

David Porter

GAYS AND THE SCRIPT VACUUM

Homosexuality I define as "the capacity to become emotionally and sexually involved in a loving relationship with someone of the same sex". It is however important to add that not all such friendships are physical and that there are many different kinds which exist outside such a definition. Also, homosexuality is rarely a makeshift in the absence of the opposite sex, nor is it a fear or rejection of that sex. It is estimated that more than one in twenty is predominately homosexual and that a much higher number are bisexual. And contrary to popular belief, very few gay men are "effeminate pansies" and probably even fewer are sexually attracted to pre-pubertal boys.

In this essay I want to explore some aspects of homosexual life-styles, in particular those of older men. I do not know enough about gay women to be able to write convincingly, but I believe I have something to say about gay men as I am able to draw upon about fifteen year's experience of the gay world, spending five of those years as secretary to various different gay groups and gatherings. I now have no particular role in that world except in that I continue to subscribe to various gay organisations and have contributed a number of essays and letters in recent years to the newsletter of the Friends Homosexual Fellowship.

Indeed, it has been in that newsletter that I have raised the question of what we mean by gay maturity, my argument being that many men who are homosexual seem to have a much tougher time in developing their personalities beyond a certain stage. This situation is by no means unique to gays. It is one faced by the disabled and handicapped, especially those growing up in restricted environments such as homes and hospitals. That aspect has already been commented upon by counsellors from S.P.O.D. (Sexual Problems of the Disabled) and I would go so far as to say that the challenges faced by the two sub-groups are almost identical. It is a situation that I imagine confronts people growing up in Hollywood or Las Vegas. And it is certainly one that strikes at the heart of the middle-aged playboy, the aging pop-star or disc jockey, and the "eternal boy scout" of the post-Great War years.

Much of gay oppression is readily understandable. The individual gay runs the risk of being labelled "poof" or "queer". If he is a teacher, doctor, or nurse, he does not always enjoy security of employment. Much of his life may be lived out under a shadow, and the "twilight world" of the homosexual is no myth. His personality may suffer as a result and it appears not uncommon for such a man to have difficulties in reaching any real maturity. Nor is the gay world much help for, as will be outlined later in this article, the greater part of it is a sort of "extended adolescence" in which the individual can easily get stuck.

Gays and Maturity

In recent years - perhaps because I am now in my late thirties - I have found it most challenging to debate amongst my friends, both gay and heterosexual, what we mean by gay maturity and what is the best kind of life-style and adult male homosexual can lead. Maturity generally is of course open to question for there are many folk who think it immature to drink milk, to not have a car, to watch television, to have a faith, to be quiet, to be noisy, and so on. Unfortunately there is no court of last resort, no final answer to the question of what is and what is not mature behaviour.

One might begin with the word "gay". Unlike the words "Quaker" and "Teetotaller", both of which originated as terms of contempt and have since become respectable, and both of which have fairly well-known origins, the word "gay" remains somewhat silly and inappropriate while its etymology continues to be shrouded in mystery. One view is that it came from a French word meaning "prostitute", another is that it was an in-joke promoted by the people who made Hollywood musicals (many of which sport it to an astonishing degree!), and a third is that it originated from Gay Street in New York where apparently a significant battle took place between the local gay community and the Police around 1969. Whichever one chooses, that explanation does little for homosexual liberation and it is questionable whether the individual who continues to apply it to himself or his colleagues will ever achieve any real confidence.

A similar challenge exists with regard to a sensible term for a gay partner. I might refer to my companion as my "boyfriend" quite acceptably if he is 23, but what if he is 43 or 63? Likewise comes the problem of gay people referring to each other as "boys and girls", a common situation encountered in the gay world. In Portsmouth a gay group flourished for several years calling itself the Boys and

Girls Gay Society. (Imagine - "we're fed up with being treated as second-class citizens", said a spokesman for B.A.G.G.S!) In nearby Southampton one lesbian, the mother of two teenagers, would frequently and irritatingly refer to herself and her friends as "all girls together". She even organised a social group by that name! And in Bournemouth at a meeting attended mainly by gay men well into middle-age I heard one man jokingly remark that he felt "distracted by all these gay boys!" My reaction to such people now is to ask "and when will you all grow up?"

To add to the confusion, the gay world generally is not known for its tendencies towards maturity, an aspect which even the staunchest supporter could scarcely deny. For it is a world without any real heroes or heroines, and the emphasis that it places upon youth, beauty, and consumerism is, among heterosexuals, more appropriate to youngsters in their late teens. Certainly some gay periodicals promote a semi-alcoholic "never-never land" of self-entertainment that is unconvincing to all but the most naive newcomer to the gay scene. Rarely have they treated their readership as grown-ups and often their publications have suggested more the work of mischievous but self-conscious schoolchildren than the thinking of responsible gay activists. The notorious **Gay News** blasphemy trial, in which the bone of contention turned out to be a poem that could have been written by a giggling first-former, is but one example. And when such periodicals fill out their pages with unfunny cartoons, bad language, sarcasm, and unconstructive and sometimes cruel reports, one wonders whether the editors of "our" newspapers are capable of advancing us gays beyond a certain stage in our psychological development.

Glad To Be Gay?

It has only been within the last decade or so that gay people have been able to properly establish themselves and consequently a great many, some well into middle-age, have for the first time been able to express themselves homo-emotionally and homosexually. Some have had a lot to catch up on and that is why one sometimes encounters at gay gatherings full-grown men and women still trying to look and behave as if they were teenagers. A friend of mine once arrive at a disco wearing a denim suit. His partner greeted him with "you look as if you've come to clean the windows!" Indeed, in our larger cities it is quite easy to spot gay people on trains and buses as many wear clothes that make them look far younger than they actually are.

