

# **LGBT History Project of the LGBT Center of Central PA**

**Located at Dickinson College  
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## **Documents Online**

**Title:** Notes on Alcoholism

**Date:** circa 1978

**Location:** LGBT-001 Joseph W. Burns Collection

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## GAY ALCOHOLISM

### I. Alcoholism: general remarks

- A. Alcohol pervades our culture - we drink when we're sad or happy; to relax us or pick us up; when we're afraid or free from trouble; to make an enjoyable time more fun or to liven up the party.
- B. National Council on Alcoholism estimates that about 10% of all drinking Americans are harmfully dependent on alcohol.
- C. 10 million nationwide are addicted to this drug.
- D. I consider alcoholism to be our nation's number one health hazard. Smoking is considered to be the number one health hazard. Alcoholism should be considered #1.

### II. Alcoholism within the gay community

- A. Drs. M.T. Saghir and Eli Robbins at Washington University in St. Louis did a study comparing gay women and men to heterosexual women and men -- re: incidence of psychiatric problems -- found no significant differences except for drinking behavior. Found gay men and especially gay women to have a significantly higher incidence of alcohol abuse -
  - 22% gay men                      20% gay women
  - 15 % heterosexual men              2% heterosexual women
- B. Los Angeles County Health Dept. funded an extensive survey of alcohol abuse in the gay community -- results: 20 to 32% alcohol abuse.
- C. At Persad Center we give Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test (MAST) --
  - 44% alcohol abuse if we use strict interpretation (score over 5)
  - 30% alcohol abuse if we use lower interpretation (score over 7)These are people who for the most part are not coming to us for problems concerning alcohol.
- D. I think it can safely be said that members of the gay community have a higher potential risk for alcoholism and alcohol abuse than the general population.

### III. Why are Gays a high risk population?

- A. Most socialization takes place in gay bars, this contributes to the problem but is not the only answer -- I feel we've been too quick to blame bars for the root of gay alcoholism.

B. Gay Oppression

1. Stress -- Those of us who are gay activists sometimes forget that for many, if not most, being gay presents an added stress to our lives -- alcohol may be used to help relieve this stress.
2. Alienations -- a feeling of being "different", of being the persons you have been taught to hate and fear.
3. Isolation and Loneliness -- especially in rural areas,

C. An abysmal lack of knowledge about alcohol and its effects.

My clients and friends constantly reveal to me the lack of knowledge about alcohol abuse within the gay community. I hear such statements as:

"I only had 10 drinks."

"I only drink beer and beer doesn't lead to alcoholism."

"I need about 5 drinks before I can meet someone."

"I'm expected to drink."

"I never get drunk."

"I can't be alcoholic - I hold a responsible job and go to work everyday."

IV. What happens to Gay alcoholics?

A. Alcoholism is 100% fatal if not treated.

B. Most alcoholism centers are ill-equipped to deal with gay clients:

1. lack of knowledge about gay lifestyles
2. often discomfort on part of workers
3. usually no openly gay counselors
4. treatment plans do not take into account gay lifestyle
5. it has been my experience that some alcoholism counselors still believe that if a gay person stops drinking she/he will also stop being gay.
6. very little sensitivity to gay lovers as "co-alcoholics"
7. gays are generally thrust back into the community where perhaps her/his alcoholism first began with little or no support systems to help him/her on the road to recovery.

C. Alcoholics Anonymous reaches only about 6% of alcoholics -- gays do not generally feel comfortable talking about their lifestyles at AA Meetings

D. Alcoholism treatment centers have expertise in dealing with alcoholism -- gay counseling centers have expertise in dealing with gay people, but lack funding for alcoholic treatment programs -- so the gay alcoholic often falls "between the cracks" of both programs.

V. What can we do?

(General discussion by Council)