

QUOTABLES

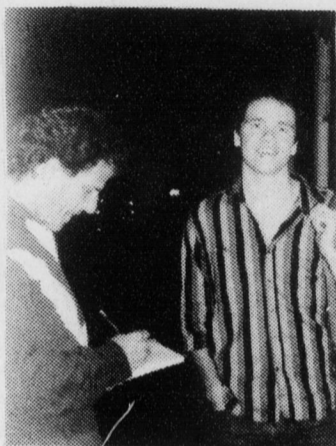
by Don Kaplan and Holly Hobbs

“What Does Serendipidy Mean To You?”



“Studying for Tuesday's Chemistry test.” -John Jarvis

“More work in Founders.” -Rick Weiss



“Jello wrestling, Project Yellow Ball and tip-toe through the tulips.” -Grant Reed

“Drunk!” -Midge Jackson and Lisa Barnes



“A BLEEPING good time!” -Don Kaplan

photos by Holly Hobbs

Homosexuality Partially Invented?

by Tracy Clark

Tuesday evening, March 12, Guilford students, faculty and members of the community were treated to an informative lecture by Assistant Professor of American History at UNC-G, John D'Emilio. D'Emilio's lecture, entitled “Homosexuality in Historical Perspective,” was the second of the semester in the Conception/Reconception: Exploring the Meanings of Human Sexuality, lecture series.

At the outset of his lecture D'Emilio relayed the story of his coming to write about the history of homosexuality in America. He couldn't find Socrates in the phonebook following a proposal to his doctoral advisor to tackle the topic of ‘gay history’ and settled for the history of the Gay Liberation Movement in America. This was the topic of his lecture.

The history of the Gay Liberation movement is, according to D'Emilio, primarily a history of homosexual politics. This history can be broken down into three distinct periods: Colonial America up to the nineteenth century, the turn of the twentieth century up to 1940, and the modern era, World War II up to the present day.

D'Emilio pointed to Colonial America as an age without sexual classifications. There wasn't persecution for being homosexual because the term homosexual

did not exist. (Nor did heterosexual.) Certain sexual acts were prohibited, such as sodomy by males or ‘ludicrous behavior’ by females, but the basis of people's persecution was the act and not the gender of the person with whom the act was committed.

D'Emilio went on in his discussion of Colonial America to say that there was no space for gay or lesbian households, and on a larger level, gay or lesbian identities. The reason for this was the mercantile economy of the period. The societal and economic basis of Colonial America was the FAMILY. A ‘brood of children’ was required for families to subsist. For women there was no alternative to marriage and motherhood. For men no alternative but to establish a household and assume certain duties in its running, complimentary to the duties of their wives (of women in general).

Addressing the turn of the twentieth century D'Emilio first referred to the work of Carol Smith-Rosenburg, an important name in Women's Studies circles. Smith-Rosenburg studied numerous diaries and journals and other papers of Victorian women. In her study she discovered that these women were passionately engaged in same-sex friendships. D'Emilio pointed to letters where women longed for the company of one another and to marriages that were secondary to friendships often accommodating six-month or year long absences for women to spend time with best friends or sister or cousins. The intensity of the friendships these Victorian women preserved despite marriage or geographical separation would be called lesbian today, D'Emilio said, but, importantly, was normative for the period.

Emerging at the turn of the century was the work of sexologists. Kraft-Ebbing and Havelock Ellis and their contemporaries who determined certain deviant sexual behavior to be a condition of being. At the same

time the economy was moving away from a mercantile one to a capitalist or market economy. For men and women the opportunity arose to be independent, free to choose against marriage and child-rearing. “Capitalism created a social context for terms like ‘homosexuality,’ a condition being validated by the period's eminent sexologists D'Emilio explained, “Non-procreative sexuality could become an organizing principle in people's lives.”

The sexologists described the ‘homosexual’ condition as being invertive, often describing sexual deviants as cross-gender males and females. Their analyses contended that lesbians were men trapped inside women's bodies and gay men the vice versa. Isolation and loneliness were salient characteristics of the lives of these individuals.

From the Colonial period to the turn of the century and up to 1940 the oblivion to ‘sexual deviance’ as a condition is recognized within individuals. D'Emilio however pointed out that often individuals realized attractions towards the same sex and accepted them without ever being able to actualize their feelings, in relationships. There was little bonding together in any political sense of persons ascribing to the homosexual condition.

D'Emilio illustrated this aspect of his argument with references to interviews he had had with gay men of the period. The men often called themselves ‘bohemian.’ D'Emilio questioned the legitimacy of the men's claim: to his mind bohemian connotated an artistic, eclectic lifestyle, yet, the man he interviewed held regular jobs and led ordinary lives. Bohemian referred to the men's

perception of themselves as stylizing their own lives, in ways or modes new and distinct from that of society at large. The turn of the century up to 1940 marks the development of homosexuality as a identity for individuals.

In the process of categorizing homosexuality as a condition of the individual distinct from the sexuality of society, the sexuality of society itself is highlighted, and the concept of heterosexuality also established. D'Emilio emphasized the contemporaneous birth of homosexual and heterosexual concepts.

Speaking of the Modern Era D'Emilio focused on the origins of the Gay Liberation Movement. That movement, D'Emilio contended was shaped by three historical occurrences: World War II, the publication of the Kinsey Reports, and McCarthyism.

The sociological dynamics of WWII marked much same-sex interaction and much social tolerance. Many individuals who had accepted homosexuality for themselves intellectually experienced homosexual relationships and also met people who shared their experiences. Notions of ‘Gay Life’ and gay liberation developed. Homosexuals began to form positive self-images.

The publication of the Kinsey Reports reinforced emergence of homosexuals in greater numbers. “The Kinsey studies demonstrated that homosexuality was commonplace and not phenomenal.” People's sense of what was possible changed. A new sense of the erotic was founded.

The Kinsey Reports were liberating but not oppressive. For this reason they did not spark the

organizing of national Gay Rights organizations that McCarthyism did. McCarthyism marked the widespread public labelling of homosexuality as a menace. Gays and lesbians suffered discrimination in the workplace and other areas. Their rights were thwarted in the press. Within McCarthyism homosexuals became thoroughly oppressed. Their oppression caused homosexuals to band together to work towards social change. According to D'Emilio, “McCarthyism prepared society to hear the proposals of the Gay Liberation movement.”

D'Emilio then pointed out the formidable Gay Rights Liberation movement existing today that is the culmination of the historical events/trends he'd outlined. In conclusion he expressed why he thought the history of homosexuality in America was as important. D'Emilio provided four reasons; first that the emergence of the movement illustrates the malleability of human sexuality, second that homosexuality is but a specific example of how sexuality has become a way for us to define ourselves, third, that homosexuality is partially responsible for the liberating sex from procreating, and fourth, that sexuality is manifest as homo- or hetero- or some other ‘socially.’

In conclusion to his lecture D'Emilio spoke of “the important story of oppression” involved in the history of the Gay Liberation Movement. “Our efforts to create a sexual ethic” must not be devoid of “politics and power” considerations. For D'Emilio sexuality continually evolves and its importance cannot be understated.