

Being Out, Ole Style:
The GLBT Experience at St. Olaf College

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Executive Summary

Setting

- Like any liberal arts school, St. Olaf College has a substantial population of GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender) students and faculty.
- This population is integrated among the heterosexual population.

Problem

- Because they live and work in the same environment as the heterosexual population, it is easy to assume that the GLBT community experiences life no differently except when it comes to sex and dating.
- GLBT students and faculty experience the college environment very differently due to the unique necessity of having to identify one's sexuality, discrimination and harassment, and unconventional dating needs.
- These different experiences cause need for different resources and support options than those that are available to the heterosexual population.

Methodology

- We advertised for interviewees using posters and word-of-mouth.
- We developed an interview script and received approval from the IRB.
- Sixteen 30-45 minute interviews were conducted confidentially.
- Interview dialogue was transcribed and evaluated.

Observations

- In general, GLBT students are not as comfortable at St. Olaf as they could be.
- Some reported difficult "coming-out" experiences, both originally and at college.

- Some discussed negative experiences at St. Olaf such as harassment and anti-gay remarks.
- All interviewees acknowledged a very supportive and respectful faculty.
- The GLBT dating scene at St. Olaf is unhealthy but not unlike the heterosexual situation.
- Interviewees made many insightful and varied suggestions for how St. Olaf could better administer to this population.

Synopsis

- The environment at St. Olaf College is not ideal for GLBT students.
- Support networks and resources exist for this population, but they are not adequate.
- Changes need to happen at all levels; from administrative, to academic, to the individual perceptions of the student body.

The GLBT Experience at St. Olaf College

Abstract

This study sought to gain perspectives from different members of the GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender) community at St. Olaf College on what life is like for this population. Fourteen students and one professor were contacted after self-identification, and interviewed using a standard script. The interviewees were asked questions about themselves and their sexuality, their perceptions of the GLBT community at St. Olaf, and whether or not St. Olaf is doing all it can for this community. Results were extremely varied and ranged from those whose sexuality affected their lives greatly and felt St. Olaf was falling short in resources and support, to those who had never really thought about this issue and had little knowledge of the challenges facing the larger community. The general consensus was, however, that there are a few things St. Olaf could do better, such as more opportunities for academic acknowledgement of this group, and more staff positions dedicated to addressing the issues facing the GLBT population.

Setting

Sexuality is not often addressed openly at a small, religious school like St. Olaf College. However, like anywhere else, a significant GLBT population exists. Gay men range from masquerading as completely straight to being extremely effeminate. Lesbians are harder to spot, but also cover the full spectrum in regards to identifying with their biological gender. GLBT students are distributed throughout all areas of the college and are not often separated from their heterosexual peers. Self-identified GLBT students are especially

concentrated in the fine arts portion of the college, whereas more GLBT students in the sciences and on athletic teams are “in the closet”—either reluctant or afraid to come out. These patterns and spectrum of difference is commonly found in any setting with a GLBT population.

Research Question

What is the experience of GLBT students at St. Olaf College? This study looked at the psychological implications, social aspects, identity issues, dating scene, and level of acceptance and security members of the GLBT community feel on campus. How different are the lives of men from those of women in this community? We aimed to assess the challenges GLBT students face on a daily basis and whether or not St. Olaf College is doing all it can to eliminate these difficulties.

Theoretical Framework

Queer theory is a set of ideas based around the idea that identities are not fixed and do not determine who we are. It suggests that it is meaningless to talk in general about 'women' or any other group, as identities consist of so many elements that to assume that people can be seen collectively on the basis of one shared characteristic is wrong. Indeed, it proposes that we deliberately challenge all notions of fixed identity, in varied and non-predictable ways (www.theory.org.uk).

The use of Queer theory in our research seems self-evident, and at a place like St. Olaf it is especially pertinent. Undergraduate college campuses are a place of searching for one's personal identity and developing the ability for social functioning. Given the religiosity and sexually conservative nature of St. Olaf, students questioning their sexuality may welcome the assertion that seeing people “on the basis of one shared characteristic is wrong.”

Another helpful viewpoint to draw on is the work of Erving Goffman and his ideas on stigma. Goffman, a theorist from the school of Symbolic Interactionism, focused his thoughts on interactions between individuals and the symbols used to understand those communications. Stigmatization happens to anyone for whom there is “a gap between what a person ought to be, virtual social identity, and what a person actually is, actual social identity.” (Ritzer, p. 361) Stigmatization is a buzzword with any minority group, including the GLBT population. Students who do not feel comfortable presenting their full selves to the general public may present a false identity, therefore causing that gap and resulting in stigmatization.

