

Glad to be Gay?

Susan Jordan



I used to think it would be simple: just a few 'Primals' and I'd get to the root of all my sexual confusion. Yes, I was attracted to women and yes, I also wanted relationships with men, and all I had to do was just get rid of the first and work a bit more on the second and then I'd end up 'normal', a 'real person' in Janov's terms, and I'd be able to finish my 'normal' therapy with the cure completed. Once I'd read *The Primal Scream* I knew I hadn't a hope in hell of being anything like a proper human being until I'd worked through all my sexual feelings (whatever that means) and emerged without an ounce of homosexuality left in me. Until I could convert myself from the 'unreality' of loving someone of my own sex — however deep and genuine that love might be — I just didn't stand a chance as a fully paid-up member of the human race.

You can imagine my reaction, then, when at the end of a weekend group

where I had failed to do more than examine my feelings fairly honestly, a facilitator said 'This is primal integration, not primal amputation'. My immediate response was that she was wrong: how could she/they/we accept something that was so obviously a 'neurosis' and needed to be changed, treated, done away with . . . At the time I felt the same about my hay fever, short-sightedness, period pains, and almost any physical imperfection you might care to mention: it shouldn't exist because it was a neurotic symptom, and being whole meant being perfect. I think I've come on a bit since those days — or is it just that getting older means you have to come to terms with the things that can't or won't change, as well as the many surprising things that can and do?

But of course the guilt and non-acceptance didn't start when I read Janov, though I read him at a time of great conflict and unhappiness. As a child I was always falling in love — mainly with

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grown-ups or older children, and more often with women than men. At secondary school I probably had more than the regulation number of crushes on teachers and older girls, and by the time I'd reached the age of about fourteen I'd begun to wonder when — or if — I was really going to start wanting boyfriends. I was desperately shy and a 'late developer'; other girls were already going out with boys; and people were beginning to say nasty things about anyone who they thought might be (God forbid!) a lesbian. Girls at school very rarely touched each other in case anyone might think it about them, so thank goodness I wasn't the sort of person who went round touching people . . . But I'd already begun to suspect it about myself, or at least to wonder.

As I got older the issue became more confused. I found myself getting involved with both men and women, sometimes simultaneously, and managing to feel guilty about both. I couldn't help feeling what I felt for women but found it incredibly hard to accept — just as I found it hard to believe that my friends could accept my having such feelings, though they did. For all sorts of good and not-so-good reasons I 'became a Christian' in my early twenties, and was at once thrown into a further mess of guilt, conflict and torment. The Bible said homosexuality was wrong yet my feelings wouldn't go away. I felt both guilty for having them and rebellious at being told I shouldn't have them or do anything about them. Since 'being a Christian' seemed to involve adopting a culture and lifestyle that were alien to me I had plenty more to feel guilty about. The general message was clear: being myself was wrong. I think my sanity was only

saved by having a platonic boyfriend who was openly homosexual and engaged in the same kind of struggle.

Then I met a man with whom I had a far from platonic relationship. I was attracted to him, but unable to have proper sex because of all my guilt and fear. According to the Church it wasn't only sex with women that was wrong; sex with a man without being married was as bad or worse. I liked him and wanted the relationship to continue, and I was afraid of eternal damnation, not to mention rape, pregnancy and my mother, if we had sex together. And at the same time I was still in love with a woman. The result was an uneasy compromise where nobody really got what they wanted. I certainly didn't, and my being in love with X was spoiling my relationship with Y.

In due course I met a woman who I knew had fallen in love with me in the way I had with her. I was still involved with the same man and continued to be, but that didn't stop me declaring how I felt. (When I read a biography of Vita Sackville-West I could sympathise with some of her 'muddles', extreme as those situations were.) To my shock and bewilderment the woman rejected me and denied her own feelings. It made me feel as if I had expressed something deeply wrong and harmful. I felt I was being punished for daring to put into words a reality that could only exist so long as it was not said to exist. Worse still, the love that I felt seemed to have been denied all channel of expression. Could it really be so bad to feel that way about someone who loved me?

After various relationships and misadventures, and after years of exploration, I

don't find my situation has essentially changed. At forty-three I still find myself wanting relationships with women and being interested in and attracted to men. I have sometimes been assured by well-meaning friends that of course I really want a relationship with a man and it stands to reason that one with a woman can't be so satisfying. More recently other people have tried to persuade me that if I feel as I do about women, I shouldn't be bothering with men at all. There is credibility in taking a clear position as a lesbian rather than staying in the mists of bisexuality.

