

Gay Liberation Front Valentines Day Dance

Coming Out Campy at Holiday Inn

By RICK SCHULTE
Magazine Composition Editor

All names in the following story are fictitious and are used merely for the purpose of literary identification. Names have been changed to protect the anonymity of those interviewed.

Last Friday night the Holiday Inn West posted a directory of their various social functions in the lobby. At the bottom, beneath three or four such events as a business meeting and a fraternal organization meeting, was the listing "GLF Dance at Poolside."

Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was having its "coming-out party." In elite society, a coming-out party signifies the social acceptance of a young debutante. Such affairs are often marked by lavish gowns and tuxedos, sophisticated restraint, and an obsession with the sensation created for the press and the lower classes.

For the gay society "coming-out" signifies a homosexual's self-acceptance, and often rejection by "straight" society. This self-acceptance is usually the beginning of an emotional stability, and communication with other gays that can create a stronger, better adjusted human being.

The GLF Valentine's Day dance represented a personal coming-out for a number of gays, and on a larger level represented a declaration by gay society that it is a viable, proud lifestyle with a need to be recognized.

GLF was formed at Purdue less than two years ago, but suffered from inefficient and irresponsible leadership until December, according to numerous gays. The Valentine's Day party was its first organized, public function since Jim Bollinger assumed the presidency of the organization.

Gays at the party commented that before last Friday, "there had never been as broad-based a venture as this. Before, just the outspoken campus people were involved but now GLF includes the community and surrounding area."

Publicity for the dance was distributed to gay organizations as distant as Chicago and Bloomington, and a number of people from out-of-town attended.

'Does this
freak
you out?'

At a glance the gay party resembled any straight party, but closer inspection revealed that gay society is characterized by a number of customs unfamiliar to straights. Gay clothing, dancing, and music are all part of a gaudy, showy, almost put-on style which gays refer to as "campy." This reporter was asked by everyone he talked to, "Does this freak you out? Are you flipped out by all this? How do you react to this sort of party?" The necessity to be noticed as gay, and possibly to shock the straight world into a recognizing gay society, was reflected in every aspect of the evening.



Gay music is the Motown sound. Not necessarily black soul music, but loud, extremely fast, strong rhythmic tunes dominated the dance. Gay dancing, even more than most rock and roll dancing is extremely physical. Men dancing with men grind and jerk through motions with such sexual innuendos as bumping each others' hips and behinds.

The effeminate gestures usually associated with homosexuality are imbedded into their dances and general behavior, with such a naturalness they become almost unnoticeable.

Gay clothing, for the most part, is the normal college jeans and shirts. But, here too, the personality behind the dress is unmistakably gay. Jewelry, flowery prints, tight clothing, and very "dressy" combinations are the rule.

A number of guests arrived in drag. Sequined, satin suits appeared twice, and one man was dressed in a tight brown miniskirt, a sweater, dark nylon stockings and a bouffant wig.

Gay
society's
norms

The campy air of the party, although distinctively shocking, was not intended to make the few straight guests uncomfortable. Rather it was designed as a rejection of societal norms and a demonstration of the gay society's need to have its norm recognized.

Jim commented, "To me this is normal. It is my norm. I don't like normal society...what I see of it, you know." Mike, a 21-year-old student, explained, "What I want is the straight society to accept us as human beings. We're a minority, and it's just like we're a black minority. We're the gay minority, is what we are, and I just wish they'd accept us for what we are. We are human beings, we're just as intelligent, we're just as talented as they are. They go and live their lives. We want to live our lives just like the normal human beings which I think we are. That's my dream, my basic dream. I don't consider myself sick like some people do. I'm a very normal gay person, I think, and that's what I want them to consider me: a very normal gay person."

To everyone interviewed, GLF is a major force in accomplishing the goal of societal acceptance. Mike acknowledged that GLF is still in its "underground stages," but also said, "Without the organization we couldn't do anything like this (the Valentine's Day dance). This is bringing it above ground I think. We're breaking ground with this tonight."