Literature Review

To begin our research, we first looked at studies conducted on other campuses. For example, in 1989 a researcher named Reynolds took a sample of matched pairs of 32 gay or bisexual male students and 32 heterosexual students and administered a questionnaire to “explore differences in perception of university climate between gay and heterosexual male students” (as quoted in Wall/Evans, 33-36). Reynolds found that gay students felt less safe, supported, or comfortable on campus. In 1993 Herek found, from a questionnaire with 166 lesbian, gay, and bisexual respondents, that the vast majority of these students had been victims of discrimination, harassment, or intimidation because of their sexual orientation.

Books that we found pertaining to GLBT communities on college campuses were very useful. Kim Howard and Annie Stevens published in 2000 a book of personal accounts by GLBT college students for which they asked questions very similar to the questions addressed in our study (Howard and Stevens, 2000). Nancy Evans and Vernon Wall have two books published as handbooks for college faculty and administration on how to handle GLBT issues (Evans and Vernon, 1991, 2000). Ronni Sanlo published a similar, even more exhaustive handbook in 1998 (Sanlo, 1998). Ellen Lewin and William Leap’s book *Out in Theory* is a discussion of the emergence of lesbian and gay anthropology and helped us develop our plan of action for this particular ethnography.

According to Ronni Sanlo in *Working With Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender College Students: A Handbook for Faculty and Administrators*, the following are some of the many categories that pertain to GLBT issues on a college campus. A campus must evaluate every area of its functioning and ask whether its doing all it can for GLBT issues. The following categories pertain especially to St. Olaf College:

Residence Life—Residence halls are meant to be a “home away from home” and a way for students to “learn social values and norms of interaction while enhancing their academic achievement.” (Sanlo, p. 57) Same-sex-only building arrangements (versus co-ed living) can cause tension between a GLBT student and his/her roommate(s). Also, the role of residence staff and the issues they choose to address in orientation can affect the comfort of GLBT students.

Library Collections—The academic resources of a school say a lot about its level of tolerance and acceptance.

Academic Advising—All students need career advising pertinent to their lifestyle, including the GLBT population.

Health Services—Homosexuality must be discussed as much as heterosexuality in brochures, presentations, and other information made available by the health center. Health issues unique to the homosexual lifestyle must not be ignored or

marginalized but addressed even more openly to foster comfortable discourse on the topic.

Athletics—Often GLBT student athletes feel particularly marginalized by their team members and coaches.

Curriculum—Does a course encourage the broaching of GLBT issues within class discussion, and are classroom environments such that this feels comfortable for anyone?

Course Offerings—Beyond being discussed in any course, are there special classes dedicated to (for example) GLBT history and contemporary issues, sexuality, and policy making? Is there some sort of Queer Studies major offered?

Faculty Issues—Are faculty trained in handling GLBT issues in and out of class? Are there domestic partner benefits for GLBT faculty themselves?

Student Organizations—GLBT issues need to be considered, and addressed as needed within all student organization. Furthermore, there should be student organization devoted especially to GLBT issues on campus.

Religious Affiliation—Very importantly, when a college is religiously affiliated, the religious community must recognize its power to sway public opinion on GLBT acceptance.

Methodology

To give us an idea of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community at St. Olaf, we conducted sixteen 30-45 minute interviews with fifteen students and one faculty member. To find people to interview we put up flyers around campus explaining our project, with the hopes of receiving a few phone calls or emails from interested students/faculty. We based our interviews off of a nineteen-question survey we put together. The survey included question topics ranging everywhere from the homosexual dating scene at St. Olaf to the support systems available to GLBT students. The students ranged from first-years to seniors, with of a variety of majors, experiences, and sexual preferences. Since much of what we asked and discussed in the interviews is considered very sensitive and personal, we designed our study to minimize risk for all subjects. We conducted our interviews in private study rooms within the St. Olaf Rolvaag Library. No real names or other identifying information will be included in this study. In order to guarantee anonymity of names, we asked subjects to give us oral consent to participate in the study. The interviewees read a project information sheet before the interview addressing all of these concerns. It was also made clear in the project information sheet that the subjects could terminate the interview at any time if they felt uncomfortable or they simply didn't want to answer a question or continue with the interview.

