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Stonewall sexual liberation. Nowhere is that philosophy more evident than in the Sex Panic movement. The organization was formed on the notion that gay liberation began with sexual liberation as well as with civil disobedience.

Activist Rex Wockner recently criticized the gay lobby group Equality Colorado for helping the police discourage cruising and public sex in Denver's Cheeseman Park. He writes: "Equality Colorado may not be happy till we are all living monogamously in the suburbs raising hard-to-place adopted babies—till we are exactly like our straight neighbors except for what we do in bed (which is distasteful to discuss anyway)."

For some gay men, the separation of love and sex is as sacred as the separation of church and state. Take Mike and Lex, for instance, a Portland couple who cruise together: "We're men," they say. "We like to hunt."

Or Adam, a twenty-something who tells me, "It's like that song, 'You and me ain't nothin' but mammals / So let's do it like they do on the Discovery Channel.'"

Josh, a graduate student, adds: "Public sex is just so convenient. I go to the beach, I read my book, I get a blow job, I go home."

He calls it the peeing-in-the-woods syndrome. "Men have sex outdoors for the same reason we pee outdoors: because we can."

The Sex Panic philosophy is perhaps best summed up by porn actor and writer Scott O'Hara. In his essay "Wholesome and Natural," he writes: "Sharing my body with another person was an affirmation of everything positive in life; and making a public display of that sexuality was one of the most basic ways in which I could improve the world. So I had sex in all the places we're not supposed to do it: parks, beaches, bathhouses, bars, back alleys."

O'Hara died from AIDS complications in 1998.

LOOKING FOR LOVE IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

Longtime AIDS activist Larry Kramer writes: "Once again, this has become a battle over civil rights rather than an issue of public health.... Why is public sex a civil right?"

Kramer, along with writers Michelangelo Signorile, Gabriel Rotello and Andrew Sullivan, has been doing battle since 1997 with Sex Panic's advocacy of unrestricted, promiscuous free love. The price for that free love, they say, seems to be increasing rates of HIV, gonorrhea and syphilis infections.

I spoke with several men who engage in public sex regularly (more than 25 times a year), and each one has at least one chilling story of high-risk activity he's observed. What's more, of the 240 men surveyed, 35 percent said they think men having sex in public places is not an acceptable part of gay culture. Interestingly, 71 percent of the men who never have had sex in a public space approve of the practice, but only 61 percent of the men who have had sex in public places approve of it.

I asked David, who by his own estimation engaged in 2,000 to 3,000 public sex acts with men during his marriage, why that might be.

"It's just my opinion, but I think that those who have done it know how emotionally unsatisfying it is," he says. "When two people come together, it's like making a cake—one person brings the flour and the butter, the other brings the milk and sugar—and they work together. Sex is just the frosting on the cake. But most people, gay and straight, just go ahead and open up the can of frosting and eat it first."

A youthful-looking 48—"I stay overweight because it stretches the wrinkles," he says—David stumbled upon "fuck bookstores" after 15 years of marriage when a business colleague invited him along while they should have been on a sales call. Within weeks, he was reorganizing his workday around his libido, going to the bookstores in the morning, then hitting the parks in the afternoon, sometimes racking up as many as 10 sexual encounters a day.

"I thought that sucking dick in the park was gay life," David says ruefully. One bonus, however, was that the constant action honed his sexual skills.

"Practice makes perfect," he says. "Now, I'm a hellcat between the sheets."

"But if anything is too good to be true," he continues, "it probably is.... I just got tired of the empty feelings."

moved to Oregon to join the Living Enrichment Center in Wilsonville and, as part of his sex-addict recovery, won't even go into a restroom with a glory hole. Although certainly "no saint," his attitude toward sex has changed.

"Now, I want to set up house," he says. "And that's just not in the cards when it's a sport fuck."

Or, as Kramer wrote in his controversial novel *Faggots*, "Having so much sex made finding love impossible."

ARRESTING BEHAVIOR

Not finding love might not be the worst thing that happens to someone engaging in public sex. Public sex acts involving the genitals are illegal, and the law always has taken a dim view of them.



