

Transformation

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Pedophilia And The Endangerment Of Children: How Wrong Can The Right Be?

Suzanne Pharr

Along with the "No Special Rights" propaganda, the religious Right has been successful in falsely labeling lesbians and gay men as "pedophiles" to frighten the public with misinformation. This highly emotional issue is used as one of the linchpins in the effort to persuade voters that homosexuality is about wrongful behavior and therefore discrimination is a moral issue rather than a civil rights one.

For the last decade, women's anti-violence programs and child advocacy organizations have brought the issue of child sexual assault to public attention. However, the media coverage has often been misleading and sensational, leaving many people confused about the true nature of child sexual abuse. While most understand that it is widespread, people are generally ignorant about how and where it happens and who the perpetrators are.

The religious Right, with unerring instinct for creating highly emotional reactions marked by alarm and anger, steps right into the middle of this confusion and ignorance, and manipulates people's fears about the safety and well-being of their children.

If we are to combat the Right's false information by using the truth,

we have to stop using the incorrect terms they introduce into the public debate. Pedophilia does not describe child sexual abuse in general; it is a psychological term used to define the behavior of a very specific group of people: **adults who have sexual attraction only for children and are unable to relate sexually to adults.** The religious Right, for the purpose of distortion, uses the term in a broad manner to describe *any* adult who has sexual relations with children.

Using "pedophilia" as a catchall for all forms of child sexual abuse, they link the word directly with gay men and lesbians by arguing that our contact with children – through parenting, teaching school, leading youth groups, etc. – will lead to sexual molestation of the children involved.

They suggest that we are out of control sexual predators and present the preposterous lie that because we cannot have our own children (despite the evidence that many of us are parents) we have to recruit children into our ranks. To complete the "big lie" (so outrageous that many believe it, thinking that no one could tell a lie that big), they state that association with

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HERLAND LIBRARY
PROPERTY OF

Pedophilia

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lesbians and gay men causes children to become homosexual. They then argue that we must protect children by making laws to keep lesbians and gay men separated from children.

If caring and publicly responsible persons came to believe that there was a single group of people in this society that was primarily responsible for the sexual abuse of children, would they not want laws created to restrain and limit this group of people? This idea is behind the strategy of the religious Right to lead people into believing that homosexuality equals pedophilia; **however, the flaw in the strategy is that the information they provide is false.**

Even though we are bombarded with sexual images by the media, few people in the U.S. talk about sexuality in any real sense. It is the great unknown. The religious Right relies upon the public's ignorance about sexuality in general for the success of its campaign to demonize lesbians and gay men. Most schools do not teach about sexuality and certainly not the wide range of human sexual expression. The religious Right, of course, fervently opposes sex education in the schools. They insist that sex education be kept in the family, but families are reluctant to discuss it. Hence, most of the population gets its education haphazardly through bits and pieces of information picked up from acquaintances or the popular media. In the absence of open discussion and adequate information, it becomes simple to use misinformation to manipulate attitudes. The area of

child sexual abuse is especially volatile because of our feelings about the innocence and vulnerability of children.

Who the real child abusers are

It is common knowledge that the majority of the perpetrators of sexual abuse of children are heterosexual men. The religious Right wants us to believe the primary perpetrators are lesbians and gay men, particularly the latter. Though most people think of girls as the victims of sexual assault, we know that boys are also often victims, and when the perpetrator is a man, people jump to the conclusion that the man is gay. Nicholas Groth and Jean Birnbaum, the most respected researchers in the field of sexual assault of children, address the inaccuracy of this conclusion:

