



SEX PANIC!

SEX PANIC!

NEW YORK CITY



SEX PANIC!

Sex Panic! is a pro-queer, pro-feminist, antiracist direct action group. Our multi-issue agenda aims to defend public sexual culture and safer sex in New York City from police crack-downs, public stigma and morality crusades. We are committed to HIV prevention through safer sex, to sexual self-determination for all people and to democratic urban space.

Contents

- 1 This is a Sex Panic!**
by Douglas Crimp, Ann Pelligrini,
Eva Pendleton and Michael Warner
- 4 A Century of Sex Panics**
by Allan Bérubé
- 9 Lesbians, Feminism and Sex
Panics**
by Lisa Duggan
- 11 Liberation Backlash**
by Douglas Crimp
- 13 Safer-Sex Panic**
by Joseph Sonnabend, M.D. and
Richard Berkowitz
- 15 The Monogamy Code**
by Jim Eigo
- 21 Normative Dissonance**
by Phillip Brian Harper
- 23 The Bloodless Revolution of
the New Gay Right**
by Michael Warner
- 28 Know Your Enemy: The
Coburn Bill**
- 29 The Gay Media Monologue**
by Jim Eigo
- 31 The Mixed Constituency of
Sexual Commerce**
by Alison Redick
- 35 Know Your Enemy: New York
City Zoning Law**
- 36 What Is the Gay Right
Saying?**

Fight back!

Contact Sex Panic! at
(212) 252-4925.

Come to our meetings at the
Lesbian and Gay Community
Services Center,
208 West 13th Street,
New York, NY, 10011
on Thursdays at 8 P.M.

E-mail Sex Panic! at
sexpanicnyc@geocities.com.

Sex Panic is on the Web at
[http://www.geocities.com/
WestHollywood/Heights/5777/](http://www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Heights/5777/).

This is a
Sex Panic! publication.
It went to press in early
November, 1997.
Thanks to the
Sheep Meets Sheep
collective for design and
production help.

This Is a Sex Panic!

by Douglas Crimp, Ann Pellegrini,
Eva Pendleton and Michael Warner

The ad hoc group Sex Panic! has come together because we think that queer New York is in danger, and the worst part of the danger is that few people are responding. Andrew Sullivan has declared in the *New York Times Magazine* that AIDS is ending,

and many seem to believe it. Too many also seem to believe that gay rights are won. "Following legalization of same-sex marriage and a couple of other things," Sullivan has said, "I think we should have a party and close down the gay rights movement for good."

We think it's too soon to pop that cork. In New York, we see queer spaces being taken away. Mayor Giuliani has closed not just theaters and sex clubs but dance clubs and bars such as Cake and Crowbar. His zoning law, passed by City Council, will eliminate the vast majority of legal sex businesses, including the ones on Christopher Street. According to the Anti-Violence Project, men are reporting being entrapped and arrested in significantly higher numbers than last year—on the streets, in the parks and in public bathrooms. The Port Authority police have arrested over sixty men in the World Trade Center bathrooms alone. The piers have been fenced off and put under curfew. The combined effect of these measures has been felt across the city, not just in the venues that have been harassed or closed. Night life has been

chilled. The places for queers to find each other are dwindling.

This is not the first time that officials have launched repressive measures against sex in the name of the public good. Since the nineteenth century, it has been a recurrent pattern: Public morals and health have been invoked; scapegoats have been found in homosexuals, sex workers and others who are unlikely to fight back; and a fantasy of purity is held up as the norm. Historians have come to call this pattern a "sex panic." We have taken this name, with a sense of irony, to publicize our belief that we are in the middle of one.

Maybe you don't cruise in parks or go out to bars. Maybe you disapprove of some behavior there. So why should you defend these places?

We have three simple answers. First, when norms of purity go unchallenged, we all lose. We cannot expect to gain respect and liberty by casting derision and shame on others who fail to meet the standards of propriety set by an imaginary mainstream. Sooner or later, we all flunk that test. Most Americans hate gay sex, no matter how proper, no matter

how private, no matter how intimate. The first principle of queer life is respect for sexual diversity and for the dignity of people who have fought through shame and stigma to find each other. It's a lesson America still needs to learn.

Second, the current crisis of AIDS prevention requires more honesty and understanding about sex, not less. With a whole new generation at risk, with increasing numbers of gay men feeling burnout with safer sex or taking bigger gambles because of new drug therapies, it has become more important than ever to face the conflicts in our desires. Any HIV-negative gay man who is having unsafe sex needs a more honest response than blaming gym culture. And it doesn't help when journalists declare, as John Weir wrote in *Details*, that a person taking risk simply "is an idiot." Effective prevention cannot be based on shame and a refusal to comprehend. It requires community efforts at honest discussion to help individuals make decisions about risk and protection. Both of these in turn require realism about desire and a respect for pleasure.

Finally, the strength of the community depends on an urban scene where queers can find each other. Phone sex and the Internet cannot compensate for the loss of public space. The more isolated and privatized we are, the less we know about each other and the less we care. The

evidence is all around us: Activism has shrunk along with sexual culture.

Already the signs of our weakness can be seen in city politics. AIDS services are underfunded and getting worse along with welfare and immigration reform. Domestic partnership law languishes, undermined by Councilman Antonio Pagan. The schools no longer even attempt to teach about homophobia. And even in an election year, city politicians do nothing. The Giuliani campaign dismisses lesbian and gay issues, and most Democrats seem reluctant to fill the gap.

Of course, it's not just New York. As the *Village Voice* reported in June, gay venues are being harassed in Los Angeles, San Diego and cities in Michigan. And the national political climate only fosters repression. The Supreme Court has ruled that states can confine sex offenders even after their criminal sen-

We see queer spaces being taken away. Giuliani has closed not just theaters and sex clubs but dance clubs and bars. His zoning law will eliminate the majority of legal sex businesses including the ones on Christopher Street.

tences by pronouncing them to have something as vague as "mental abnormality." Megan's Law has been used to terrorize anew men who were charged with gay sex before Stonewall. Meanwhile, an allegedly pro-gay president has made military antigay policy worse; he has appealed every court decision against the new policy; he has signed the so-called Defense of Marriage Act; his Justice Department has refused to argue against Colorado's Amendment 2; he supported legislation designed to

purge the Internet of sex; he signed the welfare reform act of 1996; and now he has refused to support needle exchange as well. Buried in the fine print of the welfare reform act are 250 million federal dollars earmarked for sex education, with significant strings attached: States will get the money if and only if they make abstinence the exclusive aim of their sex education efforts and top off the federal block grants with 75 percent more in matching funds. Abstinence until marriage and absolute sexual faithfulness within marriage are presented as the only way to prevent HIV and AIDS, other sexually transmitted diseases and teenage pregnancy. That adds up to \$87 million per year to tell kids that, in the words of the federal guidelines, "Sexual activity outside the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects."

And these are just the measures supported by President Clinton. The Republicans have even worse ones, such as the Coburn bill, cynically titled the HIV Prevention Act. It provides no new money for prevention and no support for campaigns targeted to gay men. Instead, it would divert prevention money to HIV testing without consent and to contact tracing. It would allow doctors to refuse treatment to people without first performing an HIV test.

Sex panics, locally and nationally, are not new. What's new is that so many voices in the gay media have failed to learn from history. Instead of informing us about repressive measures and rallying resistance, they urge conformity. Some, like Andrew Sullivan and Bruce Bawer, are explicitly conservative; they tell us the gay movement—which came into being by fighting a sex panic—is outmoded.

Some, like Larry Kramer, claim to be radical; but even more than the avowed conservatives, he saves his most demeaning language for gay men who have sex or for those who, like Edmund White, dare simply to write about it. Some, like Chandler Burr, even support the measures contained in the Coburn bill.

Why do these voices dominate the media? Where is the rest of the debate? Articulate and thoughtful responses can be found among grassroots organizations, in the still powerful tradition of lesbian feminism and in colleges and universities where lesbian and gay studies and queer theory have boomed in the last five years. But the gay media, including *LGNY*, have overlooked these voices, preferring instead to promote a small handful of columnists and minor celebrities who are just as eager to shut down queer sexual culture as anyone in the right wing. The standard of debate has sunk to the sound bites of tabloid journalism.

We expect better. *LGNY* editorialized against Sex Panic! without first finding out what we were really up to, and although we're glad to have this opportunity to correct the record, *LGNY* and all other gay publications must begin to foster a more inclusive debate.

Sex Panic! has no rules and no formal membership. The group is a means, not an end. It exists to catalyze a public, to get queers to stand up for themselves. We want a publicly accessible sexual culture, a community effort at AIDS prevention that sustains safer sex and a city that is as queer as we know how to make it. Come to the Center on Thursday nights at 8:00 if you want to take part. Or do your own part!

A Century of Sex Panics

by Allan Bérubé

What is a "sex panic"? A sex panic is a moral crusade that leads to crackdowns on sexual outsiders.

Sex panics usually take place during politically conservative times, election years, world's fairs, health crises, anticrime drives or religious campaigns. They are started by politicians, religious leaders, journalists or professional experts who think they know what's best for other people. These "right thinking" crusaders expose a frightening "new" problem then point to a despised sexual group as its cause. Others jump on the bandwagon by scapegoating people in this group as perverts, deviants or degenerates who need to be contained because they are irresponsible, immature and dangerous.

A sex panic is not merely an assault by a fearful society on sexual freedom in the abstract or even a fear that makes gay men too afraid of contracting AIDS to have sex, as Gabriel Rotello characterized it in his "Open Letter to Sex Panic" (*LGNY*, Aug. 3, 1997). Sex panics are powerful attacks on real people. The sexual practices of real people are sensationally exposed and condemned in the media. The public and even private places where they have sex are put under government surveillance. Real people are harassed and arrested by police. The commercial establishments where they meet are padlocked and closed or intimidated into "voluntarily" shutting their doors. New

laws—hard to get off the books once passed—are adopted to control their sexuality.

Once a sex panic is up and running and the police take over to conduct their own coercive crackdown, it's hard for those who started its engine to steer it in the direction they wanted or to put on the brakes and stop it. It is at this moment when journalists say that they never intended the crackdown to go so far or that the crackdown isn't as bad as the victims are making it out to be. Gay activists and journalists have often dismissed the importance of a crackdown they've supported by saying it was aimed at other groups as well as homosexuals. Gay men and lesbians have rarely enjoyed the political "luxury" of having sex crackdowns aimed exclusively and explicitly at them.

In the United States sex panics have targeted prostitutes and other sex workers, public school teachers, federal employees, military personnel, day care workers, welfare mothers, women who work in traditionally male jobs, butch and femme lesbians who hang out together in public, people who are HIV positive, people who use the Internet.

Sex crackdowns have targeted men who cruise and have sex with other men in places such as public parks; toilets in subway, bus and train stations; movie theater balconies; military bases; public baths; gyms and YMCAs; hotel rooms; private parties; back streets and alleys; trucks, docks, ships and piers; booths in porn shops; lesbian and gay bars; gay sex clubs and bathhouses; s/m dungeons and other private play spaces; and, recently, cyberspace. In and around these places erotic adventurers and non-conformists have created some of

the most long-lasting, varied, creative and unruly forms of gay sexual culture.