GLF is also a major force in many gay's self-acceptance. "The only advantage of being in GLF is a very personal one," said Steve. "The satisfaction of knowing that I know who I am and that I'm to the point where I want to tell other people. But at the same time I'm not asking everyone who joins Gay Lib to make the same decision. I'm only asking them to support me because I've made that decision. We're all working for the same cause, and that is to educate the public. We're not out to seduce boys in the bathrooms or whatever."

Self-acceptance

For Steve, the self-acceptance problem presented "a real psychological hassle. I went through 8 years thinking 'I'm going through a phase, I hate myself, but I'll grow out of it.' Well, I never grew out of it. When I was 23-years-old, at Purdue, I was a grad student, I met a person. We talked for three hours, and that was the first time I had sex with a guy that I did not regret. And I thought 'OK, this is me.' I finally accepted myself, but I was 23-years-old. I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown before that happened. I happened at the right time."

Steve is a PH.D. candidate in English at Purdue and previously taught in Evansville, Ind. His coming-out not only improved his image of himself but his image with his students.

"For the first two or three years I was very paranoid. For the last three years I decided 'I'm not going to be paranoid. I'm not going to stand up in front of the class and scream, but I'm not going to be paranoid.' And I got along better with my students the last three years than I did the first two.

"And the reason was they thought that I was gay the first two years, they knew I was gay the last three. The first years they were paranoid as well as me. But the last three nobody was paranoid. And we got along great. Not once was the word 'gay' used in class pertaining to me. But they knew."

The only way it was hard was in a phallic sense.'

Coming-out was not as difficult for many people. Jim commented, "I've known I was gay ever since I was a little kid. I really had no problem with other kids being hard on me for being different. The only way they were hard was in a phallic sense."

David, too, was always out. "I had girlfriends, though, you know. But I used to go and make out with my girlfriends, and then go home and sleep with the guy next door. All night. That's the way sex was in my home town. All the guys had sex together."

Mike came-out "officially when I was 19. I hate to say this, but I think I went through puberty late. I thought the male body was always a very good looking body. I think it's a very beautiful thing. I wasn't really sexually attracted to a male until I was a sophomore in high school. I didn't do anything in high school, I was dating girls. I was dating a girl and I almost married her and we broke up. I've never been with another girl since. I met a gay guy when we broke up and he brought me out."

See GLF, page 11FM

GLF, from page 7FM

Although coming-out usually increases a gay's self-identification and his identification with other gays, straight society often remains outside of the gay lifestyle. GLF is making progress in its attempts to increase social acceptance of homosexuality, but gays still feel an alienation from the straight world. This alienation can surface in ambiguous attitudes towards gay behavior in public.

'The University will know pretty soon, if it doesn't know now, that I am gay.'

For instance, Mike stated he has been out since he was 19, but also commented, "My family doesn't know I'm gay yet, I don't think. At least I hope they don't know yet. I don't think my family could cope with this yet."

"You know it really surprised me to have my picture taken here tonight because I don't know who's going to see it. But I'm not going to worry about it that much. You know, here I am, and this is what coming-out totally is all about and that's what we're doing."

Steve holds an office in GLF, but doesn't worry that the University will react negatively when it finds out he is homosexual. "The University will know pretty soon, if it doesn't know now, that I am gay. I don't think it'll make a difference, not in English. But if I were in Mechanical Engineering it might."

He is still uncertain, though, about "standing up and screaming that I am gay. GLF now has unofficial word from President Hansen that it doesn't make any difference at all, period. But it's unofficial. He said that if anybody wants to stand up and scream that they are gay it wouldn't make any difference to him."

"There are people now working to get gay rights in the Student Bill of Rights and I think it's really necessary simply because of the way gays have been treated by society in the past."

'Look at those perverts.'

