

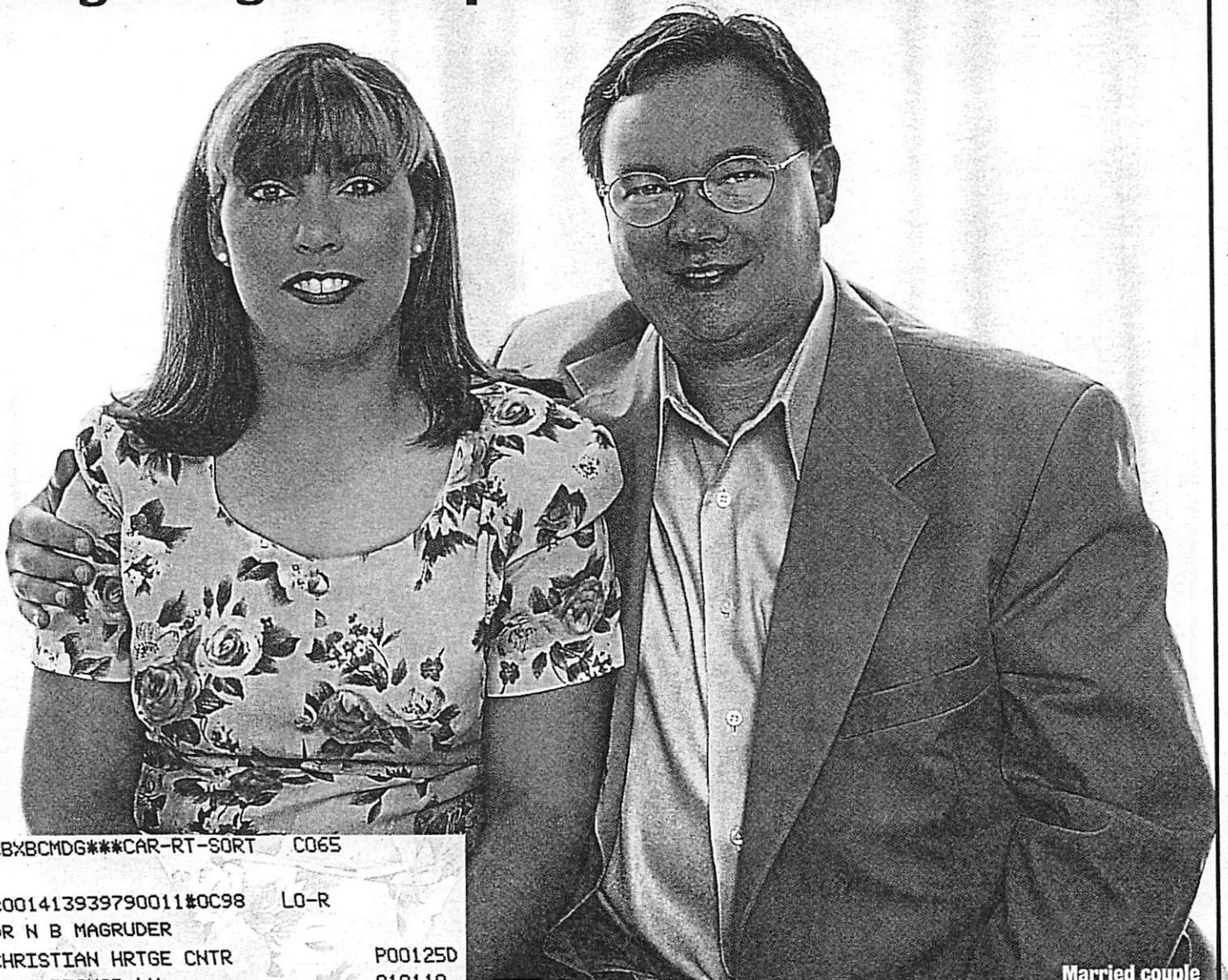
News

TERROR THE U.S. EMBASSY BOMBINGS

Week

Gay for Life?

Going Straight: The Uproar Over Sexual 'Conversion'



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Married couple
John and Anne Paulk
are ex-gays

Can Gays

Fitting in, speaking out

Ex-gays John and Anne Paulk underwent counseling in an Exodus ministry, where they met. They married in 1992.

'Convert'?

A controversial series of ads claims that homosexuals aren't born that way, and can change. A look inside the 'ex-gay' movement, and the elusive science of sexual orientation.

BY JOHN LELAND AND MARK MILLER



You go, girl!

When gay, John Paulk's alter ego Candi won first runner-up in the Miss Ingenue pageant

IN A TOWN HOUSE IN NORTHWEST Washington, D.C., Anthony Falzarano calls for a show of hands. "How many of you," he asks, "were raped, molested or sexualized as children?" More than half of the 20 men and three women raise their hands. Falzarano, 42, is neatly dressed, a former architectural restorer who talks with the reassuring cadences of a motivational speaker. For the last hour or so, he has recited Scriptures and talked about his own life—about his rather glamorous turns in the New York gay scene of the 1970s, about his Christian reawakening, about his wife and two children. Now he urges the others to talk.

