

THE LAST CIVIL RIGHTS FIGHT?

Activism in the collegiate gay community reaches a new level



Tres Fromme (left) and members of Queer Campus at U. of Delaware express gay pride.

By Michele Humphrey, *The Daily Beacon*, U. of Tennessee

Tres Fromme, a gay student at the U. of Delaware, first came face to face with heterosexism when he was harassed for kissing his boyfriend on campus. He wore a T-shirt with the word "fag" on it; his friend wore a shirt depicting two men kissing. Two passersby began mocking them — harassing them in a stereotypical affected gay male voice.

When they called campus police, Fromme says the responding officer's attitude was anything but sympathetic. With T-shirts like that — what did they expect? Fromme says he was angry.

"I mean what is the difference between that and the frat boy who wears a T-shirt about why beer is better than women?" he says.

In an attempt to address perceived homophobic climates on campus, homosexual students like Fromme now are taking bolder steps to heighten their visibility and acceptance nationwide. They want to create an environment in which images like Harry and Sally are balanced with equal representation from Harry and Bob. And to achieve this parity, homosexuals are using shocking, nearly militant tactics and graphic imagery to attract attention.

Groups like Queer Campus, Students Honestly Opening Up Together and Strong Queers United In Stopping Heterosexism have surfaced on college campuses as a result of what some gay activists call "the last great civil rights movement."

Modeling their tactics after radical organizations like Queer Nation, known for its militant shock value actions, these students have adopted what they refer to as an "in-your-face" attitude.

Fromme, a gay activist, organized a Queer Campus chapter in October 1991 at the U. of Delaware.

"It was getting to the point where I was feeling more radical measures were necessary because the conservative route wasn't getting through," he says.

The idea behind Queer Campus is to "support queer pride and enjoy ourselves while at the same time, using 'in-your-face' methods to heterosexuals and homophobics," Fromme says.

U. of Delaware's Queer Campus organized a benefit 5K race for AIDS research, where participants dressed in drag.

They also post controversial fliers carrying messages like "Suck dick, lick clit, homophobia's got to quit," and "Homosexuality, a truly Greek tradition, with an accompanying photo of two naked men kissing, with the words "My brother can lick your brother."

Efforts like these have elicited varied responses from heterosexual students. Some claim the tactics are just plain offensive rather

than persuasive.

Joseph Dias, president of the Student Government Association at Northeastern U., says he does not believe these are effective methods for confronting the issue.

"A scare tactic will make the homophobic not like the organization even more. If anything, scare tactics will make homophobics worse," Dias says.

But homosexuals do not necessarily perceive their actions as scare tactics or even radical. Students at the U. of Nebraska, Lincoln, staged a kiss-in as an awareness activity but did not consider it to be a radical measure.

"A kiss-in, I mean what are people doing — they are doing something heterosexuals do everyday. It really should not be that shocking," says Vanessa Spencer, co-director of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Student Association there.

Militant tactics on college campuses also confront heterosexism and attempt to change attitudes about sexual orientations, says Adriane Carrier, president of Gay, Lesbian Bisexual Students United at California State U., Long Beach.

Queer Nation Long Beach, 95 percent of which is made up of Cal State students, put up billboards depicting heterosexual couples in bed and the slogan: "We don't care what you do in your bedrooms" written underneath.

"Some students were pissed off but there were those who said, 'Oh, I never thought of it that way,'" she says.

John Canalis, a student at Cal State, Long Beach, says he

supports the use of radical measures. "I think that their tactics are good. I think people need to be shocked."

Spencer says homosexuals need to make a statement to the heterosexual community.

"We can do all the things you do; we don't care what you think. You will oppress us anyway," she says.

Even though Queer Campus employs radical tactics, Fromme says he believes a conservative side of gay activism is needed on campus for balance.

"Definitely both approaches are important. We can move ahead and push things and they can smooth things out."

One of the "theys" who might have to smooth things out is Walter Gadecki, vice president of the Northeastern U. Bisexual, Lesbian and Gay Association.

He says the political goals of groups like Queer Campus differentiate them from campus organizations that exist for support and awareness. But he supports the message radical groups expound.

"You know who they are, don't you? A lot of people think they go too far and offend. But others will say it's time to be offended." U

► Affidavit fuels fires

The Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps has stirred up more controversy with its decision to make midshipmen repay scholarship money if they refuse to sign an affidavit denouncing homosexual behavior in the military.

In the wake of President Bill Clinton's plan to lift the Department of Defense policy prohibiting gays from the armed services, some see this as a vindictive measure against gays and lesbians.

"Now the Navy is making gay people pay for the Navy's discrimination," says William Rubenstein, director of the American Civil Liberties Union's National Lesbian and Gay Rights Project. "It's McCarthyism."

But Lt. Bob Garcia, spokesman for the Office of Navy Information-West, says the clause only was implemented in an effort to establish a method — similar to ones already in use by the Army and Air Force — to ensure that midshipmen understood policies regarding homosexuality.

"The Navy wanted to avoid using NROTC funding to train persons who would not be eligible to serve in uniform," he says.

The controversy began when midshipmen at Cornell U. objected to the wording of the statement they were asked to sign. One student showed the affidavit to a lawyer, who contacted the ACLU.

Rubenstein says the potentially discriminatory aspect of the policy has not been tested legally, but the ACLU has represented several students in the past and the military has backed down in every case.

Army ROTC cadet James M. Holobaugh was discharged in 1990 and asked to repay his \$25,000 scholarship funds after publicly admitting he was homosexual. When the ACLU told the Army that Holobaugh would complete his term or refuse to repay scholarship funds he already had received from ROTC, the Army forfeited the money.

Lt. Cate Mueller, a spokeswoman for the Navy, says students who admit to being homosexual after they have completed the ROTC program will not be asked automatically to repay their scholarships. Repayment will be considered on a case-by-case basis, she says.

Although Mueller would not speculate on the fate of the affidavit, if Clinton lifts the ban, the affidavit theoretically becomes ineffective. ■ Rhonda Stewart, *The Cornell Daily Sun*, Cornell U.