As early as 1860, Walt Whitman wrote a poem about Manhattan, called "City of Orgies," in which he praised the "lovers, continual lovers" he passed on the streets, with their "frequent and/ swift flash of eyes offering me love." Since then, Whitman and other pioneering sex radicals have affirmed and defended a wide range of public erotic cultures. Their opponents have been puritanical antisex crusaders—homosexual as well as heterosexual—who have been quick to use a battery of powerful, negative words as their first weapons—hostile terms such as "promiscuous," "irresponsible," "immature," "lewd," "indecent," "obscene," "lascivious," "disgusting," "sick," "sinful," "criminal," "inappropriate," "abnormal" and "predator." They combine these

verbal weapons with lurid exposés to spark and then fan the flames of sex panics that regulate, punish and try to wipe out queer sexual behavior outside—and inside—the home.

Following are some major antigay or antilesbian sex panics and crack-downs that have occurred in New York City in the last 60 years:

1939: Right before the world's fair, the New York State Liquor Authority closes down many gay bars in a push to "clean up" Times Square, where many out-of-towners come to sightsee. (The same thing happens in advance of the 1964 world's fair.)

1944: During World War II, an Army-Navy Disciplinary Control Board initiates an antivice campaign that shuts down gay bars, allegedly to protect the morals of servicemen.

1953: In this election year, police target gay bars and step-up antihomosexual arrests in public parks. "The situation here in New York is getting worse," a man writes in a letter to the homophile magazine *ONE*. "Raids on gay bars, arrests on the beaches this summer and cops chasing belles out of Sutton Place where they cruise in the evening on the river's edge."

1955-1956: In "spring clean-ups," police round up "undesirables," "suspected hoodlums and homosexuals" in public parks, Times Square, the West Side and Greenwich Village, resulting in mass arrests—387 people in one weekend, 715 in another.

1959-1960: Lee Mortimer, columnist in the *New York Daily Mirror*, starts an anti-gay-bar crusade,

asking "whether it is in the best interest of American traditions to encourage the degenerates who roam our streets at night." He lists gay bars by name in his column; police shut them down. He celebrates their closure in his next column then names more bars he wants closed. "For the first time in several generations," writes a gay columnist in a homophile magazine, "just about every New York City gay bar has been closed down." Thirty gay bars are closed.

1969: In another election year, police arrest "drunks, homosexuals, loiterers and other undesirables" by

"For the first time in several generations," wrote a gay columnist in 1960, "just about every New York City gay bar has been closed down."

the hundreds in Times Square, the *New York Times* reports. Several Greenwich Village bars, including the Stonewall Inn, are raided. The Stonewall Riots are a response to this crackdown, helping to launch a new era of gay liberation and pride.

1982: Police wage a major, city-wide attack on places where queers of color and lesbians hang out. In the summer, police arrest over 1,200 men for "public lewdness" on the gay beach at Jacob Riis Park in Queens. They beat and arrest a black lesbian in a section of Washington Square Park where young black and Latino gay people gather at night. State liquor authorities close two lesbian bars—the Club and Bonnie and Clyde. Then the NYPD Morals Squad raids and closes two more lesbian bars—the Duchess, a racially mixed bar, and the Déjà Vu, frequented mostly by black lesbians. In an attempt to "clean up" Times Square, police conduct two violent raids on Blue's (a black, gay drag bar across the street from the New York Times building). They beat and rob the patrons and smash the premises, leaving it looking "as if it had been bombed." A crowd of 1,000 gathers in Times Square to protest the Blue's raid. Women protesting the raids on the four lesbian bars call it "Stonewall II, but this time with lesbians."

1985: In this year of AIDS panic—when politicians debate the quarantining of people with AIDS, mandatory HIV testing and name reporting, and the criminalization of all sex for people with AIDS—a columnist for the *New York Post* goes undercover to expose the hidden world of gay sex in commercial establishments. At the same time, Governor Cuomo institutes a new emergency health code, allegedly to

stop the spread of AIDS, which prohibits oral and anal sex, with or without condoms, in commercial establishments, including hotels. City and state officials use this new sex code to close sex clubs and bathhouses. Police also close Stuyvesant Square Park at 2nd Avenue and 16th Street, a popular gay male cruising area.

1995 to present: Massive redevelopment transforms Times Square into a family-friendly tourist area, and new city zoning laws require the padlocking of nearly all adult businesses. Several gay columnists write exposés in mainstream publications calling for the closing of gay sex clubs and bathhouses; many are closed by the police and other city agencies. Arrests for "public lewdness" are up; piers are more heavily policed with midnight curfews; and gay bars and dance clubs are harassed and shut down, some for allowing dancing on the premises.

In the past, sex panics were sometimes sparked by antigay, straight male columnists who used inflammatory language and lurid exposés to attack places where homosexuals congregated, either socially or sexually. It's important to remember that in the 1950s and 1960s, columnists and police attacked lesbian and gay bars as places where "lewd" conduct took place—illegal conduct such as touching, kissing, soliciting or dancing with members of the same sex. They also attacked lesbian and gay bars as places where "sick" people went to spread their sexual "disease"—homosexuality. "Like the carrier of any other communicable disease," wrote antigay columnist Charles Denton in a 1965 attack on gay bars, "the homosexual belongs in behavioral quarantine until he is

cured, not out spreading his mental microbes among your kids and mine."

There is also a long tradition in which straight columnists guided a hostile public on shocking but titillating tours down into the "lower depths," the hidden nighttime underworld where men had sex with men outside the confines of marriage and the home. For a 1985 *New York Post* article headlined "Night Visit By Post Reporter Reveals Shocking Evidence," Richard Esposito went undercover into several New York gay bookstores, sex clubs, bathhouses and bars. He exposed these places as "dens of desperation" where men engaged in "promiscuous" and "anonymous" sex. He condemned them as the "skid row of gay sex" populated by "desperate men—men without families, men without lovers, men without real friends . . . men who would look at home washing windows at Delancy Street." In protest against his columns, queer activists organized a mass rally and threw up a picket line at the *Post*, chanting "Fight AIDS, not gays!" They organized a town meeting at the United Methodist Church, across the street from what is now the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center, to protest the "*Post's* antigay crusade and Cuomo's new ban on gay sex," as their poster announced. That town meeting drew hundreds of angry people and led to the eventual formation of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD).

Because lesbian and gay activists forcefully protested such antigay

attacks, we are in a new historical situation. At first glance this looks like a success because the mainstream press now publishes columns and op-ed pieces by openly gay journalists. But on closer inspection this situation looks like trouble.

In the last decade a growing number of openly gay columnists—mostly white and mostly male—have used their new power to take up the formerly straight task of publicly attacking gay sex—calling for an end to "promiscuity" and for the closure of gay baths, sex clubs and even gay bars.

The language these columnists use is as inflammatory as the language of the antigay straight columnists that

"The homosexual belongs in behavioral quarantine until he is cured, not out spreading mental microbes among your kids and mine."

in the past sparked lesbian and gay street protests. In his *Newsday* column, Gabriel Rotello wrote a sensationalistic exposé of gay sex clubs, attacking them as "the killing fields of AIDS" and "bustling hives of contagion" where he

claimed to have witnessed "sex murder/suicides." Jonathan Capehart, writing in the *Daily News*, guided a primarily straight readership on a lurid tour of a gay bathhouse—"a trip back in time—to a deadly era," as he called it—attacking gay bathhouses as "factories of destruction." In a gay twist on the old negative stereotype that gay men are irresponsible, Michelangelo Signorile wrote in the *New York Times*, "I quite honestly don't trust myself when it comes to sexual behavior." Not too long ago the antigay religious Right columnist Pat Buchanan wrote that "the poor homosexuals" have "declared war on

----->

Nature, and now Nature is exacting an awful retribution" by giving them AIDS. Resurrecting Buchanan's anti-gay diatribe, Larry Kramer, in a long cover story in the *Advocate*, tells us that "Nature extracts a price for sexual promiscuity" and that "we brought AIDS upon ourselves." And Chandler Burr, in the *Harvard Lesbian & Gay Review*, praises Rotello for realizing that "Buchanan was correct" in saying that AIDS was Nature's punishment for gay men's "promiscuity." These inflammatory public attacks on already stigmatized forms of gay male sexuality constitute the dominant gay voices in the mainstream press. They have shut down rather than opened up a much needed public dialogue among gay men about our own sexualities.

And these attacks have shut down more than dialogue. Some gay journalists went beyond their capacity as columnists to form a group that met in secret with top New York City officials, imploring them, as Mark Shoofs reported in the *Village Voice*, "to crack down on sex clubs that do not adhere to the state health code"—the repressive 1985 code that prohibits all oral and anal sex, including sex with condoms. According to Duncan Osborne's reports in *LGNY*, dozens of sex clubs, theaters and parties were in fact raided or closed down in the period that followed these meetings.

The attacks by gay columnists on "promiscuous" gay sex outside the home are sometimes coupled with praises of monogamy that set up heterosexual marriage as the romantic, idealized, safer alternative. Because such views are reassuring to heterosexuals uncomfortable with gay male sexuality, they are finding a warm wel-

come in mainstream magazines and newspapers, as well as on TV news features during "sweeps" months. Being openly gay, these columnists are able to attack how and where gay men have sex with more credibility and with greater ferocity than any straight columnist could without being called homophobic. By contrast, gay journalists or columnists who affirm the varieties, meaning and value of gay sexual cultures, including those who eroticize safer sex, find few mainstream publications that will even publish their work, let alone promote their ideas with cover stories and feature articles.

In the past, when straight columnists used such inflammatory rhetoric to foster attacks on our bars and sexual practices, queer activists have responded with angry letters, mass rallies, protests in the streets, sit-ins and civil disobedience. But now that openly gay columnists are using the same language to attack the stigmatized varieties of queer sex, the response from those who are its targets has been silence, inaction, confusion, fear, namecalling and even despair.

This new situation raises a difficult question about the sex panic we have entered in New York and in other parts of the country.

How can those of us whose sexual lives are under attack defend ourselves when openly gay columnists, working from positions of power inside the mainstream media, are inviting and assisting the crackdown against us—using the same inflammatory language and negative stereotypes that we did not tolerate when they were hurled at us by straight columnists who openly despised our sexuality?

Lesbians, Feminism and Sex Panics

by Lisa Duggan

Writing in the August 3 issue of *LGNY*, Michelangelo Signorile and Gabriel Rotello claim that the new group Sex Panic! formed as a collective unconscious defense, designed to distract attention from the "challenges" to gay male sexual culture contained in their writing and activism. And certainly, criticism of their sexual politics is one ingredient in the mix of issues motivating members of Sex Panic! But sorry guys, you aren't the center of everyone's attention. There are quite a few women active in Sex Panic!, and we have a range of concerns and motives that don't get included in the "it's all about me!" analysis.

Most obviously, we are concerned about the lack of diversity in public discussions of queer politics. The range of voices now circulating in the queer as well as mainstream press has been shrinking to a smaller and smaller circle of mostly white guys, with an increasingly narrow range of viewpoints, mostly quite conservative. Lesbians in Sex Panic! want to find ways to expand the public platform in ways that will facilitate broader participation. Beyond that shared goal, some of us have very specific arguments to make about the sex panic currently underway in New York City.

Many lesbians come to Sex Panic! from a background in feminist activism, with particular experience from the 1980s "sex wars" over

pornography, butch/femme roles, s/m practices, sex work and public sexual expression of all kinds. Some of us spent years of our lives opposing antipornography feminists' efforts to bring in the police, the legislatures and the courts to regulate our speech, sexual practices and cultural productions. We watched in shock as Andrea Dworkin, Catharine MacKinnon and other "radical" feminists supported the Meese Commission's attacks on sexual expression, collaborated with members of the Moral Majority and Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum in passing antipornography legislation and advised the Canadian courts in reinterpreting their obscenity law. (The first prosecution under the newly interpreted law was against the Toronto gay bookstore Glad Day for selling *Bad Attitude*, a lesbian sex magazine). We worked to defend artists, filmmakers, sex workers, bookstores, publications and educators from myriad forms of harassment and legal persecution. We argued that "radical" antipornography feminists were acting conservatively, as their efforts worked to fan the flames of sex panic, even when they weren't directly collaborating with Ed Meese or the Eagle Forum.

