

# ...and proud of it!

by Matt Hays

Last September, an article in the New York Times explored the popularity of Bart Simpson among Afro-Americans. Writer Michel Marriott noted the proliferation of Black Bart T-Shirts (which included Bart in the personae of Malcolm X, Michael Jordan, and Bob Marley), and pondered the question: Why is Bart so popular with blacks? The conclusions were varied, but the main one seemed to be that blacks identified with Bart's underdog status.

Then came the inevitable: Gay Bart Simpson T-shirts. Selling at T-shirts stands in Greenwich Village, New York, these latest variations of Bart have raised some eyebrows. One features Bart with a Pink Triangle carrying an ACT UP T-shirt. The shirt reads: "Get used to it, dude!" Another has Bart in leather pants and suspenders. The inscription: "On your knees, dude!" Perhaps the raciest reads: "Cocksucker, and proud of it."

Bart's popularity with gays is probably due to many of the same reasons he's popular with blacks. "He's an underdog," says Robert Del Tredici, who teaches the History of Animation course at Concordia. "If life is hopeless, and unfair, then Bart Simpson is someone who knows that."

Bart's appeal may also have something to do with his ability to cope with hardship. "He's about

survival. This kid is going to have problems. His future is not bright. What lends power to the episodes in which Bart is in is that he's stuck with his character. These are survival tactics. It's not just naughty. It's very poignant." Del Tredici stresses, though, that he sees little significance in Bart's popularity amongst gays. After all, Bart is immensely popular generally. "He's a bad boy. Everybody likes seeing things that they're not supposed to be seeing, but that really reflects what's going on. He's very close to the way people actually think and feel, but don't admit to."

"I have problems with the gay association, though, because that's an agenda, and I don't see Bart as having an agenda. It's more brutal than that, less conscious. I think it's more a result of his tremendous popularity. But maybe it signals a new aggressive stance of the gay movement."

Tom Waugh, who co-taught the course Sexual Orientation and Representative last year at Concordia, feels the T-shirts may have less to do with Bart than with the Simpsons in general. "The show is very camp," notes Waugh. "It has this sense of parody, and this tremendous wit about family roles and sex roles."

"It's completely amoral. Even the most irreverent sitcom has a fundamental morality to it. All of them seem to have a humanistic slant to them. The endings of

episodes of the Simpsons, though, are not straight."

As for the idea of Bart Simpson as some sort of a new gay icon, Waugh responds, "I like Lisa Better."

It isn't hard to see why the Simpsons as a whole would appeal to the gay community. The cynical treatment of the "normal" nuclear family unit has been a continuous theme since the first episode.

The episode which had family unity as the theme most central to its narrative (and one of the best written episodes) had Homer distraught about how 'abnormal' his family is. On the way to his company picnic, Homer screams, "Remember, as far as anyone knows, we're a nice, normal, family! Be normal! BE NORMAL!"

After a miserable experience at the picnic, Homer goes to the bar to down a few beers. A television advertisement catches his eye. Dr. Monroe's Family Therapy (Cable) guarantees family bliss, for a fee (just dial 1-800-HUGS). Homer has his solution. "The answer to life's problems aren't at the bottom of a bottle," he realizes, "they're on TV."

Despite strong protests from the rest of the family, Homer pawns the TV for the money Dr. Monroe's session requires.

Dr. Monroe requests that each

member of the Simpson family draw what they consider the roots of their unhappiness. They all draw patriarch Homer.