"My name is Dave," begins one. "It's been a good week. I haven't had any lapses into masturbation for more than a month." Shannon, 27, has not had a good week. He started a new job, and already, he says, "people are buzzing. 'Is the new guy gay?'" Falzarano admonishes, "You're still sending out mixed signals." The secret sharers are mostly in their 20s and 30s, racially mixed, united in purpose: they want desperately, some painfully, not to be gay.

They have come to the Transformation Ministries branch of Exodus International, a non-denominational Christian fellowship dedicated to helping homosexuals change their orientation.

Touting strict Scriptural reading and a discredited theory of childhood development, Exodus was until recently one of the better-kept secrets in the American church. Then on July 13, in conjunction with conservative groups like the Christian Coalition, it started taking out full-page ads in major newspapers (including The Washington Post, NEWSWEEK's sister publication). In gentle, loving language, smiling "ex-gays" offered the bold promise: we changed, so can you. Gay advocates fumed. "This is a deliberate campaign ... to make homophobia acceptable," argues Anne Fausto-Sterling, a professor of biology and women's studies at Brown University. The mainstream psych community bridled: therapy to change sexual orientation, says Gregory Herek, a research psychologist at the University of California, Davis, "doesn't have any scientific basis." For the ad's sponsors, the uproar was golden. "We've done 37 interviews in the last 10 days," exults Falzarano, who describes himself as "one of the top five 'ex-gays'." After years of daytime-TV indignities, ex-gays like John and Anne Paulk of Colorado Springs—a former drag queen and a former lesbian, now married with a son—were working prime time.

The ads come just as factions within the Republican Party are battling over gay rights. Senate leader Trent Lott recently likened homosexuality to alcoholism and kleptomania,

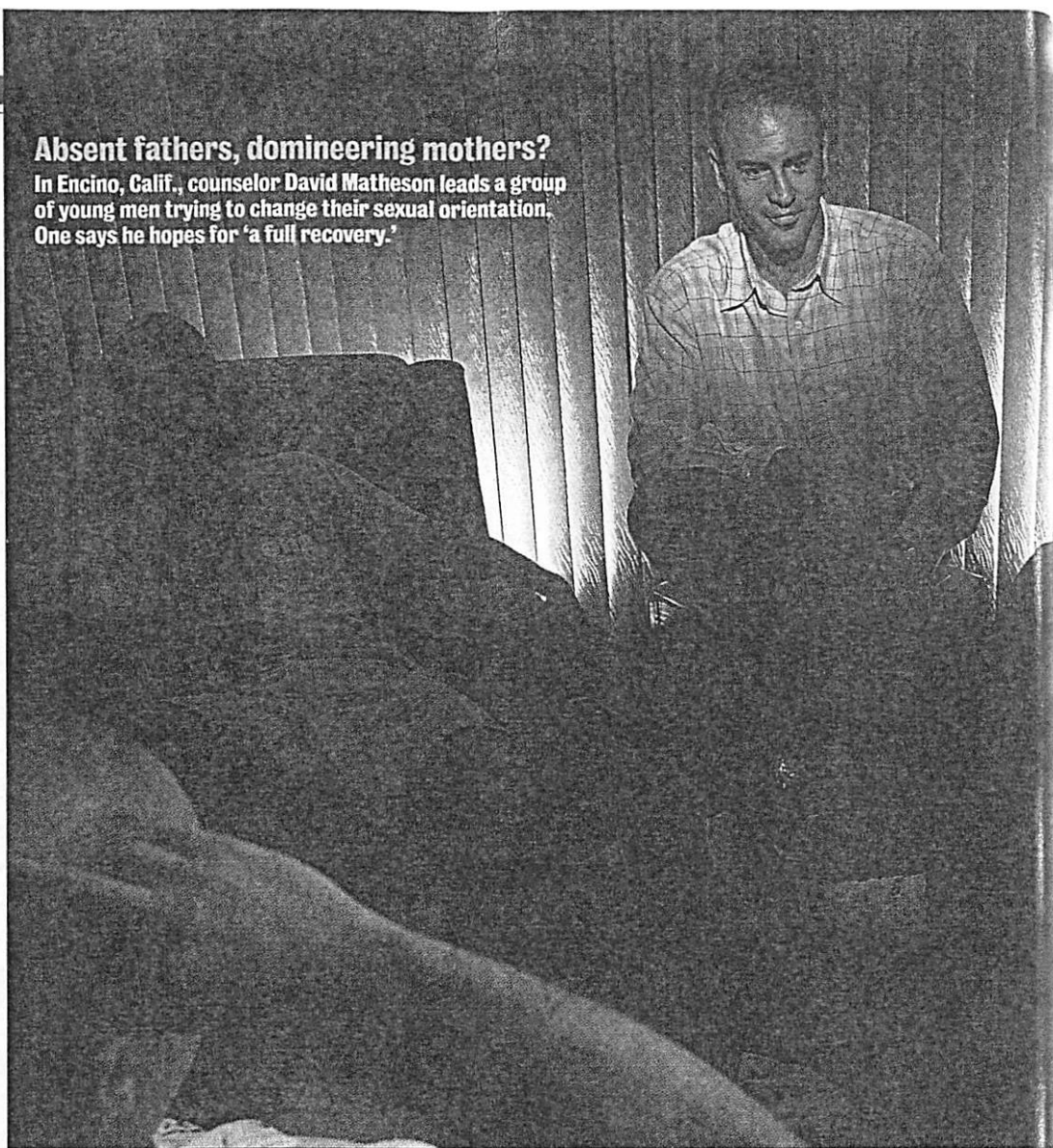
and blocked a vote to allow James Hormel, who is gay, to become ambassador to Luxembourg. The Republican-controlled House voted to deny certain federal funds to any city that required contractors to provide health benefits to gay partners. But just last week, defectors within the party helped defeat a GOP bill to rescind President Bill Clinton's anti-discrimination order for gays in the federal government.