Fortunately, the feminist movement backed away from antipornography politics, and most new efforts to police and censor sexual expression failed. But conservatives of various kinds found new ways to pursue their goals. Taking a page from antiabortion forces, who moved from efforts to prohibit abortion to efforts to restrict funding and close down public space for it, moral and fiscal conservatives promoted efforts to privatize as much of public life as possible—by attacking public funding for the arts, defunding legal aid for the

poor, cutting welfare benefits, restricting immigration, eliminating affirmative action and corporatizing public services from prison management to garbage collection. These efforts do not isolate public sexual culture as the target, but such broad attacks crucially depend on sexual demonization (as in the war on NEA funding for homoerotic art and in the portrayal of welfare mothers as promiscuous and sexually "irresponsible") and centrally include attempts to "privatize" sexuality—to make the streets safe for Disneyfied family values. The overall goal is to restrict and contain democratic dissent and accountability in public life.

The current sex panic in New York City is an integral part of this larger attack on public spaces and democratic public life. When *LGNY* editorializes that if we have a sex panic, then we must have a Hispanic panic and a lot of other panics going on, too (Schindler, "Is It a Gay Thing or A Giuliani Thing?" Aug. 3, 1997) . . . that's right. There *are* a lot of "panics" going on. The existence of other crack-downs in no way diminishes the seriousness of the sex panic we now face.

When lesbian and feminist anti-censorship activists look at the current sex panic, we see something all too familiar. Here we have multiple incursions into public sexual culture coming from multiple, uncoordinated sources. The city, the police and the

courts go after gay male commercial spaces and public sex, as they also pursue sex workers and close down non-commercial space like the piers. These actions and others (harassing homeless people, closing small businesses using draconian licensing regulations, arresting people of the wrong color playing the wrong kind of music in the wrong neighborhood) do not constitute a centrally organized conspiracy. They are part of an overall trend toward closing down public space and de-democratizing public

life. And here we have gay "spokesmen" (and they are all men) aiding and abetting this catastrophe. Self-avowed conservatives like Bruce Bawer and Andrew Sullivan want access to privatized domesticity and the military, while openly opposing queer sexual culture and a raucous, diverse queer public life. Political progressives like Signorile and Rotello espouse

Here we have multiple incursions into public sexual culture coming from multiple, uncoordinated sources. These actions do not constitute a centrally organized conspiracy. They are part of an overall trend toward closing public space and de-democratizing public life.

a sexually conservative politics and support efforts to close queer public spaces for "health" violations out of a wish to stop HIV transmission. But the health code is not designed to foster safer sex, it is designed to prevent public sex, including safer public sex. The enforcers of the health code or of the cabaret licensing laws are not our friends any more than Ed Meese or Jerry Falwell were our friends because they opposed the "degradation of women" in pornography. And the gay

spokesmen calling for club closings at worst, or for complacency as our spaces are eliminated at best, have helped create an atmosphere hostile to queer sexual culture, as Dworkin and MacKinnon helped create the atmosphere that now supports, with hardly a peep of protest, the draconian new zoning law.

There's another troubling little problem for feminists in the discourse of the new gay sexual conservatives. Many of them keep insisting on pointing to a gift for "intimacy" and domestic stability that lesbians are supposed to have and that gay men might profitably imitate. I feel ill every time I hear it; it sounds so much like something one might hear in church from Pat Robertson—let's all give our thanks to the womenfolk, who know how to keep those home fires burning! (Burn, baby, burn. . .) I would like to send one message in particular to all gay men who spout this line, as Larry Kramer did in his recent *Advocate* interview—**WE DON'T WANT TO DOMESTICATE YOU, THAT'S WHY WE'RE LESBIANS!**

The opposition of private domestic intimacy (good) to public sexuality (bad) has been a historical staple in the control and subordination of women. To be a good woman (madonna) and deserve respect and protection, one must stay home and devote oneself to intimacy and the welfare of others. To be in any way a "public" woman (whore) is to risk opprobrium and violence. The supposed lesbian gift for intimacy is directly related to our lack of full access to public institutions and economic resources. Save the moral deference guys; most of us would rather have real equality.

Liberation Backlash

by Douglas Crimp

Since the early 1980s neoconservatives have claimed that the social movements of the 1960s are to blame for the ills of contemporary life, and they have set about, systematically and successfully, to roll back the gains of the civil rights, feminist and gay liberation movements. Now a number of prominent gay journalists are reinforcing the neoconservative attack on gay liberation. These gay moral puritans—Larry Kramer, Gabriel Rotello, Michelangelo Signorile, Andrew Sullivan and others—argue that our fight for sexual freedom was folly—immature, irresponsible, self-indulgent, unnatural. They claim that sexual liberation led directly to AIDS and that only by jettisoning it can AIDS be overcome. Their program calls for us to conform to a narrow standard of sexual expression, essentially limited to monogamous relationships or marriage. They believe that the distinctive sexual culture we created should be abandoned in favor of imitating the most constricted, institutionalized forms of heterosexual conformism—"small-town American values," in Signorile's phrase. Even among straights, only the Christian Right has such a restrictive view of sex. In order to combat these dangerous views, we need to remember why we fought for our sexual liberation.

Until the early 1970s, it was illegal to have homosexual sex in New York state. In 1986, the Supreme Court upheld, in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, the right of all states to make homo-

sexual sex illegal. And it is still illegal in nearly half the United States. Whatever other rights have been at stake for us since Stonewall, the primary right we've had to fight for—and still have to fight for—is the right to be sexual. But the gay moral puritans would have us believe that homophobia is no longer a problem, that the police are on our side, that our right to be sexual is not in danger.

We demanded the fundamental right to experience sexual pleasure as an ethical human ideal in and of itself. This was part of the wider movement for sexual liberation that fought for the right of all people to enjoy consensual sex, regardless of their relation to the institution of marriage or propagating the species. We thus took part in the on-going radical historical shift from understanding sex as strictly procreative to understanding sex as fulfilling the human need for pleasure. The gay moral puritans rarely speak of pleasure except in the negative. They want to limit sexual expression to some "higher" purpose.

Our struggle was part of a larger fight for sexual liberation in which women were in the forefront. The sexual oppression of women was manifested in many ways. If a woman was raped, for example, she was likely to be disbelieved if she wore sexy clothes or had a history of extramarital sex—she was said to be asking for it. The gay moral puritans revive views of women held prior to the movement for sexual liberation—that women are by nature not sexual, that their function is to moderate male sexual behavior.

Not so long ago it was illegal and considered unnatural for people of different races to have sex with each other. Our country has a long and ignominious history of fearing and

punishing nonwhite people for their sexuality and particularly for having sex with white people. The history of lynching black men is largely a history of murdering them for accusations that they desired white women. Today poor women of color are forced to cede reproductive choices to qualify for welfare benefits. Men of color are routinely treated more harshly when entrapped and arrested on charges of public lewdness. The gay moral puritans never mention the unequal treatment of the sexuality of people of color.

The culture we have built allows for sexual choice. All gay men and lesbians are single at least some of the time. Many enjoy being single. Many who want a mate are still looking. Many want sexual pleasure in their lives whether or not they are coupled. Many want diverse sexual pleasures when they are coupled. Many couples like to have sexual pleasure outside their relationships. Our sexual culture has given people choices and fulfilled their needs for sexual pleasure, however they define it. The gay moral puritans want to take our sexual choices away.

Gay men's experimentation with a wide variety of sexual pleasures and shared sexual ideals has been a crucial factor in our ability to adapt to the necessities of safer sex during the AIDS epidemic. We trusted each other, we changed our experimentation to incorporate safer pleasures and we saved untold numbers of lives. Gay liberation has made possible every dimension of our community's heroic fight against the epidemic. The gay moral puritans want us to forget our community's achievements. They claim that safer sex has failed and thereby put the future of its funding in jeopardy.

Safer-Sex Panic

by Joseph Sonnabend, M.D.
and Richard Berkowitz

Although it is uncertain whether a second wave of AIDS is occurring now, it is clear that the possibility of such an event must concern all of us. There has been a substantial reduction in HIV seroconversion rates since the early days of the epidemic. Even those who advocate an end to sexual promiscuity as a response to a second wave acknowledge this decline; after all, a second wave implies that the first wave has subsided. However, they attribute the fall in seroconversion rates to a saturation of the AIDS-susceptible population and the second wave to a presumably delayed influx of new susceptible individuals. They appear to believe that the introduction and practice of safer sex has played no significant role in curbing the epidemic. However, the striking reduction of all sexually transmitted diseases among gay men and the correlation of reduced HIV transmission with the adoption of safer-sex practices found in many studies attest to the success of safer sex.

For example, in Washington state, 658 cases of rectal gonorrhea were reported in 1982, while there were 49 cases in 1996. In San Francisco, over 4,000 cases of rectal gonorrhea were reported each year between 1976 and 1982; the numbers in 1993 and 1994 were 66 and 57. In New York City, there were only about

30 cases reported for both 1995 and 1996, a remarkable drop from approximately 2,000 cases reported in 1982. However, in some cities these encouraging trends are no longer being sustained. Increases in the incidence of gonorrhea among gay men were reported in several large cities in 1995 and 1996. Interestingly these increases were not reported for New York City, but sadly, we must admit that such increases may well be occurring here now. This is a tragic turn of events. Anecdotal accounts suggest that gay men are now relaxing their safer sex practices, and this is the worst time to be inundated with messages that safer sex cannot work.

Further evidence that safer sex can work is provided by the Multicenter AIDS Cohort Study (MACS) which followed 3,262 initially seronegative gay men; by the end of five years about eleven percent had become HIV seropositive. Black, Latino and young gay men were at higher risk than older white men. Such differences are highly suggestive that safer-sex education can work, as those showing the greatest risk are the ones least likely to have been reached by it. The efficacy of consistent condom use in reducing HIV transmission has been shown in numerous studies of gay men, female sex workers and HIV-negative partners in serodiscordant couples, both gay and straight.

The contention that safer sex cannot work is not only wrong, it is dangerous. The condemnation of promiscuity and the promotion of monogamy as the only way to save the lives of future generations of gay men could in fact be the greatest threat to their health. This advice rests on a belief that safer sex does not work, and consequently, efforts at intensive

targeted safer-sex education could be undermined and even discouraged, as they will be seen as a license to promiscuity. Monogamy is not a workable option for some nor is it the choice for many others. If the opponents of sexual promiscuity have their way, those who cannot or choose not to heed their message will be deprived of safer-sex education so essential to keeping them alive.

Ironically, in 1983, before the introduction of safer sex, we, along with the late Michael Callen, pointed out the dangers of a way of life that promoted the spread of STDs. We went to great lengths to point out that our attack on promiscuity was not judgmental but based solely on health concerns. Safer sex changed everything—it has enabled promiscuity—while it is the call for sexual restraint and monogamy with its inherent de-emphasis of safer sex that now constitutes the greater hazard to the health of gay men.