Results

As mentioned in the abstract, results were extremely varied. There were patterns, however, found among groups of the same age, or with other similar characteristics.

Overall, we interviewed 7 gay males, 3 lesbian women, 5 bisexual women, and one straight male professor whose gay son graduated from St. Olaf in 1992. Results will be discussed in the order of questions asked.

Self Identification: “Coming Out”

Most subjects came-out between 7th and 12th grade, although many acknowledged having feelings or suspicions earlier in life. This is very typical, according to the accounts we read in Howard and Stevens. The high school years are a period of self-awakening for everyone and sexual exploration is common. Unfortunately, the high school environment is not always the most welcoming. Some interviewees experienced some sort of personal struggle:

“I figured it out when I was 16. I always felt like I was different than everyone else and I didn’t know why. First they said I was gifted in school, but I said ‘nope I’m not different because I’m gifted’. When I was 16 I noticed that I was attracted to girls and I labeled myself a lesbian. That explained all of my problems.” (Elizabeth)

Others felt they had always known their sexuality:

“I’ve always known. It was never a tough experience for me. When I learned what the words were, I said ‘well, that’s me’.” (Travis)

Coming-out accounts often had a similar pattern of confiding to a peer first before facing parents or the general public. This is a way of “testing the waters” to see who is a safe listener:

“First I came out to a random person on AIM, because I needed to come out to a stranger before I came out to someone who mattered to me. Then I came out to a couple friends at school, my Catholic high school. My parents are Baptist fundamentalists, they cried a lot. They wanted to send me to reorientation therapy, and all that. My Mom’s brother is gay, and they have accepted it now.” (Peter)

“I came out my freshman year of high school. At the time I had a girlfriend so I came out to her and to other friends. My mother had a lot of struggles because she thought that reflected onto her.” (Christine)

“I knew I was gay when I was masturbating to a porn the summer after freshman year [of high school]. I was watching man and a woman have sex and I realized I was more turned on to the pictures of the man. I told a friend on her birthday. I told her over an email. The beginning ones were all like that; ‘ never be in person’. After a while it became common knowledge. I called parents one day because another guy at school was also gay and we were going to come out to the whole school. My parents were furious when I came out at school with another student. After a while my family is really supportive.” (Jack)

Other interviewees experienced coming-out with no repercussions or difficulties:

“I came out in 9th grade. I was assigned in speech class to give a speech on something that has affected my life profoundly. I decided to come out to the entire class. It seemed like the easiest way to set things straight and it was fine.” (Travis)

“My parents are ridiculously liberal, so they were okay with it.” (Lara)

One student had a particularly beautiful coming-out story:

“My parents got divorced and my mother decided she was gay. She fell in love with a woman she knew in middle school, high school and college. I decided that seeing the relationship my parents had, I was turned off by guys. I thought ‘Look at my mom, she’s with a woman and they can have a fantastic relationship and it can be healthy.’ Three months after my parents came out to me, I came out to them.” (Melissa)

Most interviewees agreed with the idea that many GLBT students are afraid to come out at St. Olaf. Reasons given usually had to do with the conservative nature of the school, the religious affiliation, and a student body that is generally wary of alternative lifestyles.

“I have a number of friends who have really struggled with coming out during their time at St. Olaf. It’s not the best atmosphere to come out here.” (Allison)

“It is a Christian college and it carries the stigma that you get with Christianity that they aren’t accepting to homosexuals. I don’t think that’s true of the college but people carry that stereotype.” (Elizabeth)

Gender Differences:

The general consensus was that there are more “out” gay men than lesbians at St. Olaf. However, a few interviewees thought that lesbians just go unnoticed, for various reasons:

“Lesbians are less vocal and less visually evident.” (Peter).

