blueprint says 'we two against the world', and that can be protective and comforting. But it can also be suffocating, leading to neurotic dependence and underlying hostility, the emotional dishonesty of staying in the comfy safety of the home and garden, the security and narrowness of the life built for two, with the secret guilt of fancying someone else while remaining in thrall to the idea that true love lasts a lifetime -- as though there were a ration of relationships, and to want more than one were greedy. Not that sexual fidelity is necessarily wrong; what is wrong is the intuned emotional exclusiveness of the couple which stunts the partners so they can no longer operate at all as independent beings in society. People need a variety of relationships in order to develop and grow, and to learn about other human beings.

It is especially important for gay people to stop copying straight -- we are the ones who have the best opportunities to create a new life-style and if we don't, no one else will. Also, we need one another more than straight people do, because we are equals suffering under an insidious oppression from a society too primitive to come to terms with the freedom we represent. Singly, or isolated in couples, we are weak - - the way society wants us to be. Society cannot put us down so easily if we fuse together. We have to get together, understand one another, live together.

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Two ways we can do this are by developing consciousness raising groups and by gay communes.

Our gay communes and collectives must not be mere convenient living arrangements or worse, just extensions of the gay ghetto. They must be a focus of consciousness-raising (i.e. raising or increasing our awareness of our real oppression) and of gay liberation activity, a new focal point for members of the gay community. It won't be easy, because this society is hostile to communal living. And besides the practical hang-ups of finding money and a place large enough for a collective to live in, there are our own personal hang-ups: we have to change our attitudes to our personal property, to our lovers, to our day-to-day priorities in work and leisure, even to our need for privacy.

But victory will come. If we're convinced of the importance of the new life-style, we can be strong and we can win through.

THE WAY FORWARD

AIMS

The long-term goal of the London Gay Liberation Front, which inevitably brings us into fundamental conflict with the institutionalised sexism of this society, is to rid society of the gender-role system which is at the root of our oppression. This can only be achieved by the abolition of the family as the unit in which children are brought up. We intend to work for the replacement of the family unit, with its rigid gender-role pattern, by new organic units such as the commune, where the development of children becomes the shared responsibility of a larger group of people who live together. Children must be liberated from the present condition of having their role in life defined by

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biological accident; the commune will ultimately provide a variety of gender-free models.

As we cannot carry out this revolutionary change alone, and as the abolition of the family and gender roles is also a necessary condition of women's liberation, we will work to form a strategic alliance with the women's liberation movement, aiming to develop our ideas and our practice in close inter-relation. In order to build this alliance, the brothers in gay liberation will have to be prepared to sacrifice that degree of male chauvinism and male privilege that they all still possess.

To achieve our long term goal will take many years, perhaps decades. But if at the moment the replacement of the family by a system of communes may seem a very long way ahead, we believe that, in the ever sharpening crisis of western society, the time may come quite suddenly when old institutions start to crack, and when people will have to seek new models. We intend to start working out our contribution to these new models now, by creating an alternative gay culture free from sexism, and by setting up gay communes. When our communes are firmly established, we plan to let children grow up in them.

FREE OUR HEADS

The starting point of our liberation must be to rid ourselves of the oppression which lies in the head of every one of us. This means freeing our heads from self-oppression and male chauvinism, and no longer organising our lives according to the patterns with which we are indoctrinated by straight society. It means that we must root out the idea that homosexuality is bad, sick or immoral, and develop a gay pride. In order to survive, most of us have either knuckled under or pretended that no oppression exists, and the result of this has been further to distort

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our heads. Within gay liberation, a number of consciousness-raising groups have already developed, in which we try to understand our oppression and learn new ways of thinking and behaving. The aim is to step outside the experience permitted by straight society, and to learn to love and trust one another. This is the precondition for acting and struggling together.

By freeing our heads we get the confidence to come out publicly and proudly as gay people, and to win over our gay brothers and sisters to the ideas of gay liberation.

CAMPAIGN

Before we can create the new society of the future, we have to defend our interests as gay people here and now against all forms of oppression and victimisation. We have therefore drawn up the following list of immediate demands.

1. that all discrimination against gay people, male and female, by the law, by employers, and by society at large, should end.
2. that all people who feel attracted to a member of their own sex be taught that such feelings are perfectly valid.
3. that sex education in schools stop being exclusively heterosexual.
4. that psychiatrists stop treating homosexuality as though it were a sickness, thereby giving gay people senseless guilt complexes.
5. that gay people be as legally free to contact other gay people, through newspaper ads, on the streets and by any other means they may want as are heterosexuals, and that police harassment should cease right now.

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6. that employers should no longer be allowed to discriminate against anyone on account of their sexual preferences.
7. that the age of consent for gay males be reduced to the same as for straight.
8. that gay people be free to hold hands and kiss in public, as are heterosexuals.

London Gay Liberation Front has already been active in some of these areas, and plans to start activity soon in others. The GLF youth group is involved in working for a liberated sex education in schools, and for the lowering of the age of consent. The counter-psychiatry group is fighting against institutions and doctors who daily torture gay people with aversion therapy. The action group is coordinating activity against harassment and entrapment by queer-bashers and the police. GLF has held demonstrations against publishers and bookshops who distribute antigay literature. GLF holds regular gay-ins in the public parks to develop our solidarity as gay people, to encourage others to join us and to show that we will no longer allow ourselves to be confined to 'safe' ghetto areas. Our paper *Come Together*, our street theatre and other propaganda activities are designed primarily for gay people, but they are also aimed at winning support from our friends in the straight community, and at exposing and attacking our enemies. Within a few months of our existence we have confronted millions of straight people with our homosexuality; these people will find it increasingly difficult to 'protect' themselves and especially their children from our ideas.

We do not intend to ask for anything. We intend to stand firm and assert our basic rights. If this involves violence, it will not be we who initiate this, but those who attempt to stand in our way to freedom.

This manifesto was produced collectively by the Manifesto Group of GLF. We recognise that it leaves many questions

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unanswered and open-ended but hope it will lead to the furtherance of a scientific analysis of sexism and our oppression as gay people.



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The Politics of Homosexuality

Don Milligan, London: Pluto Press, 1973

About this pamphlet

The outlook of this pamphlet was largely the product of discussion in the meetings of Lancaster Gay Liberation Front during 1972. Although developments since the early 1990s have amply demonstrated the wrong-headedness of much of its analysis this text continues to have historical interest because it was the opening shot in the struggle successfully waged by numerous individuals and groups during the 1970s and early '80s to get socialist, trade union, and other labour movement organizations to take the oppression of gay people seriously.

Introduction

In 1969 the New York police raided a gay bar, the Stonewall on Christopher Street. It was an ordinary affair until the customers started to resist. They drove the police from the bar onto the pavement and into the road. This was the first time that homosexuals had fought back directly on such a scale. Police reinforcements arrived and the riot that followed led to the formation of the Christopher Street Gay Liberation Front.

The emergence of the gay liberation movement in the United States led to the development of gay liberation groups in a number of countries, including Britain. By building up an understanding of why hostility to homosexuals is inevitable in a capitalist society, gay

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liberation groups have shown clearly the political significance of homosexuality. The existence of this movement in Britain marks a new awareness that law reform societies like the Campaign for Homosexual Equality cannot really challenge gay oppression.

In the routine resistance of workers against the employers and the struggle of socialists against capitalism we often lose sight of the aims – we can't see the trees for the wood. Because people do more than work in factories and pay rent rises we need to gain a fuller knowledge of the different ways that capitalism disfigures all human relationships. By doing this we will get a better picture of the kind of society we want to build for our- selves.

The movements for women's liberation and gay liberation are important because they make us more aware of the ways in which we are drenched in myths and prejudices that support the way things are – enabling capitalism to continue.

Undermining the family

Opposition to homosexuality is founded upon the belief that procreation is the fundamental objective of sexual activity. The production of children is not seen as incidental to human sexual activities but as central to them. Consequently, heterosexual fucking is thought of as vital to any sexual relationship. Homosexuality is condemned as unnatural simply because it cannot produce children. Therefore homo- sexual relationships are an affront to capitalist society – they do not support the family, and necessarily take place outside it. They are formed simply because people derive pleasure from them. Gay sex is unmistakably sex for its own sake and tends to upset the moral apple cart.

Even when homosexuals do 'marry' each other they unwittingly turn marriage into a charade. Gay marriages performed by the Metropolitan Community Church in the USA are a grisly parody of heterosexual ceremonies. Far from making homo- sexuality acceptable, they demonstrate the absurdity of marriage and challenge the assumptions that the institution rests upon.

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The homosexual relationship breeds no such natural corrective (children), no compulsion to be outward looking, and to enter, as in a family, into new and ever-growing relationships [sic]. It is, in more ways than the obvious one, sterile.¹

Homosexuality cannot be drawn into the net formed by marriage to encompass love and sex in monogamous unions. Marriage is primarily a means of legitimizing and rearing children. The family consisting of the man in charge, a subordinate women, and their children on who they imprint themselves, has no place for homosexuality. The family denies the sexuality of children, represses that of adolescents and reduces fidelity to an expression of property rights.

Sexual repression starts in the family. Because parents are conditioned and trapped, they tend to ensnare ‘their’ children in the prevailing masculine and feminine stereotypes – into relationships of domination and subordination. By attempting to govern and control the entire development of the individual, parents ‘bring up’ their children in their own image. In carrying out this task families fulfil a basic function for capitalist society – that of soaking each new generation in the values of bourgeois society and male supremacy.

Homosexuality breaks the rules, it is seditious and unnatural because it runs counter to the family and the fundamental values of capitalist society.

Our values in Western civilization are founded upon the sanctity of the family, the right of property, and the worthwhileness of ‘getting ahead’. The family can be established only through heterosexual intercourse, and this gives women a high value. Property acquisition and worldly success are viewed as distinctly masculine

¹ *L for Learner*, published by the Guide Association, quoted in *Ink*, No.25, 7 January 1972.

aims. The individual who is outwardly masculine but appears to fall into the feminine class by reason. . . of his preference for other men denies these values of our civilization. In denying them he belittles those goals which carry weight and much emotional colouring in our society and thereby earns the hostility of those to whom these values are of great importance.²

Masculinity versus Femininity

Homosexual relationships generally parody those of heterosexuals with ‘butch’ and ‘fem’, active and passive. But implicit in homosexuality there is a challenge to this division between men and women, and consequently, to male supremacy. The handing out of male or female characteristics among homosexuals is of course not related to the genitals of the individual but rather to one’s personality, mannerisms and sexual preferences. This fact alone makes homosexuality subversive. Most homosexual relationships deny the genital basis of our individual characteristics, our roles and our status in society: women can be ‘butch’ and men can be ‘queens’ – women can be male and men can be female. Gay relationships imply that the adoption of male and female roles is arbitrary, and that the supremacy of men is founded upon myth and not biology.

It is remarkable that so much effort and so many taboos and prohibitions are thought to be necessary to enforce the sexual norms of our society. The differences between masculine and feminine forms of behaviour are dinned into us all from the earliest age to ensure that we are capable of ‘doing what comes naturally’. It is of course not enough to assume that because people have female genitals they will be feminine. An intense process of teaching and learning is necessary to ensure that somebody with penis and testicles will be appropriately masculine. In fact women and men have the same intellectual capacities and the same emotional

² Dr Fred Brown, a conservative American psychiatrist. Quoted in the *Manifesto*, London GLF 1971.

abilities. Our sexual roles are imposed upon us by society, because of our genitals but not by them.

The capacity to menstruate, bear children and breast-feed must affect the psychology of an individual. However, the recognition of physical and psychological differences between men and women cannot justify the acceptance of the social concepts of masculine and femininity. The biological differences between the sexes historically resulted in a special division of labour between men and women, and in the social subordination of women to men.

The concepts of masculinity and femininity that have arisen out of this relationship of domination and subordination are used today to defend the continuation of male supremacy.

For example, girls and women tend to score higher on the verbal tests and nearly always do better than boys and men on the coding test which calls for short-term memory, speed deftness, males on the other hand, invariably achieve higher scores on arithmetic and on block-design, the visuo-spatial test.³

Such observations lead this psychologist to argue that girls:

are particularly skilful and deft with their hands, which may be one reason that women often are, and enjoy being, seamstresses and needlewomen. . . This dexterity results in women generally being extremely competent typists too, and it is a competence that men find difficult to match.⁴

‘Science’ is wheeled in to justify the inferior status of women and impose ideas of femininity that inevitably subordinate women to men.

The ideas and expression of femininity and masculinity are completely interwoven with the relationship of subordination and domination. In our society feminine characteristics are considered to be definitely inferior to

³ Corinne Hutt, *Males and Females*, Penguin 1972, p.88.

⁴ *Ibid* p.97

male ones. Muddle-headedness, frivolity, gossiping, giggling and emotional frailty are all female qualities. While men are concerned with abstract ideas, are strong, capable and responsible for the management of industry, the family and the nation:

the male is physically stronger but less resilient, he is more independent, adventurous and aggressive, he is more ambitious and competitive, he has greater spatial numerical and mechanical ability, he is more likely to construe the world in terms of objects, ideas and theories.⁵

The attribution of particular roles and forms of behaviour to individuals simply because they have male or female genitals is largely arbitrary. It has little to do with muscles and nothing to do with the intellectual abilities or emotional make-up of either sex. Yet the division between masculinity and femininity remains a basic feature of human sexual relations. This tyranny, the tyranny of gender, is so intense that people who identify completely with the other sex become members of the opposite sex psychologically – they become transsexual. It becomes imperative for some transsexuals to undergo surgery and other treatment in order for them to bring their physiology into line with the way they think of themselves and want to be thought of in our society.

By rejecting in practice the idea that the core of human sexuality is the sexual subordination of women to men, homo- sexuality poses a real threat to the sexual ‘balance of forces’. This is particularly true of homosexual women. Women are the passive, and sometimes co-operative, objects of men’s sexuality. For the male supremacist women who define their sexuality independently of men are almost a conceptual impossibility. Hence Queen Victoria’s ignorance, the absence of biblical prohibition, and the usual words of encouragement to lesbians: ‘a good fuck’ll put you right, love’. Women who are masculine by reason of their

⁵ *Ibid* p.132

independence or their mannerisms and personality are feared and resented because they question the biological basis of the social roles and status awarded to either sex. Similarly, men whose behaviour, either socially or sexually, is considered female are savagely ridiculed and oppressed because they break the ‘natural’ rules. They threaten the status and position of all men by indicating that masculinity is not natural at all, but is instead strictly learned and rigidly enforced. Homosexuals and transsexuals by asserting the primacy of personality and sexual identification over that of social assumptions about biology question the basis of the sexual categories – masculine and feminine.

Oppression and Repression

Sensuality and physical contact between people of the same sex is acceptable only on specifically ‘emotional’ occasions – like scoring a goal. Such prohibitions don’t apply equally but the advantage women have rests on the belief that they cannot have a sexuality which doesn’t depend on a man. At any rate women are still restricted:

Girls should be discouraged from walking around the College arm in arm.⁶

Lesbianism is more a matter of ‘don’t mention it and it’ll go away’, while arse tapping and mock sexual advances among men are a regular part of life on building sites, in factories, offices and schools.

Even the clothes that people wear are rigidly prescribed according to sexual roles. Transvestites are victimized with an extraordinary fanaticism, coupled with a widespread fascination for drag ‘artistes’.

**THE FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT
THAT EVERYONE’S
FLOCKING TO SEE!**

⁶ Principal’s memo to staff on staff/student relations. Park Lane College of Further Education, Leeds, 1968.

‘BIG, BOLD & BEAUTIFUL’ ‘CAN YOU TAKE
THE FAMILY? – CERTAINLY!

There are only a few naughty jokes, and no doubt the
kids will explain them to you on the way home’

For adults he is a wit,
for children very gentle’.

DANNY LA RUE
– QUEEN OF HEARTS

That sexual roles can be swapped is common knowledge,
but it is only acceptable when institutionalized in pantomime
or drag. When firmly defined roles are confused in real life
by transvestites or homosexuals the repression is swift and
violent.

With a fear reminiscent of the Inquisition people assert
their ‘normalcy’; rendering themselves unable to touch or
embrace each other, or express friendship fully. Such taboos
restrict and mutilate the personal relationships of all people
irrespective of sexual preferences. Lacerating jibes are the
inevitable penalty for failing to stick to the behaviour
‘appropriate’ to one’s sex. Humour whips most people into
line; defining what is possible; limiting self-expression and
oppressing everybody. Ridicule of gay people is the means
by which heterosexuals repress them- selves.

However, ridicule is only one aspect of this oppression.
Discrimination in jobs and housing is widespread. Generally
homosexuals experience little difficulty in finding work in
every kind of occupation – but this is usually dependent
upon secrecy. Most homosexual people lead a ‘double-life’
exemplified by the small ad:

Attractive woman, early twenties, wanted to share
social outings and be seen about with gay businessman
(30). All expenses paid no obligations.⁷

The police have openly admitted keeping secret dossiers
on 8 school teachers whose private lives they think to be

⁷ *Time Out* classified advertisement.

‘corrupt’⁸ and some resourceful employers use a device which tests a person’s reactions to visual material shown on a screen. D. C. Southward of AIM Biosciences replied to an enquiry concerning the ‘pupillometer’ as follows:

I am sorry to reacted so violently to the list of applications suggested for the pupillometer. [One of them given as detection of homosexuality.] There is no suggestion that employers should discriminate against homosexuals but merely that its presence should be measured along with as many other characteristics as possible – IQ, nAch, colour vision, etc. Judgement on the basis of one characteristic alone I would agree is almost invariably misguided.

I am quite certain that in certain fields – interior design, male dancers etc you could positively correlate homosexuality with success.

Please be assured that whether you are homosexual or not is a subject of monumental indifference to me – I just want to sell the pupillometers.⁹

If a person makes no effort to conceal his homosexuality then jobs are difficult to find and often impossible to keep. Houses and flats too often depend upon secrecy. Two years ago a forty year-old kitchen worker was evicted by Stoke-on-Trent Corporation from the council house where he had lived all his life – because it was alleged he was homosexual. Councillor Jim Westwood, chairman of Stoke’s housing committee, was quoted as saying that the man had been evicted because his house was dirty and because he was homosexual. And the housing manager said ‘We couldn’t prove homosexuality, but it was strongly suspected.’¹⁰

⁸ *Gay News*, no 9, 1972

⁹ Letter dated 1 March 1972 to convenor of counter-psychiatry group, Lancaster GLF. From AIM Biosciences, Cambridge.

¹⁰ *Sunday Times*, 12 December 1972.

When 'it' is confessed families often assure their 'bent' offspring that they can be straightened out. GPs, psychiatrists, and electrodes are all brought to bear in the struggle for normalcy. All the family and social pressures conspire to bully a person into accepting that they are sick and will benefit from treatment. Isolated homosexuals not surprisingly hope for a 'cure'. They opt for interviews with professional men who will confirm how queer that they really are. They volunteer for aversion therapy and co-operative subjects administer electric shocks to themselves; watching their hands twitch as erotic pictures of the 'wrong' sex are displayed:

I was taken to a small, darkened room in a secluded area of the hospital. In the room there was a desk with the photographs and pictures lying on the top. They had been pasted onto pieces of card so that it would be easier for me to handle and look at them. Next to them was an electrical device with a pair of electrodes connected up to it. At the side of the table was a chair and a pair of screens....

He explained that it would be better if I could nod or signal in some way to him as soon as I got even the slightest feelings at all from the picture in front of me, then he could electrocute me at the first point of sexual vibes. So I got strapped up and then it began. He handed me a picture and as soon as I got any vibes from it I signalled to him and he pulled the switch. I felt a terrible burning sensation at the back of my wrist and my fingers began to twitch violently. I couldn't stop my face from grimacing and sweat drenched my whole body instantly. . . .

After two more shocks I told him to stop. I couldn't stand the burning sensation and seeing my fingers in

such a distorted position. But what really got me was the waiting in between shocks.¹¹

The repression of homosexuals is a social necessity for a society committed to male supremacy and the family. Gay oppression is pervasive: haunting the lives of all homosexuals and destroying everybody's potential.

Social Scenes and Gay Ghettos

One of the results of gay oppression is the 'gay scene'. The scene is a ghetto of a special type; composed simply of bars and clubs it concerns only people's social and sexual lives. The freedom that gay people have to conceal their homosexuality enables many of us to escape occupational and residential discrimination, and this in turn limits the functions of the ghetto to purely social and sexual ones.

There are some jobs where gay people can 'come out' with minimal risk to their employment. Artists and 'creative people' are permitted certain eccentricities, and it may be that homosexual people are attracted to some occupations because they afford greater freedom. Homosexual women might also find life easier in the uniformed services but it is probably true to say that as many gay women are teachers, typists and bus conductors as are members of the army. And caution hides many gay men behind the overalls of factory workers and the lounge suits of bank clerks.

Minorities, like the black population in Britain, are strengthened by their almost totally working class composition. This is not true of gay people. Gay people, drawn from all classes, races and both sexes have only their sexual propensities and their oppression in common. The heterogeneous nature of the gay minority gives homosexuals little real power in society. We can exert no economic sanctions against those who attack us, and we cannot effectively protect ourselves by geographical concentration.

¹¹ *Lancaster Free Press*, no. 7, December 1972.

This weakness has led gay people, both in and out of the gay scene, to absorb and accept the values of male supremacy that inevitably oppress us. Male homosexuality has often involved the rejection and denigration of women. If men are considered superior to women then clearly men can have much more stimulating relationships with each other. The idea that love relationships between men are finer and more worthwhile than relationships between women and men is an ancient belief that flows logically from the view that women are inferior. These ideas are unfortunately still alive and well on the gay scene. Women are generally excluded, or at least discouraged from using gay bars and clubs used by men. Publications, clubs, bars, and homosexual social, cultural and political organizations are almost exclusively for men:

As a new member of CHE [Campaign for Homosexual Equality], and having received my first bulletin, I find it most disturbing to read that there is a campaign to try and get more women into what appears to be male groups. Personally I think this is an unhealthy move in the wrong direction, and could in the end do more harm than good. . . .

By all means have female homosexuals in CHE, and they should have the same right to equality as the men: to hold office, and send delegates to conference, but they should have their own groups and stick to them.¹²

These values of the ghetto are the values of capitalist society both politically and culturally. This is facilitated by the commercial control of clubs and bars. The existence of gay bars is completely dependent on the whim of publicans and breweries. Gay clubs are generally very expensive. Their piss-elegance proclaims the bourgeois aspirations of the scene, while their existence often depends upon bribing the police. It is true that gay bars are ‘meat-racks’ – like any Mecca dance hall. The gay ghetto mirrors the relationships

¹² *CHE Bulletin*, October 1972, letter page.

common to heterosexual people. The result is a parody of heterosexual relationships; intensifying romantic myths and oppressive realities. The search for a life-time companion or Mr Right is a long and desperate business. Single-minded promiscuity co-exists with an emotional commitment to monogamy.

Despite its inadequacies the gay scene exists because many homosexuals need it. The size and character of the ghetto is determined by forces that gay people have virtually no control over. Political attitudes on the scene are permeated by the belief that homosexuals really are sick, and that we shouldn't push our luck – gay people should avoid trouble at all costs and appeal simply for tolerance.

Homosexual Equality and Capitalism

Like all oppressed people, overawed by the influence and power of those that persecute them, homosexuals resist by evasion, avoiding open conflict with the norms of heterosexual society. Homosexual women and most gay men cope with their situation by joining in with the anti-gay humour and sentiments of their workmates and families, in practice accepting that they are 'queer'. While some gay men strike back with camp jokes and irony, anticipating ridicule by laughing at themselves and flouting the mannerisms expected of them.

This response is patronized and absorbed by capitalist society, enabling the homosexuality of prominent showbiz personalities to become an open secret. Camp humour presents forms of behaviour that differ from those usually associated with masculinity as absurd. In this way it supports male supremacy. The camp comedian defines what is 'normal' and what is 'queer' reinforcing his own oppression by ridicule of non-masculine behaviour. Such humour is based upon acceptance of the view that homosexuals are 'queer'.

This tradition of acceptance and evasion has resulted in the belief that gay people simply need to be freed from legal restrictions and all would be well. Law reform is widely held to be a panacea on the gay scene and is the major objective

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of most gay political organizations. Law reform is clearly important but to make it the central aim of the movement implies that gay people are principally oppressed by laws. This is not so. Gay women are not restricted by any laws and the oppression of gay men does not come from legislation.