Coupled with this phenomenon is the fear of growing old, and one gay group secretary interviewed by **Gay News** was reported as saying "I'm typical (of gays) - paranoid about growing old!" Some gay men passing the forty mark experience feelings of panic as they realise that they are no longer youngsters, or indeed attractive to youngsters. And in recent years a whole new industry in male cosmetics has been developed, clearly aimed at gay and het men wanting to look nineteen again. Such chemicals may work for a few years, but eventually the user becomes another victim to the "law of diminishing returns".

By contrast, however, it is necessary to emphasise that the aforementioned symptoms confront only a fraction of gay people and that there are many who enjoy happy and fulfilling lives, living alone or with a partner, or maybe with a group of people or in a community such as a friary. Such people are unlikely to present themselves for "treatment" by psychiatrists, nor can they boast of much interest in the gay scene to be found in London and other large cities.

Many a homosexual male wishes only to meet a partner or series of partners, to eventually settle down and build a nest, and to live his life to the best of his ability. He is neither sick nor sinful. He is merely a fellow human being who, among the many aspects of his personality, happens to be attracted emotionally and sexually towards certain others of the same sex. Because he is largely freed of the restrictions of heterosexual monogamous marriage he often has a great deal of time and energy to devote to his interests and often turns out to be a good, quiet worker, his inclinations largely unknown to all but his closest friends. Yet even when successful in his personal relationships he may occasionally experience a lack of fulfilment. For example, he may have a strong parental instinct and wish to be with children, a desire unlikely to be satisfied unless he takes up a career involving the young. Or he and his partner may want to be recognised by their particular church as a couple, a recognition that is still rare even for long-established couples for the British church has not so far seen fit to give its blessing to such relationships.

The Script Vacuum

Transactional Analysis, a system of psychology developed in the sixties by Eric Berne, author of "Games People Play" and other books, provides a useful instrument in examining what goes on in people's lives. Transactional analysts frequently speak of "scripts", the blue-prints of a life-time which determine, usually unconsciously, how a person will live out his remaining years. Very basically, scripts are of three kinds: winning, non-winning, and losing. Winners are people who set out to do something positive and either succeed or try again. Non-

winners are people who don't exactly win but tend to say "at least" a lot of times ("At least I have a job") while losers are people who simply lose.

One transactional analyst, Dorothy Jongeward, has written extensively about women's scripts. In the **Transactional Analysis Journal** for April 1972, in an article entitled "What Do You Do When Your Script Runs Out?" she has described some of the problems of American women in mid-life. Because such women put most of their energy into becoming the good wife and mother they sometimes experience a great deal of depression and a sense of unworthiness around the age of forty, often the time when the last child has grown up and left home. Jongeward calls this the script vacuum, a hiatus or empty period in the woman's life. "When a modern woman suffers a script vacuum", she writes, "she is likely to feel lost, finished, depressed, and useless in what is actually the prime of her life; her drama is over and a new lifetime stretches before her that nobody told her about or prepared her for." Treatment therefore involves an examination of new life styles and a setting of new goals such as continued education, developing a community project, or getting a different job.

I believe that much of these comments can be applied to the predicament of the homosexual male. "No-one loves a fairy when she's forty" squeaks the aging queen, yet many a true word is spoken in jest and it would certainly seem that the fear of growing old, of losing one's youth, and of becoming lost and lonely, can plague even the most well-adjusted gay person. In my experience, many gay men who are still unattached by the age of forty manifest most of these fears and want to talk about them, over and over again. Many feel neglected by the existing gay movement which they feel to be aimed mainly at youths of university age.

The individual gay often responds to the process of aging with considerable panic. He may withdraw into a deep depression, or go out and get repeatedly drunk (an easy procedure as the vast majority of gay gatherings, including even those of the gay campaigning and gay religious organisations, are held in back-street gay bars), or he may simply attempt to reproduce in himself the life-style of a much younger man, becoming a sort of middle-aged Peter Pan.

Society leaves undefined it's image of the older homosexual. Younger versions are now more widely accepted if television programmes are anything to go by. But the older gay men are still thought of by most people as being either withdrawn depressives or screaming

queens of the type who appear in "drag" in Christmas pantomimes and who in an earlier age would have been court jesters or clowns. Perhaps society needs to be reminded of such people as Peter Peers and Benjamin Britten, or of Edward Carpenter and his companion George Merrill, all of whom were able to lead happy and constructive lives until well into old age.

I have sometimes thought that there is a theme of homosexual contentedness behind the 1939 movie "Goodbye, Mr. Chips". Although this film features a "Mrs. Chips" she is a fleeting figure who dies and is soon forgotten as the rest of the story concentrates on Mr. Chips' Christ-like devotion to several generations of schoolboys. I am not suggesting that Mr. Chips is or should be gay, but I think that the type of character he presents is one worth pursuing by individual gays, namely that of the responsible man who is, in his own way, able to love and care for those in need of such love and care. His image is certainly very different from the type portrayed in the "Carry On" films!

Philip Burnard

THE HUMAN POTENTIAL MOVEMENT: A Personal Perspective

I recently wrote a letter to 'Self and Society' which was critical of the current status of the human potential movement in this country. In this article I hope to share some of my concerns about the current situation as I see it. I express them as my own feelings and I would be curious to know whether or not they strike a chord in anyone else.

I am a psychiatric nurse tutor and I have been interested in the theory and practice of humanistic psychology for about five years. I use experiential methods to facilitate learning in my work and use co-counselling as a tool for developing self-awareness. Currently I am undergoing another educational course which has enabled me to explore the field further.

As a relative newcomer to the human potential movement, as a branch of humanistic psychology, I will enumerate the various points that I wish to examine more closely and offer them for discussion: