



ARTIFACTS

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The Gay Lib Controversy: Social Change versus Social Norms at the University of Missouri

Erin Niederberger

In 1971, a homosexual student organization known as Gay Liberation or Gay Lib requested and was denied recognition at the University of Missouri-Columbia. For the next seven years, Gay Lib members would work their way through a system of appeals and court cases until they were finally awarded recognition in April 1978. This was not an isolated incident. The reasons why students were willing to go to such lengths for recognition, why administrators denied their request, and why the students succeeded had their roots in decades of social and legal change at the university and national level. Mizzou's Gay Lib controversy provides a look into the way students, campuses, and America as a whole were changing in the 70s. To properly grasp its significance, the history of university-student relations and LGBT+ Americans must be understood.

Early Universities

When colleges and universities began, they played a close and developmental role in student life. These institutions operated under the doctrine of *in loco parentis*, or 'in place of parents'. Students were not considered free adults but were instead children who transitioned from the care of their birth parents to the university. College administrators were responsible for students' moral development and could manage them as they saw fit, even curtailing behavior American adults could legally engage in and denying them Constitutional rights that non-students their age enjoyed (Forrest, 2013, p.12).

The structure of early colleges and universities supported this system. Enrollment sizes were small, and administrators often also served as faculty members. Their close relationship with a small number of students allowed them to police student behavior. As universities grew, their structure changed. Colleges became bureaucratized, with faculty members separate from administration. Administrators' lack of personal contact with growing numbers of students led to laxness in enforcing their pseudo-parental role. Busy with the affairs of running the university, they handed off some disciplinary authority to the students themselves (Forrest, 2013, p.6, p.40).

This laxness only went so far, however. In 1929, scandal rocked the University of Missouri when a student sent out a research questionnaire asking students about social values and sexual practices. The questionnaire quickly gained national attention, drawing criticism from furious parents and threatening legislators. By the time it was all over, one professor involved had lost his job, one was suspended, and the president himself was fired. The debate swirling around the issue – arguing over issues of propriety versus academic freedom – revealed a culture

not yet entirely comfortable with changing social values (Nelson, 2003).

WWII

WWII marked a major shift for universities. Thanks to the GI Bill encouraging veterans to pursue college education, universities were flooded with high numbers of more mature students who were harder to control. An increasingly sexualized national culture challenged lingering Victorian sexual mores, changing ideas of what counted as respectable. WWII moved people, particularly men, away from restrictive rural areas. This allowed for greater socialization and community-building among homosexual individuals. At the same time, though, WWII also solidified the medical model for homosexuality. Army psychiatrists diagnosed gay soldiers who posed a 'risk', purging them from the ranks (Eaklor, 2008, p. 68). A mindset where types of homosexuals could be determined and evaluated gained traction, and homosexuality was seen as a treatable identity rather than a criminal act (Bailey, 2002, p. 38-40).

This mindset spread to the rest of the society post-war. In 1952, the DSM-1 listed homosexuality as a personality disorder. Universities picked up on the military's ideas as well. Homosexual students might face removal from the university if they were deemed dangerous, rather than simply 'bad'. "Pseudo-homosexuals" or "latent" homosexuals were students who had experienced homosexual impulses and perhaps acted on them but were not fully committed to the homosexual lifestyle and wished to preserve their heterosexual identity. If these students were treated with therapy to reject homosexual impulses, they might be saved. This shift from sin to sickness meant that universities forsook their position of absolute religious moral authority for a more subjective diagnostic approach. This move eroded the moral high ground that helped buttress their position as an arbiter of student behavior (Bailey, 2002, p. 62).

Post-WWII and the Cold War

Post-WWII America saw a reaction against homosexuality and sexual freedom in general. The Cold War had begun, and with it came a heightened fear of deviant behavior. Homosexuality was considered perverse, and homosexuals might well be communists or communist sympathizers. They, like the Reds, were an invisible threat, having the ability to pass as 'normal' American citizens. Even as a second Red Scare swept the nation, a Lavender Scare followed suit. Starting in 1947, the government began to purge homosexual workers. In 1952, the expanded Immigration and Nationality Act banned various undesirable immigrants, and the ban was interpreted to include homosexuals. Executive Order 10450 made homosexuality grounds for dismissal from federal service (Eaklor, 2008, p. 87).

Even so, some Cold War values threatened this model. As American soldiers returned from fighting fascists and the nation turned against oppressive Communist regimes, oppression at home became harder to justify. Cold War-era citizens needed to be trained in freedom and democratic values so they could uphold the nation. Could universities justify hemming in students and treating them like children while allegedly preparing them for the world outside?

