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Playing it straight with Gay Liberationists



ORDINANCES prohibiting discrimination against homosexuals have been passed in Minneapolis, Detroit, and the District of Columbia recently; the matter came before the New York City council for debate Thursday morning.

to the reasons why a person cannot be denied employment or housing—"race, color, creed, national origin, ancestry, sex, or physical handicap"—the proposed amendment to New York's civil rights law would add "sexual orientation."

Should homosexuals—"gays," to use the word they prefer to the dozens of slang derogations used by "straights"—be given a legal means to combat a social stigma?

I think so. But not for the reasons advanced in most of the writing on this subject.

AS HOMOSEXUALS have gained the courage to come "out of the closets and into the streets," many have proceeded to overstate their case. No longer do gays say "live and let live"; they suggest that criticism of homosexuality is bigoted and psychologically outdated, and assert that their way of life is fulfilling and morally unassailable.

Psychiatrist Robert E. Gould, writing in a recent New York Times magazine, holds that if social taboos were lifted, "most humans would be functioning bisexuals . . . pathology might very well consist of exclusive interest in one sex . . ."

Flat assertions like that, with no empirical evidence to back them up, go unchallenged. It is one thing for the American Psychiatric Association to decree that homosexuality is no longer considered a category of mental illness, but to say that in the future the heterosexuals will be considered the deviates steps over the brink.

To be gay is to be abnormal, whether or not that abnormality extends to one-tenth of the population. To be gay is to be engaged in an activity that both moral absolutists and moral relativists would label "immoral," with both Scripture and sociological statistics on their side.

The majority which considers homosexuality to be a mental problem to be corrected, or a moral decision to be castigated, is not to be dismissed as a bunch of benighted bigots.

Homosexuality should be discouraged; the prospect of universal bisexuality is infinitely depressing. The question then becomes: How can this abnormality be contained in a way that does not abridge personal freedom? To that fine, philosophical question can be added this practical note: How do we deal with gay militants so as not to make heroes out of them?

The answer is to treat gays as people who are different, who are becoming unashamed of being different, and who have every right to be different. People

who are "normal" [the etymological root of that word is "square"] have every right to disapprove, to discourage, to dissuade, but not to coerce.

Does this high-sounding concern for civil liberty mean that we should pass laws allowing gays to teach small children in public schools? I'm afraid so. As long as a teacher does not teach homosexuality, he's entitled to be gay; we can hope that gay leader Ronald Gold is right when he says, "it isn't catching."

That is a painful stretch, but there is a practical side: Better a forthright homosexual teacher than a secret one.

Certainly there is danger in toleration being taken for approval, but the greater danger is the invasion of everybody's right to privacy. The adult homosexual's right to be let alone must not be invaded by a majority seeking to make unlawful what it regards as sinful.

If society does not like what it sees, society should remove its eye from the keyhole; now that gays want to come

out of the closets, it is not right for the majority to slam them back in.

Is our morality so tepid, or our heterosexuality so enervated, that the majority must find petty ways to discriminate against homosexual men and women? In sexual competition, the male-female connection needs no legal or social edge: Let the straights play it straight.

REPRESSION and intolerance [as well as a tone of condescension I cannot comb out of this essay] demeans all of us and cloaks a psychological problem in the guise of a "cause." Homosexuality should be neither a cause nor a crime, but as long as we treat it as a crime, we will be giving its practitioners a cause.

The New York City councilmen who shy away from offering homosexuals the full protection of antidiscrimination laws worry about backlash on Election Day [or worse, support from Gay Liberation groups], but they should worry more about each citizen's personal freedom.

We can treat the gays as people with mental problems, or counter their new proselytation with some missionary work of our own, or gratify our consciences by railing at them as sinners; but when we fail to give them the equal protection of the law, then it is the law that is queer.

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