At Falzarano's ministry, such political machinations are lost on people like Shannon. He has led a complicated life. At his first meeting, he wore mascara and outrageous dress. "I was flaming," he says, conspiratorially. Raised in a strict Pentecostal home, with a violent, drug-addicted father, he "got into the lifestyle"—Exodus-speak for homosexuality—at the age of 14. By 20, he says, "I wanted a change. I [believed] I was an awful, damaged product in God's eyes." He returned to the church, quickly married and fathered a child, but eventually started seeing men again. Earlier this year, with a second child on the way, he brought himself to an Exodus meeting. He was dubious—"I thought they were all fakers"—but desperate. "At first, I came because I didn't want to waste more of my wife's life. I really, really enjoyed the gay lifestyle. But now I want to come out of this for myself. I'm tired of homosexuality being my identity."

For more than a century, therapists, churches and groups like the Aesthetic Realists have tried to change gays by means including drugs, electroshock and even testicular transplant. One Masters and Johnson treatment taught gay men how to make

Absent fathers, domineering mothers?

In Encino, Calif., counselor David Matheson leads a group of young men trying to change their sexual orientation. One says he hopes for 'a full recovery.'



conversation and eye contact with women. But after the American Psychiatric and Psychological associations voted in the 1970s that homosexuality was not a disorder, most therapists got out of the sexual-conversion business. Last year the American Psychological Association officially declared "reparative therapy" scientifically ineffective and possibly harmful. Its guidelines strongly discourage such therapy as

unnecessary. The public is less convinced. In a new NEWSWEEK Poll, 56 percent said gays could become straight; 11 percent of gays agreed.

Exodus, founded in 1976, has taken up the call. With 83 chapters in 35 states, the group claims to have "touched" 200,000 lives, though it keeps no figures on how many people have gone through treatment. "I don't know of anybody who can do it on

Straight Views, Gay Views: By the Numbers

In two national polls, NEWSWEEK compared the general public's opinions on gay issues with those of the gay community. Though

there's more common ground than in recent years, the two groups still disagree strongly about some hotly debated issues.

Overall population:
33% say that homosexuality is something people are born with, not the result of upbringing or environmental influences

Gay respondents: 75%
 say they believe homosexuality is something people are born with, not due to upbringing or environmental influences

Overall: 56% say that gay men and lesbians can change their sexual orientation through therapy, will power or religious conviction

Gays: Only 11% say that gay men and lesbians can change their sexual orientation through therapy, will power or religious conviction

FOR THIS SPECIAL NEWSWEEK POLL, PRINCETON SURVEY RESEARCH ASSOCIATES CONDUCTED TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS WITH 602 ADULTS JULY 30-31, 1998. THE MARGIN OF ERROR IS +/- 4 PERCENTAGE POINTS. FOR THE OPINIONS OF HOMOSEXUALS, PRINCETON SURVEY RESEARCH ASSOCIATES CONDUCTED TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS WITH 502 GAY MEN AND LESBIANS JULY 28-30, 1998. RESPONDENTS WERE RANDOMLY DRAWN FROM LISTS COMPILED BY STRUBCO INC. OF 750,000 WHO ASSOCIATED THEMSELVES WITH GAY OR LESBIAN INTERESTS AND ACTIVITIES. THOSE WHO IDENTIFIED THEMSELVES AS HETEROSEXUAL WERE EXCLUDED FROM THE SURVEY. THE MARGIN OF ERROR IS +/- 5 PERCENTAGE POINTS. SOME RESPONSES NOT SHOWN. THE NEWSWEEK POLL © 1998 BY NEWSWEEK, INC.



with attraction [to men]. But I don't see attraction as a problem, because people are attractive." Ministries claim success rates of about 30 percent, but have allowed no long-term studies. The failures, on the other hand, have been most importune. Two of Exodus International's founders, Michael Bussee and Gary Cooper, fell in love and left the organization in 1979. In all, 13 Exodus ministries have had to close because the director returned to homosexuality.

