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Mid-Atlantic States

# Baltimore Gay Paper

COMMITTED TO DIVERSITY

A Program of the GLCCB • March 16 • Volume XXI Number 6  
2000

## It's Not Because You're Gay, It's Because You're a Man

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As a straight man I never related very well to the idea that male gay-bashers and other homophobes were insecure about their sexuality and were protesting too much about gayness. That's convenient and clever, I know, and it might seem to explain why male gay-bashers attack gay men more than gay women, but it serves only to polarize men—gay and straight—against each other. It is more than a little like the insensitive and haughty old saw from macho men who can't understand or accept the existence of lesbians. "She just needs a good lay," they say. Suggesting that people who don't identify as gay really should gets us nowhere.

Let's turn the old analysis on its head. Let's try to think like a typical gay-basher might be thinking. Let's try to understand what he thinks about sex. (I must acknowledge at the outset that the approach I suggest probably holds little

promise for reducing attacks against lesbians. I suspect that problem arises from psychosexual issues entirely distinct from the ones I will discuss.)

First, male sexuality in the animal world is often manifest in aggressiveness by males toward females. Female participation in igniting sexual union—pheromones and other elements of estrus—are almost always passive and sometimes invisible. It is easy for a young boy observing copulation by neighborhood pets to think of male sexuality as predatory, cruel and selfish. In human societies sexuality is even more difficult for young men to see clearly. Sex researcher Carol Cassell, in her book *Swept Away*, describes human heterosexual transactions in starkly commercial terms. "To be blunt," she writes, "sex has historically been a commodity. It's a valuable source of power."

Buried in the recesses of [women's] memories are years of messages telling us that

sex is our most important asset IF rationed, IF kept out of reach." (Emphasis in original.) To the typical young straight man, much less the typical gay-basher, sex comes to be seen as something a woman provides and he has to get. Straight men have developed a panoply of ploys for "getting some." Many straight men are like desperate and disreputable door-to-door salesmen offering free gifts and other introductory offers in the constant search and scant hope of closing a deal. Other "tricks of the trade" include posturing, flashing money, making insincere promises, offering calculated flattery, outright lying, manipulating emotions and sometimes deploying drugs and alcohol.

The thought that any man might wish to use invasive and ignoble male sexual machinations against him is what makes a straight man uncomfortable and angry. It is not that the gay man is gay that upsets the gay-basher. It is that the gay man is a man.

To reduce the bashing of gay men we

should work not only to improve the image, understanding and acceptance of homosexuality, but also to improve the image, understanding and acceptance of male sexuality.

Through the usual implements of cultural change—education, literature and media chief among them, but also in our personal thoughts and interactions—we should confront and supplant the widespread and deeply rooted idea that male sexuality is ugly, untrustworthy and exploitive. If we can help young men see male sexuality as a healthy and honorable biological impulse and if we can honestly discuss how it is constrained, distorted and villainized by our culture, gay-bashing straight men might no longer feel outraged at the thought of how some gay men might like to direct it toward them.

*Jack Kammer is the author of GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN (St. Martin's Press, 1994).*