

Dear Vivian,

I have a small history of misfortune in the printing of my articles in *Self & Society* so I am pleased that my recent one on *Drama Therapy* has come out all right. There are still one or two errors due, I expect, to my writing being hard to read. I'd like to draw people's attention to one mistake, however, which destroys the sense of what I intended. In the second paragraph on page seven it should read 'I do not claim that this is a different aim from Moreno's. However, his adherence to a cultural conserve, the theatre setting with its differentiation of stage and auditorium, actors and observers, seem, to me at least, a paradox'. As printed the sentence doesn't make sense. What I'm trying to do is point out that Moreno is here going against his own ideal of getting at creativity and spontaneity by escaping from cultural conserves.

Love,

Nick Owen

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David Porter

## Gay Self-Oppression

Whilst gay people and members of other minority groups may be only too aware of external oppression, particularly from the mass media, the law, psychiatry and the Church, they sometimes fail to recognise how certain aspects of their oppression may be incorporated into their own personalities, leading to self-inflicted oppression. Such forms of self-oppression appear to be best investigated in a group setting, such as an awareness group or an encounter group, although I prefer the term problem-solving group because of its emphasis upon direct action and rational discussion. Such groups have already achieved widespread adoption in the States, particularly in the Women's, Black and Gay Liberation Fronts. The demystification of oppression coupled with healthy, joy-giving messages allow struggling minorities to become 'O.K.' These may also provide them with a realistic path to personal liberation. Claude Steiner, in his book *'Games Alcoholics Play'*, describing the Black Panthers, says 'these movements are of great value in that they clearly offer an alternative to the usual self-defeating scripts which are commonly seen among black people; the basic message given to a black youth by such a movement is 'you are O.K., not in spite of being black but because of it; you are a prince and deserve princely treatment; black is beautiful; your hair is beautiful; you are beautiful; you can have anything you want; you are O.K.:' this statement offered at the time of decision is a powerful antithesis against the adoption of a self-destructive script such as heroin addiction or alcoholism'.

A similar and exciting process is taking place in the Gay Movement where group discussion and pro-gay literature demystify questionable 'facts' concerning homosexuality and re-inforce the message 'glad to be gay'. However, I have yet to come across a theory of gay liberation that is part of a gay group's statement of policy; indeed, it appears that the leadership has an unspoken ability to set the goals (or limitations) of the group. Hence one finds that some groups are very active on the campaigning front, whereas others merely organise a series of parties. Also, when the leadership publicise their telephone numbers, they may find that they are expected to answer enquiries about local gay hotels, beaches, sauna baths and other places or events which, in my opinion, have nothing whatsoever to do with campaigning for homo-sexual equality or achieving gay liberation.

What, then, do we mean by gay liberation? Such organisations as the *Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE)* may advocate law reform but may lack a basic philosophy of life, and may be largely ineffective concerning, for example, alternatives to the nuclear family, that basic unit of socialisation that oppresses and excludes gays; indeed, most gays appear to prefer to be integrated unnoticeably into that oppressive situation. This is no more clearly seen than at Christmas Time, when gays must face the stress of whether or not they are going to be honest about their sexuality. What could be a time when gays get together to combat familialism and to share companionship with one another is in fact a time when many experience all the symptoms of alienation and of feeling 'out of step' with society. Just ask all your gay friends what each will be doing on Xmas Day!

An area which is as yet to be investigated is how one gay oppresses another, or 'inter-oppression' as I call it. Within the gay world there is, I believe, considerable pressure to conform. Although I recognise that I run the risk of being labelled 'paranoid', 'over-sensitive', or 'trying to create splits in the gay movement', I must state that I think that there are mysterious and powerful forces which cause us to oppress ourselves and each other. These cause some of us to be our own worst enemies instead of our loving best friends. This internalised oppression, or 'pig parent' as the radical therapists call it (since it is the parent ego state that constantly 'pigs' us and puts us down), re-inforces our oppression and makes us feel sick, sinful or shameful - 'The Accursed Race' as the American psychoanalyst Robert Seidenberg calls us. Gender-roles indoctrinated into us from birth do much the same job, so that by the time a gay person is twenty she or he is already adapted to the status quo, often without awareness.

Thus, there are some who think that gay liberation means going to as many as possible of the pubs and clubs advertised in *'Gay News'* and similar publications. There are others who think it means adopting a hysterical and adolescent life-style or 'counterscript' flitting from one social event to another, which is alright until one runs out of money and stamina. There are still others who think it means identifying with our oppressors and becoming as 'ordinary' as possible, whilst at the same time putting-down effeminate gays and other 'noticeable' minorities.