Exodus's claims take up an unresolved scientific debate. In the early '90s, three highly publicized studies seemed to suggest that homosexuality's roots were genetic, traceable to nature rather than nurture. Though the studies were small and the conclusions cautious, many gay groups embraced the news. We're born this way, they announced, don't judge us. More than five years later the data have never been replicated. Moreover, researchers say, the public has misunderstood "behavioral genetics." Unlike eye color, behavior is not strictly inherited; it needs to be brought into play by a daunting complexity of environmental factors. "People very much want to find simple answers," says Neil Risch, a professor of genetics at Stanford. "A gene for this, a gene for that ... Human behavior is much more complicated than that." The existence of a genetic pattern among homosexuals doesn't mean people are born gay, any

more than the genes for height, presumably common in NBA players, indicate an inborn ability to play basketball. Isolating environmental factors of homosexuality has proved equally elusive: in blind psychological evaluations, gays are indistinguishable from straight people. Most scientists postulate that homosexuality results from some combination of genes and environmental factors, possibly different in each individual. But, admits biologist Evan Balaban, "I think we're as much in the dark as we ever were."

Matt, 20, thinks he knows the answer. A junior at a Los Angeles university, Matt is articulate, casually chic in a retro surfer shirt. Since 1997, he has been a patient of psychologist Joseph Nicolosi, the leading exponent of the secular approach called reparative therapy. Matt had his first homosexual experience in college—unsatisfying, but not traumatic. His parents urged him to see Nicolosi. "I basically hated Joe at first. I thought he was full of s---." He agreed to continue treatment, he says, "just to talk through the issue. I didn't expect to change."

Nicolosi considers himself a maverick in a profession held captive by the gay political lobby. He is the executive director of NARTH, the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality, a small band that steadfastly maintains that homosexuality is a disorder that can and

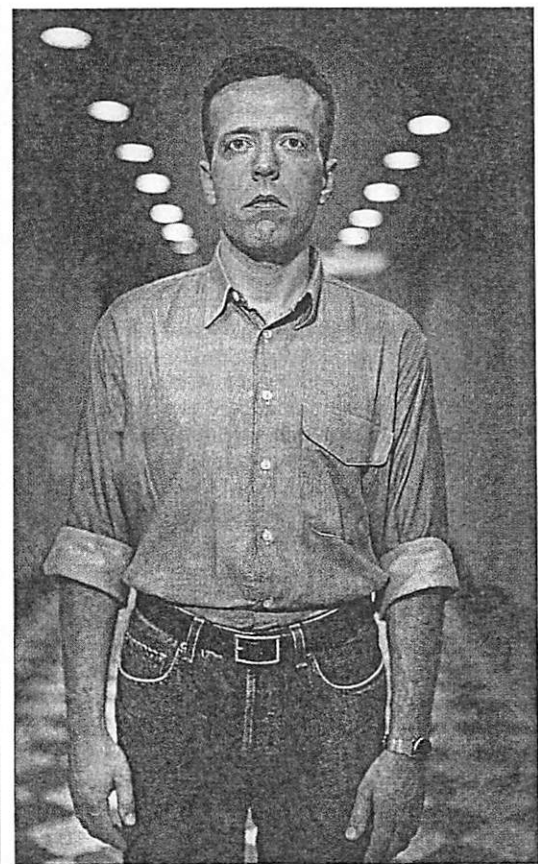
should be treated. NARTH represents "the fringe of the mental-health establishment," says psychologist Herek. Nicolosi's patients, most controversially, can be as young as 3 years old. Like Exodus, he trumpets his success rates, but has done no long-term follow-up study. "I don't have time," he says.

Still skeptical, Matt read Nicolosi's book "Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality." "It could have been written about my family," he says—distant father, very attentive mother, no interest in sports. Matt started to come round. He looked into mainstream "gay affirmative" therapies, which hold that gay tensions derive from "internalized homophobia." Nicolosi had an answer to each. "It was a battle of theories, and Joe's really convinced me more." Matt says his attractions to men have diminished. He still hasn't dated a woman, but feels confident that the move is "imminent. I want to make sure I'm ready."

Despite Matt's experience, both Nicolosi and Exodus stress that the process isn't for everybody. People who are gay and happy won't find it useful. "We have to work with people who are broke and ready," says Anita Worthen, a counselor at New Hope Ministries in San Rafael, Calif. "We can't drag

Once lost, now found—and happily gay

James Campbell, son of a Baptist minister, tried an exorcism to overcome his homosexuality. Today he's partnered with a man and secure in his faith in God.



their own," says John Paulk, the national board chairman. Exodus rejects what members call the "homophobia" of censorious conservative churches; rather, the idea is to help gays become healing members of the congregation. The "homosexual lifestyle," the group contends, is a sin, though not of the sinner's choosing—a neat distinction in a culture loath to accept blame for anything.

The group offers a tidy explanation for homosexuality. Boys with absent fathers, girls with absent mothers, get stuck in developmental limbo and seek masculine or feminine fulfillment through sex with members of their own gender. By recognizing this deficiency, and through prayer, individuals can replace some gay desires with same-sex friendships. Or so the theory goes. Heterosexual desire may or may not follow. Along the way, Exodus workshops encourage gay men to "butch up" through sports, and lesbians to unleash their inner heterosexual through dress and makeup.

"Recovery" might mean anything from a heterosexual marriage to abstinence. Temptation alone, the group counsels, is not a sin. As one ex-gay man puts it, "I still struggle

them off the streets." Worthen's own son is gay and not in therapy. At her ministry, she and her husband, Frank, try to warn off the less stalwart. "You don't want to come in and fail at one more thing."