For example, black people are restricted by immigration controls and deportation orders just as gay men are restricted by the Sexual Offences Act, but immigration controls are clearly not the source of racialism in Britain. Black people generally have worse jobs and housing, fewer educational opportunities and a higher level of unemployment than the white population. None of this is the result of legislation. The inferior position of black people is the result of prejudices which operates formally and informally without the force of law. Legal restrictions against gay men might well be swept away by an 'enlightened' parliament, but gay oppression will remain intact.

Homosexual equality is not possible under capitalism. Gay relationships run against the grain of family life and outrage male supremacists, both agents of the sexual repression that permeates capitalist society. Permissiveness, abortion scandals and a soaring divorce rate scarcely shake the male dominated family. Sex is compulsively related to the production of children their care and their introduction into the norms of our society.

The family is not economically necessary for capitalism but it is vital as a mechanism of social control. The despair of the right at the decay of parental authority underlines this very clearly. The myths centred around romantic love, motherhood and life-long monogamy are promoted by those that support the way things are. Although redundant, socially and economically, the family is preserved, like a sickly glaze cherry, as an ideological prop for the present system.

Constant hard work for a weekly wage and two days off in seven, sometimes relieved by annual holidays, is the life most people lead. Sexuality is confined to a quick fuck a few times a week. The sexual life of workers is destroyed by shift work and by the ever-present pressures of routine labour. Spontaneity and the development of full sexual and

personal relationships is denied to most working people, because sexual life is subordinated to the physical demands of capitalism:

The psychological impact of shift working is probably more serious than the physical effects.

One of the most common spontaneous complaints about shift work is that it interferes with family life.

A study on German workers, for instance, showed that 74 per cent of married men and 45 per cent of single men who followed a shift schedule which included night work complained of disturbances in family life. The most frequently mentioned difficulties in husband and wife relationships concern the absence of the worker from home in the evening, sexual relations, and the difficulties encountered by the wife in carrying out her household duties.

Another area of family life that seems to be adversely affected by certain kinds of shift work is the father-child relationship. . . As one shift worker put it to me, “the only thing that has saved my marriage is an electric blanket.”¹³

The economy is organized in a way that involves workers making, servicing and administering things and organizations that they have no control over. ‘Ours not to reason why. Ours is but to do and die.’ This authoritarianism is basic to capitalist society which is operated by our rulers in their own interests.

Workers are asked to help ‘put the country on its feet’, to ‘get Britain moving’, to work with, and not against, ‘the National Interest’. People are cajoled, disciplined and compelled to work not for themselves but for employers who present their interests as identical to those of the

¹³ Tony Cliff, *Employers' Offensive*, Pluto Press 1970. pp.70-71. Quoting P. I. Mott et al. *Shift Work, the Social, Psychological and Physical Consequences*, Ann Arbor, 1965.

‘public’, to those of the workers. To make profits the employers have to compete. This in its turn necessitates the accumulation of capital to invest in new machines and equipment. People must be kept working to make this constant capital accumulation possible even though the worker has no influence over investment and gains nothing from the process.

In societies where the economy is completely nationalized under bureaucratic hierarchies like Russia or Cuba, homosexuals are also persecuted. The First National Congress on Education and Culture convened in Havana didn’t mince its words:

The social pathological character of homosexual deviations was recognised. It was resolved that all manifestations of homosexual deviations are to be firmly rejected and prevented from spreading It was resolved that it is not to be tolerated for notorious homosexuals to have influence in the formation of our youth on the basis of their ‘artistic merits’. Consequently, a study is called for to determine how best to tackle the problems of the presence of homosexuals in the various institutions of our cultural sector. It was proposed that a study should be made to find a way of applying measures with a view to transferring to other organizations those who, as homosexuals, should not have any direct influence on our youth through artistic and cultural activities. It was resolved that those whose morals do not correspond to the prestige of our Revolution should be barred from any group of performers representing our country abroad. Finally, it was agreed to demand that severe penalties be applied to those who corrupt the morals of minors, depraved repeat offenders and irredeemable anti-social elements.¹⁴

These state-capitalist societies are dominated by the belief that life here and now must be subordinated to building up

¹⁴ Quoted in *Ecstasy*, no. 1, journal of the Gay Revolution Party, New York.

the national economy, for ‘progress’ and for the ‘future’. Government praise and laws supporting the virtues of family life and the strict regulation of sexual life go hand in hand with the oppression of homosexuals.

Under capitalism a whole system of beliefs and values has grown up which justifies keeping our noses to the grindstone. Capitalist society is dominated by imperatives that run counter to the interests of most people. Sexual desires are bottled-up and organized to conform with ideas that support the belief that hard work is virtuous. The male dominated family plays a crucial role in maintaining this repression. In the words of the right-wing Monday Club:

Humane tolerance of diversity and frailty should not obscure the recognition that the protection of the family is the essence of positive social morality.¹⁵

If homosexuality were fully accepted, many more people would have gay relationships. This would present a major threat to the family institution and the functional view of sex.

Socialism: Oppression or Liberation?

Homosexual liberation is not possible under capitalism and it is not guaranteed under socialism. Socialists in Britain are confused and embarrassed by the issues raised by the gay movement. Homosexuality is thought of as a middle or upper class ‘disorder’. Not something that a working class mum or a rugged proletarian might ‘suffer’ from. This, of course, is absolute nonsense. There are well over two million homosexuals in Britain and most of them are working class people. Alexandra Kollontai’s views on sexuality after the Russian revolution make the point well:

¹⁵ Executive Council statement, *Aims of the Monday Club*, March 1968.

To imagine that only members of the well-off sections of society are floundering and are in the throes of these problems would be to make a grave mistake. The waves of the sexual crisis are sweeping over the threshold of workers' homes, and creating situations of conflict that are as acute and heartfelt as the psychological sufferings of the 'refined bourgeois world'. The sexual crisis no longer interests only the 'propertied'. The problems of sex concern the largest section of society – they concern the working class in its daily life. It is therefore hard to understand why this vital and urgent subject is treated with such indifference. This indifference is unforgivable.¹⁶

This indifference has led to the repression of homosexuality inside socialist organizations of both the reformist and revolutionary type. Smug liberalism enables many socialists to oppose police harassment of homosexuals while making life impossible for gay people inside the organizations of the left. The fact is that homosexuals have very, very rarely 'come out' inside socialist organizations. Gay people work in the branches of political organizations, in the trade unions and in rank and file movements, yet never tell their 'comrades' that they are homosexual or live openly as gay people.

The reason for this is that gay people feel *and are* oppressed culturally and socially within the revolutionary movement. Liberal attitudes of tolerance and sympathy for the sexually 'deviant' crush the spirit of gay socialists and isolate us from each other. The emergence of the gay movement independent of socialist organizations is of great importance for us because it breaks down the guilt and fear that results from isolation. By coming together, we will be able firmly to reject the sympathy offered by our 'comrades' and demand solidarity with our struggle against gay oppression.

¹⁶ Alexandra Kollontai, *Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle*, 1919. Falling Wall Press, 1972, p. 3.

Because the gay population is dispersed throughout different occupations and places, the gay movement can make little practical contribution to the labour movement. We can't strike or organize tenants' associations, except perhaps on Earls Court Road! But the contribution we can make is nevertheless of vital importance in challenging the ideology of capitalist society. Capitalism does not simply depend on paratroopers and policemen – it depends on its ideas. A mass movement can be built on the wages issue alone but it will only be revolutionary if it rejects the basic ideas of capitalist society. Socialism is not simply about economics – it is not even mainly about economics. We are fighting for a whole life where people will not exploit and dominate each other – a society free from material oppression and sexual poverty.

Working class people suffer more from the disruption of their personal lives than any other section of the population. Reactionary and repressive attitudes about the status of women or the rights of homosexuals are a direct result of the sexual repression that the working class is exposed to. The popular hostility to homosexuality and women's liberation in the working class influences the labour and socialist movement very deeply.

However, the working class is the only social force capable of removing capitalism and building a society in which people control their own lives, determining the objectives and amount of work they will do. The position of the working class is central in the struggle to overthrow capitalism not because workers are the 'salt of the earth' or because working people are socially or culturally 'progressive'. The workers alone possess the social and economic strength to frustrate and overturn the present system and are compelled to seek collective solutions to problems.

The way forward for a clothing worker, car worker or gas worker is not to earn more than one's mates but precisely to gain equality of income – the slogan 'Parity not Charity' speaks for itself. Because it is obvious that modern production cannot be broken up and distributed to workers like land to peasants, working people are increasingly

compelled to smash capitalism and more than any other social group is constantly aware of the collective nature of economic life. This awareness is of fundamental importance for the development of alternatives to capitalism.

But workers' control of industry and the abolition of capitalism would create only the *possibility* of gay liberation. The abolition of gay oppression can only be brought about by breaking down sexism in the working class and by building up an understanding of the way male supremacy and the persecution of homosexuals represses everybody.

Gay Liberation – The Movement We Need

Life-style politics have featured prominently in the development of the movement for gay liberation with the setting up of a number of communes. Groups like the Radical Queens have opted for increasingly bold shock tactics, both as a means of propaganda and as a means of understanding more completely the ways in which men oppress women.

The development of communes is important because it involves people living together and exploring new forms of relationships: discovering ways of breaking down aggression and possessiveness in personal relationships. Communes have also formed a significant part of the squatting movement, directly challenging waste and exploitation in the housing industry.

However, these activities cannot be spread effectively while land and housing policy are controlled by landlords, local authorities and the state. Communes, free schools and other experiments in new ways of living are essential but they will not succeed by gradually replacing capitalist social and economic relations. Under capitalism life-style politics are necessarily exclusive, involving small groups of people and tiny minorities. Communes show us *what* is possible. But they do not *make* a new life possible for the majority – that can only be done by creating a whole new society.

It is important for us to maintain the strongest possible links with all gay people. Because, in order to challenge our oppression, we need to build wide understanding and

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support for homosexual liberation on the gay scene. Lifestyle politics help us to understand more fully the nature of our conditioning but most gay people simply cannot participate in these activities. The gay liberation movement must fight on the basic problems facing most homosexual people and relate these to developing an understanding of the position of gay people in our society.

Because the oppression of homosexuality is tied up with the very fabric of capitalist society, gay liberation groups must also aim to spread our ideas throughout the labour and socialist movement. Shop stewards' committees have been known to prevent gay workers from being re-employed after serving prison sentences (an instance occurred at George Angus & Co Ltd [Fire Armour Division] in 1968).

We have to reverse this situation, because we cannot effectively fight against job discrimination without the support of the trade union rank and file. Gay people will not be able to 'come out' at work until we have established a clear understanding of what is involved in sexual repression. This can only be done by concerted propaganda: demonstrations, leaflets, meetings with shop stewards, apprentices, trades councils and rank and file workers' groups.

Because gay people are oppressed by male supremacy, the significance for us of the women's liberation movement can hardly be overestimated. Lesbians are oppressed because of their independence from men. Gay men are oppressed because they do not participate in the sexual subordination of women. Gay liberation and women's liberation are part of the same struggle and the liberation of gay people is inconceivable without the liberation of women. Gay people are a scattered minority while women make up over half the population and a third of the paid labour force.

By working in association with women's organizations that are fighting sexism, the gay liberation movement must direct its efforts towards the working class movement and socialist organizations around a set of basic demands including:

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1. An end to all discrimination against homosexuals in jobs and housing.
2. An end to aversion therapy and the treatment of homosexuality as a disease or sickness.
3. Full recognition of the individual's right to change sex and the right to all necessary medical treatment free.
4. An end to exclusively heterosexual sex education in schools.
5. Abolition of all restrictions which prevent gay people from caring for their own children or adopting children.
6. Equal rights for homosexuals to display affection for each other in public places.
7. Abolition of all laws relating to the age of consent for boys and girls.
8. Abolition of all legal discrimination against homosexuals including police harassment and entrapment.

Criticism of *The Politics of Homosexuality* made at the time of publication by Bob Mellors in *Come Together* (16) Manchester, Summer 1973

THIS PAMPHLET WAS written primarily as an attempt to get gay politics discussed among the International Socialists. Don is a member of that group, as well as belonging to Lancaster GLF. As such the pamphlet does not add much to the statement of our oppression in the London GLF *Manifesto*, but the political programme he proposes is different, and it is this I would like to discuss.

Don argues that there are two main reasons for our oppression – one, that we undermine the family and marriage, and two, that we, particularly the butch dyke and the screaming queen, make a mockery of the roles women and men are supposed to play. The role of the family in repressing children and training them for their future roles, ties in fairly clearly with the need of the capitalist system for a particular kind of worker and for the repression of sexuality. (Don says countries such as Cuba and the USSR have been no less oppressive to gay people.) But the connection between

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capitalism and gender roles is made less clear – Don argues that it is part of the conditioning capitalism requires if it is to continue.

The economic system is such a force dominating people's lives that no real liberation is possible without first overthrowing the capitalist system. Thus Don argues that we should direct our demands for an end to discrimination not at the ruling class and state government, but rather at the organised Labour movement which is the only group with the potential power to overthrow the state and end economic exploitation.

Attempts at communal living and 'lifestyle' politics are good because they show us what will be possible in the future, but this kind of politics can only have a limited effect since it does not challenge the economic system on an organised mass basis. Gay people do not form a united economically oppressed group, neither do we have a geographical unity around which we organise. Only the working class has this power.

The weakest point in the argument seems to be the lack of a clear connection between male supremacy and capitalism. I think that Don is so fixated on the economic evils of capitalism that he assumes that everything else must be part of a very elaborated confidence trick arranged to keep the system under control. But what is obviously true is that male supremacy existed long before capitalism, and so the domination of women cannot be said to be specifically caused by capitalism. I would argue the other way around – that capitalism is male domination developed to its highest form, where the male values of domination, aggression, competition, individualism, inhumanity and exploitation are imposed on all aspects of life. Male supremacy is not an outgrowth of capitalism, rather capitalism is the highest form of masculine supremacy.

Seeing things this way round has political consequences. I would argue that men and workers will be incapable of authentic collective action (with women and children) until they take notice of the demands of women's and gay liberation and change themselves, and *stop* oppressing gays, women and children. They will be incapable of taking over the factories and organising things collectively until they take our demands seriously.

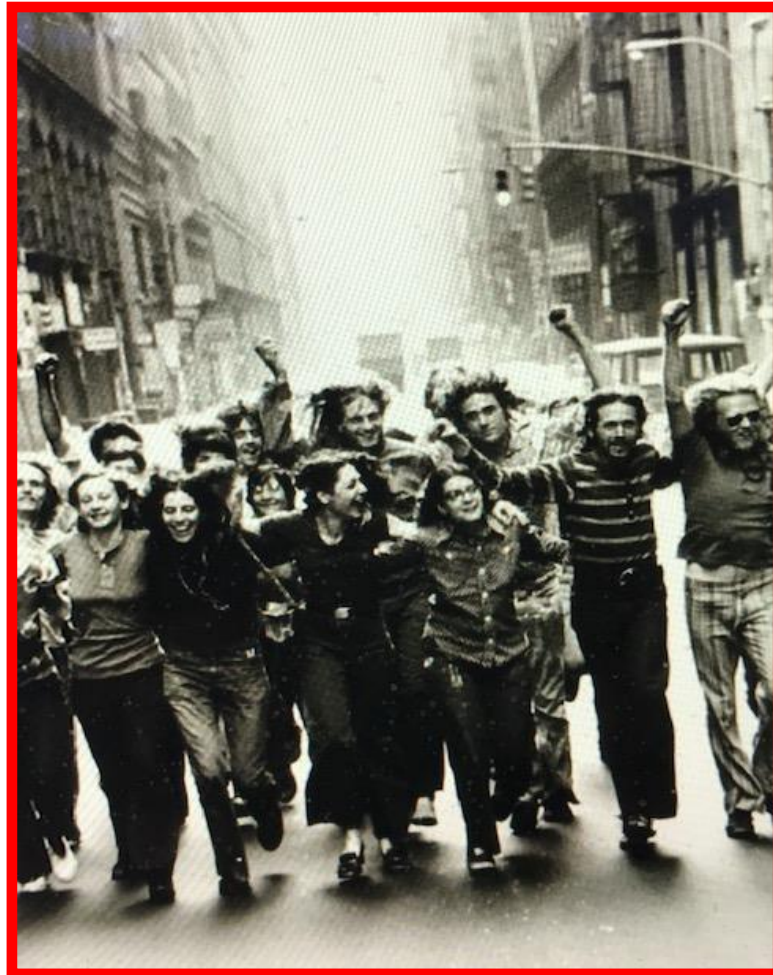
In this I think communal living and lifestyle politics have a large part to play. Living together has been the only way I've known that gay men have really been able to get to grips with the way we've been messed about by straight society, the only way we can begin to understand what we really want. Only when we discover what we really want, can we find ways of getting it.

In the long term Don may be right that communes and such like only have a limited role to play in an overall change, but at this time and for us I think they are very important. Part of communal

living has been not-working (unemployed and sharing whatever money we can come by while not-working). We probably won't be able to do this for the rest of our lives, but I think it is an important thing to do for a while. The most common question we are asked (by workers) is, 'How do you fill up your time?' People seem *afraid* of not-working, of not being told what to do, for most of their lives, dreading retirement when they'll have times on their hands an 'nothing to do'. Until people lose the fear of taking control of their lives, we're not going to be revolutionary.

Rumour has it that Don is in danger of being thrown out of IS for his trouble in raising these issues These are things we should talk about more.

Bob Mellors, 1973



Homosexuality

Sexual Needs and Social Problems

Don Milligan

First published in Roy Bailey and Mike Brake, eds, *Radical Social Work*, London: Edward Arnold, 1975, pp.96-111.

There is no doubt that the people who are distressed or in trouble because they are homosexual need help. But what kind of help and who should provide it? The help provided by Gay Liberation and the Campaign for Homosexual Equality is not enough. Both individual and group counsellors must value homosexual erotic experience, and understand what it feels like to be gay. They must proceed from a felt rejection of the ideas of heterosexual superiority that permeate our culture.

People become aware of their homosexuality at different times. Some during childhood or adolescence and others not until they are adult. However, individual awareness of homosexuality and personal acknowledgement that you are homosexual are distinct experiences. Awareness of homosexual desires and fantasies, even of actual homosexual behaviour during childhood or adolescence, is often not sufficient to evince a personal understanding that you are homosexual. Generally, it has to be spoken about to a close friend – a confidant – or written about in letters or a diary. This ‘confession’ is often very difficult and always confusing. But it is crucial because the awareness that one feels with all its physical urgency and emotional longing has to cease being cerebral. It has to break out of your private thoughts and seek some response in the world outside your head.

Once this awareness of insubstantial sensations, of vague fantasies and of [the] theoretic[al] significance of people of your own sex is talked about or written about it is transformed into a self[-]conscious knowledge that you are

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homosexual.¹⁷ But this does not necessarily mean acceptance of one's gayness. The contempt, disgust and hostility meted out to lesbians and 'poufs' cannot escape anyone's notice, least of all those who experience intense homosexual feelings. For many the time when homosexuality is acknowledged is the time when psychiatric treatment is applied for, family doctors are consulted and desperate marriages are contracted. A time of nervous breakdowns, overdoses and terror, or simply of numbness.

Heterosexuality is the result of a 'healthy' childhood: it is 'natural'. It is with this belief, finely taught and deeply ingrained, that homosexuals discover the implications of their emotional attachments and sexual longings. They discover their sexuality alone and unsupported by any positive social assumptions. This isolation frequently robs homosexual people of their self-esteem and confidence, rendering them vulnerable to the idea that their sexuality is sick and degraded.

Most people grow up sharing the basic sexual assumptions of their relatives and friends. It is assumed that they find, and will continue to find, members of the opposite sex physically attractive. The behaviour appropriate for the male and female gender is learned very early indeed and it is understood that gender must correspond with the appropriate genitals. Girls in the fourth form know the penalties of being suspected of being a 'les' as much as little boys fear the label 'sissy'. All homosexuals are brought up as heterosexuals in a heterosexual world. The 'rightness' of heterosexuality is confirmed in every classroom, game, street, park, pub, cinema, dance hall, daily paper, and on every [jukebox], radio, television and advertising poster.

Homosexuality is quite simply the desire and ability to relate sexually and emotionally to members of your own sex. But heterosexual domination ensures that it is seen as an incapacity to form what are called normal sexual relationships. 'Normal' sexual activity must involve intercourse and "the essential criterion of normal intercourse is that it tends to fertilize the woman" (Allen, 1962).

¹⁷ Texts within square brackets are corrections of the original text.

Wilhelm Reich (1931) argued [that] “it can be established that sexual satisfaction for a healthy heterosexual is more intense than sexual satisfaction for a homosexual.” One wonders how he found out! The desire to deny the value of forms of sexuality other than heterosexual ones is urgent and insistent. Arthur Janov (1972, 322) echoes Reich’s patronizing sympathy: “The homosexual act is not a sexual one. It is based on the denial of real sexuality and the acting out symbolically through sex of a need for love.” However absurd such formulations appear, they are the intellectual expression of ideas thoroughly taught and commonly held by heterosexual people throughout our society. Matey psychologists at conferences, honest jazz musicians and arts writers for the *Guardian* who shrink from calling a ‘spade a nigger’ are never so coy about ‘queers’. What passes for the intelligentsia in Great Britain simply articulates the prejudices of working people without their honesty.

So, the sexuality of gay people is denied in many ways. And the spurious sympathy of concerned thinking-people is the most disarming and insidious form of denial. Gay sexuality is seen as inferior and masturbatory. It is a substitute for real sex: “a grown-up must not masturbate because it is, or should be, in his power to do the real thing” (Schwartz, 1949, 32). The term ‘wanker’ is commonly used as an insult to indicate complete contempt. To be a ‘wanker’ is to be ineffectual and unproductive. It is obvious that because it is theoretically possible for us all to do the real thing – by engaging in heterosexual coitus – that persistent mutual masturbation between people of the same sex must be pathological: “Pathological masturbants usually link this act with fantasies that are not realizable in normal intercourse, and are mostly people with a sadistic or masochistic disposition or perverts of another kind.” (H[i]rschfield, no date, 127.) Gay people are, of course, all ‘pathological masturbants’.

As gay people stumble from awareness of the erotic attraction of their own sex towards self[-]conscious understanding that they are homosexual, the first painful confrontation with anti-gay values is experienced. By the time that most gay people know that they are homosexual

they have already internalized heterosexual values. Many believe that they are inadequate or obscene. The spirited defence of a gay boy to reactions of passengers on a Bradford bus makes it clear! "Don't worry, dear! It could happen to the best of us!" Full of camp irony and courage he defended himself with his own sense of affliction. Fighting back with blunt weapons.

The internalization by gay people of the belief in heterosexual superiority forms the roots of self-oppression. Heterosexuality is 'normal'. It is not simply the most common form of sexual expression, it is dominant; and society admits no legitimate alternatives. Moreover, heterosexuality is essential for marriage. And marriage is the passport to children, legal recognition, social approval and consequently to self-respect. It is also important because it is believed that the penalty for remaining unmarried is loneliness. The best response to these feelings has been given in *With Downcast Gays* (Hodges and Hutter, 1974):

It is a basic mistake to accept heterosexual conventions as God-given criteria by which gay people may be judged. Instead we should use the insights that we have gained as homosexuals to criticize a sexist and hypocritical society. An example of the failure to do this can be seen when the fact that gay couples are childless is pleaded as an excuse for their relationships ending: and our spokesmen fail to point out that, if married couples stay together only for what they imagine to be the benefit of their children, they are not models of permanence but of thwarted impermanence. Instead of comparing our freedom unfavourably with such unions, homosexuals should feel pity for heterosexuals who find themselves trapped in an unhappy marriage and rejoice in the liberty their own homosexuality bestows. (pp.7-8)

Apparently, marriage is biologically natural, emotionally fulfilling and socially mature. Isolated homosexuals are as vulnerable as most heterosexual people to the apparent advantages and securities offered by marriage.

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Heterosexuality is not only considered natural; in its monogamous form it is the hallmark of maturity: 'the sexual association in its mature and perfect form, which is marriage, is meant to be enduring.' This is the key to the sense of loss and deprivation cultivated in most homosexual people. The heterosexual act is not valued simply because of its supposed superiority – it is the social dimensions of heterosexuality that are valued. But homosexual people can have alternative values – alternatives that the counsellor must present to the so-called 'client'.

