

W.T. Quick – “Under the Underground the Bitter Fruit: A Survey of Homosexuality on Campus” – Vol. II No. 3 pg. 4-6, February 7, 1969

He had long hair and was young – 17 maybe 18, and most of his cleaner-cut friends would have called him a hippie. A gentle person. He sat in the south Talley and talked about sex:

"Anything is all right, man, anything at all. If it makes you happy or makes your chick happy, then it's a groove."

Later, he said, "But those goddam fags -- ugh!"

This is the dichotomy the homosexual faces; in a nation laboring with revolutions sexual, social and political, the gay world is untouched, unhelped by any. The, hippie, generally, no matter how promiscuous, how 'open-minded' doesn't have time for the homosexual" nor does the militant leftist" hung up as he often is with the new orders already at hand" concern himself with the particular problems of the men who prefer sex with other men.

It would take too much time to stumble through thickets of social history trying to nail down the origins of American contempt for this particular group world. Suffice to say that the contempt does exist, that the gay world has been the most ignored; both by its own choice and by the choice of others, than all the rest of the persecuted minorities put together.

TOA feels that things giddy and gay have been ignored; far too long at Ball State. Read on, then and learn about a part of the University you perhaps didn't know existed though it's been here long before you and will survive long after you've gone.

Kinsey's studies of the male's sex life in America were perhaps the first real groundbreakers regarding the prevalence of homosexuality in this country. Faced with the somewhat astounding estimate that at least five percent of the adult male population was actively homosexual, the American public could no longer relegate this particular minority group to, the class of insignificant bogeyman. If Kinsey's figures hold true today, then there are at least five million active male homosexuals in America.

Moreover, Kinsey researchers found that this percentage went even higher, (as high as 8%) when certain specific subject groups, particularly those groups with greater education, were involved.

Basing estimates on Kinsey's figures, it would seem that there are between 350 and 600 active homosexuals at Ball State University. TOA's survey in no way verifies this figure, since we were unable to speak directly with that many members of the gay world, but our interviews do indicate that homosexuality is at least as prevalent within our campus community as at any other typical university.

If there are as many active homosexuals on campus as statistics would indicate, they certainly aren't an obvious presence. But this too is a compound of the nature of Ball State and the nature of the great myth about homosexuality -- that all homosexuals are obvious, easily recognized types. As a matter of fact, the situation is quite reverse. For instance, one student replied to our opening question this way:

"What's it like to be gay at Ball state? I can answer that in one word -- shit." When we asked him to elaborate" the student continued, "I don't know. It's not like a lot of other places. At a really big university, for instance, there's usually a gay bar for the college kids, and a pretty active, obvious crew of people. Here, though, I'll bet there are more homosexuals that at an average college twice the size, but nobody knows who they are. This place is literally jammed with closet queens." (A closet queen" in gay jargon" is an overt homosexual who nevertheless conceals his homosexuality and limits his sexual contacts severely – ed. note.)

TOA's interviews and observations led us to believe, in fact, that the great majority of homosexuals on campus are of the closet variety. The reasons for this shyness, when one examines the social nature of Ball State, are almost immediately obvious.

Almost every homosexual, no matter what his status in life, has one constant, overriding fear: the fear of exposure. Anyone who is at all familiar with Playboy Magazine's campaign for sexual freedom realizes the kind of social and personal vituperation the revealed homosexual draws. His job, friends and family are all at stake in the great underground game. Young adults, gathered together in the autonomous, closely knit and tightly structured college environment, are especially susceptible to the social pressure of their peers. Ball state, rigid socially even for a college, offers the homosexual nothing but grief should his sexual preferences become known. It is no wonder, then, that the youthful homosexual should prefer, at all costs, to keep his secret from becoming public knowledge. So adept have many young men become, in fact, at this particular deception that even their closest friends probably have no suspicion whatsoever that a homosexual is in their midst.

This passion for privacy and need for total secrecy places great pressure on many homosexual students. Most particularly affected are the fraternity men who, because of the lack of privacy of house living, are in continual danger of exposure and concomitant rejection by their brothers.

