

letters

Dating in the '90s

To the Editor:

At the end of September I had the privilege of spending four days in San Francisco, working on HIV-prevention issues with a caring group of people from across the western United States. Although that work holds great meaning for me, I think the most impactful moment of the trip occurred on the sidewalk outside my hotel.

I noticed two teens walking, holding hands, window shopping (at the GAP, where else?) and generally enjoying each other's company on one of summer's last days. Both were young men (boys?), one maybe 16, and the other maybe a year younger.

The older of the two turned to a woman standing about 10 feet behind them and said something like "Mom, is it OK if Jason stays with us for dinner tonight?" Mom replied, "Well, it's all right with me, as long as he calls his mother to be sure it's OK with her."

Here were two young guys on a date, with a mother who cared more about good parenting than her son's orientation.

It's becoming more and more important to me to notice and call attention to the social progress we have made, even as others attempt to block it.

Jim Clay
Portland

Adding to the confusion

To the Editor:

I read with interest and concern the editorial ["Playing devil's advocate," *Just Out*, Sept. 2, 1994]. In it there was mention that the transsexual community has been misunderstood. This occurred even in the editorial. Transsexuals are often confused with transvestites and drag queens. A mention was further made suggesting that a conference of "cross-dressers and transsexuals" had denied association with the term "gay." Transsexuals represent only one in 20,000 people, while one in 100 men is a transvestite. At such a gathering described in the editorial, they would outnumber us 400 to 1! Any conference that claims to be for both transvestites (cross-dressers) and transsexuals would have only token numbers of transsexuals at most. The gathering is really just for straight men with a fetishistic interest in wearing womens' clothing, often their wives'. Of course they denied being called gay!

Transsexuals have historically fallen into two camps, the ones trying to assimilate into straight society and those trying to assimilate into gay society. Only recently have transsexuals begun to come—as transsexuals—into the gay community in large numbers. We have felt too afraid to do so before. We were trashed by the "Big L" lesbian crowd, Mary Daly, Janice Ramond, Alix Dobkin, etc. We were disowned by the "straight look" and "macho" gay male crowds, only to be pushed into the drag queen scene—and then only accepted in bars, not at the pride parades. But why would a lesbian male-to-female transsexual hang out in a gay male bar?

The reason that acceptance of transsexuals is happening now is partly due to our own political work within the gay community. We have been working quietly and patiently for two decades. Journals such as *Transsexual News Telegraph* and *TransSisters* are forging new ties and greater understanding between the transsexual and gay communities at large. We are gaining acceptance from the younger gay generation. The one that grew up after Stonewall had become a historical event to be looked back on. Groups like Queer Nation and the Lesbian Avengers are openly accepting of transsexual members. At a recent conference of lesbian physicians, Dr. Joy Shaffer gave a talk on transsexuals and the gay community. She noted that the age group 45-60 was very antagonistic, while those younger or older were

sympathetic. Those in their 20s, the "Generation X," were supportive to the point of hero worship. Thus the future of transsexual acceptance in the gay community is secure.

Candice Hellen Brown
Portland

What's reasonable?

To the Editor:

I am writing to thank *Just Out* for its editorial ["The issue is NAMBLA," July 1, 1994] denouncing the North American Man/Boy Love Association and to offer a few clues for the individuals who then wrote in defending NAMBLA.

It's very true that there are reasonable controversies around when young people should be able to decide to have sex with older people, and NAMBLA is quite right to question 18 years [as the] age of consent. It's also true that there are reasonable controversies about what percent of the population is gay, and the OCA is quite right to question unthinking support for the 10 percent figure. But neither the OCA nor NAMBLA stop with what is reasonable.

The bottom line is, NAMBLA stands for no age of consent laws at all. Their official line is that all sex should be legal unless someone can prove it was coerced—which means sex with babies is always OK (they never say no) and usually sex with 2- or 5-year-olds, since they are unlikely to come up with a coherent complaint.

Adults have tremendous power over children and a tremendous ability to hurt them when they use those children for sexual purposes. This is true even when they "talk the child into it." I have talked with many sexual abuse survivors, gay and straight, and it is amazing the level of pain still experienced 20 or more years after the event. If NAMBLA wants to be considered respectable, it needs to propose reasonable means to protect children against exploitation and damage. Till it does so, it no more deserves the support of the gay community than does the OCA, the KKK, or whatever.

Ron Unger
Eugene

No evil agenda

To the Editor:

Excuse me?! What film did you actually see, Ms. O'Hartigan? I saw a film of the same name (*Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*) and had a totally different experience. Sorry, but this film has no evil agenda. You, on the other hand, have an agenda: It is called knee-jerk political correctness.

Portrayal of real-life situations, such as violence against a particular group of people, does not necessarily endorse violence. It is the context in which it is depicted which determines endorsement. However, this subtlety is lost on people who are hung up on the politically correct bandwagon. The unquestioning embrace of a package of ideas and dogma such as political correctness is no different from embracing religious fundamentalism. It only requires a mind that will not think, sort out, and decide for itself.

As a transsexual, undoubtedly Ms. O'Hartigan has experienced a fair amount of the unpleasant side of human nature in our society. It is obvious that her bitterness has rendered her incapable of any objectivity in her review. As a result she appears sanctimonious. The (Ms.) fortunes of life leave us stronger, or just plain unhappy. People such as the reviewer of this film lack a valuable sense of humor for getting by in life.

Will Romanelli
Portland

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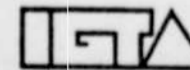
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