

Op-Ed

Out in the Mountains

The Bisexual Community Gives Gay Conversion Ads a Run for the Money

BY KIMBERLY A. WARD

This year, there has been a lot of talk about the "gay conversion" programs run by the Florida-based Center for Reclaiming America and other similar groups. However, one of the most invisible parts of this discussion all along has been the issue of bisexual and trans identities and how they fit.

A few months ago, the national bisexual community decided it was time to open up the discussion. After all, if the "powers that be" were going to claim that a lesbian, had been converted, and write under her photo, "she's married, a mother of two and happy," or something similar, what was the first thing that would come into the minds of most bisexuals? "Well, so am I" is one thing and "Maybe she's bi" is another.

The fact that bisexuality is ever-absent in any discussion where it could muddy the waters for groups such as the Center for Reclaiming America has been painfully obvious to many.

What did the national bisexual community do about it? They raised money and produced a spectacular rebuttal ad, which ran in a recent issue of *Anything that*

Moves. The only national magazine of its kind, *ATM* has put all of its chips on the table and found that it's won the pot.

This ad, created with the utmost care and love, is currently circulating through the campuses and communities of the world. It shows boldly the faces of varied community members including national speaker and activist, Elias Ferrajaje Jones, youth organizer Penelope Williams from New York City, pioneer Maggie Rubenstein and many others. The top of the ad states it simply: "Toward a new national discussion of sexual orientation." Underneath, in bold letters, is a repeat of the Center for Reclaiming America's slogan, "If you love someone, you'll tell them the truth."

The ad is also running on the magazine's website (www.anythingthatmoves.org). Though the site recently had to be rebuilt from the ground up due to hackers, it still makes the information available to all who wish to use it to further the cause of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, non-labelling, questioning communities.

The only thing they ask is that anyone who uses it report how and where they used the ad, so

that they may track the ad's progress and keep us all informed and pushing for national awareness on the issue at hand.

I recently received a great list of places that have been registered as hitting the website to see the ad. The list included Ivy League schools across the country, campuses in Australia, France, and England, and the list went on.

The long list of contributors and supporters includes organizations such as BiNet USA, FTM International, LLEG, National Black Lesbian & Gay Leadership Forum, Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays, and many others.

Many of these same organizations have also signed on as allies to Bisexual Network, USA during this past year. Within the ranks of BiNet USA, the push is on to get that bridge built between the gay/lesbian and bi communities of the world, between the queer and straight communities, the trans and bi and so on.

Why? Because if we don't join together soon, the push to oust us all from our very own backyards will begin to succeed. And because BiNet USA has reached a point where it is old

enough and organized enough that it is not only able to stand alone, but to start mobilizing toward others and reaching out a hand.

This ad campaign is proof that not only is there still a bi commu-

excited to have such a wonderful new tool with which to help present the case for bi inclusion. The ad's text body is full of the most precise, on-target arguments we've made for years. As the EBAH push starts, and the idea

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nity out there, but its national consciousness is becoming active enough to be noticed. With the religious right adding our name to the lists of evil on their proposed legislation, those who resist bi inclusion are realizing that bi people are and have always been a part of their community as well.

With the Equality Begins at Home visibility project coming up in March, many activists are

of having a "50-state march" is fleshed out with specifics, I know I am one activist who will be spending some time and money at the copy machine. ▼

Kim Ward is Volunteer Coordinator for BiNet Vermont, a North East Regional Organizer for BiNet USA, and author of the column: "On the Other Hand," which has run on and off for three years in *Out in the Mountains*.

From: V T P R I D E N E T > > > >

NGLTF PRESS RELEASE:

New Study Debunks the Myth of Gay Wealth

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WASHINGTON, DC— Contrary to conventional wisdom on the subject, gay, lesbian, and bisexual people do not earn more than heterosexuals. In fact, they may even earn less.

Released today by the Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies, *Income Inflation: The Myth of Affluence Among Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Americans* is a startling study of the economic status of a frequently stereotyped population of Americans. M.V. Lee Badgett explores the inaccurate notion that GLB people are an economic elite, insulated from discrimination by wealth and disconnected from society by a privileged status. After examining data from seven different surveys, she finds that none support this stereotype.

"The evidence from many different scientifically sound data sources points to the same clear conclusion: gay, lesbian, and bisexual people do not earn more than heterosexual people, either as individuals or as couples," reported Badgett. "Now that we have credible data, we can stop relying on flawed studies designed to find high-income gay people."

Right-wing organizations and individuals perpetuate and exploit the myth of gay wealth to bolster attacks against the GLBT community. The myth is so pervasive that even Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia injected it into the dissenting opinion in the Colorado Amendment Two case.

"We have long known that the myth of gay wealth is just that - a myth," said Urvashi Vaid, director of the NGLTF Policy Institute. "Income Inflation shines the light of truth on yet another of the Right's distortions of the facts."

REACTIONS FROM OUR EMAIL DISCUSSION LIST:

>>My household income is probably about the same as that of my neighbors, but since I don't have four kids, my income after living expenses is probably much higher. Does that make me wealthier?

It's the same issue as with DINKS (Dual Income - No Kids).

>>... queer leadership has contributed to the myth of gay wealth. Rarely do community leaders take on class issues, or concern ourselves with queer access when it comes to anti-poverty organizations, homeless shelters, or low cost medical clinics. And while we have taken on some of these issues as they relate to HIV or AIDS and gay or bisexual men, there has been little attention given to single lesbian or bisexual women with children.

I believe that queer people in rural areas have an intuitive understanding of the fallaciousness of this myth.

>>Another group for which statistics would be interesting, are those of us who have been disowned by families. Economic consequences vary, depending on when this happens. Young adults may lose the financial advantage

of living at home while attending school, and may have to leave high school to support themselves. Others lose the family contribution towards higher education. When one has to enter the workforce earlier, with less education, s/he will have reduced earning potential for the future, until such time as they can get a degree, unless they're in a field where experience brings significant economic reward.

>>Did the study look at the difference between men's income and women's income? A family living on one male and one female income (straight) may have less money than one living on two male incomes — which is often enough the case with gay men, even some of those with children. I think these double-male-income households are probably what the myth of gay wealth is based on — though they may be in the minority. And a family living on two female incomes is likely to have proportionately less. This "class" difference between many gay men and many lesbians has sometimes been discussed and debated in the gay/lesbian press.

>>Let's think about which queers we see in the media: Ellen and Anne, Elton John, George Michael, Barney Frank, Andrew Sullivan, Rosie O'Donnell,

Chastity Bono. Not exactly a cross section of our community. Queer people are often portrayed as middle or upper class in movies: *The Opposite of Sex*, *Object of My Affection*, *Basic Instinct*. Let's see, we're absent on the television, unless we're talking about *Will & Grace* or cable. And on the radio, mostly NPR, we're talking about 1) AIDS, 2) Gourmet Food, or 3) Life in New York.

>>I agree that money DOES buy access and visibility. How many poor queer people are asked to be on boards of directors of non-profits? The wealth that these people enjoy means they are able to give TIME and MONEY to a cause. When I think of some of the wealthier people queer people I know, MOST of them are using their money to support gay organizations, and do a lot of committee work to support them! Thanks to those people for doing the right thing!

>>In Vermont, however, I feel we are better about encouraging participation from all walks of life, not just the well off. This might be because most of the queers I know in Vermont are here for our great lifestyle, rather than money. I see much greater class issues in the big queer centers like NYC and SF.