

Opening eyes and minds

John Stuart Mill's harm principle says one may restrict a person's freedom to act if the restriction is necessary in order to prevent harm to others. Our laws are founded upon this assertion. For society to function justly, there must be rules which stipulate we do not have the right to violate the rights of others.

A similar premise is the basis for Dalhousie's Policy on Discriminatory Harassment. Although freedom of inquiry and of expression are acknowledged as essential to university life in the proposed statement, it goes on to say "the freedoms must not, however, be exercised in ways which simultaneously deny freedom to others or make their exercise more difficult."

Last week, the official unveiling of the anti-discrimination policy was met with a mixed response. Though there were many positive remarks directed towards the committee which drafted the document, there were also a significant number of speakers expressing concern about limits on academic freedom the policy may entail. Some believe there should be no obstruction of freedom of speech whatsoever; others point to the controversy behind the definition of "hate propaganda".

It cannot, however, be argued that academic attitudes have progressed so far that the threat of discrimination is no longer pressing. For example, at the University of Cape Breton, a group of students have applied to form an Aryan Society. The Klan's literature has recently cropped up on local high school grounds. The threat of racism is very real and very close to home. Democratic freedom should not include freedom to hate.

On November 9th, three years ago, the Berlin Wall fell, the barrier marking a new-found liberty to East Germany. Sadly, a flux of racism was also freed. Ironically, this date is also the anniversary of *Kristallnacht*, one of the first systematic outlashes of violence against Jewish people in Germany before World War II.

Early this week, thousands of Germans gathered to commemorate this dark milestone in German history and show disapproval of recent demonstrations of neo-Nazi sentiment sparking throughout the country. "When all the foreigners leave then who will we hate?", read one placard. "Those who forget the lessons of the past are destined to relive it," said another.

If we are truly committed to fostering a harmonious, welcoming "diverse" Dalhousie community, we must understand that a policy officially asserting intolerance as unacceptable is necessary. This is not to mention the prejudicial bias inherent in our learning. Whether it be history, philosophy or biology, the vast majority of our studies still concentrate on works of dead, white European heterosexual men. Thus, there exists a multitude of perspectives which have been consistently overlooked by Western civilization. True academic freedom will only be achieved once all blinders and all barriers are removed from the academic setting.

Miriam Korn

Envisioning a brave new world

Emotions within words were spinning in the Green Room of the SUB on November 4 as students, faculty and administrators participated in the forum on discriminatory harassment. A committee was working on a proposed statement on the subject for over a year. This proposal outlines the rights and responsibilities of members who will sit on the committee on discriminatory harassment, and procedures to be followed on receipt of a complaint. The purpose of the forum was to allow open discussion on the proposal and to cite example of situations which may be applicable to the statement.

Providing these examples was an important function of the forum as there have been concerns regarding the often grey line between academic freedom and harassment. The examples were certainly effective in presenting the difference. Three groups of students (the Women's Collective, the Bisexual, Gay and Lesbian Association of Dalhousie, and the Transition Year Students) presented scenarios of discriminatory harassment. The skits were jolting to the viewers and the performers alike. Even more disturbing was the realization that these scenes could happen on any campus, do happen everywhere and have happened at Dalhousie. The examples cited by the members of the committee also served to illustrate how harassment can anger and hurt.

Although the proposal will not become policy until it is approved by Senate, the need for such a statement was clearly demonstrated at the forum. The committee members should be applauded for their hard work on this clear and thoughtful policy which was well-received by the audience who, nonetheless, knew that it was not perfect. For example, it is difficult to achieve a balance between efficiency and representation in the composition of a committee on discriminatory harassment.

One of the most ubiquitous and powerful forms of racism, sexism and homophobia is silence

While the proposed statement recommends that representatives be chosen from several groups at Dalhousie (such as the Black Canadian Students' Association), a number of unorganized groups (for example, students with disabilities) will not have automatic membership.

Stimulating points were raised during the discussion. One comment was that the policy will not stop, for example, B-GLAD! posters from being torn down - it will not stop racism, sexism, homophobia.

No, it will not. There is no possible mechanism, policy, law in the world that can erase these from human nature. Some of the most biting forms of discriminatory harassment are simply not measurable. In its definition of the term, intimidation, personal vilification, and derogatory speech, and expression are included, but one of the most ubiquitous and powerful forms of racism, sexism, and homophobia is silence. More often than not, it is the person that is "different" from everyone else (whether by colour, religion, sexual orientation) who pretends to look over notes at the start of class while the room about her/him is buzzing with chatter. Even if the individual is not entirely ignored in the academic or political setting, what happens after class? Society still has some way to go before diversity is accepted on a social and personal level.

However, maybe it is not something about which to be overly discouraged. In the past few years, society has progressed rapidly towards welcoming differences. No, this proposed policy will not abolish hate. It is not sufficient condition and yet it is a necessary condition. It is a start - it is something. One would hope that this laudable proposal, with some fine-tuning, will be approved and that the university will have the courage to implement it when necessary.

Mausumi Banerjee



LETTERS

The Dalhousie Gazette welcomes letters to the editor. Letters should not exceed 300 words in length and should be typed and double-spaced. The deadline for letters is Monday noon before publication.

Letters may be submitted on Mac or IBM-compatible 3.5" disk.

Call for tolerance

To the editor:

If we are to evolve, we must learn to dispense with hate and think with clear yet compassionate logic. By focussing on past injustice we tie ourselves to the millstones of history, enabling us to do nothing but suck the weeds at the bottom of an intellectual ocean.

We refer, specifically, to the 'Blacks on Black' column as featured in the November fifth edition.

To begin, we do not wish to divulge our race (or races) or our gender or our sexual orientation, as, unlike many in these times, we do not find this to be the focus of our existence. We exist on the premise that the individual is per-

fectible, and, while not denying the effects of prejudice and hate believe that, in essence, life is what you make it: accept your limitations and they are yours.

To the article in question. Under the guise of a column on the movie treatment of Malcolm X, we are treated to a racist's creed. The advocacy of Islam extremism as a tool for "racial" liberation is no different, nor more excusable, than the use of Christianity for a similar purpose. To take a paragraph at random: "They (members of the Nation of Islam, including the author of the column in question) are politically, economically and religiously mature and established. They don't chase after women. They don't chase after men. They are kind, courteous, upright and clean." Now, please take this and changes "Nation of Islam" for "Ku Klux Klan". Like the

NOI, they claim to speak for a "race" and for God. The current leader of the NOI, Louis Farrakhan, believes that blacks are genetically superior to other races. He has said that Jews afflict the blacks. Yet, according to the author, the NOI are not racists, bigots, and anti-Semites, but are courteous, upright, etc. Yet we must compare this claim of tolerance with a contradiction earlier in the article: Adams states that Farrakhan believes that whites are devils - hardly the voice of tolerance or respect. One must question the credibility of Mr. Adams, especially when he claims to be speaking of and for his "race". There are other internal contradictions throughout which illustrate again and again the muddled way in which Mr. Adams seems to think. To whit:

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