During the same month David came out and separated from his wife, he also was arrested in an Omaha, Neb., park restroom. He got off with a \$175 fine, but it served as a wake-up call, and he began attending Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous. He swore off the parks and restrooms, instead developing a social life through gay bars and what he calls the "Electronic Park," America Online.

Today, David's spiritual life takes priority. He

After Portland's YMCA "vice" scandal of 1912, public outcry was so great that the maximum sentence for a sodomy charge was tripled the following year to 15 years imprisonment. That same year, Oregon voters rejected by a narrow margin a statute to require sterilization of "those who are addicted to the practice of sodomy or the crime against nature, or to other gross, bestial and perverted sexual habits and practices prohibited by statute."

The 1917 Legislature enacted the law anyway. In the next four years, until the statute was repealed, 127 Oregon men were castrated.

Since then, police forces everywhere have not been above entrapment of the sort that involves sending out hunky undercover cops who not only make passes but actually enjoy a blow job first. A joke of the 1930s went, "It's been wonderful, but you're under arrest."

For every George Michael who is able to put his life back together, countless others' lives regularly are ruined by aggressive police crackdowns. And although gay men might make distinctions between sex in public parks and restrooms—as opposed to private commercial venues, such as adult video stores—the police do not.

Recently, at the Adult Superstore & Theater in Las Vegas, plainclothes officers sat in arcades with the doors ajar, invited men to join them, then arrested them on the spot. And last January, a man in Arkansas committed suicide after the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* in Little Rock published his name among those arrested in a sex raid. (The newspaper then failed to report his suicide and ignored requests from five major gay organizations to discuss its policy of selective publication of the names of men arrested for misdemeanors.)

During the debate about police brutality in the 1993 Laurelhurst Park scandal, Ariel Waterwoman wrote in *Just Out*: "Though only some of these men are self-identified as gay, they are all perceived to be gay by the public and the police." Point well taken.

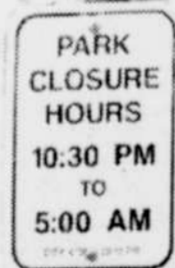
The plight of men, gay or straight, unjustly entrapped by the police in gay sex raids is our problem as a community. But the public opinion of men who engage in unlawful or unsafe public sex is our problem, too.

"Why do gay men have sex in the bushes?" my exasperated lesbian friend asked me. I suppose we do because we can. And also because we can't. But the more important question we gay men must ask ourselves is: "Should we?"

Note: Most of the names of the men interviewed for this article have been changed to protect their privacy.

■ MARC ACITO wonders whether he and his partner are committed to fidelity for moral reasons or simply because nobody cute has hit on them.

ARREST AREA TO AVOID



Portland police again are asking for help after being alerted by officials about public sex acts in North Portland's Kelly Point Park.

On July 11, officer Liz Caruthers briefed the Sexual Minorities Roundtable about the problem. She says several complaints from elderly citizens have been made about public sexual activity between men. She says pornography and paper towels with human feces have been found in the area, as well.

Caruthers says most license plate numbers she has checked have been registered to two people with the same last name—presumably married couples.

Portland Police Cmdr. Greg Clark says the department is looking for ideas about how to curb the problem. "We'll do anything you ask," he says.

But if the problem persists, police will take on a higher profile and strict enforcement action will be planned, Clark adds.

Roundtable co-chair Norm Costa says he has already taken action. He's looking for support from the

city of Portland, Multnomah County, the Portland Police Bureau and the Sexual Minorities Roundtable to initiate a solution.

Costa thinks the issue should be reported in *The Oregonian*, because many of those having public sex are not in mainstream gay culture but are closeted bisexual men. He says previous coverage in *Just Out* about other problem areas has had limited results.

He also approached officials about naming violators in the newspaper and setting up a diversion program that would require those arrested to learn about sexually transmitted diseases and blood-borne pathogens.

But after speaking with city officials, Costa found out those ideas aren't viable—partially because of funding issues. Instead, the roundtable and police will work with the Port of Portland, which owns the land where Kelly Point Park is located, and work on a poster campaign to discourage public sex acts.

Costa says arrests likely will occur as well. He's hoping interviews can be conducted with those arrested to learn more about the problem and how to solve it.

■ Reported by JONATHAN KIPP