Mizzou's answer in the 1950's seemed to be a resounding yes. The university attempted a post-WWII crackdown on student behavior, which included monitoring both heterosexual and homosexual student activity. Jack Matthews was appointed as Dean of Students in 1950, creating a position devoted to policing student behavior. After the laxness of the 20s and 30s, Mizzou was back on the job. Concerns over (male) homosexuality rose, spurred on by greater numbers of openly gay veterans, similar purges in the military, and Cold War paranoia over moral deviants. A longtime openly gay faculty member was fired, and homosexual "rings" were sought out and dismantled. Administrative documents from the 40s through 60s reveal insights into Mizzou's war against homosexuality. The

shifting language showed the administrations' adoption of new medical mindsets, yet they also struggled with how far they could impose their parental role on students in this new and changing world.

Thomas Brady and the Witch Hunts: Mizzou in the 40s and 50s

In the late 40s and 50s, the University of Missouri took an active approach toward homosexual students, encouraged by Thomas Brady, Dean of Extra-Divisional Administration. The Student Health Service worked as an arm for the administration's witch hunt, along with the Mental Hygiene Clinic that provided Student Health's psychiatric and psychological services. The clinic was intended to identify and "eliminate" homosexual students. Emphasized was its role in removing "more flagrant examples of undesirable behavior" that was "detrimental to other people" (Memorandum, 1949). At this time, the university did not target every homosexual. They identified who they believed was most visible and threatening to the status quo. The SHS was marketed as a center for treatment, not punishment, a distinction officials felt necessary to maintain. "We are convinced," the writer of a letter to Brady says, "that it is important that the medical service should not ever come to be considered an agent of the disciplinary function of the University" (SHS, 1949). This worked within the new view of homosexuality as an illness, not a crime. In 1950, a letter between members of the SHS insisted that the service was targeted at "patients who are willing to try to help themselves". The writers maintained that the university took care of students, arguing that "most schools now take a responsibility for helping the normal student adjust to his emotional problems" and that the service "has grown out of the needs of the students" (McKinney, 1950). Administrators still took a paternalistic view toward their charges. They were saving students from themselves.

The post-WWII decades remained a time of transition between views toward homosexuality, and that uncertainty is clear in university records from the time. Brady took a hard stance against homosexual students, devoting a significant amount of his time to building and maintaining an infrastructure to catch, treat, and dispose of "true" rather than latent homosexuals. He did not feel overly protective, writing "I think [handling these cases] requires a mental toughness – a freedom from sentiment" (Memorandum, 1949). However, in another memo to the president, he did insist that "our work here is kept largely on a personal, student welfare basis" (Brady, 1948). The tension between homosexual students as a threat and a 'child' of the university left administrators not always certain how hard to come down.

Taking a Chance?: Mizzou and the Sixties

By the late 50s and 60s, the ferocity with which university officials hunted down homosexuals was waning, but they had not relented entirely. Some members of the SHS argued for greater lenience, believing that their harsh policies only alienated students already uncomfortable and insecure about their identities. Where better than a university, they claimed, for open-minded and progressive thinking? On the other hand, the 1960s Dean of Extra-Divisional Administration Robert Callis stated that existing sexual deviance policies would remain in place, "even though these policies are unwritten and perhaps properly so". In general, these policies involved identifying "pathological and predatory sexual deviants", separating them from the student body, and trying to help them get treatment (Callis, 1966). Less serious cases required a judgment call. Now even the most dangerous homosexuals were being offered treatment – earlier beliefs that the worst were incurable had been phased out.

Despite signs of a thaw, the university in the sixties did not welcome homosexual students with open arms. Callis revisited an earlier crackdown in the 40s that he deemed a sign of the danger homosexuals posed to others and themselves. He reflected that the university had imposed emergency actions and policies of "a rather serious and rigid nature" and "There is clear evidence that there was major dissention within the ranks of the University" for years after the event. Students were starting to resist university control over their lives. Whether or not they may have agreed with the homosexual ring's activities, they resented the university crackdown on everyone (Callis,

1966).

As the university floundered, the 60s witnessed the rise of the New Left. Student groups like Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the Berkley free speech movement interpreted college campuses as a place for voices to be heard. Gay Americans began to organize, often in secret, and some picketing and other acts of resistance arose. The most famous incident, of course, is the Stonewall riot of 1969, when a crowd fought back against a police raid of a popular gay bar, spurring a movement for increased gay visibility and liberation. The Gay Liberation Front formed soon after, and they helped lead a movement suggesting that coming out was not merely personal – it was political. The politicization of homosexuality encouraged students who might formerly be closeted to come out and organize. Clubs like Gay Lib formed across the country, and the group at the University of Missouri almost certainly had its roots in these movements (Eaklor, 2008, p. 115-122).

