

## The fountain of youth



THE TORTURE OF OUR YOUNG CONTINUES: 25% of young gay men and lesbians who come out to their parents are kicked out of their homes, often becoming "throwaway" street kids like the thousands who struggle to survive in cities such as Los Angeles. After Amendment 2 passed in Colorado, the high school dropout rate in that state for lesbian and gay

youth doubled. Of some 50,000 young people forcibly locked up in mental institutions every year, at least 20% are gay or lesbian. Faced with statistics such as these, why do gay and lesbian leaders so often shrink from addressing youth issues?

Ask lesbian and gay youth themselves, and they are ready with perceptive answers. "It's so ironic," says one gay college student. "Our elders are terrified of the youth issue because they're always being labeled pedophiles. And yet some politicians at Stonewall 25 were willing to make NAMBLA the issue on which they drew a line in the sand. Why not ask gay youth what we think? You can't find support for NAMBLA with us. If older activists spent half as much time listening to us as they do defending NAMBLA's rights, the movement might really move!"

NAMBLA aside, some have real internal conflicts in dealing with gay youths. Another gay student reports, "I tried to get involved in my local gay political group and ended up getting hit on after every meeting, so I gave up. Gay male culture is youth-obsessed, and youth is idealized, but we're treated like objects. Well, we're sick and tired of it."

On a broader level a lesbian youth organizer explains the failure of the movement to prioritize youth issues this way: "I think lesbian and gay adults ignore us because we remind them too much of their own painful youth."

The good news is that timid support from their seniors has not prevented lesbian and gay young people from organizing on a massive scale. In the past two years, more than 300 local lesbian and gay youth programs have sprung up, 100 in high schools. In addition, 800 college groups are linked via the NGLTF's campus project. During the march on Washington in April 1993, more than 600 young people participated in a Youth Empowerment Speakout (YES) to outline a youth agenda subsequently published by the Bridges Project of the American Friends Service Committee.

Young lesbians and gay men are fighting not only their own fight but also ours. The ROTC issue is reemerging;

the University of California, Los Angeles, now has biweekly vigils and protests—with civil disobedience being considered—challenging the ROTC for being in violation of the university's strong antidiscrimination stance. A University of Minnesota student, Gary Schiff, organized "freedom buses" this fall to take student organizers to Idaho and Oregon for six weeks of work against the radical right's antigay ballot drives in those states.

Sometimes, however, the bitter legacy of a generation of conservative politics—political despair—collides with this burgeoning youth movement. Its influence, ironically, is evident even in the "queer theory" that is currently all the rage in gay academe. As another gay college student told me: "I was an out gay high school organizer, working to change the school. When I got here, I was out to change the world. But now I've learned you can't change the whole system; you can only resist it in your own personal way." Where did he get this idea? From a queer-theory course at college. The underlying message of this ideology is that because our homophobic culture is hope-

lessly dominant, or hegemonic, power resides not in collective political action but only in personal rebellion. And that is a relentlessly conservative message, no matter how many tattoos, cross-dressings, or militantly queer slogans accompany it.

Lesbian and gay youth need all the optimism and empowerment we can give them. In turn, they offer us an extraordinary opportunity. Most social-change movements, if they even last longer than

a decade, have failed miserably to extend hands across the generational divide: Young women too often disdain the word *feminist*. In the '60s we didn't trust anyone over 30. The NAACP is struggling to develop strategies to reach the young. But the established gay and lesbian movement—despite AIDS, despite Helms, despite despair, despite all our isms and schisms—can link arms with this exciting youth movement.

It could be a healing force for us all. At a conference of the San Antonio Lesbian and Gay Assembly in October, an eloquent plea came from a young Latina lesbian: "I'm 26. I'm your daughter. Please get over your differences so you can teach me together!" Our youth are clear: They want us to include them, to mentor them—and to listen to and learn from them. They want leadership training, youth slots on every board of directors, jobs wherever possible. They want the national groups to incorporate their agenda. As lesbian youth advocate Jenie Hall, head of the Bridges Project and editor of the YES report, says: "When the lesbian and gay movement fully embraces youth issues, it will signal the world it has grown up."

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# The erosion of heterosexuality

By Charles W. Socarides

A significant portion of society today is of the belief that homosexuality is a normal form of sexual behavior different from, but equal to, that of heterosexuality. Many religious leaders, public officials, educators, social and mental health agencies, including those at the highest level of government, departments of psychiatry, psychology, and mental health clinics have been taken in by a widespread sexual egalitarianism and by accusations of being undemocratic or prejudiced if they do not accept certain assertions thrust upon them — as if deprived of all intellectual capacity to judge and reason.

This revolutionary change in our sexual mores and customs has been ushered in by a single act of considerable consequence: The removal of homosexuality from the category of aberrancy by the American Psychiatric Association in 1973. It is furthermore a fateful consequence of our disregard for established psychoanalytic knowledge of human sexual behavior. (See "Sexual Politics and Scientific Logic: The Issue of Homosexuality," the Journal of Psychohistory, Volume 10, No. 3, Winter, 1992, New York and London. In those pages I present a detailed account of the social and political forces both within and without our organization responsible for this act, and critically examine the spurious and pseudoscientific reasons put forth for the removal of a diagnosis from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual.)