Unfortunately, in the prevailing conservative climate, messages condemning promiscuity will have no difficulty being disseminated. Such messages fall neatly into a conservative agenda that places a moral value on sexual restraint. There is a danger that added to the notion that sexual promiscuity is physically unhealthy will be the dreadful implication that it is also morally wrong. Attacks on sexual promiscuity may therefore not only endanger the health of gay men but also engender a sense of shame and loss of self-esteem. We had come a

long way to accepting that sex is one of life's great joys, but the current attacks on sexual promiscuity—even by those who claim to be concerned only with AIDS prevention—may in today's conservative climate undermine this acceptance.

Support of promiscuity must be coupled with demands for greater and sustained targeted safer-sex educational campaigns. This is even more urgent in light of the recent reports of rising rates of gonorrhea among gay men. Sadly, current educational efforts fall far short of what is needed. The most important challenge facing the gay community is the creation of a coordinated effort to produce and disseminate targeted safer-sex educational material to encourage and support gay men in maintaining the practice of safer sex. An indication of just how urgently these efforts are needed is the recent decision by the federal government to

give \$250 million to states that implement celibacy campaigns as the means to prevent AIDS among young people. Alarming, safer-sex education would be prohibited in programs receiving these funds.

Attempts to control how people choose to express themselves sexually are not new and have always resulted in misery—and now may also promote the spread of AIDS. The most effective way to combat AIDS and prevent a second wave is intensive and well-crafted targeted safer-sex education, not telling people with whom they should or should not have sex.

***The conservatives' call
for sexual restraint
and monogamy with
its inherent de-emphasis
of safer sex constitutes
the greater hazard to
the health of gay men.***

The Monogamy Code

by Jim Eigo

A Moralist's Ecology

Gabriel Rotello's recent book on AIDS prevention, *Sexual Ecology: AIDS and the Destiny of Gay Men*, begins as an outline of select AIDS epidemiology. But it ends up as a windy riff on a strained metaphor, as Rotello transports his reader from the stolid realm of science survey to the headier one of papal bull. The book's central metaphor, that monogamy equals healthy sexual ecology, can only be sustained by an age-old fallacy common to all fundamentalism. It derives a spurious "natural law" from time-bound, mutable conditions: the prevalence of HIV among gay men in 1997 and the lack of effective vaccines and treatments to counter it.

Rotello's argument: Significant new HIV infection occurs among gay men, and beyond AIDS there lurk many unnamed plagues. Gay men should therefore abandon current safer sex strategies (primary among them, the "condom code") and supplant our current diverse sexual landscape with a new, unified communal norm of serial monogamy, complete with a system of penalties for the promiscuous and rewards for the faithful. This "transformative" approach will make us altruistic; it will make us responsible; and then we can raise kids. Somewhere, I've heard this before.

Rotello's call for gay men to

march two-by-two under the yoke of Noah back to a mythic Eden, presents an unsettling echo of fundamentalism's equation of heterosexual union with Nature. Rotello disparages conservative columnist Pat Buchanan's formulation of AIDS: "The poor homosexuals—they have declared war on Nature, and now Nature is exacting an awful retribution." Yet if we substitute Buchanan's "Nature" with Rotello's "ecology," Buchanan's venom becomes the thesis for Rotello's book. Rotello's call for us to diminish the "status" of all non-monogamous sex is a muted rendition of fundamentalism's attempt to delegitimize all "non-procreative" sex. Both imply that anything beyond their narrow parameters is sin or willful sickness.

Some serious diseases are airborne; some are genetic. We do not, however, advocate cessation of breathing, nor an end to procreation. Taking a purely ecological approach, one could argue against the propriety of living in a city since urban concentration spawns disease. But cities fulfill certain cultural needs. No serious ecologist argues that we revert to hunter-gatherers. Rotello contends that gay men have created conditions that may be a greater enemy than HIV. This is as useful as blaming cities for causing the flu. Transfusions have spread AIDS, and we work to minimize their risk. Why is gay sex different? Rotello's "ecological" argument with current AIDS prevention is that the "condom code" relies on a "technological fix," a "mistake of favoring the simple over the complex." As if proposing that universal (one size fits all) monogamy should replace the diversity of gay male sexuality is not itself breathtakingly simplistic.

Rotello is just one of a recent breed of gay male fundamentalists. They all believe that because gay male sexual conduct offends Nature or ecology or the social order, we gay men have brought AIDS upon ourselves. It follows that a form of monogamy is the natural, ecological, socially responsible cure for our ills. His message is now the dominant gay voice in mainstream media—unsurprisingly, since it's congruent with the dominant culture's long-held view of queers. The social program of these fundamentalists feeds on gay male guilt and fear. Its realization would curtail the freedom of all queer people.

The particular danger of Rotello's book is his attack on safer sex. The fresh challenges of an evolving epidemic require the expansion of safer-sex efforts so they target particular populations. *Sexual Ecology* is fuel for a potential diversion of prevention resources toward the promotion of a puritan fantasy: global gay male monogamy. Such diversion could be disastrous for public health; Dr. Joseph Sonnabend, one of the inventors of safer sex, says: "This prescription could kill you."

Rotello's prevention policy rests on a misrepresentation of AIDS epidemiology. The results of AIDS cohort studies are outdated before they're even published. Having com-

mitted my own body to a rigorous AIDS cohort study for nine years, I count myself an ardent supporter of the primitive science of AIDS epidemiology. When repeated cohort studies tell us that young gay men are seroconverting at rates higher than their elders, we know where we have to reexamine our prevention efforts. But studies tell only so much. Rotello patches together results from different studies asking different questions of different populations in different locales within different time frames,

and he comes up with a grand unified theory despite a lack of data on whole segments of gay men. Rotello claims gay men have probably never seroconverted at rates below epidemic threshold. No AIDS expert I've questioned thinks we have such data. Rotello pushes fallacy into absurdity when he locks the destiny of gay men—not just our present but our future—into some-

thing as abstract and indeterminable as whether this year's seroconversion rate is two percent or three percent.

To fit gay men into this future, Rotello has to twist our recent history. He routinely depicts gay men's response to AIDS as narrowly self-interested, usually delusional. In fact, mutual affection has fed the vast network of grassroots AIDS-related service and activist organizations. He says that a major delusion of ours was the reduction of safer sex to a "sim-

Rotello's call for AIDS-induced monogamy and his glorification of terror reverses the liberating vision of Stonewall. He advocates the use of fear and stigma to lead reluctant gay men to monogamy. What sort of lives would he have us lead?

plistic" condom code. But in fact, community-based safer sex efforts have always offered a varied palette of risk reduction procedures, be it encouraging the use of a simple barrier, emphasizing non-penetrative sex acts or reserving unprotected anal sex for a primary partner of the same serostatus. By mixing and matching strategies in sequence or combination, a generation of gay men has incarnated safer sex literature quite polymorphously.

In Rotello's book, nominally concerned with gay men and AIDS prevention, the voices of sexually active gay men and of real-world prevention workers are never heard. Nor is there an inkling that gay male sex involves passion, pleasure and meaning. "Sexual ecology" unsullied by desire has no claim to holism. Unburdened of mundane AIDS prevention, the book becomes a lengthy brief for gay monogamy, with AIDS as its occasion. So Rotello's "deep ecology" has all the specificity and real-world relevance that Nancy Reagan's bromide "Just Say No" had more than a decade ago. Rotello counsels, "The answer is moderation. Balance." This is prose more appropriate to a self-help audiotape, utterly unequal to the choices gay men face in the age of AIDS. He offers no specifics, advocating education, the continued development of community alternatives to bars and baths and a system of rewards and punishments according the monogamous a "status" to be withheld from the rest of us. He tells us we're free to disagree with his few non-specifics and to come up with our own. But AIDS prevention needs concrete strategies that people can apply to their lives and adapt with ease. Amid a health crisis, does

Rotello seriously propose that we replace current programs with his muddle?

Virally-enforced monogamy is a prescription for an airless life, an edict from above that neither engages individual gay men nor addresses their sexual needs. Recognizing that gay men mate without the constraints of breeders, Rotello says we need not be a lot more promiscuous than heterosexuals, just a little—hardly an airtight personal prevention strategy. Marriage is historically the engine of much misery, and today among heterosexuals, with the tradition of monogamy and child rearing, it is in a shambles. Rotello tells us that in 1978 only 14 percent of gay American men were in monogamous relationships. Even in the face of AIDS, gay men have shown no widespread inclination to monogamy, a measure of how little it satisfies significant numbers of us. With many finding it akin to purgatory, bringing about Rotello's monogamous utopia would require extensive, invasive social engineering.

Openly nostalgic for the epidemic's early years when dread and ignorance sparked sporadic celibacy or makeshift pairing-off, Rotello advocates the use of fear and stigma to lead reluctant gay men to monogamy. What sort of lives would he have us lead? Fear is an animal response to a threatening condition, but it's an emergency response. Protracted fear is phobia—an ineffective base for long-term AIDS prevention. Rotello thinks his call for AIDS-induced monogamy is a new "revolution," but his glorification of terror reverses the liberating vision of Stonewall.

Fear being his bulwark, Rotello laments two features of the virus which limit its devastation: Most

unsafe encounters won't result in infection, and those that do won't result in immediate disease. Since "weak penalties" vitiate viral fear, he asks us to figure out how we can make them swift and certain. Because not even a full-blown AIDS panic will be strong enough to compel gay men to monogamy endlessly into the future, Rotello has to invoke the threat of "devastatingly predictable" future plagues.

Of heterosexual couples in which one partner is HIV positive and the other HIV negative, only 48 percent consistently use condoms. Monogamy is AIDS prevention only if its defenders accept one of the two implicit subordinate arguments: Either containing the epidemic will mean accepting lots of individual infections within couples of discordant serostatus, or there will have to be a practical sexual quarantine of HIV-positive men so that couples have uniform serostatus. By contrast, humane AIDS-prevention efforts are concerned even about those lives within discordant couples that are, in the chilly abstract, epidemiologically insignificant, and they do not demand that gay men segregate affection.

For gay urban youth today the pool of potential partners is vast. Failing to provide a framework for low-risk promiscuity, Rotello's dictum of monogamy effectively abandons gay youth. Rotello may valorize those who, youth spent, withdraw from the fast lane, but no accolade will confer on them retrospective immunity. Rotello repeatedly turns his guns on monogamy's greatest enemy: a core group of multipartnerists. He tells gay men outside the core that they can't just ignore the core: Core members are dangerous because they occasion-

ally infect outside the core. But this attack ignores individual lives: In an age when many consistently practice safer sex, a simple rate of partner change no longer determines infection rates. Even Rotello admits that, "A core in which everyone uses condoms or engages only in masturbation is not going to amplify disease." Epidemiologically, the only relevant activity is unprotected anal sex between partners of different serostatus, and that takes place outside the core as well as inside.

A Future for HIV Prevention

Effective prevention programs target the activity of individuals and their shifting situations rather than their membership in a group that has to be identified differently in an age of safer sex. We should modify behavior as necessary, but not consecrate it as some naturally-ordained ecological ideal. Yes, the "sexual ecology" of white heterosexual America is not conducive to widespread HIV transmission. But laying waste to the gay male sexual landscape is not something we could easily do. Nor would anyone who prizes people's right to self-determination want to. Calls for monogamy may be simpler than the dirtywork of the real world, but the latter messy complexity has one significant advantage: It has a chance of being effective.