Gay people have no reason to envy the institutionalized sexuality available to heterosexuals, cluttered as it is with ceremonies of courtship and marriage and further poisoned by a division of roles which condemns the man to dominate and the women to submit. A heterosexual pick-up is fraught with implications of the man conquering and the woman surrendering; it is unlikely to enjoy the sense of mutual agreement enjoyed by gay people. For this reason, it is easier for homosexuals to make sexual contacts, and once made there is no tedious process of persuasion – no ritualized escalation of intimacy to be carried out before sexual pleasure is reached. (Hodges and Hutter. 1974, 8.)

Because the sexuality of gay people is dismissed as, at best, a perversion and, at worse, as a sign of inadequacy, homosexuality is not supported by any positive cultural expression and has no institutional protection. The response of many gay people to this negation of their sexuality and the denial of its social expression is to marry, while many more remain hopelessly unmarried. Family life is difficult enough for heterosexuals, but for gay people it is impossible without major concessions to heterosexual norms, which in turn intensify the contradictions.

Most homosexual people are living with their husbands or wives, or their parents, or quietly alone with little social contact with other gay people. Only a minority of gay people live a more or less openly gay life in the conventional

gay social ghetto or on its political periphery. This means that counselling will inevitably be concerned with helping people trapped in a web of heterosexual social relationships which are probably far from supportive. In order to be of any assistance a councillor must be aware that the feelings of social inadequacy, and the sense of their own obscurity are the most important obstacles to overcome for gay people seeking help.

While desperately wanting homosexual friends and lovers, gay people who come to see a counsellor often have a real desire to dissociate themselves from other homosexuals. The stereotypes of 'queers' held in society as butch lesbians, screaming queens and effeminate pansies revolt many isolated gay people. This revulsion disarms them and leads them to ape heterosexual norms of behaviour in a desperate attempt to appear 'straight'. However, the point about most stereotypes is that they are true. Many gay people who live more or less openly are 'butch' lesbians, screaming 'queens' and effeminate 'pansies.' The sense of revulsion felt by the isolated homosexual must be transformed into a sense of pride. Because prevailing concepts of dignity are heterosexual, anyone who steps outside these patterns of behaviour is inevitably thought of as absurd and contemptible. "Occasionally one comes across a . . . boy who wants to be a girl and, if this desire is strong enough, adopts a female mentality which may lead to all sorts of absurdities in later life, such as homosexuality, dressing as a woman, or even the wish to be transformed into a woman by means of operations." (Schwarz, 1949, 48-9.)

One's behaviour must correspond with the behaviour appropriate to the gender divisions of the society. If your genitals are female you have no choice; your gender is automatically ascribed – you must be feminine. A gay woman whatever her mannerisms or social behaviour breaks the cardinal rule of femininity – she does not desire to be sexually subordinate to a man. Similarly, the heterosexual Women's Liberationist who may be severe and bitter will be dismissed by most men as "in need of a good poke".

Gay people whose mannerisms are stereotyped are implicitly rejecting the ascription of gender roles and asserting their right to be feminine or masculine irrespective of their genitals. Their ‘crime’ is simply that they reject heterosexual stereotypes. They are homosexual and they are not afraid to acknowledge their gayness – they flaunt their sexuality. In this, openly gay people are very similar to heterosexuals who flaunt their sexuality all the time. But ostentatious weddings, walking hand in hand, and the myriad other affirmations of heterosexuality are not thought of as ‘flaunting’ sexuality. While virtually everybody knows the meaning of the word *homosexuality*, many ‘normal’ people simply do not know what the word *heterosexual* means. Why should they? They have no need to use clinical terms for themselves – they are just people. Heterosexual people can be amused, disturbed or annoyed by openly gay behaviour. But that really is their problem. Stereotyped or not gay people have a need and a right to live openly and a counsellor who does not understand this can be of no assistance to a closeted or isolated homosexual.

It has been said (Righton, 1973, 21) that “full integration of the homosexual into society is, of course, the end towards which to work.” But however well meant, this object can only weaken gay people. Integration, whatever is literally meant by it, in practice always means cultural submission of the minority to the majority. For ethnic minorities integration means assimilation. It means the destruction of their culture. That’s what all ethnic groups in Great Britain, irrespective of colour, resist so tenaciously. If you want to be integrated you must seek approval from the majority. At present that means being ‘English’. It also means being heterosexual. And if you are not heterosexual you must pass for one because you must not offend the sensibilities of heterosexual society by flaunting your gayness. Lord Arran (quoted in Hyde, 1972, 303) welcoming the passage of the Sexual Offences Act in 1967 made the position clear when he both threatened and asked:

[T]hose who have, as it were, been in bondage and for whom prison doors are now open to show their thanks

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by comporting themselves quietly with dignity. This is no occasion for jubilation; certainly not for celebration. Any form of public flaunting, would be utterly distasteful and would, I believe, make the sponsors of the Bill regret that they have done what they have done.

The internalization by openly gay people of a particular form of behaviour is both an assertion and a defence of their homosexuality. Stereotyped behaviour in the gay community says simply “I don’t give a damn what you think of me – I am what I am!” By whistling in the dark people narrow their fear and broaden their courage. Isolated homosexual people hate stereotyped and camp behaviour mainly because they fear public acknowledgement of homosexuality. They identify with heterosexual values and heterosexual stereotypes. By chopping their lives up in bits, they seek approval from straight society saying – what I want to do in bed has nothing to do with the rest of my life or my general social interaction. This attitude merely points up the contradictions and makes things worse.

Of course, there are apparently good reasons for concealment. One’s children might be taken into care or access denied because one is ‘morally unfit’. Jobs and flats are also put in jeopardy if it is known that one is homosexual. But the security offered by concealment is vulnerable to discovery at any time, while the inevitable lies and furtiveness strengthens the suspicion that perhaps, after all, there really is something rather nasty about homosexuality. The security achieved by concealment is more than an illusion, it undermines confidence in one’s sexuality and erodes pride and self-respect. Concealment cripples many gay people’s lives both socially and sexually: it also makes participation in any struggle to defend and improve our situation impossible. Concealment intensified loneliness and isolation and keeps us in our place – which for gay women is nowhere – and for men is the cottage (public lavatory) and the comedy show.

Coming out and living openly in a limited sense within the gay community or in the slightly wider sense within

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radical gay organizations is difficult. The gay community is not a true community. Composed simply of bars and clubs, the gay scene is a social ghetto with specific limitations. It is not residentially concentrated and it has no class, racial, occupational or sexual homogeneity. The position of lesbians is tenuous with the clubs and bars. Gay women experience the same problems as their heterosexual sisters because it is very difficult for women to go into pubs, dance halls or clubs alone. A woman as a rule cannot just drop into a bar. She is much more likely to go with her 'affair' or with a group of friends. Consequently, lesbians find it harder to develop informal and casual social relationships in gay bars which are used largely by men. The gay community in many areas is cleaved in two and women are very restricted in all their social options, having to maintain a network of supportive relationships and contacts in a more personal and private manner. As a result, the social life of gay women is inaccessible to the isolated lesbian, and loneliness and the sense of being cut-off is more difficult to overcome.

However, criticisms of the gay ghetto, of social relations within it, and of camp and stereotyped behaviour are not very relevant when they come from heterosexuals and isolated gays. The social ghetto inhabited by many gay people has severe limitations, but it exists because homosexuals who have to deal with a hostile society need it. The implications of camp humour and stereotyped behaviour cannot be the concern of heterosexual social workers nor can social relations within the gay community. Only gay people and their social and political organizations can identify the problems or begin to tackle them. Social workers and counsellors who are concerned to criticize the forms of behaviour adopted by gay people only strengthen the 'value' of heterosexual stereotypes and impair the confidence of the isolated homosexual who comes to them for help.

It is true that social relations in gay bars and clubs – shellacked with sentiment – are often competitive and brittle. However, the gay ghetto is supportive to quite a large minority of gay men and to not a few women. The world of gay bars and clubs must not be romanticized, neither should

it be attacked from the outside because to many isolated gay people it offers the only available chance of sex, support and friendship. The object of counselling is to render individuals capable of living, loving and working in a hostile environment. This objective can only be achieved by helping gay people in isolation overcome their fear and hatred of their openly homosexual sisters and brothers.

The context in which people are aware and become conscious of their gayness, the denial of their sexuality and its social expression, and the contradiction between their heterosexual values and homosexual desires creates many specific problems. These problems have no easy solutions. Isolated gay people cannot simply be directed to the nearest gay bar. People do not learn to swim by being thrown in at the deep end. If you're not careful they drown. Glib solutions are useless because the aim of counselling and other supportive work is of course to increase confidence and self-respect, while the presentation of alternative courses of action which are all extremely difficult as being 'a piece of cake' always makes things worse.

Of course, a counsellor must never tell a person outright what to do, but the idea of almost neutral so-called 'client-centred' counselling is equally dangerous. This arises most critically with gay people who desire to be 'cured' of homosexuality. Homosexuality is not a disease, illness or behavioural disorder; all that the available forms of 'treatment' achieve is great confusion – a confusion which often befuddles and sometimes destroys an individual's sexuality rendering them incapable of forming sexual relationships of any kind. A person who wants to be 'cured' must be dissuaded by a presentation of these facts.

The Family Doctor pamphlet, *Homosexuality* (Kenyon, 1973) published by the British Medical Association is a good example of the insidious propaganda both counsellors and isolated gay people need to guard against. It starts off well:

Public attitudes are more enlightened these days and homosexuality has come to be accepted as a 'variation from normal' rather than something abnormal, to be

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sneered at or condemned. And yet there is still a lot of prejudice, misunderstanding and even fear surrounding the subject. This booklet, which is factual and non-moralizing, is intended to disperse the many false impressions and put the subject into proper perspective. (p.2)

Apart from word-games like “variation from the normal” one could reasonably suppose that it would reject anti-gay ideas. In fact, the superficial impression created by the pamphlet led a number of Campaign for Homosexual Equality groups to recommend and distribute it.

The pamphlet is fairly representative of the attitudes of ‘enlightened’ social workers, doctors, and psychiatrists. For this reason, it is not non-moralizing, factual or intended to disperse false impressions. Its object is to allay the fears of heterosexuals, while its effect is to disarm and demoralize homosexual people. For example: “The more aggressive type (of lesbian) may seek direct competition with males and go for the managerial executive-type jobs.” But don’t worry, “not all ‘bossy’ managing types of women are lesbians, nor are all Scout Leaders and such-like homosexuals. It is easy to blacken and denigrate any movement which seems a potential threat to the established order by insinuating sexual deviancy.” (Kenyon, 1973, 14.) Well, if nothing else, it comes as a relief to know that the Boy Scouts are not going to threaten the established order!

The author of this pamphlet, F. E. Kenyon, treats us to three personal stories. The first concerns Ann (aged 18) who “thought she was turning into a lesbian”. She “fancied herself falling in love with a well-known female singer who often appeared on TV”. But Ann “was a late developer”. And, “her mother was in her late forties and herself a very anxious and emotional person, particularly since the death of her first husband.” Kenyon saw Ann on six visits, “during this period she was treated with a minor tranquillizer and reassurance. She was encouraged to pay attention to her diet, and was given treatment for her facial acne and hair on her face.” This story ended ‘happily’ because apparently Ann “realized that her attraction to the female pop star was not

really a sexual one but at the time she stood for all the things that she most envied – i.e. good looks, sophistication, popularity. She fully accepted, too, that she was a normal girl and that she had been temporarily overwhelmed by a rather late but rapid adolescent phase.” (pp.16=17)

Lesley (aged 27) married with two children. “Lesley had been following her (female doctor) about, came with obviously trumped-up symptoms, culminating in a terrible angry scene in the surgery when Lesley put her arms around her (doctor) and said she loved her.” Kenyon gathered that his ‘terrible’ behaviour resulted from depression that “had come on shortly after the birth of her last child, and then made worse by her father’s death.” Lesley had had a couple of homosexual relationships in the army but was “accepted for out-patient treatment and had twenty-five one-hour psychotherapy sessions spread over two years, as well as three months’ treatment with anti-depressant drugs. She made very good progress, lost all her lesbian inclinations, and coped with her mother much better. Gradually her relationship with her husband improved, she began to enjoy sexual intercourse, and all round became a much happier wife and mother.” (p.17)

The last of the three cases cited concerns Barry (aged 25), a postgraduate student. “The main aim of treatment here was to help Barry to come to terms with his homosexuality. As a start, and because of his religious background, he was advised to read Norman Pittenger’s book *Time for Consent: a Christian’s approach to homosexuality*. At the same time, the medical aspects were discussed with him. He rapidly became less depressed, began to regain his self-esteem and felt less like a freak.” Barry “faced up to his parents not, however, by saying he was gay but by saying the he preferred to remain a bachelor for the foreseeable future.” After six sessions Barry was relaxed and happy. “He had met another student for whom he felt a great natural affinity. . . they had now decided to share a flat and at last Barry could accept himself as a perfectly ordinary, well-integrated member of society.” (pp.18-19)

These three cases are very instructive. This doctor and his ‘treatment’ worked on a set of entirely negative assumptions

about homosexuality. Ann was immature, had acne, facial hair and an anxious mum. She also had a crush on a woman TV star whom she envied. Her sexuality was presented to her as immature and her love was disposed of as envy. Lesley suffered from post-natal depression, the death of her father, an unloving mum and the bad influence of some gay women when she was in the army. Barry had a sheltered upbringing, was shy with women, had a possessive mum and a “fussy, strict, unemotional” dad. What is more his younger sister “could never keep a boyfriend for long as she was a rather moody, unsociable sort of a person and not particularly attractive as she was painfully thin.” Barry’s sister was obviously not a social success while he “reacted poorly to the rough and tumble (of school).” And “hated all forms of games and sport” (p.18).

People such as Kenyon have to ask why individuals are gay because they see homosexuality as a behavioural disorder. They never once question what causes heterosexuality and the inability of the majority of people to form homosexual relationships. This is because they don’t believe that homosexuality is a rewarding form of sexual expression. At best gayness is seen as a temporary lapse from grace and at worst as something that can concealed from the world as a “great natural affinity” with a member of your own sex – plus a desire to stay single.

Frightened and bewildered homosexuals do commonly go to see their family doctor and a minority are referred for psychiatric treatment. Invariably they will be harmed and not helped. They will be injured by actual physical ill-treatment masquerading as a ‘cure’ – aversion therapy – or simply by verbal authoritative confirmation of ideas of inadequacy learned throughout childhood and adolescence. The defence offered by doctors, psychologists and psychiatrists that homosexuals have to be ‘treated’ because they ask for it is in reality no defence. When lonely, devout, heterosexual Methodists go to the doctor because they are afflicted with sexual fantasies and generalized randyness it does not enter the doctor’s head to prescribe repressive therapy. They are reassured and encouraged to participate in

social activities that will objectively increase their sexual opportunities. Lonely gay people need similar advice.

Counsellors must aim to replace doctors. And doctors must learn to refer distressed homosexuals to counselling and befriending agencies. Most doctors are hopelessly ignorant about homosexuality and the problems confronting gay people. There is no reason why somebody with a medical training should be considered qualified to counsel people on any social problem, particularly one which results from oppression which the medical profession is actively involved in perpetuating. Even on the odd occasion that a doctor has a positive approach to gayness, she or he is still the person that you go to see when you are sick. It is this continual association between sickness and homosexual that does the most harm.

Most general practitioners if they are not openly hostile, will assume an attitude of breezy acceptance or indifference towards the patients' distress – assuring them that they have nothing much to worry about. "It's just like having one leg really; nothing to be ashamed of!" Dr James Hemming (1974) has perhaps a more typical and more sympathetic approach:

There are about the same number of colour-blind people as there are homosexuals. Well, you shouldn't really feel guilty or ashamed or put-down because you're colour-blind, you just happen to be colour-blind. Well, if you're homosexual you really needn't feel any more deviant than a colour-blind person.

Such reassurance does not take positive form. Its assumption is that to be gay is to be disabled. Hemming also thinks that heterosexual marriage is perfectly suitable for gay people, as long as they 'talk it through' with their fiancées before marriage and "don't expect it (homosexuality) to clear up because you get married." Quite apart from his implicit repressiveness Hemming's rather bland irresponsibility is astonishing. People who are not only aware of homosexual feelings but know that homosexuality is an important if not

exclusive aspect of their sexuality should not get married under any circumstances.

Pat Sullivan of *Friend*, a counselling organization, talks about the consequences (1974): “I know from personal experience – people I’ve met – where the women got married at 17, have had two or three kids and their life is absolute hell. And there’s just no escape from it except, in a lot of cases, suicide. But even then, they’ve got pressures not to commit suicide because of the kids. If she’s got a girlfriend already who’s prepared to live with her, OK. If she hasn’t, she’s got nothing to go to. So, she tells herself she’s got to stick with it. Financially she’s not secure. And there’s really nothing she can do. She’s either got to decide to stay with the family or go off and be by herself. Even if she has got somebody to go with very often the man will want the child. She doesn’t want to leave the child.”

Pat Sullivan goes on to talk about a particular case of a woman who wanted to leave her husband and go to live with her girlfriend in Liverpool. “But she couldn’t take the kids with her, because they couldn’t afford to look after the kids. And she didn’t want to lose the kids. What could she do? She was stuck. She had to stay with her husband and the kids. There was no other way out for her. Also, in a lot of divorce cases if they find out the correspondent’s a woman – you know with the wife – the judge is quite likely to give custody of the children to the man.”

This is the real situation for gay people who are married. The situation for men is better than for women. Men are likely to be financially better off – even paying maintenance. But the social, legal and emotional pressures against breaking up a family are still enormous. Alternatively, if a gay man stays with his heterosexual wife her oppression will merely be intensified by his. While her husband cruises cottages, parks and bars in search of sexual satisfaction, her chances of being left in front of the telly, baby-sitting night in and night out are greatly increased. In this situation a full sexual relationship is impossible for him. Either way the woman remains sexually unfulfilled and trapped.

The question of bisexuality in this situation does not seriously arise. If somebody is sufficiently concerned about

their homosexuality to find their way in front of a doctor or a counsellor then the problems they have are the same as those who see themselves as homosexual. Bisexuality is often a defensive description used by people who are afraid of the label homosexual. However, bisexual people who are married are simply people whose 'infidelity' is complicated by the fact that their lover is of the same sex. If they accept their bisexuality a conventional marriage cannot be a rational arrangement, but merely an insurance against the insecurities of being single and a defence against being thought of as 'queer'. For both the bisexual and the homosexual marriage is a glaringly stupid and oppressive social arrangement. However, as long as homosexuality is despised and penalized, many homosexuals and bisexuals will contract marriages with all the confusion and misery sewn in. Faced with married gay people, particularly those with children, a counsellor can do little but draw out the inconsistencies and contradictions of the individual's situation and present the person with possible alternatives. One thing is unavoidable – somebody, and often everybody, will get hurt whether the marriage is stuck together or pulled apart.

Once a gay person is married and has children the problems become truly intractable. This is why the positive counselling of adolescent and young gay people is so important. It is often thought that girls of 16 and 17 cannot be sure they are really homosexual. They can't know their own mind. This may be so. By the same token they can't be sure they are heterosexual either. If a young person is worried about their homosexual feelings it is irresponsible and cruel to argue them into 'feeling' heterosexual. On the contrary the rightness of their sexual feelings needs to be confirmed and supported. Too often the response young people receive is like this:

Dear Jim

I know what you are doing is not right. You are a man if every sense of the word and fully developed in that way. The first thing I did was to get some books on the

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subject and there is plenty of medical treatment available with hormones and hypnosis etc. I know that at the moment you don't want to know, but I hope before it gets too great a hold on you, you will. I read that it mostly stems from a bad experience with a girl in early puberty and when that is overcome in the mind everything comes right. It broke my heart to see you looking so obviously what you say you are which hasn't been apparent before. I hope and pray you will find the strength to remove yourself from the influence of this person and come home and we will find the absolute best man in London to help you no matter what it costs. It is obvious that those that practice this are going to persuade you that there is nothing shameful or wrong in this and I hope you are not too weak to realize this. Some people are not developed and have a makeup that can't help it but I am convinced it is not so with you.

William is coming home for the weekend with a girlfriend. He phoned me this morning. Please think about this letter and write soon.

Your loving
Mother¹⁸

Fortunately, 'Jim' was just 21. He did not go home – he joined the Gay Liberation Front instead. But many young homosexuals faced with such a response seek help only to be told by doctors and even counsellors¹⁹ that they are probably not really homosexual. It is not the business of the counsellor to question the authenticity of a person's homosexuality – however young they are. The legal problems of men under 21 are considerable and a counsellor needs to warn sympathetically individuals of this, and to

¹⁸ Private letter, dated 5th April, 1974, received in May, 1974.

¹⁹ An instance of this occurred at the Bradford CHE Symposium, 9 March, 1974. A discussion workshop report was suggested that, in most cases, young people who come for counselling should be encouraged to attempt heterosexual relationships.

help them feel confident enough to meet other homosexual men in social situations. With the advice and companionship of other gay people the boy will hopefully explore his sexuality. The legal problems are obvious, and inevitably involve the counsellor in taking sides. If the counsellor is to be supportive and encouraging the law must be condemned and evaded.

The attitude of the counsellor to the law is particularly important. The Sexual Offences Act (1967) is essential reading. It legalized homosexual acts between men who are willing and over 21. The law does not apply to members of the Armed Forces or to relationships between crew members aboard British merchant ships throughout the world. Nor does it apply to anybody in Scotland and occupied Ireland where homosexual relations between men remain entirely illegal. In 1971 Lord Reid ruled that there is “a material difference between merely exempting certain conduct from criminal penalties and making it lawful in the full sense.”²⁰ In other words, two homosexual men over 21 may have sexual relations in private without fear of penalty, but it is not fully lawful. There is no legal way in which gay men can get into bed with each other, because this usually involves a suggestion or a request that can only be defined as ‘importuning’.

Many gay men do spend their time looking for sexual contacts by ‘cottaging’ in public lavatories or strolling the parks. These activities are illegal, but social workers and counsellors will not assist anybody by condemning them. Cottaging is practised and enjoyed because of the social situation of gay men. The reasons for cottaging are complex and cannot be explained away as the result of people ‘having nowhere else to go’. Sexual contact in a public lavatory enables gay men to have sex that is exciting and erotic without emotional entanglements. The risks are calculated and often thought worth it. Cottaging is [often preferred because of] the difficulties experienced by a gay man having *social* as well as *sexual* relations with another man.

²⁰ See *Gay News* 2.

A social as well as an erotic relationship between two men inevitably involves being seen in the pub and the cinema together. It means being seen in cafés or restaurants and perhaps going on holiday together. A social relationship between two men who are lovers involves risks far greater than being caught cottaging. Cottaging presents less of a threat to your marriage, your job, or your painfully constructed emotional independence. The moralizing of people who condemn cottaging does more harm than good. Gay men who cottage are victims not villains and deserve our solidarity against police harassment and intimidation. There is no way that people who believe in obeying the Sexual Offence Act or the relevant parts of the Common Law can help gay men.

The relationship between the specific oppression of homosexual people and major social and legal institutions in our society gives homosexual counselling a political significance. It is through political struggle that homosexual people have taken control of who they are. In the same way that 'niggers' are Beautiful and Black, 'queers' are Glad to be Gay. Many oppressed people are heartily sick of being told who they are and what they are by those with power. Oppressed people need to define themselves.

A necessary part of this process is the open organization of homosexual doctors, psychiatrists, teachers, probation officers and social workers. Heterosexual people who work in these fields can best help us by making it clear both in the work situation and through their trades' unions and associations that they will actively defend the job security of gay people. In this way it will be possible to ensure that distressed and isolated gay people who seek help will be counselled by fellow homosexuals. Of course, there is a need for both individual and group counselling. The form that these should take is detailed in *Counselling Homosexuals*, compiled by Peter Righton and published by the National Council of Social Service. Apart from the assumption and acceptance that individual counsellors will be heterosexual (Righton, 1973, 25-8) the specific suggestions make in this pamphlet could hardly be bettered.

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Although counselling homosexuals and gay political action are distinct activities, they are interdependent. The purpose of political action is to defend and extend the freedom of homosexual people to enjoy their sexuality. On the other hand, the object of counselling must be to render individuals capable of living, loving and working in a hostile environment. Political struggle and counselling depend on each other. An isolated gay person is unlikely to develop the pride and self-confidence necessary to live openly without the sort of individual help offered by counselling and befriending agencies.