This act was naively perceived by many psychiatrists as the "simple" elimination of a scientific diagnosis in order to correct injustices. In reality, it created injustices for the homosexual and his family, as it belied the truth and prevented the homosexual from seeking and receiving help. At the social, group, and community level, it proved to be the opening phase of a two-phase sexual radicalization: The second phase being the raising of homosexuality to the level of an alternative lifestyle — an acceptable psychosexual institution — alongside heterosexuality as a prevailing norm of behavior. The motive force for this movement was the wish to protect the homosexual against injustices and persecution which could. For all intents

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and purposes, this could have been legitimately effected by the demand for equal rights for the homosexual, a demand arising from humanitarian motivations so deeply embedded in our humanistic science. Instead, the false step of removing homosexuality from our manual was substituted. This amounted to a full approval of homosexuality and an encourage-

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ment to aberrancy by those who should have known better, both in the scientific sense and in the sense of the social consequences of such removal. To many American psychiatrists, this action remains a chilling reminder that if scientific principles are not fought for they can be lost — a disillusioning warning that unless we make no exceptions to science, we are subject to the snares of political factionalism and the propagation of untruths to an unsuspecting and uninformed public, to the rest of the medical profession, and to the behavioral sciences.

The devastating clinical fallout from this decision was to follow. Those who would wish to retain homosexuality as a valid diagnosis have been essentially silenced in lectures, meetings and publications, a silencing that originates both within our association and from other sources. Political parties and religious leaders have been utilized to reinforce this silence. The press has been influenced as well as the electronic media; television and movies promote homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle, and censor movies that might show homosexuality as a disorder. Homosexual sex education has entered our schools and colleges; and pro-gay activists — homosexual or otherwise — portray their way of life as normal and as "American as apple pie" and intimidate others with different views. In

essence, this movement has accomplished what every other society, with rare exceptions, would have trembled to tamper with: a revision of the basic code and concept of life and biology, that men and women normally mate with those of the opposite sex and not with each other.

This psychiatric nonsense and social recklessness bring with it many individual tragedies, as men and women who no longer care for their appropriate sexual roles create confusion in the very young for generations to come. Gender-identity disturbance is bound to increase and more true homosexual deviations result as parents distort the maleness or femaleness of their infants and children.

Homosexuals who are in therapy have developed tremendous resistance, which retards their progress, while others are dissuaded from seeking appropriate help. Other medical specialists, such as pediatricians and internists, are baffled by psychiatry's folly. Residents in psychiatry have very little interest in going into an area of psychiatric research where they will be attacked, belittled, and demeaned, and their knowledge of sexual development will cease to grow. Above all, however, it is the individual homosexual wishing to change who suffers the most.

Young men and women with relatively minor sexual fears are led with equanimity by some psychiatrists and nonmedical counselors into a self-despising pattern and lifestyle. Adolescents, nearly all of whom experience some degree of uncertainty as to sexual identity, are discouraged from assuming that one form of gender identity is preferable to another. Those persons who already have a homosexual problem are discouraged from finding their way out of self-destructive fantasy — discouraged from learning to accept themselves as male or female, discouraged from all those often painful but necessary courses that allow us to function as reasonable and participating individuals in a cooperating society.

After all, homosexuality cannot make a society or keep one going for very long. It operates against the cohesive elements of society. It drives the sexes in opposite directions, and no society can long endure when either the child is neglected or the sexes war with each other. Those who reinforce the disintegrating elements in our society will get no thanks from future generations.

Forces whose spokesmen adamantly insist that homosexuality is an alternative lifestyle have not been stopped by appeals to tradition, enlightened self-interest, or

nature, man and society. Some of the individuals say that homosexuals are healthy, society is sick, and that science should cure society. Others raise false or outdated scientific issues in their war with traditional values.

Many of our values can change, but polemical pseudo-science and genetics without corroboration is not the way. No society has accepted preferential homosexuality. Nowhere is homosexuality, or so-called "bisexuality," a desired end in itself. Nowhere do parents say, "It's all the same to me if my child is heterosexual or homosexual." Nowhere are homosexuals more than a small minority at the present time. Nowhere does homosexuality per se place one in an enviable position.

Some pro-homosexual proponents within the behavioral sciences state that mental illness is simply a product of social definition, and that sexual behavior considered normal in one society may be deviant in another. Examination of the facts shows that this is not true of all illness and all behaviors. Some behaviors are universally deviant and every society thinks them destructive. Incest, rape, psychopathic (apparently unmotivated) violence are considered taboo in all societies. So is predominant or exclusive homosexuality or even bisexuality. While homosexuals can and should be protected by all the laws of society, homosexuality should not be encouraged.

The forces allied against heterosexuality are formidable and unrelenting. Charges of being "undemocratic," "cruel and inhuman," or "irresponsible, homophobic and prejudiced," are leveled at those who would question the normality of homosexuality. These accusations are then reinforced by the media and motion pictures, and

render the ordinary citizen, who disapproves of such practices (as well as faint-hearted members of the psychiatric and psychological professions) mute before their onslaught.

The counter for such forces is the knowledge that heterosexuality has self-evident adaptive value: Decades and even centuries of cultural change are not likely to undo thousands of years of evolutionary selection and programming. Man is not only a sexual animal, but a care-bonding, group-bonding, and child-rearing animal. The male-female design is taught to the child from birth and culturally ingrained through the marital order. This design is anatomically determined as it derives from cells which, in the evolutionary scale, underwent changes into organ systems and finally into individuals reciprocally adapted to each other. The male-female design is thus perpetually maintained and only overwhelming fear or man's false pride and misdirected individual enterprise can disturb or divert it.

All of this is enough "to make the angels weep." I borrow the phrase from one of William Shakespeare's bitter comedies, "Measure for Measure." One of my patients brought the quote to my attention some time ago, as he himself mused about his condition. (He is a homosexual and a distinguished scholar, but he is learning about the dynamic forces behind his homosexuality and learning to gain control of them.) Here's the entire quote:

*But man, proud man  
Dress'd in a little brief authority,  
Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd,  
His glassy essence like an angry ape  
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven  
As makes the angels weep.*

WEEKENDS START IN  
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