

ACADEMICS AND ACTIVISM: FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR
GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER STUDIES

by

Walter L. Williams

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I'm really honored to have been asked to give the opening keynote address to this conference. In keeping with the title of the conference, however, instead of calling it a "keynote", I've been told that this address is really a "queernote." I hope I can live up to that title. As a member of the Program Committee for this conference, who helped to choose and set up the many sessions of Queer Frontiers, let me say that I have been tremendously impressed with the range of research topics and the quality of ideas that are going to be presented here.

To those of you presenting papers and doing work in this area, you are on the cutting edge of new scholarship in so many disciplines, and your work will be advancing research and analytical insights in numerous ways. You may have felt resistance from your teachers and peers as you began to do research in lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender studies. You may have been cut off from financial support by your relatives. You may have lost friends, scholarships, or jobs. You may have suffered homophobic violence, or the deaths of loved ones.

You may have been dissuaded in numerous ways by a heterosexist system that all too often stifles open-minded investigation instead of promoting it. Many of these things happened to me, when I first began doing research on these topics back in the 1970s, but I'm pleased to see the amazing amount of progress in the growing acceptance (and indeed, encouragement) of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender studies within academia. But the battle is not yet won, and I'm sad to note that each of these negative things is still happening to a number of people sitting in this room.

However, the very fact that you are here, shows that you have persevered. You have not given up, you have faced adversity, and discouragement, and all the other negative emotions that drag us down, and yet you have continued along. You have produced thoughtful analysis, you have done creative research, and you will continue to make significant contributions to scholarship. For that I honor you. To each and every one of you who will be presenting papers at this conference, or adding to the discussions as we think about the important issues being discussed, I offer my heartfelt thanks and appreciation for your participation in this learning experience. This weekend, you will be MY teachers, and the teachers of many others here. We ask that you teach us a lot.

I also ask that we all try to remember the journey that brought us here, and the struggles that many of us have had to endure in getting to this place. Accordingly, let us think about this before we jump to

attack another person because their interpretation might differ from our own. The Program Committee has intentionally tried to mix speakers with different perspectives and viewpoints on the sessions. There is no party line here. We come from numerous disciplines and theoretical positions. Let us break free from the usual academic rigidities that traditionally characterize single-discipline conferences. I hope that we can recognize something that I learned from my research on Indian reservations, that all of us benefit from our differences, that we will learn most from those whose perspective is at a different place than our own. Those differences are not a threat, but provide a complementarity that make our universe of thought complete. Let us revel in our differences, in our nonconformity, in our queerness.

As we discuss and debate, I hope we can avoid making the newly-emerging Queer Studies simply one more conformist academic in-group that takes its place on university campuses. Just as we ask our non-gay colleagues to respect us for our differences, we need to remember to respect our differences within our queer communities. Let me suggest that we can learn some important lessons from the mistakes, and from the successes, of the past. In our young movement, we tend to think that this is the first generation to investigate Queer Studies. All this shows is our ignorance.

Many of us are starting to recognize that what we today call Gay, Lesbian, Bi Studies, does have a past. From Germany in the late 19th century spread an intellectual ferment of studies of homosexuality that had an impact in many European nations, as well into North Africa, the Americas, and as far away as Thailand. The central focus of this research movement was the Institute for Sexual Science, in Berlin. That Institute's director, Magnus Hirschfeld, oversaw the collection of documents and interviews from homosexually-inclined people from many nations. Journals were edited, books were written, and conferences were held.

From the very beginning, that early German academic scholarship also had a politically-activist stance. Hirschfeld's Institute was at the center of the effort to decriminalize homosexuality from the German criminal code. The homosexual-rights movement made substantial gains in Germany by the 1920s, and they probably would have reached their goal had it not been for the international financial collapse in 1929.

The severe depression that hit Germany in the 1930s not only distracted attention from social reform, but also led to the rise of the National Socialist Party. As we too well know from our own times, when people feel financially insecure, they will lash out in scapegoating hatred against nonconforming minorities. This is exactly what happened in Germany, against many groups but most notably against Jews and against homosexuals. We all know about the Holocaust, but many do not know that much of the Nazi bookburning was directed against this burgeoning homosexual studies movement. Hirschfeld's Institute was burned to the ground, with decades of many people's research destroyed in a single night.

This Nazi bookburning of research collections on homosexuality deserves to be ranked as one of the great intellectual atrocities of world history, along with the sacking of the ancient library of Alexandria, the destruction of Muslim libraries by Christian crusaders, and the leveling of Mayan libraries by Spanish conquistadores in Mexico.

Yet, despite the enormity of the loss, some of these German writings survived, and had a significant impact. This impact would first appear most notably, after World War II, in the American city of Los Angeles. It is in many ways not surprising that Los Angeles would become the wellspring of the modern gay and lesbian liberation movement. Despite a sometimes-homophobic public stance, the burgeoning movie industry in 1920s Hollywood attracted nonconformist bohemians of all sorts. From the gay makeup artist on the set, to Marlene Dietrich's strutting in topcoat and pants, Hollywood had a decidedly queer cast from the beginning. Gay niteclubs catered to a growing homosexual population throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

This population swelled during World War II, as LA served as the departure point for numerous young servicemen and women leaving for the Pacific front. Some of these felt homosexual attractions, and may have first run across gay and lesbian bars in LA's wild nitelife. In addition, many young lesbians working in defense industry plants found each other in their new wartime jobs or all-female boarding houses. At the end of the war, however, as detailed in Allen Berube's wonderful book, *Coming Out Under Fire*, many of these lesbians in the Women's Army Corps, and gay men in all branches of the service, found themselves with undesirable discharges. Not able to return to their families, and many of them not even wanting to go back to a life of enforced heterosexual marriage in their provincial small towns, many of these returning veterans decided to remain in the City of the Angels.

Gay and lesbian populations became much more noticable in LA by the late 1940s, and community-organizing efforts were springing up. For example, in 1947 Edith Eyde began printing the first American lesbian newsletter, *Vice Versa*, writing under the pseudonym "Lisa Ben." Though these emerging queer voices were decidedly non-political, it would not remain that way for long. Responding to the new gay openness, the Los Angeles Police Department began taking a decidedly anti-gay stance. Queers were arrested upon any excuse, in a determined effort to rid the city of "sexual perverts."

