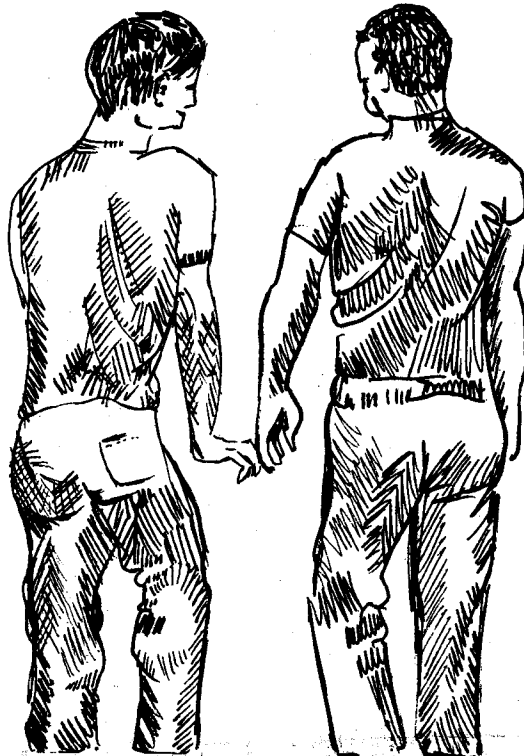


# The World of Washington Homophiles

by Frank Speltz



I'm prejudiced--against homosexuals. So are you. Admit it. When two men walk past you on the street, hand in hand, something grabs you in your guts and you suddenly feel very uncomfortable. Why? Why should love between two human beings turn you off? Or don't you think them capable of love as you know it?

Both the police and the Mattachine Society estimate the homosexual population of Washington at a quarter of a million. Sociologists maintain that ten per cent of any city's non-juvenile population is likely to be homosexual. Next to Negroes, homosexuals are America's largest minority -- 15 million, to be approximate. So every tenth stranger you pass on the street has a life style and emotional makeup entirely different from yours.

I've long realized, in a vague sort of way, that something happens to me when I'm confronted with homosexuality -- usually I attempt to remain aloof and ignore it, hoping it will not "affect" me. Often I even make remarks my "masculine" friends about "disgusting" it is. I even use derogatory nicknames equivalent to "nigger" and "kike" in their world: "faggot," "fairy," "queer." I finally decided to do something about it -- decided to start at the beginning.

All over Washington there are communities of homosexuals, living together for the same reasons hippies or radicals do: economy, camaraderie, security. I visited a "ghetto" community, remarkably well integrated racially, where about twelve homosexuals live. I was received with openness and infinite patience, as I blurted out all those "do Negroes tan in the sun?" questions: "Do you sleep with each other much?" "Where do you buy your dresses?" "Why don't you change your sex if you don't like it?"

It turned out that all us "straight" people wonder the same things about homosexuals, because all of us have the same sexual fantasies and stereotypes. Of course they don't sleep together much. They countered with a query as to how often we sleep together at the FREE PRESS. Same answer, same tone of voice. Homosexuals buy their dresses where your girl friends buy theirs, stupid -- in a boutique, you know, a dress shop. Why, the Paraphernalia in New York City sets aside two hours a week especially for men. The only hassle in New York is that it's not the law (enforced only occasionally) to wear clothes commonly attributed exclusively to the opposite sex. Eagerly I empathized with their horrible shame as they sink into a dress shop, whisper their needs to a sales lady, and try on the dresses hidden in dressing rooms. I added snide remarks and raised eyebrows. One problem -- no such problem; most middle and higher priced boutiques are very

used to and dependent upon the "queen" trade -- consequently politeness and openness reign.

Slight digression: A queen is a homosexual who prefers dressing and acting the female role. There are three different kinds: drag queens, who "flip" between playing a male role in men's clothing and a female role in women's dress (when a person is wearing women's clothing, he is said to be "in drag"); flame queens, who wear women's makeup, eyelashes, and hair-do even when dressed in men's clothing; and closet queens, who masquerade as heterosexual males with all their acquaintances, preferring to pursue their homosexual lives with strangers, often in another city. Each year a large, well-known Washington hotel is the site for the "Academy Awards," when hundreds of homosexuals expertly make themselves up to resemble movie stars. The community showed me many pictures of the last one. It was hard to imagine that the tall, thin Negro male sitting next to me on the couch had so altered his appearance at the Awards that I had exclaimed "Lena Horne!" before I was corrected. Such a very formal affair is "high drag." "Medium drag" prevails at luncheons and cocktail parties, where the women's business suit and cocktail dress are in order. "Low drag" involves the casualness of slacks, skirts, no makeup, etc.

Changing one's sex is a very complex and frightening thing -- even for a homosexual. Homosexuals are not people who prefer feminine roles and characteristics -- they are men who prefer them. For a man to lose his penis and develop female accoutrements, when all his sexual pleasure and drives have centered around his penis -- when his very personality and identity and

beauty have been developed as a man over a period of a quarter of a century or more -- is a major, not lightly taken step. Consequently very few homosexuals ever alter their sex.

