

The University of Maine

DigitalCommons@UMaine

Social Justice: Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

Special Collections

4-12-1973

New Bangor gay group helps members find themselves

Bill Gordon

University of Maine

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/social_justice



Part of the [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), [Gender Equity in Education Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Gordon, Bill, "New Bangor gay group helps members find themselves" (1973). *Social Justice: Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion*. 251.

https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/social_justice/251

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Social Justice: Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

New Bangor gay group helps members find themselves

by Bill Gordon

Gay liberation has finally come out of the closet in Maine, and it looks like it is out in the open to stay.

A gay group began last semester at UMO as part of the Abenaki curriculum. Intended as an academic discussion of the social and psychological aspects of homosexuality, the small group expanded and turned from discussion to become an active gay social-support group.

Initial efforts to establish a meeting place near the UMO campus were met with opposition, notably from the Newman Center which refused to house the group because homosexuality is not condoned by the Church. The group also ran into opposition at Maine Christian Association, but eventually succeeded with a Unitarian church in Bangor. The group, called "Action and Support," meets each week in the large traditional church on Hammond Street.

Members say the group is the first of its kind in this area, and prior to its establishment homosexuals had no place to meet.

The group is composed of both male and female homosexuals. Three-fourths of the members are UMO students; the rest often travel several-hours distance to attend the weekly meetings. Numbers are continually increasing, and attendance runs from 25 to 50 gays for the newly formed group which has existed only a few weeks.

Most members say they joined for personal and social reasons. "It's just that when you're with other people who think like you," one girl said, "there is a bond."

"If you are in straight society and smoke dope, you know you can't talk openly about it. But when you're with friends, they know exactly how you feel."

Explaining what the group means to the individuals involved, one member, a UMO student, said it helped him accept himself even with the label "deviant" applied.

"I think I'm deviant. I don't go through a day with the same kind of attitudes, knowledge, and responses that other people do. I think that because I am gay I have an awareness that other people don't. I'm not suggesting any superiority—it's just a cultural thing. You get pushed and you respond differently."

The people who compose the group disprove the stereotypes created by the straight world depicting homosexuals as

limp-wristed sissies or lesbians with butch haircuts. All could and do pass for straight.

Deception of the straight society, for reasons of self-protection was emphasized by the member who said, "One problem is exposure—whether anyone in this group wants to openly admit that they are gay. The fact is he probably would be leaving his job soon afterward."

They have adapted themselves to a world that condemns them, and now they have come together out of a mutual need to bring about their self-acceptance of what they are and admittedly have no desire to change.

This group therapy method is the hope of one young man, Paul (fictitious name) who said that he suffered a mental breakdown from the strain of trying to accept his sexuality.

"I'm only 18, but I've been cruising the streets since 14—in johns, the Bangor public library, and so on.

"I like the physical part of a relationship, but I never want to be, emotionally involved. That's how I had my breakdown, because I was confused whether I was gay, bisexual, or hetero."

Paul expressed optimism about his involvement with the group. Like the others, he hopes to come to an acceptance and better understanding of himself.

Psychological support for persons like Paul and others in the group struggling for an identity that includes homosexuality is the primary function of the group at present. The emphasis is on "support" with an eye toward "action" in the future. Members agree that conscienceness-raising would have to precede any political activity.

The evening's group leader expressed his determination to openly advocate political causes eventually as the need for action arises. "I'm personally interested in seeing the laws against deviant sex taken off the books. And I don't think that it is going to be any great problem in Maine.

"I would and can go out and see what I can do to bring this change because I have seen a lot of people suffer—being pushed out of their jobs and into such isolated positions in society that it seems to be totally unreasonable and inhuman."

As an example of discriminatory laws which isolate homosexuals, he brought a copy of the Maine statutes which define homosexual acts as "Crimes against Nature."

Some members of the group expressed surprise at the penalties called for by

Maine laws—sentences ranging from one to ten years. Many said the antiquated laws were absurd and ridiculous, but frightening because they have been enforced recently in some areas of the state.

Laws discriminating against homosexuals are not easily changed because politicians find the subject a politically treacherous issue. Noted one girl, "When a white person rallies for the blacks, it's obvious he's not black. But if you move to legislate for gays, the finger can easily point at you because there is no way to prove you aren't gay yourself."

Although it is obviously impossible to know how every gay votes and despite the fact the gay groups themselves are splintered, the group believed these human rights issues would override all other considerations to unite gays behind a candidate.

Some members of "Action and Support" expressed the homosexual's traditionally greatest fear of police harassment in the Bangor area. One male member related an incident of harassment. "There was a case last fall

when a party was raided and two persons arrested. The police let them go under the condition that they supply a list of every gay person in the area. And they did it."

"The police are handling the gay scene just like the drug one which doesn't make any sense because it's a different thing altogether," stated one girl.

Most members of the group believed police harassment and interference of social activities to be slight or even non-existent for those who attend UMO.

One woman said that she worried little about police harassment when she held a "women's party" near campus. "I did worry about the police raiding it even though it was completely straight," she said. "But I worried most about the fraternities. I worried about what would happen if some of those guys got drunk and came over to see what was happening."

Although they all fear individual persecution, they have begun to talk to people, including the congregation of the church where they meet, ministers from the Orono area who once refused them a meeting place and even the police.