

A National Trend Becomes a Concern

Homosexuality is not a new trend, but recently it has become one of the nation's top concerns. What was once simply a way of life has turned into a socio-political tug-of-war.

College campuses across the country have been forming gay organizations. There is no gay organization at the University of Richmond. Therefore, the University has no gay population, right? Wrong. There are gay students on campus.

2 Percent Gay

Dr. Warren Hopkins, assistant professor of psychology, estimated that about 2 percent of the UR community is homosexual. "That's just a guess," he said. "This just isn't the climate to express one's homosexuality."

Hopkins' estimates are drawn from his experiences at the Center of Psychological Services. "We get students with homosexual concerns about themselves and/or their family and friends," he said.

The possible reasons that a gay organization has not been formed at UR are varied. According to Dr. Kira Slevin, assistant professor of sociology, the size of the University would make such a group "highly visible," and pressures from students would make a founding unlikely.

To establish any University recognized organization a group must prepare a statement of its purposes, goals, members and reasons for wanting to be an official organization. The club must draw up a constitution and bylaws. The Richmond and Westhampton College Student Affairs Committees review the statement and recommend if the organization should receive University recognition.

The statement and recommendation are then presented to the faculty, who make the final decision.

"This would be true of any official organization on campus," said Dr. William Leftwich, vice president for student affairs.

"I can only contrast the interest in a gay organization with the interest shown by other groups who

have become recognized by the University," he said. "I have never encountered any expression or hint of interest by any student or group for a gay activists' organization on this campus," said Leftwich.

According to Max Vest, director of student activities, "A gay group would be given the same chance as any other group" requesting to become officially recognized.

"Those gay students that we do have probably associate with the Gay Alliance of Students at Virginia Commonwealth University," he said. "The VCU community is more open and acceptant of homosexuals."

"With the type of students we have, the possibility of a gay alliance-type organization is unlikely," Vest said. "The environment is not such on this campus that the gay members would be readily accepted by their peers," he said.

Hopkins agreed, saying, "I think that our student body is so homogeneous in their socio-economic background that the establishment of such an organization at UR would be difficult or impossible."

"The student body here doesn't have the tolerance level for these individuals to survive," Hopkins said. "I think anyone who openly expresses his ambisexuality or homosexuality on this campus would suffer from ostracism and ridicule," he said.

Biological Predisposition

Hopkins said that Inge Ward, the distinguished speaker in the psychology department last year, showed that "there is evidence for a biological predisposition for homosexual tendencies completely beyond one's control."

He added that recently the mental health professional community revised its evaluation of homosexuality to no longer be a mental disorder.

"Many people don't know this or can't comprehend this," Hopkins said. "I would like to think that all students could appreciate the uniqueness and differences among people and develop a tolerance," he said.

Not Just a Social Issue

have heard no more about it."

Homosexuality is not just a social issue. Politics are becoming more involved with gay rights. Tuesday the residents of California voted on Proposition 6, which if passed, would have banned homosexuals from teaching.

Last year a gay alliance held a rally in Monroe Park in Richmond the same day Anita Bryant performed at the Robins Center. Robert Dillard, director of campus police, sent a member of security to the rally to warn the University, if necessary, of a possible protest on campus.

Dillard said there were many UR students at the rally. It is unknown if they were present because of their homosexuality or if they just wanted to see the demonstration. Dillard also said that homosexual

activity does occur on campus; but it is very seldom. And it usually involves non-students, he said. He cited only one homosexual incidence in the men's dormitories.

Jeanne Goetz, RC housing coordinator, declined to talk about homosexuality on campus. Anything a student discusses with her is "personal and confidential," she said. Goetz added that there is an awareness of the gay community at UR. She denied that it is a problem but called it a part of society.

UR does not have a policy on homosexuals. According to Leftwich, "There exists no special statement in University policies with regard to the employment or recruitment of employees or students."