Student Rights and Challenges to In Loco Parentis

In 1961, *Dixon v Alabama* established that students deserved due process of law, opening the door to college students retaining at least some of their Constitutional rights (Justia, n.d.). Rulings in the late 60s and early 70s built off this precedent. In 1969, the Supreme Court ruled on *Tinker vs Des Moines*, concluding that neither “students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate” and fear that something might cause distress or a disturbance was not reason enough to stifle freedom of speech or expression. They stated, “School officials do not possess absolute authority over their students. Students in school, as well as out of school, are “persons” under our Constitution. They are possessed of fundamental rights which the State must respect.” While students must respect obligations to the state in return, they could not be forced to only express thoughts and ideas that the school or state approved of. Without a good constitutional reason to regulate speech, students could express their views (Justia, n.d.).

In 1971, 18-year-olds were given the right to vote in the 26th Amendment. This furthered a view of college-aged individuals as adults rather than children. If they could vote and go to war, did the university really need to act as their parent? Close on the amendment’s heels was a case that would be widely referenced in the Mizzou Gay Lib controversy. In *Healy v James*, decided in 1972, the Supreme Court heard complaints from members of a campus SDS group who were denied recognition by their university. The school claimed the group was connected to the national SDS, which could be violent and disruptive. The judges cited *Tinker v Des Moines* as they restated that “state colleges and universities are not enclaves immune from the sweep of the First Amendment.” They stated that, rather than First Amendment rights having less impact at colleges, there was nowhere more important to protect such rights. The court concluded that the burden of proof rested with the college, not the organization, to prove that recognition would lead to serious negative consequences. Schools could not forbid an organization they did not like – “The College, acting here as the instrumentality of the State, may not restrict speech or association simply because it finds the views expressed by any group to be abhorrent.” The university would need to provide solid proof that the organization would behave in a disruptive or illegal manner in order to justify their refusal of recognition (Justia, n.d.). The application of this ruling would become a major point of contention as the Gay Lib case worked its way through the court system.

In what can be seen as the Supreme Court’s mortal blow against in loco parentis, in 1973 the court ruled on a case originating from the University of Missouri. Journalism graduate student Barbara Papish was expelled for handing out SDS literature considered obscene by the university. Both the district court and court of appeals upheld her expulsion. The district court did so because they found the materials obscene. The appeals court did not consider questions of obscenity important. Instead, it ruled that a campus could supersede issues of freedom of speech when it came to matters of decency and convention. The Supreme Court found that “Since the First Amendment

leaves no room for the operation of a dual standard in the academic community with respect to the content of speech, and because the state University's action here cannot be justified as a nondiscriminatory application of reasonable rules governing conduct, the judgments of the courts below must be reversed" (Justia, n.d.)".

Campus reaction to the case was mixed but intense. Although the eventual lawsuit surrounded Barbara Papish, four students were arrested. On February 24, 1969, not long after the arrest, over 2500 students supporting free speech gathered peacefully in front of Jesse Hall after their group grew too large to congregate by the union. Another rally on March 21 drew 300 students, and students from several schools marched to Jefferson City in a crowd that at times reached 500 people. Faculty, for the most part, supported student rights. Many faculty members believed this censorship would not hold up in court. A faculty-student Committee on Student Rights and Freedom formed, and the Arts and Science faculty voted to oppose the university's censorship (*The Maneater*, 1968-1969).

Whether or not students agreed with the SDS's literature, many did not like seeing the administration crack down on their rights. The editorial and letters to the editor section filled up with commentary, and almost every issue of *The Maneater* after the incident had something to say about the SDS situation. Students complained that the repression was outdated, undemocratic, and not in keeping with university values of intellectual freedom and exploration. All MSA candidates in 1969 campaigned for more student rights and criticized Matthews. Their choice to integrate this into their platform suggested they believed most students supported it. In 1970, Jack Matthews retired as Dean of Students and was not replaced. He did not comment on the ruling in 1973.

In *The Maneater's* 1969 year in retrospect, an article ran titled "University Sees Activism Reborn". Whether or not activism had ever truly died, the SDS case helped stir students up over freedom of expression. These issues would be revisited in the Gay Lib controversy.

