

30somethings: The “Invisible” Generation Looks for Community in Each Other

By Mark Vogel

Eighteenth and Castro (which a recent New Yorker article dubbed “perhaps the gayest address on earth” is, in all senses of the word, a climate – a feel, a look, a sense. This leads many of us to use “Castro” as an adjective: the “Castro scene” or a “Castro clone,” or we just say “That is so Castro.” At many times, particularly on weekends, it provides a glimpse of several communities intersecting at one point. On one corner, the “Castro clone” is rushing to the Midnight Sun before the drink special ends; on another, a group of Bears is warming themselves up with cups of coffee outside Starbucks. Next to them are the former clones, now in recovery, also sipping coffee. And every now and then you see a drag queen walk by or a Sister of Perpetual Indulgence promoting safer sex. We now also see parents – straight and gay – walking with their children in tow.

On one hand, this is great. Where else can you see all this diversity at one intersection? On the other hand, this intersection represents so many different realities – from the clone, to the Bear, to the drag queen, to guys who identify with one or more or none of these. One can easily wonder what is the reality? Who am I and where do I fit into this mix? Why don’t guys on one side of the corner talk to guys on the other?

When I first moved back to San Francisco two and half years ago (after spending 10 years on the East Coast), I struggled with these different communities – whether the Castro, SOMA, or the city as a whole. I struggled with identifying with any one particular scene or group, which seemed to be what most gay men here did. I was used to a less complicated (yet often boring and homogenous) Washington, D.C., where you were, for the most part, simply gay – not a Radical Faerie, a Bear, a Circuit Queen, whatever. Figuring out who I identified with most and wanted to spend time with was a bit disconcerting.

As time went on, I began to realize that it wasn’t necessary to pick just one group – that I could be as comfortable at leather bars as in a Castro bar after work. I could also enjoy more spiritual outlets for gay men to gather such as yoga and meditation or potlucks with some of the Radical Faeries.

Yet, I still felt like something was missing. I wasn’t connecting with many creative and intelligent guys, particularly around my age. I missed more cerebral discussions about politics, film, and contemporary cultural issues with other gay men. The more I thought about it, and talked about it with a close friend of mine also in his 30s, we decided that we needed some new activities for gay men

in their 30s: ways for 30-something men to meet each other offline, outside of the typical scenes (bars, clubs, the gym, and so on).

Why things specifically for gay men in their 30s? Many San Francisco gay men in their 30s have described our generation as “invisible.” We are a bit too mature to be regulars of the bar and club scene and not quite at mid-life yet. Younger men have youth and other peer-support groups, as do older guys. Many of our contemporaries are at a point where they are in relationships and not as visible as they once were. Our generation is one with a unique relationship to AIDS: We are old enough to remember the initial years of the epidemic, life before effective antiretroviral therapy. We lost a few of our friends and acquaintances but our communities were not decimated in the same way they were for many gay men now in their 40s and older. Gay men in their 30s need a social venue to meet other 30-somethings and a forum in which they can discuss issues related to guys of the same age. In addition, we can consider ways in which we serve as a sort of bridge between younger and older generations of gay men and ways in which we can also seek to share common bonds and experiences among all gay men.

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After a few months of talking and planning, we launched “30something”, an ongoing cultural salon for creative, thinking men of our age group. Has the group been a success? You bet. A core group of members quickly formed and new guys come to nearly every meeting and event we have. It really has been one of the best experiences for me so far in this city. Many of us feel like we have a new group of friends to socialize with and engage each other in interesting conversation. And any of us can organize a group of guys to go to a movie, check out an art exhibit or try a new restaurant. We’re also organizing a book club.

The beauty of life in San Francisco is the diversity of things to do and get involved in. You just have to take the initiative and get out there and do it. If 30something doesn’t sound like the right social group for you, there are many other people, groups and organizations offering opportunities to meet new people, to socialize and do new things. And if you are putting yourself out there and you’re still not connecting with the type of people you want to meet (like I and my friends were), consider forming your own group. You can be sure that there are many other men who share your interests and a desire to connect with other like-minded men.

The key is putting yourself out

there and meeting, talking to and connecting with people you ordinarily would not have the opportunity to do things with. 30something, the group we started with SFGMCI (www.isparksf.com), is just one of many groups out there. If you’re a gay man in your 30s, check out our website/Yahoo! Group at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/30something_sf/.

Mark Vogel is co-founder of 30something: A Queer Men’s Group for Celebrating Our Creative Minds and a member of the steering committee of the San Francisco Gay Men’s Community Initiative.