But where does it all leave me? Can I, and others like me, maintain both integrity and bisexuality? Shouldn't I just come out as a lesbian and admit that's what I've really wanted all along? It is what I've wanted, but it's not all I've wanted. Labeling myself as lesbian would feel like getting into a cage and clanging the door shut to keep men out. On the other hand should I say, as I've tried to in the past, that however enticing the idea of a relationship with a woman may be, one with a man would be far more solid/real/grounded/rewarding? Not to say normal, and socially acceptable, and better theraped, and generally more convenient. But then that would leave out the feelings that I can't help having for women . . . Or do I have another go at trying to opt for both at once, which may not be happy or successful? Or do I simply wait and see who comes along next, having finally stopped pretending that my being attracted to women is only a temporary aberration? It may not be the whole picture but it certainly isn't an aberration, and to say it was would be a betrayal of

the depth of love I've felt. Whatever Janov says, love is love and it comes in the most varied shapes and sizes.

In humanistic psychology there often seems to be an unwritten assumption either that everyone is heterosexual or that sooner or later they will become so. Apart from a recent issue of *Self & Society* (May 1993) the question of homosexuality seems to have been swept under the carpet. Janov has discussed it, but hardly in a constructive way. I still believe that given optimum conditions early in life people are more likely to become heterosexual. But no-one experiences optimum conditions: we are all shaped and distorted by countless influences. And what we are is what we are: we can't cure it or reject it as neurotic, only accept it and make use of it and see what lies beyond it. Even Janov has had to admit that the majority of his homosexual patients can't or won't be cured but simply want to live their lives better. Whatever kind of person my life has made me, I still have the choice to live decently and honestly and creatively.

After years of struggle and self-rejection, I can finally allow myself to believe that the sex of the person I choose to live with is far less important than the quality of the relationship. Otherwise I would be forced to the conclusion that a heterosexual relationship, however violent or exploitative, must automatically be better than a homosexual one, however loving and respectful, and looking at people I know, I can't believe that. For the first time in my life I have lesbian friends and can allow myself to enjoy and value them as people, rather than having to feel all the time that there must something wrong with them. How could I possibly say they

were less caring, compassionate and responsible than other people I know? More neurotic? People are people.

In the end I don't know whether I'm glad or not to be gay, or bisexual. Being in a minority will always have its problems, especially a minority that tends to get little acceptance from either side. I don't choose to identify myself primarily by my sexuality, but then I don't choose to identify myself by any of my other labels

either (female, white, middle class, Jewish, university educated. . .). I am myself as a person, and I'm trying to be that person as fully as I can. Somewhere along the line I will make choices which will probably cause society to categorise me in a particular way, but I hope those choices will be personal ones, not limited by adherence to a movement or set of beliefs. I can only be glad to be the person I am, with all its struggles, insights and confusions.

Hall of Mirrors

David Evans

A sharp swing left off a quiet country road took me between worn stone pillars into the avenue of tall lime trees that lead to The Hall and there in the sudden shade I involuntarily braked and brought the car to a standstill. 'What' I thought 'am I doing here? Do I really want to face all those men, strangers all?' Such thoughts and feelings ricocheted around inside me as I drew near to meeting the gay men who were to be my close companions for the next week — 60 or so of them — ten times as many as I'd met knowingly in the whole of my life till then.

Let me start from the beginning. I'm a late developer for it was not until recently that I accepted that I was gay. In the few years that have elapsed since then I've begun to explore cautiously what my new found self is all about, and that has included a love relationship that ended

without ending. Thus the summer of 1993 found me raw, very vulnerable, apprehensive and not a little fearful at the gates of The Hall.

I'm a determined soul, however, so I put the car into gear and drove on.

The Hall is a late Victorian pile set in spacious grounds which include the end of a large lake. The estate is home to a mixed community who live in the top floor 'servant quarters' or in homes round about that range from stable block or caravan to thatched wigwam. They were our hosts and we used the 'master' rooms on the first two floors for communal living that centred very much round the ever blazing log fire in the great hall. Most of the heating in the house comes from wood-burning stoves and one morning in the week was set aside to help the residents clear dead trees in nearby pine

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