Critics accuse NARTH of preying on the vulnerable. "It intensifies conflict," says psychiatrist Susan Vaughan, the American Psychoanalytical Association's spokesperson on gay issues. "Being celibate, or trying to have sex with the opposite sex, can lead to anxiety and depression." James Campbell, 37, now an ordained Methodist minister, said his therapist tried to exploit his fear of AIDS, and goaded him to "remember" an incident of molestation he now isn't sure happened. Since leaving therapy, he says, "my acceptance of myself as a gay man saved my life and any relationship I had with God."

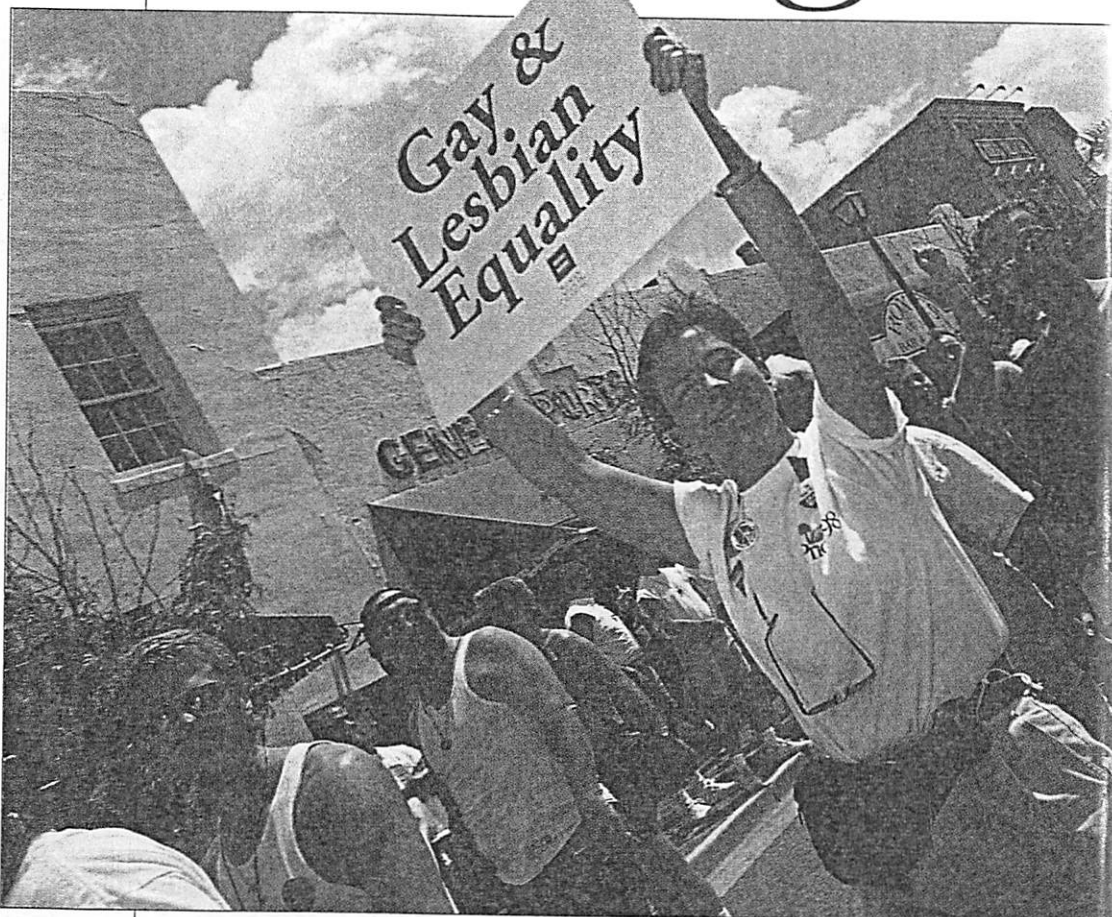
There is a middle ground between the camps—between the ex-gay claim that anyone can change and the opposing contention that no one can. The psychologist Patricia Hannigan has argued that individuals can, in the face of strong religious conflict, lay down their own laws. "If the foremost priority in one's life is religious faith, then personal happiness might come from conforming to faith rather than from pursuing sexual orientation." She likens gay Christians in reparative therapy to priests who have taken a vow of celibacy.

At Transformation Ministries, Falzarano asks the men to describe their distant fathers, an assortment that runs from abusive drug addict to benign workaholic. "So you see," he says, nodding, "we didn't all show up in this room by accident." He is building up to something, and raises his voice a notch. "Homosexuality is not a lifestyle we chose. It was inflicted on us as children. Most churches don't realize we were molested. Most churches don't realize we didn't bond with our fathers."

This is the payoff. There is strength in unity, strength in grievance and in rejection. Few identities in America are more marginal than ex-gay. In here there is community. After a pop hymn, the group members hug or shake hands. Then they head off into the night, perhaps less lonely than when they came in.

With CLAUDIA KALB, PATRICIA KING,
THOMAS HAYDEN and MATTHEW COOPER

Battling Ba



THE GREAT POOL DEBACLE probably won't go down as a major gay-rights setback, but it's shown West Hartford, Conn., how homosexuality can still send people off the deep end. The trouble began in January, when Michael Antisdale, 40, and Mark Melanson, 36, applied for a \$395 family pass to the town-owned indoor pool. The couple, who have lived openly in town together for 10 years, knew that some people didn't consider them to be a traditional family. But since West Hartford offers health benefits to the partners of its gay municipal employees, the men assumed they'd also be entitled to the reduced-rate family pass (saving \$295). They were wrong. In June, the town council voted 6-3 against them. The men had tripped over a battle line they never imagined existed. "When we were two gay men living quietly in the suburbs and keeping our grass cut, we were perfectly well accepted," says Antisdale, a

marketing executive. "As soon as we raised our hands and said we want what you get, the response was: 'How dare you even ask!'"

No one would dispute the fact that homosexuals now enjoy unprecedented freedom—to have children, serve in Congress, even star in a sitcom. But the rapid progress of the last few years has also created a kind of backlash. Some of it has been fairly isolated, like when Irmo High School in South Carolina barred the lesbian folk-rock duo Indigo Girls from performing on campus this May or when Ross Perot revoked domestic-partnership benefits at his Dallas computer-services company in April. Other incidents have national implications, especially Trent Lott and conservative Republicans' attempts to make homosexuality a key issue in the November elections. Few gay-rights leaders think they'll lose their partner benefits or inheritance rights, which have become increasingly commonplace. But the accumulation of setbacks raises the issue of whether straight America has reached some

cklash

After years of remarkably fast progress, gays are facing a new set of barriers. Where are the lines of tolerance being drawn? BY MARG PEYSER



The battle continues, on the streets and in the Senate chambers
Gay-pride marches, such as this year's in Myrtle Beach, S.C. (left), are rarely met by large protests anymore, but conservatives like Trent Lott are making homosexuality a wedge issue again

queasy when they view the issue in terms of morality and taboo sexuality. In a recent NEWSWEEK Poll, the vast majority said gays deserve equal rights in obtaining jobs and housing (83 percent and 75 percent)—52 percent even said gays should be allowed to inherit their partners' Social Security benefits. But 54 percent believe homosexuality is a "sin." That distinction played a major tactical role in overturning the Maine gay-rights law. The conservative forces—led by a group called the Christian Civic League—largely avoided attacking gays for seeking "special rights" like job protections and focused on morality. "They talked much more about how gay people were a threat to their children and were going to take over the Boy Scouts," says Karen Geraghty, a gay-rights lobbyist. The conservatives couldn't agree more. "Technically, it does have to do with special rights," says Michael Heath, president of the Christian Civic League, "but if you scratch the surface, it's a moral concern."

kind of tipping point, a limit to its tolerance for gays. If so, where are the lines being drawn in other West Hartfords across the country? In short, how gay is too gay?

On the national level, the backlash has taken some familiar forms. Perhaps the most glaring is the reported number of anti-gay bias crimes, which rose 7 percent last year while the overall crime rate dropped 4 percent. In the military, gays also face continued resistance. Despite the Clinton administration's "don't ask, don't tell" policy, discharges of gay servicemen and -women

increased 67 percent from 1994 to 1997. The hottest issues have been at state level. Before anyone has legalized gay marriage—the Hawaii and Vermont supreme courts are considering it—28 states have rushed to outlaw those unions. And in February, Maine became the first in the nation to reverse a statewide gay-rights law prohibiting housing and employment discrimination.

But it's really on Main Street, U.S.A., where the telltale lines are being drawn. Straight people generally accept what might be called gay civil rights, but they get

the Christian Civic League, "but if you scratch the surface, it's a moral concern."

The morality issue may explain why heterosexuals find same-sex marriage to be the most unacceptable item on the gay-rights agenda. The NEWSWEEK Poll found that only 33 percent of people supported legal gay marriage. In part, the fear may flow from straights' belief that marriage is the last arena of public life that sets them apart from gays. "People even think of the actual word—marriage—as a straight institution," says lesbian activist Chastity Bono.

Overall: 33% say there is 'a lot' of discrimination against gays today; **29%** say the country needs to do more to protect the rights of gays

Gays: 60% say there is 'a lot' of discrimination against gays today; **83%** say the country needs to do more to protect the rights of gays

Overall: 33% approve of legally sanctioned gay marriage; **36%** say they believe gays should be allowed to adopt children

Gays: 85% say legal gay marriage is 'very' or 'somewhat' important; **90%** say adoption rights for gays are important

Overall: 51% say they are 'very' bothered by gays kissing in public; **29%** are 'very' bothered by same-sex couples holding hands

Gays: 64% think same-sex kissing in public bothers straights 'very much'; **39%** say gays' holding hands bothers straights 'very much'



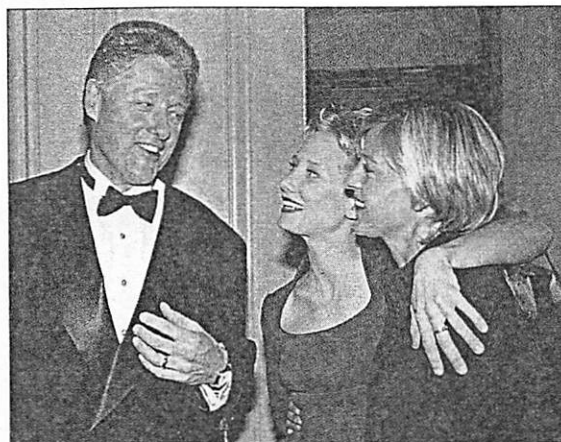
Civil rights are fine, but no sex, please

Heterosexuals largely support equal rights for gays in jobs and housing. But public displays of affection—like in the movie 'In & Out' (above), between actresses Ellen DeGeneres and Anne Heche (below) or by onlookers at a pride parade—disturb many straights.