However, these agencies owe their existence directly to the political action of gay people themselves. The counselling of gay people was not seriously considered until homosexual people began to struggle for social as well as legal change. Recognition of the need for counselling has grown as a result of political struggle. More importantly the activity of gay people has created new ideas and attitudes to counter our oppression. Without these alternative ideas counselling would exist only in the form of support for repressive psychotherapy and clinical 'treatment'.

Out for Sex and Laughs

Refusing to blame apathetic 'scene-queens'
for the lack of a lesbian and gay movement

From *Living Marxism* February 1989



The gay scene: a labyrinth of clubs, one-nighters, piano bars, drag shows, and all-round, all-year *bonhomie*. By and large male territory, the gay scene is extensive. More than 400 pubs, bars, and clubs cater exclusively for homosexuals in Britain, more than 60 regular weekly or monthly one-nighters for gays are organised at otherwise straight venues, and there are dozens of hotels, health clubs, travel firms, restaurants, theatre companies,

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chatlines, dating agencies and student societies. Concentrated in London and Manchester, the scene is a going concern in half a dozen other conurbations and all big towns have a gay bar of some sort.

To most people the gay scene is the object of rumour, known about through friends of friends. Direct experience is restricted to 'sightseeing' or gained incidentally by those attracted by late licences or the sophisticated fun-loving crowd. News about homosexuals, or more politically, 'the gay question', filters through the outrage of popular newspapers or the prism of left-wing concern. For an object of so much angst, the scene remains blithely inarticulate, apparently unable or unwilling to give an account of itself.

Private Party

In response to pressure every gay organisation must now carry the prefix 'lesbian and . . .'. This is insisted upon whether women are being addressed or involved or not. However, nobody has ever been able to make a case for talking about the 'lesbian and gay scene'. Reality is more powerful than word games. The scene is a private world of homosexual men that small shoals of lesbians, circle as a threatening presence.

More likely to be unemployed or low paid, much more likely to be saddled with kids than gay men, lesbians, merely by their presence, unnerve the boys. Alienated by the partying glitz, lesbians thwart the carefully contrived sense of well-being. They are the poor relations, of little interest to hard-pressed proprietors. Here and there a special, a women-only event, can up the take on a quiet Monday night, but catering for women will not give a good return on £250,000 worth of lights, carpets, and club furnishings. The squeeze mounted by bank managers and breweries converges with the prejudices of businessmen who in turn rely on their customers' desire for entertainment; the scene demands a convivial ambience unsullied by poverty or oppression or struggle.

Night after night, defying all appeals for good taste, the drag artistes pantomime, entrancing thousands of gay men

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with a confection of bathos and sexual vulgarity. Without the lineage of Punchinello, the art of mime or the desire to revive vaudeville the drag queens press on, expressing the absurdity of the social position of gay men. Denounced on all sides as 'sexist' and – worse – 'tacky', Adrella, Lily Savage, and The Trollettes flaunt the defiance necessary for the survival of their audience.

Star-gazing

More explicitly tactile and erotic, leather bars attract great crowds of men trussed up in webbing of black straps cunningly held together by cockrings. Chains, boots and peaked caps, a jumble of sartorial motifs from the Third Reich, to the San Francisco PD and fifties bikers at the Ace Café. Refusing to be done down by radical criticism or feminist fury the S&M lads continue to camp it up with baby oil and whips. Whether an effeminate 'nancy' or a ludicrously stern clone, aloof behind moustache and lumberjack shirt, gay men on the scene are out for entertainment, sex and companionship.

The left often identifies this escapist, introspective 'scene consciousness' as the barrier to building an effective campaign for homosexual liberation. By shifting the blame like this, the left forfeits the right to lead 'out' homosexuals.

Even in the great homosexual demonstrations against Clause 28 last year the relationship between the 'leadership' and the crowd was strikingly tenuous. The organising committees drew their personnel from the Labour Party apparatus, the direct or indirect employees of Labour councils, the bureaucracy of the National Union of Students and radical left groups. Aware of their inability to lead anything they hit upon the idea of hiding behind television and stage personalities; stars that had won the admiration of the gay scene, both by their portrayal of homosexual characters in *East Enders* and *Brookside* and by their tireless commitment to Aids charity work.

However, one year on, nothing remains of the huge campaign. The organisers are back in their committee rooms, the popular personalities are out fund-raising for

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people with Aids and HIV infection, the crowd are back on the scene. Yet last year 98 gay men were arrested in four weeks for gross indecency at one public toilet in Harrow. All are pleading guilty. Vincent Beasley of the gay London police monitoring group commented: "There is nothing unusual about the arrests except the particularly polite way they were dealt with, and the numbers." Policemen being polite is probably not a growing trend, but the arrests for gross indecency and 'infringement of public park by-laws' in London rose from 184 in 1986 to around 600 by the end of 1988.

In November two young men, Gordon Mack and Christopher Hayes, were fined a total of £170 at Bow Street for kissing. Whether it is kissing, cruising a public park or simply running the gauntlet of 'queer-bashers' that hang around known gay spots, the lives of gay men are getting decidedly riskier. Repression is growing apace, yet the lesbian and gay movement seems at a loss. Its organisers are now almost as discredited at the NUS officials or Labour councils. The media figures can attract the crowd and win its confidence, but they cannot sustain a struggle for equality without either the organisational infrastructure of a real campaign or any coherent political strategy.

Our Problem

No doubt the moral guardians of the left will continue to chastise those 'empty-headed', 'sexist', 'good-time boys' on the gay scene for only being out for sex and laughs. But why should 'scene queens' stick their necks out to follow wheeler-dealers who recycle popular aspirations for equal rights into a litter of Labour Party resolutions and begging letters to the European court? The gay scene is no more and no less reactionary than any other social milieu. The working-class men who make up the bulk of the scene's clientele are generally no more sexist or apathetic than any other group of British people. They are no more progressive either. Their 'apathy' is the product of a wise refusal to be drawn into struggle without an adequate

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strategy or some prospect of success. That is first and foremost our problem, not theirs.

Boys for Rent

Villains or Victims?

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Rent boys threaten many reputations with a trail through the mud. Synonymous with 'blackmailer', 'thief', 'liar', 'cheat', the rent boy lurks in the tabloid imagination awaiting his chance to bring down some much-loved public figure. Since celebrities like Elton John and René from *'Alo 'Allo* got caught up in rent boy scandals, scores of other pop stars, family entertainers and politicians must live in fear that some lying ungrateful youth will claim to have charged them for sexual services. Worse still is the prospect that the boys might tell the truth.

Barnardo Boys

The image of rent boy as malign and untrustworthy parasite vies with that of rent boy as innocence corrupted. In the view from the moralist's pulpit, the waif, a barefoot candidate for Dr Barnardo, falls into evil company and is lured into prostituting himself to fish-eyed old men. His corruption is caused by rich 'queers' – if it wasn't for them, he would be usefully employed on a Youth Training Scheme! Such myths weave in and out of reality, truthful enough to seem plausible, they are embellished by a deep-rooted horror of 'bum-boys'.

The practice of young men renting out their bodies for sexual purposes by the minute or the hour is considered by many to be more revolting than heterosexual prostitution. The authorities endorse this view. After all, women selling themselves to men is 'natural', the 'oldest profession', etc. But boys selling themselves to men, that's vice.

Various official reports have emphasised the need to give teenage boys special protection, arguing that young men at 16 and even 18 are 'particularly vulnerable' to the offers of gifts, money and hospitality from older men in return for

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indulging in homosexual behaviour. Girls can consent to sex with men at 16, boys have to wait until they are 21. Whether they are on the game or just having free sex gay teenagers are criminals; for their older partners they are 'jail bait' whether or not they charge money for their favours. In the eyes of the law and the law-makers, no youth in his right mind could possibly consent to committing 'gross indecency' with a man, so any who do so must have been corrupted by greed and dishonesty.

Rent boys are indeed lying cheats. They pretend to like their prospective clients. Yet they give as little sex for as much money as they can negotiate. They will attempt to drive an hour down to 50 minutes, and to make the punter ejaculate in five. This tension undermines the illusion of affection and eroticism that the customer has paid for. It lies at the heart of the whore/punter relationship, making all prostitutes appear peculiarly dishonest and ungrateful. Of course, this problem is not restricted to male prostitution; but the circumstances in which men often make casual sexual contact with each other introduces a note of confusion and ambiguity that is generally absent from heterosexual life.

Fine Line

Because homosexual men frequently pick up complete strangers in parks, streets and public toilets, the dividing line between prostitution and free sex can become blurred. There are many opportunities for confusion, wounded pride and allegations that the older man is cheating the younger by refusing to pay. The straight boy down on his luck can find himself embroiled in gay sex when all he wanted was a drumstick and chips and a bed for the night. More commonly, a destitute straight lad will use offers of sex, threats of police involvement and violence to get cash out of a gay man alone in his flat.

The ambiguity between prostitution and free gay sex is not simply a product of circumstantial confusion; it is a product of the legal status of homosexual men. The dark and casual circumstances in which gay men cruise each other are themselves a product of legal repression. When considering

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the behaviour of homosexual men looking for partners the state makes no distinction between prostitution and free relationships. The exchange of money is rarely at issue. Any attempt by gays of any age to meet each other in public places is in law a species of prostitution, punishable by fines and imprisonment.

The most vulnerable rent boys, working in central London streets, pubs and clubs, can make a living out of £10, £15 or £20 sessions. However, at two or three in the morning, when all the clubs are closing, the homeless boy often has his price driven down or wiped out altogether in return for a bed for the night. It is an insecure, often boring and at times dangerous occupation that can pay as little as £100 per week.

The more prosperous and better organised can get clients by registering with escort agencies. In return for 15 per cent of the prostitute's fee, the agent will put clients in touch; £45-£50 for 30 or 60-minute sessions are common, with home or hotel visits at a premium. The market for home visits by masseurs is even more lucrative. These forms of prostitution afford the best prospects of a decent income for the rent boy, and maximum protection for him and his client. Many youths involved in them doubtless plan to quit after a couple of years, having accumulated enough to finance some cherished scheme. But, for all but the few, this remains and unfulfilled aspiration.

Friends and Rivals

The life of the houseboy, or the gay gigolo that wines and dines and crews one's yacht, has its advantages. But the restricted circumstances and vulnerability of even very rich gay men renders this type of rent boy very rare. So, the escort and the masseur remain the principal forms of stable and organised prostitution among men. Pimping is generally restricted to agency fees and does not involve intimidation. However, where the gay scene is small and rent boys cannot merge into a wider homosexual milieu, physical threats and violence are used to control boys in the market and to take a slice of their fees.

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Violence from pimps, poncing by boyfriends or repression by the police are not the main problems for the rent boys working from bars or trading on the street. The more mundane problems are boredom and loneliness. The boys crowd around the space invaders building up a hearty togetherness. The middle-aged men crowd the bar talking loudly about theatre and business, nonchalantly pulling £50 notes from thick wallets. Like people at an auction they indicate, with nods and glances, which boy the barman is to fetch a drink for. The two camps eye each other. Despite the desire for friendship between the boys they are thrown into competition with each other. To survive they must do each other down. The clients offer no respite from the lies and deceit and the competition; indeed, they are its cause.

The rent boy is compelled to counterfeit sexual interest and affection day in and day out. For the most part his companions are also his commercial rivals; he lives without mates. He has forfeited the separation that most of us strive to maintain between our private life and the rigours of competition for money and status. He must develop a precocious cynicism, and present it as the wisdom of one who has seen it all.

Boys do disappear without trace, clients are blackmailed and murdered. But these are startling and shocking exceptions. As a rule, male prostitution is not played as the lurid or sordid melodrama portrayed in the Sunday papers. In many ways it is just another commercial outlet in the you-gets-what-you-pays-for society. The clients can browse through the photo catalogues of escort agencies. The tired businessman can ring the masseur. The boys working the bars can team up for a coach trip to Alton Towers, and their clients can be kind and helpful. The lads can treat a respected elderly client with great charm. Reality is much more complicated than popular imagination would ever allow. There are no whores with 'hearts of gold', but there are a lot of rent boys trying to make out.

Male prostitution is one of the more dismal consequences of the struggle for survival. The repression meted out by the state against homosexual men compounds problems which are in turn exacerbated by the ghoulish interest of the

popular press. The motive for the sale of sexual services can range from destitution to the battle for a more leisured existence. Many young men become prostitutes simply because they are poor or unskilled; others do so to save up a lump-sum or to avoid the horrors of working for wages. For most, it proves to be a mistake. While failing to produce any appreciable capital, prostitution frustrates the creation of a protective network of friends and acquaintances. By opting to live on his wits the rent boy, like the petty crook, does indeed become both victim and rogue.

Aids: Fighting the Epidemic

First published in *Rouge*, spring 1990, London BM Rouge

The point of agreement between Aids activists, the authorities, and the gutter press, is that unprotected heterosexual intercourse is a risky activity. Those who engage in it are at risk of contracting the virus from those already infected. It is this outlook more than any other that shores up the deadly logic of the ‘gay plague’ thesis: the people infected so far have, by and large, been gay – therefore it is they who threaten ‘innocent’ heterosexuals with the fatal virus.

Strikingly, neither the Aids activists nor the reactionaries have shown the slightest respect for the facts. The gutter press uses the predominance of homosexuals and drug users in the Aids/HIV figures to argue that those groups constitute a threat to the whole of society. In opposition, Aids activists and commentators ignore this, asserting that Aids/HIV is a national health emergency because it will spread out to infect wider groups of heterosexual people.

I think that both approaches are grievously flawed. Aids/HIV in Britain is important because 1612 people have already died and 1228 are seriously ill. It is important because a further 11676 people have to negotiate the confusion, terror and discrimination that a positive test result brings in its wake. We know also that more people will test positive and that more people will die in the coming years and months. Our demand for resources does not have to be predicated on the idea that this epidemic is more serious or far-reaching than it actually is. It is serious enough now.

Of course, we cannot be certain that there will be no significant heterosexual spread. The viruses might mutate and become more resilient and consequently easier to transmit. They might just as easily become more vulnerable and more difficult to contract. All sorts of things might happen. But we have to deal with the viruses and the epidemic that we are actually confronted with – not with some apocalyptic nightmare. The epidemic in Britain and

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North America has very distinct features. It is spreading among the groups identified as high-risk, and the partners and babies of those at high-risk. There is no significant danger of widespread infection through heterosexual intercourse.

People are at high-risk if they inject infected blood into themselves while taking drugs, or if they engage in unprotected receptive anal intercourse with an infected person. They are at high-risk if they have a sustained sexual relationship as the receptive partner in sexual intercourse, anally or vaginally, with somebody who is infected. People with venereal disease who have receptive intercourse with an infected person are at high-risk. And, anybody is at high-risk if they are given injections with infected needles or receive transfusions of infected blood or blood products in hospitals and health centres.

Evidently, the great mass of heterosexual people in Britain and North America are not at high-risk, and they are unlikely to find themselves in this position.

The epidemiological conditions in poor inner-city areas in the United States, and in many third world countries have no parallel in Britain.

The real course of the epidemic in Britain confirms this outlook. Since 1983 13 heterosexual people (at no other risk) have become ill. Seven of those people have died. The other heterosexual people who have become ill or died were infected abroad (126), were intravenous drug users (80), the recipients of blood or factor eight (190), or had partners who were at high-risk (22). 23 children of infected parents have also become ill, 13 of whom have died. A further 50 'unclassified' people have become ill, 27 of whom have died.

In stark contrast 2288 gay or bisexual men have become ill, of whom 1295 have died. A further 38 gay or bisexual intravenous drug users have become ill, of whom 19 have died. The figures for HIV infection reveal a similar picture. There are 36 healthy heterosexuals who have contracted the virus in Britain. The other heterosexual people who have tested positive were infected abroad (383), are intravenous drug users (1727), were the recipients of blood or factor

eight (1228), or are the partners of people at high risk (135). 144 children have also tested positive. A further 2263 people who have tested positive are as yet unclassified.

However, 5661 healthy gay or bisexual men have tested positive. The shape of the epidemic revealed by these figures has not changed and shows no sign of changing. As more becomes known about those unclassified people, who have tested positive, they will exhibit a similar distribution of gays to straights, and drug users to non-drug users, to the present Aids figures. This has been the case since the end of 1985, and we have no reason for expecting there to be any change.

If these figures are right, they indicate that there is no statistically significant tendency for HIV infection to spread beyond the gay population or those who inject drugs. If there were a risk of widespread HIV infection through the route of heterosexual intercourse, I would have expected it to be at its most virulent between the mid-seventies and the early eighties. In those years, gay men, lesbians and heterosexuals were all ignorant of the epidemic in their midst. There were no safe-sex guidelines on the gay scene and no one was aware of the danger. In these early days, as a result of transmission of the virus during intercourse, thousands of straight people would have been infected. Today, some seven years later, dozens of heterosexual people would be falling ill each month. Thankfully, this is not happening. Only nine heterosexual people, at no other risk, have become ill since December 1986, bringing the total number of such cases to 13 in December 1989.

Can we rely on these figures? I have no doubt that the GPs, the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre and the Communicable Diseases Unit will have made errors. Errors will also have been made, from time to time, by the Department of Health. However, no reporting mistakes, statistical slips or typing errors could conceivably account for the striking absence of heterosexuals infected, simply through intercourse, from the lists of Aids and HIV cases published by the government and its agencies.

If we disregard wilful distortion and concealment it is safe to assume that the official figures give a fairly clear picture of the epidemic. Of course, the government does indeed

fiddle all sorts of figures, unemployment figures being the most striking example. However, in relation to Aids/HIV the government's scientists and agencies would have no good motive for concealing its heterosexual spread. On the contrary, the government and the British Medical Association have strenuously argued that Aids/HIV would spread to the heterosexual population. Despite this, the figures that the Department of Health publish every month contradict their own gloomy prognostication. If there were any desire to massage the figures it would be to push up the heterosexual figure. This would be the only distortion consistent with the government's line since November 1986.

In fact, the desire to do just this led the cabinet and the Whitelaw committee to bury the report of the Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens. In June 1986 the government scientists said:

While there is no doubt that infection with this virus can lead to severe disease for which there is no effective prophylaxis or treatment, it still does not present a high risk of spreading in the community except in the high-risk groups. This view has not changed and on current evidence is unlikely to do so in the foreseeable future.

[‘LAV/HTLV III – The causative agents of Aids and related conditions – Revised guidelines’, Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens, June 1986]

This statement was endorsed by the health departments, the health and safety commission and the health and safety executive five months before the Tories launched their ‘Don't Die of Ignorance’ campaign. After very detailed scientific advice to the contrary, Thatcher and Whitelaw gravely warned the nation that ‘everybody was at risk’. The effect of this message on the gay community was little short of disastrous. Tension against us mounted throughout the country. Creating favourable conditions for attacks on honest and open sex education in the schools; laying the foundation

of Clause 28, and stepping up the expression of mean, narrow and violent prejudice.

The promotion of the idea that Aids/HIV is a threat to heterosexuals did not make anybody more caring or understanding towards the homosexuals who had tested positive or who were already ill. On the contrary, it intensified the climate of fear and brutality. We must ensure that Aids workers and commentators part company with the government, the BMA and the gutter press. They must stop promoting the fear of the spread of HIV infection through heterosexual intercourse. They must deal with the real course of the epidemic, and raise demands for effective means of combating it.

The London Lighthouse is an excellent institution. In my visits there I've always been impressed by the quality of the service. The people running it have obviously set their sights considerably higher than the abysmal standards of much NHS provision. The Lighthouse is in many respects the flagship of the charitable effort on Aids. However, charitable activities will not, in general, provide the resources or standards of care, research or treatment required. Funds for these services must come from the state. Unfortunately, recognition of this has drawn most Aids workers and commentators thoughtlessly into the political orbit of the BMA and the authorities. In their efforts to fight for adequate funding they have felt obliged to promote the official view that the entire population is at risk from Aids. This strategy has not produced adequate funds. It comes as no surprise that the government has not rewarded those who have remained steadfastly loyal to its 'Don't Die of Ignorance' line. On the contrary, it has fobbed them off with a few cheapskate schemes and grants. Consequently, the 'Aids Industry' in Britain amounts to no more than a ramshackle network of underfunded agencies that are unable to do the work that is expected of them.

It is true that healthcare, welfare benefits and educational provision for the population at large are under attack. The government clearly wants to increase the reliance of working people on charities and private provision. However, the ability of the state to behave in this way towards people

affected by Aids is enhanced by the vulnerable social position of most of the people who are actually at risk. It is the oppression of homosexuals that creates the basis both, for the continued spread of the virus, and the inadequate benefits and lousy treatment that many people often receive.

HIV infection and the diseases that it facilitates are not a political matter. They can only be dealt with by scientific research and medical advances. However, the epidemic – who and in what circumstances contracts the virus, and how they are treated – is most definitely a political matter. The oppression of homosexuals ensures that most gay men are closeted. Their sexual encounters are furtive, episodic and often unplanned. These social conditions make it less likely that closeted gay men will be able to follow safe-sex guidelines. Of course, for ‘out’ gay men the position is very different, but unfortunately most of us are not ‘out’. Most gay men are married, or in some way or another, live entirely within the embrace of family life and straight society. The idea that broadcast government publicity campaigns will effectively reach them is stupid. Such campaigns can only make closeted people more fearful and anxious without creating the social circumstances where they could adequately protect themselves. In fact, broadcast campaigns have simply added fuel to the prejudice and bigotry that already blights their lives.

It is also the promotion of hostility and prejudice by the authorities that ensures that those who do test positive or become ill will be regarded by society at large as in some way responsible for their misfortune. Because HIV infection is in general transmitted sexually Aids is widely regarded as a sexually transmitted disease. Disgrace and blame is heaped upon those who contract it. They are widely considered less ‘deserving’ than the frail elderly, cancer patients or children needing expensive surgery. The preparedness of Princess Diana to shake hands with an Aids patient does not confer respectability upon us. Rather it serves to point up how compassionate and brave the princess is – it’s a bit like the Princess Royal making a well-publicised visit to a leper colony. Such patronage doesn’t assist at all. In their struggle for scarce resources people with Aids often have to face an

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uphill battle to get housing, benefits and decent treatment. In a situation where the NHS is facing cuts on every front the fight for proper care is often blocked or derailed by a groundswell of prejudice orchestrated by the authorities.

Faced with oppression and a terrible shortage of funds the capacity of Aids workers and activists to do much more than 'hold the fort' is limited. This has got little to do with 'burn-out', but everything to do with the strategy of supporting the outlook of the BMA and the government. By giving such overwhelming support to the thesis that 'everyone is at risk' from Aids, lesbian and gay organisations have found themselves in the strange position of being in alliance with precisely the people and institutions that they need to fight against. It is the authorities that ratify and promote hatred of homosexuals. It is the authorities who have argued that the 'pool of infection' among homosexuals constitutes a threat to the heterosexual population. It is the authorities that have built up an atmosphere of panic and irrationality around the epidemic.

The response to this has not been a steadfast campaign of opposition to the authorities, but a mealy-mouthed acceptance of the medical establishment's agenda. It is now argued that because Aids is such an urgent matter, we must do something immediately – fighting oppression is fine – but that's a long-term project. 'Just for now' we must concentrate on Aids. Even militant campaigns of demonstrations and stunts have not seriously focused on the fight against oppression. The fight is about Aids in the context of the imaginary threat that it poses to the entire population. Today, when people are arrested or chain themselves to railings, they are raising the Aids issue on terms remarkably similar to those laid down by the authorities. In the resulting muddle, rational discussion has been rendered well-nigh impossible in many lesbian and gay circles; with anybody who dares to challenge the state-inspired orthodoxy being denounced as uncaring and irresponsible.

This has got to stop. Before we can develop an effective strategy, we have to acknowledge that there has been no heterosexual spread of HIV in Britain. And, that in the

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foreseeable future there is little likelihood of this occurring. We have to break out of the mind-set established by the government and the BMA. Of course, it is vital that voluntary activities designed to directly help people with Aids continue. But, we must recognise that the social oppression of the people most at risk is the key factor in the continued spread of infection, and in our failure to secure adequate facilities for care and treatment. This means that the fight against the Aids epidemic must be conducted as a fight for equal rights for homosexuals against the government, the educational authorities and the medical establishment.

HIV/Aids figures cited are from the Communicable Diseases Surveillance Centre and the Communicable Diseases (Scotland) Unit. They are cumulative totals up to the end of December 1989 and were published by the Department of Health on 11 January 1990.