In response to this, a Hollywood actor named Harry Hay proposed the founding of a society devoted to guaranteeing the rights of homosexuals. He made this suggestion for the first time at a house just a few blocks north of USC, during a gay social gathering. After many struggles, the Mattachine Society was born in 1950. Two years later, at a Mattachine meeting, someone proposed that they should start a magazine to express "the homosexual viewpoint." A small core of dedicated people saw this magazine into existence, naming it ONE in recognition that homosexual people shared a common bond that made them "one." They rejected the medical term "homosexual," and favored using "homophile" to express the notion that it was their same-sex love which united them rather than just sexual behaviors.

Mattachine soon fractured, and the more radical activists moved their emphasis to ONE. They focused on publishing the ONE Magazine out of a belief that communication of ideas, to break down the intellectual and emotional isolation, was the prime need of homophile people. For over a decade, ONE Magazine was the major publication of the movement, later joined by *The Ladder* published in San Francisco by lesbian activists. In Los Angeles, the small group of committed men and women who published ONE became much more than magazine writers. Led by Dorr Legg, they became a full-fledged community center. Dorr Legg, who quit

his job to devote fulltime work at ONE, later termed himself "the first full time professional queer."

Day after day, and year after year, Dorr showed up to open ONE's office to people needing counseling, attorney referrals, information, and just a place to be with others like themselves. They organized social events, lectures, political events, and even a gay travel club. In so many ways, ONE became a prototype of what would later emerge as Gay and Lesbian Community Centers. ONE was a forerunner in practically every area that has subsequently blossomed in our community since then, from the lesbian and gay press to RSVP Travel and Olivia Tours.

Certainly a momentous decision on the part of ONE pioneers like Dorr Legg, Don Slater, Tony Reyes, Jim Kepner, Ann Carll Reid, Stella Rush, and Harry Hay, was the decision to begin holding classes in what they called "Homophile Studies." They decided that the lack of solid information on homosexuality was a major gap in the effort to improve the situation of the homophile community. Not only did they teach classes on numerous subjects, from history and anthropology, to critiques of Freudian psychoanalysis, but they also began publishing the first scholarly publication on homosexuality in America. ONE Institute Quarterly of Homophile Studies became in 1956 the prototype to all our academic publications today.

The United States Post Office was not content to sit back and allow this emerging homophile voice to be sent through the mails. Even though ONE Magazine contained no sexually-graphic language or pictures, they impounded the magazine and labeled it "obscene." What they did not count on, however, was the stubbornness of this intrepid little band. ONE Institute brought suit against the United States Post Office, and the case was carried all the way up to the United States Supreme Court. In 1957, the Supreme Court made the first pro-gay decision in American history, when they ruled that the Post Office did not have the right to censor the free expression of ideas just because they dealt with the subject of homosexuality.

This court decision was nothing short of revolutionary, and it laid the basis for the legal distribution of all our subsequent lesbian and gay newspapers and magazines. ONE built on that move for legal change, even publicizing a "Homophile Bill of Rights" in 1961, which presaged the lists of demands presented at the Marches on Washington in 1979, 1987 and 1993. Unfortunately, ONE lost momentum in the 1960s, and suffered a factionalizing split that weakened it. Other organizations took its place in the limelight.

But a prime strength begun in the 1950s was ONE's library and archives. Jim Kepner and Don Slater, along with others, worked day and night for years to build up the ONE library. After the 1965 fracture, Don ran the Homosexual Information Center, and Jim developed what became the International Gay and Lesbian Archives. Each group continued to add more books, periodicals, manuscripts, and artifacts to their separated collections, but their separateness weakened their impact. When I began doing research on homosexuality in Native American cultures in 1979, it was these three collections where I located much of the documentation which was later published in my book *The Spirit and the Flesh*. In fact, I do not think I could have written that book without the help of these pioneering archivists and librarians. In the mid-1980s I served as President of the International Gay and Lesbian Archives, and later became director of the Center for Advanced Studies at ONE Institute.

A momentous event occurred in 1994, when the Boards of Directors of ONE and of the International Gay and Lesbian Archives voted to merge their collections. The event helping to bring this historic merger about, was due to the offer that I and Lynn Sipe, USC's director of libraries, arranged for them to move their vast collections to USC. Another offer was made to the June Mazer Lesbian Collection, for them to also move to USC, and negotiations are currently ongoing for the Morris Kight Collection.

After the completion of my talk, we are going to have a reception at Kerkhoff Hall three blocks north of campus on Adams Blvd., which is next to the building that USC offered for the housing of these collections. A tour of this building will be made, showing the great potential for growth now that these incredible collections are housed in association with a major research university library. Together, these collections will comprise the largest library and archives of gay and lesbian material anywhere in the world.

This is a major development for promotion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender studies. And it has been due to the hard work over many years of many, many people. Tomorrow night we are going to be honoring many of these founders of our movement, at the banquet, and we will be hearing from some of them during tomorrow afternoon's two founders' sessions. But for now I would like to ask all those who have in the past, or currently, serve on the Boards of ONE, the International Gay and Lesbian Archives, the June Mazer Lesbian Collection, the Homosexual Information Center, and the Morris Kight Collection, to please stand and let us recognize you.

At USC we have great plans for building a center for research in Gay and Lesbian Studies. I have been appointed as Chair of the Task Force in Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Studies, and we are currently discussing plans for future progress based on our strong faculty presence in many disciplines. I'd like to ask USC faculty and staff who are here, to please stand and be recognized.

What we have at this point is a university-owned apartment complex, that is being provided for housing scholars who are visiting campus to do research and writing in Queer Studies. Several conference speakers are staying in this building, which is three blocks north of campus at 634 West 27th St., just west of Figueroa. We have 16 apartments, plus a conference room, theater with big-screen TV, security enclosed patio, and a swimming pool. This is, after all, southern California. While you are here, I encourage you to take some time to drop by this building (just a block east of Kerckhoff Hall, where the reception is being held), and see what we have to offer.

What we are offering is a place to live for graduate students working on their dissertations, to live in the complex with post-doctoral scholars, and senior scholars on sabbatical from their employment. We want a range of ages, mixing with current scholars in residence such as graduate students like Sandra Scott and Ziv Israeli, to post-doctoral scholars like Sylvia Rhue, to senior scholars like Jim Kepner and Janet Demb (a psychology professor who just returned to her job at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine). We want this building to become a genuine "think tank" center for intellectual interchange and cross-disciplinary fertilization. Please consult the brochure which you received in your registration packet.