Rotello's construction of a core group invites measures to eliminate that group's activities—measures that curtail freedom and waste prevention resources. It's my experience that multipartner sex can be compatible with and even foster a healthy sexual ecology. For more than a dozen years I've been a more or less promiscuous practitioner of my version of safer sex,

a personal expansion of the hoary old slogan, "Come on me, not in me." In my sex life I stress non-penetrative sex acts, wear condoms for my infrequent anal sex, do not use condoms for oral sex but do not take ejaculate into my mouth. (This will seem unacceptably risky to some gay men and unaccountably stodgy to others. I support them all in their right to make their sexual decisions and ask that they refrain from interfering with mine.) I take an HIV test regularly. I'm middle-aged and remain HIV negative.

Though I'm not immune from an occasional, short-term, low-grade AIDS-induced panic, fear has ceased to be the primary reason I keep safe. Applying some of the community lessons that activism taught me, I now have sex to promote personal, partner and group pleasure and well-being and persist in believing that the best long-range prevention, supporting habits to be maintained over a lifetime, will be fueled by desire rather than fear.

During this epidemic I've been able to distill a personal sexual lexicon that's been consistent with health and pleasure, but I don't elevate it to a universally-applicable ecological law. It's not the Destiny of Gay Men or even of this gay man, forever. Safer promiscuity is not the right prevention strategy for every gay man. But many men have practiced it successfully through-

out the epidemic, and I and they resent the call by gay journalists to close down the very establishments that enable our practice of safer sex.

Rotello writes, "Only a short time after Stonewall, the official police harassment of gay social and sexual spaces abated." This ignores the fact that in Stonewall's hometown, New York City police, with the support of reactionary gay journalists including Rotello, have for the past three years, regularly infiltrated and closed gay

cinemas, bars, clubs and meeting places in the name of safety. Yet Rotello himself contends that gay sex in public spaces today is overwhelmingly manual or oral, therefore, epidemiologically marginal. I find chilling the indifference of a fellow gay man to the consequences of the forced relocation of casual sex from safe establishments where condoms are available and fag bashers rare. For Rotello the "safety and comfort

and sense of community" that characterize the baths, rather than something to honor, becomes something to destroy.

For some of us multipartnerism has not been a threat to our safety, but its source, and semi-private and commercial sex clubs the platform for that safety. In many sex clubs there is an unspoken taboo against anal sex without condoms. For some men, Rotello's efforts would eliminate that communal inducement to safety and move

***AIDS prevention needs
to speak to young men
who have no direct
experience of AIDS,
to older men who no
longer fear AIDS as they
once did and to men
who live beyond core
gay neighborhoods.
Today's strategies
should help them
integrate low-risk
sexual activities into
lives they want to live.***

sex to the arena that's riskiest for them: a stranger's bedroom. Community norms can promote safer sex; communal sex is one way. And when safer sex becomes the norm at a commercial establishment it can promote safer sex in other contexts. Rotello's advocacy of closing sex spaces has interfered with my own practice of safer sex and diminished the pleasure I share with dozens of other gay men in any given year, interactions that I and they cherish, interactions that strengthen the web and fabric of gay New York City.

Rotello recognizes that safer sex has been "a remarkable success by almost any scale." Even a worst-case reading of current data holds that the rate of new infection among gay men is never far above epidemic threshold. All the more reason to augment efforts that have been significantly successful. AIDS prevention today needs to speak to young gay men who have no direct experience of AIDS, to older men who no longer fear the disease as they once did and to men who live beyond core gay neighborhoods. Today's strategies should help men integrate low-risk sexual activities into lives they actually want to live, exploiting the new hope engendered by more effective AIDS treatments.

During this epidemic every sexually-active gay man has attained a body of knowledge. Hundreds of thousands of gay men have altered the way they express their sexuality and come up with safer models that meet their needs more nearly than monogamy could. Pooling these bodies of knowledge—a kind of community-based epidemiology—so that other gay men might draw from the pool in accord with their needs, would be a more effective prevention project

than trying to stamp out promiscuity.

Early in his book Rotello asks: can gay men create a sustainable culture at the same time we preserve our liberation? I finished the book wondering what notion of gay liberation could trash gay culture and commit us to so much internal and external regimentation. Like earlier generations of gay liberationists, I acknowledge the genuine power of multipartner sex. In a quest to subvert the current order, some queers have found a polygamy of potential—that anyone might be anyone else's lover—a useful tool for opening up the airless, asocial closed circuit of the state-sanctioned couple. I shudder at the notion of a queer nation reduced to such couples in the aggregate.

Rotello claims that most activists are sexual libertarians and that, among gay men, sexual libertarians have the strongest voices. If Rotello is right about that, I'd like to issue a challenge to all my loose-lipped, loudmouth comrades, irrespective of serostatus. Time is past due for a prevention activism to augment our treatment activism. Safer sex is unsustainable unless it engages individuals to make personal decisions that promote their sexual pleasure, which, in the time of plague, will be the project of a true AIDS prevention activism.

We libertines know sexual health is a lot more than freedom from a pathogen. Gay male sexual culture will be healthier when it's infused with a sense of community, and every individual gay man shares in the well-being of every man he has sex with and, by extension, all gay men. But unless we go out and claim our sexual space, forces from inside and outside our community will work to take it from us.

Normative Dissonance

by Phillip Brian Harper

Andrew Sullivan—the political analyst and journalist who gained widespread media attention for being a publicly self-identified gay man at the time of his appointment as editor of the *New Republic* in 1991—has for the last several years been making propositions about homosexuality, about lesbian and gay “lifestyles” and about queer cultural politics that have attracted extensive and sustained attention in the arena of mainstream social-policy discussion.

What this means is manifold: First of all, since it is extremely unusual for publicly-identified homosexuals to gain access to the policy debates that effectively define our modes of existence within this country, the fact that Sullivan has succeeded in doing so must mean that he speaks a language that is recognizable—and valued—within those contexts. And, as it happens, a glance at one of his recent publications bears out this hypothesis. In the opening paragraphs of his introduction to the “reader” on same-sex marriage that he edited, Sullivan relates an anecdote about visiting with a friend’s family in a Florida panhandle town that experienced significant upheaval when its schools were desegregated in the 1960s. Having gotten to know this family fairly well over the course of several years, Sullivan eventually asked his friend’s father why the years of desegregation “had been so traumatic.” The man tells him that

“the thing people were most worried about was not integrating the schools as such—or the quality of the education they would get. They were worried that once they started integrating the schools, the kids would get to know one another better; and then maybe some of them would fall in love—and then maybe some of them would get married. That’s what they were really worried about.”

It’s quite clear to me that the “they” in this sentence refers not to all the residents of the community in question, but to whites, as black people seeking school desegregation generally had other things on their minds than who might end up sitting on the opposite side of the aisle at their children’s weddings. But as is all too typical in this country, this man’s statement, as quoted by Sullivan, presents white people’s experience as generic, asserting that the possibility of interracial marriage is “what people [i.e. all people] were most worried about,” and Sullivan himself both participates in and reinforces this mode of thinking, as his conceiving of school desegregation as “traumatic” in the first place clearly indicates that it is the perspective of the white majority that he both identifies with and speaks from.

It is this majoritarian or normativistic way of framing issues that gives Sullivan the access to major public forums that he currently enjoys. The problem is that those he is presumed to speak for, as an openly gay man, comprise a minority constituency, which means that its interests are undercut by the very tenets of normativist thought and thus by the propositions of Andrew Sullivan himself.

It is already clear from the anecdote I cited that Andrew Sullivan is not particularly savvy about the social significance of minority status, despite his having spilled an awful lot of ink in analyzing the position of homosexuals such as himself in contemporary western industrial society. This lack of consciousness on Sullivan's part means that not only does he conceive of a typical homosexual subject as white, male and financially secure, but he also believes that one of that subject's principle faults is its failure to conform to normative or majoritarian notions of social and sexual behavior; indeed, elsewhere in his collection on same-sex marriage, he proposes that gay men "are the group that most needs incentives for responsible behavior, monogamy, fidelity and the like."

Sullivan obviously doesn't question for a second that "responsible behavior," "monogamy" and "fidelity" are all alike or, in fact, identical; the point for him is that they are all represented in the institution of marriage, posited as the pillar of social normativity. And one of the primary points in his argument in favor of legal same-sex marriage is that, "marriage acts both as an incentive for virtuous behavior—and as a social blessing for the effort." In other words, optimum treatment under both law and custom is reserved for those who strive to conform to normative modes of behavior. This is majoritarian thinking at its most distilled, and it spells disaster for minority subjects, since it implies that equitable treat-

ment is forthcoming only to those members of society who strive to be fundamentally the same—the same in their living arrangements, in their sexual practices, in their social values, if not, indeed, in their racial, class and gender identifications. This is the message that Andrew Sullivan is promulgating in his all too voluminous work, and it is a profoundly dangerous one.

What do we do about it? We have to fight majoritarian thinking on all fronts and not simply by repeating the standard praise of diversity that by now has become empty in its stock repetition. Rather, we need to insist on the value that inheres in all the

Sullivan's majoritarian thinking implies that equitable treatment is forthcoming only to those members of society who strive to be fundamentally the same.

specific ways of being in the world that are comprised in our existence as queer people; the value, for instance, in sex itself, in sensory stimulation, in the ongoing negotiation of pleasure and danger—not because they are experiences that "all

people" have in common, as if we give a damn about what other people do, but specifically because they are vital for us, and what is vital for us by definition has value. To articulate this from our own particular positions is much harder than proceeding as Andrew Sullivan does—after all, appearances to the contrary, he speaks the language of the normative culture, while what we have to say will not translate well. But it is imperative that we articulate our positions just the same; if we don't, while we may feel strongly that Sullivan doesn't speak for us, he eventually will—whether we like it or not.

The Bloodless Revolution of the New Gay Right

by Michael Warner

If you don't know much about the history of the gay movement or AIDS activism, and if you get your information only from the press—if, in other words, you are in the position of nearly everybody on the planet—you might easily conclude that American gay politics is a minor branch of neoconservatism. Everywhere you turned, you encounter a small number of gay writers, all of them male: Andrew Sullivan, Larry Kramer, Michelangelo Signorile, Gabriel Rotello, Bruce Bawer and kindred spirits. You find them in recent cover stories not only for gay magazines, such as *Out* and the *Advocate*, but in the mainstream press as well: the *New Republic*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *New York Times Magazine*, the *Weekly Standard*, *New York* and even the *Nation*. You find them on NPR, Charlie Rose, in *Newsweek* and nearly every other forum of note. By the standards of the past, this adds up to a lot of press for gay topics. But in the spectrum of gay political thought, the ideas promoted in all this press range from right to far right.

Some of these writers will squirm at being called neoconservatives—and well they might. Michelangelo Signorile, for example, sees himself in the mainstream of the gay movement. He seldom aspires to doctrine, preferring to sound the populist note with all the noisy incoherence of a tambourinist eager to be liked. But

Signorile—like Larry Kramer, Gabriel Rotello, Daniel Mendelsohn and others who write for the trade press—has increasingly come to share the assumptions of neoconservatism, whether consciously or not.

Here's why: these writers repudiate the legacies of the gay movement—its democratic conception of activism, its goal of political mobilization, its resistance to the regulation of sex and its aspiration to a queerer world. They tar "liberationists" with the same brush the neocons used to work over "liberals," inducing the same amnesia. They scorn queer subculture and seek the moral high ground by denouncing the sex lives of queers. They promote a vision of the gay future as assimilation. And they willingly endorse state regulation of sex to that end. They are interested in sex only insofar as it lends itself to moral respectability and normal self-esteem; forget unconscious desire or the tension between pleasure and normalization or the diversity of contacts by which queers have made a world for each other. They see their own role, and that of activism generally, not in helping that world to be more commodiously and articulately queer, but in disciplining its excesses. And they reject, as liberal claptrap of victimhood, any speculation about the place of sex in broad ideas of social justice or fuller conceptions of cultural citizenship. For them, the legitimate outcome of a politics of sexuality is a happy lesbian or gay identity in a normal, private home—mature, secure and demure. This adds up to a heady program of neoconservatism, with or without the name.