'Sir' Ian McKellen and Stonewall

Published by *Living Marxism* as

'From Somewhere Over the Rainbow to Sir Ian', March 1991

I recently saw *Return to Oz*. It had its moments but it was not a patch on the real *Wizard*. Dorothy just blown in from the Mid-West. The Munchkins munchkinning. The Ruby Slippers. The Lion trembling with fear, the brainless Scarecrow, and the Tin Man who wants to get a heart. Just the idea of the Yellow Brick Road, a causeway of hopes and dreams, is enough to carry them all along. No matter what the Wicked Witch of the West tries to do, the Lion will be brave, the Scarecrow brainy, the Tin Man full of heart, and Dorothy will get back to Kansas. At the Emerald City the Scarecrow gets a Diploma, the Tin Man gets a Testimonial, the Lion gets a Medal, and Dorothy gets whisked from Technicolor into black-and-white reality murmuring 'There's no place like Home.'

It's a curious fable, but it has had gay men in America and elsewhere declaring themselves 'The Friends of Dorothy' since 1940. What succeeded was the ludicrous completion of an heroic exploit, an epic journey, an enterprise of mythic significance, by a homely girl with a cool head and plain good sense. It was the bathos that appealed. To be delivered from misfortune and oppression by a heroine called: Dorothy! Not Hera, Helen or Diana, but Dorothy! Not an ethereal beauty from Elysium but a farm girl from Kansas. It appealed to the ironic; to the reality of being unbelievable. It was camp.

I thought about this rather sadly when I heard that the gay actor and campaigner Ian McKellen had accepted a knighthood and become 'Sir' Ian McKellen. Gay filmmaker Derek Jarman attacked him for accepting the knighthood and the row continues to rumble on. A host of homosexual luminaries rushed to Sir Ian's defence. They think that Sir Ian's knighthood is 'inspiring', and, curiously, that Sir Ian is remarkably 'honest' and 'dignified'. This is said with a perfectly straight face and all done in the best possible taste! The fact that a bunch of lesbians and gay men

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should say such things is astonishing; that it should be comedians, comediennes, theatre people, artists and artistes is almost unbelievable. Whatever happened to that famed homosexual wit? That ironic understanding of the absurd, the ludicrous, the pompous? The lines delivered with still, icy expressions as if every word were malodorous? Obviously, the further degeneration – the exquisite bathos of exchanging the Yellow Brick Road and the Emerald City for the garden party and Buckingham Palace – has passed this gang of epigones by.

We all know that ‘honest’ and ‘dignified’ are words used by the Wicked Witch of the West. They mean ‘definitely not camp’, ‘good enough to be straight’, ‘will always put the national interest before sectional advantage and personal gain’. I’m certain that Sir Ian deserves these epithets. But you’d think all these ‘creative people’ (his friends after all) would be able to tart them up a bit. At least make them sound like accolades. But no, ‘honest’ and ‘dignified’ it had to be.

In a similar vein the *Guardian*’s Nicholas de Jongh described the defence of Sir Ian by these luminaries as “one of the most remarkable examples of gay solidarity in the arts” since 1967! Again, this entirely mirthless lack of proportion. Leaping to the defence of somebody . . . anybody . . . who has consented to bend the knee to Elizabeth R can hardly be described as ‘remarkable solidarity’. Wouldn’t ‘crawling’, ‘sycophancy’, perhaps even ‘toadying’, be more apt? And how can siding with the establishment against a radical film-maker be described as ‘gay solidarity’?

All the po-faced rectitude is the product of complex tactical discussions and advice concocted at Sir Ian’s Stonewall. Stonewall is not a particular place, it’s an idea. It’s a round of dinners, drinks parties and informal consultations between well-heeled homosexuals and junior members of the establishment. It is hoped that they will be able groom a steady supply of well-behaved candidates for official committees and delegations; it also supplies nomination lists of homosexuals it considers suitable for the magistracy and other positions of responsibility.

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It is engaged in the struggle to ‘demarginalise’ homosexuals. This is yet another code word. It means ‘normalise’. It means defending homosexuals by asserting their normality. Privately Stonewall deals with this problem by not allowing homosexuals to join its charmed circle until they have been vetted by the vetting committee. Stonewall is desperate to ensure that the ‘abnormal’ and the ‘marginal’ are kept out. In its concern for form, rather than content, Stonewall, has got more in common with the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes than it has with an authentic bourgeois association.

It’s so sad; the whole thing is based entirely on a misconception. Because the Stonewall diners see the bourgeoisie conducting business informally in clubs on St James’ and at dinner tables in private homes, they imagine they can do the same! Sir Ian and his friends obviously think that power and influence stem from a sense of propriety, good food and good conversation. They evidently believe that they can impress the powers that be with good set-dressing. The truth is, of course, that the bourgeoisie can wield influence as if it were simply an extension of good manners *because it already has power*. This ersatz gay ‘establishment’ will be readily identified for what it is: a powerless bunch of queers trying to join the club. ‘Dignity’, ‘honesty’ and poise of a sort exemplified by Sir Ian, and advocated by his fellow diners, will not, I fear, pull the wool over the eyes of the *real* establishment. They’ll be seen coming from a mile off. Of course, they’ll be knighted, promoted and quoted whenever the bigwigs find it suitable; they’ll also be brushed casually aside whenever the authorities want to smash the lives, faces and bodies of the homosexual rank and file.

Time was when homosexual dramatists used to feast with panthers. Now they dine with chief constables – or want to. It’s a bit of a come-down. It’s so shaming to think that our public figures are such spineless wimps; such a bunch of worthless worthies. Even Elton spends all his time like some latter-day Noel Coward, sucking up to the royals. In their *bland attempt* to exorcise the ghost of Joe Orton or Kenneth Williams the Stonewall artistes have left us with Julian

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Clary. Well? He's alright . . . I suppose. But he's not exactly got the substance or wit of his predecessors.

Not to worry, this gruesome attempt to replace our camp profile with 'dignity' and worthy of gravity is bound to fail because it completely misses the point – it adds nothing to the fight against oppression. Lesbians and gay men are denied equal rights because they are homosexuals, *not* because they are silly, undignified or even irresponsible. So, I anticipate, sooner or later, a renaissance of dreadful dykes and garish gays. But I'm afraid the old camp is gone for good. The sad truth is that grass is growing between the Yellow Bricks of the Road. Tumbleweed is lazily bumping through the Emerald City and the Ruby Slippers have been lost forever. Dorothy is not going to save us, not even in the form of Betty Windsor. We will have to forgo those dreams, and plan instead for a final showdown.

Prof Norman Stone and gay sex

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'Stormin' Norman and gay sex', March 1991

Freddie, Britain's most approachable dolphin has been sexually assaulted. The police have informed the Crown Prosecution Service, and divers on the Northumbrian coast are reported as 'very troubled'. I was planning to share all this with you but I'm afraid *sub judice* has intervened. Instead I'm going to have to tell you of an evening I recently spent with Norman Stone, Oxford's professor of modern history.

Normally, 'Norman Stone' is not a name one could drop with any great effect, but he's been in the news a lot lately: an expert on Russia, a specialist on the German national character, an adviser to the cabinet and a Wapping pundit. So, I was excited when – quite by chance – we met. I was leaving a function at Oxford town hall. Across the throng, Norman's eyes caught mine, we smiled, and he invited me to a nearby pub. I bought the drinks, and got pleasantly woozy, while he got sentimental about Russia and something called the 'Russian Soul'. It was all entirely innocent. He waxed lyrical in his extraordinary leery-beery style about babushkas and queues, about Soviet prudery and about what an enchanting, chaotic, loveable lot the Russians are. He was prepared to give credit where it was due and there, in the saloon bar (after several drinks), Norman struck me as such a very wise, perceptive sort of chap. It was then that I understood why (despite his carefree liquid charm) he occupies such an exalted social position.

I'm telling you all this because my opinion of Norman as a truly great communicator of homely truths was raised even higher by an article he wrote for London's *Evening Standard*. It was called: 'The gays do protest too much'. It was a *tour de force* in the expression of public opinion. Norman was able to ventilate every nuance of the popular hatred of homosexuals. And, he managed to do so as if he was talking indulgently about some old roué; an old debauched friend, unseemly and self-indulgent, but a *pal*

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nevertheless. It's a style of writing Norman derived from a trick he learned as an undergraduate. It's called: 'How to vomit all over the pavement and completely miss your shoes.' Over the years, in public and private, Norman has perfected this sort of approach to life. Bigotry without malice and malevolent charm have become his stock-in-trade. It enables him to remain unruffled and unsoiled while he honks common sense about the place. He even managed to give expression my own confusion about the latest gay protests.

It is not that I object to men kissing each other on the steps of Bow Street police station. I've kissed a man or two there myself. No, it's this business of them attempting to turn themselves in for 'soliciting' and 'procuring' that left me nonplussed. I think I'd be happier with a more combative sort of approach. Surrender doesn't appeal, not even when it's just for publicity. And another thing . . . I'm beginning to get very irritated (and utterly confused) by the legalistic opposition to the government's latest anti-gay measures. It's all 'the Act of 1956, Circular 73, the Act of 1967, Clause 25, Paragraph 16, and the eighth sentence from the top of the page'. Norman's quite right, it doesn't really convey the gravity of the situation. What is more, when health minister Virginia Bottomley or good old John Patten (over at the home office) agree to move a comma, drop a full-stop, or delete a phrase, confusion reigns supreme.

The attempt by gay radicals to highlight shifts in government policy towards homosexuals by adopting the lingo and tactics of parliamentary lawyers fails to communicate what the problem actually is. Focussing attention on ministerial circulars and draft legislation tends to conceal the fact that male homosexuality is already illegal and has been so for more than a century.

When I'm in a pub or a café with my boyfriend we have to be careful that we don't seem too intimate in case our behaviour is construed as likely to cause a breach of the peace. It's illegal when he stays at mine. The reason for this is that when we go to bed, there are usually people present in other rooms. In law, a place is not deemed private if a third party has access to it. Consequently, a package holiday

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would present problems, as would booking into a boarding house or hotel. Dancing together in a public place is not permitted because it would be lewd and obscene and may occasion a breach of the peace. Introducing out different gay friends to each other is illegal. It's also illegal if a gay man stops to chat up another gay man in the street.

It's true that there are no penalties for two gay men who commit acts of gross indecency with each other in a room to which nobody else has access. Of course, they must both be over 21 and they must both be civilians. However, everything that they do in order to get themselves into this happy position is illegal. It is illegal for them to invite each other to be grossly indecent. This would be soliciting. And, anybody who facilitated their being together in order to be grossly indecent would be a procurer.

The idea of 'consenting' sexual offenders is a misnomer. A gay man between the ages of 16 and 20 can be as willing as he likes but he cannot consent to an act of gross indecency. If he willingly commits an act of gross indecency he has, nevertheless, been 'assaulted' as far as the authorities are concerned because he cannot lawfully consent. Similarly, older gay men break a host of laws, transgress numerous circulars, regulations, and rules and even railway by-laws, because they insist on meeting each other, going to clubs, propositioning each other, dancing, kissing, cuddling and having sex. As a result, homosexuals appear peculiarly hedonistic and sex-obsessed. They are defined almost entirely by their sexual status and by no other quality. In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that homosexuals, both men and women, are deemed unsuitable to care for children or even to live in the same house with children. Consequently, lesbians and gay men, often as a matter of course, lose custody of their own children. They are regularly humiliated in the courts and are automatically turned away by adoption agencies.

The point about all this is that homosexuals are no good to themselves, let alone the children. The reason? Narcissism, 'extraordinary destructiveness' and self-hatred. This, after much study, is the Oxford professor's opinion. Norman is an expert on destructiveness, on himself, and also

on narcissism, so he is more competent than most to comment. What he has grasped is that homosexuality is an *illegal deviation*. He is not troubled by Clause This or Paragraph That. He understands the essence of the matter – the police should crack down where necessary, and not waste public money when it is not. He is an easy-going sort of bigot who likes to present his banal opinions and casual brutality as moderation; he thinks they're the sign of a man with a sense of proportion.

We need the same sense of proportion. We don't want to fiddle about with statutes and regulations. We don't want to get publicity by attempting to get the police to arrest us. It is quite simple. We need equality. So, we want all the laws, rules and regulations that ban or restrict same-sex relationships abolished. Nothing more, nothing less.

Now, even an Oxford Don should be able to grasp that.

The Trouble with Bruno

First published in OffTheCuff, No 46, 2009, at www.donmilligan.net

Sacha Baron Cohen is at it again, luring the unsuspecting and vulnerable into revealing their prejudices and fears. Racism and anti-Semitism have been his targets. Now, with *Brüno*, Sacha's latest mockumentary, those who hate homosexuals have been drawn into his sights. Brüno's career with Austrian television is in ruins after he wrecks a Milan catwalk with his all-in-one Velcro outfit. Disaster forces the gay Austrian, like Arnold Schwarzenegger before him, to make a bid for wealth and fame in America. Emulating Borat, Brüno travels across the US dismaying, disgusting, disgruntling, and discomforting, almost everyone he meets. Things got so bad that the gossipblog, *Defamer* (*Gawker's Column from Hollywood*), suggested that the film be called: *Brüno: Delicious Journeys Through America for the Purpose of Making Heterosexual Males Visibly Uncomfortable in the Presence of a Gay Foreigner in a Mesh T-Shirt*. Because this subtitle is reminiscent of Sacha's, *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*, many people have been lured into thinking that *Defamer's* spoof title is the real thing. It's not; the film is like Brüno, simply called, *Brüno*.

Now, Brüno is what people of a delicate sensibility like to call "flamboyant". For many years "flamboyant" was a euphemism for pansy, poof, turd-burglar, queer, and a host of other names resorted to by the more vulgar among us, when confronted by the love that dare not speak its name. Until recently, "homosexual" and "homosexuality" did not roll lightly off the tongue. There was often a rather clumsy emphasis placed upon the first two syllables resulting in a sort of hyphenated effect as the embarrassed and appalled spoke of the abominable act or the vile persons as "*homo-sexual*" or "*homo-sexuals*".

"Flamboyant", of course, was an ambiguous term, which permitted one to talk about Quiz Show hosts, other family entertainers, and top variety show compères, particularly

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those with elegant long hands flapping around at the end of rather loose wrists, without causing offence or bringing up that unseemly and seemingly unpronounceable “*homo-*” thing.

This was all long before we learned the handy words “gay” and “straight”; it was also decades before flamboyant became simply “camp”. Of course, we always had Nelly Queens or, for those with a penchant for archaic spelling, “queans”. Brüno is this kind of flamboyant person, in fact he’s a Nelly Queen, or even a Screaming Queen, and as such he’s not only a problem for squeamish straight men and those outraged by the outrageous, he’s also a bit of a problem for the well-adjusted gay man, the modern homosexual, those with Partners, Civil or otherwise, those represented by lobby groups and Anti-Defamation leagues.

These new respectable *homo*-sexuals have come in from the cold, and with their two incomes and no children, have been gratefully admitted into wider society, enhancing decaying city centres with stylish life styles and generally brightening things up all around. Now, like the “straight-acting” Closet Queens before them, the modern *homo*-sexual likes to be thought of as risqué, even humorous, capable of the odd camp flourish in the office, or even a bit of flamboyance in the bar. However, he does not generally speaking like to be thought of as a Queen. He is not even a little bit like Brüno. He is not effeminate, mincing, or girlish; he doesn’t sweep through life with a carefully elegant gait, his neck held straight, and his nose in the air. This is because he is a “Man” who simply likes “Men”, not some fairy (or faerie).

The modern *homo*-sexual is not vulgar either. He is not, like Brüno, given to talking endlessly about matters anal, douches or douching; he does not discuss shaving or bleaching his pubic hair. He might, in fact do all of these things, but he is not given to talking about them at dinner parties or with friends from work.

Consequently, Brüno is a bit of a problem. While the Human Rights Campaign, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, Stonewall and other representatives of the modern *homo*-sexual have welcomed the film, there is

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some concern that not everybody might get the joke. They might think that all gay men really are effeminate Nancy Boys obsessed with anal hygiene, tanning, waxing, and given to indiscriminately propositioning every fella they meet. They might think that we're all like Brüno. Although, Cathy Renna of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance has insisted, gay people are "able to laugh at themselves" there is still the sense that with *Brüno*, Sacha might just have gone that little bit too far.

Of course, we all know that he has. There are many screaming queens, many girlish boys, and many gay men who cannot cross the road without endangering life and limb gawking at the lads, or as we used to say, "the trade". Gyms are full of gay men tanning and obsessing over their body hair and personal hygiene. Sacha's joke cuts both ways, it has to, or it wouldn't work. Stereotypes work because they refer to a certain reality; Brüno encapsulates the homophobe's idea of gay men by referring to everything they most fear about homosexuals, our surreal capacity to upset all their assumptions about their bodies, the stability of their sexual orientation, and the host of other certainties they need in order to get through their day. Despite the best efforts of modern *homo*-sexual campaigners many homosexuals really are disorderly, down and dirty obsessives, with only one thing on their mind; many really are excessively flamboyant, camp, and effeminate in that time-honoured mincing manner, and are still capable of bursting into histrionic song, mascara running, with "*I am what I am*".

As Brüno lays waste to bigotry and bad faith we should also remember that all of us modern *homo*-sexuals are also his target and we should – each of us - learn to take it, like a man, because Sacha's creation can only be good for us. This is particularly the case when Brüno decides that he wants to be normal; he wants to become heterosexual like Tom Cruise, John Travolta and Kevin Spacey. This is when he encounters a pastor who specialises in turning gay men straight. Such people really do exist and Sacha Baron Cohen must be applauded for revealing the awful extent of the malice and bigotry that masquerades as Christian charity.

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This motley crowd of quacks and snake oil salesmen run curative programmes for SSA people: that is people struggling with same-sex attraction. By a mixture of evangelism and psychotherapy these Christian bigots seek to build upon the self-hatred felt by many homosexual people, by encouraging them to overcome their queerness with piety and restraint. They've moved beyond aversion therapy, electric shocks and induced vomiting, and now specialise in 'Reparative Therapy', 'Conversion Therapy', or 'Transformational Ministry'. Whatever the name, the aim is always the same, to bring the sexual feelings of the benighted queers into proper alignment with those apparently ordained by God in the Good Book.

These assorted Evangelicals and Baptists belong to the same camp as those Islamists who stone homosexuals to death, or perhaps more moderately, they share the outlook of the Supreme Leader, the Grand Ayatollah, Benedict XVI, the Vicar of Rome: they are committed to making sure that homosexuals disappear, or at least become more or less invisible; all these clerics, like the British National Party, want us to return to the closet.

Consequently, we should cherish Sacha Baron Cohen's creation. Bruno will certainly make us cringe, and at times wish we were anywhere else, rather than in the cinema watching his appalling carry on, but just think how the bigots are feeling, and rejoice!

Boyz Will Be Boyz

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Stephen Gately was a working class lad who escaped a tough area of North Dublin where he was born and raised. His success explains only too well the reason that millions are entranced by celebrity and fables of escape from lives confined by inadequate income and the necessity of routine labour in jobs, which nobody would actually choose to do. As a member of Boyzone, Stephen escaped working for wages and from the fear of unemployment; he became rich and famous.

His success was guaranteed by his capacity to look directly through the lenses of the television camera at you and at you alone. His eyes were sparkling at you; he was singing to you, and if you were a straight teenage girl or a young gay lad, he fulfilled the fantasy: a grown man whom it would be safe *and* exciting to be with. Shorter, and smaller, than the other rather hulking members of Boyzone, Gately appeared vulnerable, dynamic, and sexy, in equal measure.

Consequently, he was able to draw the mawkish sentiment of Boyzone's histrionic ballads into a litany of determination to overcome all obstacles in order to *believe in love* and to fight, *no matter what*, for the simple power of romantic love. This said, he did not innovate, he added little or nothing to our musical culture which was not done better elsewhere by others. But he was, by all accounts, a nice man, modest and loyal.

In 1999, when a member of Boyzone's security team attempted to sell stories of Stephen's homo-sexuality to a tabloid newspaper, Stephen Gately wisely and boldly came out; yes, he was gay and he had nothing to hide. Boyzone broke up soon after but the teenage girls and boys – the core of Stephen's fan base – stuck by him as he pursued a solo career. His future was secure and he could relax in the knowledge that revelations of his homosexuality would no longer haunt him. In 2003 he met and fell in love with Internet entrepreneur, Andy Cowles; the two married in a

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Civil Partnership ceremony three years later, and until last week, all was apparently well with the couple.

That was until, Stephen Gately's death on 10th October at their apartment in Port d'Andratx, South West Majorca. Gately had died after a night out drinking with his husband and a 25-year-old Bulgarian, Georgi Petrov Dochev. His sudden death caused consternation among his friends, relatives, and fans. Andy Cowles is reported to be inconsolable. Matters were made considerably worse, however, by the insinuations of *Daily Mail* columnist, Jan Moir.

"There was nothing 'natural' about Stephen Gately's death," she intoned. Stephen's death was "more than a little sleazy" and the circumstances of his demise has struck yet "another blow to the happy-ever-after myth of civil partnerships". Warming to her subject she became quite lyrical: "Under the carapace of glittering, hedonistic celebrity, the ooze of a very different and more dangerous lifestyle has seeped out for all to see."

What is really interesting about this rather routine piece of 'queer bashing' by Jan Moir and the *Daily Mail* is the nature and shape of the uproar that it has provoked and the apparent contradictions it has revealed in the attitude of the mass media towards homosexuality. Predictably, Stephen Fry and other gay celebrities were first into the fray, twittering for all they were worth against Moir and the *Mail*; complaints and outrage spread, and the website of the Press Complaints Commission crashed under the weight of public outrage. Marks and Spencer removed their advertisements from the *Mail's* website and Nestlé hurriedly issued a statement abhorring prejudice in all its forms.

However, despite Jan Moir's self-evident homo-phobia and the rather nasty cultural outlook of the *Daily Mail*, she did have a point. The couple had gone out for drinks at around midnight at Aries a popular nightclub in Palma Majorca. At about 12:30 they went to the nearby bar, Euphoria, and from there, on to the Black Cat club. Three and a half hours later the couple, Stephen and Andy, took a taxi home in the company of Georgi who they'd met up with earlier in the night at Euphoria. I haven't the faintest idea

what happened when they all got back to the flat, but cannabis, amyl nitrate, and other sex enhancing potions cannot be ruled out.

In such circumstances the constitution of a perfectly healthy young man like Stephen Gately might well give way. He died of a pulmonary oedema – an accumulation of fluid on the lungs. This death was shocking and an excess of alcohol and other stimulants may well have contributed to it. Despite this, the popular media, the Gately family, and his friends, have all stoutly denied this possibility and used the entirely justified outrage at the tone and nature of Jan Moir’s insinuations in the *Mail* to bury any discussion of the actual risks, which the three young men might have been courting.

In particular, this week’s *News of the World* is at pains to demonstrate that Stephen and Andy were sober; emphasizing how few drinks had been consumed at Aries and Euphoria, while passing silently over the three and a half hours spent drinking in the Black Cat. Dan Wootton, the *News of the World*’s “showbiz editor”, has constantly referred respectfully to Andy Cowles as Stephen’s husband and has adopted an entirely positive tone in all his television appearances and in his print reports. This said, the newspaper decided to publish a photograph of a fight between Stephen and Andy a few months after they’d first met.

This fight is then used to explain why members of the band, Stephen’s parents, and other relatives gave his husband “the cold shoulder” at the funeral. They refused to embrace him. He did not sit vigil with the band members on the night before the funeral Mass. It was “Boyzone, Family, and Fans” which bid the star “Farewell”. The rights of Andy Cowles as the principal mourner at his husband’s funeral were evidently ridden over roughshod by the oh-so-straight Boyz from the Band, by Stephen’s siblings, and by his mother and father. It seems that they’d never liked Andy and didn’t think he was ‘right’ for Stephen.

None of this will come as any surprise to gay men living in long-term relationships, many of whom, when bereavement has struck, have found themselves fighting the massed ranks of their partner’s family, with the family

claiming priority in everything from funeral arrangements to the disposal of the couples home and property. It is quite extraordinary that Andy Cowles should be facing insinuations of responsibility for his partner's death, ostracised at his lover's funeral, and facing the blatant trashing of his relationship with Stephen.

