

The Middlebury Campus - May 9, 1991 - Opinions

Open your mind, Mr. Upham

by M. Carrington Spangler

I am writing in response to David Upham's article in the 25 April edition of the Campus. I find his views rather disconcerting and cached in a rationalized sophistry which does not hold to careful examination, even his own.

Mr. Upham argues that his right to free speech and discussion of controversial issues are being limited by the College's inclusion of homosexuality in its sexual harassment policy. I think it rather significant to note that homosexuality was chosen as his example. Why were not potentially offensive comments about Afro-Americans taken as the example since they do represent more of the population of the campus? I do not see Mr. Upham crying out for the "right" to call someone a "nigger" or a "darkie" on campus. I think that even Mr. Upham realizes that this is unacceptable. Yet Mr. Upham would not find epithets against gays and lesbians as deserving a place beside other minorities in the harassment policy. Quit the sophistry, Mr. Upham, even you should be able to tell the difference between "negative comments" and "expression of opinions." Expression of opinions cannot be called out from passing cars, dorm windows, etc. Hate speech

thrives there.

I think that perhaps part of his argument might be that homosexuality is a sexual disorder. Homosexuality is more than sex, just as heterosexuality is more than male-female genital contact. We, too, have our own culture including our own history, art, literature, and even language. This culture is just as rich and diverse as any culture.

Just as it is impossible to sketch out a “normal white heterosexual male” it is just as impossible to accurately draw a portrait of the “normal white homosexual male.” We are not one big happy family just because of our sexual orientation, just as the heterosexual world is not. Before attempting a true dialogue of sorts, I think Mr. Upham should truly question why he believes what he does, including questioning the sources that he uses to back up his beliefs. His numerous articles in *The Campus* belie the fact that he is being prohibited from expressing his views. Yes, I found his views repugnant, yet has he been called into the Dean’s office?

Mr. Upham in his 25 April article eventually concedes that the policy “allows for ‘classroom’ discussion of homosexuality” which he finds insufficient. Before finding this insufficient, he should perhaps consider participating in one of these courses. He makes reference to a course during Winter Term taught by the Psychology Dept, entitled, “Controversies in Psychology.” Contrary to what Mr. Upham would have us believe, the topic pertaining to homosexuality

was in fact its origins, i.e. genetic or environmental, and not whether homosexuality itself is in fact a controversy in the field of psychology. Perhaps Mr. Upham would have been better informed had he taken this class. Another class was offered in Winter Term as well. This class also felt the absence of Mr. Upham's in depth analysis and well-thought out opinions. The course was entitled, "Gay, Lesbians, Straight Dialogue: Can We Really Talk To Each Other." The class required very little time commitment and was on a pass/fail/ honors grading criteria. None who wished to audit was turned away from this course. I do not remember Mr. Upham seeking out this forum for discussion, however. Nor has Mr. Upham sought out for "non-classroom" discussion any members of the MGLBA during the current year. Both Jeff Spencer, convener of MGLBA, and I sit within 10-20 feet of Mr. Upham during a French class three times per week. Never have we been approached to engage in the meaningful dialogue which so eludes Mr. Upham.

Equally as elusive as this dialogue are the sources from which Mr. Upham bases his "evidence." After searching the CD ROM catalogue, neither Mr. Dilenno nor his masterpiece "Homosexuality: The Questions" seem to exist even in the Library of Congress, much less in the on-line catalogues to which Middlebury has access. Taken out of context, Mr. Upham would seem to be supported by the quote from Mr. Dilenno in any case.

In 1976, the DMSI-III, the standard diagnostic manual for mental disorders, does indeed make reference to homosexuality. This diagnosis on page 72, however, reflects the distress experienced by those who feel homosexual arousal or the absence of heterosexual arousal when a heterosexual relationship is desired. In the other standard diagnostic manual, another reference is made to this “adaptation.” However, again the diagnosis concerns the, “persistent and marked distressed about one’s sexual orientation.” (Psychiatric Diagnostic Interview Manual, 1983, p.296) In both instances, homosexuality is not in question. The anxiety felt is in response to entering a hostile heterosexual environmental, and an awareness of the ill-treatment of homosexuals in our culture.

His reference taken from the Psychiatric Annuals of 1976 remains in question. I could not find these in Vermont, only in Massachusetts and New York, Mr. Upham’s home state. How then could he have recently done this research? During spring break perhaps? Not likely. I also find it problematic that his elusive sources are so old. He would contend that homosexuality remains a controversy in psychology, meaning that there still remains a chance that the Mr. Upham’s of the world will once again become the establishment, the norm. The only thing controversial about homosexuality seems to be opinions about it by the students here on campus. This is a beginning, but not an understanding.

Mr. Upham seems to take refuge in the teachings of the Catholic Church. Look out, David, there is a leak in the cathedral roof. Homosexuality remains a controversy there, too. Try taking a look at Richard McBrien’s “Catholicism” for a beginning on where the dialogue sits within your safe place. But look out, David, “intrinsic evil” lurks in your Church: I too am Catholic. I look forward to the day when a meaningful dialogue with you will be possible, but that will involve you knowing as much about my culture as I do about yours. We could, however, start with coffee in the Crest Room sometime, if it’s free speech you are really worried about. Relax, I promise not to oppress you for your ignorance.