

# The Kelsey Fisher file: Strident letter stirs trouble

## Fisher's letter did violate ODE policy

When the *Oregon Daily Emerald* published a series of articles about same-sex relationships during Gay and Lesbian Pride Week two weeks ago, we expected it to be controversial. Indeed, we hoped people would talk about the series and debate the still unsettled matter of gay and lesbian rights.

But we must admit we were a little unprepared for the response that we got from one reader, Kelsey Fisher, and the furor she would cause.

In the last week, there has been a constant, ever-swelling outcry over the *Emerald's* Letters to the Editor policy because of Fisher's submission "We are moral," which appeared May 1.

In her letter, Fisher responded to comments made by Robin Madell and Maureen Burke in an April 23 *Emerald* article. The article was a feature about Madell and Burke's upcoming wedding and plans to start a family. Fisher, in no uncertain terms, declared her opposition (which stems from religious reasons) to Madell and Burke entering into such a relationship.

But Fisher didn't stop at stating opposition. She went on to describe Madell, Burke and all lesbians as having "psychological and sexual problems." Fisher said that Madell and Burke would pass these problems on to any children they had, and so were unfit to be parents. At this point, her letter moved from the realm of free speech toward defamatory personal attack.

Many *Emerald* readers were incensed at the attack. We received almost 30 responses to Fisher decrying her for bigotry. Many questioned the *Emerald's* judgment in printing the letter.

Because the *Emerald* Letters section is designed to be an open forum, we try to print all letters we receive. Our policy for publication is simple: A letter must be 250 words or less and refrain from personal attack. Actions, beliefs, declarations; these are suitable debatable matters for the Letters section. Simple character assassination through untrue or defamatory claims is not.

We admit parts of Fisher's letter can be seen as defamatory, and the *Emerald* should have asked Fisher to remove those lines. The first amendment guarantees the right of free speech, but doesn't give one the opportunity to libel someone.

If we had to do it again, we would still have printed Fisher's letter, sans personal attack. The *Emerald* Letters section should be a place where students and members of the community can air their views. There should be as little editing of letters as possible. It is not our job to tamper with or pass judgment on the opinions of submitted letters.

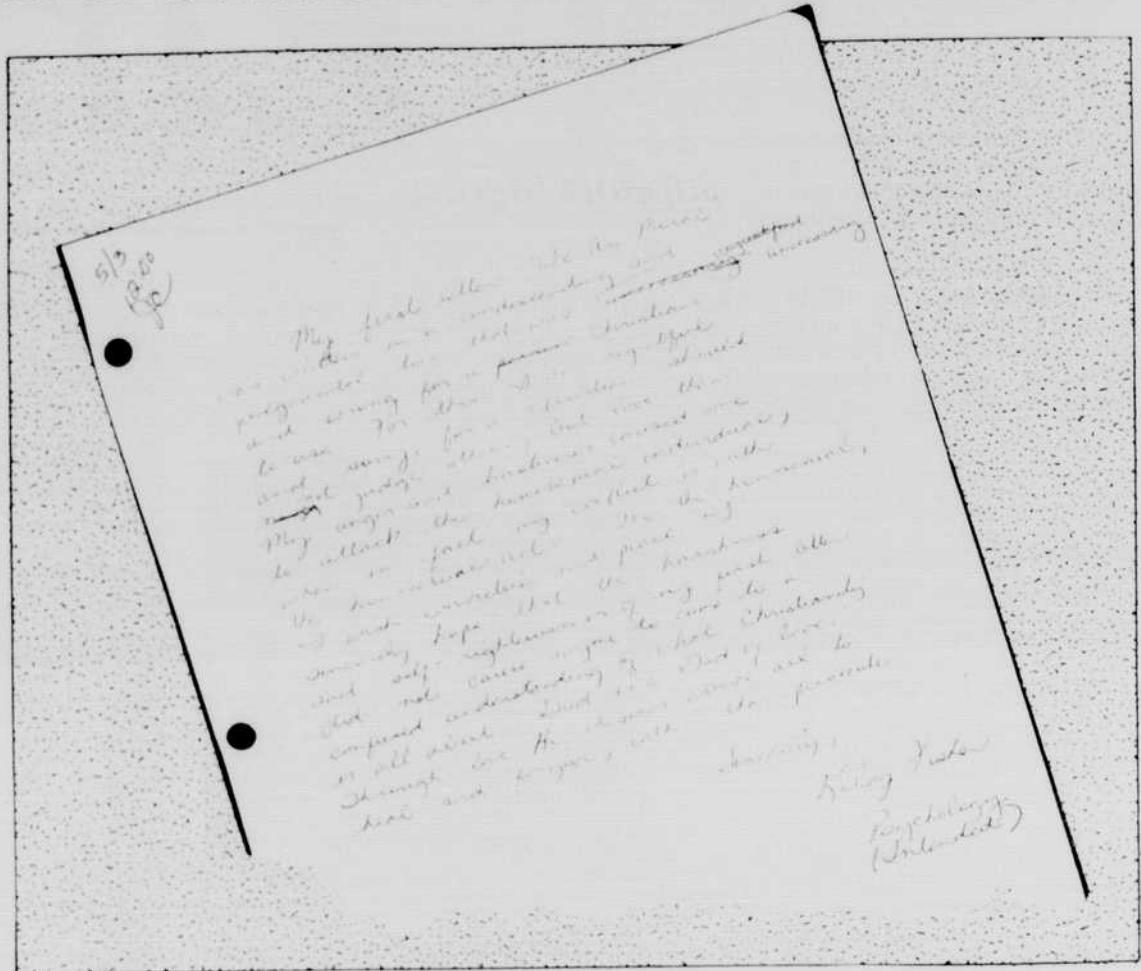
Fisher had the right to express her views on homosexuality. The many people who responded to her letter also have the same right. No matter how you personally feel about Fisher's words, her opinion does have some backing on this campus. There are people who share a common viewpoint with Fisher, and those people should not be denied the opportunity to speak.