But the often unacknowledged core of the marriage issue is the link with children. Despite studies that show kids of gay parents are no more likely to grow up gay than children of heterosexuals, many people fear that gays will alter a child's sexuality. Joann Flowers, a fortysomething restaurant owner in Myrtle Beach, S.C., counts her gay hairdresser as one of her "favorite people." She was even glad that this year's gay-pride parade moved to her hometown. "To each his own. Plus, it's good for business," she says. Still, she draws the line at gay marriage. "That's taking it too far. They adopt children and then the kids grow up and we've got all this perversion," Flowers says. It's not just marriage that poses a threat. The Boy Scouts recently fought two legal challenges to their ban on gay scoutmasters. "A homosexual is not a role model for traditional family values," says Scout spokesman Gregg Shields.

Not surprisingly, schools have become ground zero in the battle over which kind of gayness is acceptable. Hundreds of high schools nationwide now have Gay/Straight Alliances designed to provide moral support for gay kids and teachers. That openness has touched off fierce retaliation. Last October, a lesbian teacher in San Leandro, Calif., came out to her high-school science class during Diversity Week. Parents complained. The teacher became the target of a petition drive and a death threat. When Karl Debro, who is straight, allowed his honors English class to discuss the teacher's situation, he was cited for "unprofessional conduct." "Homosexuality has replaced communism and atheism as the last great threat," says Jerry Underdal, a Gay/Straight



Alliance faculty adviser in Fremont, Calif. "People are afraid their sleepy community will turn into San Francisco." (Citing Debro's appeal of the case, San Leandro officials wouldn't comment on specifics.)

But this kind of friction hasn't quelled younger people's tolerance. The NEWSWEEK Poll found that young adults (ages 18 to 29) were significantly more accepting of gay marriage—or even adoption—than people over 30 (and baby boomers were more tolerant than people over 50). That's probably because Gen-X and -Y people also are more likely to have a homosexual friend or acquaintance (65 percent) than 50-plus adults (45 percent). Tony Trueba, 19, of Huntington Beach, Calif., didn't even know what "coming out" meant until his cross-country coach, Eric Anderson, did just that to the entire team. Five years later, Anderson has become the coach at Saddleback College in Mission Viejo and Trueba, who is straight, has followed him there as an ath-

lete and a friend. Tony's father, Richard, 47, says he no longer worries about his son's being alone with his gay coach. But he's not entirely comfortable with the friendship, either. "Obviously, the coach is not what I'd call an ideal role model for my son, but we've gotten to know him over the years," says Richard. "In most respects, he's an outstanding young man."

It's progress like that, however grudging, that makes gay-rights activists optimistic despite the recent setbacks. "Ellen" may have been pilloried for being too gay, but the past season saw a record 29 openly homosexual characters on network-TV programs. "We've made enough progress so that people feel gays are acceptable, but they'd rather not go behind the bedroom door," says Paul Rudnick, who wrote the screenplay to last summer's hit movie "In & Out." Not surprisingly, NBC's "Will & Grace," the next sitcom with a gay main character, won't show any gay kissing when it premieres in September. "This is the best of times and the worst of times for the gay community," says Kevin Jennings, executive director of the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network, a New York-based advocacy group. "We're experiencing unprecedented visibility and success. But in periods of social change, there's always a backlash. In the African-American civil-rights movement, the most violence [by whites] was in the '60s, when things were changing the most."

In West Hartford, the pool-pass defeat has actually made Antisdale and Melanson appreciate their community even more. They received overwhelming support from their straight neighbors, including 450 residents who sent a petition to the town council, to no avail. Doris Uricchio, an 85-year-old churchgoing woman who lives next door to the men, was so angry with the Republicans who voted against them that she left the GOP. "We can't dictate to other people how they lead their lives," says Uricchio. "They're wonderful boys. I don't take kindly to disdain for other human beings." These personal gay/straight alliances—a backlash against the backlash—may ultimately change attitudes once and for all.

With DEBRA ROSENBERG in Maine, T. TRENT GEGAX in Myrtle Beach, NADINE JOSEPH in San Francisco and ANA FIGUEROA in Los Angeles

Leaving the Gay Ghetto

I called for a new post-gay identity, defined by more than sexuality and more open to self-criticism. So I got criticized—a lot. BY JAMES COLLARD

SIX MONTHS AGO, A DREAM CAME TRUE, AND I moved from London to New York City to become editor in chief of OUT, the magazine for gay men and lesbians. In many ways it's been a soft landing: America is a friendly country, and New Yorkers—despite the pride they take in being feisty—seem gentle in comparison with Londoners.