There are about fifteen Washington "gay" bars. If you want to know the names and addresses of them, together with all the rest of the known gay bars in the world, five bucks gets you the Guild Guide, published by Washington's own Guild Press (507-8th Street, S.E., Washington, D. C.). The mecca for homosexual activity, curiously enough, is the same area in which servicemen and travelers gather -- 13th Street and New York Avenue, N.W. There are three gay bars in a block there. Denizens of the area have a very logical explanation of why that area is the all night meeting ground for homosexuals, travelers, and servicemen: homosexuals thrive on numerous social contacts, and accept the fact that most liaisons are by their nature temporary; travelers seek out friendly (and at home often forbidden) companionship of a temporary and anonymous nature; servicemen, because of their pent-up sexual needs and segregated lives, have learned that other men can gratify these needs. Two interesting facts add light to this phenomenon: it is estimated by at least one sociologist that nearly fifty per cent of the country's homosexuals are (or were) Roman Catholics, whose strong emphasis on segregated (by sex) education, sexual guilt (masturbation, contraception, homosexuality are all considered sins), and authoritarianism would explain this fact. Also a surprising number (again nearly half) have served in the armed forces, where some said they had discovered their homosexuality. It could very well be that the ar-

my's segregated (by sex) life and authoritarianism help these fellows "discover" homosexuality.

I asked every homosexual I talked with whether he considered himself a hippie, what he thought of hippies, and whether hippies were homosexuals of a new order. The answers were surprisingly similar: hippies reflect the culmination of a modern rejection of a dependency on sexual role-playing. Consequently virile, heterosexual men actually prefer to wear their hair long and to wear gay clothes. But they do not, as a group, alter their sexual roles -- men still prefer women, and vice versa. LSD and marijuana are as popular among homosexuals as among hippies, probably because both groups are very intensely creative, having let go of outmoded taboos and accepted new pursuits. Most homosexuals I talked to disliked hippies' habitual poverty, uncleanness, tribalism, and mysticism.

"Hustlers" are homosexuals who will offer their bodies to other men for money. Entrapment and violence dog their footsteps. Several mentioned run-ins with the police in which their civil liberties were completely disregarded. Several members, almost always in drag, claimed to have been picked up by policemen in squad cars, driven to secluded spots, and forced into having sex with them. They mentioned by name five Washington policemen whom they say are homosexuals. One theorized that the same factors mentioned above exist in both the army and the police force. I mentioned that a drag queen had been molested and completely stripped in Dupont Circle the other night, while the Park Police looked on with seeming approval. They characterized Dupont Circle an "ac-

cident," pointing out that there aren't even any gay bars in the vicinity. Dupont Circle got its local reputation as a gay circle both from a public inability to distinguish between hippies and homosexuals and from several recent programs (notably on WOL) and articles accentuating the relatively few homosexuals there.

Homosexuals, like any minority, have massive legal problems to overcome in a society which tends to enforce restrictive legislation on those whom it fears or dislikes. The Mattachine Society (1319 F Street, N.W., 737-4950) was formed to educate the public about homosexuality and to protect homosexuals' civil rights. They liken their organization to the NAACP. Dr. Frank Kameny, its president, (as opposed to drag queens and hustlers) had very few complaints about police harassment. He pointed out Miami and Los Angeles as cities where policemen were unfair to homosexuals. The Mattachine Society has picketed the White House and the Pentagon in the past, and every July Fourth it travels to Independence Hall in Philadelphia to demonstrate that "fifteen million Americans still lack their civil rights." Dean Rusk publicly stated on August 27, 1965 that he would never "knowingly permit a homosexual to work in the State Department." The Mattachine Society is still waiting to get its day in court against Mr. Rusk. This August the Mattachine Society will host the annual National Planning Conference of Homophile Organizations to better coordinate this national program of education.

Washington abounds in beauty salons, art and fashion designers, etc. Consequently there is not the customary shortage of jobs for homosexuals. Add to that the fact that Washington is a convention city where drag queens can make up to \$150 a day hanging around hotel cocktail lounges. With this kind of "free-lance" opportunity, blackmail becomes almost meaningless in a homosexual's life.

Homosexuals point out that the burden of guilt is rapidly shifting from those who do not have children to those who do, because of the population explosion. Once the accusation of "what if half the population did what you're doing" is lifted, homosexuality, they feel, will rapidly advance in stature.

Of course, it will never be on a par with heterosexuality in the public's mind until homosexuals decide whether their condition is a preference rather than a disease. Most answers to this question were ambiguous: "Of course it's a preference. . . I never got along with my father. I was very close to my mother." But that sounds like neither preference nor disease. That sounds like over-compensation for a childhood vacuum. But certainly homosexuality has been with us as long as any other type of sexuality, which lends it a certain time-honored immunity from the petty distinction of sociologists. At any rate, I no longer feel quite so smug about my knowledge of and disdain for homosexuality. Do you?