

Speech by Mr. B. Muirden on Media Attitudes to Homosexuality - cont.

Reform Society of the A.C.T. was formed. There has been some backsliding by the media recently though; the Sydney Morning Herald refused to print a review of Dennis Altman's book 'Homosexual Oppression and Liberation', and the ABC in Sydney ruled against a TDT feature on homosexuals on the truly remarkable ground that the subject had been over-exposed! Like Germaine Greer at Sydney Town Hall: thousands couldn't get in to hear her, so the ABC judged her over-exposed and canned a costly film coverage.

1. The landmark of media coverage of homosexuality in S.A. was the bold and unexpected editorial of July 1, 1972, headed 'Legalise Homosexuality'.

2. One test of media attitudes was the front-page feature of Mr. King's reply to a question by Mr. Goldsworthy about the number of prosecutions for homosexual acts in S.A. in the last year.

3. I wonder how many forthright heterosexually-practising journalists have been in mortal danger of deviate contamination over the last few months? Mail to the Journalist's Association goes to Box 1205K. Mail to the dreaded C.A.M.P. goes just above it to Box 1204K!

"THE SEXUAL OPPRESSION AND LIBERATION OF WOMEN"

- Summary of speech by Ms Jill Matthews, History Department, Flinders University School of Social Sciences.

The basic problem with lesbians is that they're women. Women are ignored in most investigations into society's functioning, except in the areas of reproduction and child-rearing. It's men, as distinct from women, who control and run the country, from government and economy to sport, to the arts, even to language and history and, as you can see, to forums on sexual liberation. Men run the whole show.

Men, as distinct from women, are in a position to define the world. Rather, that the world has been defined by previous generations of men in such a way that it works to their advantage. They are the ones who can initiate activity, who have power, who can see a world created in their own image. Not all men have an equal share in this power or defining situation: class, race and age have a very great and complex influence.

As well as the workers and the blacks, women are victims of this society. And just as workers over several hundred years, and blacks over the last few decades have challenged capitalist and racist society, now women are beginning to challenge sexist society, demanding not merely equality and freedom with men, to be as men are, but equality and freedom as full human beings.

The first part, equality with men, is something that increasing numbers of men are coming to accept. Equal pay, education, civil rights etc. But something happens still when women get down to demanding freedom and human equality in the basic area which distinguishes men from women, and that is sex. It is here that one can see that the equality that men are willing to grant in the other areas is still Orwellian; that is, men and women are equal, but men are more equal than women. e.g. many men accept equal pay for equal work, and then quite happily proclaim that some work is women's work e.g. typing, and that it is not equal to men's work as a clerk. So boys and girls attend the same schools, boys do woodwork and girls, cooking.

And there are many instances where women are discriminated against because they might get pregnant, regardless of the fact that in most cases it is quite possible to control pregnancy, and anyhow, pregnancy isn't necessarily a debilitating disease. It can be fitted into most fairly flexible work schedules. Thus, men still see themselves as ultimately more equal. Not because they each have a penis, as Freud and many after him have explained, but because men, as a group, have power in this society and they intend to keep it.

That power is kept by maintaining manpower as a closed club, and by defining manhood, or masculinity, not only biologically, but in terms of behaviour. It's not enough for a person to have a penis to be defined as a man: he must also use it in a masculine way and behave generally in a masculine way. A man, in this social definition, must act as if he dominates women, either explicitly, or in the more sophisticated way known as chivalry. He must act within the generally-accepted frame-work of man being dominant, woman submissive, man being active, woman passive, man the leader, woman the follower.

Many men suffer under this system, of course, chief among them the homosexuals. The insecurity, the tension, the fear of not being a proper

man, is the price that individual males pay to the power of the group of males in general. The masculine club exists, and for a member to fall foul of its rules is for him to suffer. Nonetheless, sex is still kept as a power exercise, directed primarily against women.

Within this male-defined game, to be a woman, apart from biologically, is to submit to male power and be dominated. People tend not to enter into bondage willingly: there seems to be 3 main compensatory inducements to accepting this subservient role:

1. The myth of Love, which has replaced the old idea of force, which still exists e.g. rape, including marital rape.
2. Vicarious privilege. The woman is accorded social status through the man she associates with. She is given protection from other men and she gets economic support from him, if she's lucky, and usually only for performing fairly menial tasks outside bed.
3. (Negative) If she does not submit, a woman is denied recognition as a female, which is as close as a biological woman can get to being human in this society. If she does not submit, she's on her own, she's an outcast, and fair game to anyone.

For this third inducement to work, there must be social ways of telling whether or not a woman has submitted to male power. So we come to femininity: things like appearing weak, silly, emotional, passive, gentle, maternal - the list is in most psychology books. A woman who slips up on a few of these more common characteristics is warned that she isn't being feminine, Ladylike. Slip up on a few more and you're called aggressive, or a castrating bitch. The final step is to be called lesbian - unnatural, evil and sick.

And of course, this is the behaviour praised in men: independence, creativity, intelligence, courage etc. None of these characteristics is in any way related to the genital sex of the person, male or female. They are, rather, human qualities, found in varying proportions in all human beings, but selectively reinforced or oppressed from childhood on in both males and females. Masculinity and femininity have thus become strait-jackets for restricting our individual human potential and behaviour for the sake of maintaining this oppressive, sexist society.

