

Trying to overcome stereotypes, they've been ostracized and harassed. Asserting individuality is an ongoing struggle. They are Iowa State's...

Gay Students

by Rich Robeson

"You just learn to live with it," Larry said as he looked down at the floor. He looked up and forced a slight smile. "You just learn to live with it."

Learning to live a normal lifestyle would be hard for most college students faced with Larry's situation.

Larry can't hold hands with his lover in public, nor can he dress the way he'd like to, or even wear his hair the way he'd like to. He can't tell his parents about who he is in love with, nor can he tell his friends who he thinks is attractive when he's in a public place.

Larry faces all these problems because he is gay.

There are between 2,000 and 3,000 gays and lesbians on campus, according to John Napier, former president of Gay-Lesbians Student Outreach (GLSO) at Iowa State. He bases this estimate on Dr. Alfred Kinsey's 1948 and 1953 sex reports which said about 10 percent of all Americans are gay or lesbian.

Being silent about about their homosexuality can become a personal, inner struggle for many gays. But the alternative to silence often leads only to a more stressful situation.

"You hear your classmates talking about dates they had or how their relationships

Runyan sums up the way most gays and lesbians feel about homosexuality: "It has a lot more to do with the relationship than sex. You just emotionally identify with the same sex and feel more comfortable around them. I think there's been too much emphasis on the sexual aspect of homosexuality because of the the word homosexual — it implies homosexuality is an act instead of a way of relating to people."

"Most aspects of my life are just like the rest of the college people. I work, I study, I watch television occasionally, I listen to my stereo, but the aspect of my life that is different is who I choose as my romantic partner."

Homosexual attractions begin the same way heterosexual attractions do, Bennett says. "When you are attracted to someone you do little things toward them that other people aren't going to notice. Little discreet things — the way you talk to them, the way you act toward them, and if that person notices you and they're interested in you, they'll reciprocate and you'll eventually get together."

Homosexual dating is just like heterosexual dating too, Runyan says. "There are those people that sleep around. You might meet someone in a bar and have a one night stand, and some people are there just to have a good time and not get picked up — which is usually the case with me. What homosexuals do in bed is the same thing heterosexual people do except for genital to genital intercourse, because it's impossible."

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are going," said Susan, who wished not to be identified. "I can't do that. I can't say my girlfriend and I had a fight last night, or we went to dinner last night and it was real romantic."

Iowa State student Laura Runyan, president of GLSO, says she's bisexual but goes out with women more often. She feels similar pressures. "If I'm in a public place, I can't look at who I choose or talk about who I'd like to date like heterosexual students can. I can't tell my friends that I think that woman is really attractive unless I wanted to offend the neighboring table. I just say it with a hushed voice," Runyan says.

Jacki Bennett, GSB senator for the Off-Campus Association, and her girlfriend bought each other rings as a sign of commitment to their relationship, but she can't explain her ring to some people for fear of remarks she might get. "People just don't understand two women having a serious relationship. When we go out there's always that barrier that we can't touch each other or hold hands because I don't want any snide remarks or comments."

"I have to limit my circle of friends to people I know won't discriminate against me. We can't go to a bar in Ames and dance together because of the harassment we'd get," Bennett says.

Any similarities between heterosexuals and homosexuals stop here, however. Everyday, homosexuals say they wake up and have to face the prospect of discrimination and harassment of all kinds on the ISU campus.

"I know people from the gay community that think Ames is the closest thing to being in Hell because they come from large communities where being 'gay' is no big deal," says Ron, who also wished not to be identified.

"Mostly," Runyan says, "it's just been harassing comments, obscene phone calls, funny stares and snide comments in restaurants and bars. But there are worse things. We had a GLSO dance and there were fundamentalist Christians — those people who interpret the Bible literally — standing outside the door handing out anti-gay literature. I don't need their morality legislated on me."

"Also, when we had the GLSO booth for Blue Jean day (a day for publicizing gay rights), people would walk by and say 'fags' or 'fucking queers.' It's humiliating to sit there for what you think is a good cause and realize that there are people that are immature enough not to be able to restrain their personal beliefs. I would think a University community would be more open-minded about it, but ISU has a long way to go," Runyan says.