It's no surprise that conservative voices might have emerged from the gay movement, as they have in

American politics generally. First "postfeminism," now this. Look at the way Stephen Carter and Stanley Crouch have found an easy soapbox as black conservatives. Many of the gay Right's strategies have been learned from these other movements. But the problem for queers is worse. We don't just have a new right wing battling traditional movement leaders. The other movement leaders have either signed on to the conservative program or are struggling to be heard from the wings and from small, grassroots bases. In a bloodless revolution that few even noticed, the publicly visible gay movement has become the gay Right.

Meanwhile, among academics, the scene could not be more different. There, the story of the past five years has been the explosion of "queer theory." Straight and gay readers alike draw on the innovations of writers who have fame among academics, though nowhere else: Judith Butler, Lauren Berlant, Leo Bersani, Douglas Crimp, Lee Edelman, Jonathan Goldberg, David Halperin, Cindy Patton and Eve Sedgwick. Some straight academics, feeling the pinch of ex-privilege, have begun to claim that queer theory tyrannizes them. Remarks that used to pass as common sense now might be suspected of homophobia.

Between these worlds the phone lines have been cut. From time to

time someone climbs a hill in the increasingly right-leaning gay movement, trains a grimy spyglass on some distant collegiate spire and writes a sentence like this one: "We need to rethink the meaning of the word activism, and we need to put behind us the concept of monolithic otherness that is urged on us by many gay-Left leaders, academics and writers." The author of this sentence, Bruce Bawer, shows no sign of having read these Lefties whom he doesn't bother to name. He doesn't even try to explain how "monolithic otherness"

***The gay public has
been colonized by the
Right. Neoconservatives
like Burr and Sullivan
find a ready audience
in the national press
because their message
of assimilation and
state regulation of sex
is the one many
straight editors want
to hear.***

somehow emerges from queer radicalism's emphasis on differences, self-divisions, unconscious desires, social contradiction, competing frames of reference and moments of transition. How could he? The sentence comes from a book called *Beyond Queer: Challenging Gay Left Orthodoxy*, and this shadowy idea of a gay-Left orthodoxy is just the swishy specter

Bawer needs in order to present himself and his contributors as brave insurgents, bracing us for the novelty of what turn out to be rehashed creeds of the pre-Stonewall homophile movement. Here's a sample: "Until we start imposing honesty, fidelity and emotion on our lives [sic]—in other words, until we are willing to talk about moral standards—we will make little real progress in social acceptance." As if fidelity could only mean monogamy. As if honesty and moral

standards had not been the theme of gay liberation. As if who's accepting whom were not at issue.

The queer "orthodoxy," in turn, has ceded the mass media and the trade press to Bawer's ilk. Small wonder: After the culture wars, academics in the humanities have a hard time simply being heard amid all the talk about political correctness. The gay media, which ought to know about such hazards, are the worst of the lot; they have yet to do even minimal reporting on academic queer theory. The queer theorists I named have never even been reviewed by *Out* or the *Advocate*, let alone interviewed or published there, with one exception: a blurb-length exercise in anti-intellectualism that *Out* packaged as a review of Eve Sedgwick's *Tendencies*. Meanwhile, national gay leaders have chosen to march under the banner of assimilation, pleading for acceptance by the alleged "mainstream." Under these conditions, it's hardly surprising that so many thinking queers have stopped writing for a movement public. They have elected to dismiss journalists, as the journalists have dismissed them. The frostbite of this mutual avoidance has left queer publics stunted and numb.

Many of these trends were set about five years ago, just as queer theory was emerging. Political energies shifted from direct action groups like ACT UP, where intellectual and activist efforts often required one another, to national electioneering, where money talks. The notion that what we really wanted was to be represented—either by officials or by celebrities—dislodged the sense of belonging actively to a movement; it made having a vital public seem less urgent. At this Clintonian juncture,

what now passes as current wisdom in gay politics was then trumpeted by Andrew Sullivan as a neoconservative revolt. In the issue of the *New Republic* that hit the streets just in time for the 1993 March on Washington, Sullivan—then the magazine's editor—wrote a manifesto that turns out to have been the most influential gay essay of the 90s. He called on gays to abandon "the notion of sexuality as cultural subversion," which, he said, alienated "the vast majority of gay people who not only accept the natural origin of their sexual orientation, but wish to be integrated into society as it is." For these people, "a 'queer' identity is precisely what they want to avoid," and a responsible gay politics should be about helping them avoid it. Sullivan's 1995 book *Virtually Normal* explained the point at greater length, claiming that gay politics reduced to only two issues: military service and marriage. Everything else is mere private difference. If you are queer and don't want to enlist or get a marriage license, then politics is not for you. The message, which Sullivan is now taking to gay audiences in promoting his *Same-Sex Marriage, Pro and Con*, is that the gay movement is essentially over or will be when gay couples can marry. This message goes over well with a key constituency: middle-class white gay men, many of whom were never happy to be political anyway.

Sullivan is less openly hostile to gay sex than, say, Larry Kramer or Gabriel Rotello. But hostility to sex lurks just below the surface in every paragraph he writes. His mode of argument is to project the possibility of the Good Gay. For real-world queers and the cultures they've made, he has at best a patronizing sympathy;

their excesses demonstrate how people are damaged by not being welcomed into "society as it is." Once allowed to marry, the Good Gay will display virtue, respectability and maturity. (As if these were the distinguishing features of existing marriage. This idealization especially appeals to those with least experience of marriage: teenagers, gays and priests.) The more Sullivan affirms this image of the Good Gay, however, the more he is forced to distance himself from the Good Gay's shadow: the Bad Queer, whose immaturity can be inferred from his or her pursuit of sex, defiance of propriety and willingness to build a collective way of life through promiscuity.

Others are not content to leave this invidious comparison implicit. In Gabriel Rotello's *Sexual Ecology*, it is the main theme. Rotello argues that gay men brought AIDS on themselves, that safer sex has failed and that the solution is monogamy. Intoning the mantra of "deep ecology," he urges us to abandon mere "technological fixes" to the problem of the epidemic, like what he calls the "condom code." He wants a more "holistic" approach to AIDS. But in this argument the metaphor of "sexual ecology"—and it is never more than a metaphor, since sexual cultures have neither the boundedness nor the coordination of functions that define ecosystems—has gotten skewed. In Rotello's hands, it has come to mean not the total environment of HIV, but a natural equilibrium, a healthful state, from which man has fallen into artifice, urbanity, technique and death. Latex, however, is not a "technological fix" as opposed to nature; it is as much a part of the ecology of HIV as gay sex. Sometimes Rotello

means by ecology something so banal and obvious that no one has ever thought to disagree with it: "Among gay men in the seventies, our sexual behavior was extraordinarily conducive to the transmission of HIV." What is the purpose of the concept if this is all it means? Unprotected sex was a condition for AIDS, but didn't produce the disease by itself; HIV was not a constant. But Rotello—following the wacky Ian Young, who still thinks AIDS was caused by poppers and Crisco—is determined to argue that "the gay sexual revolution of the seventies was profoundly anti-ecological," independent of HIV. "Gay men," he concludes, "can never go back."

Ironically, Rotello himself quotes Pat Buchanan's famous remark, "The poor homosexuals—they have declared war on Nature, and now Nature is exacting an awful retribution." He seems not to notice that his own argument has slipped into an uncanny echo of the same diagnosis. He has simply substituted a concept of ecology for Buchanan's "Nature." Larry Kramer, for one, draws the obvious conclusion from what he praises as Rotello's "definitive, airtight" argument: "Nature," he writes in a recent issue of the *Advocate*, "always extracts a price for sexual promiscuity." Kramer evidently fears that if he doesn't use the opportunity of AIDS to stamp out gay sex, he'll never get a better one. In the *Advocate* piece, he rails against Edmund White and every other gay writer who stoops so low as to write about sex at all.

Rotello's rhetoric not only fuels Larry Kramer's ranting; it can lead to dangerously regressive policy. In New York City, it has accelerated Mayor Giuliani's drive to shut down queer

life: Bars and clubs have been closed, adult business has been zoned into oblivion and arrests for public lewdness have skyrocketed, while the gay community has done little to fight back. Similar reports come from Los Angeles. In the cover story of the June *Atlantic Monthly*, a gay writer named Chandler Burr proposes in effect a crackdown on people with HIV, through contact tracing and HIV testing without consent. Burr endorses the proposals of the Coburn bill, currently pending in Congress and opposed by every major AIDS organization as counterproductive and punitive. Its author, Tom Coburn, is the same homophobic Oklahoma congressman who went into high dudgeon last year over the network broadcast of that indecent film, *Schindler's List*. Burr notes that this leaves Coburn with a credibility problem, especially since the Republican Congress will not fund prevention targeted to gay men (that would "promote homosexuality," in the words of the Helms Amendment), nor will it make protease inhibitors and other AIDS therapies universally available to people infected with HIV. Coburn agrees with Rotello: "Because we want to say it's OK to be promiscuous," he tells Burr in *Poz*, "we're willing to rationalize the effectiveness of condoms." Promiscuity, not HIV, is the target.

So why is a gay writer promoting the Coburn bill? Burr has a credibility problem of his own. He has no background in AIDS prevention or in the gay movement. A conservative with a degree in economics, he broke into print with the *Atlantic* by arguing that homosexuality is genetic. More recently, he wrote a cover story for the

rightist *Weekly Standard* in December that essentially explains how conservatives can continue to be antigay if a gay gene is found. "The gay gene is a remarkable vindication of conservative ideas about human nature and may offer one of the most devastating refutations of liberalism we have yet seen," he writes. Calling himself an "ardent assimilationist," he announces that he would "not be opposed to considering genetic surgery" to cure himself of the genetic "disease" of homosexuality. Yet this is the writer whom the *Atlantic* has chosen to be its sole voice on gay issues and whom it has elevated from nowhere to national prominence.

By such means the gay public has been colonized by the Right. Neoconservatives like Burr and Sullivan find a ready audience in the national press because their message is the one many straight editors want to hear. And they find a ready audience in gay political circles partly because of a structural problem in the movement: Politics depends more and more on fund-raising and media jockeying, which in turn is more and more disconnected from any queer public in which discussion of strategies, ideals and histories might take place. The gay press no longer plays that role. The gay Right has been able to project itself as a virtual gay movement, one whose mission is normalization and the end of politics. This trend is likely to continue until queers speak up, lobby the gay and straight press alike, engage the donor base in debate, recover a sense of the movement's history, draw queer intellectuals back into the mix, remember how sublime the queer world can be and nerve ourselves for the fight to reclaim it.

Know Your Enemy: The Coburn Bill

Disingenuously titled the "HIV Prevention Act of 1997," the bill (S 503/HR 1062) was introduced by Tom Coburn, Republican Congressman from Oklahoma (the same Coburn who achieved notoriety last year by denouncing the network broadcast of *Schindler's List* as indecent). The bill requires that states do the following:

!Mandate the reporting of all positive HIV test results to public health authorities, ending anonymous testing.

!Cooperate with other states in developing a national partner notification program, to trace and notify the sexual partners of anyone who tests HIV positive.