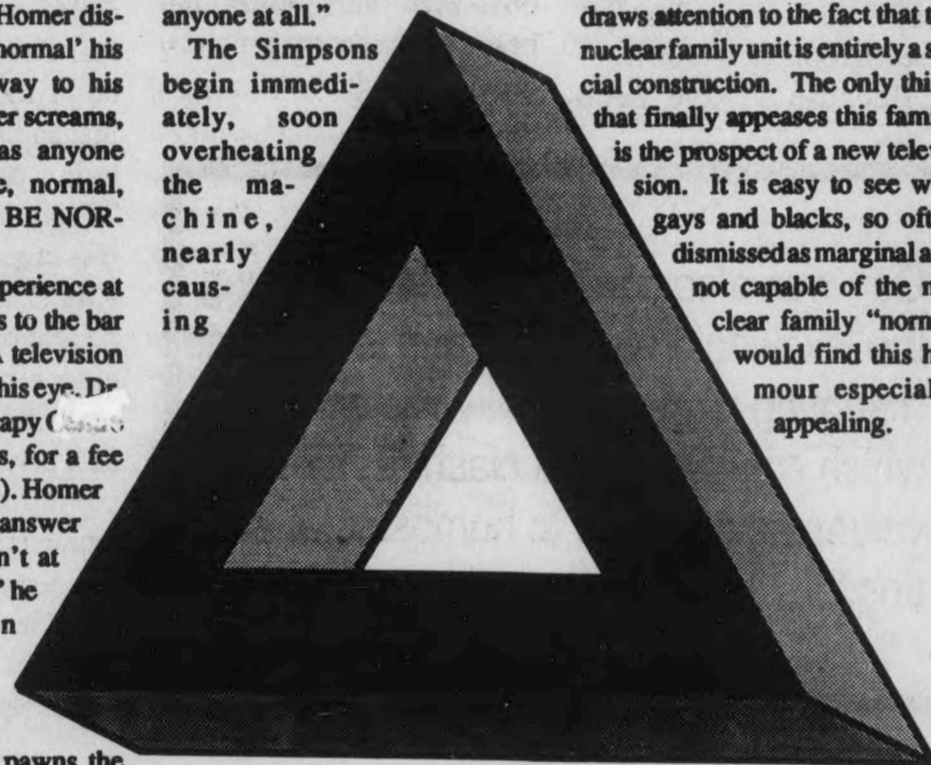
Finally, Dr. Monroe attacks the family to his last resort, an aversion therapy device whereby each member of the family is hooked up to be electric shocked. Each member can press a button to hurt any other family member they choose. "When someone hurts you emotionally," explains Dr. Monroe, "You hurt them physically, and eventually you learn not to hurt anyone at all."

The Simpsons begin immediately, soon overheating the machine, nearly causing

a nationwide blackout. Dr. Monroe declares them an incurably unhappy family, and gives them double their money back (as guaranteed).

The family achieves ultimate happiness, as Homer promises to buy a new and improved television. Finally, Marge exclaims, "We love you."

The episode is an ultimate anti-sitcom, with no eventual happy, cheery epilogue to make up for all of the nasty one-liners exchanged during the previous 23 minutes. But most of all, the Simpsons draws attention to the fact that the nuclear family unit is entirely a social construction. The only thing that finally appeases this family is the prospect of a new television. It is easy to see why gays and blacks, so often dismissed as marginal and not capable of the nuclear family "norm", would find this humour especially appealing.



## Commentary

# A few thoughts on community

by Kevin Elliott

It's time for a few thoughts on the nature of community.

"Gay community" is a phrase used by the "straight" community - the larger community - to pigeonhole us. It's a label that suggests a tightly knit group of individuals that has little to do with those outside.

And in large part, that's how the larger community sees us. We have our own bars, our own clubs, and our own newspapers. We have our own little customs, mythology, symbolism, patois, and celebration. We're mysterious, invisible and probably come from away.

We're not them.

Activists use community more in hope than in description.

Surely being a community - close knit, common interest and all that - is our best defence against a hostile world, we argue.

Without stating it so explicitly, I think many activists look at the Jewish community for inspiration.

As a group, Jews in this country have suffered terrible discrimination. Until the 1960's, it was quite common to have beaches, restaurants, bulbs and gold courses closed to Jews. Restricted, it was

called.

And the Jewish community, to outsiders at least, appears to have arisen strong, organized and united, with numbers no greater than our own.

But these similarities are superficial, and while there is much the lesbian and gay community can learn here, ultimately it is not a role model we can follow. So we're stuck trying to forge some new model of community, not based on common religion or culture, not based on common language, and not based on centuries of tradition handed down through the generations.

In crassest terms, our community is based on sex. Or more accurately, certain very specific kinds of sexual acts.

Not much of a basis for a community. In fact, you'd probably find more in common among German Shepherd owners. We have become as heterogeneous as society as a whole.

That's why activists pay so much attention to our common problems, our shared experiences of discrimination, violence and growing up different in an unfriendly world.

But even that's unappealing to most. Who wants a common community built on pain? It becomes a sort of group grip club where people meet to lick their wounds and whine.

It's the worst sort of denial to pretend there is any kind of agreement between gay men and lesbians about the common ground of oppression either. The more I, as a gay man, become aware of concerns and attitudes within what appears to me from the outside as a "lesbian community" the more painfully aware I become of how little we understand each other.

