

Ron Gold, Journalist

Your Biography

You were born in Brooklyn in 1930 and entered Brooklyn College at fifteen. It took you twelve years to get a degree. By that time, you had been a junkie in San Francisco.

The actual Ron Gold has told his story as a part of a theater production called 'Queer Stories' in New York. The total story is available online (see 'Must Read' section), but I'll excerpt the early part here:

When I was 13 I told my sister I thought I really liked boys, and it was right after that I saw my first psychiatrist. He shot me full of sodium pentothal, and all I really remember about him are his big, round, thick glasses on his big, white, moon face, very, very close to my face. I was scared out of my wits.

The next one was when I was 15. I'd just entered college, and I wanted to move out of my parents' apartment — which they thought required medical attention. This pleasantly ruffled psychiatrist gave me his diagnosis: homosexuality. He told me I should get away from my mother. I was grateful for that, and three years later I got him to write a note for me to the draft board.

The draft board psychiatrist asked me, "where do you cruise?" I told him, but he still didn't seem convinced I wasn't putting on an act, until he saw the book I was carrying. "T.S. Eliot!" he said, and checked off the fag box on his form.

At 19 I went to school at Berkeley, California and soon I was having a thing with an ex-convict named Frank and Eddie (he told some people his name was Frank and some people his name was Eddie). Anyway, it wasn't going very well, so I went to the university counseling department and got this psychiatrist who didn't seem much older than I was. He kept his watch on his desk facing HIM, and once I asked him what time it was. He wouldn't tell me. He wanted to know the REAL reason I'd asked the time.

So I quit him, quit Frank and Eddie, quit school, moved to San Francisco and became a junkie. After I got busted, I moved back to New York, lived with my parents, worked for my father and spent my entire paycheck every week on junk. Except one week, age 24, I decided to do what my friend Carl Solomon had done, pound on the door of Psychiatric Institute, demanding instant entry. Except they didn't take junkies. And I had missed my weekly connection and was getting sick. So I gave all my money to somebody I didn't know — who never showed up with the dope — and I walked from the Bronx to midtown for a matinee of "Wonderful Town."

I was really sick by intermission, so my sister took me to a doctor — and ANOTHER psychiatrist, who shipped me off to the Menninger Clinic. So I was in Topeka, Kansas for five years, and I can actually say I got something out of it. I had a nice place to be locked up in for a while (so I couldn't get to the junk); I finished college; went to work; joined the Topeka Civic Theatre; learned to play bridge — and learned that there were plenty of people,

including psychiatrists, who were just as crazy as I was, and doing more or less okay.

And, when I got back to New York, at age 29, I found it wasn't true that I hadn't solved my biggest psychological problem. I found a lover; and right away I began to see that MY HOMOSEXUALITY WASN'T A PROBLEM: that homosexuality isn't a problem. So ten years later I was ready for Stonewall. And my next encounter with psychiatry, at 41, was as the leader of a zap by the Gay Activists Alliance, at the behaviorists convention. You remember the behaviorists: they're the ones who show you pictures of gorgeous naked men (or women, if you're a lesbian) and then they give you an electric shock.

So we took over one of their sessions and there I met Dr. Robert Spitzer, who turned out to me a member of the American Psychiatric Association committee (news of which I leaked to the New York Times), and he got us a major panel discussion at the 1972 APA convention in Hawaii.

[Note: the events of the 'Zap' are described in the gamebook, as well as Gold's encounter 'taking over one of their sessions' and meeting Spitzer at the New York talk by Socarides. Gold is slightly wrong here: the APA convention in Hawaii was 1973. And Socarides, who's talk the GAA took over, was a psychoanalyst, not a behaviorist. He did, however, probably use aversion-based shock therapy.]

Spitzer recounts the interaction as:

“I went to this conerence on behavioral modification which the gay lib. group broke up. I found myself talking to a very angry young man. At that time I was convinced that homosexuality was a disorder and that it belonged in the classification, I told him so.”