“St. Olaf is male dominant as far as coming out. There are so many social attributes attributed to gay men, so it’s easier to point to them.”(Christine)

“There are more gay men out than lesbians. Why? Because being a girl and being a homosexual puts them in an isolation category. Men wear the clothes and have girlfriends and they hang out together. Straight girls and gay men get along really well, whereas straight men and gay women don’t have that sort of connection”. (Elizabeth)

One student had a different take on the number of lesbians to gay men. She explained why people only think that there are more lesbians at St. Olaf:

“Obviously there are more girls on campus, but it’s probably even. It’s always easier for girls to be out anywhere you go. That’s why people get the impression that there are more lesbians here.” (Kara)

Another student derived her answer from stereotypes:

“The stereotype is that St. Olaf is where all of the gay men are. It’s been implied to me that that’s because St. Olaf has a strong music program. The whole artsy, gay male thing...there is more of a gay male group here.” (Allison)

Gendered Experiences

There was an array of answers to this question. It appeared to be a hard question to answer for the subjects, because they seemed to only have information pertaining to their own gender. The patterns of queer theory can be seen in this section as far as the fluidity of gender it provides for. The gender a person chooses to identify with greatly influences their life experience. For the most part, interviewees talked about the differences in the level of difficulty to be out for lesbians and gay men:

“There are different stereotypes that go on with each. That’s how they differ. Being a gay man is almost easier than being a lesbian. People aren’t as shocked

about it.” (Travis)

“The experience of being a lesbian in comparison to gay men is a very different thing. Going back as far as the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic, where men were forced to come out, so we created an environment where it was safer for men to come out. It was part of the healing process. Lesbian women were less affected by that, so they weren’t given that cultural permission to come out and heal. I think there are still echoes of that. So I think the lesbian community is less noticeable.” (Krista)

Many interviewees thought it was easier for women than for men to be out:

“It’s easier for girls. It’s not as important for women to be feminine as it is for guys to be masculine. There aren’t the same repercussions if you’re not. There is also less social pressure for women to be out.” (Kara)

“It is much easier for women to stay under the wire, under the radar. It’s easier for women to have relationships with their friends. For men it seems like a much more public kind of thing if they’re coming out or dating someone. The gossip factor is much higher for men.” (Allison)

Another person thought that it is often times easiest for bisexual students on campus:

“For bisexuals it is easy because they can hide behind a straight relationship.” (Melissa)

Comfort and Acceptance

Although many interviewees said that they do not go around telling everyone or shouting about it, and that they choose who they talk about it with selectively, most subjects described being pretty comfortable and open about their sexualities:

“I’m 80% comfortable. Some people I don’t talk about it with. If it comes up in conversation I’ll talk about it but I won’t bring it up in conversation of political nature. When talking about first dates I use what is called neutral pronouns. Well, you know, this person asked me out and we went on a date they...” (Elizabeth)

“I’m comfortable enough that if anyone ever asked me I would answer them. But I won’t just bring it up in class.” (Christine)

“I’m open. If it comes up I’ll talk about it, but I won’t just mention it.” (Dorian)

“I feel like I’m comfortable. There isn’t anyone I wouldn’t tell. I’m guarded about the situations in which I bring it up. I wouldn’t just bring it up, in order to protect the community rather than myself.” (Krista)

“As open as I’d want to be. Not going to shout about it... Never gotten a negative reaction.” (Jack)

“Very comfortable. Don’t go around with a big sign, but if someone asks me, if someone’s confused, then I will tell them that I am gay.” (Travis)

Some subjects talked about being comfortable only because that’s the way they’ve always felt:

“I’m really comfortable with it but I always have been. I think it would be different if I hadn’t been out previously. I was surprised about that fact that this place is less accepting than where I grew up.” (Kara)

“I’m very comfortable with it. It’s just the type of person I am. My family has been very supportive. Many of my friends were gay and/or had a lot of experience with the gay community. I think that helped me.” (Allison)

“Depends on who I’m with. I can tell who’s okay with it by the way they look.” (John)

Negative Experiences

Only three of the interviewees reported ever feeling threatened at St. Olaf:

“Freshman year there was a series of chalkings. Very violently anti-gay chalkings on the sidewalk. After coming out day, where there were stick figures of people holding hands, overnight people drew bloody knives and things. It surprised me. It was strange. There was a lot of outcry about them, which was good. It’s not that all people are anti-gay, it’s just that people forget that gay people exist.” (Allison)

“During week one I was too scared to tell anyone. Closeted guys have told me that I am too gay. The closeted guys are mostly sports players and the masculine stereotype.” (Peter)

“Not physically. I get emotionally threatened, just because of the struggle of finding the places and finding someone to talk to. Building friendships can be frustrating.” (Christine)

One student explained the confusion experienced by other students when her mother and her stepmother dropped her off:

“Being dropped off with both mom and step mom, students were confused and shocked.” (Melissa)

Several students had never felt threatened at St. Olaf:

“Not because I was gay.” (Jack)

“I’ve never felt threatened here. Mildly uncomfortable maybe.” (Krista)

Harassment

None of the subjects has ever experienced harassment at St. Olaf, but some know other people who have:

“St. Olaf is a really safe place physically and sexually and it would be rare to experience physical and sexual violence but there is emotional pressure. I know guys who have been made fun of and called names.” (Kara)

“Yes. People get things written on their belongings and on their doors.” (Christine)

One student describes harassment by other GLBT students:

“I’ve seen forced outings by other gay people. They feel compelled to talk about the person behind their back. They think that since they are happier they are out themselves, helping them come out will be good for them. If you have had, as a gay person, a smooth transition coming out, then it is hard to see the danger emotionally, physically, socially of doing this.” (Allison)

Many interviewees mentioned nonchalant remarks by other students:

“Never any faculty. One time I heard some [students] say, “oh that’s so gay. You’re a faggot.” That offended me. I left the room. I went back later and told

the liberal people in the room that they should have said something.” (Melissa)

“Nothing from faculty. Definitely students. The standard stuff. “That was so gay, he’s such a fag.” I’ve also heard jokes where if a gay person was telling another gay person it would be okay and funny, but from others it isn’t the same. People aren’t for the most part actively anti-gay.” (Allison)

“People use the word gay as like, “that’s so gay”. They don’t mean it. It’s an unconscious move, but it is still offensive. People say that, “that lifestyle isn’t in accordance with my beliefs, but I’ll let them be” is what I’ve heard at St. Olaf.” (Elizabeth)

One student mentioned something negative about faculty with regards to anti-gay behavior.

“I’ve heard anti-gay remarks by students. I’ve heard faculty member sort of blow off issues such as unimportant or irrelevant. Nothing direct though.” (Christine)

Discrimination

For the most part, subjects had positive things to say about faculty and administration with regards to the GLBT community at St. Olaf:

“The administration is wonderful. Thomforde is amazing in trying to move forward in accepting GLBT alumni. The alumni are getting started.” (Elizabeth)

“The faculty have been really supportive. In talking about getting a queer studies class, they have been supportive. Nothing but positive contact.” (Peter)

However, there were a few answers that showed otherwise:

“I’ve gotten only the fault of omission. Having them not consider the issue might be colored differently from a GLBT standpoint. But I’ve never had anyone give me a worse grade or anything.” (Allison)

“No, I’ve never seen any discrimination against particular people, but there are subtle things inherent in the curriculum.” (Kara)

Dating

We were curious if the dating scene helps GLBTs connect and build networks. This is another section in which the ideas of queer theory are evident. Interviewees talked extensively about the problems gender fluidity creates when looking for someone to date. Lots of people laughed nervously when this subject came up, and it seems the homosexual dating scene at St. Olaf is as awkward and uncomfortable as people perceive the heterosexual dating scene to be:

“It’s the same as the heterosexual dating scene! Not as many prospects, but since no one dates anyway it doesn’t matter.” (Peter)

“It’s incestuous—everyone has dated everyone else!” (Lara)

“It’s such a small population, a lot of people look to other campuses for partners.” (Christine’s girlfriend goes to Luther College)

“It’s pretty crummy. I’ve done more dating at Carleton than at St. Olaf. When I show interest in men, they get confused because they often assume I’m a lesbian. As for gay men, there’s lots of random hooking up, two or three weeks at a time. None of the good gay men are out (is what the gay men say).” (Allison)

We asked for a rough idea of how many GLBT couples and individuals people knew on campus. As researchers we didn’t really have a good idea how big our research pool is. The number of individuals students knew of varied from just a few to 50-60. The “couple count” turned out consistently low; no one knew more than 3 or 4.