In the course of our professional work we have had an opportunity to study men who have sexually assaulted children. Our aim is to examine some of the psychological characteristics of the child offender with particular attention to the relationship between the offender's choice of victim in regard to sex and his adult sexual orientation. Those offenders who choose children as their victims were for the most part (76%) exclusively heterosexual in their life-style. There was a small group (24%) classified as bisexual. However, in no case did this attraction to men exceed their preference for women, and in every case the sex partners, male and female, were adults. *There were no men who were primarily attracted to other adult males found among the group of child offenders. Those offenders who are sexually attracted exclusively to chil-*

dren show a slight preference to boys over girls, yet these same individuals are uninterested in adult homosexual relationships. In fact, they frequently express a strong sexual aversion to adult males, reporting that what they find attractive about the immature boy are his feminine features and the absence of secondary sexual characteristics such as body hair and muscles. Homosexuality and homosexual pedophilia are not synonymous. In fact, it may be that these two orientations are mutually exclusive, the reason being that the heterosexual male is sexually attracted to feminine characteristics, and the sexually immature child's qualities are more feminine than masculine. In our twelve years of work with child molesters, we have found...the child offender who is also attracted to and engaged in adult sexual relationships is heterosexual. The adult heterosexual male constitutes a greater sexual risk to underage children than the adult homosexual male. (Emphasis added) ("Archives of Sexual Behavior", Vol. 7, #3, 1978)

Why the lie works

Given that long-term studies of child molesters point to heterosexual men as the major perpetrators, why then is it that people so easily believe that the abusers are gay men? There are several reasons:

❖ In general, people do not understand that rape and child sexual abuse are about power, control and dominance rather than sexual gratification. Hence, when heterosexual men are perpetrators of incest or sexual abuse of nonrelated children, their focus is not so much the gender of the child but the fact that they can dominate and control the child sexually. Whether the

victim is a boy or girl is not necessarily relevant to the perpetrator.

◆ Because the word homosexual has been used loosely to describe same-gender sex, regardless of whether the parties involved are heterosexual or gay in sexual orientation, it is easy for people to confuse the sexual *act* with sexual *orientation*. In prisons everywhere, there are heterosexual men who assume dominant sexual roles and force other heterosexual men into submission. In the rapes or sexual relationships that occur, one can easily observe the significance of power and control as a motivation. It is also easy to see that the perpetrator's or victim's heterosexuality is not changed by the experience of same-gender sex. When these prisoners leave prison, they act out the same heterosexual orientation that they did prior to imprisonment. They go home to their girlfriends and wives.

It is not the act of sex that makes someone heterosexual or homosexual: one can be a lifetime celibate and still have an orientation of heterosexuality or homosexuality. How we determine sexual orientation is by the gender – same or opposite – one has consistent sexual/erotic attractions to. Homosexuals can have sex with heterosexuals and it does not make them heterosexual. The same is true for heterosexuals having sex with homosexuals. **It is not the act of sex that determines sexual orientation; it is instead the persistent source of erotic attraction, whether acted upon or not.**

◆ People often do not understand or accept that the majority of

the perpetrators of child sexual abuse are family members or known and trusted individuals: clergy, coaches, teachers, neighbors, etc. Abuse by strangers is more rare. Fathers, step-fathers, boyfriends of the mother are the most common abusers, and they are heterosexual. However, it is easier to accept the notion of stranger abuse and to warn our children away from strangers than it is to accept that the potential abuser could be a man the child trusts. **The most dangerous place for a child is in the home.** The problem of protecting our children becomes all the more complicated when family relationships are involved. **If we accept the myth that the homosexual stranger or the unknown rapist is the greatest threat, then we divert ourselves and our children from looking at the true source of danger. The result is that we leave our children even more vulnerable to abuse and undefended by those responsible for their well being.**

◆ There are, of course, some children who are sexually molested by lesbians and gay men because the lesbian and gay community, for good or bad, reflects all the variety that exists in the larger community. However, these cases of abuse are only a small percentage of the whole. The lesbian and gay community must hold these people accountable for their actions. There are also gay men who in their youth had sexual relationships with older gay men. (And to a lesser extent, young lesbians and older women.) We must also examine the power and control issues in these relationships.

Given the homophobia and heterosexism that isolate gay and lesbian youth, judges them harshly,

and prohibits their exploration of their sexual identity with other gay and lesbian youth, it is not surprising that some welcome an opportunity to be in relationship with someone of their own sexual orientation no matter what the age difference is. Having experienced the sexual violence against women that is a given in this society, many lesbians are especially concerned about cross-generational relationships because of the imbalance of power and potential for abuse.