Evidently, Jan Moir's article is not the only homophobic element within this sorry tale. Every week heterosexual relationships end in squalid divorces, suicides, beatings, and child abuse. Heterosexuals drink too much, take drugs, and engage in group sex, voyeurism, and much else. So, there is no reason why the circumstances of Stephen Gately's death should call forth lurid insinuations concerning the failure of Civil Partnerships or of gay relationships in general. Jan Moir is evidently a nasty piece of work, incapable of stating the most obvious thing about equality, which is that homosexuals are equally capable of behaving badly or well, probably in much the same proportions of the rest of the population. I have no statistical evidence for believing this, but then neither does Jan Moir or the *Daily Mail*.

However, the most enraging thing about this death is not Jan Moir's column, but the behaviour of the rest of the media, the Boyzone singers, Stephen's family, and other media luminaries who have treated Andy Cowles in such an intrinsically homophobic manner.

Uganda: Killing Homosexuals

First published as: 'Is it OK to kill homosexuals?' in *OffTheCuff*,
No 67, 2009 at www.donmilligan.net

This question has arisen in response to the introduction of *The Anti-Homosexuality Bill* in Uganda's parliament in Kampala. Male homosexuality is already illegal in Uganda (and has been so since the British authorities defined the boundaries of the 'protectorate' of Uganda). The British, in the days of imperial glory, could be said to have had "a thing" about buggery; all British colonies – whether empire, protectorate, territory, or mandate – had anti-buggery statutes, because it was thought that buggery might demean European colonial authority, it might undermine the British race, disturb the proper order of things between superior and inferior classes of persons, and lead finally to the decay and collapse of the Empire.

Well, as we all know Britain lost her Empire with or without the baleful influence of buggery, which has always been quite popular in Britain and, incidentally, is widely practised throughout the vast realms that once made up Britain's Imperium. However, many in modern Uganda have found that colonial era anti-buggery statutes do not go far enough in discouraging homosexual relationships because lesbians and gays are busily engaged in undermining the "traditional family", upon which Ugandan society and culture apparently rests, by importing neo-colonial ideas of freedom and equality for all, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation.

These ideas, which are foreign to Uganda, must be stamped out in favour of traditional hatred and intolerance. This need has at last been recognised by David Bahati MP, the *Born Again* Christian who has introduced the Anti-Homosexual Bill. The Bill, which is due to receive its Third Reading in January provides a comprehensive list of punishments for homosexuals convicted of "The offence of homosexuality" by the courts. The Bill provides for "imprisonment for life" for any consensual homosexual act

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– touching, stimulating, or penetrating orally or anally, with “his penis or any other sexual contraption”. Or, if “he or she touches another person with the intention of committing the act of homosexuality.”

The Bill also proposes a new offence of “Aggravated homosexuality” where all those men and women who have had gay sex with a disabled person, with someone under 18, or those who have previous convictions for homosexuality, or are living with HIV, will face the death penalty.

For an “attempt to commit homosexuality” you will be liable to seven years imprisonment and on conviction for an attempt at “aggravated homo-sexuality” to life imprisonment. Seven years for “aiding and abetting homosexuality”; seven years for “conspiracy to engage in homosexuality”; seven years for running a brothel or a club; five years for renting rooms to homosexuals; five to seven years imprisonment (and a substantial fine) for the promotion of homosexuality . . . and so it goes on until the *pièce de résistance*: three years imprisonment and a fine for “failure to disclose” any knowledge you may have of the perpetration of a “homosexual offence”; you will have to tell the police (within 24 hours) about any homosexual offences committed by your children, your friends, tenants, acquaintances or neighbours.

Oh, I almost forgot: if you are a Ugandan citizen, or a permanent resident, you are liable to all these penalties even if you commit “the offence of homo-sexuality” while travelling or living abroad.

Not even the appalling British colonial rulers thought up anything as terrible as this Bill, which will expose Ugandans to a veritable epidemic of accusations, malicious denunciations, blackmail, and ferocious violence; it will ratify vigilante beatings and the murder of homosexuals by family members and neighbour-hood gangs, and will even expose those simply suspected of being homosexual to the same barbaric treatment.

Uganda is a land in which three quarters of the population live on less than \$2 a day. It is a country with a severe food crisis. It is an impoverished country with a tiny per capita income. It is a country blighted by a history of dictatorship,

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mysticism, and witchcraft, by Roman Catholicism and *Born Again* Christianity. It is a country that has been periodically torn asunder over the last 25 years by those who claim to be in direct communication with the Holy Spirit and who are engaged in an armed struggle to establish the reign of the Ten Commandments by mass killings and by the wholesale abduction of children and young people.

In this context it is not at all surprising that opportunist politicians and religious fundamentalists should advocate wiping out homosexuals and homo-sexuality by the promotion of exemplary state violence, and the ratification of *do-it-yourself* queer murdering and queer bashing by the wider populace. After all, they are instructed by leading churchmen to save themselves from the Wrath of God and eternal death by resolutely driving out the sin and the sinners from their midst. The Anglican Bishop Joseph Abura of Karamoja, who is certain that homosexuality is against the Word of God, recently asked his flock: “Why accept compromise and destroy yourself and the entire human race? Yes, God punishes sin. He punishes all sin. The wages of sin is death, eternal death. The world then has to be punished.”

Apparently, Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury ensconced in Lambeth Palace, has been “working quietly behind the scenes” in an attempt to moderate the views of the Anglican clergy in Uganda and to win both Christian leaders and politicians more generally in the country to take a more measured view. He has been doing this for some time by shilly shallying upon the world stage about the admission of women priests to the episcopate and opposing the appointment of gay priests to Bishoprics in Britain and the United States. Everybody knows that Williams thinks that homosexuality is a sin and is, consequently, not acceptable to those committed to living in full communion with the Anglican Church.

However, Rowan Williams is a liberal-minded, cultured and erudite man. Like Pope Benedict, Tariq Ramadan, and the Chief Rabbi, Rowan Williams does not equate the sinner with the sin. This enables the Archbishop of Canterbury to respect and value the individual homosexual person, while

simultaneously denouncing their sin, and excluding those predisposed to this sin from leadership in his church. Taking the lead from these august and liberal religious leaders Ugandan MP, David Bahati, explains his Bill by saying “We are not after the sinners. We love them. We are after the sin.”

The specious distinction made by leading Christian theologians, by radical modernising Muslims, and by Orthodox Jewish religious leaders, between the sin and the sinner is the rubric by which the apparently cultured and apparently liberal have chosen to camouflage their hatred of homosexuality and homo-sexuals. They hope that it will enable them to trumpet their prior commitment to love and inclusiveness, while simultaneously driving homosexuals out of the Church, out of society, and finally, out of existence altogether.

Christians in Uganda, both church leaders and politicians, are merely following the logic of St Paul’s *Epistles to the Romans*, the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, and the literalist prejudices of the *Born Again*, the Muslims, and the Orthodox Jews. What is more they are doing it within a country and within a society in the midst of a fistful of profound existential crises; it is in these circumstances that religious leaders reveal the bankruptcy of their ideas and the bankruptcy of the institutions, which they purport to represent. If they have nothing more to offer the starving masses in Uganda but the prospect of murdering their homosexual relatives and neighbours why should we listen to them about anything else?

Peter and the old queen

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Peter Tatchell has distinguished himself in a number of ways, most of them good. Most notably he has been tireless in his promotion of equality for homosexuals, transsexuals and transvestites. He has sustained his activity without major institutional support and without wages; he has scrimped and saved and has only occasionally been afforded a holiday or some other ‘luxury’ with the assistance of a sympathetic editor or programme maker; friends and supporters also provide assistance, now formalised through the Peter Tatchell Human Rights Fund, whose trustees pay some of Tatchell’s fares and other expenses.

Throughout his long career as a gay rights activist in the early seventies to his broader activities in green politics and human rights he has displayed a fearless courage in the face of mobs of detractors (many of them gay) and of numerous physical attacks in the course of his audacious interventions and demonstrations.

In many situations Tatchell has manifested the chutzpah inseparable from the life of many an old queen. The flaunting of his sexuality, his determination to go exactly where he is not wanted, to provoke those – gay or straight – whose commitment to convention often leads them into brutal compromise or shameful betrayal, are all of a piece with those old queens who, in the past, refused to conform to either straight society or to the rather careful etiquette of more careful homosexuals. Tatchell has all the measured anger and the taut *hauteur* of an old queen, and he is all the better for it. Indeed, his kind of life would have been impossible without these sterling and very traditional gay qualities.

So, there is considerable irony in Tatchell’s renewed attacks on Quentin Crisp for being a reactionary old queen. Tatchell’s latest outburst on the subject was in *Pink News* last week. It was prompted by the recent screening of *An Englishman in New York*; this film, starring John Hurt, is

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about Quentin Crisp's declining years in New York. Peter thinks the film is well made, that John Hurt's performance is "stunning", but that overall the film fails because it sanitises Crisp, who in real life was nothing more than a reactionary self-oppressed old queen, trading on his past as an "astonishingly brave and defiant out gay man in the 1930s and 40s".

Tatchell cannot forgive the "infuriating" contradictions in the figure cut by Quentin Crisp. Crisp was not, Tatchell insists, a gay icon, he was hostile to gay liberation; in fact, he "was a misogynist, as well as a homophobe". Above all, Crisp was a self-obsessed, egotistical, narcissist, who thought very highly of himself.

It is entirely true that Quentin Crisp was a self-publicist who had a high opinion of himself and was certainly not a team player. In this respect he was not very different from Peter Tatchell, who through the years has created a singular role for himself as a heroic gay trailblazer, dragon slayer, and public scold. Tatchell has most assuredly been associated with many a collective effort and political initiative, but he is most certainly not a team player. He has, like Quentin Crisp, become a one-man phenomenon, and like Quentin, Peter has contributed enormously to the emancipation of homosexuals.

However, their contributions have been radically different. Tatchell's contribution to the struggle has been in the footsteps of Allan Horsfall and Anthony Grey in the UK or Harry Hay and Phyllis Lyon in the US; he is an organiser, a political activist, and an agitator, a person who helps formulate social and political demands which in turn inform public discussions and plays a role in the formation of public policy. Tatchell clearly believes that only people of this ilk, people of his own sort are deserving of the status of "gay icon" and "role model". Consequently, Tatchell cannot abide the memory of Crisp's malignant self-hatred, nor can he recognise the importance of Crisp's contribution to our emancipation.

Tatchell's outlook is founded upon a strikingly narrow conception of social, political, and cultural change; it is an outlook that sees all change as flowing from the self-

conscious interventions of self-conscious and self-directed activists like his own good self. Consequently, he believes that “along with Larry Grayson and John Inman” Crisp “confirmed rather than challenged prejudices”. He might just as well have added Oscar Wilde, Jean Genet, Radcliffe Hall, E. M. Forster, Danny La Rue, Alan Turing, Kenneth Williams, and a host of our disreputable, self-oppressive, or camp forebears.

What Tatchell seems to be missing is that Larry Grayson, John Inman, and Kenneth Williams, confirmed in an engaging and humorous manner the common stereotypes of effeminate gay men; however, in their celebration of camp and bitchy personas they most certainly challenged prejudices. In the 1960s and 70s they brought queerness out of the closet by confronting mass audiences with homosexual persons who could be discussed, lampooned and related to. In doing so they broke up the hard ground, making it ready to receive the much more fertile discourse of homosexual emancipation promoted by Tatchell and pioneered by his stable of gay and lesbian “icons” and “role models”.

The progress of homosexual liberation has been replete with contradictory figures like Quentin Crisp. Oscar Wilde for example was a brilliant dramatist, a sort of utopian socialist, and a scourge of bourgeois hypocrisy that regularly bought working class rent boys for his own pleasure and that of his aristocratic friends. Genet was a thief who admired fine young blonde Nazis, and expressed through his own degradation the sensuous beauty lying at the heart of homosexuality. Like many gay authored literary works, gay movies until the last decade of the twentieth century, were replete with these sorts of contradiction: mawkishness and self-oppression, all mixed with a surprisingly robust and affirmative sense of what it means to be an outsider or even an outlaw. *Victim* (1961), *The Killing of Sister George* (1968), *The Boys in the Band* (1970), *Sunday Bloody Sunday* (1971), and *La Cage aux Folles* (1978), to name a few; all these films in their own distinctive ways reflect the real contradictions which have framed the lives of many homosexuals.

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I can remember an old queen (I'll call him Mervin) who owned a little teashop in a small town in the North of England. Once a month during the early seventies, Mervin would host a private gathering for local homosexuals in his café, entrance price, one shilling (10p). When I remonstrated with Mervin that some people couldn't afford that price, he replied "Well, you can't really call yourself gay, if you can't afford a shilling"! This expressed Mervin's worldview.

Another elderly gay man who I met in the early seventies lived in lonely poverty. He was intrigued to meet young Gay Libbers and told me confidentially that he "used to be gay when he was young". This working class gay man regaled me with stories of riding in open-topped sports cars and of luxury lunches in the 1930s with the rich men who paid him to keep them company. He had latched on to this kind of commerce early in his youth at a Christian Brothers orphanage in Ireland, where he had been paid in apples and other treats in return for sex with the brothers. Despite this, and never having led a heterosexual life, he could only think of his homosexuality in the context of prostitution.

He was not a role model any more than Peter Tatchell or Quentin Crisp. The battle for gay liberation is composed of a myriad of experiences and struggles, all taking place in the midst of startling social and economic changes, that from the late fifties onwards, have provided us all with a fair wind. So, let us honour Quentin Crisp and Peter Tatchell in equal measure, not as 'role models' or 'icons', but as people who simply helped to improve things for homosexuals.

David Laws and 'living a lie'

First published in OffTheCuff, No 88, 2010, at www.donmilligan.net

David Laws, the LibDem MP for Yeovil, and the former LibCon Chief Secretary to the Treasury, has been caught claiming rent and expenses for staying in James Lundie's Kennington flat and then at James' new house in a square nearby. This has become a talking point because it emerged last week that David has been having sex with James (who apparently doubled as his landlord), for eight or nine years. The reason I have put it so bluntly is because although David was 'having sex' with James, his live-in landlord, they were not in any sense partners or espoused. They did not share bank accounts, friends, or social lives. James just had sex with David, and David reciprocated by paying rent and expenses to James.

These distinctions are crucial to David Laws' insistence that he was not cheating Parliament or the taxpayer by claiming expenses for his partner's home, because James Lundie was not David Laws' partner until last week when in anticipation of revelations in the *Daily Telegraph* David decided to announce publicly that he had some sort of relationship with James for years:

“James and I are intensely private people. We made the decision to keep our relationship private and believed that was our right. Clearly that cannot now remain the case.

“My motivation throughout has not been to maximise profit but to simply protect our privacy and my wish not to reveal my sexuality.”

This sort of statement has, in fact, merely compounded the problem because it appears to confirm that whether spouse, partner, lover, or just plain old landlord and tenant, James was having a 'relationship' with David all along. It was a relationship that they, because they are “intensely private people” decided to keep secret both from the electors and from the Parliamentary Fees Office, thus enabling James to

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receive £40,000 from public funds as his boyfriend's landlord.

Now, you may well ask why such an intensely private person as David Laws should decide to engage in political activity for sixteen years or so, and why he decided to run for office and become a Member of Parliament and subsequently, a cabinet minister? This doesn't seem to me to be the career of an "intensely private person". Nor, it must be said, does his previous career as a Vice President at JP Morgan, and as Head of dollar and sterling treasuries at Barclay de Zoete Wedd strike me as the sort of activities that an "intensely private" person would engage in. Similarly, James Lundie's jobs as adviser to LibDem leaders, Paddy Ashdown and Charles Kennedy, and his current role at Edelman, an independent "global" public relations firm, do not seem to be jobs for an "intensely private" person.

There are clearly two issues here: First there is the reason why two independently wealthy individuals should be claiming expenses from Parliament and the taxpayer for simply living together. Second there is the way they both used the closet as a cover for what were manifestly dishonest claims. It is difficult to see why David could not pay his share of the costs of living with James without involving the public purse, and it is equally mysterious why two such powerful, well-to-do and accomplished professional men should lie about their sexuality over the last ten years.

I use the phrase "lie about their sexuality" because as everybody knows if you keep your homosexuality secret you are sailing along in the hope that people will simply assume that you are straight, normal, heterosexual. Because, as is well known, heterosexuality is the *default* orientation; unless explicitly stated or indicated otherwise, we are all straight. I know something about this because I didn't Come Out until I was 26 – I spent the entire nineteen sixties in a state of denial about my sexuality – but then I did not have a sexual relationship or a sexual experience of any kind with a man. I was deeply, deeply, closeted. Then an accumulation of confusion and distress, drove me first to seek psychiatric help, and finally into the arms of the Gay Liberation Front.

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Consequently, I am not without understanding or empathy for homosexuals dismayed by the prospect of having to live openly as lesbians and gay men. It was a daunting and frightening prospect in the sixties and seventies, and I imagine it can still be a daunting and frightening experience for youngsters in school, college, or university, still in the process of finding their feet in the world, or for those of any age entangled in communities where religious or communal prejudices remain strong. Indeed, the dating agency, ManCentral.com recently found in a survey of 3,200 gay men that 61% were uncomfortable with displaying affection in public, whereas just 6% of heterosexuals were uncomfortable with kissing or holding hands.

Although we have come a very long way in the last twenty years, and have even achieved practical and legal equality since 2000, things can still be pretty hairy for homosexuals who find themselves stranded in out of the way places, in rough neighbourhoods or tough occupations, or embroiled in heterosexual relationships they find it difficult or impossible to extricate themselves from. But none of this applies to the Metropolitan elite; upper middle class men in London and elsewhere are as free as birds. They may from time to time encounter prejudice, and like us all they have to ensure that they do not find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time, but apart from these caveats they are as free to enjoy their lives as similarly situated heterosexuals.

This is exactly the position of David Laws and James Lundie. Yet somehow and for some reason, perhaps shielding elderly relatives from the awful truth, they felt compelled to hide their sexuality and hoped that the world would assume that they were heterosexual. They went to great lengths to sustain this lie, up to and including, cheating the authorities out of money that they certainly didn't need – indeed it is argued by them and their friends that David and James' motive was not in any sense, financial. They simply had a paranoid fear of acknowledging that they were homosexual presumably because they both felt that it is slightly more difficult to be taken seriously in many

professional milieus if colleagues know that one is a cocksucker. However, given that they must both have known that Peter Mandelson was a cocksucker and that he, along with many others in Parliament and in business, have managed to overcome these obstacles with ease, it is difficult to grasp why Laws and Lundie should be so exercised by the need to remain in the closet.

Despite voting for homosexual law reform and supporting equal rights on paper, both of these shysters have been revealed as people who regard the oppression of homosexuals, and their collusion with this oppression, as intensely private matters. Astonishingly, for people who are political activists and prominent political players, they evidently, have not felt any need to stand shoulder to shoulder with homosexuals in much less favourable positions than themselves. Until they were Outed by the *Daily Telegraph*, they were perfectly happy to clamber up the greasy political pole as straight men in a straight world, acknowledging no fellowship or solidarity with gay people. I have no doubt at all that their defenders will respond by saying that everybody in the Westminster 'Village' knew that Laws was a 'shirtlifter' and friends will bang on about David and James' commitment to good conduct, privacy, and integrity.

However, it remains true that they have been caught out cheating and lying in order to pose as heterosexuals and in order to sustain their *self-oppressed* conception of propriety while the great mass of homosexuals have battled and fought, day in and day out, for years on end in order to maintain their dignity and to live freely and openly.

Now, that is what I call integrity.

Capitalism, High Camp and the straightening out of homosexuals

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There is a striking correlation between advanced or wealthy capitalist countries and the capacity of homosexuals to live free of state repression and legal sanctions. There continues to be an uneven situation across the US, but in most states of the Union the trend is towards equality and the abolition of laws framed for the punishment of same-sexuality. Throughout the world, where the rule of law and bourgeois democracy prevails, lesbians and gay men find themselves benefitting from legal changes and from a fairly rapid cultural drift towards acceptance. Of course, this is not universal, the situation in Poznan or Scunthorpe is radically different from that in downtown Manchester or Seattle, but by and large there is a strong correlation between acceptance of homosexuality and modern capitalism.²¹

Elsewhere, brutal prejudice and state-sanctioned violence is widespread but not global. In China, for example, homosexuality was decriminalized in 1997 and removed from the official schedule of mental disorders in 2001. Recently, attempts to straighten out gay men with electric shock therapy in Chongqing have been declared illegal by a court in Beijing. Similar changes have taken place in Russia, but Putin's regime continues to support repression and refuses to countenance the legal protection of homosexuals – there are no gay rights in Moscow, or in Shanghai for that matter. In Havana homosexuals continue to strive against prejudice, but as Cuba moves towards opening itself up to capitalist development the Castro dictatorship has gradually

²¹ Inescapably most references in this article are to male homosexuality because camp sensibility is largely, though not exclusively, expressed by gay men. Regarding the law, lesbianism is not proscribed or even mentioned in most polities. However, the fact remains that lesbians have usually suffered discrimination and oppression regardless of whether or not they are the subject of statute laws. See for example Louis Crompton, 'The Myth of Lesbian Impunity: Capital Laws from 1270 to 1791' in *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 6, Fall/Winter, 1980/81.

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abandoned its policy of repression; corralling homosexuals in revolutionary prison camps is now only an awful memory.²² The situation is improving in Hanoi too, but things are considerably worse in Cairo, Abuja, and Kampala, where imprisonment, beatings, vigilante killings and officially approved ostracism are the order of the day.

There appears to be a scale in which the more developed and wealthier a capitalist state - the more consistent and well found it's legal system is – the freer life will be for lesbians and gay men.

However *correlation* does not amount to a *cause*, which in this case remains opaque. Why is it that some capitalist states begin to free homosexuals from legal restrictions and cultural impediments, while others insist upon a policy of denial or even implement active repression?

Perhaps the answer lies simply in the deepening of democracy? Perhaps, but I think that this merely begs the question. Alternatively, some people attribute these developments to the audacious action of gay liberationists in the lesbian and gay movement that arose after New York's Stonewall riot in 1969, others might take it back to the patient work of the Moral Welfare Council of the Church of England in the fifties, or to the quiet lobbying of the Homosexual Law Reform Society and the Campaign for Homosexual Equality.²³

There can be no doubt, of course, that these efforts in Britain and North America opened up the discussion and helped to dissolve taboos – they certainly contributed noisily

²² These were the Military Units to Aid Production in which more than thirty thousand Cubans – gay men, Jehovah's Witnesses and other suspicious elements were imprisoned by the regime during the 1960s. Homosexuality was decriminalized by the dictatorship in 1979 and there has been an improvement in the situation, albeit a glacially slow one.

²³ In 1953 the Church of England Moral Welfare Council called on the Government to set up an inquiry into homosexuality – the Wolfenden Committee (Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution) was set up in 1954 and in 1957 recommended decriminalization for homosexual acts between consenting adults. The Homosexual Law Reform Society was founded in 1958 to lobby for the implementation of the Wolfenden recommendations. This was finally achieved nine years later in 1967. The Committee for Homosexual Equality was founded by a group of homosexuals in 1964 and was renamed the 'Campaign' for Homosexual Equality in 1968.

by giving voice to ‘the love that dare not speak its name’.²⁴ But, none of these tiny groups could have brought about such momentous changes in public attitudes and legal arrangements unaided. We need to ask what was it that made it possible for them to have such an extraordinary impact . . . we probably need to look at the question with a longer lens.

As far as anyone knows there have always been same-sex relationships, sometimes incorporated in dominant cultural practices, sometimes denied and hidden. Certainly in circumstances outside of ordinary family life homosexuality appears to have always been present in royal courts, amongst aristocracies, and other privileged elites, in monastic institutions, in armies, navies, and the merchant marine. However, for as long as material production was inextricably tied to the small holding, to the craft workshop or forge, to the domestic sphere, and the family remained at the centre of more or less all agricultural and artisanal activity, the opportunity for sexual relationships beyond what we would now recognize as heterosexual arrangements were extraordinarily limited.

It was not until the emergence of commercial society in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century that we can detect the appearance in London and other big places of a common life in which commodity production began to move beyond the confines of the family. It is there that we can see the first signs of what we now call homosexuality . . . forms of relationships in which ordinary people who habitually engage in same-sexuality from across all classes and professions begin to create their own secret institutions, surreptitious networks, modes of speech and ways of being.

The authorities in England, informed by venerable religious prejudices resorted to imprisonment, transportation, and the gallows, but seemingly nothing could suppress the emergence of molly houses and other places of illicit resort,²⁵ which arose specifically to serve those who

²⁴ This is a line from the poem *Two Loves* published in 1894 by Alfred Lord Douglas, Oscar Wilde’s lover. Wilde was asked by the prosecution to explain its meaning during the trial *Regina v Wilde* in 1895.