Support/Resources

The part of our study we were most interested in was the role the institution of St. Olaf plays in these students’ lives. This was their chance to speak openly about frustrations and make suggestion for change, and many people took the opportunity gladly. Lots of people thought the St. Olaf administration was doing enough, that now what’s left is for student perception to change:

“The administration does enough. The student organizations are a problem. I dropped out of GLOW. We wouldn’t get anything done; we just sat around. The administration is doing a wonderful job.” (Elizabeth)

“St. Olaf has really done all it can regarding policies. The rest has to come from

the actual student body.” (Lara)

Others did recognize a deficiency in St. Olaf’s provisions for this community:

“Not at all. GLOW is inadequate; it doesn’t provide enough socialization. President’s Ball and the ballroom dance class both enforce traditional gender roles.” (John)

“In general, no. GLOW, I am a part of glow. People don’t go to the meeting unless they are comfortable with their sexuality. For people who are just coming out, there isn’t much support at all.” (Melissa)

“Resources exist, but not enough support. There are student organizations and library materials, but no real safe space.” (Christine)

Whether or not they saw problems with the current situation, nearly all interviewees had thoughts and suggestions for change. This was the most richly varied and interesting part of our interviews. If the reader gets anything out of this study, we hope it is ideas for what they can do to help St. Olaf change in a positive way to better accommodate the growing GLBT community.

Some suggestions came regarding academic offerings:

“Some homosexual studies programs needed (a GLBT concentration exists at U of M now). Offer more classes! At least this would acknowledge the population exists. AND give them an honor house.” (John)

“ARMS major and classes should include GLBT issues.” (Christine)

Other students recognized the weaknesses of GLOW and ways to better empower the student organization:

“At an administration level I would like to see something like the center they have at Carleton. I’ve seen it do a lot of positive things for students. I haven’t been satisfied with GLOW. But it’s a student run organization. Some professional adviser to help the students who run these organizations would be helpful. Students don’t have those kind of skills.” (Allison)

“I think that a lot of what would help the gay community has to come from students because it is a social thing. For the administration, comparing it to Carleton, their GLBT organizations (several) get a house, an office suite, a library. GLOW doesn’t get money enough from the school. I wouldn’t ask for it, but the point is that a lot of [other college] administrations do something

special for GLBT organizations and St. Olaf doesn't really do that." (Kara)

"There needs to be a paid faculty position as an advisor for those struggling and for GLOW. GLOW has a 4-year turnover, this way it wouldn't have to keep starting over. It also needs an endowment and could even give a scholarship. I've thought about there being a gender and sexuality center, a queer house, and a faculty intern position. GLOW is the wrong place to go for those closeted and dealing with angst. Carleton has many more resources than us. Things are going slowly, but I think we're on the right path." (Dorian)

Finally, several students had ideas that went beyond academic offerings and GLOW:

"At the beginning of the year JC's should bring it up; don't assume that no one in your corridor is gay." (Andrew)

"[The school] should start a conversation. People should talk about it. There is a lot of fear and many people not okay with it, fear of harassment and fear of people not liking you, thinking you're awful and wrong. Many people think gay marriage is wrong here. More things like pride week would be good. Someone should talk in chapel about this because the people that go to chapel are some of the most conservative and most against [gay marriage]." (Melissa)

Summary and Conclusions

Our findings show that for the most part sexuality is something that GLBT think about often during the course of their lives at a place like St. Olaf College. Like any young adult, these students adhere closely to the idea of stigmatization—they pick and choose who gets to see their "real" self. The fear of being judged harshly is even more present for GLBT students than for heterosexual students just worried about wearing the right clothes and looking the right way. These students have all had, be it tiny or large, some negative experience regarding their sexuality at some point. This is due to the lingering aspects of discrimination that still remain in American society, but they do not have to remain at St. Olaf, a place that considers itself so progressive and open-minded. This brings us to the final, most important part of this study—what can St. Olaf do better?

Suggestions for Change

We have all but eliminated the social acceptableness of racial and ethnic slurs, but some people don't yet think twice about labeling something "gay" when they mean "stupid." To change this situation means changing mindsets and

preconceptions of the entire student body. This could be accomplished through more awareness programs such as seminars, workshops, chapel talks, and on-campus displays that would raise general consciousness about the issues facing the GLBT population. To provide for such programs, however, would require change higher up on the administration ladder.

GLOW would benefit from more funding and a permanent adult leader. Due to the nature of GLOW as a student organization, every four years the group is dealing with a whole new group of members, leaders, and project ideas. A paid faculty position, even perhaps an intern position, would help the group continue to move forward and lose less momentum to the yearly personnel changeover.

GLOW would also benefit from representation in the honor house system.

Ideally there would be a GLOW house (co-ed, similar to the Diversity Awareness house) but if this cannot be arranged the Diversity Awareness house should include more GLBT issues in its agenda (for the past two years the DA house project has focused primarily on racial issues, and would be better named the Racial Diversity house).