GLSO: Hard to find meeting sites

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Susan agrees that it's hard to deal with the harassment. "You get pointed at or stared at or bumped into. It hurts, but you just have to try not to let it get to you. I'm choosing not to be named for this article because of an article that ran a year ago in the *Daily*. Only my first name was in that article but someone figured out who I was and started calling me and threatening to rape me. They would call at all hours of the night, like 3 a.m. We had our phone tapped by the police, but it didn't work."

Bennett used to be the president of GLSO and had to go to the GSB to ask for funding for the group. "Some of the GSB senators made us feel humiliated — one senator even identified himself as the number one homo-hater at Iowa State. He said he couldn't even stand to look at them. That's pretty degrading to stand up in front of 36 people and hear that."

Napier says one of the worst problems GLSO faces is finding a place to meet. "We've had problems with the people that live in Alumni Hall, which is directly above the YWCA where the GLSO meets once a week. I went up there and talked to them and they were very polite, but to this day whenever I walk by there somebody yells 'faggot' at me. And I've been sitting on the steps before the meetings and someone would yell faggot at me — it makes you feel like shit — it hurts me."

Ron remembers the discrimination he faced in the dorms. "One thing I had to deal with in the dorms that I really hated was when there was something about a gay outreach meeting put on the bulletin board, someone would always rip it down. So I was discriminated against in that I wasn't notified of events in the community. Sometimes the R.A. wouldn't even put it up

the time. We were both nervous wrecks — our grades suffered.

"We went to our R.A. and she couldn't do anything about it, so I had to live with her all semester.

"Then, three years later, during *ISU Speaks* on KUSR, this woman called up and was saying lies like I had locked her in the room and that I had tried to convert her. It was so degrading but there was nothing we could do. We tried calling the

"I know people from the gay community that think Ames is the closest thing to being in Hell, because they come from large communities where being gay is no big deal."

because he would just assume since no one on the floor told him they were gay, that there were no gays on the floor."

Some of the gay/lesbian students suffer from more severe harassment or discrimination, Bennett says. "Three years ago when I lived in Maple-Willow-Larch, I had a roommate who was very religious. My girlfriend and I were in the den watching TV and she would come in and sit in front of us and start reading the *Bible* to us and tell us we were going to go to hell.

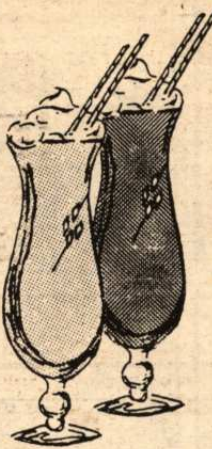
"It got so bad that one time during Kaleidoquiz with our big brother floor, when everybody was having a good time, she would bring guys over and introduce us to them as the two lesbians on the floor. Then she started doing it all

show for an hour but the phones were always busy."

In addition to the verbal and mental abuse, the gays on this campus say they have also been subject to physical violence.

Jeff, who also wished not to be identified, can relate to this harassment. "Last October, I met somebody in a bar that indicated to me that he was gay and wanted to go outside. Once we were outside, he proceeded to beat me up for a couple of minutes. I tried to defend myself but I did get a split lip. I didn't file charges because it's kind of hard to go up to the police and say this guy picked me up and then beat me up. I reported it to the