The 70s

The 70s are referred to by some as "a kind of Golden Age" for the gay rights movement. Pride events and organizations appeared in greater numbers, and gay Americans gained greater visibility. Academic networks, groups, and courses began to appear as the universities caught up with the times. Organizations like the National Gay Task Force, which made contact with politicians, and the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, which challenged discriminatory laws, gained traction. In 1973, the APA removed homosexuality from the DSM as a psychological disorder (Eaklor, 2008, p. 150-156).

Despite this, Missouri was still not a homosexual-friendly state. The state of Missouri had an anti-sodomy law in place throughout the time of the Gay Lib controversy. Missouri statute § 563.230 stated, "Every person who shall be convicted of the detestable and abominable crime against nature, committed with mankind or with beast, with the sexual organs or with the mouth, shall be punished by imprisonment in the penitentiary not less than two years" (OpenJurist, n.d.). In 1979, the statute was revised to target homosexuals with the following language:

566.010 Chapter Definitions

(2) "Deviate sexual intercourse" means any sexual act involving the genitals of one person and the mouth, tongue, hand or anus of another person

566.090 Sexual misconduct – 1. A person commits the crime of sexual misconduct if:

(3) He has deviate sexual intercourse with another person of the same sex (Vernon, 1979, p. 4703-4).

Overall, the 70s were a time of greater gay visibility and upheaval. Homosexual individuals spoke out, challenged oppression still embedded in the legal system, and spread the message that being gay did not have to be shameful. Meanwhile, years of the university undercutting their moral authority with delegation to students, admissions and exceptions added to once unyielding rules, and a shift to subjective science over rock-solid religion gave students a foothold for their opposition.

The Gay Lib Controversy as Historical Moment

Gay Lib initially attempted to gain recognition for a fairly non-nefarious reason. Recognition would allow the members to use university buildings for meetings, as the group had had trouble finding places to gather.

Gay Lib received approval by MSA and the Committee on Student Organizations, Government, and Activities (SOGA). However, Edwin Hutchins, Dean of Students, vetoed the approval. Normally, he wrote, he would not like to contradict the students' decision. However, he claimed the student committee did not spend enough time discussing the issue thoroughly. Because of this and a minority report of five dissenting votes on the SOGA approval, he felt more comfortable vetoing their decision (Hutchins, 1972).

Soon after the denial of Gay Lib, another group calling itself the Committee on Sexual Freedom arose through MSA. The group's statement of purpose was essentially identical to Gay Lib and was headed by Lawrence Eggleston, who had been a major player in the Gay Lib organization as well. University officials suspected that the Committee was merely a front for Gay Lib to get around university rules and discussed denying it further use of University facilities. Hutchins deemed it a trick, while Chancellor Schooling wrote to President Ratchford cautioning that "We would like to avoid making martyrs out of the Gay Liberation supporters and the attendant negative publicity which a confrontation over a freedom of speech or freedom of assembly issue will produce. At the same time we do not intend to sanction the Gay Liberation group or permit them to avoid the consequences of recognition denial through subterfuge" (Schooling, 1972).

Facing opposition on two counts now, Gay Lib appealed to Chancellor Schooling, who denied their request on February 28, 1973, claiming it would be against the best interests of the university. On March 26, 1973, President Ratchford upheld this decision. Looking at the purposes stated by the organization, he said that they "import an activist role in the Gay Liberation movement. The name itself, "Gay Lib", implies the liberation of homosexuality. These purposes are more than establishing an "understanding and knowledge". They are in fact an attempt to actively promote the practices of homosexuality by claiming that they are acceptable in society" (Ratchford, 1973).

Gay Lib next appealed to the Board of Curators, alongside another organization from UMKC that had been facing similar difficulties. The Board looked to outside aid, appointing former justice Cullen Coil to hear information on the case and offer recommendations that would help the board come to a decision.

After hearing the evidence, Coil came to the following conclusions. He decided that the existence of the organization probably would not influence non-members, might encourage homosexuals to seek counseling, and could get homosexuality out into the open where it could be studied. However, he also concluded that it might perpetuate and encourage homosexuality. He also believed that approval of the organization would show the University's approval of homosexual lifestyles, despite the fact that university approval of organizations did not constitute official endorsement. On the basis of Coil's feedback, the board rejected the appeal on November 15, 1973. Gay Lib's response was to take them to court (Coil, 1973).