This alienation from straight society was expressed by Mike, in the form of envy of the straights' freedom in their overt sexual behavior. When asked how he reacted to public heterosexual relations, such as a man and woman kissing in public, Mike said, "It doesn't bother me, but I just kid around, you know, with the gays."

"I say 'Look at those perverts' because they consider us perverts. Why can't we consider them perverts, because they are doing something totally strange to us. They're saying 'Gays are perverts so they can't kiss on the street,' so I'm saying 'You perverts, you can't kiss on the streets either.'

"But I don't really mind it. I just wish that I could do it. I wish that I could go out and kiss somebody that I really like. I'd like to kiss a gay guy if I felt like it."

The obstacle preventing complete acceptance of gays by society and vice-versa is misunderstanding. Initially, there are problems within the gay world itself.

Cruising

"There are gays at Purdue who are into bathroom cruising," stated Steve, "but they don't seduce anybody who doesn't want to be seduced. There are people who are in bathrooms regularly for tricks. This is what we call in the gay circle...I don't want to put them down. But this is what is known as recreational sex. This is sex without feeling. This sex without love. Pure sex."

"It's very much an underground faction. They wouldn't even want me to acknowledge they exist. If I were to see them in the hall or the Sweetshop, I would not speak to them. I don't, even though I know them."

This sort of underground faction weakens the credibility of GLF, and Steve feels it is created by a fear of coming out, and subsequent misconception about gay gatherings.

"There is a stigma you see. A lot of people first coming out assume that there is a brand on their forehead. If they do anything out of the ordinary, or if they associate with any of us, they are automatically known."

"Even me, when I know I was gay, I was hesitant to go to a gay bar for the first time. I had this misconception that a gay bar was a pseudonym for an orgy. But that's not true. A gay bar is like any other bar where people go to have fun and meet people. And the same thing is true tonight." The prejudices gay society and straight society hold against each other were exemplified by the discussions on WASK radio's "Open Forum" telephone talk show three days prior to the dance.

Steve explained, "We didn't even consciously advertise on the Purdue campus, except for giving a phone number people could call for more information. We wanted to screen people who came tonight from the Purdue and Lafayette area. But when they called into "Open Forum" they put it out in the open and there was no way we could screen the people."

The Open Forum participants generally condemned the Gay Lib Valentine's Day dance as moral degradation of the com-

munity. GLF was then concerned that people would attend the affair merely to harass the gay community.

'We don't want people to think we're out to entice their sons.'

Although there were no problems during the evening, Steve was still apprehensive. "We do not want people to think that we're out to entice their sons. We cannot turn somebody gay who is not already gay. What we wanted to do was put up phone numbers so anybody who was gay could call us up and find out the details. Now it's out in the open and there's no way we tell who's here or what they're here for."

Slowly society is perhaps accepting the gay community. The gay community is slowly accepting itself, as the Valentine dance proved. Mike explained that many gays now have enough of a self-identity to even joke about their gayness, and this is gaining society approval.

'Ben Gay' and Blind Dates

"There are records which actually come out like 'Ben Gay,' which is about a gay cowboy and his lavender saddle. And there are a lot of things done on the 'Carol Burnett Show' that are very gay and pro-gay, which is good. There is a lot of gay literature, a lot of gay music (Rod McKuen is very popular and he's very gay), a lot of gay stars, gay politicians, there are gays all over."

But the problem of being accepted in society still exists for Mike.

"I'll be talking to a girl and she'll say 'I have a blind date tonight.' I say 'With who?' and she says it's somebody on a football or basketball team. I'll ask the next day 'Was he real nice?' and she goes 'Yeah, he was really super and I had a lot of fun.' I always say 'Good.' I don't suppress it. I just wish I could say I met a guy on a basketball team and had a fantastic time. But you can't do that, you know, not to everybody. They just can't handle it."



9c
Exponent
Friday
Magazine

COLLIN C. SCHWOYER



Gay Lib
Valentine Day
Party

See page 6