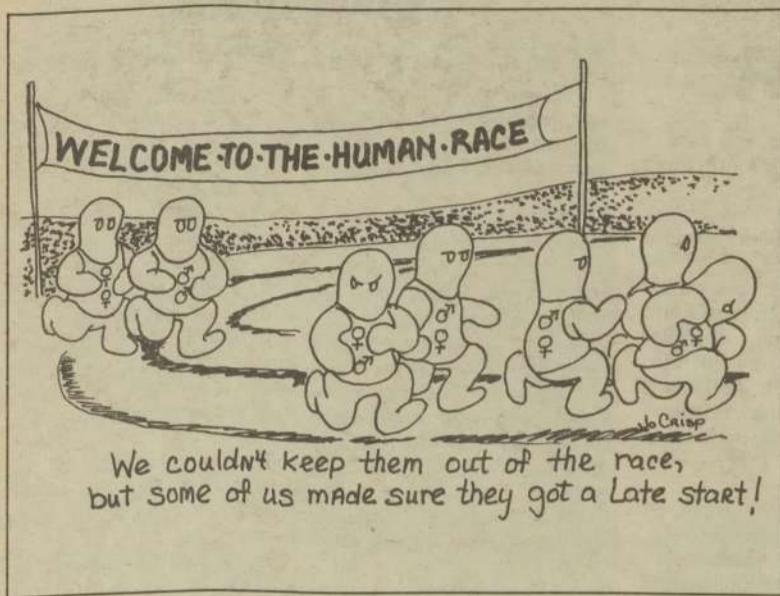


Feature



Inside the minority looking out is 'tough and scary'

by Lyn Marie Thompson
Photo Editor

This is a story of what it's like to be on the inside of a minority community looking out on the majority. Most of the names have been changed to protect the privacy of all those involved.

"It is rather unfair to make any kind of generalization about gay people as a whole by interviewing a few people because we are as diverse as any other culture or subculture," states Natalie, a member of the gay and lesbian support group here on campus. How very right she is.

In interviewing four members of the group, I found that although there were similarities between them, they each had run into very individualized problems as members of the homosexual minority.

Natalie, age 29, and mother of two, realized that she was a lesbian around the age of 13. At that time, homosexuality was considered a mental illness and was treated accordingly. She spent seven years of her life in treatment for her "problem."

"I pretty much blocked it out of my mind and went about having babies and getting married at 16 and 17 years old. I followed all the prescribed programs, and failed each and every one of them horribly and miserably until I

finally was able to come out totally to myself." Natalie now lives a gay lifestyle with her eight year old daughter and her daughter's "co-parent."

Natalie's main problem in living a gay lifestyle is dealing with her daughter's school. "It's hard to make them understand about her co-parent. She has the same, and sometimes more authority than I do. She has the same rights and responsibilities as I do, as far as I'm concerned. But when you get into the legal aspect, she has no legal leg to stand on. It's hard to make the school understand that when they call my house and get her, her answer is just as good as if it had been mine. It's hard for them to accept, but they are coming to accept that."

When speaking of herself, Natalie states, "I am not just a lesbian. I'm a mother. I'm a nurse. I'm a very good nurse. I'm actually a very nice person."

Due to his religious background, Dave, 39, has only recently come to terms with his being gay. He "came out" in September, and through the support group is learning to accept his sexuality as a part of himself and to "learn more about living a gay lifestyle."

Dave realized that he was gay when he was around 18 years old, "but I tried to change because I

was taught that it was wrong. Sometimes I still struggle with guilt feelings."

Dave felt ashamed of his sexuality until he talked to one of his closest friends in the religious community who revealed that he, himself was gay. "I just wanted to talk to somebody about it. I viewed it as a problem at the time."

Dave joined the group on campus around the third week of its existence. "It's nice to know now

'...I don't like playing games. I don't like hiding. I hold back because I don't want to be misunderstood.'

that I have a few people to talk to. I still find myself divided within. Part of me is very secretive. I'm afraid to be friendly with men. Sometimes I think, 'Oh, they'll get the wrong idea and think I'm after them.' It's very frustrating because I don't like playing games. I don't like hiding. I hold back because I don't want to be misunderstood."

When discussing anti-gay attitudes, Dave replies, "I can understand 'their' point of view. For years I thought that way. But even during that time, I was somewhat sympathetic for those

people, even though I knew that it was wrong. I always felt like it was one thing to believe it's wrong, but does that mean you have to be down on people?"

For Mike, 30, the problem is society's stigma of publicly expressing affection. "You don't show too many signs of public affection, which is something our society allows for heterosexual relationships. There are a lot of times I see couples holding hands, walking in the park and I think 'Oh, I wish I could do that.' I guess it makes me jealous."

"It's hard to find somebody else in the 'straight' society that you can talk to about a problem with your mate or lover," says Mike. "In the rap group, we've got the framework of different students and you can get their views and ideas and they're not 'Oh no! You're one of THOSE!' They'll talk to you instead of being shocked by what you say."

Meagan, who has realized that she was a lesbian since she was about six, "came out" when she was 14. Now 21, Meagan's main problem in living a gay lifestyle is acceptance. "It's tough, and it's scary. There must be some support out there somewhere, I just wish they'd vocalize it a little bit."

Even though she's been "out" for so long, her family

members have yet to fully accept her sexuality. "They know and they're supportive, and they're not. They are because I'm their child, but they still think that getting married and having kids is the number one priority. My mom and stepdad know and acknowledge it, but they don't accept my lover as much as they would a guy. My father just ignores that part of me entirely."

Her desire for acceptance is clear. "Overall I'd rather see a large acceptance. People accept us as people. I don't care if they really accept us as being gay or lesbians, but that we all are human beings and we do have rights. I've seen some things and heard some things on campus that have put down homosexuals because they're not 'normal' and that's not true. They're one of you and one of me. They can be anybody and everybody."

Each of these people is very unique and separate from each other in some way. Natalie's final comment sums it up in a nutshell; "The only way you can really generalize us is by the sexuality, and that's such a minute portion of our lives. As yet, that is how society classifies us immediately."



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