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Gay Liberation: Out of the closets . . .



By GLF and MADISON LESBIANS

Our gayness was once something we were ashamed of. We hid our homosexuality and lived private, quiet, repressed lives, hoping that straight people would not discover our secret. We lived in ghettos all over this country. We hated ourselves. And if our homosexuality was discovered we were thrown out of our families and our hometowns.

We fled to places like San Francisco, New York City, and even Madison. And in a lot of ways we have formed ghettos out of self-protection. We have tried to block out the straight oppressive world. We have tried to forget that we are most hated group in America. But our ghetto rather than being a free territory, became a cage that belonged to the straight world. Straight cops patrol us, straight legislators govern us, straight employers keep us in line, straight money exploits us.

We have pretended everything is OK, because we haven't been able to see how to change it—we've been afraid.

Over the past two years there has been an awakening of gay liberation ideas and energy, in the country and also in Madison. How it began we don't know, but when it did we discovered that we were capable of building a beautiful, strong community of proud gays. We came out of the dingy, dark bars and began to see ourselves as people, as sisters and brothers.

More important we discovered that together we could begin to change Amerika, we could begin to change our own lives, to stop pretending we were inspired by black people and their struggle for liberation. We learned how to stop pretending from the youth movement in Amerika. We have learned and are still learning how to attack our own sexism and how to relate to women both gay and straight in a healthy and unoppressive manner. All of this in two years. Most of all we are revolted by the quality of our ghetto life.

Where once there was frustration, alienation and cynicism, there are new characteristics. We are full of

love for each other and are showing it; we are full of anger at what has been done to us and to all our gay sisters and brothers. And as we recall all the self-censorship and repression for so many years, a reservoir of tears pours out of the eyes. And we are euphoric, high, with the strong flourish of a movement.

We want to make ourselves clear: our first job is to free ourselves; no one else is going to do it for us; that means clearing our heads of the garbage that's been poured into them. That means struggling with our gay sisters and brothers. This issue is dedicated and written to gay people in Madison. Hopefully the issue is representative of our culture, our love and our politics. If straight people find it useful in understanding what liberation is about, so much the better.

There are at the present time two gay organizations in Madison; Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and Madison Lesbians. GLF was started a few years ago by a small group of gay men. It has since grown to be a very large and active organization of both men and women. Its activities encompass everything from consciousness raising, to planning social activities, to planning a nation-wide gay Thanksgiving conference in Madison.

The GLF Manifesto explains the aims of the group:

"WE HOLD THAT people receive their sex but learn their sexuality; that ideas of "homosexuality" and "heterosexuality" are contrivances to discredit the capacity of all persons for sensual pleasure and love in each other:

that these contrivances exist to legitimize male supremacy, competition and the regarding of persons as property;

that the exploitative pre-condition of sexism has necessitated the defamation and suppression of love between members of the same sex;

that this defamation and suppression has impoverished all people emotionally, aided all forms

of domination, and created frenzy and self-hatred among persons attracted to members of the same sex;

We pledge ourselves accordingly, to the destruction of sexist categories and their social forms, and their replacement by a pansexual social sensibility.

We summon gay brothers and sisters to leave their closets, recognize their complicity in their own oppression, and join others who seek to build compassion in an often ghettoized and cannibalistic subculture.

We declare our allegiance to liberation movements of all persons victimized by sexism, racism and all other direct or indirect forms of exploitation and domination of one person by another. We condemn as counterrevolutionary any movement for change which ignores the oppression of gay men and women or fosters sexist consciousness among its own members."

Madison Lesbians was born last spring out of Madison GLF. Gay women could not get themselves together in a male-dominated large organization. The women slowly and painfully realized that most gay men had not even begun to deal with their sexism and anti-woman feelings. Gay men refused to give up their male-privilege. So the gay women's group began. Reprinted below is a statement by that group.

"Gay women in Madison have been alone and alienated for too long. A group of lesbians are working to end this alienation. We have put posters up announcing our meetings. They are constantly torn down, but nevertheless women are getting together to talk. For many of the women this is their first affiliation with the gay movement. They came to discuss without fear or condemnation the situation in which the gay woman finds herself in today's society.

"The difficulties of the gay individual are obvious. Laws against homosexuality exist in 48 states. But

more severe and more difficult to overcome is the social oppression, the negative feelings created by this hostile environment: Fear of rejection by peers, job discrimination, and the inhibition of human expression. The result of this social oppression is self-oppression in the form of self-denial, self-hatred, guilt and the fear of failure. We feel that this oppression must be eliminated.

