

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CXII, Number 174, 11 November 1988 — Students rally against harassment on campus
[ARTICLE+ILLUSTRATION]

Students rally against harassment on campus

By Joshua C. Gillette

Over 150 people gathered on Low Plaza yesterday to hear speakers bitterly attack Assistant Football Coach Tom Gilmore, members of the football team, and other University administrators in a Stop Harassment on Campus (SHOC) rally organized by the Columbia Gay and Lesbian Alliance (CGLA).

According to CGLA, Gilmore and football players left comment cards expressing anti-homosexual sentiment in Johnson Dining Hall after observing Jame Mukherjee, a worker there, kiss a male friend goodbye.

Mukherjee, who is not homosexual, complained to CGLA, which has

since publicized his complaints and brought them to Columbia College deans and University administrators.

CGLA has also issued demands, with the backing of the Columbia College Student Council, that Gilmore be fired, that University President Michael Sovern make a statement condemning harassment based on sexual orientation, and that a similar condemnation be issued by the Athletic Department.

Gilmore wrote a letter to CGLA soon after the charges were made public, saying his complaint was directed solely at Mukerjee's allegedly unsanitary practices while working, not at the kiss. Since the letter, Gilmore has continued to deny the charge of homophobic harassment.

Sovern has appointed a three-person committee of administrators and faculty to investigate the incident.

CGLA members and other speakers at the rally blasted administrators for being unresponsive to the charges.

"We are being stonewalled by an assistant football coach who, though he claims to be unbiased, refuses to meet with us," said Jeff Ordower, CC '89, CGLA co-chair. "We will not let the administration shove the problem under the rug and thereby roll out the red carpet to bigotry and hatred."

Mukherjee said the wording of Gilmore's comment card indicated that the coach was concerned primarily with the kiss.

"He used the wrong verb tense—we weren't kissing, we kissed. He discussed with me my kissing, not my jeans," Mukherjee said.

CGLA has also charged that Gilmore led members of the football team to jeer at Mukherjee the day after the first comment card was submitted, and to submit two other cards, reading "Get the homo's [sic] out of dining services you are encouraging AIDS die!" and "Get rid of the fags who serve

the training table.”

“This man [Gilmore] spread homophobia among his players,” Mukherjee said.

Pierre Louis, GS '89, excoriated Sovern for not responding to incidents of harassment, leading the crowd in a chant of “Where was Mike?” —a chant recalling Senator Ted Kennedy’s attack on President-elect George Bush, “Where was George?”

“I’ll tell you where Mike is—Mike is a coward. Mike is probably downtown somewhere with some of his white male buddies making racist and sexist jokes and having a good time,” Louis said.

Barnard College Senator Veena Sud, BC '89, recounted emotionally how she and other women had been attacked and then muffled by men when they attempted to report violence.

“I’m sick and tired of hearing my sisters and brothers screaming and nobody listening,” she said.

Columbia College Senator Warigia Bowman, CC '90, charged that administrators are more eager to investigate victims of harassment than those who harass others, and blasted deans for trying to have Mukherjee negotiate with those who allegedly harassed him.

“I don’t negotiate with the [Ku Klux] Klan,” she said.

Violence against homosexuals has surged in New York City in recent years, giving Columbia students reason to be afraid, said Columbia College Senator Tom Kamber, CC '89. Kamber included the behavior of Gilmore and the football team in a list of anti-gay actions.

“When it seems clear to us that a Columbia football coach has incited a group of large men to practice homophobic harassment, and when the University takes weeks to resolve the issue, we have reason to be afraid,” Kamber said.

“When our fellow students, at only the hint of a homosexual relationship, immediately begin to harass their target, when they place frightening cards in a suggestion box, when they jeer and point, we should know where these actions lead, and we should be afraid,” he added.

Urging victims of harassment to confront their attackers, he said, “We must isolate their bias, draw it out from its protective shield of humor. No longer can we accept that a harasser is ‘only joking.’ Bias is not funny.

“We should not want bigots to feel comfortable around us. We’re going to have to spoil a few jokes, create a few awkward situations, make ourselves a little unpopular—then we might make some progress,” Kamber continued.

Kamber said no one at Columbia will be able to “walk

without fear” until “no one spits out the word ‘faggot’ without turning some heads, no one screams ‘bitch’ off a fraternity stoop without fear of reprisal—in short, when bias is no longer socially acceptable.”

Following the rally, about 25 people went to Hamilton Hall to file complaints with Columbia College deans about what they said was insensitivity of the administration and security towards incidents of harassment on campus.

“We need to voice our opinions to the people who run the school,” said Daniel Levine, CC ’91.

At today’s meeting of the University Senate, resolutions calling for stricter University policies against racial, religious and sexual harassment will be introduced.



SPECTATOR/QUINTANA ROO DUNNE

Veena Sud