²⁵ See Rictor Norton, *Mother Clap’s molly house: the gay subculture in England, 1700-1830*, London: Gay Men’s Press, 1992

enjoyed same-sexuality. It appears that beyond the confines of the family and the village sex would, as it always had, take off in all directions. Now, as commercial society gradually began to organize commodity production in larger and larger workshops, in larger towns and cities, a life beyond the nexus of hearth, home, and kinship, became more widely available – such a life was no longer restricted to courtly elites, to soldiers or seafarers.

This was a lengthy social development during the course of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century in which relations between relatively independent young men and women earning wages in burgeoning ports and manufacturing towns, and subsequently in industrial cities, outgrew parish boundaries, and popular life slipped the leash held by churchmen and local landowners. The emergence of same-sexuality was an integral part of this process and was eventually given its name, *Homosexualität*, by Károly Mária Kertbeny.²⁶

In England in 1861 the Offences Against the Person Act abolished the death penalty for sodomy, which had in any event become a dead letter since the execution of James Pratt and John Smith at London's Newgate in 1835.²⁷ It would seem that by the middle of the nineteenth century juries were reluctant to convict for buggery if those found guilty might be hanged.

For the authorities, male homosexuality remained a problem of order, one akin to the regulation of prostitution.²⁸ The extension of the bourgeois family²⁹

²⁶ Károly Mária Kertbeny was a citizen of the Austro-Hungarian Empire who is also known as Karl-Maria Benkert. He first used the terms homosexuality and heterosexuality in his pamphlet of 1869 which opposed the Prussian buggery statutes: *143 des Preussischen Strafgesetzbuchs und seine Aufrechterhaltung als 152 des Entwurfs eines Strafgesetzbuchs für den Norddeutschen Bund* ("Paragraph 143 of the Prussian Penal Code and Its Maintenance as Paragraph 152 of the Draft of a Penal Code for the North German Confederation").

²⁷ See 'The Trial of James Pratt and John Smith', 1835, *Homosexuality in Nineteenth Century England* a source book compiled by Rictor Norton at <http://rictornorton.co.uk/eighteen/1835prat.htm>

²⁸ Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 known as the Labouchere Amendment created the portmanteau crimes of "gross indecency" and "soliciting for an immoral purpose", terms much vaguer than the old buggery statutes and consequently much more effective at securing convictions.

to the working class became the order of the day from the 1850s or thereabouts, and enormous social energy was expended in attempting to train young workers in the virtues of house and home. No longer the centre of material production the family became a refuge from the world, and the principal site of moral education and sexual discipline. Health, 'legitimate' births, and good order required men to be able to earn the 'family wage', and sexuality to be regulated and confined as far as possible within marriage.

Lying well outside straight marriage and expressed much more easily within the relative anonymity of large towns and cities homosexuality became a phenomenon that needed to be controlled by police activity and prisons, and in the fullness of time, analyzed and treated by medical and psychiatric science.

These were measures congruent with the need to patrol and integrate the proletariat into the capitalist mode of life in Britain during the last third of the nineteenth century and the opening decades of the twentieth. Respectability - church attendance, trade unionism, social, educational and sporting clubs, marriage, and the franchise – all helped to stabilize class relations within vast industrial centres.³⁰

These arrangements stood the capitalist class in good stead until the early 1950s when changes in technology and the organization of the labour process began gradually to break up the old homogeneities which had held the lower middle class, and the great mass of the working class together for the previous eight or nine decades. As industrial and commercial organization was transformed and service activities of all kinds began to occupy a dominant place within the economy, the old opposition to social differentiation

²⁹ See Margaret R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780*, Oakland CA: University of California Press, 1996.

³⁰ See George Eliot's novel *Felix Holt the Radical* (1866) for a revealing insight into the meliorism with which the more liberal sections of the bourgeoisie confronted their fear of the industrial proletariat.

amongst working class and lower middle class people began to break down. The premium upon the common experiences of a common life and common sharing began to lose its value and its appeal. The field of individual choices and individual aspirations, not simply in the sphere of consumption, but in the manner in which one chose to live, came to the fore.

This gradual process of individuation coincided with deindustrialization and the advent within the older capitalist economies of a labour process typically dominated by relatively small units of production, regardless of the size of the enterprise, in which workers were required to embrace fully the objectives of the management – to develop a more articulate engagement with the nature of the job in hand and the interests of their employers. Skilled in general (rather than in detail) these workers have over the last forty years come to represent the mass of the working class in the West. Control is exercised within small teams in which acceptance of difference, rather than the homogeneity of yesteryear, is prized by both workers and employers alike.

It is in this social landscape that the old model of controlling homosexuality by arrest, by public humiliation in the press, and by imprisonment, broke down. Starting during the early fifties, it slowly dawned upon the authorities that homosexuality presented no threat at all to good order within working class communities. Subsequently, it became clear that the acceptance of difference and the capacity of diverse kinds of people to get along with each other is a positive boon to the process of capital accumulation. Whereas in the past difference within the working class was understood to be disruptive and dysfunctional, it is now grasped by all and sundry, that it is a positive virtue in which different experiences, talents and capacities can be mobilized to the best effect. Consequently, we're all expected to get along with each other regardless of our race, our creed, our range

of physical and mental abilities, our gender, or our sexual orientation.

All this was recently brought into sharp relief by traditionalist opposition to gay marriage. Apart from the usual Biblical objections, the opponents of allowing homosexuals to tie the conjugal knot could only come up with the argument that allowing gay marriage would somehow cheapen or degrade heterosexual unions. The bizarre logic of this passed most people by, and the legalization of same-sex marriage went through on the nod.

The reason for this was that straight marriage has over the last fifty or sixty years been stripped down to its bare essentials. It is now an entirely voluntary union between two individuals who decide to register their love and commitment to each other in a partnership, which is dissolvable at will by either party. In this sense marriage is not seen as having any singular or critical role in community or familial cohesion. It has been denuded of most of its past associations. No longer a union between two families – marriage is principally a matter of importance to the individuals concerned who typically seek no permission or blessing from their respective parents – although everybody is happier if the ‘in-laws’ can get along, and help defray the cost of the wedding and honeymoon.

In this sense, straight marriage has been made entirely consonant with homosexual marriage – a public commitment entered into by two individuals to look after each other through thick and thin regardless of the misfortunes which life throws at them. The permission of religious authorities, parents or other relatives is neither sought nor required. The rearing and care of children takes place outside wedlock, often in single parent households, or within marriages, regardless of the gender of parents or guardians, and is not infrequently shared *between* different married couples whether gay or straight.

We have arrived at a ‘new normal’ in which it is now possible to accommodate homosexuals without

difficulty. In a sense the straight world has become gay. Or, looked at in another way, the difference between straight and gay realities is gradually being eroded by the manner in which all normal relationships emanate from two individuals' desire for love and pleasure, and from the love of pleasure.

Homosexuality, which has no biological promise or potential to fulfill, fits perfectly into this 'new normal'. Indeed, in the past the principal objection to same-sexuality was that it could produce no children and was therefore purposeless, barren, and unnatural. Now, in the context of widely available and effective contraception in which straight couples exercise control over their fertility it can be seen that opposite-sexuality for pleasure without the potential or 'risk' of pregnancy runs parallel to gay realities.

The old accusation that homosexuality is unnatural is, of course, entirely correct in the sense that it has no biological function and is engaged in for entirely synthetic, 'manmade', or human purposes. It is artificial. This is surely why the love of artifice has long been associated with homosexuals. Indeed, who would "gild refined gold . . . paint the lily" or "throw a perfume on the violet"?

The answer to Lord Salisbury's question in Shakespeare's play is: We would!³¹

From Dolly Parton to the lights in children's shoes, from purple hair and green carnations, to computer games, the magnificent Shard,³² and the absurd Gherkin,³³ to the landing of Philae on Comet 67P, we all rejoice in artifice and the celebration of the human capacity to improve upon nature by finding evermore extraordinary ways to realize our human purposes and our desires.

³¹ Spoken by Lord Salisbury in Act IV, Scene II of *The Life and Death of King John* by William Shakespeare, written some time between 1587 and 1598.

³² The Shard, the 87-storey glass tower at 32 London Bridge Street, London SE1, opened in 2013.

³³ 30 St Mary Axe, the 41-storey office building in the City of London known popularly as the Gherkin.

The camp sensibility, that characterizes much of modern capitalism, is urban, even it's engagement with the 'natural world' is highly mediated through urbanity and the technologies essential to life in cities. It is a sensibility which dissolves the boundaries between the serious and the frivolous so that frivolity can, like One Direction or David Beckham, be taken extremely seriously, while the spectacle of Islamist terror assumes the status of ludicrous grotesqueries, the absurd posturing of Islamic State fighters making their murders and massacres, idiotic, beyond caricature.

In her 1964 'Notes On "Camp"' Susan Sontag wrote that while "not all homosexuals have Camp taste" they "by and large, constitute the vanguard – and the most articulate audience – of Camp [. . .] Homosexuals have pinned [the hope of] their integration into society on promoting the aesthetic sense. Camp is a solvent of morality. It neutralizes moral indignation, [and] sponsors playfulness."³⁴ While these observations were sound fifty years ago, they are now somewhat outmoded. This is because what Sontag attempted grasp as an ineffable sensibility sponsored largely by homosexuals, has now not merely "hardened into an idea",³⁵ it is an idea embraced by the straight majority, camp has become a mainstay of mainstream bourgeois culture.

It is pointless for the homosexual radicals of the seventies or eighties to bemoan the loss of the edginess of the lesbian and gay 'community' when the truth is that we've been swallowed whole – straight society has caught up with us – taken us to its bosom – and finally absorbed us into it's 'new normal'. What was once the creation of an outcaste demimonde, a life in the margins, has moved centre stage because it expresses a sensibility that most authentically captures the times through which we are living.

³⁴ Susan Sontag, notes 51 & 52, in 'Notes on "Camp"', , 1964, available at <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Sontag-NotesOnCamp-1964.html>

³⁵ Susan Sontag, Preamble to 'Notes on "Camp"'.

“Being-as-Playing-a-Role”,³⁶ applies as much to our own trips to Ikea as it does to seeing ourselves drinking coffee or eating pizzas in franchise restaurants and coffee shops. Like Chicago gangsters who famously modeled their speech and gestures on the movie representations of themselves, we inescapably conduct ourselves like the actors in advertisements for the clothes we’re wearing and the bars we’re patronizing.

Of course there are counter narratives beloved of those who believe in ‘appropriate technology’ and insist upon the ‘limits of growth’, but these dismal spirits are merely recuperated by being awarded parts within the camp parade of roles and ‘lifestyles’ and ways of being appropriated by modern capitalism – the love of artifice, innovation, improvement, and growth. Indeed it is plain to see that the only viable solutions to our ecological problems lie in mobilizing all our ingenuity, our technologies, and our love of artifice, to overcome the degradation of the environment.

I have no idea of whether capitalism is ‘late’, on the rocks, or simply going through a particularly rough patch, but I do know that if socialists are to pose any effective alternative to a system in which billions fall under the wheels of the juggernaut it will not be by rejecting innovation and artifice, but on the contrary, it will be by finding a way of building upon the degree to which capitalism has emancipated humanity from raw unvarnished nature, in order to emancipate us all from the private ownership of capital and the profit motive.

³⁶ Susan Sontag, note 10, in ‘Notes on “Camp”’.

The Straightening out of Homosexuals: Natural Law, and Marriage Equality

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Some twenty-two years ago I argued that the constant struggle by many oppressed people to redefine normality was poison bait.

This perpetuation and intensification of the discourse of sexuality is often conflated with the continuing need to fight against oppression. It is thought that continued involvement in the discourse of sexuality is necessary if an opposition is to be mounted and sustained to the oppression of women, of lesbians, or of gay men. It is often thought that because the social status of the oppressed derives from their relative positions within the discourse of sexuality it is imperative to change its meaning. Hence the ensuing struggle to redefine normality, to refurbish the idea of family, to reorganize the meaning of ‘woman’. However the prospect of redefining reality offered to us by the theory of social construction turns out to be poison bait. The realization of the ideal eludes us, but we continue to slide towards the creation of an ideal type of sexuality or range of types of sexuality. We are drawn towards considerations of relationship and kinds of relationships that entangle us in the web of the discourse of sexuality.³⁷

Indeed, this is exactly what has happened; normality has been redefined to include homosexuality, and even to involve the induction of homosexuals, legitimately and publicly, into the toils and joys of marriage and childrearing.

This is indeed not what those of us who were gay radicals in the late sixties and seventies fought for, or even conceived of happening. The scale and extent of the process of our

³⁷ Don Milligan, *Sex-Life: A Critical Commentary on the History of Sexuality*, London: Pluto Press, 1993, p 110-11.

normalization has been truly astonishing to anybody of my generation (I was born in 1945). These developments have dismayed some gay and lesbian people who hanker after the days when we were edgy, alternative, and where-it-was at. It was not to be. Mainstream opinion swung our way and absorbed and recuperated us in the manner that advanced capitalism has a habit of doing. In a recent article I refer to it as 'high camp capitalism'.³⁸

These changes have profoundly altered the circumstances of homosexuals in this country, removing by 2003, all discriminatory criminal sanctions from the statute books. Subsequently, the struggle was continued by mainstream lobby groups, Stonewall and others, to complete the process of reassuring the capitalist class that homosexuality is in no sense deleterious to the process of capital accumulation. This is rather like the astonishing social processes that have resulted in many former revolutionary communists transforming themselves into conservative-libertarians who write articles for the *Spectator*, the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times*.

So, yes, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the full-blooded onset of globalization, the floor has tilted under many of us, as previous assumptions and certainties have been ground to dust by the actual trajectory of social development. This has meant that lots of homosexual campaigners and activists have, like some of those who were Revolutionary Communists prior to 1996 or thereabouts, become fully paid up members of the chattering classes.³⁹

This development has led in recent years to the strenuous insistence in some quarters that the state, the political class, and something called the 'liberal elite', is redefining everything and telling us all what to think. It's a kind of

³⁸ See Don Milligan, 'Capitalism, High Camp . . . and the straightening out of homosexuals', *The Project*, January 2015, <http://www.socialistproject.org/womens-liberation/capitalism-high-camp-and-the-straightening-out-of-homosexuals/>

³⁹ See Don Milligan, 'Radical Amnesia and the Revolutionary Communist Party', January 8, 2008, http://www.donmilligan.net/DM_Articles_files/RadicalAmnesiaAndTheRevolutionaryCommunistPartyA.pdf

“political correctness gone mad” trope, in which ordinary right-thinking people are being put upon for continuing to think things that in days of yore were uncontested and uncontroversial. The state is apparently telling us all what to think. Consequently, the gays “who have won a lot more acceptance of their sexuality” should stop asking for more, and what’s more they should stop using the state to impose themselves, their sexuality, and their ideas on the rest of us.

Perhaps most surprising is the manner in which such irritation has led some conservative-libertarians to campaign in defence of heterosexual marriage by calling upon the British state in 2012 and 2013 to continue the exclusion of homosexuals from the institution. This issue re-emerged recently in the context of the marriage equality referendum in the Irish Republic, with renewed conservative-libertarian insistence that marriage must and could only ever be between a man and a woman, regardless of what the state or the law has to say about it.

Consequently, “marriage is a heterosexual institution” and that “most people get married to start a family.” I’ve no idea really whether most people get married to start a family or not – I suspect that nowadays that this is probably not the case – but even if it were – it would not amount to a compelling argument for preventing homosexual couples from marrying. Just over half of married couples have children, and just under half do not, and heterosexuals who are incapable of having children for whatever reason get married all the time.

Determined efforts are now being made to diminish the result of the Irish referendum in which more than a million people, rural and urban, young and old, voted for marriage equality. In fact there was a majority in every county and voting district, except one. Some in the anti-equality camp are even arguing that homosexual couples should not be allowed to marry, because they suspect, that most people still think of marriage in heterosexual terms. Why this is a sufficient objection is unclear, precisely because nobody is asking straight people to have same-sex weddings. It is also an odd point of view, because I imagine that large numbers of people who agree with allowing homosexuals to marry

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probably still do think of marriage in pretty conventional heterosexual terms. Homosexuals are a relatively small minority, and most marriages will continue to be heterosexual; indeed the minority status of homosexuals is even being used to say that because there will be very few same-sex marriages, they will amount to no more than a “legal fiction”. If this is the case, one can only wonder why conservative-libertarians bother to oppose marriage equality quite so strenuously.

This strand of opinion, led by Brendan O’Neil of the website *Spiked*, and promoted in *The Spectator* and elsewhere in the conservative press, although broadly secular, deploys natural law arguments regarding heterosexual unions, and the reproduction of children within those unions, as a reason for opposing the right of homosexuals to marry. So I think it is important to look briefly at natural law and then to review the pickle that conservative-libertarians have fallen into on the issue of marriage equality

Natural Law

The natural law is that which has been bequeathed to human beings by God from which we, by the use of reason, shall know how to act in relation to our natural disposition and our destination within God’s creation. Unlike inanimate objects or lower animals, human beings, because endowed with free will and reason, are able to know the good from the bad and are consequently able to shape their conduct in a manner consonant with their intrinsic natures and the architecture of God’s plan.⁴⁰

This is a very brief outline of what Thomas Aquinas and the modern Roman Catholic Church thinks about natural law.⁴¹ It does not provide a fixed

⁴⁰ This does not apply of course to children or to adults whose capacity for reasoning is restricted or impaired in any way.

⁴¹ See the articles on natural law in *New Advent: The Catholic Encyclopedia* <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/>; and the articles on natural law in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <http://plato.stanford.edu>.

template for determining the good and bad in every situation, but it does provide means whereby, with the employment of reason, we can determine the moral from the immoral and the natural from the unnatural in every set of circumstances. Therefore the natural law forms the principles of practical rationality and provides us with a means to know whether a human action may be judged reasonable or unreasonable.

This deployment of reason leads Roman Catholic thinkers to the conclusion that adultery, lying, blasphemy, and sodomy among many others forms of conduct, are intrinsically wrong, or disordered, because they violate the natural law.

It is clear that Roman Catholic thinking on sexuality is imbued with a deep respect for this conception of the natural law. The Church's thinking is rooted in the idea that human sexuality is intrinsically related to the reproductive aspect of our biology, and to the 'working of that which is natural' as a part of God's creation. What they mean by this thought is that the undeniable necessity of human reproduction, imposed upon us by our nature, is the right and principal purpose of the impulse to sexual pleasure.

This does not mean, however, that modern Roman Catholic clergy think that coitus can only be justified by an intention or potential to reproduce. Priests have recommended *coitus interruptus* in times past, and certainly, the idea of the 'rhythm' or 'calendar method' of calculating the best periods in which to avoid conception, has met with the approval of the Church. As long ago as 1931 Pope Pius XI in the encyclical, *Casti Connubii*, argued:

Nor are those considered as acting against nature who in the married state use their right in the proper manner, although on account of natural reasons either of time or of certain defects, new life cannot be brought forth. For in matrimony as well as in the use of the matrimonial rights there are secondary ends, such as mutual aid, the

cultivating of mutual love, and the quieting of concupiscence [strong sexual desire] which husband and wife are not forbidden to consider so long as they are subordinated to the primary end and so long as the intrinsic nature of the act is preserved.⁴²

The mind boggles here about what the old Pope might have meant by “the proper manner”, although it is pretty clear what is meant when he concludes “so long as the intrinsic nature of the act is preserved.” It means that the ‘the sexual act’ must take place within guidelines or context created by God, which we can see by the use of our reason, is that right and proper sexual congress must take place between men and women. Because, it is only opposite-sex relations, that accord with our intrinsic nature and the biological necessity to reproduce.

This means that the superfluity of human sexuality creates, and always has created, a problem for natural law theory. Because, it is evident that the pleasure derived from cunnilingus, fellatio, buggery, and the entire range of erotic touching, has no necessary relationship with heterosexual coitus at all. As with many things in nature a superfluity or abundance has been created, whether by God or evolutionary pressures, we cannot know for a certainty.

What we can be certain about though is that same-sexuality and the pleasure derived from it has always been with us because of the superfluous and plastic (or flexible) nature of human sexuality. We can, with the use of our reason determine that same-sex relationships are undoubtedly natural. The problem for the modern Church is not really whether such relationships can be said to be natural, but whether they can be said to be moral.

⁴² Pius XI, *Casti Conubii: Encyclical Letter of His Holiness Pope Pius XI*, Sheed & Ward, 1933.

The Roman Catholic Laity

There is little disagreement within the Curia and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Homosexual acts and homosexual conduct remains sinful because same-sexuality violates the principles of natural law and God's plan for humanity. Evidently, large numbers of ordinary Roman Catholics do not believe this, however it remains the position of the Church to "love the homosexual, but hate the sin", i.e. the fact that homosexuals actually do have sex with people of their own gender remains an unacceptable sin.

This is where most of the Catholic clergy has come adrift from great masses of their own laity. Roman Catholic's on the whole are in favour of using artificial contraception, and do not believe that homosexuality should be condemned out-of-hand. Whatever else they think, they do not believe in the shibboleths of natural law theory. They know from their own concrete experience that the superfluity of human sexuality cannot possibly be contained within traditional Christian teaching of what is natural for men and women engaged in erotic play with each other. Similarly, most heterosexuals can, through the employment of their reason, see that such conduct between people of the same gender, while mystifying, or even repulsive, cannot in all conscience be said to be unnatural, and cannot therefore be said to be sinful.

In this way, natural law arguments regarding sexuality have collapsed within their own terms because modern material and social circumstances have facilitated a public reflection and discussion of these matters that would have been unthinkable in times past. It is through this public discourse that the taboos about acknowledging what Freud might have called the extension of the sexual object, that it has become plain to many people just how widespread and natural a whole repertoire of sexual actions and pleasures are above and beyond heterosexual coitus.

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Marriage

The old style disdain, dismissal, denunciation, and revulsion, regarding homosexuality, has gradually ebbed away. Straight people have come to the realisation that they're not so straight after all.

Something similar has happened regarding marriage. In the quite recent past, marriage was still regarded as a coming together of two families through the exchange of a boy and girl. Although most people in society never had any significant property, the central virtue of marriage was that it would help to moderate promiscuity and philandering, and provide a secure environment for the raising of children.

In the distant past neither the church nor the state was involved in the recording or registering of partnerships. Legitimate marriages could be contracted between couples simply by them exchanging vows to the effect that they'd chosen to marry each other to the exclusion of all others and had pledged to stay together forever. In case of dispute it always helped to have had a witness to these vows, but even that was not essential. However, where substantial property was involved it was always likely that the respective families would want the vows exchanged in church witnessed by the entire community.

The church, of course, played a vital role in recording births, deaths, and marriages in England for many centuries. However, with the emergence of non-conformity – Methodist, Baptist, and Roman Catholic churches – outside the parochial structures of the Anglican Church, a large number of births, deaths, and marriages were going unrecorded. Consequently, from 1837, the state instituted an official procedure for the registration of these events regardless of religious affiliation.

Since then, of course, marriage has undergone, like industry, technology, and social life, considerable

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changes. It is now a much more private event in which the couple involved choose which friends or family members may attend. Whether in a Church, a Register Office, an hotel, or on a beach in Thailand – it is a decision of the couple who they will invite – because marriage is now simply a declaration before the selected guests that the bride and groom will love and cherish each other, and that come what may will look after each other through thick and thin.

Such marriages are dissolvable at the will of either party, although the stated intention of those who marry is, at the time of their wedding, to stay together for life. Interestingly, nowadays most people who marry in the UK will have been living together for some years, and may even have had children with each other (or another person or persons), a shared mortgage, and many other commitments in common. Their decision to marry is informed by the desire to reaffirm the permanence of their relationship in front of their friends and relatives, and to have a grand occasion, a large expensive ceremony, and party, which will in the most memorable way reaffirm their love and commitment to each other.

These new manners and attitudes concerning marriage have also destroyed the notion of illegitimacy. Children born out of wedlock are no longer ostracised for being bastards. Indeed, the word “bastard” has simply been demoted to a handy epithet for those we may disapprove of – the word has certainly lost the terrible connotation of indelible stain that it carried two or three generations ago. Bastards no longer exist – what a marvellous turnaround wrought by modern heterosexual conduct and marriage practice. People really don’t care whether or not you’ve been born in wedlock, Christened, or whether your ‘father’ is your biological father or not. Although much of the stigma has disappeared, these confusions often lead to much heartache and confusion, but it was ever thus. The biological relationships continue to be viscerally felt by the individuals they directly concern, but

‘irregularity’ no longer carries with it the shame, secrecy, or disapproval that it once did in the wider community.

