



Homophobia in the Jewish Youth Culture

By Aaron*

I am sitting here reading an article from my youth movement's national newspaper, which dates back from July 1993. It's all about homophobia in my youth movement. While it may be a bit dated, it still rings true.

It really sucks being gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender in a Jewish youth movement/group today. I know you are probably thinking, "It's the 21st century, everyone is accepted, and everyone is equal, blah, blah, blah," but it is sadly untrue. Being a g/l/b/t youth today is hard enough, but being one in a Jewish youth movement/group adds complications.

Jewish youth turn toward youth movements/groups to find acceptance. Most people in Jewish youth movements/groups go there because they may feel "different" at home. They may have a love for Israel or Zionism. They may feel connected to Judaism and want to be around other Jews. But we all come together despite our other differences, right? Wrong. There is one other difference that is still not really accepted formally in Jewish youth movements/groups. Homosexuals.

To be honest, a lot of kids think that there are no gays in their movement/group. But just because we are Jewish youth doesn't exempt us from the national statistic that one of every ten people is exclusively homosexual (If you are wondering where this statistic comes from, it relates back to Dr. Kinsey, who was the first sexual researcher, and the bell curve of sexuality. It says that 10% of the world is completely straight, 10% of the world is completely gay, and the other 80% are varying degrees of bisexual, with the majority of the world falling in the center of bisexuality. I could keep talking about this, but that would be a whole other article!). So, there are many g/l/b/t youth in Jewish youth culture today having a very hard time.

One of the hardest things about Jewish youth movements is the use of derogatory language. It is very common for people to be called "gay," "fag," "dyke," and other negative comments. While name calling maybe done jokingly, it still cuts deeply and is very insulting. People also use this language to describe bad things, such as, "That's so gay," or, "What the hell are you, a faggot?" It is very hard for g/l/b/t youth to feel good about themselves when they are made fun of, or hear others being teased this way.

Oddly though, same sex interaction isn't looked down upon that much. Girls hold hands, sleep in the same bed, shower together and there is nothing wrong with that. Guys lie on top of each other, grind during dances, and also sleep together. But these same guys and girls also interact with each other in

much the same way, and they do even more when it is two members of the opposite sex. But these things aren't really looked down upon. It's actually all one big joke. I think when a bunch of Jews get together, hormones rage, and are pointed in every direction. I am sure that none of these kids would go home and hang on their friends of the same sex; it only happens within the comfort of the youth movement/group. Most people act the same among each other, but the second that you label yourself as gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender, people's attitudes towards you change. If you tell people that you may have "hooked up" with someone of the same sex, it isn't that big of a deal. You could have been under the influence of something, or just experimenting, but the second that you are g/l/b/t, people take a step back and are like, "Oh." And then they look at you differently. Sometimes they feel funny around you, other times they might stop being your friend altogether, but it is so hard for Jewish youth to come out in their movements/groups. Usually people come out once they have left, or when they are about to leave, but it is very hard to find the "alternative" youth in movements/groups. So, many g/l/b/t youth stay in the closet until they don't really have any involvement with their movement/group anymore.

But don't think that all of us live in the closet. There is the "gay underground" in movements/groups today. While a lot of us may still be in the closet, those who have accepted themselves for who they are find each other. The hardest thing is to find that other g/l/b/t person.

I recently realized why being g/l/b/t is so hard when I got back from a convention. You see it is easy for "straight" youth in movements/groups to find someone whom they can relate to in a sexual way. But for those of us into the "alternative" lifestyle, there aren't that many people out or able to have fun in a discreet way (when anyone is with anyone, most people know within about 10 minutes.). So it leaves us feeling alone and unaccepted.

What it comes down to, is that most people's attitude toward homosexuality is along the lines of bigotry, and is as unacceptable as racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism. In today's world, we have become so accepting of people for their differences, but homosexuality just isn't quite there yet. In Jewish youth culture, homosexuality needs to stop being fodder for jokes and people need to become more accepting. Through education and activities for people to rethink their attitudes towards homosexuality, we might be able to stop homophobia in Jewish youth movements/groups in the years to come.

*** Names have been changed to protect anonymity.**