A particularly glaring deficit is the lack of any GLBT representation among the major and concentration offerings of the college. There is no provision in the academic departments for any queer studies or gay history major. Carleton recently added a queer studies concentration, and it is time for St. Olaf to do at least the same. The closest we have to this is the ARMS (American Racial and Multicultural Studies), and as one student pointed out, this program should be revised to include a section on sexual minorities. Being devoted to the liberal arts, St. Olaf has so many course offerings like Sociology of Dying, Death and Bereavement; The Hero and the Trickster in Post-Colonial Literature; The Arts of the African Diaspora; and Food, Work and Culture, but no single course on gay history, culture, or the gay rights movement. It seems that to add this course would be a simple step.

Our interviewees seemed optimistic that this college campus is on the right path towards complete acceptance for GLBT students...but they are being awfully patient about it. Hopefully the day will come when we will look back on our era of discrimination against GLBT people with the same shame with which we view the fight for civil rights, the times of female subordination, and the history of anti-Semitism. Only then can we truthfully claim to be an “inclusive community that invites, welcomes, and affirms diversity as an essential component of a quality liberal arts education.” (www.stolaf.edu/community)

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www.stolaf.edu/community

www.theory.org.uk

Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

What is the GLBT experience at St. Olaf College?

This ethnographic study is designed to assess the challenges of being homosexual at St. Olaf, and whether the school is doing enough to help.

We need you! If you can give us any sort of insight on this topic, please let us interview you. Your participation will be completely confidential.

This study is a project for Soc/Anthro 373, Ethnographic Research Methods

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent

As the researcher, I affirm that the interviewee has read and understood the information on the project information sheet and has given informed consent to be interviewed for this project.

Researcher

signature x _____ Date _____

Appendix C: Interview Script

Interview Script

Thank for coming today. [Introductions, names...]. Before we begin we'd like to have you read this page so you are adequately informed in order to consent to this study.

[Supply consent form, obtain consent]

Thanks so much for your help! Ok, let's get started.

First, tell us a little bit about yourself.

Probe: age, year, major?

Great, now we'd like to get right to the study topic. It would be most helpful to us if you can explain your answers to questions and let us know anything you feel comfortable telling us that you think will be useful to this study.

Sexuality

Can you tell us what sexuality best describes you?

When did you figure this out?

(If gay) When did you "come out"? Can you describe how that was for you?

Do you feel that there are many GLBT students afraid to "come out"? Why do you think this is?

How do you perceive the ratio of lesbians to gay men at St. Olaf? Why is this?

How do you think the experiences of lesbians and gay men differ here?

Discrimination/Harassment

Now we'd like to know a little bit about how your sexuality affects your experience at St. Olaf and your perceptions of the GLBT experience at St. Olaf. Please remember that nothing you say will be attributed to you.

How comfortable are you being open about your sexuality at St. Olaf?

Have you ever felt threatened (physically, emotionally, academically) at St. Olaf because of your sexual preference?

Have you or anyone you know experienced harassment because of their sexual preference?

Have you ever heard any anti-gay remarks by fellow students or faculty members?

Have you ever felt or seen any discrimination by faculty or administration?

Dating at St. Olaf

How would you rate the homosexual dating scene at St. Olaf? How would you say it compares to your perceptions of the heterosexual dating scene?

Do you know many gay couples on campus? Do you know many GLBT students or faculty on campus?

[Faculty Only]

Does your sexuality affect the way you do your job?

Do you know of any closeted or openly GLBT faculty members? [No names please, but how did you find out this information?] How does it affect your view of them as faculty?

Does your sexuality affect your interactions with students or fellow faculty members?

Have you ever felt your own or anyone else's job security threatened because of sexual orientation?

How aware are you of what homosexual students experience at St. Olaf?

Sources of support

Do you feel like St. Olaf has enough support for GLBT students on campus?

What support systems are you familiar with? Do any others exist that you don't necessarily utilize?

Do you feel you have a voice in decisions made by the St. Olaf administration

that affect you? [Especially in regards to sexual orientation]

Do you have any GLBT or heterosexual faculty role models that are influential to your perceptions of sexuality and sexual diversity? [Again, no names, just describe how these people have affected your life]

What could St. Olaf do to make GLBT students feel more comfortable here?