So it is that marriage and childrearing has now become habitable for homosexuals.⁴³ There is no longer any reason why homosexuals should not marry, or have children, adopt children, or care for kids they have decided to call their own.

The Three Objections to Marriage Equality

It is the internal collapse of natural law, and the moral strictures that flowed from it, that has revealed the significance of the changes in heterosexual erotic conduct and social arrangements, which now permit the inclusion of homosexuals into the institution of marriage.

The arguments recently deployed by the Roman Catholic Church and other religious and secular conservative-libertarians that marriage must only be conducted between a man and a woman depend upon three principal pillars:

1. That children both need and deserve a Mother and Father;
2. That the inclusion of homosexuals within the institution of marriage will demote the value of the marriage, rendering it shallow and meaningless;
3. That the redefinition of marriage to include homosexuals is a “top down” and unwelcome imposition upon the mass of the population by the liberal elite.

⁴³ Same-sex marriages became lawful in England and Wales on March 13, 2014 and in Scotland between those in Civil Partnerships on December 16, 2014, and those without Civil Partnerships on December 31, 2014. Northern Ireland does not have same-sex marriage, but those registered in other jurisdictions are treated in law within Northern Ireland as Civil Partnerships.

Now, it's a moot point whether children need to live with their biological Fathers and Mothers in what once was a conventional household – large numbers of children have strong relationships with biological parents with whom they do not live. While 63 per cent of all children live with married heterosexual couples, 37 per cent live in other types of family. What is certain is that kids need stability and good relationships with a small number of adults, adults that are good providers, and can be relied upon to love them and take an active interest in their welfare and development. So, no, children do not 'need' or 'deserve' parents or guardians in the form specified by the church and conservative opinion.

Concerning whether marriage equality will result in demoting the value of heterosexual marriage, I simply cannot see the force of this argument – it only works if you think that homosexual relationships are intrinsically unnatural and disordered. Indeed, this is why it works for the Roman Catholic Church, because they do actually think that homosexuality is unnatural and disordered. So it is difficult to understand the reasoning of those who oppose marriage equality, but would not go so far as to claim that homosexuality violates natural law. It's a mystery.

On the third and final point, concerning the prejudices of the 'liberal elite', I would agree that there is indeed a layer of well-to-do liberal intellectuals who often despise and ridicule common or popular opinions, more or less, because they are popular and common or garden opinions. However, it is difficult to see the changes which have been wrought in society over the last forty or fifty years regarding the loosening purchase of natural law arguments, and the profound changes in sexual conduct and attitudes, changes in the circumstances of women and the arrangement of family life, the disappearance of bastardy, the legal emancipation of homosexuals, and so on, as a transient product of the chattering classes. These are enormous changes shaped to some degree by direct political

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intervention and campaigning, but more fundamentally by the reorganisation of the workplace, changes in the manner in which class relations are experienced and depicted, by technology, and the role and nature of the neighbourhoods and networks to which people belong.

So I think that the whole question of marriage equality needs to be seen from the perspective of the changes that have taken place within heterosexual marriage and relationships, and the manner in which natural law conventions and arguments have gradually decayed, steadily losing force and authority since the mid-fifties of the last century. Certainly, popular attitudes towards homosexuality, and the equal marriage referendum in the Irish Republic have made it abundantly clear that conservative-libertarians who blame the 'liberal elite' for transforming marriage and sexual conduct have lost the plot.

Genitals = Gender

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Historically – certainly for as long as anyone can remember – the form of our genitals have told us our gender. Our gender is ‘ascribed’ not ‘achieved’. The antiquity of the concepts involved should not as a matter of course lead us to suppose that this will always be so, but it should give us pause. Clearly, something peculiar is happening to the meaning of some of the words involved.

Men and boys are male, and woman and girls female; in strict biological terms they are immutable categories. Of course, a few individuals at birth present a challenge to these neat certainties in the form of hermaphroditism – where the biological presentation of an infant’s genitals is of a mixed or an indeterminate character. These rare exceptions ‘prove the rule’ that genitals equal gender because the category, “indeterminate”, arises from the biological oppositions ‘male’ and ‘female’.

This opposition is, no doubt, folded into the complex and socially determined modes of thought associated with the long and complicated history of biology, but it does refer to an undeniable characteristic of adult human beings that some of us have vagina, clitoris, and breasts, while others have testes, penis, and merely residual breasts. These different or opposing physical characteristics work together, through their difference, in the process of biological reproduction.

Now, one can become as ‘Foucauldian’, or as ‘constructivist’, as one likes in opposition to the ‘essentialism’ of the binary opposition, male and female, without touching upon the confusion at work over the proposition that “genitals = gender”.

Evidently, we cannot reproduce without a sexual encounter between a male and a female whether this is

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expressed through direct heterosexual intercourse or through the special delivery of sperm through the post, or the insemination of a woman (designated as surrogate) with donated sperm. Regardless of the mode of human reproduction chosen, the rather blunt oppositions of biology undeniably hold firm.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

Genesis: 1.27:28 *Bible*: Authorized by King James, 1611.

The idea that the binary opposition male and female are essentially imposed upon us by God (or by Nature standing in for God) is very old and conveys, expresses, or contains, a number of fundamental confusions. If nothing else these biblical truths anger a great many feminists, animal rights activists, and assorted vegans, precisely because they conflate biological and social categories, and in doing so attempt to confer an immutable or ahistorical status upon relations between men and women and between human beings and other animals.

This ancient script is bugged up by men who insist upon having sexual relations with members of their own sex. Lesbians and gay men insist upon having sexual relations that play no role in sexual reproduction and in doing so blatantly separate sexuality and its associated pleasures from the eternal truths proposed by God, by St Paul, and by a host of other religious and secular luminaries down the ages.

In a similar manner women who insist upon expressing manly virtues and characteristics, and men who consciously adopt the virtues and modes of behaviour historically associated with women rip through and violate the binary

categories derived from biology. This occurs because ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ are socially and historically determined categories, which vary from culture to culture, from age to age, from time to time.

I well remember encountering a crude conflation of social with biological characteristics at a meeting of young communists in Moscow around 1965. In response to a question concerning homosexuality and male ballet dancers in the Soviet Union, the ‘leading comrade’ present simply replied: “In Russia, All our Men are Men.”

Nowadays, this nonsense would simply elicit guffaws in Britain, if not in Russia, because we have grown used to the separation of biological gender from the mode of sexual expression. However, the opening of this particular Pandora’s Box has recently led explorers in sexual identity to extend the notion of sexual expression and gendered personalities towards the complete separation of gender from genitals through the curious route of transsexualism.

The reason I think that this is a curious way of challenging ‘genitals = gender’ is because, by and large, people who identify themselves as transsexuals are often engaged in surgical and hormonal interventions designed to bring their physical form – their bodies – into proper alignment with how they feel about themselves, their true selves, or their proper gender. In this, transsexuals whether they intend it or not are endorsing the age-old idea that ‘genitals = gender’ because if they didn’t believe in aligning their bodies with their ‘felt’ gender, they would feel no need at all to alter their breasts or genitals. They could happily self-identify as a man or a woman or indeed as ‘non-binary’ regardless of the genitals they were born with.

This is precisely the point we have now reached where some people regardless of their genitals have decided to self-identify as male or female or as non-binary in a total and radical rejection of the idea that biological form should dictate our relationship to masculinity, femininity, or any of the fields, rich in ambiguity, which have always lain between the two grand certainties apparently bequeathed to us by God and Nature.

In principle there is no problem here. If a six-foot, broad shouldered, bearded man, wants to be addressed as “she” or even by some entirely novel pronoun, it is and should be their right. People really should be able to say anything they like about themselves and there is no reason at all why the law, the state, or people in general, should get into a pickle over this.

The problem arises when individuals in the course of advocating these novel forms of self-identification attempt to conflate or collapse the concrete social and biological experience of others. For example, when a born man identifies himself as a woman, whether or not she is transsexual, or is simply transgender employing entirely new modes of address, or finding novel uses for existing pronouns, ‘ze’ is manifestly not a woman in same sense as the person born biologically female, and raised as a girl and a woman.

Deciding to be a woman is not the same thing as being born female, any more than deciding to kick over the traces by refusing to be identified as either male or female removes you from the gender assigned to you at birth. In other words, an individual’s autonomous decision to reassign their own gender does not automatically remove them from the cultural expectations and experiences which have proved formative in their social development. Incidentally, bi/gender, trigender, pangender, and any number of the neologisms involved in the self-gendering process, lead to considerable distress, embarrassment, or confusion. This is because, we cannot know, in advance, how people want to be addressed, or whether or not they wish to be thought of as male, female, or as ‘none-of-the-above’.

Masculinity and femininity vary between both time and place. They may be held in tense opposition, or they may be thought of as opposite ends of a more fluid continuum. Whatever they are, regardless of how they’re figured, they are undoubtedly cultural creations that have arisen historically within a given society. Masculinity and femininity, might be said to have arisen on the foundation of the biological male and female, but they are not reducible to it, and there is no reason to insist upon conformity between

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women and femininity or men and masculinity. Girls can be boys and vice versa. Manifestly, we don't have to agree with the gender assigned to us at birth.

However, if we decide to challenge the sex to which we've been assigned at birth, at whatever age we embark upon this of course of action, we can never hope to achieve identity with 'cisgendered' persons, because the social and biological experience of a cisnormativity creates a chasm, which cannot be bridged by self-identification.

A person who starts out as male, as a boy and man, cannot expect, through the process of declaring themselves to be female, to be accepted as identical to those who have always been female. This is because girls and women not only inhabit an entirely different biological reality from transgendered people, but also the transgendered person has by and large not shared the social and cultural experience of growing up into womanhood. Neither the transsexual nor the transgendered person who started out as male can share in the experience of born women who have never challenged the gender assigned to them at birth.

Consequently, male to female transsexuals are not women, just as female to male transsexuals are not men. This also applies to those transgendered individuals who wish to challenge the gender assigned to them at birth, without employing surgery or hormone treatments.

Trans-women are not women and trans-men are not men, and any proposals in law to declare 'self-identification' as the legal basis of gender will inevitably be opposed by women. This is because women will certainly fight against the participation of people born male in women-only institutions and spaces. Women will simply not accept trans-women into women's refuges, women only swimming pools, public toilets, and many other institutions established exclusively for use by women, because trans-women do not share the physical or social experience of women.

Trans-women and gender fluid people born as male who now identify as female do not have the experience of growing up as little girls, they do not menstruate from puberty to middle age, they do not have the potential at any time, of pregnancy or childbirth. They can have no

experience of the menopause, of what it is like to be a middle-aged woman, or indeed an old lady. They have little or no experience of what it is like to be a woman in a society, which continues to be largely dominated by men. Trans-women are not women and born women do not need to be styled “cis-women” because their status as women requires no qualification. Trans-women however do need the prefix “trans” to establish exactly that they were born male and have decided to adopt a female persona and lifestyle, however they wish to express this. Trans-women cannot claim identity with women or with people whose fundamental experiences they do not share.

I do not know whether trans-women need special trans-women places and facilities, but I would have thought spaces currently available for both genders might be recast as spaces for all genders – male, female, trans, and any others that might come along.

None of this means that we should reject out-of-hand the challenge that the self-identification of gender poses to the historical association of masculinity and femininity with gender assigned at birth. Nor do the more radical activists who challenge the need to identify with gender at all pose any threat to the stability of society.

All that needs to be acknowledged by trans people is that deciding to reassign your gender will not result in identity with those who are untroubled by living with the gender assigned them at birth. Cisnormativity cannot be wished away anymore than we can be rid of transsexuality or the challenges posed by the transgendered.

You can, of course, alter your genitals, and change your behaviour in extremely radical ways, but ‘gender intelligence’ tells us that your identity will always be that of a transsexual who has moved from one gender to another, or the identity of a gender fluid person. This is because although you might have always felt ill at ease with the gender assigned at birth you cannot elude or forget the reality of this unease; you cannot wish away the process or experience of becoming trans – which I imagine is an incomparable journey. A trans-woman cannot efface her singular experience anymore than most of my readers could

ignore the fact that whatever other dilemmas they may have faced, consciously questioning their gender wasn't one of them.

Queer Britannia

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Cultural change and innovation is always something of a mystery. Who knows how or why it became acceptable, almost *de rigueur*, for girls and young women to swear in public like the dockers and longshoremen of old? And, was it simply David Beckham that gave us tattoo studios, rather than “tattoo parlours” and inked skin on the respectable and svelte, as well as on the rough and uncouth? Then there are the manicure desks and counters dealing with cuticles and fitting elaborate artificial nails in markets and shopping streets all over the place. Who knows why that’s occurred? It’s just as mysterious as the rise of *Diana-ism* – the florid displays of public grief with candles and flowers – that now surround the minute’s silence and formal observance of loss in accidents or terrorist attacks. It wasn’t always so.

In a similar vein “Queer” has travelled from being a reference to feeling unwell or odd, to an insulting term for homosexuality. Gradually over the last thirty years “Queer” as won a new and positively respectable position due to its application to the edgy disruption of gender stereotypes, or as a reference to novel, ‘irregular’, or subversive sexualities and sensibilities of one sort or another.

Now, Queer has gone mainstream, stepping out of the academic shadows into the light of day. Most recently in Britain this has been prompted by acknowledgement of the fiftieth anniversary of the Sexual Offences Act 1967. This is the act that resulted in the decriminalisation of homosexual encounters taking place in private between men over the age of 21. It legalised what very few men were ever caught for, while reaffirming in practice the use of laws and police entrapment for the repression of all the things that gay men actually did in order to make contact and form friendships with each other.

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Yet the curators and commissioning editors of art exhibitions, radio programmes, and a raft of TV shows, have decided to give great prominence to an anniversary, which at the time passed most of us by. It is true the '67 Act was a good piece of legislation pioneered by the moral welfare council of the Church of England, and lobbied for over thirteen or fourteen years by early gay rights campaigners, liberal-minded politicians, artists, and intellectuals, but the wider implications of this reform took perhaps another five or ten years to dawn upon society at large.

If male homosexuality was acceptable in private, then surely the things that gay men did in order to meet each other must surely be legitimate. Importuning for an immoral purpose, acts of gross indecency, licentious dancing, and the like – the sorts of things heterosexuals got up to all the time in the back seats of the picture houses, in “lovers’ lanes”, dance halls, and chat-ups in pubs and clubs – must surely be OK for homosexuals too? This was the battle that had to be fought. And, it was the battle that was joined by the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, by the gay liberation front in London, and by gay liberation groups from Edinburgh to Birmingham, from Lancaster to Bradford and Leeds, from Newcastle to Bristol in the dozen or so years following the 1969 riot in New York’s Christopher Street.

The activity of these groups forced the issue on to the agendas of everything from the conferences of psychiatrists and medical professionals, to the meetings of far leftist groupuscules, trade unions, and labour party wards, eventually on up to the leading bodies of all the major political parties. In 1989, in the context of the Aids epidemic and the ham-fisted and reactionary response of Margaret Thatcher’s government, ‘the great and the good’ of the homosexual world, actors, artists, and politicians, for the first time, broke cover, and ‘came out’ as gay, with the formation of Stonewall, a well resourced and professionally run lobbying organisation, set up specifically to fight Clause 28 – Thatcher’s law which aimed at preventing the discussion of homosexuality in schools and amongst young people.

With the birth of this campaign the debate about homosexuality became mainstream. Of course it took the

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efforts of John Major's wing of the Tory Party, and the governments of Tony Blair and David Cameron to bring the ship home, but by March 2014 homosexual men and women finally achieved full equality with heterosexuals before the law.

In surveying this history one has to acknowledge the difference between lobbying, campaigning, and cultural shifts – the difference between social change and social movements, so to speak. The release of movies like *Victim* in 1961, *The Killing of Sister George* (1968), *Flesh* (1968), *Boys in the Band* (1970), Mick Jagger's, *Performance* (1970), *Sunday Bloody Sunday* with Murray Head and Peter Finch in 1971, David Hockney's *A Bigger Splash* (1973), the televising of Quentin Crisp's *The Naked Civil Servant* in 1975, and the release of *My Beautiful Launderette* ten years later, along with the marvels of Lou Reed, the Velvet Underground, and David Bowie were all signs of the times. Between the publication of James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* in 1958 and E. M. Forster's *Maurice* in 1971 vast tectonic shifts and disturbance was occurring; very little of it the product of political action, campaigning or lobbying.

It is this that much, or most of the current media output on the anniversary of the 1967 Act fails to grasp. The messy confusions of gay liberation and our radically dysfunctional unity, the points at which this intersected with the initiatives of the proprietors and landlords of gay clubs and pubs, or the broader changes in society which made the improbable, not just possible, but actual.

This is more than Barclay's or Bacardi financing floats on gay pride parades, or homosexual policemen and women marching in uniform, besides soldiers, and fire fighters at gay celebrations; it is the way acceptance of homosexuality has become normal, commonplace, embedded in mainstream cultural assumptions throughout society that is interesting.

Witness the current Coca-Cola ad in which an attractive brother and sister tumble over each other get to the fridge in order to be first to quench the thirst of the handsome hunk cleaning the pool, only to discover that they've both been beaten to it by Mum, who stands smugly next to the

gorgeous pool boy as he glugs down the refreshing can of Zero she's given him. It is not a problem for us, or the Coca-Cola Company, that the lad is as eager to please the sexy pool boy as his sister; it's a good, almost subliminal joke for the modern consumer.

This takes some explaining, well beyond the sterling efforts of those of us in gay liberation or the conspicuous successes of the grandees of homosexual life in and around Stonewall, Switchboard, or the voluntary sector's Aids network. Fundamental alterations in the way most people live and work, in the nature of our neighbourhoods, our family life, and the organisation of our workplaces, had to take place before it could be demonstrated that homosexuality was neither threatening to the social order, or dysfunctional for the sound operation of the capitalist system.

It is unnervingly true for those of us on the communist and socialist left that it is only in well-developed capitalist societies – in post-industrial capitalist society – that homosexuals have been emancipated to any degree whatsoever. In all other social circumstances vicious repression has remained the order of the day.

The kind of industrial life which arose in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and in which most of our people lived in up to the late nineteen fifties had to be swept away before a freer attitude to sexuality in general and homosexuality in particular could arise. The old harsh discipline of working class life had to be eroded by relative prosperity, by mass consumption, by contraception, by more diverse forms of employment and workplace organisation, by foreign travel, and much else, before the rigorous enforcement of the gender roles and respectability of working class life, ratified by the state, by the labour movement, and by popular culture, could pass away.

The emancipation of homosexuals and homosexuality, and the possibility of Queer Britannia, is not the product of progressive legislation or of the steady growth of liberal sentiment in society leading us from the dark days of repression to the sunlit uplands of marriage equality.

It is however, the result of the desperate and often destructive processes of economic, technical, and far-reaching social transformations, accompanied by tumultuous politicking and uproarious campaigning, barely captured by focus upon the Sexual Offences Act or upon the leading lights of the lesbian and gay community. It is undoubtedly true that – like swans and icebergs – most of the activity and the bulk of social movement lies below the surface, and its disappointing that our media folk have not given more attention to the underlying forces at work in this truly extraordinary transformation of our common life.

Review

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Sharing Truth and Shame



The Inheritance

by Matthew Lopez, directed by Stephen Daldry

This play is performed in two parts of three hours and fifteen minutes each; it's nothing, if not ambitious. I saw it on two successive nights at the Noël Coward theatre in the West End. Matthew Lopez has used E. M. Forster's novel, *Howards End*, as a reference point and inspiration for a play about what we, in our present, owe to the past, and to the future. It insists upon the kinship of gay men over time and talks to us of the necessity of suffering if we are to love and care for each other.

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E. M. Forster wrote his novel *Maurice* about the fear, shame, and joy of homosexual love during the year before the outbreak of the First World War. *Maurice*, like the short stories published as *The Life to Come*, did not see the light of day until 1971, a year after his death. Forster was known to be homosexual among his close circle of friends and confidantes, but this secret was never allowed to leak into the public realm. Forster sustained a love affair for forty years with Bob Buckingham, a married policeman, and became close friends with Bob's wife, May; he died aged 91 at Bob and May's suburban semi in Coventry, and his ashes were later mingled with those of Bob's.

E. M. Forster was conflicted and dishonest in a manner familiar to many gay men to this day. The contradictions and confusions of our personal lives collide with political and social circumstance, which often result in shame and the suppression of truth. This cannot be resolved simply by disclosure or coming out, but constitutes us in a manner common to all men and women regardless of sexual tastes and predilections. There is something universal here which Forster explores in all his novels. He is acutely aware of the class tensions, colonialism, conventional propriety – the life denying fears and prejudices which frame and disfigure the world of his fictional characters. It is here that Matthew Lopez has grabbed the historical baton in order to talk about ourselves.

The play opens with ten good-looking young men lounging about the stage in street clothes, artfully composed in a picturesque tableau which contends with their relaxed and casual appearance. The story of their lives begins to unravel with the help of Walter an older man in suit and waistcoat. He is also Morgan, or E. M. Forster, an active personality in all their stories as he metamorphoses from one person to another, appearing and reappearing, encouraging, correcting, lamenting, and relishing the company and experience of the young men.

Walter haunts the play like the dead swept away by Aids. The life he shares for thirty-five years with the billionaire, Henry, presents the young men in the play, and us watching in the dark, with the amorality of capitalism,

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when it meets the certainties enjoyed by young social justice warriors, who lack all awareness of their own entanglement in the contradictions inherent in their lives. The viral nature of racism and nationalism in America is brilliantly articulated as the dismay and defeat of 'Hilary' echoes the dislocation and dysfunction of our own state here in Britain.

The young men in this play are middle class in the English sense of the phrase, and avowedly liberal in sentiment. Consequently, Henry's vast fortune, his wheeling and dealing, his corruption and amorality, provide a counterpoint to their own liberal betrayals, and misuse of each other; their ambition and gaze averted from the love, grief, and tragedy, which actually compose their lives.

Michael Lopez's writing is vivid and humorous, vital and humane; the rapid and feisty dialogue, and its quiet and reflective moments, carry one through the six and a half hours of the play. He and the actors demand unflinching attention, and they get it. It is an extraordinary achievement which explores the camp absurdity, the gripping challenges, the necessity of suffering – death by suicide, by disease, by neglect – redeemed finally by the recognition that care must be taken in all our dealings with the past, with each other, and the future.

This is sharply drawn when the sexual hedonism of the gay milieu, dominated by cocaine, crystal meth and GHB – the misuse, and disregard of each other – is depicted in a powerful evocation worthy of the Inferno of Dante. It is a world in which prostitution, brutality, and desire is allowed to run riot without regard to the wreckage left in its wake. This is done by Michael Lopez, his actors, and the director, Stephen Daldry, without unctuous moralism – they have not pitched their tents on the moral high ground – on the contrary they see this kind of crisis as one that flows out of the past and the repression to which we have all been subjected. It is a crisis that must be overcome.

The haunting by those lost to the plague in the eighties and early nineties is depicted seamlessly and with unnerving skill. It is here that Margaret (played by Vanessa Redgrave), the housekeeper of 'Rooks Nest' or 'Howards End', reimagined in upstate New York, reflects on her efforts

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to save her handsome son from the cruel attention of the queers which abound down in the city, and of her grief when he is brought to the house to die at the age of 25. She and Walter continue to bring dozens of dying men and boys to the house to accord them the care and dignity which eludes them in the city.

Walter, Margaret, and Eric, who ultimately inherits the house, do not function as Mother Teresa who helped the dying, but did nothing to drain the swamp of poverty and despair. On the contrary, Eric and the other young men, despite the terrifying death of Toby Darling in the flames of a car crash he contrives because he cannot escape from his past, are redeemed by love and the realisation that their gaze must not be averted from grief if they are to learn how to care for each other.

The play is performed on an empty stage except for the brief moments when a cherry tree, symbolic of abundance, change, and dogged survival, makes its appearance, or a large dolls house is displayed, as 'the house', at the rear of the stage. We are always aware of when a person changes into another character, and the action moves from one situation or period to another, the movement between the dead and the living is subtly realised, almost without effort. The lighting, music, and above all the dialogue, brilliantly spoken, carries us along to the heartrending conclusion lifted by Margaret and Eric's determination to see it all through.

Wherever and whenever this play is staged I will make every effort to see it again and again.

Gay Liberation

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