Now, after stating how much we want Letters to be an open forum, we have to close the Fisher matter. As you will notice, all the letters in today's section are representative responses to Fisher's letter. There were many more submitted than appear here, but we cannot print all of them. To do so would tie up the Letters section for the next two weeks easily, and would prevent other authors and subjects from appearing.

And more importantly, Fisher seems to have realized herself she was possibly over the line. Last Friday, we received a second letter from her, this one an apology for her May 1 stridency. This apology appears at the end of today's Letters section.

We hope this will end the argument. We apologize to readers who submitted letters that will not run. We understand the time you spent was valuable, and we appreciate your response. But we feel it's time to put the Letters section back on track rather than to continue a round of finger-pointing and name-calling.

We urge everyone to continue to use the Letters and Commentary sections as ways to present an opinion to the campus. The *Emerald* hopes that the problems of last week will not keep students and community members from submitting letters. We also appreciate the opportunity to remind readers of our Letters policy, and to remind them that adherence to it will result in a level-playing field for all.



## Letters

### Speaking for us

Who are you to speak for "us," Kelsey Fisher (*ODE*, May 1), and what we find morally offensive? You do not speak for me or any of my friends. It's hard enough to find happiness in this world without you screaming about your narrow-minded morality.

You speak of destroying "the life of a child as well as your own." I'd much rather see the children of loving gay parents than neglected and/or abused children of straight parents. And isn't it your God that teaches looking past people's differences? Or if you still don't agree with people's right to live their own lives (which is certainly your right), doesn't your God teach looking past people's sins and letting Him judge?

Don't ever speak for "us" again.

Wendy Hinrich  
English

their limited horizon and poison the environment with hate. I also didn't know that there is a constitutional right for people of the opposite sex to sleep together, as you imply in your letter.

As for destroying a child's life by being raised in a homosexual partnership: A heterosexual family doesn't ensure a healthy upbringing. Just think about physical, sexual and emotional child abuse, or being exposed to spouse abuse or poverty. Divorce doesn't really help a child, either.

You might find it interesting to learn that other societies are more open-minded about same-sex relationships. At the end of last year, Denmark passed a law to legalize same-sex marriages. And since foreign legal marriages have to be recognized in this country, it is only a matter of time before the first same-sex marriages here will enjoy the same privileges heterosexual marriages do.

Christiane Mrozek  
Biology

### Open your mind

Kelsey Fisher, speak for yourself when talking about that "we are a moral, God-loving society" (*ODE*, May 1). Who are you to decide what the rest of society thinks about gay issues and same-sex lovemaking?

And who gives you the right to label every member of this society as God-loving? If you are sick and tired of listening to issues that concern your fellow humans, then don't listen. I cannot see anything disgusting in any two consenting adults' lovemaking, no matter what their gender might be.

What I do find disgusting is the intolerance shown by people who cannot see beyond

### Love is love

To Kelsey Fisher (*ODE*, May 1): Please do not be so presumptuous to speak "for the rest of us." You do not. You have not been granted the authority nor the right to do so.

Neither have you been given the right to define loving for anyone but yourself. No one person is in the position to declare what love is or is not. I found your letter and the opinions expressed far uglier than any exchange I have witnessed between truly loving couples, whether female-female, female-male, or male-male.

Perhaps if you allowed love to flow truly and honestly from

and into your heart, you would not be so quick as to deny or judge it in others. Love is love, and the more this tired planet has, the better.

Susan Kjellberg  
Eugene

### Look it up

With regard to Kelsey Fisher's letter (*ODE*, May 1), though it is not in the Constitution, perhaps you remember another quotation put down by our founding fathers. "We are endowed by the creator with certain unalienable rights, and among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Forgive me if I misinterpret, but would not living your life as you see fit (given that others are not hurt by your so living) fall under the heading of "pursuit of happiness?"

Pray tell, where is it written that Maureen Burke (or anyone else) does not have the right "to sleep with members of the same sex?" Merely because such a right is not explicitly listed in the Constitution (that oh-so-holy and sacrosanct of documents), does not mean it doesn't exist. Maybe you had best read it again, just to be sure you have the right to breathe.

If it seems that you are being inundated by demands for "gay rights" every time you turn around, perhaps you should take a closer look at these demands. Are they all that different from the civil rights demands of earlier decades? Believe me, gays and lesbians are not demanding special rights, they are demanding equal rights. Is that so difficult to deal with?

There is a phrase that goes well with this subject: "and it harm none." Go look it up.

James Drew  
Computer science  
Monday, May 7, 1990