But these straitjackets have become part of us; they appear as natural and as normal, and to be without one is to stand alone in the howling winds of social ostracism. So even those people who can't, or won't fit, into the regular-sized straitjackets of masculinity and femininity, eg. the camp people, quite often feel that any straitjacket is better than none, even 'butch' or 'pooffer'. Because at least it's a position that is recognised by society, with its attendant security and limited freedom, even though they have to accept a drastically reduced social status.

To attempt to escape from this role-playing or straitjacketing, is to face fear, persecution and hatred. To say that I will not submit to the power of men, that I will love only when a relationship is equal, and that I am attempting to become human, which is a third way between the perversions of masculinity and femininity: this is to invite ridicule and repression, because chains and straitjackets have come to be loved by those that wear them. They give security, privilege. The cost of renouncing them seems to be too great; but the possible gain from trying to escape from role-playing can be even greater.

One of the first statements to come from the U.S. Gay Liberation Movement expressed this idea very simply:

"We reject society's attempt to impose sexual roles and definitions of our nature. We are stepping outside these roles and simplistic myths. We are going to be who we are. At the same time, we are creating new social forms and relations based upon sisterhood, co-operation, human love, and uninhibited sexuality. This is why the movement for Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation are so closely linked: because the enemy is the same: white, heterosexual, male, chauvinistic society. The aim is the same: free and equal human-sexuals, living in a non-exploitive world community. To do this, we must free our minds, ourselves and our bodies, and we must destroy the institutions of this society which seek to repress, alienate, divide, deny and destroy us."

A very appropriate American slogan to end upon:

"Come out of the closet before the door is nailed shut!"

"HOMOSEXUAL LIBERATION"

- Summary of speech by Mr. David Hollinworth, Politics dept.,
Flinders University School of Social Sciences.

To be a homosexual in this society is to be stigmatised, but also other groups are also stigmatised - women, nonwhites, old, sick and the ugly. A crucial difference exists between the homosexual and other groups in that unlike gender, or skin colour or infirmity, gayness is not immediately apparent to ourselves or others, and can be repressed completely, or simply hidden away from public view, or proclaimed openly and joyously. This is one reason for the real feeling of horror some straights experience with homosexuality; unlike other stigmatised groups, gays lie within the oppressor itself.

It is this possibility of faking it that makes the the process of 'coming out' so important i.e. the public and open display of gayness. Hence the chants and slogans - "Blatant is Beautiful, HO HO HOMOSEXUAL, 2 4 6 8 Gay is just as good as straight," and finally "Out of the closets, into the streets."

Simply standing up and being counted and identified may make it more likely that legal persecution, police and public harrassment, psychiatric punishment and job discrimination will be done away with.

However, "Liberation, particularly for a minority as self-hating and concealed as the homosexual, requires a change in values and consciousness that transcends traditional politics. Of course it is important to change laws, to confront magazines that give inaccurate information, to demand equal time on television. But this does not add up to liberation. We are freeing ourselves through the way we live, and as long as homosexuals are oppressed, walking arm-in-arm with one's lover down Fifth Avenue is as much a political act as campaigning for legal reform...those of us who are oppressed because of our sex or our sexuality need a new and broader definition of politics to meet the requirements of our oppression."

From p.119, HOMOSEXUAL OPPRESSION AND LIBERATION, dennis Altman,
Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1972.

The logic of commitment of liberation requires a revolutionary redefinition of what constitutes politics, a redefinition encapsulated in the slogan 'THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL'.

Firstly, at least for the highly urbanised, capitalist societies like the US and our own, social and political change must be affirmed on a community of personal change, a kind of revolution in embryo. Secondly there is in this quotation, a firm belief in the necessity and worth of confusion, flux and turmoil which is embodied in the frequent rejection of programmes, formal meetings or leaderships, and the use of small consciousness-raising groups by Gay Liberation.

These notions have before existed in the margin of radical politics, the anarchists of the commune and spanish civil war, the conscientious objectors, the Blacks, the dope fiends, hippies, yippies and so on. Some might say then that womens lib and gay lib will have just as little effect on society. Marcuse however sees the social function of gays as analagous to that of the critical philosophers:

"Against a society which employs sexuality as a means for a useful end, the perversions (that's you and me) uphold sexuality as an end in itself; they thus place themselves outside the domination of the Performance Principle, and constitute the negation of the repressive order of procreative sexuality - the Great Refusal".

In other words, non-guilty sexuality without the need for utilitarian rationalisations doesn't help the Gross National Product, and they can't afford too many people who don't see the GNP and the affluence derived from it as all-important.

"If the counterculture helped undermine the dominant cultural hegemony of white, middle-class, middle-age America, the women's and gay movements have carried the undermining one stage further, and together represent the next and vital step toward the creation of a genuinely new consciousness,..incorporating a vision of sexual liberation which includes homosexuals, our full acceptance into society" -Altman.

The movement must not just be built around law reform, though that is obviously necessary. Successful integration with society and personal happiness seem to be best pursued within gay liberation:

"What's the use of a revolution without general copulation" Weiss, Marat, Sade.