And there is the merest obligatory attention paid those who are marginalized in our own community. Where is the common ground between Wueer Nationals and gay Conservatives? Between drag queens, twinkies and clones?

In order to manufacture a gay community to create structures to fight for our common interests, activists have pushed a single ideological perspective for gay liberation.

That worked well in those early days, when there were only a few, tremulous voices, raised to the lie to white, middle-class Western

society's view of all that was good and righteous.

But our victories have opened the closet doors of people of all flavours. And the variety of demands within our own walls is growing far beyond what most humble activist can cope with.

The debates rage over whether we are ageist, classist, rightist, leftist, lookist, racist, sexist or tools of the patriarchal hegemony. Do we wear shirts or not, allow women-only spaces or men-only spaces. And what about bisexuals? Transsexuals? Transvestites and drag queen? Is our past an embarrassment or a thing of pride?

This is not a problem. It's a logical consequence of doing business the way we have, and that was the only way we could.

It's time for us all to stop pretending that a "gay community" is anything but a pluralistic collection of individuals whose collective interests collide at only a few crucial points in their living experience.

Consensus is not possible.

And that, even though it runs counter to what many have worked for and built over the years, is not a failure.

It's the victory.

**HETEROSEXUAL** - A person who is attracted - most of the time - to people of the opposite sex. The word came into being after the introduction of homosexuality.

**DYKE** - Originally a 19th century slang word referring to male clothing. When first used in reference to women, it carried a derogatory connotation of masculine appearance or behavior. While the masculine connotation often remains, many lesbians have adopted the term, thus reducing the negative nuance.

## In this crowded public...

In this crowded public I am with dark, and you.  
I hesitant cup one breast and hidden shudder  
Press my thumb to risen nipple as compass  
For my touches' quest of weighted silk.  
Arch, shifting, and erupts propel me further still  
beyond my own containment.  
As muted moon sylphs part my lips I laugh  
To see your spirit out-of-sinc with flesh  
And writhing to catch up  
Expose the more to me  
I race! I race - to cover you!  
Against the quickening throb Against your alien skin  
Against Venus heating hard beneath me  
A humming current from hidden spring encircles  
You wish me deeper; lowered down cascades  
But in so asking, tilt your head in moans  
So now I cannot bear to pull away  
Unstick myself from honey-scent. For a moment to be two.  
I linger your enchanted throat  
And spell a secret vision in a gallery  
Before pilgraming lone and fasted silent uttering prayers to Yoni  
Ah, but the rest "is elementary..."  
Or, at least it was until I met you and learned of dumb exhaustion  
Drowsy calm afterward, you held my hand up to our sister  
Spoke in wonder at the contrast "...black on white..."  
I worried that you loved me for my pedigree  
Until once among the courted arts I came upon a bust: Dark continent displayed  
And as a moth to that Ebon was transfixed  
My hidden pulsed. I would have kissed that slender wooden neck  
Lingered. Lingered on the gracelines  
But that would be obscene In this crowded public place.

Tristis Baird

## As always

Oh, if I could spend but one night in your warm embrace.  
But that shall never be, for it would do no more than fan  
The flames of my desire.  
So that one night would leave me wanting twenty more.  
Twenty nights that can not be had;  
One night that can not be had.

Your feelings are clear and simple, simple as the glassy  
Surface of a pond on a windless morning.  
We are friends!  
While my feelings are confused and intricate, like the universe  
I am in love!

Without your love I am not unhappy, but without your friendship  
I would be in great pain.  
So do not despise me because of the love I feel for you.  
That love is as the universe, without explored bounds.

Never would I choose to do anything that would hurt you.  
And no amount of pain I might feel could keep me from loving  
You and prizing what we do have.

A strong friendship, as always;  
My true love!

This poem is dedicated to my cousin Kenny and to  
Adrian in Halifax

He was a tall man  
in heels  
and a drop-dead red dress  
within his eyes shone all the romance  
of our childhood  
the prison of our fathers' princess  
that no longer holds us bound

But, what we pushed away he held  
to his artificial breast  
it clung to him like scented mist  
it fell upon his shoulders  
though with someone else's curls

He knew what he was buying  
with that wiggle in his walk  
he was the fairest in the kingdom  
was most chosen at the brothel  
and walked down endless bridal paths  
in white - despite the rumour.