"We realize as women and as gays that we have two battles to fight. Black lesbians are the most oppressed and must fight for liberation on three levels. We have been put down and discriminated against as women in this sexist society. We have to wage a constant battle for freedom of expression as lesbians. Our black sisters must deal with racism and sexism. We see ourselves as part of the women's movement; as a very important part and as feminists. We support the goals of the larger GLF organization.

"We are working to create a truly human society where people are not looked upon as sex objects; where terms such as homosexuality and heterosexuality do not exist. We look forward to the time when people do not place labels and limitations on who they love. Love must flow freely between people. And no one has any right to say who we should or should not love.

"We have taken on the label lesbian because of its social stigma, because we are not afraid of what we are. We see lesbianism, women loving women as a very beautiful and healthy thing. We have taken a word and turned it inside out and we say that "gay is good" and that homosexuality is natural and far-out. Among ourselves we are people, among our friends we are people, but to this society that oppresses us, to this straight world, we are lesbians and proud of it."

Editors for this issue are the sisters and brothers of Madison gay liberation. Photography by Barbara Wechsler and Eric Johnson.

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Coming Out

By JUDY GREENSPAN

I'm gay. I say that now without fear or hatred of myself and my sexuality. I say it with joy and with a tremendous love for all of my gay sisters. But it took me four very long years to accept myself. For four years I kept my gayness inside and tried to play it straight.

From as far back as I can remember, going back to fifth grade, I always had crushes on women teachers. It wasn't until my sophomore year in high school that I began to understand where my feelings for women were coming from. I developed at that time a very close friendship with my journalism teacher. It was a very intense emotional relationship. I found it hard to distinguish friendship from love. I found myself after awhile very much in love with her, emotionally and physically. I was terrified of my physical attraction for her. I suppressed it and tried to put it out of my mind. I just couldn't handle it. I never discussed it with her, constantly fearing rejection and telling myself that those physical feelings were sick.

THAT YEAR I became very aware of my strong attractions and feelings for other women friends. I felt so guilty about them, the fact that I wanted to touch and caress

women I loved. I was very self-conscious when I was with these friends, especially when I was with this teacher.

I kept telling myself that my lesbian feelings were only a passing phase (Freud did wonders for my head in his straight way). I kept hoping. I was going to a shrink at the time and refused to talk about these feelings. I was afraid of admitting to myself that I was gay.

The next year I decided to play straight. No more close friends who were women. I went with this guy who really meant very little to me. It was all a front. Late in my junior year, I became friendly with a woman who was bisexual. I was very much attracted to her. But I soon ended our relationship, feeling too uptight to express myself physically.

PLAYING STRAIGHT didn't work. I couldn't shut off my natural feelings for women. I quit trying. I began to slowly and painfully accept myself. I started reading about gay liberation in New York. Slowly some of my guilt feelings about being a lesbian began to leave me. I still couldn't talk about it. I was still alone and to myself "freakish."



Reading about gay pride and the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) of New York eased some of my loneliness. I became more confident about my friendships with women. They were not as uptight. I fell in love with a close friend at this time and our relationship was very strong and equal. I didn't suppress my love for her but I did suppress my gayness.

When I came to Wisconsin, I was still in the closet. I still hadn't fully accepted my lesbianism, my love for women. I was still in hiding. I became involved in women's liberation which slowly strengthened my confidence in myself. I dug going to meetings and talking with my sisters. I felt that these women were really trying to break down the barriers and get close to each other.

I soon began to realize how super uptight my sisters in women's liberation were about homosexuality and lesbianism. Everyone supported gay liberation in their heads but were too scared to see it as something directly affecting their own lives.

My sisters could talk for hours about abolishing the nuclear family and sex roles but at women's dances they were afraid to

touch or dance close to one another. I began to get impatient. I had to meet some gay sisters and get together with them. They, like me, had been in hiding. I couldn't find any lesbians in women's liberation.

THE WOMEN'S struggle in a lot of ways helped me to come out, to accept and love my own gay feelings. It gave me the strength to attend my first GLF meeting this past March. Gay liberation has in turn given me the support and courage to love women.

I went through four years of repressing and hating myself, fantasizing passively my love for my friends. Four years ago I was alone. I came out into a new but growing far-out gay community. I live and struggle with a group of beautiful women. We are all trying to deal with our own sexuality. My gay sisters have done the most to pull my head together. And the gay women's group gives me the support to be myself.

Now I have the strength to walk down the street holding a woman's hand, to speak on gay liberation panels and to just live my life as a gay woman. Finally, gay sisterhood is blooming all over Madison and all throughout the country. And our lives will never be the same.

