

Mental Health Meet

Sexual Minorities Express Viewpoints

By Paul Clegg
Sun Staff Writer

"What causes you to be homosexual?" a heavy-set man asked Pat Haggerty, counselor at the Seattle Counseling Center for Sexual Minorities.

"What causes you to be straight?" Haggerty asked in response.

The two questions hung in silence for a few seconds Tuesday night at Olympic Center during a meeting sponsored by the Kitsap Mental Health Association.

"You're straight," said Haggerty, "because you grew up accepting certain mores and rules of conduct. But you're as capable of homosexual contact as I am and it's a matter of whether you choose to respond to it."

Haggerty and four other spokespeople for sexual minorities discussed homosexuality,

transsexuality, bisexuality and transvestism during the meeting. Three of the speakers, Chris Darling, Rudy Cotten and Gwyn Hanscom, are co-counselors with Haggerty at the Seattle Center. The fifth, Pat Hall, works at the Gay Community Service Center in Seattle.

The counseling center was set up by Haggerty and several other persons five years ago to provide counseling for sexual minorities in an atmosphere that does not have a heterosexual bias, Haggerty said.

The five, who see themselves as either homosexuals or transsexuals, agreed that a person has a right to his particular sexual identity and that this identity is not a sickness or a mental illness — it's simply a way of living.

Acceptance of a sexual identity that does not fit the "married, monogamous, heterosexual"

norm has been a struggle for these people. A major problem, said Haggerty, is that there are few people in the mental health agencies who understand their problems or who do not have a heterosexual bias.

"At the (Seattle Counseling center)," Haggerty said, "if you come through counseling as a homosexual, that's fine."

Both Haggerty and Hanscom received psychiatric treatment at Western State Hospital and both felt the staff there avoided the issue of sex or gender.

Hanscom, who is transsexual, said he suffered from gender problems all his life. He felt isolated in the small town he grew up in and had no one he could talk with. He was a woman who wanted to relate to the world as a man. He thought of himself as a man. In the last few years, he has been taking hormone treatments and is a patient at the

Stanford gender clinic. The hormone treatments, he said, have stabilized much of the emotional conflict he has suffered.

Chris Darling said he has been openly gay for a year. At first, he went to San Francisco where there is a large gay community. He made the circuit of gay bars but still felt problems with his sexual identity. He went to a psychiatrist and the psychiatrist sent him to sex seminars that were basically heterosexually oriented. It was a long time, even in San Francisco, before he found a gay psychiatrist and gay centers that could relate to the things he was talking about.

One issue that raised considerable debate was the way in which Haggerty planned to raise his daughter. He had a daughter by a woman who sees herself as a lesbian. The daughter is one year old and the couple shares custody of her.

Several persons questioned what kind of sexual identity the daughter would have, seeming to imply that the daughter would suffer because of the parents' sexual orientation.

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"You have to teach them to love people," Haggerty added that the Department of Social and Health Services now recognizes the right of people at the center to act as foster parents. Homosexual juveniles have been placed with homosexual parents in Seattle for some time, he added.

A sizable homosexual population exists in Kitsap County, Haggerty said, but mostly in "closed homosexual" units. The center has been involved in a number of battles with the Navy over discharges of homosexuals, Haggerty said. "There are a lot of GIs at every rank and level but they're dismissed. If they've found out," he said.

The problem is particularly serious because many homosexuals establish their sexual identity between 18 and 22, he said. "They're not openly gay at first but then they get involved in homosexual activity or establish their identity as homosexuals while in the service," he said. "When they've found out, it's a very heavy issue."

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