Together, the two buildings that USC has offered represent the largest commitment that any university has made to Lesbian and Gay Studies. I feel fortunate to be at the center of all these developments that are happening at USC, and we hope you will take advantage of your time here to explore our new resources. Hopefully, some time in the future, many of you may return here to participate as part of this research complex. And we'll gladly welcome transfers if you want to get your PhD in USC's many queer-friendly departments.

What kind of research do we want to promote at this research complex? Certainly, once the archival collections are set up in the new USC building, we want to encourage research in multiple subjects and different disciplinary perspectives. But we have decided to give special attention to the following areas, based on a decision made by fifty leading researchers working on homosexuality, in a conference held at the University of Chicago in July 1994, and sponsored by the Wayne Placek Trust. Wayne Placek was a member of ONE from the 1950s, who died of old age. He left his entire estate to establish a Trust Fund that would promote research which would be of benefit to the gay and lesbian community. The first thing the trustees of the estate did was to choose scholars to advise them on what kind of research most needs to be done. I was invited to be part of this working group. The task of this Placek conference was to come up with a consensus of the most important topics which need future research, from a multi-disciplinary perspective.

After much discussion and many debates over the course of three days, some interesting things happened. A consensus emerged that the main areas of focus on research relating to homosexuality have been on the etiology or causation of homosexuality, on health matters, on cultural representations of homosexuality, and on purely theoretical matters. Certainly all of us in this room are familiar with these trends. The attendees decided that other topics, different from these previous areas of focus, should be given more encouragement. This is not to say there is anything wrong with research on any of these topics which have heretofore been the focus. But it is to say that other topics need more encouragement of research.

What emerged as a strong theme of this Placek conference was the need for academics to take a more direct role in lesbian and gay activism. I think we were greatly affected by the recent political defeats facing our community, from Colorado's Amendment 2, to Sam Nunn's "Don't ask, don't tell." We were also disgusted at the lack of effectiveness of our national gay and lesbian activist organizations. We learned, from some of the attendees who had been directly involved in these organizations, that a large part of the reason for the lackluster performance of these organizations is because they do not have much research base on which they make their strategic decisions. In sharp contrast to the Right Wing, which heavily funds several Think Tank research centers (like the Heritage Foundation), we do not even have one single operating Think Tank to do research and suggest long-range strategies for the future.

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force has used the term "NGLTF Policy Institute" as a fund-raising tool, but it heretofore has been more of a name than an actuality. I am hopeful that this may change, due to the emphasis being placed on research by NGLTF's new executive director Melinda Paras. She and I have discussed this need, and I feel that NGLTF is starting to move in the right direction, especially by bringing in

Professor John D'Emilio to help build a research base. But an activist organization like NGLTF is so busy fighting the fires on the front lines, that they often have little opportunity to step back from the fray, in order to ask if the most effective strategy might be to find out what is starting the fires in the first place, rather than just reacting on the front lines after the fires are already raging.

It has been this reactive quality that has been the greatest weakness of our movement since the late 1970s. As a community, we have basically just reacted when the other side attacks us. We have not been nearly as proactive as we should have been, and when we have tried to be proactive we have often fallen on our face. Let me suggest that our biggest single weakness is the lack of long range strategies, and a plan of how we might carry out such strategies. This long-range thinking is precisely what the Radical Right has done so skillfully, building on their Think Tank research studies back in the 1970s, which set the stage for their dramatic impact on the nation in the 1980s and 1990s.

At the Placek conference a consensus was reached that we academics, who are also members of a politically besieged minority, can no longer afford to spend our time and energies engaging in academic hairsplitting speculation and in simply debating fine points of jargon with each other. It is time for us to apply our considerable research, analytical and writing skills to the work at hand. Public policy implications have to be a prime consideration for where we put our resources. This is not, however, to suggest that we should all become political scientists. Far from it. On the contrary, given the conservative trends of national politics in the 1990s, perhaps our biggest public policy impact can be made outside of political parties.

Let's look at just one example of a hugely successful project that has arisen in Los Angeles. The LA chapter of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation (GLAAD) decided a number of years ago to focus on changing the homophobic images put forth by major Hollywood film studios and television production companies. Tomorrow morning we're going to hear from Professor Peter Nardi, the former co-chair of GLAAD-LA, about how they managed to make a significant impact on these companies. His paper, along with the other papers in two special sessions tomorrow morning, are based on chapters written for a book that Professor James Sears and I are editing, tentatively titled *Overcoming Heterosexism: Strategies That Work*. This book is under contract with Columbia University Press. The other session from this forthcoming book consists of papers focusing on effective strategies for reducing heterosexism in African-American, Asian-American, and Latin American communities.

There are certainly lots of potential contributions that academics can make toward activist goals. But there are a few things holding us back.

First, since the anti-war protests of the 1960s, there has been a profound distrust of academia on the part of many political activists. This has sometimes expressed itself in an anti-intellectual bent, that academics are useless when dealing with the practical requirements of real life. The stereotype of ivory-tower elitism has prevented many activists from seeing the great value that academics can bring to a movement for social change. I am convinced that much of this anti-intellectual stance is because activists are totally turned off by academic jargon.

Let me suggest that if we genuinely want to build stronger bridges of cooperation between academic and activist communities, we academics MUST curtail our use of discipline-specific jargon. Now I have to admit that jargon can be a lot of fun, and it's great for building a sense of togetherness among one's little group that is "in the know." It's sort of a school-kids' version of "say the secret password" before you are admitted to the exclusive little clubhouse. I did that in my early journal publications, and in my first book. But later, I decided I did not want my books read only by an exclusive little clubhouse. After publishing six books, I have come to the conclusion that writing a book, and getting it published, is simply too much trouble if it does not result in a lot of people reading it. I'd rather spend my time lying by the pool in Palm Springs.

Let me also suggest that we gay and lesbian academics have a particular reason not to use jargon in our writing. As anyone who can take off their class blinders can notice, there are an awful lot of really intelligent lesbian and gay people who do not have much formal education. This is due to homophobia in schools, which turned off a lot of our people to higher education, and also it is due to internalized homophobia. If people do not have confidence in their basic worth, they may not be likely to feel they can attain higher education. As a result, we have a large potential readership who could be influenced by our writing, but because of their lack of formal education they avoid books filled with academic jargon. Yet they hunger for information, which is a main source for self-education in a society which censors out all mention of sexual diversity in the public schools.

