

letters

Taking a bite out of a national "hero"

To the Editor:

I would like to point out, regarding Patricia Nell Warren's [op-ed piece] ["Student teachers," *Just Out*, March 21, 1997], that Thomas Jefferson held slaves throughout his life (who were not freed upon his death), and thus is not a person to honor and hold as an icon.

As I'm sure most of your readers are unaware, I'd also like to point out that the U.S. Constitution is based on the philosophy of the Iroquois Confederacy and uses some of that language in translation.

It is deeply frustrating to me as a First Peoples Two Spirit Woman (translation: Indian lesbian) that Euro-immigrant queers often embrace colonizer ideology, as though all the anti-racist work we've been doing for 25 years within queendom hasn't happened. So get it already: Jefferson is not a hero, the West was not "won," and Columbus did not discover "America." Otherwise, the fight for queer rights is just another round of more white supremacy. I am very weary of struggling to be in solidarity with people who continue to oppress me with their ignorance.

As regards the JoAnn Loulan scandal, I have a simple solution—she donates back into the lesbian community all the money she made off us.

Chrystos
Bainbridge Island, Wash.

Don't let disappointment create divisions

To the Editor:

I take issue with Patty Lee [Letters, *Just Out*, April 4, 1997] of Portland who felt "the right to feel a sense of betrayal" [regarding JoAnn Loulan's announcement that she's dating a man]. Yes, we have a right to have feelings. What we don't have as human beings is a proprietary control over another person's object of attraction.

It does not one in the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community any good to ask bisexuals to go somewhere else and start their own publications. I know it is difficult to accept the fact that relationships are subject to impermanence, whether gay, lesbian or bisexual. It is deeply painful to lose an attachment to someone, whatever their orientation.

I think the myth of bisexual relationships being immune to any integrity or fidelity is the same misunderstanding, spread by right-wing homophobes, that has delayed the gay and lesbian acceptance into the mainstream of society. The community cannot afford to allow such segregation and prejudice to destroy the unity we have created.

Bruce Martin
Vancouver

HCV disease merits more coverage

To the Editor:

I'm very glad to see your report on hepatitis C virus ["Hepatitis C and HIV," *Just Out*, April 4, 1997]. I've been suffering from HCV infection (HIV negative) for at least 10 years, though I was

diagnosed only 4 years ago. One of the hardest things about having the disease is having to explain all the time why I'm tired, why I'm reluctant to plan an evening out a week ahead, etc.

It bears repeating that with 8,000 people per year dying and 4 million people in the United States infected, it's way past time that this disease came out of the closet. Hard facts are difficult to come by, though, when it comes to HCV. My doctor (a nationally prominent specialist) once told me, for example, that there is no linear relationship between or among the variables that can be observed with HCV infection. A patient may have a very high viral load and not have very severe liver inflammation. On the other hand, another patient might feel very ill (chronically tired), have a low viral load and little liver tissue inflammation.

The virus, as you point out, was only isolated and identified in 1989, but several subtypes have also been identified, and in reference to the success rate (20 percent) of interferon alpha therapy, the viral subtypes vary greatly in their response to the drug. By the way, for anyone who hasn't already heard, one year on interferon is not going to be a very good or productive year: The three-times-weekly dose makes you feel pretty awful for about 24 hours. Since this "cure" is often thought to be worse than the disease, you should ask your specialist to determine your virus subtype before choosing to submit yourself to the one-year course.

I try to stay well informed on the subject of HCV. In your article, however, I read for the first time information pertaining to alcohol consumption and HCV. Interesting. Of course it is the liver that must metabolize alcohol, but many people who are perhaps unknowingly infected with HCV, and/or who are at an early stage of the infection, have livers that still function very well. As for me, a doctor cautioned me three years ago that alcohol suppresses the immune system, so to drink when one is trying to overcome a chronic viral infection seems just plain dumb.

The other thing worth noting is the sexual transmission rate. In your article you state that "HCV is not as efficiently transmitted through sex as is HIV." True. The HCV transmission rate among married couples having unprotected sex was between 3 percent and 10 percent, depending on the study. Though as you point out, there is no reason to be complacent. I always inform my sexual partners if an exchange of any kind of body fluid seems imminent, and unfortunately this involves lengthy talk about what this disease is. Imagine! So few people know much of anything about it. That's why I'm writing to thank you, and to request that you inform the gay community much more thoroughly and frequently on HCV. Spread of HCV is not common outside of blood transfusion or IV drug use, and even more so than with HIV, there is little danger of sexual transmission if safer sex is practiced.

We need to have everyone, and maybe especially gay people, better informed about HCV.

John Walsh
Portland

CORRECTION

In the April 18 editorial we incorrectly stated that Kate Bornstein was the author of *Gender Jail*. The title of her book is *Gender Outlaw*. *Just Out* regrets the error.



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