Homosexuality and the Law

By JIM YEADON

Contrary to popular belief, it is not against the law in this state to be a homosexual. It is, however, against the law to do anything about it—such as having sex.

Section 944.17 of the Wisconsin Statutes—entitled Sexual Perversion—states: "Whoever does either of the following may be fined not more than \$500 or imprisoned not more than five years, or both: 1.) Commits an abnormal act of sexual gratification involving the sex organ of one person and the mouth or anus of another; or 2.) Commits an act of sexual gratification involving his sex organ and the sex organ, mouth or anus of an animal."

THE ABSURDITY of this law is on several levels—the most obvious being that the government should not have the right to interfere with private affairs of consenting people. Secondly, it is impossible to enforce the law without a closed-circuit television in every bedroom. Sexual relations in public falls under #944.20 (Lewd and Lascivious Behavior).

Opinions on what is "perverted" or "abnormal" are widely varied. There are more people who get "sexual gratification" from the mouth or anus of another person than there are both gay and straight people in all of Wisconsin, and Minnesota, and Michigan, and

a few more states besides.

Yet, though the law exists, few gay people in this city are ever bothered by the police department, which generally leaves Madison's illustrious gay bar alone.

THE STATE OF Texas has a "sodomy law" very similar to Wisconsin's which was recently tested by a straight couple who took it to the State Supreme Court. They asserted that a husband and wife should have the right to do whatever they wanted together. As a result of this case, part of the law was struck down as unconstitutional.

As for other states, a model penal code adopted by Illinois in 1962 made private affairs by consent adults (over 18) legal, making homosexual acts legal too. But police still use Lewd and Lascivious conduct (2W) to intimidate gays and other "social

perverts."

In Idaho, homosexuality will no longer be an "infamous (and ambiguous) crime against nature" after Jan. 1, 1972, and "deviate sexual intercourse" will be legal if both parties are over 16, but asking for it is a misdemeanor with a 30 day penalty. Still, that's an improvement over Idaho's old law which carried a minimum penalty of five years. A man in the mid-50's received life imprisonment.

IN OREGON after Jan. 1 homosexuality will be legal if both parties are over 18 years old. But "public indecency," "sexual misconduct" or "accosting for deviate purposes" is subject to arrest and 30 days in jail.

Colorado has adopted a new law setting the age of consent at 16. But generally, no crime exists if both parties in a consensual sexual

act are under 16 or if one is under 16 and the other no more than two years older. "Loitering in a public place for the purpose of soliciting deviate sexual intercourse" still carries a penalty of up to \$500 or six months in jail.

The other states have not as yet liberalized their laws, but internationally, the laws aren't quite so stringent. Consensual adult homosexual acts are legal in France (since 1810), Italy (1810), Belgium (1867), Holland (1886), Denmark (1933), Switzerland (1937), Sweden (1944), Czechoslovakia (1962), not to mention Great Britain, West Germany, Canada, Finland, and many other places. But gays should avoid the Soviet Union, People's Republic of China, Cuba and the Union of South Africa.

If you can't dance, get off the floor

By DAVE BRYANT

DANCING THE GAY LIB BLUES:
A YEAR IN THE HOMOSEXUAL LIBERATION MOVEMENT
by Arthur Bell. Simon and Schuster, \$5.95

Arthur Bell's *Dancing the Gay Lib Blues* is a personal account of the author's experience as an active member of New York City's Gay Activist Alliance through 1970. Bell's account focuses on the main activities of the GAA—acrimonious internal politics and "militant" confrontations with various public officials of New York City. Interspersed among these is the failure of Bell's relationship with one of GAA's heavies, Paul. Arthur and Paul's relationship was built on the premise that "politics and sex produce electricity." But GAA's politics and Paul and Arthur's sex life end in a major power failure during an ego-tripping campaign for the presidency of GAA. Paul loses, Arthur joins a commune, and GAA plows along, burnt out.

The book ends on this sour note, and one puts it down with a similar sense of disappointment. Bell has done little towards making it clear to the reader what it is like to be a homosexual in Amerika, except that one experiences some vague form of oppression that people demonstrate about in the street. But he does give the reader a sense of why his year in the GAA was such a blues-creating experience. The picture he presents of the GAA is a group that has failed on two accounts. Its unsuccessful reformist politics and its lonely and fragmented separation from other oppressed people come across as the bluest parts of GAA.