Concern for children: protection or propaganda

That the religious Right's civic concern for children is limited to using them only for political gain in the attack against lesbians and gay men and against reproductive rights is demonstrated in their lack of interest in supporting programs that advocate for children. For instance, in a country where most of the impoverished are children, the Right opposes welfare. And at a time when most women have to work to support their children, they oppose pay equity, parental leave, publicly funded childcare, etc. Rather than preaching sermons that hold men accountable for the sexual abuse of children and women, they promote keeping families together at any cost and attack women's shelters and child protection groups for "breaking up the family." The religious Right's fundamentalist belief requires that men have power and dominion over women and children; hence, for them to acknowledge the truth about violence against children and women would severely damage the argument for male domination.

Given what is known about

heterosexual male violence, one might wonder, rather ironically, why the religious Right is not seeking laws to restrict the contact of heterosexual males with children, if indeed they are so socially and biblically concerned about child sexual abuse? After all, it was heterosexual Lot who offered up his two virgin daughters to be gang-raped by the heterosexual townsmen in the famous Sodom and Gomorrah passage (Genesis 19: 1-10) that is used so often to condemn homosexuality. This offer was made after Lot refused to deliver up the two male angels to the same crowd of men.

The perfect tool of oppression

The religious Right's strategy for using children as the centerpiece to build discrimination against lesbians and gay men is twofold:

- 1) to demonize lesbians and gay men by identifying us as out of control sexual predators;
- 2) to prevent us from having contact with children, thereby eliminating the possibility of countering false information with real life, truthful experiences.

Establishing an argument that lesbians and gay men are sexual predators is a perfect strategy for oppression because it meets two of the basic requirements: stereotyping and scapegoating. The accumulative effect of the two is to dehumanize. Once a group is dehumanized, those who wish to do them harm no longer feel standards of conscience or common humanity: members of the targeted group are no longer seen as worthy of fair

treatment or capable of experiencing ordinary human feelings. Indeed, perpetrators of discrimination and violence often believe that they are doing society a favor by doing harm to their victims. **It becomes the mark of a good citizen to discriminate.**

The accusation that a targeted group harms children has been a part of the demonizing and dehumanizing process throughout history. It was classically employed to promote racism, and now the Right has transferred it to increase homophobia. To arouse fear, hysteria and violence, gypsies were accused of stealing children, Jews of killing and drinking the blood of gentile babies, Native Americans of stealing white babies. In their attempt to prevent school desegregation, the KKK distributed fliers showing African-American males (drawn to resemble a gorilla) towering over little white girls at their school desks. Each group is inevitably described as oversexed, predatory and dangerous to children. If one accepts the lie as truth, then discrimination becomes a matter of morality.

The second arm of the strategy – to prevent association with children and youth – ensures the maintenance of oppression by preventing generation after generation from exposure to information and experiences that would counter bigotry. Another falsehood enters here. The religious Right would have us believe that association with lesbians and gay men, or even talking about homosexuality, leads one to become homosexual. They base this notion on the idea that sexuality is a choice, not an orientation, and they ignore the fact that no one, at this point of study, knows what makes a person heterosexual, homosexual or bisex-

ual in orientation. There is no evidence that association or conversation about sexuality effects one's orientation. Gay and lesbian children growing up in heterosexual families and living in a primarily heterosexual society are not shaped into heterosexuals, and neither do heterosexual children of lesbian or gay parents become homosexual. The more important point in such a discussion is that it should not matter whether sexuality is a choice or a condition of birth. No matter what the sexual orientation, everyone should be treated with dignity and given full civil rights.

Turning lies into policy

The false premise that reading or hearing about homosexuality makes children become homosexual leads the Right to create policy that harms children. For example, a few years ago the country became aware that a large number of youth were attempting and/or successfully committing suicide. The Department of Health and Human Services under the leadership of Louis Sullivan, a Bush appointee, commissioned a study of teen suicide. It found, among other things, that over 30% were youth who were struggling with their lesbian or gay sexual orientation – not because they were sick or mentally ill but because they were so isolated, condemned and unsupported. Upon the study's completion, Sullivan suppressed it because it "promoted homosexuality" by talking about homosexuality as a factor in teen suicide. Until it was later released under protest, this decision prevented teachers, school counselors, administrators and parents from having information that

could help save children's lives. The very clear message from the Bush administration was "We'd rather have our children dead than gay."