!Test people accused of sexual offenses whenever the victim or alleged victim requests it and permit the defendant's HIV test results to be used in court.

!Authorize health care workers to refuse to perform any invasive medical procedure until the patient has been tested for HIV.

!Authorize funeral homes to refuse to perform funeral procedures unless the body is tested for HIV.

!Disclose a child's HIV status to adoptive parents.

The bill withholds federal Medicaid funds to any state that does not comply with these mandates. It also includes a "sense of the Congress" resolution urging states to criminalize the intentional transmission of HIV.

It provides no new money to finance any of these initiatives. It has

only a nonbinding resolution to protect the confidentiality of test results. It provides for no non-punitive HIV-prevention measures, such as prevention campaigns directed to gay men. It makes no provision for following testing and notification with health care or counseling. It provides no money, for example, to make protease inhibitors available to those who test positive, leaving protease inhibitors unaffordable and inaccessible for the majority of those with HIV.

It is expected to pass.

What's Wrong With Routine Testing and Contact Tracing?

!Routine testing means testing without consent. Anytime someone draws your blood, you can be tested for HIV without your knowledge.

!Voluntary testing means that a patient is already involved in his or her health care and has options for counseling and treatment. Routine testing does not allow for any consideration of the individual's point of view.

!One of the main reasons for testing and notification is that early treatment can help. But many of those tested without consent—for example, prisoners and many of the uninsured—will not receive treatment.

!Mandatory reporting and contact tracing will force anonymous testing sites to close despite the fact that many people report that they would not have been tested at all if they could not have done so anonymously. And those who are tested in anonymous sites are more likely to be positive than those who are tested elsewhere. Many will simply avoid health care.

!Contact tracing isn't easy. Think about the government tracking down your sexual partners.

!And contact tracing is expensive. Is the money for this going to come from the tiny and already strained budget for AIDS prevention?

!No other disease is required to be reported by federal mandate.

!States are already free to require notification and four states have done so: Arkansas, North Carolina, South Carolina and Oregon. These are not states noted for their care for HIV-positive people.

!Both name reporting and contact tracing have been subject to disturbing abuses around the country.

!The Coburn bill prevents states from tailoring prevention efforts to different communities. Contact tracing and partner notification do not mean the same thing in all contexts.

The Coburn bill won't save lives; it will endanger them. It withholds Medicaid funds from states that do not comply with its mandates, jeopardizing health care for people with HIV. Nearly two out of three New Yorkers with HIV depend on Medicaid.

It is a building block for a nationwide sex panic. It would enshrine in federal law the demonization and scapegoating of HIV-positive people that is being used in our city to contain and control queer space and queer sexuality. A true "HIV Prevention Act" would look to the successes we have achieved during the AIDS epidemic: It would provide support for education and safer-sex initiatives while offering resources to affected people. It would help us foster trust and communication rather than institutionalizing discipline and surveillance.

The Gay Media Monologue

by Jim Eigo

*A letter to the editor of LGNY,
August 3, 1997:*

A headline on the cover of the Pride Day/Independence Day issue of *LGNY* asks the question "How Can We Be Gay Now?" Since it's Larry Kramer posing the query, the answer by now should surprise no one. It goes something like: Let's Be Just Like the Straights We See All Around Us. And just in case you don't hear him the first time, he says it over and over and over.

The only real surprise in this is how *LGNY*, the self-styled "newspaper for Lesbian and Gay New York," would find this a fitting message for Pride Day, which, after all, commemorates our rebellion against the constraints straight society would have us live by. It's not like *LGNY* could be ignorant of Larry's recent "Let's Go Straight" spiel. The blood is hardly yet dry from the infamous *Advocate* article in which Larry, borrowing a page from the fundamentalist Right, equates AIDS with Nature's revenge and a sexually active man's asshole with a toilet. These are metaphors that, in 1997, most of our enemies are afraid to use against us. They no longer need to; Larry Kramer does it for them, and "gay publications" like the *Advocate* and *LGNY* endorse the hateful spew with cover articles.

Actually, the Kramer speech is pretty toothless pap by the usual standards of Larry the Axe. He says he's tired of cock, when he sounds like he's just plain tired. But even a weak wind

is toxic when it issues a call for gays to mimic straights. Larry's vitriol is not new, but the anger he once turned against the power structure in his very real and enduring contributions to early AIDS activism, he now turns against community-based AIDS organizations and his fellow gay men. Larry's disgust with gay sex is not new. Two decades ago it fueled the unpleasant but undeniably powerful novel *Faggots*. But he's scratched that particular itch so long that by 1997 it's an open wound that nothing seems to be able to plug.

The same issue of *LGNY* features Paul Schindler's (unintentionally) humorous editorial. It seems that Schindler's got his shorts all in knots because someone slipped flyers for the new group Sex Panic! into copies of Mike Signorile's latest book. (I should mention that I am a member in good standing of Sex Panic!, but I am not a

group spokesperson.) As a result of this guerrilla leafletting, no one was hurt or inconvenienced, no property damaged. Our righteous editor rises in defense of a phalanx of homosexual neocons whom, he says, Sex Panic! has painted as "the Other."

You, dear editor, are either very ignorant or a hypocrite. Several of the writers whom you defend against the Sex Panic! flyer are veterans of the AIDS/queer activist movements of the 80s. They regularly supported and even perpetrated acts that were several

degrees more radical than the Sex Panic! leafletting. Today, as media spokespeople for the normalization of queerness, they have spent their last few years making us "the Other:" vilifying those queers who refuse their Straight-jackets, collaborating with authorities to close our spaces, warning the outside world that we have to be controlled and urging other gays to subject us to second-class citizenship.

The editorial is a sad measure of how far we've fallen from the early days of AIDS activism. But I guess I should realize it's the 90s now, and

As media spokespeople for the normalization of queerness, the homosexual neoconservatives have spent their last few years making us "the Other"—vilifying those queers who refuse their Straight-jackets and collaborating with authorities who close our spaces.

LGNY, NYC's only gay newspaper, sees its special role as paving our way to the mainstream. So any vestige of 80s radicalism—even one as mild as a phantom leafletting—must indeed seem a threat to the editor and his publisher. Well, get used to it: Sex Panic! has just begun. Over the brief six weeks of our group's existence, several hun-

dred savvy and passionate fags and dykes have participated in its fledgling activities. Unlike the coterie of media deadwood that fuels *LGNY*, we do not believe that AIDS is Nature's revenge, and we do not believe that mimicking white heterosexual America is a cure-all. Sex Panic! is beginning to articulate a vision of Queer America that stands in marked contrast to the great, gray suburbia that *LGNY* and its staff of fundamentalists would have us all check into. Stay tuned; it could make being gay fun again.

The Mixed Constituency of Sexual Commerce

by Alison Redick

Who exactly composes the constituency of sexual commerce? Since the winter of 1994-95, when the Giuliani administration first proposed zoning legislation to "clean up Times Square" and move the sex industry to the outskirts of Manhattan, activists have coalesced around the question of sexual citizenship. On the municipal level, battles to preserve "adult entertainment establishments," have been waged primarily by a group of sex business owners who call themselves the Coalition for Free Expression (COFFE). Other activists have organized in primarily queer contexts. Groups such as AIDS Prevention Activist League (APAL) and Community AIDS Prevention Activists (CAPA) formed early in 1995 to insist on the preservation of gay public sex spaces as venues for distributing safer sex education literature and condoms. In the past six months, the activist group Sex Panic! formed to combat the increased policing of queer sexualities that has taken place in conjunction with the zoning laws that are rapidly transforming Manhattan into a safe space for megastores and corporate real estate interests. Absent from both municipal and cultural opposition to the zoning are the voices of the large heterosexual constituency of sexual commerce.

The zoning of sex businesses and the massive influx of primarily tourist-oriented commerce under

Mayor Giuliani's supervision are closely linked. The physical details of the transformation of New York City zoning reveal Giuliani's blatant intention to fill the outskirts of the city with large shopping venues, completely eliminating any semblance of a cohesive sex district. The makeover of Times Square by the 42nd Street Improvement District, under the rubric of neighborhood improvement and redevelopment, has brought large corporations such as Disney, Virgin and Condé Nast to 42nd Street in the interests of family entertainment and the wholesome revenue that this sort of tourism brings to the city. The deep irony of this transformation is that Times Square was *already* a source of tourism, patronized largely by heterosexual populations, presumably many of the same people who will now bring their families into the city to enjoy an afternoon of entertainment at the celebrated New Victory Theater.

Behind the rhetoric of Giuliani's "quality of life" campaign is a clear vision of the ideal New York citizen: home-owning, law-abiding, someone who wants the city to be a safe place to raise a family, go to church and walk the streets without having to encounter homelessness, smut, loud noise or any of the other distractions that characterize New York City. For the numerous people who are not included in this vision, living in New York has become an increasingly challenging proposition. Presuming that there is such a thing as sexual citizenship and that citizens who enjoy and participate in the production and consumption of public sex have rights that deserve to be protected, how can the conflict between the ideal citizen and the reviled sex industry be

resolved? For the card-carrying perverts who are not afraid of being identified as sexual consumers, there are ways of protesting new zoning regulations. For countless others, an overt and identifiable interest in preserving sexual culture seems to threaten the limits of citizenship.

Giuliani's "quality of life" campaign has prompted many who already perceive themselves as being outside these limits to ask, "whose quality of life?" According to the story told by the Giuliani administration, sexual commerce deeply interferes with the quality of an ideal citizen's life, tainting the city with its explicit signage and unsavory patrons, contributing to increased rates of crimes and a host of "quality of life" misdemeanors, including pan-handling, drinking in public and late-night congregating in the streets, parks and on the piers. Whose quality of life? Do sex workers and sexual consumers have a right to access sexual commerce that is safe and readily available? Or must the already stigmatized activities of buying and selling sex be driven to the waterfront and outer boroughs, inconveniencing sexual consumers and putting sex workers at different risks? There is an implicit assumption that sexual deviants—in this case portrayed primarily as victimized sex workers and the perverts who pay for sex in its many commercial forms—are not the same people as those who will patronize the new, improved 42nd Street

and should not be given the same rights. But what if they are, in fact, exactly the same people?

The historical precedents for the current situation in New York City, especially the "vice campaigns" of the early 20th century that were aimed at the elimination of brothels and saloons, illustrate the relationship between the moral and financial interests at stake in zoning. "Vice districts," as areas with high proportions of sex and liquor based businesses were referred to in the 1910s and 20s, were seen to be the expression of social ills brought about by the unusu-

According to Giuliani, sexual commerce deeply interferes with the quality of an ideal citizen's life, tainting the city with its explicit signage and unsavory patrons and contributing to increased rates of "quality of life" crimes.

al circumstances of urban life. In the early 20th century, zoning was invented to prevent manufacturing districts from interfering with the quality of residential and commercial districts. Produced by the new professional class of city planners, zoning was designed to transform early industrial cities into places

where both commerce and health would thrive. Zoning would regulate the uses of city spaces, provide city dwellers with parks and open spaces to combat moral and physical ill-being and alleviate the congestion that was believed in part to be responsible for the proliferation of vice in cities.

In the 1930s, a group of American sociologists and social Darwinists known as the Chicago School, latched on to the rhetoric of the vice campaigns. In their work, the church, the school and the family are

clearly pointed to as institutions especially threatened by the persistence of what were known as "moral regions" in the city. The resemblance of the contemporary New York zoning ordinance—which strictly prohibits a sex establishment from existing within 500 feet of a church, school or residence—to early 20th century vice campaigns is not coincidental. In the "Adult Entertainment Study" conducted by the Department of City Planning values that travel under the guise of "quality of life" clearly persist in order to protect religion, youth and family. These values are conceived of as being in direct conflict with sexual citizenship, even if members of these categories are themselves patrons of sexual commerce.