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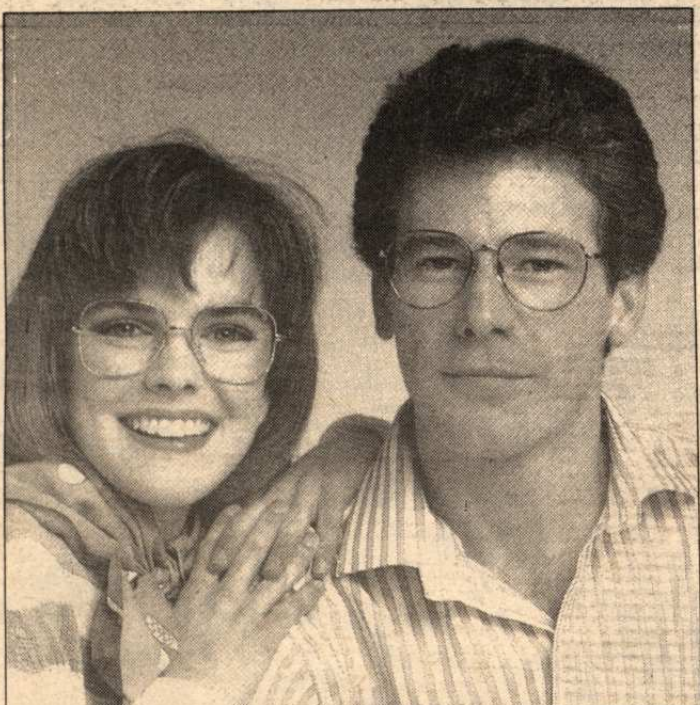

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Problems stem from misconceptions

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National Gay Task Force in New York and they gave me counseling over the phone and sent me a pamphlet."

Larry says, "It makes you nervous when a group of guys walks by or a car goes by and you think they might come back and want to beat you up. Last winter I was walking to campus through a parking lot and I was by myself. Another guy was by himself and he walked by and called me a fucking faggot. So I turned around, and since he seemed like the stereotype he obviously thought I was, I called him a 'frat rat.' That really made him mad.

"He must have thought I would just take his abuse so he came back and wanted to fight. So we fought and I got a chipped tooth

from a ring on his finger. It ended when I grabbed him by the hair and pulled him down to my knee. He fell down and I walked away.

"I would much rather not have had to deal with it and call him a frat rat, but he forced it.

"I had dots all over my face from where his ring had punctured me."

physically assaulted go to the authorities, but for gays, sometimes that answer is not so easy.

Bill Grace is the Program Advisor for Student Organizations

"You get pointed at or stared at or bumped into. It hurts, but you just have to try not to let it get to you."

Dean Drake, head of Campus Security at ISU, says assault and battery is not a big problem here. In all of 1984, there were only six reported assaults that involved hands, fists or feet.

Most students who are

and an advocate in helping students who suffer from discrimination. "If they weren't ready to come out of the closet — which would be necessary to seek due process in the judicial system — I would want that person to at least get as much personal support both through the counseling office and through GLSO so they could gain an understanding of the implications of leading a gay lifestyle," Grace says.

Why does discrimination and harassment among students happen in the first place?

The reason named by counselors and student advisers is an affliction called "homophobia." ISU counselor Allen Hale defines it simply as "the fear and hatred of gays."

"When heterosexuals put down gays, they are just

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by John Trudell

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Monday, October 28, 1985

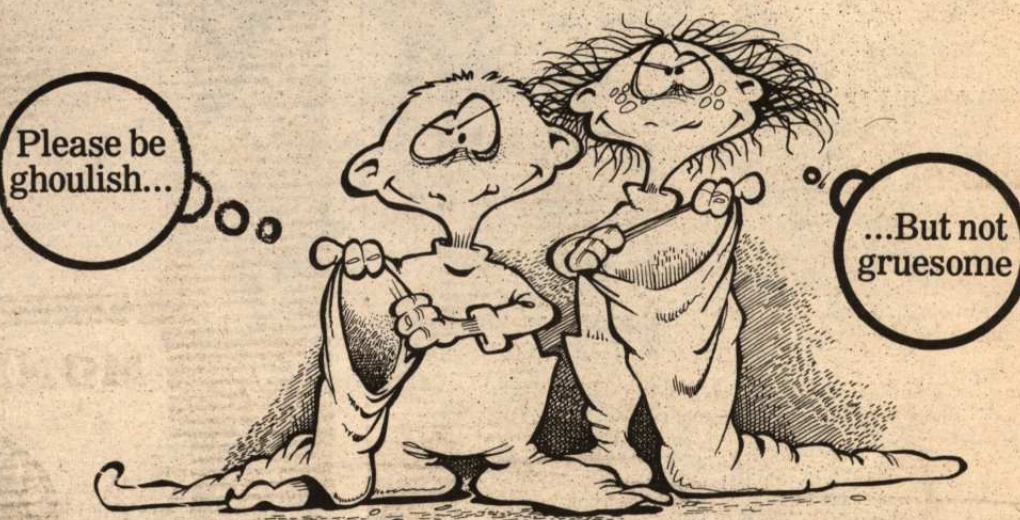
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Gays are often a target to pick on