Preventing lesbians and gay men from teaching, retaining custody of our children, adopting, participating in foster care, leading youth groups, etc., eliminates the possibility of children and youth understanding lesbians and gay men as individualized and fully human. Additionally, lesbian and gay youth are prohibited access to role models and adequate information about who they are and the life they are entering. Instead, they along with heterosexual youth, are not given access to the history and culture of lesbians and gay men, though they are given the full range of biased information and attitudes concerning homosexuality. Because of the extremes of the prejudice, there is no one to counsel or protect lesbian and gay youth and rarely is there anyone who will intervene in situations when biased language is used, such as "faggot," which is common name-calling in schools.

Consequently, our schools become breeding grounds of bigotry. It is no surprise that the majority of those who physically attack and kill gay men are boys in their late teens and early 20s. Part of what motivates them is their own sexual development and attendant insecurity at the time of entering the often repressive and violent arena of manhood. Equally significant, however, is that they have just graduated from what could be called boot camps for bigotry against lesbians and gay men – the public and private schools of the U.S.

What can be done

It is the challenge of the lesbian and gay community and progressive groups to figure out how to counter misinformation with the truth. There are many arenas to work in as we begin to gather information to create a truthful and complete analysis: lesbian and gay sexuality, children's rights, child sexual abuse, violence against women and children, progressive policies in welfare, health, education, and support for families (using, of course, a broad definition of family.)

❖ On the issue of pedophilia and child sexual assault, it seems important that the lesbian and gay community begin the dialogue internally before attempting to work in coalition with other groups on debunking the myths and lies. Since all of us, whether heterosexual or homosexual, are recipients of society's misinformation and lack of adequate information about sexuality, lesbians and gay men share equally in the general ignorance about sex.

We are unclear about what we think about sexuality, what is good or bad, right or wrong. The Right's narrow view of sexual morality has diverted us from the questions that might help us sort through the differences of sexual orientation, sexual behavior and sexual ethics. It is the latter that requires our clearest thinking and most persistent attention. Perhaps we could get closer to developing positive community standards if we held all sexual practices up to this ethical question: **Is there use of power and violence and control to violate the integrity, autonomy and wholeness of**

another person? If so, then we know we oppose that behavior. Using this guideline, it becomes simpler to talk about difficult issues such as cross-generational relationships, sadomasochism, etc., within a framework that does not call for immediate polarization.

Additionally, there needs to be discussions about the many ways lesbian and gay sexuality manifests itself, how individuals came to understand their sexual orientation, and what the most positive relationship to children should be. Throughout history we have had positive and meaningful roles in children's lives – as parents, coaches, teachers, priests, poets, actors, etc. – but we have been closeted and afraid of exposure. However, it seems exceedingly clear that homophobia and heterosexism can never be eliminated until lesbians and gay men can associate openly with children and youth and provide truthful information to them. Lesbians and gay men must develop the courage to confront this artificially constructed taboo head-on by taking responsible positions that put us openly in association with children and youth.

❖ We must advocate for sex education in schools. Alliances can be made with those groups working for reproductive rights, for HIV education, for freedom of expression and against the banning of books. If we continue to keep children and youth in ignorance about their sexuality, we keep them in risk of teen-age pregnancy, AIDS, other sexually transmitted diseases, as well as self-destructive behavior and suicide. In this context, to refuse sex education is once again to send the message, "We had rather see you dead than gay."

Unfortunately, there has not been enough effort put into what should be a natural alliance between those working for reproductive rights and those working for lesbian and gay rights. These meet on common ground in the area of sex education, school-based clinics, and HIV/AIDS education, of the understanding of the right to privacy, and of the fundamental belief that all people must have authority over their own bodies. It is the latter – the belief that we own our bodies – that stands in direct opposition to the Right's authoritarian vision. Therefore, the Right must oppose sex education in the schools because an underlying premise of sex education is that if we understand our own bodies and their uses in the world, then we will have authority over them. These bodies – their sexuality, their health and wellbeing, including the right to choose death through a living will – will not be given up to someone else to control.

