

letters

Homo on the Range

TO THE EDITOR:

Willie Nelson, whose haunting song "He Was a Friend of Mine" enhances the ending of *Brokeback Mountain*, is being congratulated for singing "Cowboys Are Secretly, Frequently (Fond of Each Other)," the "first gay cowboy song." However, this new recording is not the first by any means.

In the early days of sound recording, before the term "country and western" was even coined, hundreds of songs sang of life in what remained in most minds the American wilderness, that vast area west of the Mississippi. These were the songs that eventually bridged the gap between the "hillbilly" or "mountain music" being recorded in the early 1920s and what finally transformed into the C & W we now recognize.

These first ballads spoke of love, longing, friendship, loss, loneliness, the trail, the prairie, treasured companions, happy times remembered, the warmth of campfires—and even of bedrolls. Interestingly, only a small percentage of these lyrics actually specified that the warm feelings and the longings were directed at feminine objects. The vast majority of these old lyrics were entirely gender-nonspecific. "Pal," after all, was only one letter off from "gal," and many a song to a faithful horse (or "mount") was couched in terms very much resembling a lover—again of unspecified gender.

In addition to that, there was a "tender sensibility" in many of the songs that spoke of, longed for, mooned over and even celebrated the soft (feminine?) hearts thudding fondly under the rough, dusty (masculine) exteriors. Some of them (like "Night-

Time in Nevada") clearly refer to trail situations and circumstances where there never would have been a woman present—but there sure is love and longing.

I'm not a country music buff, but I am a collector of old phonograph records, and I have noticed these songs again and again. The man-to-man message in them is loud and clear, if you know what to listen for. And that's the way it was once intended: If you were "in on it," you were in on it. If not, it just went right past you, and no one was the wiser—and nobody got upset.

Something else to remember is that the emergence of active homophobia was largely a product of the post-World War II era—exactly the time in *Brokeback Mountain* when Ennis' father "made sure he saw the dead queer"! Those patterns of scrutiny and negative response had not yet developed when those first cowboy songs were written and sung.

Thanks, Willie, for digging back into the roots of the cowboy sod. And don't forget—there's plenty more gold down there. By now, most of it's in the public domain.

ALAN CARELL
Portland

Double Standard Uncovered

TO THE EDITOR:

It was a pleasure reading Jon Sauer's letter ["Once Again, Oversensitive Homosexuals Overreact," Feb. 17].

I, for one, will not allow people I know to use the words "queer" or "fag" in my presence. Like Jon, I find them coarse and uncivil and words that have way too much baggage. Most of my friends feel the same and would be appalled if someone from the straight community would use the terms.

I do find it strange that the paper that attempts to speak with tolerance uses words that many of us find offensive. It makes hollow your arguments and reveals a double standard in many of your editorials.

STEVE SMITH
Portland

New Attorney General Rules Discriminate

TO THE EDITOR:

In the area of domestic violence we manage to progress a foot, then step back a yard. Oregon's new guidelines for Batterer Intervention Programs (BIP) address only one segment of the population: heterosexual men. As to females and gay men: "Additional rules shall be developed later to address standards for intervention services for female batterers and battering in same-sex relationships." When? The rules adopted by the Oregon Attorney General Advisory Panel don't say. Different types of relationships can be acknowledged in a curriculum, but there should be only one set of regulations for all.

As importantly, measurements of victim satisfaction should be added to this list. The failure to adopt outcome measurements is perhaps due to some members of the advisory panel having a financial interest in such programs.

The National Institute of Justice has determined that traditional batterer intervention programs (which the new Oregon standards merely enshrine) have "little or minimal effect" in reducing repeat offenses. Part of the reason such programs do not work is that Oregon's standards specifically prohibit obvious assessments and strategies: "Offering, supporting, recommending or using couples, marriage or family counseling or mediation as appropriate

intervention for battering; identifying any of the following as a primary cause of battering or a basis for batterer intervention: poor impulse control, anger, past experience, unconscious motivations, substance use or abuse, low self-esteem or mental health problems of either participant or victim."

Let's see, alcohol and drug abuse is not a primary factor in a large percentage of family violence incidents? Does this make any sense at all? How could a BIP be effective if assessments for substance abuse are not required and treatment offered?

More than 100 published studies demonstrate that men are frequent victims of domestic violence and that women can be abusers in both lesbian and straight relationships. The postponement of treatment standards for these groups denies victims and perpetrators vital services.

The failure to develop standards for female batterers suggests that the advisory panel has no empathy for men who are the recipients of distaff rage. The lack of standards for same-sex relationships demonstrates that a commitment to diversity is in the details, not lofty rhetoric about treating everybody the same.

Female perpetrators share many of the same attitudes about violence and abusive tactics as male perpetrators, and research demonstrates that mutual abuse is as frequent as single perpetrator abuse, yet Oregon's standards totally reject this reality.

All this begs the question: Does the Oregon attorney general really care about intimate partner violence? The decision to develop standards with little accountability or realism, and only "later" for underserved groups, suggests that he does not.

JACK TURTELAUB
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