We need to pay a lot more attention to our writing style. I think one of the most valuable classes I ever took was a fiction-writing seminar here at USC, from the gay writer John Rechy. He is a brilliant teacher, and his ability to reach a diverse audience of readers is admirable. Maybe because he comes from a Latino background he is more aware of this; maybe I am more aware of this because of my background in American Indian Studies, where a similar lack of formal education exists among Native readers. If we want to have the maximum impact on society through our writing, we need to reach the maximum number of readers. I'm sorry to be such a sourpuss, but there's important work that is crucial to be communicated. The fun and games will have to wait.

Another problem afflicting academia is the over-specialization into separated disciplines. When historians of education look back on the 20th century, I think they are going to see that the traditional academic disciplines made their mark on scholarship in the first two-thirds of the century. During the last third, it is going to be interdisciplinary research which is seen as adding more importance to the store of human knowledge. The first interdisciplinary field in which we saw this occur was Black Studies, and later in Feminist Studies. Who can doubt the dramatic impact on scholarship of these two fields? Yet, in contrast to ethnic studies and women's studies, in gay studies we have seen the reverse trend occur. As I pointed out earlier, the original development of Homophile Studies at ONE Institute from the 1950s and into the 1960s was very interdisciplinary.

All of the people involved at ONE were brilliant and visionary, but only one of them was in academia. And I am proud to say that that one person was Professor Merritt Thompson from USC. He has been dead for many years now, but I sometimes think his spirit is hovering over us as

we develop our new Queer Frontiers on this campus. We've certainly had some angels on our side here, and I'd like to think at least one of them is him. Though it could also be some other deeply closeted USC professors (or even a former president of this university) whose voices have unfortunately been lost.

When the Gay Academic Union was founded, it also was quite interdisciplinary. But something happened later in the 1970s. As academics started coming out on campuses, they put their attention into the particular professional association of their discipline. I myself was part of this trend, having been the co-founder of the Committee on Lesbian and Gay History, and as co-chair I put my energies into getting this organization formally recognized as an affiliated society of the American Historical Association. Later I became an officer of the Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists, and I did likewise with my work in the American Anthropological Association. At one point I tried to get an interdisciplinary connection of this group with the Sociologists' Lesbian and Gay Caucus, but that attempt failed due to the strong opposition of several gay sociologists. The 1970s and 1980s did not seem a time to promote interdisciplinary connections, especially as each discipline popularized its own unique jargon, making even interdisciplinary communication more difficult.

Dorr Legg, still holding forth at ONE Institute after all those years, bitterly complained about the limited disciplinary perspectives of the professional academic caucuses. He sneered at the emergence of "Gay Studies." I heard him many times fairly sputter those words contemptuously from his lips. He thought Lesbian Studies to be somewhat better, since at least it had ties to the interdisciplinary Women's Studies. In dogmatic stubbornness, he held onto the term "Homophile Studies," and offered stinging critiques of gay academics who let the academic establishment define our boundaries of study. He said over and over again that WE are the experts about our lives, first in opposition to the psychiatrists who claimed to know us better than we did, and later to those who merely conformed to disciplines of study whose specializations often obscured more than they clarified.

When his health began to decline, Dorrr asked me and David Cameron and Don Paul to help edit his mammoth book project that he was attempting to write. We did this, and the book Homophile Studies in Theory and Practice was published last year. After it came out, I think Dorrr decided that his life's work was complete, and in July he died peacefully at the age of 89. His was a life full of controversy, but more importantly it was an incredibly full life. Even though I do not agree with everything in that book, I highly recommend Dorrr Legg's Homophile Studies in Theory and Practice, which ONE Institute is generously providing to attendees of this conference at a heavily discounted price.

What this brings us to, is a hoped-for return to an interdisciplinary focus for research. After much discussion, the Placek Conference came up with a list of priorities where research should be most focused. These priorities are as follows:

1. STUDIES OF HETEROSEXISM: How best to change attitudes, on a societal or individual level, toward a more positive acceptance of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and/or transgender persons. This might include research in areas like case controlled studies, demonstrating which strategies and techniques are most effective in neutralizing perpetrators of hate

crimes and other homophobic activities. Since we already know that the single most effective way to change homophobic attitudes are through one-to-one personal contacts on an ongoing basis, we need research to suggest the best ways to encourage more lesbian and gay persons to come out to their relatives, friends, and co-workers, and to engage in repeated one-to-one dialogue about heterosexism with the people they are closest to.

This repeated one-to-one dialogue is more effective than all the parades, protest marches, political lobbying, workshops and educational lectures put together. I truly feel that we cannot defeat the Radical Right Fundamentalists unless we take our pro-gay viewpoint into the living rooms of our parents and friends, and into the offices of our jobs, where we can overcome stigmatizing generalities and let people interact with us as individuals.

I teach a class at USC called "Overcoming Prejudice" SWMS 384, and in the process of preparing this class I learned a lot that I never knew before. One thing I learned is the crucial role of person-to-person dialogue that is ongoing, between people who have a personal connection or from someone whom the listener respects and wishes to be like. That is, teachers who are effective are effective not just because of their teaching skills, but because the students want to become like them. What this implies is that, especially for those of us who want to become teachers, we should strive to become good role models for youth -- not only for lesbian and gay youth, but also for non-gay students who may admire us for our knowledge, our compassion, our professionalism, and our approach to life.

For this class I also learned that the second most influential means of changing prejudice is through the mass media. As an academic, I was distressed to learn that pop novels have more impact on public opinion than academic books of the sort I write. I was distressed to learn that young people are more likely to change their attitudes based on something that a TV or movie celebrity says, than what I as a teacher might say. That is, when Professor Griff of the rap group Public Enemy claims that homosexuality never existed in Africa, he has much more impact on public opinion than when Professor Williams of USC lectures about indigenous forms of acceptance of same-sex eroticism in numerous traditional African cultures.

So, rather than bemoaning this fact, if we want to reduce prejudice we must accept that reality and build positively from that. Therefore, we need more research showing how the mass media and celebrities being quoted in the mass media can be convinced to portray a more positive image of sexual minorities. We need to know which kind of media ads and public service announcements are most effective in creating pro-gay public opinion (especially in communities under Radical Right attack).