Gold says (in Gold, R. “Three Stories of Gay Liberation”) “[Spitzer] said he believed in the illness theory. I said, alright, who do you believe? And he hadn't ready any of it... But he happened to know Socarides and thought he was a nut. Whom do you believe? Bieber? I don't know. Have you read it? No. But they all believed it.”

After a career writing for various publications, including Variety, you became a full-time gay activist at the age of forty-one. You were one of the founders of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. You were also the Media director for the Gay Activists Alliance during the early 1970's.

Game Objectives

Work with Frank Kameny / Barbara Gittings (if they are in the game) to convince the APA to remove 'homosexuality' from the DSM.

You're interaction with Spitzer after the Socarides talk is not 'played' in the game, but is part of the background included in the gamebook. That means you already have a relationship with Spitzer. Use this to convince him that homosexuality itself doesn't make people anxious or mentally unstable, classifying homosexuals as mentally ill makes them anxious or mentally unstable. You have a great deal of data to pull from in making your case: Kinsey made a similar argument, and Hooker's data showed that homosexuals, outside of the context of psychiatric

institutionalization, were indistinguishable from heterosexuals on standard psychological tests.

As a non-member of the APA, you cannot vote on the **definition of mental illness**. But be sure to advocate for one that does not penalize or marginalize those with harmless social differences.

Specific Assignments

Work with Marmor to draft a proposal to remove 'homosexuality' (302.0) from the DSM-II in 1971.

Sit on the symposium on the declassification in 1973. Your paper title should be “Stop It, You’re Making Me Sick!” and you will argue that “their sickness label provided the biggest rationale for our oppressors, and was the CAUSE of homosexual’s self-hate, not the solution.”

Invite Spitzer to a secret meeting of the GayPA in 1973. Advise him to be 'undercover' and just observe the large number of psychiatrists who are members. Legend has it that at that meeting, a young navy psychiatrist broke down in tears upon seeing Spitzer in attendance, overcome with the anxiety that his sexual orientation would lead to the loss of his job. It was at that moment that Spitzer became convinced that your argument was correct: that the classification of homosexuality as a mental illness was doing more harm to homosexuals than good. Again, legend has it that you and he draft the language to remove homosexuality that night.

There are a few problems with the legendary story. First, the 1st person accounts vary in their details: the actual Ron Gold sets the events in 1972, but that's impossible, as the APA met in Dallas in 1972 and Honolulu in 1973. Second, I'm not convinced that the 'conversion' experience does adequate justice to the many others involved in the movement, including Judd Marmor and John Spiegel. The student playing Spitzer is aware of these inconsistencies, but has not been instructed to play it one way or the other. It will be up to you and him or her to determine how the proposal of 1973 is created.

SECRET: you were a patient of Charles Socarides. You're familiar with the kind of reasoning that a psychotherapist can trap you in, if they are willing. [Game Note: this is a conflation for the purposes of the game – Gold had been ‘treated’ for homosexuality by a psychoanalyst as a adolescent, but not by Socarides]

Must read

Gold, R. “Three Stories of Gay Liberation” <http://www.queerstories.org/custom.html>

Moor, Paul (2001) The view from Irving Bieber's couch: “Heads I win, tails you lose.” J. Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy, 5(3/4):25-36. (also reprinted *Sexual Conversion Therapy* (Ariel Shidlo, Michael Schroeder (PsyD.), Michael Schroeder, Jack Drescher)

Organizations in the UK have recently been trying to collect first-person accounts of this treatment. You can access a summary here: <http://www.bmj.com/content/328/7437/427.full>

Smith, G. Barlett, A. King, M. (2004). "Treatments of homosexuality in Britain since the 1950s—an oral history: the experience of patients" *BMJ* 2004; 328 : 427 doi: 10.1136/bmj.328.427.37984.442419.EE (Published 29 January 2004)