

HUMOR

Do a Google search for "Gay men and smoking" and you'll get directed to exactly one Web site about the health risks we face—plus 630 more dedicated to "smoking fetishes" (whatever that means) as well as a host of other fetishes I wasn't even aware existed, like "teen girls in poopy diapers." Forget the Information Age. We're in the Too Much Information Age.

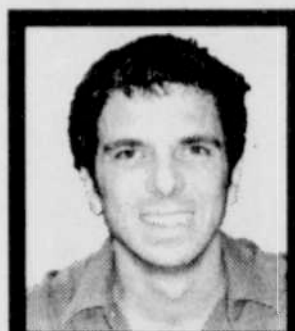
According to the 2001 California Health Interview Survey, gays and lesbians smoke 70 percent more than the general population. The number seems shockingly high, especially in health-conscious L.A., where it's hard to tell smoke from smog.

Regardless, the fact remains that smoking is the No. 1 killer in the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities, cutting short the lives of more queers each year than AIDS, hate crimes and suicides combined.

The survey also concluded that the average gay man smokes twice as much as the average straight one. (Then again, since no gay man wants to be considered average, who knows what that means?)

And, despite their reputation for consuming healthy vegan fare like Casserole de Birkenstock, more lesbians die of lung cancer than breast cancer.

The statistics are born out by firsthand experience—and secondhand smoke. Just go to any gay party and the liveliest conversation is outside because that's where everyone goes to smoke. As a nonsmoker, I don't mind, except now that I finally have only 10 percent body fat, I'm always freezing. I could put on a



The Gospel According to Marc
by Marc Acito

Flaming homosexuals

Gays and smoking

sweater, but what's the point of having only 10 percent body fat if you have to cover it up?

Even worse are gay bars or, as I like to call them, the Disco Inferno. Hopefully Portland will follow California and New York and ban smoking in nightclubs, but in the meantime I come home sounding like Harvey Fierstein and smelling like the La Brea Tar Pits.

For most smokers, the habit starts in adolescence. But, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 59 percent of queer teens use tobacco while only 35 percent of straight ones do.

What's more, gay teens are twice as likely as their straight counterparts to engage in high-risk activities like illegal drug use and alcohol abuse (59 percent reported using alcohol before the age of 13). Most frighteningly, gay teens are three times more likely to attempt suicide.

So what's this got to do with smoking?

A study done by University of Adelaide in Australia found a direct correlation between feelings of being marginalized by mainstream communities and the impulse to sublimate that discomfort through destructive behaviors.

According to statistics from PFLAG, the average high school student (gay or straight) hears approximately 25 anti-gay slurs each day. PFLAG

also states that 37 percent of gay teens reported hearing anti-gay remarks from faculty and staff. Nearly 70 percent of them are being harassed or bullied, many of them on a daily basis.

After that, who wouldn't want a drink and a cigarette?

As a result, we are dying in record numbers and Big Tobacco doesn't care. In fact, when RJ Reynolds put together a campaign to target gays in San Francisco, they called it "Sub-Culture Urban Marketing" (or SCUM for short).

The CDC proposed a study to examine the smoking habits of homosexuals but was met, predictably, with opposition from the Religious Wrong, who called it "an utter waste of taxpayer money" designed to "promote homosexuality further in the culture."

So it looks like we're on our own. Simply put, gay adults need to start quitting and gay kids need to quit starting.

I know it ain't easy. But consider this: A Tulane University study showed that men who smoke more than a pack a day had a 60 percent higher risk of impotence than those who never smoked.

So let's see: You go to a bar to get laid. You



smoke while you're at the bar. You get impotent because you smoke. You don't get laid. Then you die of lung cancer. My, isn't smoking glamorous?

But fear not—Marco has a solution. The next time you feel the impulse to take a drag on your cigarette, I suggest you lean over to the person next to you and give them a good lick instead.

Think of it as community building. Or at least a more effective way of getting laid. Seriously, I truly believe the key to ending the

smoking epidemic is by fostering community, especially with gay youth. We need to learn that in times of stress we should be reaching for one another instead of a death stick. It's time we filled our hearts rather than our lungs.

Will it work? I don't know. But is it worth trying? You bet your ash.

And that, my friends, is The Gospel According to Marc. **J**

MARC ACITO's novel, *How I Paid for College*, will be published in September. Write him at marc@marcacito.com.



Syphilis is spread by "skin-to-skin" contact, through anal, vaginal AND oral sex. Many people don't notice the symptoms or know they have syphilis. The initial sore is painless. The good news is syphilis is easily cured.

GET TESTED FOR SYPHILIS
MULTNOMAH COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT 503.988.3700
www.stopthesores.org



Funded by DHS Oregon Department of Human Services. Sponsored by The Multnomah County Health Department and Cascade AIDS Project. This ad was originally created for the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services. Used with permission. Design by Better World Advertising (www.asclanmarketing.com)

Portland Gay Men's Chorus
cordially requests the honor of your presence at

"The Wedding Celebration"

A Service of Recommitment
For All Couples and All Communities

Date: Sunday, March 21, 2004
Time: 2pm (officiants gather at 1pm)
Place: First Congregational Church, 1126 SW Park Avenue

Free of charge and open to the public

Visit the PGMC website for information about this and all Chorus-related events: www.pdxgmc.org