

## From All Angles: Down for the Count

Hugh Coyle

*(Note: This series intends to look at controversial questions from a number of various perspectives, sometimes seriously, sometimes not so seriously. Several grains of salt are recommended before reading.)*

Q: How many gay people does it take to screw in a lightbulb?

A: Who knows? They're so hard to count!

Over the past few months, counting gay people has become something of a national obsession. Newspaper reports tout studies which show that anywhere from one to twenty percent of the population might be classified as "homosexual," while lesbigay activists and D.C. park officials argue over whose tallies are more accurate for the Great March on Washington in April. Our opponents insist that there really aren't very many of us, and we shout back that "we're here, we're there, we're everywhere!"

Let's say for the sake of scientific inquiry that there really aren't so many gay people in the general population - like maybe one in a hundred. This is what various right-wing conservatives would like John and Jane Doe to believe. Of course, if John or Jane Doe were sensible citizens, they'd instantly dismiss all the right-wing fuss over gays and their "agenda" by reasoning that such a small number of people could hardly pose a threat to national security. Any group of people which feels threatened by one percent of the population must be suffering from paranoid delusions of one kind or another, and we'd have to be rather imbalanced ourselves to take such claims seriously.

With this in mind, it would be best for the conservative right-wing to fully embrace and even endorse studies showing higher percentages of gay people. Such a move would serve to strengthen the urgency of their call to arms. Why, Jerry Falwell could triple the amount of money he's making with the "queer menace" hook if he were to validate his perceived invasion with charts and statistics. He could even hire someone like Ross Perot to present them in provocative infomercials to the American people.

Of course, it's not very difficult to push the numbers of gay people higher. For starters, you could look at how various researchers define the term "gay." Some so-called sociologists claim that you're only gay if you've got ten or more years of steady experience behind you. This leaves out most of the twenty- and thirty-somethings like myself who haven't clocked enough hours to be considered bona fide homosexuals.

Such a statistical fallacy also ignores the large number of gay and lesbian youth hiding in fear in our nation's high schools. Studies have shown that an inordinately high number of those kids will try to kill themselves in their teen years as a result of the guilt and shame heaped upon them by certain segments of society. Some of these kids will succeed, and that probably suits the right wing just fine. It means the numbers of gay people in society goes down, and that the hate-filled messages of the religious right are getting through effectively.

While we're looking at the morbid side of things, we could also figure in the number of deaths attributable to AIDS in the gay community. This brings up an interesting irony. Before the onset of the AIDS pandemic, you didn't see or hear much about gay people. If the disease were indeed a divine act meant to silence the gay community, it's had the opposite effect. Gay people are more vocal and visible than ever before. The fact that more showed up at the

recent March on Washington than appeared in previous marches suggests that our ranks are growing, not diminishing.

Another easy way to boost the gay count is to start acknowledging that lesbians exist, too. All too often these scientific studies get hung up on men and their sexual habits, as if women didn't exist or matter at all. Has anyone stopped to ask why all these predominantly male researchers are so obsessed with male sexuality? How come no one seems to care if there's a lesbian revolution in the works? If the right wing alarmists knew what was what in the lesbigay world, they'd know that the women pose a more serious threat to moral order in the country. Goddess only knows how many lesbians there are waiting for the men to wipe themselves out in the cross-fire and clear the way for a new, matriarchal order.

In the end, all this talk of numbers obscures the real issues anyway. Basic civil rights require no quota for implementation, and neither do certain special rights. If they did, you wouldn't see all those handicapped parking spaces out in front of the grocery store, would you? Then again, if we follow the right wing's logic on this, we should just let the small percentage of people who are physically challenged fend for themselves. After all, there aren't so many of them that we should be worried about their rights, and it only costs taxpayers money to reserve those parking spots that decent God-fearing people could be using instead.

The way I see it, if there were even only one gay person in all the world, I'd be among the first to wish for a partner for him or her. That's how order and balance in nature should be understood and maintained. From this, we really have but one lesson to learn: if there's only one thing which gathers its strength through numbers, then let it be love. ▼

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