❖ The lesbian and gay community must take a strong position that never excuses sexual exploitation or abuse of children. Our bottom line must be that no one be allowed to sexually abuse children, no matter what gender or sexual orientation, race, religion, age or class. To achieve this goal of protecting children, we must tell the truth about who the perpetrators are. Alliances can be made with the women's anti-violence movement and children's advocacy groups to present the truth and to develop strategies to eliminate sexual violence against children.

❖ We must join others at the forefront of the work against racial injustice, using our understanding

that the tactics of oppression are similar and are employed against all targeted groups. We must understand that the religious Right's attack against lesbians and gay men originates in racism and sexism, in the desire to dominate and control. The language of "No special rights" and of sexual predators comes directly from racist strategies employed to destroy programs designed to eliminate discrimination and from tactics used to increase fear and bigotry. Homophobia and heterosexism cannot be eliminated without the elimination of sexism and racism. All are intertwined, and no progressive movement can succeed without major leadership from people of color and women.

Finally, we must do mass education. Were it not for the widespread ignorance about sexuality in general, and lesbian and gay sexuality

in particular, the religious Right would not be successful in its efforts to demonize lesbians and gay men. The greatest hope for changing ignorance to informed understanding is to put a human face on the oppression. To do so will require lesbians and gay men to be open with the people we live and work among, talking about the reality of our lives. Study after study shows that discriminatory and bigoted attitudes change positively in relation to how well people personally know someone of the group targeted for discrimination. Many people attribute the victory in Oregon in large part to the fact that thousands of lesbians and gay men, in acts of great courage and dignity, came out to their families, their co-workers, their neighbors, and talked about their lives. Discrimination finds no fertile ground when people are seen as individualized and fully human.

Moving

In mid-June 1993, my longtime friend, Ann Gallmeyer, and I are moving to Oregon where we hope to find greater services for people with disabilities and a large women's community for friendship and support. Working out of a satellite office, I will remain on the staff of the Women's Project doing the same work I now do: national organizing and writing. For two weeks of each quarter I will return to Little Rock to work with the staff and board. Hopefully, this plan will give me the best of both worlds, a residence in the Northwest and work that remains rooted in the South I have loved all my life.

— Suzanne Pharr

Annual Dinner Will Honor Euba Harris Winton

Janet Perkins

On Saturday, June 12 at 6:30 p.m. at the Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church, 4823 Woodlawn Avenue, the Women's Project will sponsor its annual dinner. This year the dinner will be combine the presentation of the Evangeline K. Brown Award to a deserving woman and the celebration of cultural diversity through music, poetry and dance.

The dinner is our opportunity to honor a woman who has shown extreme commitment and dedication to fighting to improve the devastating conditions that so many face. One who has pushed the limits for justice. This year's receipt of the Evangeline K. Brown Award is Euba Harris Winton, a member of the Women's Project board of directors and a longtime organizer from Fort Smith.

Winton has battled racism, gang violence, drug abuse, teen-age pregnancy, illiteracy, AIDS and other offenses against humanity for 22 years as a community developer for Mallalieu United Methodist Church in Fort Smith.

Winton has been a member of Mallalieu United Methodist Church for 60 years and was hired in 1970 to strengthen the small church's outreach ministry. Through her work she has persuaded the city, through the courts, to spend federal community development funds in the African-American community. She has worked to gain improvements in housing, employment, education and municipal services. Through her

program, at-risk students are able to receive tutoring and support from adult mentors and attend peer-group activities to help them remain in school. Winton has been instrumental in developing community forums, counseling and other measures to combat violence, substance abuse and the devastating spread of AIDS.

Presently Winton is a South Central Jurisdiction representative nominating committee core planning group member for United Methodist Women. Winton has also been active in Fort Smith as district coordinator for Christian Social Involvement and Christian Global Concerns. In the North Arkansas Conference she served as president of United Methodist Women South Central Jurisdiction representative to the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women.