We also need research in how to change institutions. How can attitudes, especially in institutions where homophobia has been so strongly inculcated, such as schools, churches, police and the military, be changed? What can we learn from the very effective techniques used by the Radical Right, to whip up public sentiment against us? How can we turn those techniques to our advantage? Conversely, what can we learn from the example of social change movements which have been rather spectacularly successful in changing public opinion. For example, both Jewish-Americans and Japanese-Americans have dramatically reduced prejudice against their ethnic groups, within less than half a century. We need to examine more deeply the women's movement of the 19th and 20th

centuries, to understand both their successes and their mistakes, in enacting public policy changes on both political and social levels.

2. WORKPLACE AND ECONOMIC ISSUES:

The second area of focus to emerge in the Placek discussions is the need to focus in particular on changing heterosexism in the workplace. Lesbian and gay people, like most other people, spend a great proportion of their time at their jobs. It is in this locale where many people can have a significant impact, in reducing homophobia among the people who work with them. How can we expect people to come out, if they are fearful of losing their jobs? A start has been made, but we need much more research figuring out how anti-gay discrimination in the workplace might best be reduced? How can employers be persuaded to end discrimination? How can our community set up networks for those who lose their jobs due to homophobia to be able to locate other jobs.

A good model might be to study a group called "Hollywood Supports," which exemplifies both the strategies I've mentioned, of person-to-person dialogue and a focus on the mass media. Led by Richard Jennings, who first emerged as an effective media activist in GLAAD-LA, Hollywood Supports has accomplished amazing progress in improving the situation for lesbians and gays working in the Hollywood film industry. As a result of Jennings' and others' quiet, behind the scenes one-to-one ongoing dialogue with movie studio chiefs and personnel officers, the workplace situation has improved dramatically for our people in the movie industry. Not only is this important because of the impact for those employed within those corporations, but also because of the massive impact of movies in shaping general social attitudes.

Research on attitude change shows that the majority of people form their attitudes toward other groups based on what they perceive to be the social norm. Most people (sad to say) are conformists, and twentieth century Americans get their image of what social norms are, to a very large extent, from the mass media. By influencing the media to present a more pro-gay viewpoint, then the perception of what the social norm is will become more accepting, and over time that will gradually change individuals' attitudes.

What this research suggests is that, to have the maximum impact, we need to be targeting all mass media businesses as places to encourage lesbians and gays to take jobs, and to come out to their co-workers. This should especially focus on radio stations, where the Radical Right has such a stranglehold on Talk Radio, but also in TV networks and stations, major daily newspapers, popular magazine companies and mass-market paperback book publishers. We need a "Hollywood Supports" campaign for each of the major media corporations. The big employers are important, not only because they reach more employees, but also because smaller businesses in the same field usually follow the trends begun in the bigger businesses.

By having open employees in those fields who will stand up to prejudice and engage in one-to-one dialogue with their co-workers and supervisors, that will do more than anything else to quiet the homophobic rhetoric and present more positive depictions of transgender, bisexual, lesbian and gay people in these media.

Thus, a focus on the workplace, especially in media-related businesses, is of prime importance. But the larger question is not just jobs alone. We also need more studies of the overall economic position

of our people. How can economic development be further encouraged throughout the lesbian/gay /bisexual/ transgender community? The extent to which our community is thought of as economically responsible, in pulling our own weight, and in paying our fair share to help others, will be reflected in increased social prestige. I am not saying we need more rich gays. What will be much more effective is to encourage economic awareness within our community of the need to bring as many people as possible into levels of economic stability. Our community centers and business/professional groups can take the leadership on promoting entrepreneurial, skills training, and financial investment programs. This especially applies to disabled queers, lesbians, and ethnic groups that have historically been economically marginalized.

3. STUDIES OF DIVERSITY:

The Placek Conference was also in agreement that we need much more research on gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender people among different American ethnic groups, and in other cultures around the world. What are the best ways to improve the socio-economic status of lesbian/gay people of color, to reduce heterosexism within various ethnic communities, and to strengthen alliances between racial/ethnic minorities and the queer community?

A particular value of cross-cultural studies is to focus on cultures (either in the past, or the present) that do NOT discriminate against sexual and gender diversity. What are the characteristics of such societies, and how do they incorporate same-sex eroticism into their worldviews without feeling threatened by this reality? What can we learn from the experience of diverse cultures, from a multiethnic and transnational perspective, about how best to reduce heterosexism?

4. STUDIES OF SAME-SEX FAMILY ISSUES:

How can family recognition best be accomplished, both legally and in social legitimacy? This includes domestic partner rights, legalized same-sex marriage, parents' child custody rights, foster care and adoption opportunities. Again, in these areas, cross-cultural evidence can be of much value, in looking at cultures which do recognize and value same-sex marriages and families.

[WLW research on same-sex marriages in non-Western cultures, being used in Hawaii same-sex marriage case before the Hawaii Supreme Court].

These four areas, focusing on research related to changing heterosexism, changing the workplace, focusing on understudied people of color ethnic groups in the United States and in other cultures, and on recognition of same-sex families, was the clear consensus of the Placek Conference. The Placek Scholarship committee is planning to offer scholarships for researchers to focus on these areas, and hopes to start offering scholarships later this year. Also influenced by the Placek findings is a new group, the Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies, based in Washington D.C. This group of volunteers, of which I am a member of their Board of Directors, is developing a campaign to raise money to support research on these subjects. I am chair of their National Academic Advisory Panel, and we plan to use this Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies to bring academics and activists into much closer cooperation and coordination.

And lastly, the Placek Conference consensus has had an impact here at USC, where these areas of research are also the focus of our efforts to support scholars in residence. We are encouraging researchers from all disciplines, but most especially those doing research in subjects relating to these areas. I am happy to announce here tonight our first major donor, Mr. Hal Call of San Francisco. Mr. Call has been active in the movement going back to the 1950s, as a Mattachine activist. He has had much impact on changing homophobia in San Francisco over the years, and for that reason he is one of the Founders of the movement whom we are honoring at the banquet tomorrow. Hal Call is far from being a rich man, but he has decided to do something that most people with far more wealth in our community have not done. Mr. Call has pledged to make a donation of his entire profits from the sale of some real estate that is going through escrow this summer, in the amount of \$55,000, for the support of research in these topics at USC. He is truly a role model for many others, not only for his years of dedicated activism, but also for his financial support for important work being done for the future. I hope you will go up to him tomorrow, and personally thank Hal Call for his contribution.