GAA was naive enough to spend its energies for gay liberation by working within the system. Councilperson Carol Greitzer's response to a GAA demand that she support a bill prohibiting job discrimination against gays is the best statement why GAA's efforts failed: "There is no way of getting this through the democratic process—not even with bombs."

While the validity of the last part of her statement might be up for grabs, she is certainly correct on the first part. Much of the GAA's blues come from constant frustration with its publicity gaining "zaps" of Mayor Lindsay, Arthur Goldberg, the NY Republican Committee, Dick Cavett, and other NY liberals. All of these zaps are ego-boosters for GAA activists, but they bring little substantive change for homosexuals in New York.

Meanwhile, the GAA prides itself for not being radical like the New York Gay Liberation Front, who have realized that Amerika is so far gone that working within the system can only lead to frustration, fragmentation, and the dissipation of energy.

But there is a greater problem for the GAA beyond their reformist politics. GAA was formed in reaction to radical gay groups, and consequently divorced itself from all "political" issues except those that directly deal with homosexual oppression. In a political system in which radicals as well as liberals have systematically avoided the issue of gay oppression, such a reaction in a gay activist organization is understandable. But it is not right, nor does it lead to success and happiness.

Again, Councilperson Greitzer has an unwittingly perceptive comment, in her response to GAA's demands for her support of homosexual rights: "I'm sorry, I really don't have your problem." So much for Carol Greitzer and her myopic kind. And so much for the GAA, who don't feel that they have the "problem" of the Vietnamese peasant, the working class white, the ghetto black or brown, the dispossessed red people, or their sister victims of sexism.

Because the GAA can't see beyond the pigs in Greenwich Village to the pigs across Amerika and the world, they end up part of the despair of Amerika's radical groups—in dissolution, and alienation from others and themselves.

Homosexual oppression is the last issue that any radical group has become committed to, though few have. The example of YSA's national policy of excluding gays from membership until last year, when gay became radical chic—token fags and dykes and all that—is not peculiar to them, but representative of most straight movement groups.

But sexism among straight politicos is no reason for gay people to neglect their oppressed brothers and sisters. We gays can get all the legal reform in the world, all the Greitzers, Lindsays, and Goldberg's on our side, but until all people are free, our freedom can only be a sham and illusion. We are the objects of oppressive social forms and ideologies, but we are not the sole victims.

GAA is frustrated, like many other groups, because its activities are not part of the struggle of all people for liberation. Their effectiveness is only marginal, and their activities frighteningly lonely.

It is this sense of alienation of GAA from other liberation groups and, on a more personal scale, from their own brothers and sisters, that comes through the strongest in Bell's zappy account of a year with GAA. And this very untogetherness is the cause of the gay lib blues. It is very blue to read about the candidates for the presidency of the GAA catering to the support of the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, whom they had earlier rejected and been embarrassed by. So much for the liberating effects of the GAA, not only on New York, but on its own members.

"Say it loud, say it loud, gay is good and gay is proud!" shout the GAA. But neither they nor Arthur Bell ever bothered to discover what those words meant, and one is left with an image of a sexist, egotistical, alienated group fighting sexism in New York's tv studios.

It could be a big deal. But it isn't. If you can't dance, get off the floor.

black and gay—

can be pretty rough going for awhile. Eventually you don't have to accept it but it's for damn sure to accept it." At first it's probably all a matter of self enough so that you can believe in yourself. Naturalizing; you actually do believe there's out it. So it's not so much a matter of adjusting to fitting to your own outlook of yourself.

hat speal problems do you face or did you face in the black community?

to face most was being a gay black woman when I felt the black woman was the image of her now I did then have love for my race, I felt owing I was gay.

ole also me wonder if I was doing the right thing whether should be sitting in the corner having black wid or whether I should just let myself to do most to help my people.

to go within myself. The problems that I am trying to be accepted by my friends; it's a lesbian's dirty, undesirable men-haters. So I most of my feelings to myself so as not to have in the community and to keep what few friends I

image the black woman had in the sixties was rarer, gr and beauty and anyone who didn't fit in was not accepted.

black person what do you see as your role in the of black people?

am bladist, a woman second, and being gay I'm mentioned at all. I see my contribution to the termini of my comradeship to other black and my will always be defined by the various perform.

ing a wan, for in a revolutionary struggle all any wad as best they can and sex has no

ations.

and fight within the struggle, I cannot say that I keep myself "in the closet." But I do understand

that for myself, sexual preference in such a struggle, is so insignificant that I won't allow it to cause any major antagonism among my comrades until it becomes a major setback in progress.

