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OPINION

editorials, letters, commentary and perspective

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Sweeping the nation: Sudden, uncontrollable lesbianism

So maybe it isn't exactly sweeping the nation, but if we are finally able to accept biology, how hard will it be to accept choice?

Unless you've been living under a rock, you are aware of the coming out of stand-up comic Ellen DeGeneres both in real life and on her ABC sitcom, *Ellen*. With all the hype and the brouhaha leading up to "The Episode," you are probably wondering why the world needs another piece about it and, more importantly, why this two-bit columnist thinks she can bring a fresh perspective to it.

Well, I can't. What I am interested in is a side issue, one that came up in the Oprah Winfrey interview with DeGeneres and her new girlfriend, Anne Heche, cupie doll star of the natural-disaster-brings-people-together blockbuster, *Volcano*. During the interview, Ms. Heche said she chose Ellen and, consequently, lesbianism.

OPINION



Amanda Erickson

As Oprah said during the interview, "This confuses me." For a long, long time, the world has not been comfortable accepting homosexuality. It has been seen by many as a perversion that could be reversed or overcome with therapy.

Some people thought it could be "caught" like a cold and that being homosexual meant that one was solely responsible for the spread of HIV. All of these misconcep-

tions bred a paranoia about homosexuality that is only beginning to change to a more positive acceptance.

But I believe the primary reason why it has been able to be accepted is because of all the scientific research and personal testimony that points to genetic makeup. After all, it's really difficult to put someone down for the way he or she was born. The "I've always known" mantra is comforting, to say the least. But to have Ms. Heche say that she was never before attracted to the same sex and, in fact, had never considered the possibility of coming out as a lesbian is a little unsettling to me. However, I was under the incorrect assumption that this would be uncomfortable to the gay "community" as well — at least locally. While I haven't spoken to every "member," I did get a few perspectives on the issue.

One person I spoke with was Karen, from

the ASUO Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Alliance. She felt that Heche's "coming out" was a good thing. "It wouldn't even be an issue if more people would be open about their sexuality," she said. Unfortunately, the majority of people across the planet are not only uncomfortable with their sexuality but, when it comes down to it, unsure of how to define it. This is where the handiness of labels comes in.

One of the recurring issues surrounding DeGeneres' coming out was the difference between society's expectations of homosexuals versus heterosexuals. After all, society does not require me to come out and say that I'm straight. But somehow, like etiquette, gays are expected to profess their

homosexuality and their type. As in: "I am not only homosexual, I am: (check box that applies) lesbian, gay, bi, transsexual, other."

These labels make people comfortable; at least, they make straight people more comfortable, don't they? An astute friend of mine made the point that labels can also be very important for the "political identity of stigmatized and oppressed groups and for individual self-esteem." Conversely, however, they can also become "insidious" and "confining."

The danger that I see in Heche's admission is that her "choice" of homosexuality could become fuel for the fire of "gay-bashers" who all along have been certain that homosexuality is a perverse and dangerous lifestyle. Or, perhaps, her emphatic insistence that her feelings for Ellen are not perverse but are based on complete love of another person, the love of a person's soul, will open eyes and minds to the possibilities and endless boundaries of love.

After all, anyone who has fallen in love — true, deep, romantic love — can profess that there is nothing scientific about it. Perhaps sexual orientation is based in biology but maybe, just maybe, the cosmos were created in such a way that we could feel love and a soul connection to a myriad of things.

Amanda Erickson's column appears every other Thursday in the Emerald. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper. E-mail: aericks@gladstone.uoregon.edu



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

LETTERS

Defy 47

It's a double whammy! If you are registered to vote but do not vote in the upcoming election of May 20, not only do you count as a "no vote"; you also count as a denial that an election even took place.

Under Ballot Measure 47, passed last November, when a vote comes before the people which involves a revenue measure, 50 percent of the registered voters must take part in that election for it to be valid.

Since the records of registered voters are not exactly correct — deaths, moves, name changes are not automatically purged from the rolls — that 50 percent figure is highly unlikely to be a true figure.