In 1985 the Women's Project sponsored the first dinner and presented the award for outstanding work to the woman the award is named for, Evangeline K. Brown, who for more than 50 years has

fought for improvements for her Dermott community and for a better Arkansas. For those who have encountered Mrs. Brown, they know that she stands firm on the things she believes in and will go down to the wire to fight against injustice. For this reason our award was named for Evangeline K. Brown. She is tireless and fearless in her effort to transform the world into a better place.

For too long the contributions that women have made have gone unnoticed. Therefore we feel we must find avenues to celebrate the lives of women and the long struggles they have encountered in order to survive. We feel Euba Harris Winton has demonstrated enormous courage and longevity, thus making her most deserving of the Evangeline K. Brown Award.

Please feel free to call Janet Perkins at 372-5113 for more information related to the dinner. Tickets for this event will be available in May. We look forward to you coming out and helping us to celebrate the lives of women.

Transformation

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Letters to the editor are welcome.

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* Printed on recycled paper. *

Sexist Climate

Two Garland County Community College faculty members under criminal and internal investigation in two separate incidents of alleged sexual harassment said that they will retire. The charge of public sexual indecency filed against Ron Adams was dismissed at the request of the victim. The victim accused Adams of sexually molesting her by fondling her breasts while she was working in the college's data processing lab on campus. She stated she would drop the charges if Adams was fired or resigned. Fred Price was accused by another student on a misdemeanor harassment charge of allegedly touching her on the stomach and buttocks on numerous occasions while in class.

Racist Climate

Jacksonville Mayor Tommy Swaim was found guilty in federal court of discriminating against former Police Chief Frank D. Neely because he is black. The jury awarded Neely \$40,000 and directed that \$22,000 of it be paid by the city and \$18,000 of it be paid by Swaim. Swaim announced in April that he would not appeal the court's decision.

Dr. Betty J. Cravy was fired from her position of head of the state's first residential high school for mathematics and sciences due to lack of management and organizational skills to make the school top-notch. Cravy has been under criticism for the low level of African-American youth that were recruited to be part of the school, located in Hot Springs. Less than 9 percent of the students enrolled for next year's courses are black, compared with an application pool of state 10th graders that is 21 percent black.

Joyce Scott Littleton, was named interim director. Littleton becomes the first African-American employee on the school's eight-member staff.

The North Little Rock Water Department settled a lawsuit out of court with Andrew McFadden, who had contended that he had been denied a promotion

because he is black. The settlement was for \$2,500. McFadden said he had been verbally disciplined by his supervisor unfairly and had been denied a promotion because of his race.

Anti-Gay/Lesbian Climate

During a showing of the film "The Crying Game" at Park Plaza mall someone released a canister of cayenne pepper-based "defensive spray" inside the theatre, forcing the evacuation of the theatre complex. The film has become quite controversial because of its portrayal of a gay female impersonator. Some believe the act was a political statement. No arrest has been made and no injuries were reported.

The *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* and the *Pine Bluff Commercial* are two of 13 newspapers nationally to cancel the comic strip "For Better or Worse" because a character in the strip has revealed his homosexuality.

The University of Arkansas at Little Rock Art Department pulled a series of graphite and ink drawings, some of which displayed homosexual acts, from the department's student seniors show. The student wanted his work to be displayed with the other students; but the department chairman said it would have to be exhibited under conditions "deemed appropriate" by department personnel. At least 15 art students signed and attached disclaimers to their work stating that exhibiting their work wasn't "an endorsement of UALR policies which abridge the right of free expression." Later a compromise was reached in which the work was put up in the Print Study Room. The room is unlocked but monitored to prevent unsupervised children from entering.

Religious Right Activities

In continued attacks on the Governor's School, the video, "The Guiding Hand: The Clinton Influence on Arkansas Education," has been shown around the nation condemning the curriculum at the school.

