



photo by vicki shanholtzer

Gayness

All Around and In You

The *TV Guide* said "attitudes toward homosexuality" would be discussed on the Phil Donahue program, and I thought, "Who needs another of those bullshit forums where a couple of gay men gurgle about how peachy the world looks to them, and a couple of Stone Age shrinks yell back that they're sick, sick, sick?" Well, this program turned out to be a little different and raised some interesting points about the present state of gay consciousness.

For one thing, this was not a panel that tried to represent "all sides." There were only two panelists Mark Rubin, of the Gay Activists Alliance, and Rev. Kennedy, a black woman associated with Troy Perry's Metropolitan Community Church. No Dr. Reubens or other "experts" (though plenty of Neanderthal questioners worrying about what St. Paul had to say on the dreaded subject and whether Mr. Mark Rubin or his lover "did the dishes"). Just Phil Donahue himself playing the straight man, trying so hard to understand, to sympathize, to conciliate ("But can't I be for women's liberation without necessarily supporting gay liberation?").

The most important difference from the old ho-hum rap sessions on homosexuality was that the issue of gay women and the connection of women's liberation to the gay movement were at the very center of the discussion, thanks to Rev. Kennedy. Throughout the program she kept hammering on the theme of how women have been forced to live up to male expectations and to play roles that limit and constrict them. Unfortunately, she tended to fall back on jargon and sloganeering, and the parallels she was trying to draw got drowned in the sheer flood of her verbiage, but she tackled the whole question of gayness and the significance of the gay movement from the strongest possible position by emphasizing the distorting, falsifying

GAY LIBERATION FRONT

The closing of Piedmont Park and the expansion of consciousness raising groups are two chief topics to be discussed at the monthly meeting of the Georgia Gay Liberation Front on Tuesday, February 17th. The GLF will meet at the Community Crisis Center at 8 pm.

The closing of Piedmont Park is a direct move against Atlanta's gay community, denying Gays the use of the park, and action is planned to force city officials to reopen Piedmont. At present one consciousness raising group is operating in GLF, but with more persons interested other groups will be formed.

Plans for a future dance will also be worked out.
—georgia glf

nature of society's conventional sexual definitions.

The highlight of the program came, I thought, when a self-styled "drag queen" called, and Rev. Kennedy, very gently but clearly, explained that she understood what sorts of pleasures could be derived from impersonating women and what drove men to do this, but that she hoped such behavior would only represent a stage in the individual's development, not a resting point. To her, drag queens were still role players and, as such, imperfectly liberated. Interestingly enough, Mark Rubin dissented from Rev. Kennedy on this point, though they agreed on everything else, and supported

the drag queen's position unquestioningly. I felt Rev. Kennedy had achieved the fuller insight into integrated adult sexuality because she saw the need to bring the masculine and feminine elements within the individual into balance with one another rather than celebrating the liberation of the female within men.

A word about the "form" of this and similar programs. Phil Donahue was able to extricate himself from ticklish arguments by conveniently calling on his zillion friendly sponsors to interrupt, and by the time we'd been deodorized and flushed out and disinfected and scrubbed and cleansed by the commercials, the atmosphere had returned to a gentlemanly, calm, "reasonable," proper tone in which a wholly new subject could be broached. The conventional TV-program format necessitates that controversial issues be handled with kid gloves, skirted, rendered inoffensive. But if you don't lose your temper, become emotionally implicated in the subject of homosexuality, you're not really coming to terms with it.

It's worth thinking about the role of advertising in managing the boob tube's coverage of complex problems—forcing them to be chopped down into palatable morsels for the drugged viewer, and so simplified, distorted. One wonders if the establishment media would ever permit so educational a sight as Rev. Kennedy free to pick away at Phil Donahue's defenses without interruption. I reckon it would not be considered "wholesome family entertainment" to attack the subject of homosexuality other than in the context of a safe academic discussion, at the gut emotional level where, as an intrinsic factor in our biological make-up, it plays a buried or overt part in the emotional life of every man, woman, and child.

—bill cutler