At our USC Center for Scholars-in-Residence, in addition to the four topics I have discussed tonight, we have decided to add a fifth area of focus:

5. YOUTH AND ELDER ISSUES:

When I was doing research on the Crow Indian reservation in Montana, in 1982, I was interviewing a traditional Crow medicine person. He spoke so very respectfully about the bote (the name in Crow language for androgynous transgender persons). I asked him why Crow traditionalists are so consistently supportive of these gender nonconformists. I will never forget his answer. He told me, "We don't waste people, the way white society does. Everyone has their gift, everyone has their contribution to make."

It occurred to me then, in a flash of insight about my own society, that this Crow elder was right. We DO waste a lot of people, especially transgender and lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. We need more research helping to plan how the experience of queer youth, in schools, with their families, and in their social life, can best be improved? How can they be assisted to overcome internalized homophobia and transphobia, come out of the closet, improve their self-esteem, and reach their highest potential educationally, professionally, and socially? How can they be encouraged to contribute to the community in positive ways? How can we help those spending all their psychic energy in the suffering silence of the closets of a homophobic society, to not be wasted?

On the other end of the age spectrum, how can we assist transgender, bi, gay and lesbian elderly in achieving their most fulfilled retirement years. How can the queer community more effectively utilize these elders' skills in mentoring youth (for example, in Foster Grandparent programs, and in developing "Auntie/Uncle" relationships) and in contributing to the wider community? How much longer are we going to let the Radical Right's hysteria about "recruiting", keep us from assisting our youth and our elders? How much longer can we stand by while these many lives are wasted? I feel that my work, as an academic and as an activist, is not about "recruiting youth." We don't need to do that, simply because heterosexuals are so efficient at insuring we get

more and more queer youth every year. No, my dedication is to "saving youth." How can we help to bring about a society where the next generation of queer youth will not have to grow up isolated and terrified, as my generation did? How can we go beyond "tolerance," toward a society that is truly accepting of sexual and gender diversity.

My anthropological research, doing ethnographic fieldwork living in cultures which have respected roles for homosexually-inclined and androgynous people, suggests that a culture will not be truly accepting unless it figures out some way for such sexual or gender nonconformists to make special contributions to the society that are different from what the average person does. This might be as a religious leader, a healer, a teacher, or some special prestigious position that people in the society look up to.

[add on more about two-spirit people]

INDIA

We can better understand the origins of homophobia by looking at cultures which do not hold this kind of prejudice. Several new studies which investigate homosexuality in Asia offer particularly valuable perspectives which can aid us in the campaign to overcome homophobia and heterosexism in Euro-American society. Unfortunately, because only a few brief reports have so far been published on Asian female homosexuality, conclusions have to be made primarily from books that have focused on males. A high priority needs to be given to encourage lesbian researchers to do fieldwork among women in non-Western cultures, so as to improve our knowledge of female sexual variance worldwide. In the meantime, we can point to some pathbreaking recent books.

One of the most interesting new books on Asia is written by anthropology professor Serena Nanda and is titled *Neither Man Nor Woman: The Hijras of India*. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1990. xxv + 170 pp.). This book focuses on the hijras, effeminate or androgynous males who do not fulfill a standard man's role. Nanda defines hijras as occupying an alternative gender role, distinct from either men or women. In contrast, she points out, a transgender role in Western culture is not accepted due to a lack of religious sanction and an "unyielding Western commitment to a dichotomous gender system" (p. 137), which expects all "normal" persons to conform to one of only two gender roles. Western ideology, uncomfortable with ambiguity, strives to resolve in-between categories.

On the other hand, Hindu ideology not only accommodates the reality of ambiguity and diversity among different personality types, but also conceptualizes androgynous persons as special sacred beings. Hindu mythology makes frequent reference to combinedman/woman beings. The cognition of hijras as religious figures, as neither men nor women, provides them with social respect and an institutional character. They are seen as representatives of the Hindu goddess Bahuchara Mata, which gives them ritual power.

Nanda agrees with my thesis, presented in my book *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), that religion is the crucial factor in a culture's acceptance of homosexuality and gender variance. Nanda concludes that alternative gender roles are socially accepted when the religious ideology of that culture offers (1) a specific explanation for such difference, (2) formalized traditions in ritual, (3) a recognition that

there are many different paths to personal fulfillment, enlightenment or salvation, and (4) the idea that gender-variant persons cannot resist following their own true nature, and are fated to be the way they are. The implications here are important for a cross-cultural understanding of homophobia, and what must be done for it to be overcome. It is not enough for a religion to be "tolerant" of gender diversity and sexual variation; it must also provide specific recognition for such diversity.

THAILAND

We can see this clearly in the case of Thailand, whose national religion of Buddhism makes Thailand one of the most non-homophobic nations in the world. Peter A. Jackson's book, *Male Homosexuality in Thailand: An Interpretation of Contemporary Thai Sources* (Elmhurst, N.Y., and Amsterdam, Netherlands: Global Academic Publishers, 1989) is based on his research while living in Thailand for several years.

Jackson quotes extensively from a magazine advice column for homosexuals which has appeared in several Thai mass-market publications since the early 1970s. This columnist reprints letters from homosexually-inclined Thais from throughout the country, and then offers them advice from an accepting pro-gay perspective. The very fact that mass market periodicals, directed to a general audience and akin to *The National Enquirer* in the United States, would include regular personal letters from gay and lesbian people, asking advice about their love life tells us that Thailand is quite different from the West.

This example offers American activist groups an idea that we should be trying to influence U.S. supermarket tabloids to include gay-authored advice columns, as an influential tool for reducing homophobia in America.

Thai culture is not afflicted by homophobia, at least of the institutionalized sort that is seen in America. Besides the lack of religious homophobia, there are no laws against homosexuality, and the Thai government has not considered it to be an area of political concern to try to repress people's private sexual behavior. Androgynous gender-mixing queens (called *òkathoeyó*), butch lesbians (called *òTomó*), and intergenerational man-boy relationships (translated as *òlove childó*) are all well known and accepted. Homosexuals of these or other types seldom experience job discrimination, police harassment, anti-gay violence or any of the manifold evidences of homophobia that are common occurrences in Western nations.

Yet, gays still experience problems in Thailand. These problems come almost entirely from two sources: unstable relationships and pressures from the person's family. Relatives may pressure a person to get married heterosexually, because of the high value attached to having children. Those who are exclusively homosexual are not discriminated against, but they are rather pitied because they are seen to be childless.

