

Straight Women Talk About Gay Men

A Night Out With the Girls

Girlfriends, mascots, fag hags--call them what you will, but straight women who hang out with gay guys are an integral part of the gay lifestyle. They can be our best friends, they can be our confidants, they can help keep us sane.

What motivates these women? Why do they hang out with us? Why do they tolerate us? Recently, this Lambda writer talked with five UNC women who have gay friends to find out the answer to these and other questions.

In answer to the question, Why do you hang out with gay guys, all five women interviewed agreed they do not let a person's sexuality determine their friends. They don't seek out gay men as friends, yet if they met a man whom they like who happens to be gay, then so be it. The man's sexuality makes no difference to them.

Angela, a senior, says she enjoys gay men because they are fun to be with, caring, sensitive, interesting, easy to talk to, and think the same way she does. Muffy and Judy, both freshmen, echoed Angela's sentiments, adding that it is nice to have male friends without sex threatening the relationship.

Lucy, a recent graduate, states very plainly that she likes people in general but only associates with interesting ones, and the fact that so many of her friends are gay is purely coincidental.

Clarissa, a junior, says it's nice to have gay males as friends because you get the benefits of a straight guy plus the sensitivity of a woman. Lucy, agreeing with Clarissa, added that it was nice to know she always had an escort available for parties, dances, theatre, etc. when she did not have a date.

Do the women find it easier to spot gay men on campus or on the street now? All wholeheartedly said, Yes, and added that it seems all the best looking men are gay. Clarissa says that if she meets a guy who is cultured, well-mannered, and well-dressed, then 9 out of 10 times he's gay. Lucy says that any impeccably groomed "hunk" she sees is always suspect in her book.

When asked what their reaction was when they first learned one of their friends was gay, all agreed they were surprised, but once the initial shock wore off they were curious enough to ask questions and wanted to learn more about being gay.

Angela tells the story of how betrayed she felt when she learned her friend Greg was gay. All through high school, she had defended Greg to those who accused him of being gay, yet now he was telling her that it was indeed true. She felt used and hurt. But she soon realized that Greg's sexuality should not make any difference if they were friends. Later she learned that even more of her friends were gay, but it hardly phased her.

Muffy, who is from New York, said she had gay friends all through high school. But once she arrived in the more conservative South, she was shocked to see how many gays there were at UNC. She remembers thinking, My God, aren't there any straight guys left?

Lucy recounts the story of moving to New York City soon after graduating from a North Carolina high school and immediately developing a mad crush on a gorgeous guy named David. She was devastated when David told her that he was gay. But Lucy remained friends with him and learned about gay life. Later, while she was looking through David's copy of Damron's Address Book, she saw many listings for gay bars in North Carolina. Her first response was, But we don't have gay people in North Carolina. Nowadays she's beginning to think all gay people are from North Carolina.

How do they feel when they go out to the bars with their gay friends? Angela admits that she was very uncomfortable on her first trip, saying, "I felt like I needed babysitting and was really uncomfortable when I was left alone. Gradually I met some people and got more comfortable, and now I feel right at home."

Lucy remembers her first trip to 42nd Street, a former bar in Durham. She was worried that she had a neon sign on her face flashing "straight," and that she wouldn't be let in the door. Clarissa says she was very nervous and uptight on her first visit but quickly eased up. "The people are friendlier and nicer and dance a whole lot better," she says.

Do their straight friends hold it against them for having gay friends? In this case, the women's responses was somewhat divided. Angela says that her straight friends do seem to resent her having gay friends, but she doesn't let that bother her. Muffy says that these days she is reluctant to tell her straight friends that she has gay friends because of some of the bad reactions she has gotten in the past. But Muffy is quick to add, "It's foolish not to get to know someone just because they are gay. You'll miss out on a lot of human qualities."

Clarissa notes that her straight female friends seem more willing to accept her gay male friends than do her straight male friends, who seem threatened by gay men. Judy says that her friends do seem curious about gayness and ask her lots of questions. Judy says, "I don't think it matters what their sexual preference is. A lot of people don't look at the real person."

So, there you have it. Five women with gay friends. But they are only the tip of the iceberg. There are many more like them out there. Just look around you.

-James Mills