MM: I suppose I pretty much agree with everything Beverly has been saying. Except that although I too might define myself as being black first, I don't believe that my sexual preference is all that insignificant either. I want to make the black community be aware that although I am black and do have certain contributions to be made to the struggle, I am still gay and being gay is still a very important part of my life and determines in large part who I am.

Now that you realize you're gay, what do you see your relationship with black men as being?

MM: Obviously, it can't be much of a relationship, at least sexually. Outside of sex, my relationship is one of brother and sister or brother and brother, fighting mutually for the same cause. Of course it doesn't always work out that way; some men want nothing to do with you at all if you're gay, and still others feel they just have to screw you in order to feel anything even faintly resembling comradeship.

BE: I see my relationship with black men as being one of comradeship, in a solidarity of race. Because I do say that I am homosexual; it is true that I do not seek a sexual relationship with any of my brothers but this does not mean that I do not leave myself open for any type of relationship that I wish, be it male or female.

From your past experiences, what type of advice would you give to those young black people who are just beginning to have or have already realized that they are homosexual?

MM: You just have to be yourself, no matter what, no matter how hard. If you feel you can contribute to the struggle, then do it as yourself, whatever you are, might be like.

BE: Because I see so many turning away from the struggle because they feel oppressed by their own people, I would say try not to define yourself primarily by your sexual preference but rather by what you can do for the struggle.

And I would say to gay black women specifically, that even though society has put a triple stereotype upon us it only means that fighting in the struggle will come to us much easier when the shit hits the fan.

And as Fanon said, "The last shall be the first and the first shall be the last."

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you're expanding circle swallows me.

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grip me
in your circleframe.
the stretching length of your youth

—loose—

again, life-forceful fusion through
my expanding cavity.

Donna

Changing lifestyles in the gay world

By ISABEL MILLER

Traditionally, homosexual relationships have not differed greatly from heterosexual ones except that these relationships are of people of the same sex. Homosexuals have dated, some have assumed different sex roles (one the masculine, one the feminine) and some even go as far as getting married. Those homosexuals who can't find a willing partner live happily ever after in their homes as couples. Gays have even adopted children.

The past role-playing of masculine and feminine is an excellent mirror of the straight-heterosexual world. There is now all over the country a new generation of gays, of homosexuals, of lesbians who are rejecting this straight-gay lifestyle. A new generation that is rejecting role-playing, the nuclear family and all of the sick games that we've learned from the hetero-world.

As gay people we must examine these new life-styles and begin to live the world we're trying to build. Gayness must come to mean more than who we sleep with. Our relationships rather than mimicking straight couples must blossom with a form of healthy communal gayness.

The women's movement more than any other movement has awakened us to new ideas about the family, a collective living

situation. Women who have been oppressed living in one-to-one possessive ownership relationships have begun experimenting with living collectives. Women living in groups, receiving support, strength and love from their equals, their sisters. A collective situation does not negate one-to-one relationships—it does negate exclusive, dependent relationships, where two people totally build their world around each other.

We must stop using such phrases as "my girlfriend, my boyfriend" (yes, gays do use these expressions). We have to right to own anyone. A collective replaces possession with sharing. People begin to think of each other as sisters or as brothers.

It is difficult to relate to four or five people rather than just one. It is difficult for us to get over our dreams of finding someone to love and settle down with forever (we've been conditioned by straight children's stories and romantic novels). However, it is our past and present way of relating in couples that has kept us divided, that has kept us from seeing ourselves as a loving community. Let the straight world keep its marriages, we must find new ways, unoppressive ways to relate. Our lives must be collective not private.

Role-playing is almost as rampant in gay

life as in straight. Why not, we learned it well from this hetero-world. Woman taking on the masculine role, men the feminine one. The dominant and the passive. The oppressor and the oppressed.

I know that many gay brothers and sisters are still into assuming roles. I can't put that down. Ten years ago we did not know of any other ways of relating to each other. Today we who have escaped that socialization process, we who see gay as a liberation movement must be ourselves. Our sisters straight and gay are being oppressed daily by the male role. Gay men have felt the wrath of the uptight muscle-bound macho straight male. Our sisters have been enslaved by the passive feminine role. We must end this kind of masculinity and femininity.

We are beautiful as our game-free selves. This society does not recognize role-free relationships. Government has been our enemy since we were born. Why should we conform to straight standards. If we must take on any role let us turn it inside out. We must throw it up to the world so people see how ridiculous they act and look. But among gay people we can relate humanly (we must) without games and with tremendous love.

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I care for my friend very very much because I love him.

Robbie

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