Jeff Botkin, famous for documenting the Willie Horton issue, produced the film, along with the Family Council's Jerry Cox. On the video, a former Governor's School employee and unsuccessful Republican candidate for the legislature, Mark Lowery, states that a young man had become a member of a cult, and that he'd left a long suicide note blaming the Governor's School. The young man's mother said she called Lowery and told him "If you guys are going to give wrong information, leave me out." According to the *Arkansas Times*, her son was never involved in a cult. He did leave a suicide note, but it was short, and he did not mention the Governor's School. This follows action by the American Family Association of Arkansas last month which asked Governor Jim Guy Tucker to investigate the school.

The Family Council of Arkansas sponsored an ad in the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette* entitled "In Defense of a Little Virginité: a message from Focus on the Family." The ad speaks strongly against birth control, condom use and "safe sex" as methods for AIDS prevention. The Family Council is closely affiliated with Focus on the Family, an anti-gay organization formed in 1988.

A coalition of "family-values" lobbying groups won a victory in the state House of Representatives when it adopted a compromise amendment to the appropriation bill for the state Health Department.

Marilyn Simmons, state director of Family, Life, America, God (FLAG), said her group "would have liked a stronger amendment." The amendment states that before any new school clinics are established, the school board in question must pass a resolution requesting it, and that any clinic distributing condoms must maintain records of teen pregnancies at the school and report their findings annually to the school board. It also states that it is a state policy to discourage premarital sex, and that any sex education or health class must emphasize abstinence from sex as the best and only sure means of avoiding pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases.

During a House Committee meeting on Senate Bill 500, the Arkansas Disabilities Act, Fred Hart and Jerry Cox of the Family Council argued against S.B. 500 saying it's "simply disingenuous to say AIDS is not related to homosexuality." The bill failed to pass.

Ann Dierks, past president of the Arkansas Right to Life Committee, told *The Washington Post* recently that Health Department Director Joycelyn Elders, President Clinton's choice for surgeon general, "is to me really a very dangerous woman because of her policies. I see not an extension of a pro-choice policy, but a pro-abortion policy." Elders' response: "I'm not about abortions. I'm about preventing pregnancy. Which would in turn prevent abortions."

Book Notes

From The Women's Project Library

***How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* by Julia Alvarez** – "To speak without an accent is the ultimate goal of the immigrant, yet the literature of immigration requires an accent to lend it authenticity and flair. This threshold – between accent and native speech, alienation and assimilation – is the golden door through which (the author) sails with

her first collection of interwoven stories." The best stories come at the end of the book and include "rich descriptions of island life and details of the Garcia's first year in the United States." The author has "beautifully captured the threshold experience of the new immigrant, where the past is not yet a memory and the future remains an anxious

dream."

– *New York Times Book Review*

***Kitchen* by Banana Yoshimoto, translated by Megan Backus** – "A sense of the fragility of life permeates these works (two novellas); death is the central event. But Yoshimoto's message, articulated

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with delicacy and maturity, is that humans have the intellectual and spiritual resilience to overcome tragedy and find meaning in existence. A bestseller in Japan, Yoshimoto's first book should delight a discerning audience here."

— *Publishers Weekly*

1959 by Thulani Davis "is a powerful coming of age story set against the beginnings of the civil rights movement. In 1959 Billie Holiday dies, the main character has her first date, and her father begins to worry about integration when eight black college students go into the local Woolworth's and sit down at the lunch counter. This debut novel by an acclaimed playwright, journalist and poet received reviews that compared her book to *Sula* and *To Kill A Mockingbird*."

— *Feminist Bookstore News*

Both Right and Left Handed: Arab Women Talk About Their Lives by Bouthaina Shaaban. "Arab women tell of constant shame and fear, of the astounding ignorance of sexuality among Arab girls, of violent male revenge for being 'dishonored' by women's sexual behavior. These are extraordinary people recounting triumphs great and small, from persuading a husband to cook a meal to smuggling arms."

