

Opinion

Trivializing the issues behind gay rights



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Gay Awareness Week is over. For many, it is a welcome end: the entire episode, we hear, has been fatiguing — too much attention devoted to too silly, even too disgusting an “issue.”

But this attitude is irresponsible. For those who are interested in our society and in intelligent exchange — i.e., for those that read this page — this is an issue demanding serious attention: involved is a conflict between two radically different views of what America should be.

I am writing, then, to extend our consideration of gay rights. Indeed, I believe that Gay Awareness Week, insofar as it was polemic, was itself an insufficient consideration of the issue. I believe that the matters which make this issue important were trivialized and ignored, and I am writing to raise our discussion to the level of some of the more important questions involved.

Last week, we were asked to see the gay rights movement as the modern equivalent of the old civil rights movement. Discrimination against homosexuals, we are told, is the moral equivalent, the same thing, as discrimination against blacks. Discrimination is discrimination, goes the cry, and discrimination is wrong.

Given the immediate goals of gay activists, the comparison between the two movements is natural: homosexuals seek the same sort of explicit exemption from discrimination that blacks achieved some years ago. To this extent, the analogy is fair. Beyond

this, however, arise enormous differences between the two movements, and the analogy becomes inadequate: to ignore the differences between the gay rights and civil rights movements is to trivialize both the frustration suffered by blacks and the profound change sought by homosexuals.

Blacks were a group defined by their skin color; you were black, and regardless of your behavior, you were not acceptable. Prejudice is an abhorrent thing, and the success of the civil rights movement lay in belying mistaken associations of color with behavior.

Homosexuals, on the other hand, are a group defined by their behavior. Consequently, they do not seek to prove that their behavior is the same, but that it is not significantly different. Today the gay rights movement seeks not only the acceptance of homosexuals — it seeks the acceptance of homosexuality as well.

We are asked, therefore, to believe that homosexuality is as natural as heterosexuality; that it is simply a matter of “sexual preference;” you like women, I like men — what’s the difference? Sure, straights may find the homosexual act disgusting, but who’s to say that gays don’t find the heterosexual act grotesque?

Who, we are asked, is to say what is normal, or what is right?

The ultimate goal of many gay activists is a society that does not distinguish between homosexuality and heterosexuality; between the homosexual lifestyle and the heterosexual lifestyle, between husband and husband, wife and wife, and husband and wife. Witness the lesbian couple that visited the University last Friday: the proud parents of a daughter fathered by a homosexual acquaintance. Now I do not suggest that we all conform to a particular lifestyle, but this arrangement, for one, is in conflict with the fundamental organization of our society: I do not think we should treat it as equally acceptable or desirable as the traditional family life.

What is involved, as all will admit, is a question of morality. Gay activists argue that homosexuality is no more destructive to society than heterosexuality, that homosexuals are not going to hurt anyone and that the only real objection to their behavior is a fundamentalist morality that should not become a matter of public policy. This nation was founded, after all, on a separation of Church and State.

What we have here is the oft-heard argument that the government has no right “legislating morals,” insisting that certain behaviors and lifestyles are right and others wrong. This is an extreme position, one entirely at odds with our 200 year history: if accepted, it would be an enormous

triumph for extreme advocates of individual liberties, and I think the activists we heard last week are trivializing their own cause by ignoring this.

We have heard much poignant testimony to the abuse that all gays encounter. Certainly, many of the attitudes described are childish and vicious, and should be ended. But in seeking to overcome such extremes, we must be aware of the philosophy the gay rights movement insists we accept, and of the legal precedents we may establish: with issues this important, emotional, visceral responses are not enough.

The tension between individual liberty and social morality is perhaps the most vexing national issue of our time. It must always be considered, and considered intelligently. I myself am not sure how I stand on the subject; I believe that some sort of morality is essential to society, but I am also aware that we must not become locked into unfounded, unnecessarily discriminatory “moralities.”

Because of this dilemma, I am not sure how I stand on the basic issue of gay rights, I do know, however, that I refuse to be swayed by fallacious argument, and I believe the University deserves far better than it has heard so far.

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