Acceptance Comes with Maturity

"I've always been attracted to members of my sex. I don't ever remember it being different."

There were three men in the room. Two are University of Richmond alumni; one is a UR student. All three are homosexual.

"The atmosphere at the University is suppressive," said X, an alumnus. "It's like all the 'straight' people try to out-straight each other. Gays do not try to out-gay each other."

"Don't stereotype straights," said Y, another alumnus. "Homosexuality at UR is reinforced. People talk very openly about their heterosexual relationships. Heterosexuality is an image people have to live up to, and some people have difficulty living up to that image."

The other two men agreed that at the University images are set forth for students:

"It's not a healthy image," said X. "For instance, the football players are given separate dining halls, and that is what UR men are expected to follow."

"The school has damaged many sensitive young men," said Y.

During their time at UR students, the men found themselves objects of a certain amount of ridicule.

"Someone overly homosexual is hated, not hated," explained Y. "Guys would get together in packs and say things. Some of those guys could be so nice, but they felt they have to ridicule."

Z is a dorm student. "Every day," he said, "I'd get called names. I ignored it. Totally, it didn't affect me."

They agreed, however, that the people with whom they associated knew them as friends, not as gays.

One conflict that was difficult for one to overcome was the conflict with religion. Y became a Christian at school and was active in Christian groups. He said he was told his thinking was wrong.

"They told me I was wrong—but how can loving someone be wrong?"

According to two of the three, it would be easy to marry a woman

and father children, but none saw that as a necessity. X pointed out that there are several homosexual men who marry for convenience sake, then regret it.

X, and Z, said they thought of forming a gay alliance at UR, but didn't bother.

Y had claimed his lifestyle was no different than anyone else's and re-emphasized this: "Homosexuals are no different in their emotional relationships. Just leave us alone. We don't need articles written about us. We don't need people going nuts in the shower when we come in."

They cited some drawbacks that homosexuals have to encounter. They said it is illegal to sell liquor to a homosexual, which is why some "gay bars" do not sell liquor.

"It's even illegal to be homosexual," said Y.

Put in Subculture

Society puts homosexuals into a subculture. "Our social life" said X, "doesn't even begin until after midnight."

They mentioned that some people they know are gay and lonely and wished they had other gay friends.

They emphasized that homosexual roommates are not necessarily lovers, something they thought UR students could not always accept.

"It's really a relief to have a gay roommate," said Z.

"Some people," said X, "try to make statements and draw attention to themselves." These are the people who act or dress "differently," who often become the object of ridicule or, as the three have said, fear.

"A homosexual response is no different than a heterosexual response as far as the need for love, commitment or understanding is concerned," said Y.

"Society puts us into a subculture, and some people really get into that," said X. "I go to the bars sometimes, but some people live there."

They said they have seen people from UR at bars. Generally, the student does not react happily to having been seen.

There are differences between the homosexual and heterosexual lifestyles. But, as the three men emphasized, emotionally, homosexuals and heterosexuals are not so different. They have been put into a subculture; they have been ridiculed; they have had crusades led against them.

Heterosexuals find it difficult to imagine a homosexual lifestyle. The three men seemed to believe that acceptance would come with maturity.

"In college," said Y, "I preferred the company of upperclassmen. They had been on their own more and were easier to get along with."

"Like I said, we don't need any special attention. Our lives are almost no different than any straight person's."

The stories on this page were written by Margaret Brown, Bruce May and Tom Becker.

Dr. David Burhans, chaplain, said, "I have heard that one of the problems that many homosexuals face is feeling alone. Many struggle with being homosexual, while others are quite aware of and content with their homosexuality."

"They must ask themselves if they are content being homosexual, and if not do they want to change," Burhans said. "That's the big question. The homosexual question is a live, hot issue in the church and society today."

"I heard that a year or two ago there were some students who talked of the possibility of organizing a group for the gay community at UR that would be recognized by the University," Burhans said. "However, I was asked to do nothing for them, and I