Some gays try to adopt the way of life of an upper-class man-about-town. When, several years ago, I first became involved in the London gay scene, being something of

a country-bumpkin, I found the apparent life-style quite alienating. The obsession with parties, theatre-outings and so forth seemed an incredible waste of money and the relationships generated by such activities seemed alarmingly transitory and unsatisfying! Indeed, I still fail to see the connection between the gay scene, i.e. pubs and clubs, and the gay movement, i.e. campaigning and bedfriending activities. After all, when one thinks of the Women's Liberation Movement, one does not immediately think of bingo halls, hairdressing salons, the Ideal Home Exhibition and other venues or events which mesmerise women and keep them in their place.

'*Gay News*', which presents us with news of both the gay scene and the gay movement, depends on the commercial market for its continued existence. As noted in the '*Gay Left*', no.1, 'the result is that while championing 'gay rights', it nevertheless fails to challenge sexist stereotypes in its advertising and personal contact ads. These seemingly contradictory aspects of '*Gay News*' have the effect of co-opting a rising gay consciousness into capitalist values and structures'. When, a year ago, I wrote a letter suggesting that the most challenging thing a gay person could do, in terms of his own autonomy, was to lead a gay life-style without spending any money, my letter was twice refused by '*Gay News*' and only eventually was published in an abbreviated form in the '*CHE Bulletin*'. Also, by that time I had altered the phrase 'without spending any money' to 'with a minimum amount of expense'.

Whether or not we regard the activities of the commercial market as being milestones in gay liberation we must, as activists, look at other aspects of our situation. There is, in my experience, a common belief that we are not supposed to think about and talk about our oppression. Those who do are supposed to be bad, selfish and exploitative. In his book, '*Games Alcoholics Play*', Steiner describes the 'alkie hex' in which alcoholics believe that talking about something will have a negative effect upon it. There are many gays who fight shy of rational discussion and who prefer to have 'lots and lots of fun'. Not surprisingly, when some years ago I established Southampton CHE Group, some of the local gays referred to us as gay intellectuals and even snobs! They could not see the value of a discussion group. I was once told that the fifty or so gay women that I saw at a mixed gay club were quite happy with their lot in life and that they liked only to meet for a 'gin and chin'. I must admit I envied those women in their simplicity, but I wondered what they all did in the daytime.

Certain injunctions castrate people and render them powerless to deal with their oppression. The injunction 'don't think', for example keeps gays, like alcoholics, impotent and harmless. Another injunction, 'don't co-operate', re-inforces the individualism to be found on the gay scene, which is exactly what our oppressors want! As gays, it may be necessary for us to 'un-learn' competitiveness and to learn how to be co-operative and how to take care of each other and protect each other instead of putting each other down. A third injunction, 'don't feel', is common in men's oppression and states that men who have feelings are cowards, sissies or queers. Men are taught from birth to hide their feelings of sensation (e.g. pain) and emotion (e.g. fear, sadness). Men are also taught not to ask for help or nurturing lest they be labelled 'weak'. At the present time there are only about thirty gay counselling services in the whole of the country, and many gay men believe that they must not talk about their problems or help others with their problems. Those who talk about themselves

are labelled 'narcissistic' or 'obsessed with themselves'; those who try to give help are labelled 'over-sentimental'. I see part of the task of the gay activist is to help to establish more and better gay counselling services; I also see his task as being to permit other gays to talk about their fears and paranoias.

For me, *CHE's Disabled Gays Campaign* embodies everything that I believe in as regards gay liberation. I believe that if we can achieve freedom from oppression for someone stuck in a wheelchair all her life, or someone permanently disfigured in a road accident, then we have achieved our aim, since these people are only too aware of the sexism, ageism, consumerism and so forth that oppresses us as gay people, divides us and ultimately causes us to expect nothing more than an essentially joyless existence.

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I am a cave.  
Inside  
I hide  
Peep out I may  
But here I stay  
Not joyful  
Not sad  
Not good and  
Not bad  
I get by . . . . just.

#### I MUST GET OUT!

I am a zombie  
Locked in a tomb!  
But this womb is a safe.

I could explore my cave.  
I could save this disappearing self.  
I delve in the dreary darkness, and . . . .

#### OVER THERE!

I am aware of a shine, a jewel-  
It is mine  
A rich and sparkling jewel  
In me  
That I could never see before.

My cave brightens with  
The glow  
I know there is more, and . . . .  
Sure enough

Here is a jewel of hope  
In me  
I never thought I had that quality  
Before  
There is more!  
A gleam of kindness  
A glow of warmth  
A ray of affection  
All that is good.  
How could it have been  
Hidden for so long?

I leave my beautiful jewels  
And creep  
Into the deep . . . .  
All is not well  
Do I enter a passage of hell?

I bravely go ahead  
Dreading  
I don't want to see!

Here lies a part of me  
That is not good.

But why should a cave  
Have only jewels?

These stones of hate, greed and anger said:  
– Instead of wiping us out  
Leave us alone  
Our stone is part of the wall  
Without us it would fall  
Without our dullness, the jewels  
Would not seem bright at all.