

'The people there care about people'

Rap group centers on problems gays encounter

By ANNE LITTLEFIELD

"The people there care about people. This feeling has been lost in the shuffle — whether it's a relationship between two people of the same sex or of different sexes."

The speaker is John, a UT student. He is talking about a rap group for gay people of which he has been a member for about three months.

The group was started last September by Jeff Beane, a graduate student in child development, as a discussion group for gay people. Beane explained that he began it as "a kind of consciousness-raising group. Then in January I added some new things like the use of group dynamics and advertising in the Beacon."

At the weekly meetings the members might first relax by using non-verbal exercises, then

have feedback in the form of a group game or exercise.

Topics for discussion usually center around the problems gay people encounter — as Joe, another group member, said: "how to survive." An important question that comes up often is how open should gays be — how many people should they tell?

Joe said he would like to be really open about it because "I have always accepted myself." He isn't open, he said, for fear of hurting his relatives. He added, however, that of the friends he has told, all of them have accepted him.

James, who has also not told anyone except a few close friends, said only one person turned away from him after learning he was gay.

Reasons for joining the group were varied. "An increasing feeling of inability to

communicate my true feelings to people" was John's main reason for first going.

"Relationships between two people no matter what sex they are develop—they are never static. I like people and felt an inability to communicate with them—this was leading to frustration," he said.

James, a member of the group since February, said his joining the group marked "when I came out as far as accepting being gay. Up until February I had been going to psychiatrists for seven years trying to change, and my thinking process had been one of having to change."

He continued that now he accepts the fact he is gay and realizes "it's not so horrible to be this way."

It seemed that taking the first step to actually join the group

was the hardest, at least for John and James.

John said he sat for three hours beside the phone before first calling to find out where the group met. "There is such a phobia about it in society that it had built up an apprehension in me—I thought I was throwing my life away. The first time I went I felt I was not going to find what I was looking for."

James agreed, adding that it was "very frightening— I was afraid I would see somebody I knew."

Jeff Beane, the founder of the group, echoed these sentiments: "Seventy to 85 per cent of the people who come to the group for the first time are just beginning to recognize and deal with their feelings of homosexuality. They're reluctant to admit they

might be gay or bi-sexual."

He said that of the people who call to inquire about the group, only about half actually come. "This shows the pressures involved."

Joe, however, said joining the group was not too hard for him. He said he went with a friend for the first time and he always accepted himself as being gay.

The three all agreed that going every week and talking about their problems has helped them tremendously as far as accepting themselves and learning to understand other people.

They also emphasized that not only gay people would benefit from going. As John said: "We discuss such diverse topics and so many different types of problems come up that any type would be

benefited. Because of the society's ideas about gay life, people think this is a dangerous group to get into—it isn't."

James called the group "just a

bunch of people sitting around talking about anything that comes up."

For more information about the gay rap group, call 523-7288.

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