— *New York Times Book Review*

Daughters of Africa: An International Anthology of Words and Writings by Women of African Descent, From the Ancient Oral Tradition to the Present edited by Margaret Busby. Here are the

works of more than 200 authors from Africa, North America, the Caribbean, Latin America, Europe, and Asia, spanning two millennia—from the ancient Egyptian queen Hatzhepsut and the Queen of Sheba to contemporary American writers such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Jewelle Gomez. Within the 1,152 pages are excerpts from oral history, autobiography, historical fiction, science fiction, literary novels, short stories, poetry, essays, journalism, memoirs, diaries, letters, plays, folklore and more. It also includes a biographical sketch of each author and a list of her individual works, as well as substantial bibliographies of sources and further readings.

Catholic Girls edited by Amber Coverdale Sumrall & Patrice Vecchione — Women who grew up Catholic share an experience that transcends class, race and nationality. This unique anthology of 52 short stories, poems and memoirs captures in moving, humorous and

sometimes angry words the stories of Catholic girls—tales of first doubts and disappointments, fears and rebellions, and the emerging sexuality that finally challenges the church's narrow concept of womanhood. Contributors include Louise Erdrich, Audre Lorde, Mary Gordon, Marilyn Murphy and Valerie Miner (What! No Kate Clinton?!?).

Songs of My People — African-Americans: A Self-Portrait edited by Eric Easter, et al is an extraordinary and historic photo documentary of the world of African-Americans. Fifty photojournalists examine and capture on film the stirring lives of African-Americans from the cotton fields of Mississippi to the floor of the New York Stock Exchange; from the anguish of the homeless in the nation's capital to the selflessness of the nuns of the Oblate Sisters of Providence. An exhibition of photographs from this book will be at the Arkansas Arts Center through May 16.

More New Books in the Library:

The War Against Women by Marilyn French

From Paycheck to Power: The Working Woman's Guide to Reducing Debt, Building Assets, and Getting What You Want Out of Life by Little Rock's own Linda Bessette & Anne Owings Wilson

Violence Against Lesbians and Gay Men by Gary David Comstock

This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer by Ray Mills

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Life Is Painful, Nasty and Short...in My Case It Has Only Been Painful and Nasty: Djuna Barnes, An Informal Memoir by Hank O'Neal



OUR MISSION

Our goal is social change or, as the poet Adrienne Rich writes, "the transformation of the world." We believe this world can be changed to become a place of peace and justice for all women.

We take risks in our work; we take unpopular stands. We work for all women and against all forms of discrimination and oppression. We believe that we cannot work for all women and against sexism unless we also work against racism, classism, ageism, anti-Semitism, heterosexism and homophobia. We see the connection among these oppressions as the context for violence against women in this society.

We are concerned in particular about issues of

importance to traditionally underrepresented women: poor women, aged women, women of color, teenage mothers, lesbians, women in prisons, etc. All are women who experience discrimination and violence against their lives.

We are committed to working multi-culturally, multi-racially, and to making our work and cultural events accessible to low income women. We believe that women will not know equality until they know economic justice.

We believe that a few committed women working in coalition and in consensus with other women can make significant change in the quality of life for all women.

Transformation is now published six times every year.

Six times each year, members and volunteers receive analysis of contemporary issues, information about Women's Project upcoming events and activities, book reviews, and more.

If you are not a Women's Project member or volunteer and would like to continue receiving the newsletter, please fill out the membership form on this page.

Current Projects

Prison Project

A support and advocacy project for women in prison that provides support groups for battered women in prison and formerly incarcerated women, and job training and advocacy.

Women's Watchcare Network

A project to monitor incidents of racial, religious, sexual, and anti-gay violence, and the activities of hate groups in Arkansas.

The Social Justice Project

Workshops on understanding racism and homophobia and developing methods to eliminate them.

Women and AIDS

A project to develop strategies for working with women and caregivers around AIDS issues.

African-American Women's Institute for Social Justice

A project which creates strategies for overcoming the barriers that hinder African-American women's efforts toward power and self-determination.

Communications and Events

A newsletter, a lending library, statewide and regional conferences, and production of women singers, poets and novelists.



Yes, I would like to join
the Women's Project.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Phone/day _____

Phone/evening _____

_____ \$ 5 (*low income*)
 _____ 15
 _____ 25
 _____ 50
 _____ 100

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 Little Rock, AR 72206

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