One thing that is necessary, in order to improve gay status in the Thai cultural context, is for gay households to adopt children. Since heterosexual marriage in Thailand is mostly for having children, in order to have someone to provide for oneself in one's old age, perhaps gays should do likewise. Much of the social stigma against gays in Thailand is not based on any idea of sinfulness or sickness, but simply because they are outside the family structure and thus will be left alone and unprovided for in their old age.

At this point, stable gay households do not often exist in Thailand, since for economic reasons most gays live with their parents. When they get old, in turn, they need children to take care of them. In Third World societies without governmental welfare support systems for the infirm and aged, and without adequate economic resources for most individuals to dependably set aside enough money to support themselves in their old age, people survive by their reliance on kin. My research on Native American androgynous two-spirit persons leads me to feel that one of the most important reasons why such persons are so socially accepted in their community is that they have traditionally been seen as the logical persons to provide care for their young nephews and nieces, and as adoptive parents for orphan children. This has two beneficial social functions: to provide caring households for orphans, and to provide care for elderly non-reproducers.

This perspective implies that Third World gays and lesbians should not necessarily look to a Western-style romantic relationship for their long term good, as much as they should strive to fit themselves into a kinship system. They can do this by providing economic and emotional support for siblings' children, and/or by adoption. Given the massive numbers of homeless children in many Third World countries, gays could thus fulfill an important beneficial economic role for their society. The adoption issue is clearly a crucial one for the future of gay communities in the Third World, if not in America as well. In the United States, as our population ages, and as there are fewer young people to help support and take care of the "baby-boom" elderly, an anthropological perspective suggests that gay and lesbian political leaders should therefore emphasize adoption rights as a prime gay issue.

Thai attitudes toward sexuality of youth also differ from the West. Concerning homophobia, Jackson explains its absence in Thailand as being due to childrearing techniques that emphasize "having fun" as a high value, while children are not exposed to anti-homosexual rhetoric. Thais therefore grow up without much sexual inhibition. In contrast, an American child's absorption of anti-sexual, homophobic, and transphobic attitudes leads them to view their homosexual feelings with alarm and disgust as they later develop sexual attractions. That is, homophobia arises due to a person's fearful reaction to their own repressed homosexual feelings.

If there is not much sexual repression in one's childhood, there will not be much homophobia. This view suggests that homophobia is primarily learned in the home and the school, and must be broken at those levels. Therefore, as long as parents are fearful that their child might turn out to be lesbian or gay, and as long as other social influences do not challenge these prejudices, a change in attitude will be difficult.

What this suggests is that the same techniques which Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (P-FLAG) has used to overcome homophobia among parents of older children, also need to be done for parents of young children as well. When I ask my heterosexual students who say they would like to have children, how they would react if one of their children turned out to be lesbian or gay, most report that they have never even thought of that possibility. We need to exert more influence on those professionals who work with young parents, or who write childrearing books, to get them to address such issues. If parents know that they could exert great psychic harm on their child, by espousing

homophobic statements, this might have the effect of getting at least some parents to inhibit their homophobic expressions in front of their children.

Jackson also suggests that Thai people are so accepting of homosexual behavior because they have very strong traditional values that people should be able to "follow your own heart," (p. 108), that people should mind their own business, and should avoid open confrontation. This implies that gay leaders in America can best challenge homophobia by appealing to traditional American values like freedom of expression, and freedom of individual choice. American ideas that people should not psychologically repress themselves can be used to highlight the damage done to children by repression of their sexuality. Greater publicity of suicides among gay youth, of violence against gay people, and of discriminatory laws (immigration rights for gay spouses, lack of legal right of marriage and adoption, etc.), can be shown to violate traditional American notions of fair play and equal opportunity.

Because of the lack of homophobia as a public issue, whether in the form of "sex scandals" involving public figures or in the form of anti-gay laws, there has been no need for a politicized gay movement in Thailand. Yet even without a movement, an urban gay subculture has grown dramatically in Bangkok since the 1970s. This shows that we can build our communities socially and economically, even if no progress is being made on a political level. We need research to decide if it might be more advantageous to spend our money broadcasting gay and lesbian radio shows widely, including admirable openly lesbian, bisexual, transgender and gay people making queer chic on television shows, and getting famous media celebrities to make pro-gay statements, than to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars lobbying Congress. I'm not suggesting we abandon efforts in the political arena, but that we need to think about and do research to determine which strategies are going to be most effective.

No one single strategy is going to accomplish our total goals, and we need to advance across the board in all areas of life. But if we are putting all our energies into lobbying Congress for a civil rights bill, while not working on basic attitude change in the mass of people, are we using our dollars to best advantage? Where will we get the most bang for the buck? Certainly if we look back on the last twenty years, the most dramatic changes in the way gays and lesbians are treated has occurred in the mass media (with the notable exception of talk radio) and in the world of business. Except in certain localities, where the gay and lesbian community is economically powerful, government has lagged far behind.

It can be argued that a major mistake made by the various civil rights movements since the 1960s has been an overwhelming focus on government as the leading agent of change, rather than trying to change social and economic institutions from within. That is, if we have influence within our families, neighborhoods, local social groups, and workplaces as openly queer people, combined with the mass media and corporate America on our side, then Radical Right political initiatives like Colorado's Amendment 2 will fall on increasingly deaf ears. We might decide, for tactical reasons, to support political initiatives just to get people discussing the issue of sexual discrimination, but let's be very clear that our larger goal is to change attitudes.

Now, some might argue, "Who cares what straight people's attitudes are?" We can just retreat into our ghettos and pay no attention to the larger society. This might be an appropriate response for those who have had so much bigotry that they need a place of retreat. If we have strong, vibrant communities which genuinely show compassion for our people, and help them grow stronger, then that can be a positive good. But after these individuals grow strong, then it is time to spread outward. For we must never forget that the "straight" mainstream contains a lot of queer people. Whether it is those hiding in their straight-laced closets, or youths just coming into their identity.

JAPAN

Another nation with a history of acceptance of same-sex love is Japan, as seen in *The Love of the Samurai: A Thousand Years of Japanese Homosexuality* by Tsuneo Watanabe and Jun'ichi Iwata and translated by D.R. Roberts (London: Gay Men's Press, 1989. 158 pp.). The earliest Christian missionaries in Japan reported in horror the widespread social acceptance of male-male sex, especially among Buddhist monks. Demographic factors played a role in this acceptance. Unlike Europe, whose population had been reduced by numerous plagues, witchhunts, wars, and massacres of dissenters, and which encouraged procreation in order to produce soldiers and settlers for its expanding colonial empires, pre-1868 Japan was a non-expansionist island with limited space. As population numbers reached an optimal point for the land available, there was pressure to reduce population growth. Abortion, infanticide, and encouragement of non-reproductive forms of sexual expression were demographically useful means of keeping the population stable.

