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Gay Liberation Front organizes here

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By Linda Kohl
Daily Staff Writer

There was a reason for the tension in the air as 11 people—seven men and four women—sat in near-silence in the YWCA lounge waiting for the meeting to begin.

The meeting marked the first time that the Gay Liberation Front, an organization for homosexuals, held an open meeting on the Iowa State campus, and no one really knew what to expect. But as soon as everyone had arrived and discussion had started, the tension started to fade as members of the group explained to newcomers the group's philosophy.

"Homosexuality was first regarded as something sinful, then as something sick and now as something to be pitied. Gay liberation comes along and says 'bull,'" said Joe Franco, a member of the organization.

"In many ways, we're superior to straight people. We do not increase the population and we form more relationships across color and racial barriers."

The word "gay" may be used to describe persons, male or female, who indulge only in sexual activities with others of their sex. The term may also include bisexuals who participate in both heterosexual and homosexual activities. Actual sexual contacts are not necessary for membership; "There are members in our group who have never had sex with their own sex," Franco said.

Being gay is more of an orientation than a specific viewpoint, one member explained. "You just look upon sexual relations with the same sex with primary importance."

The Gay Liberation Front at Iowa State has two primary goals. Franco said the first, and most important, is to foster a sense of community and self-respect among gay people.

"We'd like to get homosexuals 'out of the closet' so they can relate to each other not as sexual objects but as people. Too often the only contact gay people have is in bed and we want to change that. We want to get gay people together and say to each other, 'yes, we are fine people.'"

"While it is perfectly permissible for heterosexuals to walk around the campus holding hands, to kiss under the Campanile or to stroll around Lake LaVerne in the spring, there is no opportunity for a gay person to do anything like that," another member added. "The only way gay people can get together is under very furtive, suspect circumstances."

Although being able to hold hands in public with a person of your own sex is a small thing, it can be awfully important, one member said. What keeps gay persons from doing it is fear that heterosexuals would react with innuendos and disgust, several people agreed.

Society's attitude toward gay people often makes them afraid to come out and make their sexual feelings known, one girl said. "You sit alone in your dorm room and wonder if you're the only gay person on campus."

Members in the group cited conservative statistics based on studies indicating there is a minimum of 200 homosexuals on campus. According to the Kinsey reports, at least four per cent of the total population is exclusively homosexual. Also according to Kinsey, up to 37 per cent of all males will have a homosexual experience to orgasm at least once in their lives, Franco said.

The second purpose of the Gay Liberation Front at Iowa State is to inform straight people that "we are gay people who are not ashamed of what we are and are not sick or perverted," Franco said.

Members in the group told of overt and subtle discrimination against gay persons at Iowa State. "The university seems to be saying, by its emphasis on heterosexual social activity, that is the way you should be," one member said.

Much discrimination occurs in the classroom. English professors, when discussing the writings of a homosexual author, will often gloss over the fact of the author's homosexuality with a comment such as "Well, it didn't make any difference in his writing." Other professors make innuendos or negative comments, a group member explained.

Also, although the university offers a course on courtship and marriage for heterosexuals, the only courses for homosexuals are on "abnormal behavior" and "deviance."

Homosexuals are overtly discriminated against when it comes to getting jobs, a member said. "The university as an employer has no qualms about hiring a homosexual as long as he is not known to be one. As soon as the community finds out—zap—he's asked to resign," he added, saying he knew of an instance where that happened.

Among the more general types of discrimination that pervade society are the subtle discrimination against men who like to knit, embroider, cook or care for children. Also the terms "faggot" and "cocksucker" indicate negative attitudes toward homosexuals, members said.

The play "The Boys in the Band," produced by Iowa State theater students recently, is another example of the per-

petuation of psychological stereotypes of homosexuals, a member said. "All of the characters in that play were filled with self-pity and self-hate and they hate each other because of it," he said.

Although the Gay Liberation Front has just recently become public through a letter to the editor appearing in The Daily and classified ads, replies mailed to the post office box address have been encouraging, Franco said. About 20 people are signed up in gay consciousness-raising groups, for gay people only, which will begin next January.

Thursday's meeting was the first open meeting of the group, but members have been meeting together since fall quarter, Franco said.

A tangible activity the group tackled this year is to work with Gay Liberation groups on other Iowa campuses to eliminate the Iowa sodomy law. Section 705.1 of the Iowa Code states that "whoever shall have carnal copulation in, any opening of the body except sexual parts, with another human being . . . shall be deemed guilty of sodomy." Maximum penalty is 10 years imprisonment in the state penitentiary.

Franco said the Gay Liberation movement at Iowa State did not come out in the open until the past weeks because "the ground had to be prepared" by other liberation groups.

Gay liberation along with women's liberation, came out of "the struggle" against oppression. "This meeting couldn't have taken place two years ago," Franco said.



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