The League of Women Voters of Lane County did not support ballot measure 47, and we worked hard to defeat it. Eugene did defeat it by 2 to 1.

The League of Women Voters of Lane County supports the upcoming ballot measure 20-83 which partially restores the cuts which Eugene would suffer under Measure 47. It is a measure that will give "breathing room" for the city to maintain its humanitarian nature while efforts are made to develop tax reform.

Good government does not come free. Good planning is to the benefit of all. Our basic civilization values seem to be in jeopardy as tax reform is on the line.

Defy the double whammy; vote yes for Ballot Measure 20-83. Vote yes on the county measure 20-84 and vote yes on the Willamette Measure 20-85. And definitely vote!

Esther Rabchuk
President
League of Women Voters

Support changes

Many students do not know that over the past few weeks the Sexual Misconduct Code has been revised. In a subject as difficult to define as misconduct, we at the MCC feel that the Student Conduct Committee has done an excellent job in protecting the rights of all persons in general.

In a University setting, sexual offenses can be common. Therefore, it is the University's responsibility to set up a just process for victims of sexual offenses.

The old Sexual Misconduct Code was exactly that... old. The total length of the rule was only a paragraph and it did not clearly define such guidelines as sexual consent or off-campus offenses.

It gave no protection to students

victimized off of campus. It also failed to define exactly what consent was. Fortunately, the old is being replaced with the new. Now we can all be assured that sexual misconduct will be dealt with in a fair and just manner.

Bryan Mercier
Public Relations Coordinator
Multicultural Center

Effective code needed

The University Counseling Center reports that, during the last school year, 121 student clients were survivors of rape or sexual assault. During that same year, less than five rapes or sexual assault cases.

The current sexual misconduct rule is inadequate; it doesn't even mention the word rape. Over the past two years, students, faculty and administrators have worked together to propose new language for the code that would broaden and clarify the current language.

In it, rape and sexual assault occur when one member of a party does not consent to a sexual act. Consent means "voluntary, non-coerced and clear communication indicating a willingness to engage in a particular act."

The goal here is not to regulate people's private lives, but rather to improve the University's ability to

respond to complaints. By supporting the proposed changes, we as students are sending the message to the University that having a sexual misconduct code is not enough; it must actually be effective and reflect the reality of students' lives.

Mandi Hood
Co-chair
Student Conduct Code Committee

Voice of Voice

After reading Rebecca Farmer's letter about the *Oregon Voice* (ODE, May 8), I felt that I must address some of issues and accusations that Farmer irresponsibly targeted at the *Voice*.

First, I'd like to apologize to Ms. Farmer for not printing her name on her one-page article/ad campaign ("If you said no, if there wasn't consent, it's still rape") in the last issue of the *Voice*. We were very eager to run the piece because it takes an intolerant stance against rape and sexual assault. However, Farmer presented us with a series of problems in running her work.

She did not put her name on the piece, nor did she leave us with a phone number, address, or contact person. We had no way of contacting her because we only knew her first name. Therefore, it was impossible to put her name on the

staff mast or on the feature. She only showed up for two meetings, and then failed to turn in an additional feature about "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," as she had promised. However, we still liked the piece and thought that it needed to see print, so we ran it.

In addition, Farmer's other accusations about the *Voice* caught us off-guard. Our "Sex Issue" received more compliments and praise than any of our past issues. Our student readership has skyrocketed and has since made it difficult to keep the issue in stock. Not only does the issue promote safe sex, but it promotes sexual responsibility in the media and explores ancient Japanese sexual attitude.

The *Oregon Voice* "Sex Issue" was our attempt to explore the issues surrounding sex in the '90s, the media's treatment of it, and find humor in sex.

Unfortunately, not everyone finds humor in sex and you can't please everyone. The *Oregon Voice* will continue to promote responsible behavior, explore student culture, and maybe even make some people laugh along the way.

Rob Elder
Publisher
Oregon Voice