Japan deserves to be ranked, along with the cultures of ancient Greece and the American Indians, as one of the world's most important examples showing how a society can incorporate homosexuality into the core of its social organization. As more research is being done, and more examples of such societies are being uncovered, we are discovering that it is not homosexuality that is abnormal in human behavior, but homophobic prejudices.

However, Japan's climate of social acceptance changed in the early 20th century. As industrialization revolutionized Japan, and made a need for more population to provide a growing labor force, prejudice emerged against non-reproductive forms of sexuality. Once Japan embarked on an expansionist military policy after 1900, even more people were needed to man the armies and navies, and to staff the large economic and political bureaucracies necessary for administering an empire. Just as had earlier happened with expansionist industrial capitalist governments in Europe and the United States, Japan began to favor pro-procreative and anti-homosexual policies imported from the West. The requirements of being a good citizen in an expansionist state meant the necessity of producing more children to add to the growing work force.

According to Watanabe, it also meant that men in modern Japan gave up "the right to be feminine." In contrast to pre-modern Japan, where males wore makeup and dressed androgynously, 20th century Japanese men have adopted the Western view that only women are supposed to exhibit beauty. Watanabe sees an unconscious desire of many men to break out of this increasingly restricted masculine role, which explains the anxiety that "normal" men have about transvestites and gays. Watanabe concludes that homophobia among many gender-conformist men arises from a detest of

the notion that a man would offer himself "as a beauty... as a passive object of desire" (p. 131). Yet, the impact of gay liberationist ideology is beginning to challenge this. By making androgyny more socially acceptable, he suggests, gay liberation can help all men in reconnecting with their full human potential. Heterosexual women involved in the feminist movement recognize that lesbians have greatly aided all women through their activist contributions to this movement. Likewise, Watanabe claims, "male homosexuality, too, will be an essential catalyst in the development of all men, helping in the re-eroticization of the male body" (p. 135).

A cross-cultural perspective, from studies of Japan, Thailand, India, and Native Americans, can thus supply many ideas as to how we might best go about attacking anti-gay prejudice. Activists and scholars alike cannot afford to restrict our knowledge to the American gay and lesbian movement alone. By looking at these examples from Asia, it is clear that any attempt to reduce anti-gay prejudice must promote non-homophobic religions, must emphasize the need to restrict overpopulation, must stress the need to adopt homeless children and/or integrate uncloseted gays and lesbians into extended family systems, and must socialize males in particular not to be afraid of their homosexual feelings and their desires to break free from rigid masculine gender roles. The extent to which we can drop our cultural blinders, and pay attention to what is going on in other cultures around the world, will make a crucial difference in the campaign against homophobia. [see Spirit and the Flesh speech]

In my research cross-culturally, I have found that those societies that have institutionalized homosexual roles, ironically do not emphasize the sex part. Everyone knows their preferences, but it is just not made a big issue. What this shows is that, in this society, it is really the right wing homophobes who have made homosexuality a public issue in recent American history. If they had not enacted so much discrimination against homosexuals, it is unlikely that a politicized queer community would ever have arisen. In a non-homophobic society, there is no reason for sexuality to become political. It's just part of life.

In the case of Native American cultures, instead of what people do sexually, the emphasis is placed on gender-role difference of the Two-Spirit person. They do not take the approach of the American gay rights movement, which has tried to gain social acceptance by saying "we're the same as you except for what we do in bed." Instead, the Two-Spirits are given social prestige precisely BECAUSE of their difference from the average person. The differences are emphasized, and thus are seen as providing society something positive, some benefits that it would not gain if everyone were the same.

The implication here is that, rather than trying so hard to blend in, we should be emphasizing our uniqueness. I think the dominant message propounded by the Radical Right in the 1980s was that everyone should be the same. That desire for sameness, for "being normal," has a strong attraction for people living in a diverse society that is going through great changes. The gay rights movement has not given society a positive message to counter that desire. All we have said is, "Please let us have our rights." Beg, beg, beg. The question is, Why should they? What's in it for them?

Let me suggest that our message in response to the Radical Right must be: "Thank goodness we're NOT all the same, because if we were, then society would lose out on the creativity and aliveness that different perspectives help to bring about." If we want our nation to advance in the new global competitiveness of the 1990s, we had better do everything we can to promote independent thinking and creativity. Mindless conformity is, economically as well as emotionally and intellectually, a dead-end road.

This is the message that a Native American perspective can give us today. This is what we can learn, if we will only listen to their voices. Then we can begin to understand what they mean, when Native people talk about Two-Spirit persons being "spiritually different." When I was doing my research, I kept hearing Indian people telling me this, and it was only after a long while that I began to understand that when they say a person is "different in spirit," the closest term that we can translate this to in English, is to say that such a person's difference is in their "basic character." But because Indians put it in spiritual terms, it allows for acceptance in a way that calls for mere social tolerance cannot do.

In other words, whether we are talking about lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender or intersex people, we are all here, we are all queer, and we are all unique. A native person from Arizona explained it this way, and I will quote here from my book

The Spirit and the Flesh. He said:

"Among my people, gay is a special status.... The more unique someone is, the more valuable they are, the more unique their vision, the more unique their gift, their perspective, everything they can offer is something that other people cannot offer.... The thing that's different about where I come from, is that all human beings are respected because all human beings have potential, all human beings have value."

To tie together this talk, starting with the value of those early homophile activists in ONE Institute, I think the statement that I find most appropriate to end this talk is quoted from a Mohave Two-Spirit person who was interviewed by a writer for ONE magazine back in 1964. During that oppressive time, when many non-Native gays and lesbians were wallowing in self-hatred and shame, this confident Native person could draw on his own tribal tradition of acceptance of sexual diversity, to say this about himself. He said:

"I don't think I would like to change. I guess I'm just on my own personal little warpath -- not against whites, but against heterosexuals who think that everyone should be like them. I may not always be happy, but I am always me. And they can like it or lump it. Life's too short to spend your time being something you don't want to be. Like the old saying, 'To thine own self be true.' Well, I'm true to my self and my own nature. I think that's all anyone has a right to ask of me."