The new zoning ordinances, based on the "Adult Entertainment Study" conducted by the Department of City Planning in 1994, are steeped in the "quality of life" rhetoric that has driven many of the reforms made by the Giuliani administration. Although inconclusive with regards to the actual effects of the sex industry upon crime and business (red light districts are often sanctioned to areas that are already dangerous, and the high traffic may in fact help to stem crime and boost commerce among other businesses in the area), the study clearly implicates sexual commerce in the deterioration of the social fabric. Yet what is truly at stake is to a much greater extent financial than moral.

From its inception, the 42nd Street Improvement initiative was driven by corporate interests. The Times Square sex industry began to thrive in the mid-70s, a time of economic decline. Real estate owners extended leases to sex business in order to avert foreclosure. Economic recovery in the

1980s brought about a series of changes to Times Square, including the elimination of welfare hotels in the area to prepare for redevelopment. In the mid-80s the Clinton Coalition for Concern fought for the development of the area into an office park. In the midst of this redevelopment scenario, "quality of life" concerns are a convenient way to mobilize public support for private profit.

Clearly, the question of sexual citizenship has different implications for different populations. Other than the Coalition for Free Expression and the queer constituency that demands its right to preserve an explicitly sexual culture, most protest against the zoning ordinance has come from the NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) faction. The outer boroughs do not want sexual commerce to move out of Manhattan for many of the same reasons that the Department of City Planning finds in the Adult Entertainment Study: Sex business is perceived to interfere with the quality of life, financially and morally. There is no simple solution for those who wish to preserve sexual commerce and culture in its many forms. Times Square has already changed. Many sexual businesses have been driven out or have already shut down in anticipation of the laws coming into effect. Thinking through the history of vice campaigns lends some context to a struggle against further regulation. Breaking down the distinctions between categories like citizen, subject and deviant opens the possibility that many people occupy each of these categories. The question is how to claim sexual citizenship, challenge individual subjection to conservative politics and celebrate deviance.

Know Your Enemy: New York City Zoning Law

The New York City Council delivered a major blow to public sexual culture when it approved the October 25, 1995 amendments to the New York City Zoning Resolution. The purpose of the amendments, as described in its explanatory preamble, is to "guide the future use of the City's land by encouraging the development of desirable residential, commercial and manufacturing areas with appropriate groupings of compatible and related uses and thus to promote and to protect public health, safety and general welfare." Its effect? It will mean the virtual elimination of commercial sex establishments and adult businesses from Manhattan. Legal sex businesses would be forced to close and sites of current safer-sex initiatives would be shut down.

"Adult establishments," in the language of the amendments, represent "objectionable non-conforming uses which are detrimental to the character of the districts in which [they] are located." The new law defines an "adult establishment" as a business which has a "substantial portion of its stock-in-trade" in "materials which are characterized by an emphasis upon the depiction or description of 'specified sexual activities' or 'specified anatomical areas.'" Those uniquely bureaucratized concepts are defined as follows:

"Specified sexual activities" are: (1) human genitals in a state of sexual stimulation or arousal; (2) actual or

simulated acts of human masturbation, sexual intercourse or sodomy; or (3) fondling or other erotic touching of human genitals, pubic region, buttock, anus or female breast.

"Specified anatomical areas" are: (1) less than completely and opaquely concealed: (i) human genitals, pubic region, (ii) human buttock, anus, or (iii) female breast below a point immediately above the top of the areola; or (2) human male genitals in a discernibly turgid state, even if completely and opaquely concealed."

The new law dictates that adult establishments "be located at least 500 feet from a church, a school [or] a Residence District." Adult establishments must also be located at least 500 feet from each other and individually may "not exceed 10,000 square feet of floor area and cellar space."

Pursuant to the new law, all "non-conforming adult establishments [i.e. those that do not meet the above criteria]" were to "terminate within one year from October 25, 1995." There is a provision allowing individual appeals for a "limited" extension of time to terminate operation, if an owner can show that it would cause substantial financial hardship.

The latest amendments to the New York City Zoning Resolution seek to establish "desirable" residential and commercial areas by erasing desire from the city. A challenge to the zoning amendments is currently pending before the New York State Court of Appeals. If the law is upheld, we will lose more than areolas and turgid genitals; we will lose places to freely gather and meet; we will lose venues of safer-sex education; we will lose locations in which we can experience our desires and celebrate our sexuality.

What Is the Gay Right Saying?

about being gay:

"Genetic research may yet lead to the discovery that the gay gene is a disease gene. . . . I am an assimilationist in part because I look at a homosexual orientation as a biological roll of the dice that has all the political importance of left-handedness, i.e., none at all."

—Chandler Burr, the *Weekly Standard*, Dec. 16, 1996

"The time is ripe for us to . . . start acting like what we are—a group of adults who want to live lives as normal and healthy as everyone else in the mainstream. If we do, I think we will be on the path to my dream—an America in which being gay is no more remarkable than being left-handed."

—John Berresford, the *Washington Post*, Jun. 11, 1995

about the gay rights movement:

"Following legalization of same-sex marriage and a couple of other things, I think we should have a party and close down the gay rights movement for good."

—Andrew Sullivan, *Out Takes* (1997)

"The standard political model sees homosexuals as an oppressed minority who must fight for their liberation through political action. But that model's usefulness is drawing to a close. It is ceasing to serve the interests of ordinary gay people, who ought to begin disengaging from it, even drop it."

—Jonathan Rauch, the *New Republic*, Oct. 7, 1991

"We need urgently to put behind us an ideology that quixotically rejects and ridicules everything the average American believes in (God, country, capitalism), that touts diversity while condemning any breach of the party line as right-wing heresy and that sees the Republican party as an implacable foe and middle Americans as unchangeable bigots."

—Bruce Bawer, the *Advocate*, Jan. 24, 1995

about AIDS:

"We should stop seeing AIDS as anybody else's problem. The sad fact is that every gay man who got AIDS by sex got it from another man and by doing something he chose to do."

—John Berresford, the *Washington Post*, Jun. 11, 1995

"We brought AIDS upon ourselves by a way of living that welcomed it."

—Larry Kramer, the *Advocate*, May 27, 1997

"AIDS has done much to discredit the idea that gay men have a lot to teach others about pleasure, since we appear to be dying from the very pleasure we wanted to educate the world about."

—Gabriel Rotello, *Sexual Ecology* (1997)

"Exceptionalists argue that routine testing will 'drive AIDS underground'—make people avoid the health-care system altogether. . . . Ultimately one must ask whether people who would go underground . . . should dictate policy—and also whether such people would cooperate in disease-prevention efforts under any circumstances."

—Chandler Burr, the *Atlantic Monthly*, Jun. 1997.

about sex:

"With the police off their backs, many [gay men] simply did what men have empowered themselves to do for centuries: They became as sexually adventurous and indulgent as they wanted to be, denying any responsibility for themselves or others in the process."

—Michelangelo Signorile, *Life Outside* (1997)

"Ultimately, to understand sexual ecology is to understand that the gay sexual revolution of the seventies was profoundly anti-ecological. Gay men can never go back."

—Gabriel Rotello, *Sexual Ecology* (1997)

"How can many lesbians and a great many gay men themselves not throw their hands in the air, rightly disgusted and anguished? Perhaps most important, what do HIV prevention leaders do now? Having found it difficult enough to grapple with men who are 'slipping up,' now they have to come to terms with what could be a significant number of people who are willfully and sometimes angrily defying safer-sex efforts, rebelling against the rest of us and thereby keeping HIV transmission thriving, affecting adversely the entire gay world."

—Michelangelo Signorile, *Out*, Jul. 1997

about gay culture:

"We don't have a gay culture, I don't believe. We have our sexuality, and we have made a culture out of our sexuality, and that culture has killed us."

—Larry Kramer, the *Advocate*, May 27, 1997

"Most gay men in urban America are not living a life of enforced heterosexuality, as gay liberationists might call it, with a driveway, a picket fence and children to nurture. Many are, however, instead living a life of enforced cult homosexuality, with parties, drugs and gyms ruling their lives. Some men have . . . found that there is a thin line between liberation and oppression."

—Michelangelo Signorile, *Life Outside* (1997)

"There are very few social incentives of the kind conservatives like for homosexuals not to be depraved: there's little social or familial support, no institution to encourage fidelity or monogamy, precious little religious or moral outreach to guide homosexuals into more virtuous living."

—Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal* (1995)

about gay marriage:

"Legalization of same-sex marriage, [critics] argue, would create a two-tiered gay society in which married couples would be viewed as legitimate, while those who were unmarried would be considered social outcasts. . . . The core of the objection . . . seems essentially correct. Indeed, that's a key point."

—Gabriel Rotello, the *Nation*, Apr. 21, 1997

"If gay marriage is recognized, single gay people over a certain age should not be surprised when they are disapproved of or pitied. That is a vital part of what makes marriage work. It's stigma as social policy. If marriage is to work, it cannot be merely a 'lifestyle option.'"

—Jonathan Rauch, the *New Republic*, May 6, 1996

Contributors

Allan Bérubé is a founder of the San Francisco Lesbian and Gay History Project. He is the author of *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (Free Press, 1990) and co-wrote the 1994 Peabody Award-winning documentary film based on his book.

Richard Berkowitz is a freelance writer and sex worker. In 1983, with Dr. Joseph Sonnabend and the late Michael Callen, he co-authored the first safe sex manifesto: "How to Have Sex in an Epidemic: One Approach."

Douglas Crimp teaches visual and cultural studies at the University of Rochester. Among his books is *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* (MIT, 1988).

Lisa Duggan teaches lesbian and gay studies at New York University and is co-author with Nan D. Hunter of *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (Routledge, 1995).

Jim Eigo wrote the first draft of the federal policy that expanded access to experimental AIDS drugs. An occasional model, he has appeared in the pages of *Honcho*. His erotic fiction has appeared in *Stallions*, *Best Gay Erotica 1997* and *Butch Boys*.

Phillip Brian Harper teaches in the American Studies Program at New York University. His books include *Framing the Margins: The Social Logic of Postmodern Culture* (Oxford, 1994) and *Are We Not Men? Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African-American Identity* (Oxford, 1996).

Ann Pelligrini is an assistant professor in the Department of English and American Literature and Language at Harvard University. She is the author of *Performance Anxieties: Staging Psychoanalysis, Staging Race* (Routledge, 1997).

Eva Pendleton is an activist and coordinator of PONY. She co-edited *Policing Public Sex* (South End, 1996), and her essay "Love for Sale: Queering Heterosexuality" appeared in *Whores and Other Feminists* (Routledge, 1997).

Alison Redick is a writer and activist. She has written for the *Lambda Book Report* and co-edited *Policing Public Sex* (South End, 1996).

Joseph Sonnabend, M.D. is a microbiologist and physician practicing in New York City. In 1983, with Richard Berkowitz and the late Michael Callen, he co-authored the first safe sex manifesto: "How to Have Sex in an Epidemic: One Approach."

Michael Warner is a professor of English at Rutgers University. Among his books is *Fear of a Queer Planet* (Minnesota, 1993).

SEX PANIC!

(212) 252-4925

sexpanicnyc@geocities.com

<http://www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Heights/5777/>