We feared him for his flaunted toss  
of power  
we say a painful mockery  
in every dance  
in every dream  
in every naughty wink  
but we loved him for his innocence  
and the lure of thin illusion  
we knew this for a fleeting wish

## Come out wherever you are

...there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops. - Jesus of Nazareth (Luke 12: 2-3)

Even tenth person you see on the street is one of us. In classes of forty students, you can count on there being at least four lesbians and gay men. The problem is we look and act just like everybody else, unless we make a point of making our sexual orientation known, everybody will assume that we are heterosexual.

Heterosexism, the belief that everybody is or should be heterosexual, is a pervasive ideology in this society. Coming out of the closet challenges heterosexism and affirms the legitimacy of a lesbian or gay identity. If we are ever going to obtain our rights or liberation, we are going to have to make an effort to live and love openly as lesbians and gay men.

Non-gays who are acquainted with openly gay people are more likely to support lesbian and gay rights. When we come out to our non-gay friends and family members, they can no longer think of gays as marginal. We are some of the people they know and love. Non-gays will be less likely to denounce us when they realize this.

Rita Mae Brown once quipped that the only people encouraged to lie are politicians and gay people. Closeted lesbians and gay men are living a lie. We are lying when we allow people to think that we are heterosexual, either

by explicitly saying things that are not true (making up lovers of the other gender, for example) or by remaining silent about our personal lives.

Often, lesbian and gay men who are in the closet will argue that it is more convenient for them to keep their sexual orientation a secret. At least you don't get discriminated against in the closet, they say. Yet maintaining a lie means constantly devising new lies to tell people or to cover up for your other lies. Sneaking around to meet people, terrified that somebody you know will find out, hardly sounds convenient.

There are many different levels, and ways of coming out. Recognizing and accepting your desires for members of your own gender is the most basic one. When you stop lying to yourself about the nature of your sexuality, you have come out to yourself. Learning to accept your sexual orientation can be a difficult, indeed life-long process. If you are coming to terms with accepting your lesbian or gay orientation, try getting your hands on gay-positive literature. You can learn more about yourself and other gay people this way, with as much privacy as you could possibly need.

The first step out of the closet can be anything from a first sexual encounter with somebody of the same gender, to participating in a gay or lesbian community event. It may be a good idea to come out to other gay people first before telling the non-gay people in your life. They will be able to offer you their advice, experience, and support.

Learning that there is nothing wrong with you, but there is something wrong

with a society that condemns you and denies you basic rights because of your sexuality is part of coming out. Discovering that lesbian and gay sexualities are equally as valid as heterosexuality, developing your self-esteem, and knowing that sexuality is a joyful, beautiful, and meaningful part of our lives are all facets of coming out.

Coming out means not being ashamed or embarrassed about our sexuality. Many non-gay people need to "come out" in this way, too. Opposing sex-negative attitudes, of which homophobia is a symptom, benefits and includes us all. Exorcizing shame, guilt, fear, and furtiveness from our lives and sexualities and being proud of who and what we are is what coming out is all about.

Taking on a lesbian or gay identity is a social act social act central to coming out. In its original sense, coming out was like a debutante's coming out, that is, being welcomed into a society. Learning to appreciate lesbians and gay men, in all our diversity and especially the ways we have found to survive and thrive in the homophobic world, is part of coming out, too.

Many people - lesbian, gay or otherwise - believe that sexuality is a private matter. Yet heterosexuals have no qualms about wearing wedding rings, showing affection in public, discussing their love lives openly. There is no reason why we should not also participate in the more social or public aspects of our love lives. And considering how much "the public" has to say about what people do in

their "private" lives (legalized marriages for heterosexuals, anti-sodomy laws, police actions against gays, economic privileges exclusive to heterosexual people), it seems rather odd to insist that it is a "private" matter. The closet stands for prison, not privacy.

Once we have accepted our sexuality as an important part of our selves, and have decided we will not be divided - telling people one thing, while being, doing, thinking, feeling something else - it is inevitable that we will want to be honest with the people in our lives, sharing with them all of who we are.

Coming out to non-gay folks can happen in many ways. Often we are afraid to disclose our sexual orientation for fear of rejection. This is a very real fear and a real possibility. Yet if we are rejected by a friend because of who we are, we have to consider how good a friend that person was to begin with.