

Gay men challenge conservative attitudes with fashion

By Shannon Uehling
Staff Reporter

Gay men wear black leather vests, black leather pants, black leather biker hats and lots of chains and leather jewelry.

What a cliché.

Sure, bar-goers might see this stereotype in a gay bar, but for the most part, the people there would be wearing Z. Cavaricci pants and J. Crew shirts.

And in the midst of the masses of generic preps, Zach, Chad and Michael usually can be seen strutting their stuff.

To say these boys stand out from the crowd is like saying rain is wet. They have their own style that is refreshing in an otherwise conservative state.

When dressing less flamboyantly, Chad may wear a short khaki trench coat over a tight, black, cropped T-shirt and short shorts with black horn-rimmed plano glasses and a pearl necklace.

Zach might wear a white, long-sleeved shirt with white, sequin-covered shorts, an opaque white rain jacket, white knee socks and black patent-leather shoes.

Michael said he recently went to the bars with friends who copied his style of dress. They were wearing pants made out of plastic-bubbled packing material.

"I could have killed them," he said, "because I was dressed in jeans and a T-shirt."

And they usually wear makeup when they go to the clubs. It's not every day that someone such as Zach is seen sporting false eyelashes, red lipstick and four days' beard growth.

In conservative Nebraska, these things just don't go unnoticed.

Chad, Zach and Michael said they chose to subject themselves to the stares of this conservative public in order to be fashionable and to make a statement about the way people see homosexuals.

"We're gay, and it's hard enough to come out in this society as a gay person," Zach said. "So we came out as being gay, and then we went past that fact . . . to become more than gay, to become objects."

Because the nature of this article could make them targets for harassment, Chad, Zach and Michael requested their last names not be used.

In dressing up, the trio imitates the styles of "club kids" without copying them. Club kids are hosts who help promote night clubs.

"A club kid essentially is someone that is in the gay scene, dresses up to have a good time or to make a statement or to make a piece of artwork, and is noticed," Zach said.

"Usually the whole definition of them is glamour," he said. "Everything centers around glamour."

"We're probably the only people in the Midwest that do this," Michael said. "We actually inspire people to dress up."

He also said Madonna was one of his fashion influences.

"Actually, I think I'm her idol," he said jokingly.

Zach, who goes by the name "Copyright" at the clubs, compared his and his friends' lifestyles to that of Grace Jones.

"She's almost an alien because she's not even human anymore," he said. "She's so sculpted and so magnificent. It's like she's a sculpture or a piece of artwork."

"We're gay and want people to know that we exist and we can . . . do anything we want. And we want other people to be affected."

We want people to stop holding back and stop caging their minds. And open their minds to anything — anything that doesn't harm people."

Zach said he thought living in Lincoln was an opportunity for him to help change the way Nebraskans viewed gay people.

"Not that I wouldn't (work for this cause) if I was elsewhere," he said, "but I have more opportunity here because there's less people that do this."

While Zach dresses up to make a political statement, Chad uses clothing to make a fashion statement.

Chad said he hoped to one day be a stylist for fashion layouts and to act as a designer's consultant, picking out models' outfits for magazine layouts and fashion shows.

His interest in this career stemmed from his love of clothes, which began when he was young, he said.

"When I was 15 years old, I decided that when I went to high school, I didn't want to be like everybody else — didn't want to be seen like everybody else — because I was an individual," Chad said. "So that started this pattern of, like, shock value."

"I would wear the worst outfits to high school."

So what began as a way of getting attention and being an individual has turned into what eventually may be a career.

Chad knows how clothes can affect the way people see themselves, he said.

"You put on this outfit and you are this different . . . object, in a way," he said. "You can't act the same."

Not all gay men dress like this and being different is not always easy, Chad said. He and his friends must be confident at all times to pull off their unique looks.

"If you're not, people are going to see it," he said.

But Chad said he and his friends only dressed up to go to the gay bars.

"As far as Nebraska goes, we would get killed if we went anywhere else," Chad said.

"I thought that when I was 16 years old, 17 years old, and thought I was going to live forever that I could (dress up in Nebraska). But now that I'm 22 years old, I understand that there are times when you can and times when you can't."

Chad said he, Zach and Michael didn't put themselves in conflict situations if they



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