

VILLAGE

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NEW YORK CITY 206-0747

SOUTH

550 THIRD AVE. BTWN. 36TH & 37TH
NEW YORK CITY 684-6400

DOWNTOWN

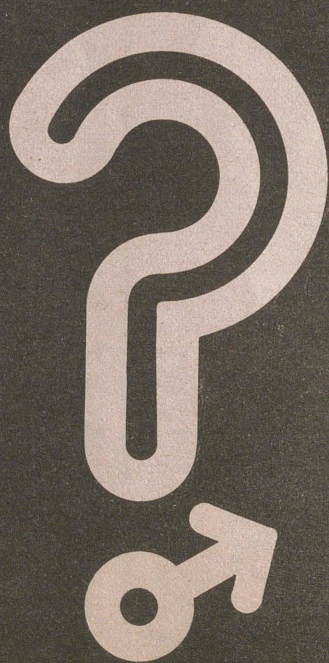
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DBG

DAVID B. GOODSTEIN



Gay bars are still the only overwhelmingly successful gay institution in the world. If all our cultural, social, educational and charitable organizations had the receipts from one Saturday night a year from all the gay bars in the United States, they would be able to perform all their duties with ease.

There are negative consequences to bars' being the most viable community institution. Rampant racial and sexual discrimination is one. When chided about this, bar-owners report, accurately, that their patrons insist upon racial and sexual segregation. An example: One of the most famous and long-lived gay discos in Los Angeles, Studio One, is becoming a private club. (Private clubs can refuse access to nonmembers.) I doubt it is a coincidence that West Hollywood has a new ordinance against discriminatory carding at *public* clubs. For years, gay bars have required people of color or of the "other sex" to have three "cards" of identification, while those racially and sexually acceptable have needed only one card at most — if they look underage. It remains to be seen if there are enough Los Angeles white gay men with racist fears and needs to make the new, "private" Studio One a success.

Bar owners are interested in making money; it is unfair to expect them to be interested in anything else. Almost all of the gay press, except *The ADVOCATE*, depends upon gay bars for its existence. Gay bars provide most of these publications' advertising and serve to distribute them; local gay papers cannot be expected to bite the hands that feed them. Accordingly, the local gay press inevitably prints favorable reports on bars and their promotions (designed to attract drinking customers), such as coronations, jockstrap contests and Mr. Leather competitions. But as long as these events remain our community's primary rituals and sacraments, the whole community will be correctly perceived as frivolous adolescents.

In order to make money, gay bars must draw crowds of people who drink alcohol. Most of their customers come for sexual and social purposes; many of them drink too much alcohol. Alcoholism and drug abuse kill as many gay men as AIDS does. Although we hear a hue and cry to close gay bathhouses, we don't hear much about closing bars with backrooms and glory holes, like New York's Mineshaft, or much about the higher risks when gay men drink too much or do too many drugs. (Of course, alcohol and chemical abuse kill lesbians too.)

Gay bars donate to gay organizations; many organizations depend on bars for fund-raising. Bar owners are smart enough to use this power. For at least the last 15 years, one organization of bar owners and employees, the San Francisco Tavern Guild, has been building a fund to establish a gay community center. Of course, any successful community center might siphon people out of the bars and into the center. I have been told there is at least \$600,000 in the fund. Perhaps some directors for the Tavern Guild have stock in the bank holding the deposit? *The ADVOCATE* is trying to find out.

I've attended a couple of Tavern Guild meetings. They began at 11 a.m. with cocktails, followed by a heavy lunch with several wines, followed by liqueurs. By the time any business came up, most people were snookered. I have long thought those luncheon meetings explain that organization's actions better than anything else does.

Gay bar culture still dominates everything else in the gay community, just as the sexually-out-but-otherwise-closeted (97% of homosexuals) dominate the rest of the community. Almost all our other social and cultural institutions are starving for resources. Even our vaunted musical and AIDS organizations are short of money and volunteers. When I began my gay life 35 years ago, the hunks thought that the only men who cared about alternatives to the bars were wimps; I suspect 1985 hunks feel the same way.

And as long as old queens either retire to suburban or gentrified "respectability" with their lovers, or chase after the young hunks, bar culture will dominate gay culture. All of us will suffer the consequences.

Enjoy *The ADVOCATE*!

D. B. Goodstein