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reinforcing their own heterosexuality," Hale says. "All the slang terms are just a way of demeaning that target group, of making them less real and less close... really preventing themselves from getting to know that person."

Bennett agrees. "I think a lot of people don't like gays because they don't know what gay people are like."

Grace agrees that most students don't understand gays. "Most of the problems students have about gays stem from misinformation or misconceptions about gays and their lifestyles."

There are other reasons Dennis Culver, a grad student currently doing research on gay/lesbian discrimination, says one of the reasons that men are homophobic is because of the sex role pressures. "Men are expected to be blatantly stereotypical male and to be macho and put down people who are different than themselves. Being gay goes directly against those sex roles," he said.

Former president of GLSO John Napier says he thinks gays are just a target group to pick on. "When things aren't going good they say 'well, let's go give the gays shit.' Also, some people are closet homosexuals and don't want to admit it to themselves, so they condemn and insult gays to relieve that tension."

Some gays think non-gay people hate and fear them because they fear a gay person will make a pass at them. The gays are quick to dismiss that myth, Larry said. "A gay person doesn't want to come on to a non-gay person any more than a non-gay person wants a gay person to come on to them."

Ron agrees, and draws this

analogy: "If you're attracted to a female that's married, you're not going to approach her because you know that she's not eligible; whereas I wouldn't approach a straight man because I know that man's not eligible."

"When heterosexuals put down gays, they are just reinforcing their own heterosexuality. All the slang terms are just a way of demeaning that target group, of making them less real and less close... really preventing themselves from getting to know that person."

Another common myth is that gays and lesbians have some say in whether they're gay or lesbian. Bennett had to laugh at that one. "Gays and lesbians do not choose to be gay or lesbian — who would want to go through all the pressures and discrimination if they didn't have to? I didn't choose to be a lesbian, I only chose to be happy and being gay makes me happy."

Hale agrees. "I believe gays have no choice as to who their objects of affection will be — in the same way that you don't know what causes you to act one way towards some people and differently towards others. Discrimination occurs because society thinks there is something they can do about it."

A booklet printed by the Gay Activist Alliance, *20 Questions About Homosexuality*, points out that "biological researchers agree that homosexuality is almost universal among animals, and it becomes a frequent form of activity among highly developed species. Similarly, anthropologists and historians report that there is no human culture from which homosexuality has

been absent." "But in the end," Hale says, "they're faced with the dilemma of either keeping their sexuality bottled up inside themselves and trying to live with that, or coming out as a homosexual and facing the

discrimination and harassment that comes with that."

Laura Runyan doesn't think there's anything wrong with homosexuality. "I think it's just as normal and viable a lifestyle as heterosexuality is. I think you can be a productive, healthy, happy person who is bettering the world for other people — which is far more important than who you sleep with."

Editor's note: Since this article was written, John Napier has moved to Iowa City and Dennis Culver has moved to the east coast.

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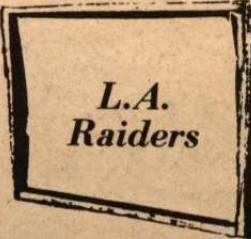
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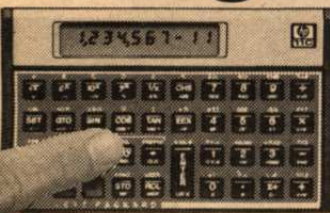


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