Independents living in dormitories are in a somewhat less pressing situation, and off-campus students live the most secure life of all. Nevertheless, gay students at Ball State, no matter what their living arrangements, share a common problem: though homosexual, their glands function as well as anybody else's, but sexual release is not the simple, open path to Cathy Coed that it is for their straight brothers.

To be sure, there are places to go. Muncie has two gay bars, one quite well known among local citizens, the other, like so many students, well-disguised. Unfortunately, due to the nature of these places, the student is often not in a position to visit them. Referring to one of the bars, a fraternity man said, "I'd love to go drinking there every once in a while. But what if one of the brothers found out? I'd be run out of the house. Other fraternity men echo this sentiment as well as the more discreet independents.

There is always the Talley-Ho. Generally, any place where students gather in large numbers is safe haven for the homosexual. The legend regarding homosexuality that "it takes one to know one" is based on a great deal of truth. Most homosexuals can detect each other when straight people would see nothing out of the ordinary. While by no means all of those men who wear pinky rings. Type of clothing and style of movement are other giveaway factors to the

discerning eye. And then, there is the phenomenon of "cruising." The Talley for gay students, is the equivalent of a cruising bar. It is a place to meet and greet, and occasionally to make new acquaintances.

And all this can be done inconspicuously. Cruising is the key. The technique is simple -- the long stare, breaking off at just the right moment. Perhaps a smile. A nod. A revealing movement. Through such insignificant signs, one homosexual can convey to another not only his own homosexuality, but whether, and to what degree, he is interested in the other. If the interest is there, introductions can be arranged by anything as simple, and hoary as a request for a light, or as complicated as a "blind" date.

For those who like their adventures a bit more raw, there are certain strategic restrooms scattered about campus, as well as the streets of Muncie itself after dark. Both areas at times offer immediate sexual contacts, no questions asked. Hustlers are scarce in this city, and the people driving the "route" up and down Walnut, High, and Mulberry are there generally to meet each other and not rough trade. (rough trade - the species of hustler, who, through psychologically considered a homosexual since he participates in homosexual acts, is best characterized by his usual protestation, 'I only do it for the money.' Usually, such a person believes he is not gay. ed. note)

While most of this article has concerned itself with the lot of the student homosexual, it would be incomplete without at least a glancing, and discrete look at one other segment of the university family -- the faculty. Kinsey reported that as the intelligence of groups rose, so did the percentage of homosexuality within the groups rise. BSU's faculty does have gay members, as do the faculties of all major universities...that is to say the percentages hold true for all groups of sufficient statistical size. As one might imagine the problems confronting the gay member of a university faculty, BSU's faculty in particular, are enormous. While the faculty member's life style may be somewhat eased by his status as a legal adult, and the cloak of respectability in the eyes of the general public which he wears, these advantages are far outweighed by the disadvantages involving possible loss of job, family, and social acceptance. The faculty member here placed in the position of one who instructs the young must be particularly careful to conceal his homosexuality. If he frequents one of the two bars, he must be circumspect in the extreme -- the options for meaningful sexual contact, few that they may be, which are open to his students are closed to him. At Ball State, the society of the faculty member is as structured, as rigid and as carefully vindictive of the "outsider" as any fraternity ever dreamed of being.

Therefore, the life of the homosexual faculty member at Ball state is, almost by definition one of continuous fear of exposure, sexual frustration and general hangup.

But while TOA can point out some aspects of gay life at BSU, it remains for one who is a member of that particular underground to fill in the blank spots. Here follows a somewhat edited interview with one of those elusive people, a gay BSU student.

TOA What's it like to be gay at Ball state?

STUDENT It's damn near like being straight.

TOA Would you elaborate please?

STUDENT I knew more gay people at my high school with a graduating class of fifty, than I do at this raving institution.

TOA How do you account for that?

STUDENT Because they're all so fucking closety, that's why.

TOA If we could turn for a moment to...

