

# Gay rights: telling a callous world

In the past several months, and especially during the past two weeks, the University community has witnessed a most edifying display of interpersonal (and intrapersonal) relations. A young man, bright and honest, stood before the community and dared to tell the world who he is. And the community has repaid

*This colloquium was submitted by Gay Student Union President Peter Brehm*

his forthrightness with fear and reproach. Recoiling in fear of a Board of Trustees and citing "conflict of interest", a University administration is currently contemplating removal of Bob Elkins from his post as Resident Advisor because of his professed homosexuality and his involvement with the Gay Student Union.

Newspaper accounts have stated that the grounds for such consideration are based on a conflict between "what the GSU has as its stated aims...and what Bob's job would be as an RA..." These accounts go on to define those conflicting aims: "... to establish justice, insure understanding, provide gay social activities, promote positive self-regard, and secure recognition for homosexuals." Where is the conflict? Since when has the pursuit of justice been a despicable (condemnable, detrimental) activity? What is wrong with trying to instill in an individual a positive concept of self? What is the harm in a group of people who feel misunderstood trying to present its case and correct misconceptions? The response of some is that "homosexuality is against the law." So were integrated restaurants and schools. So were women's voting rights. So were abortions. Laws are made by people, and changed by people.

The parallel between abortion and homosexuality is an interesting one. During those years when abortion was illegal, the practice did not cease. Instead, these operations were performed in secret by unskilled "physicians" in degrading and hideous

What she, as mistress of her own destiny had judged to be beneficial to her was condemned by society. Was the woman sick? Hardly, until after her illegal act when she returned to an unloving husband or a husbandless home and there underwent the guilt, fear, anger and shame—alone. The sickness of that woman was forced on her by an uncomprehending society.

So, too, the homosexual. Unrecognized and/or feared by society, gay people are forced underground. While expressing their sexuality in the only ways allowed to them, they are under the constant pressures and fears of being found out and the shame that is associated in the thought: "what will my friends think". All of this guilt stems from knowing that their sexuality, that integral part of their being, is condemned by their peers. This issue is crucial to personal psychology; one cannot underrate the judgment of one's peers and acceptance by them in the maintenance of sound emotional health.

True self-love and appreciation though, is not based on what other people think. It stems from a glorification of self which can come only after soul searching and an intimate relationship with one's own heart and mind. The act of self-realization for a gay person is called "coming

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out". It is standing up before others and expressing one's own feelings coupled with an unwillingness to wait any longer for acceptance and approval by others. It is a cry of "I am who I am!" It is an act to be admired, not despised, and one which few people are capable of in their lifetime. It is a cry "I am", not in a defying or flaunting manner but in a materially small albeit spiritually great and self-assertive manner which can only be based on an intimate understanding of one's self and his environment. For a

reassurance that self-love and self-knowledge are attainable goals as well as the model of person who is secure in his sexuality. More importantly, he can be a guide to those who are themselves struggling with their own sexual identity, be it straight or gay. What better criteria could there be for judging one's ability to counsel others than an individual's security in being himself?

It is difficult to conclude a statement of discussion on the topic of homosexuality. This issue creates strong feelings for many, and the feeling of gay people in recent years is this: we are tired of running. We are tired of not only

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running away from people and institutions who consider our personal lives offensive and a threat to themselves and react accordingly, but we are also tired of society running away from us, can be seen in stereotypes, discriminatory practices, and misconceptions. Gay people do not wish to force a lifestyle upon anyone—only wish to be accepted and allowed to pursue our lives free from restrictions and learned prejudices.

This applies directly to the Elkins case, where a man has considered his sexuality a complete natural part of himself and proceeded to participate in activities and programs just as any of his peers would. Note well that it was the University administration, and not Elkins, who considered this an issue and proceeded to act in a rash manner upon it.

The recent events surrounding the Ad Hoc committee and its task speak to the issues of self-realization, love and sexual expression as well as to the equally important issues of civil rights and personal liberties. In reviewing the situation, we, as members of a community, question