Which made what took place on June 24 such a rude awakening.

At a symposium held in the leafy, academic setting of New York's New School, I critiqued the ghettoization of the gay community and the orthodoxy of gay politics, suggesting that self-criticism should no longer be considered treason. I said we should no longer define ourselves solely in terms of our sexuality—even if our opponents do. That gay people were voicing these dissatisfactions, I argued, amounted to a new "post-gay" sensibility.

A barrage of hostile questions—a barracking, we Brits would call it—ensued. "Who does this snotty Brit think he is?" "What does he know?" was the general tone. Later the press jumped on, as well, with Duncan Osborne writing in the newspaper *Lesbian & Gay New York* that what I'd said was tantamount to "announcing the death of gay politics." And you, the reader, may be wondering: Why, at a time when gay bashing is a continuing reality—both actual violence and saber-rattling by politicians like Trent Lott—would the editor of OUT magazine want to wash the gay community's dirty linen in public?

So I'd like to clarify what I meant by post-gay, a term that was coined by the gay British journalist and activist Paul Burston in 1994. It doesn't refer to someone who's simply switched sexuality, like the WIFE, MOTHER, EX-LESBIAN in a recent ad campaign who claims to have filled the God-shaped hole in her life and discovered the joys of heterosexuality. Nor is it anti-gay. Post-gay is simply a critique of gay politics and gay culture—by gay people, for gay people.

For me, the post-gay sensibility began when I realized that I preferred the social variety of "mixed" clubs to the more homogenous gay clubs. First for protection and later with understandable pride, gays have come to colonize whole neighborhoods, like West Hollywood in L.A. and Chelsea in New York City. It seems to me that the new Jerusalem gay people have been striving for all these years won't be found in a gay-only ghetto, but in a world where we are free, equal and safe to live our lives.

Another point of disagreement is the obsession many gays have

with the male body beautiful. To me, it's overmarketed, commodified and, like the pressure on women to look a certain way, oppressive. At the extremes, it leads to steroid abuse or liposuction. I have as much of a weakness for a broad, manly chest as the next gay guy, but for me the overmuscled Barbie look fails on its own terms, namely esthetic. (It's also very high maintenance, and I for one am more likely to walk on water than achieve it.)

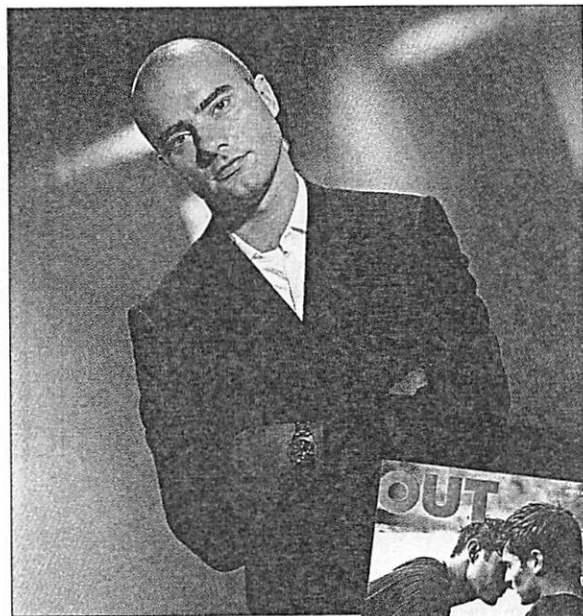
The anger that I provoked with my remarks that night goes back far beyond anything I said. In our community, anger has been a useful muscle, against homophobia and discrimination, and back in that terrible time when gay men were dying of AIDS in droves and governments stood by and did nothing, or next to nothing. At that time anger really was the only legitimate response, other than grief, and anyone who wasn't feeling precisely the same emotion was, in a real sense, the enemy.

But anger no longer has the power to unite us. Much has been achieved in the short time since the gay-rights movement leapt out of the closet—and onto the streets—in the Stonewall Riots of 1969. The movement survived the conservative backlash of the '80s, organized itself to fight the AIDS epidemic and won numerous battles for equality and acceptance. In the aftermath many gay people—because of their economic position, where they work or where they live—feel they can live their lives freely and openly. Many others cannot, and there is also a new generation of young gay people emerging who have grown up in a different climate, at a different stage of the health crisis.

These disparate groups are unlikely to be united by the orthodox tactics of angry veterans from earlier battles.

Post-gay doesn't mean "The struggle's over, so let's shop!" The struggle isn't over, and neither is the health crisis. But there's a pressure to conform within gay-activist politics, one that ultimately weakens its fighting strength by excluding the many gay people who no longer see their lives solely in terms of struggle.

It is hard to dedicate oneself to a mixed, gay-friendly society while some outside our community still hate us. But if that is our goal, we need to try to keep it alive and not respond with a kind of fundamentalism of our own. And it seems to me that if South Africa's ANC, whose members were being imprisoned, exiled, tortured and assassinated, had the heart to debate just what kind of future they were fighting for—including a commitment to gay rights—then gay people here and across the world can do the same.



By and for Gay People
For the editor of OUT, being 'post-gay' means being allowed to criticize gay culture

