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steppin' out



The Lesbian Community Project launched LezBingo on March 24 in the basement of the Northwest Service Center. Next LezBingo will take place April 21. The table in the foreground monopolized the winnings for the evening.

PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

guest editorial
Spin on killing askew

Elected officials, public leaders, and the media should use this opportunity to aggressively condemn and confront bigotry and violence against gay men and lesbians

by Robin Kane

Last month, a gay man named Scott Amedure was shot to death while he stood unarmed in the doorway of his trailer home. The accused and confessed murderer, Jonathan Schmitz, is an acquaintance of Amedure. Schmitz had appeared on *The Jenny Jones Show* with Amedure just three days earlier, when Amedure acknowledged that he had a crush on his straight male acquaintance. Contrary to media spin on this event, "surprise," "humiliation," and *The Jenny Jones Show* did not lead to Amedure's murder. Instead it is the rampant homophobia of this culture that is at the root of this murder.

Yes, talk shows are increasingly exploitative, with each show upping the ante for drama and surprises. In their thirst for ratings, talk show producers often ignore the real-life implications of the drama they create. The producers of this program certainly did not consider the all-too-real drama of anti-gay bigotry that would ultimately lead to Scott Amedure's murder. These shows need to seriously evaluate their surprise tactics and should refrain from creating volatile situations.

The sheriff's department, the county prosecutor on the case, and the media are all pointing to the "surprise" and "humiliation" of the accused murderer to explain the incident. A sheriff's lieutenant told the press that the public revelation of a gay man's crush had "eaten away" at Schmitz. The county prosecutor who is responsible for pursuing charges against Schmitz aimed most of his vitriol during a news conference not at the accused murderer but at *The Jenny Jones Show*. According to that prosecutor, Amedure is dead because of Schmitz's "humiliation." Friends of Schmitz are quoted throughout press reports discussing Schmitz's embarrassment that a gay man had a crush on him. Wire stories, *The Washington Post*, and a commentary on National Public Radio all focused enormous space on the humiliation and the hysteria of talk shows. *The New York Times* ran an Associated Press story under the headline "Fatal Shooting Follows Surprise on TV Talk Show" and a later follow-up story headlined "After Killing, Hard Questions for Talk Shows."

Why is it that the sheriff's department, the county prosecutor,

and the media seem to fully understand Schmitz's confessed feelings of humiliation without any real discussion of their cause? Is it because Schmitz was not interested in the person who expressed having a crush on him? Certainly not. Every woman in this country has at some time experienced unwanted interest from a group of men on a street corner. Is it, then, because the person who expressed interest in Schmitz is of a different sexual orientation than Schmitz? No, not really. As a lesbian, I navigate my way through the world without buying a shotgun and using it on straight men who merely express attraction. The sole reason that everyone is discussing Schmitz's "humiliation" with such ease is that homophobia is rampant in this culture. It does not need to be directly stated. It is just a given that Schmitz would feel humiliated, according to the media and officials.

One man was embarrassed; another man was shot twice in the chest with a shotgun. Surprise, humiliation and embarrassment are no excuse for murder. While the media focus their attention on the hysteria of talk shows or the uncomfortable feelings of the assailant, the actual murder of Scott Amedure is nearly lost.

This tragedy highlights the deadly nature of homophobia in our society. That anyone should be killed simply for being gay is deplorable. Sadly, the murder of Scott Amedure is not an isolated incident. Last year, 59 gay men and lesbians are known to have lost their lives in bias-motivated murders. None of the murders followed the taping of a talk show, but the victims are equally dead due to homophobia.

Rather than wringing their hands over Schmitz's so-called humiliation, elected officials, public leaders, and the media should use this opportunity to aggressively condemn and confront bigotry and violence against gay men and lesbians, which are at the root of Scott Amedure's death. A different headline, if true—"After Killing, Anti-Gay Bigotry Roundly Condemned"—could have helped prevent future incidents.

Robin Kane is the media director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in Washington, D.C.

contents

VOL 12 NO. 11 APRIL 7, 1995

FEATURES

Make room for daddy

Gay fathers agree about the important things
(pp. 17-19)

A battle of identity

Queers demand the right to be openly Irish American
(p. 29)

DEPARTMENTS

World news

Nelson Mandela will fight to retain the South African constitution's queer rights clause
(p. 4)

National news

Mel White is eating again; Gunderson insists the GOP is not "anti-gay"
(pp. 5-10)

Local news

Oregon hate crimes rise during volatile election years; area HIV/AIDS service groups get what they asked for, funding-wise
(pp. 11-15)

COLUMNS

Queer thing

In idealizing Greg Louganis, we forgot his vulnerability
(p. 30)

Amazon trail

Realizing a moral responsibility to the young
(p. 31)

ARTS

Music

A new alliance of Northwest women's and lesbian choruses will tour
(p. 24)

Cinema

The clerical rebels of Priest do have a cause
(p. 25)

Books

A selection of fools for the season
(p. 27)