

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

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Parade discrimination was clear homophobia

By Shannon Halkyard

If the titling of March 24's column "Gays at parade are a sham(rock)" was an attempt to get readers to pay attention to the pathetic editorial, it unfortunately worked as I read the article. Why does *Spectator* entertain the need to offend the gay, lesbian, and bisexual populations on our campus? I came to Columbia so that I could live in a non-discriminatory environment where conceivably I would not be criticized for my sexual orientation. Somehow the editors of *Spectator* manage to dig up these stone-age intellectual infants who would criticize my orientation and print their half-assed arguments. In addition to the most recent of these offensive editorials was artwork which was also incredibly homophobic, depicting the letter lambda nailed to a bleeding cross. Permit me to criticize the article, written by Rit Aggarwala.

and lesbians are not inherently excluded from the entire Catholic Church, whose doctrine has changed over time and is constantly being disputed, from within as well as from without. Dignity is an organization comprised of gay and lesbian Catholics, with two sizable congregations in New York City alone. The members of the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization (not the Irish Gay and Lesbian Organization, thank you) do not claim to be symbols of traditional conservative Irish Catholicism (but who is to say that they cannot be symbols of Irish Catholicism?), but they do claim to have the right to celebrate their Irish Catholic heritage in the St. Patrick's Day parade, which they correctly state is a public event--if this event were truly private, why would New York politicians bother to march? Although the ILGO may not be a bastion of conservative Catholicism, they are Irish and Catholic and gay, lesbian, and bisexual, and they, as well as the Hibernians, have every right to march in a parade which celebrates their heritage.

Aggarwala claims that "*the* Shannon J. Halkyard is the Co-Chair and Fundraising Chair of the Lesbian Bisexual Gay Coalition.

Hibernians' wish to exclude the group is not homophobia; it is a universally applied standard based on adherence to Catholic doctrine... No one expects the Gay Pride parade to include skinheads who might wish to march.' But universal homophobia is still homophobia. Conservative Catholic doctrine is still homophobic. One of the great deceptions homophobes have constructed as a defense is that homophobia is not personal--but of course, how could anyone fail to realize that this is no less personal than racism, sexism, and all other bigotry. Additionally, if skinheads wish to celebrate gay pride or St. Patrick's Day for that matter, they should be allowed to march, provided they do not engage in any violence or attempt to disrupt the parade.

Aggarwala continues, *"but those angry parade marchers must not be confused with the gay bashers who attack gays because they are gay. The parade watchers were angry because they saw their institutions*

being invaded and their rights being suppressed. It is difficult for Catholics to separate peaceful gay groups from the violence of ACT-UP and Queer Nation. Those groups have become vehicles for bashing Catholics, interrupting services, and preaching hatred against the Church.'' Then with which gay bashers should the angry parade marchers be confused? If the members of the ILGO were not gay and lesbian (and some are probably bisexual), so some of the prejudiced parade marchers attacked them by throwing glass bottles and other projectiles at the ILGO members. This is gay bashing. Moreover, the dispute was with ILGO's petition to march in the St. Patrick's Day parade, not with the Queer Nation or ACT UP, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (no hyphen, thank you). The fact that certain Catholics are incapable of distinguishing between peaceful civic groups, such as ILGO, and direct-action groups, not violence oriented, as Rit Aggarwala suggests, should not excuse their

discriminating against lesbians and gay men (to say nothing of discrimination against bisexuals).

“There is a difference between homophobia--the dislike of homosexuality--and gay bashing. There are many decent people who believe that homosexuality is wrong, and they have every right to believe that. It is not a question of bigotry; it is not the person they cannot accept, but the person's sexual actions.”

To say that homophobia is the dislike of homosexuality is quite an understatement. Rather, homophobia is the intense fear and hatred of persons who identify as or are perceived as homosexual or bisexual and also of potential homosexual activities. Additionally, I believe that Rit Aggarwala fails to understand what homosexuality is, which is as much more than sex as heterosexuality is. Homosexuality is better understood as the potential for a person to form primary loving relationships with members of that person's gender, i.e. “fall in love,” “be romantic,” etc., as well as

“have sex.” Understanding this more accurate definition, I hope Rit Aggarwala can realize that homophobia is bigotry, as it displays discrimination against a human being for how that human being expresses and experiences love as well as sex. Such discrimination can have no moral foundations and can in no way be construed as decent. Furthermore, sexual orientation is as much part of a person as any other characteristic a person has which distinguishes that person from others. If someone cannot accept a person’s sexual orientation, then that someone is incapable of accepting the person. Furthermore, the Hibernians have been implicated as having worked with the Irish Emerald Society to incite gay-bashing. This implication demonstrates a rather hypocritical aspect of the Hibernians, considering that they were founded to protect the Irish Catholics, who were a minority at that time, but now see fit to discriminate against another minority.

Aggarwala ends, “*by attempting to keep the gay group out of the parade, they have not oppressed anyone.*” But as long as Irish Catholic gays, lesbians, and bisexuals are not allowed to celebrate their heritage along with conservative Irish Catholics, they are being oppressed.

Unfortunately, the ILGO was not permitted to march in New York’s St. Patrick’s Day parade while other organizations with “political agendas” (war veterans groups) and no specific ties to Ireland or Irish Americans (non-parochial schools), and conceivable less “Irish” than ILGO were allowed to march. Perhaps even more disturbing are the fact that the Hibernians’ discrimination is legal in New York and the fact that in many St. Patrick’s Day parades in Ireland, gay, lesbian, and bisexual organizations were permitted to march.