STUDENT Wait a minute. I want to go on...aside from the few obvious types, there isn't any way for gay people to, meet to get to know each other. I mean gay people have this second sense about being able to spot each other which is pretty accurate most of the time but even though you know someone else is gay and possibly interested there's nothing to do about it but just look, and get frustrated. There's just no convenient way to get together.

TOA What about the bars?

STUDENT What bars? No, let me go on since probably a good 75% of the student body is under twenty one, they can't go to a bar in the first place. Secondly, bars that are really gay are too hot for most of the people here. See, most people don't want, or need a place to swish around in, just somewhere to meet each other that wouldn't compromise them.

TOA Would you elaborate on this for a moment? It seems that you don't want what you say you want, for instance, what is the compromise for gay people to meet in a bar, rather than, say, a restaurant?

STUDENT From my experience with big city bars, they are frequented with really nelly -- that is, effeminate -- people, who even most reasonably decent gay people call queers. They're generally in a position where if they can be that well known and swishy they have little regard for the discretion of others. To them you're just another one of the girls.

TOA Is there anything you can suggest that might improve the situation for most gay people, particularly those you have just made mention of here at Ball state or in Muncie?

STUDENT I think the answer is in the attitude of the gay people...they seem to be and have to be interested in meeting others, or they really would not be gay. But they have a hang-up about letting even other gay people of the discreet variety know they are gay themselves.

TOA In other words, it's something like a high school dance -- only a matter of getting the wallflowers away from the wall?

STUDENT Yes. From my experience at other universities there is always a place where gay people could go without necessarily being considered gay. Yet gay people could meet each other in those places.

TOA Muncie has no such place?

STUDENT Every school has its notorious restroom. Or rooms as the case may be. But its compromising to peoples' dignity, it's dangerous, it's like a john in a bus station except that the people are younger. The same low class.

TOA I'd like to turn for a moment to the question of militancy. Are there people who are militant about their homosexuality? I mean, willing to fight back?

STUDENT I am militant or I wouldn't be answering these questions. Certainly not honestly. I don't think there's any call for five hundred gay people to congregate at the corner of University and McKinley with picket signs -- but with the new libertarian attitudes so, professed but not always executed by this generation, tolerance would allow many people to let down their hair and not be so uptight about protecting their "masculinity." I've noticed about three groups on campus, three, groups of friends, I guess, the majority of whom I'm almost certain are gay, yet there's not communication between these groups, nor between them and what I consider the gay community as a whole here on campus. This would change I'm sure, if say, the radicals were willing to practice a little of this tolerance to push a little of this tolerance toward gay people that they have practiced and preached toward the blacks.

TOA Then you feel that the movement has, in some ways, been ignoring the gay world in their push toward freedom for all? That the word "all" does not seem to include the homosexual?

STUDENT It would seem so.

TOA Well I'd like to change the subject for a moment...just what are your feelings about your own personal situation right now as a result of your being gay?

STUDENT I can answer that...since my required freshman psych class taught me that most drives and activities are directed by the libido, being gay makes a great difference in my every day actions.

TOA How so?

STUDENT My overall performance on scholastic and creative areas would probably, if I may rationalize for a moment, be a thousand percent better if I were not sexually frustrated all the time. When you know, as you drink coffee in the Talley that the gorgeous person two tables away would like to go to bed with you as much as you would with him, but you're too afraid of revealing yourself for anything to happen...it's hard fifteen minutes later to keep your mind on seventeenth century English literature.

TOA As a part of the facade, do you date or have sexual relations with women?

STUDENT I don't but I am sure that the majority of homosexuals on campus do. As I said before, I am militant and I refuse to waste one moment of my time holding hands with a dewy-eyed coed who thinks she's going to do me a favor by letting me share her bed at the Travel Lodge some Friday night in the far distant future.

TOA One final question: just how great do you think the pressure placed by social discrimination on the homosexual is here at Ball State?

STUDENT I can't really answer that question, because the "pressure" you mention has never really been called up. There's been no testing of the social fabric to bring about any overt pressure against the homosexuals here. Besides, how can you pressure something you can't find?

TOA That would seem to be the case. Thank you very much Mr. _____.