

Religion, public policy should stay separate

The continuing efforts of groups nationwide to put anti-gay measures on the ballot is meeting strong electorate resistance. With the exception of Oregon and Idaho, initiatives planned for the November ballot in eight other states failed to qualify or were dropped due to legal flaws.

This is a good sign. Many of the states rejecting the discriminatory measures simply resented outside influences (read Oregon Citizen's Alliance) attempting to formulate religious values into public policy. This is especially true in the case of Washington and Nevada.

But in Oregon, the OCA gained more than enough signatures to get its measure to deny homosexuals "special rights" on the ballot for the third time in six years. But even with the signatures, there is a chance the measure could be ruled unconstitutional before the November 8 election, which brings up an interesting point.

The OCA and other so-called traditional family values coalitions are using the free speech rights of the First Amendment on one hand to push their agenda of discrimination on a targeted minority. In this case, the mark happens to be gays and lesbians. On the other hand, they ignore the section that restricts the establishment of religion into law but also protects the free exercise of that religion.

This is the dilemma of groups like the OCA who justify their actions on the basis of fundamental christian beliefs.

The Constitution guarantees religious freedom to every individual. But the practice of that religion must stay within the parameters of spirituality and away from legislation. Just as the Supreme Court removed the moral equation from legalized abortion with Roe vs. Wade and instead placed emphasis on the sanctity of privacy and choice, citizens must likewise separate personal morality from the making of laws that discriminate against certain sections of society.

When one group decides what is moral for the rest of society and decrees those personal beliefs into law, then majority tyranny becomes institutionalized. By taking those religious and moral values out of the realm of spirituality and inserting them into public policy through the conduit of the initiative process, our society is condoning the establishment of theocratic law.

The Founding Fathers, ever vigilant to the dangers of either religious domination or persecution based on religious belief, worded the Constitution to prevent the very actions currently being propagated by certain fundamentalist Christian groups against the homosexual community. As a society, we must remain wary of those who would single out any minority for discrimination, whether on the basis of skin color, culture or sexual orientation.

Whether a person agrees with the homosexual lifestyle or finds it morally offensive is a personal choice. Such a choice, and the public airing of that belief, is protected under federal law. But when an organized cadre can legislate its particular brand of morality on the whole of society, life and liberty suddenly becomes a bit more dangerous.

Homosexuals do not receive special rights in this or any other state. What they should receive are equal rights. By passing laws that allow discrimination against any minority, we should ask ourselves one question. Who is next?



OPINION

Body piercing just isn't mature

Feeling squeamish? Skip back to *Calvin and Hobbes*. The culture of shame and pain began with the advent of the Sex Pistols in the late 1970s. The anarchy developing from the punk movement and pop culture included safety pins and multiple ear piercings that signified rebellion. Black hair and white skin, 'the vampire look' is run-of-the-mill today.

Multiple body piercing has become the next thing to do by the terminally hip.

The shock value of multiple body piercing has become the underlying reason for this renaissance of body modification. If you can imagine it, it can probably be pierced. For some people, it's the only jewelry they wear. Body piercing is more than simple body modification and much closer to self mutilation.

Body piercing has a rich history. Military commanders in Roman times pierced their nipples as a sign of courage. Nose rings have a history of signifying wealth and status for marriageable women. The size of the metal ring worn by a woman indicated how large her dowry was. Traditional cultures use body piercing as a rite of passage from puberty to adulthood.

All human beings modify their bodies with make-up or clothing. Diversity is what everyone strives for, to stand out in a crowd and not be like our parents. But beauty is more than skin deep.

Body piercing leaves the impression that body worship is what the American tribe has become concerned with. Body piercing is a superficial, skin deep preoccupation with what we see on the outside and denies the significance of what really makes each person who they are. To get to know someone, you have to move beyond the surface image they present to the outside world every day.

The cost of a body piercing begins at about \$30. Jewelry is extra. Tongues, genitals and eyebrows have become the most popular parts to pierce. Most



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piercers do not use painkillers because pain is part of the process. It's part of the ritual of being pierced and numbing nullifies the ritual. A clamp or a steel needle is used as a piercing tool.

Anyone who has experienced an operation, a broken limb or any intense physical pain can tell in graphic detail how pain is not a source of entertainment.

If people believe that piercing their cheeks celebrates their bodies, maybe they should talk with others who find this devaluing of their bodies offensive. Why deliberately hurt your body to justify getting in touch with your self?

The growing popularity of body piercing has moved it from society's margins into mainstream culture. The aesthetically unpleasing elements of body piercing are divisive.

How many employers are willing to employ someone with a stud in their mouth? Is that good for business? Saying that I will not work for someone who won't accept me for who I am denies that what I've done to my body is controversial. Do the newly initiated body piercing advocates think about the next ten years and how others will see them?

Occasionally, a performance artist or an activist uses body

piercing to draw attention to the fragility of life. The statements, made by artists who use body piercing to draw attention to the ways our society is returning to life-threatening habits, are valid.

For the most part, I don't see body piercing as a conscious-raising alternative. Trend setters aren't that sophisticated.

Body piercing is a remnant of when we'd bring a note to the teacher saying I was where I said I was; 'I have proof, here's my mommy's signature.' Going to a concert and getting a new hole in your belly button is the latest way of saying 'I'm cool, and I was there, man, really there, see my new ring?'

The length of time it takes for body piercings to heal is enough of a deterrent. Generally, it takes about a month or longer for a non-ear piercing to heal, especially the eyebrow and clavicle.

I'd like body piercing to end its reign as retro fashion wear. I don't get it. Body piercing has created a multi-million dollar business glamorizing what isn't glamorous. Body piercing is about selling attitude. To be on the cutting edge of street fashion is to be pierced.

Going out of the way to inflict personal bodily harm is indicative of a ton of issues from childhood still holding someone captive. Get over it. Don't poke holes in your wrist to address unresolved personal issues. Those of us who haven't gotten holes in places no one intended holes to be, don't need to be privy to the pain of body piercing.

Anne Moser-Kornfeld is a columnist for the Emerald.

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Oregon Daily Emerald

P.O. BOX 3119 EUGENE, OREGON 97403

The Oregon Daily Emerald is published daily Monday through Friday during the school year and Tuesday and Thursday during the summer by the Oregon Daily Emerald Publishing Co., Inc., at the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.

The Emerald operates independently of the University with offices at Suite 300 of the Erb Memorial Union and is a member of the Associated Press.

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