University officials believed Gay Lib had a good chance of winning the case, thanks to recent legal activity. The

most relevant case was of course *Healy vs James* (1972), where the Supreme Court found that the burden of proof rested on the university to provide valid reasons for refusing recognition. Medical “experts” in homosexuality were called in to testify to provide these reasons. The US District Court for the Western District of Missouri found that Gay Lib recognition had a high chance of encouraging sodomy – behavior that would break the law. This gave the university the proof they needed to satisfy the Supreme Court’s post-Healy demands. Because of this, the district court ruled in the University of Missouri’s favor on June 29, 1976. Gay Lib appealed to the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals, which reversed. They found that the University of Missouri “acting here as an instrumentality of the State, has no right to restrict speech or association simply because it finds the views expressed to be abhorrent,” a statement made in the Healy case. The court rejected the conclusions of the medical “experts”, pointing out that their claims were inferences and that other studies contradicted them. Suspensions of potential unlawful behavior were not enough to infringe on First Amendment rights. Their reversal was handed down on June 8, 1977. The board requested a rehearing, which was refused, and then voted to appeal to the US Supreme Court. On February 21, 1978, the Supreme Court refused the case. One judge, dissenting, implied that the court denied it out of the desire to avoid embroiling themselves in controversial social policy. The university requested a rehearing and was denied on April 25, 1978.

During the challenge, Gay Lib had been operating off-campus. Once they were awarded recognition, they did not plan to change much beyond meeting on campus and applying for MSA funds. On April 10, Mizzou administrators recognized Gay Lib after a Kansas City district court ordered them to allow the group to meet on campus. On April 20, Gay Lib marched to their first meeting in the union, with hecklers appearing to throw objects at them, jeer, and tear at their banner.

Throughout the Gay Lib controversy, college administrators and students attempted to work through ideas and mentalities that had been shifting drastically over the last few decades. Changes in views of homosexuality often left administrators uncertain of how to proceed, while adjustments to the university-student relationship gave student groups more power. This confusion was made clear in the university’s own words. After the Supreme Court rejected the university’s request for a writ of certiorari, the university appealed and wrote “Members of the governing bodies of colleges and universities are confused and seeking guidance from this Court [...] The danger of this lack of guidance will be that the governing bodies will shy away from making decisions in sensitive areas as no decision becomes the safe decision in order to avoid litigation” (Petition, 1978). Their plea suggested the tumultuous waters university administrators had been thrown into. They no longer had a bedrock of moral certainty to fall back on, and they could no longer assume that their word was law within the confines of campus. Instead, they navigated a complex legal world where students had rights and could challenge them. This uncertainty often led to softening administrative attitudes as they backed away from further conflict.

What motivated administrators to resist Gay Lib for so long? In Hutchins’ denial in 1971, he outlined three main areas of concern in relation to recognition: “legal considerations, a concern for the psychological impact on individual students, and a concern for the impact of recognition on the general relationship of the University to the public at large.” He admitted that there were no legal reasons to prevent the group from forming. Its goals ran in line with university goals, and the group’s illumination of social issues was “compatible with the general objectives of a University.” However, Hutchins did not think that legality was enough to require recognition. He wrote, “simply because we are not legally precluded from taking a specific action does not, to my thinking, represent sufficient grounds for doing so. I, therefore, set aside questions of legality as a basis for my response to this recommendation” (Hutchins, 1972). *Healy v James* would challenge this thinking a year later. For now, though, Hutchins remained comfortable making these statements.

Hutchins’ fears that the club might increase psychosexual problems in pseudo-homosexual students were well-

grounded in medical thought about homosexuality. He did qualify these fears, noting that the club could be both a good and bad influence. The university “must maintain a vital concern for the psychological well being of all our students and specifically those students who, during this period of their growth and development, may, from time to time, be concerned about their own psychosexual problems. On the one hand, recognition of a formal group could conceivably exacerbate such problems and lead to personal and psychological stress for individual students who may be concerned about their sexual identity. On the other hand, the existence of such an organization could conceivably contribute in a productive manner to the development of an atmosphere which would allow students to seek help in dealing with what are, for many, relatively normal kinds of concerns.” While danger to latent homosexuals existed, Hutchins dismissed it as serious enough to deny recognition over. He concluded, “the psychological issues which were explored did not appear to form grounds for rejection of the request.” Gay Lib tapped into the fears of homosexual corruption and the medical model, but those fears did not seem to be the biggest ones plaguing Mizzou administrators (Hutchins, 1972).

On the other hand, references to the medical nature of homosexuality and its danger to other students appeared frequently in the legal proceedings – notably after Hutchins dismissed both legal and psychological concerns as barriers for recognition. Coil found that the club might “expand homosexual behavior which will cause increased violations of section 563.230 of the Revised Statutes of Missouri” (Coil, 1973). The Board adopted his findings in their rejection and added more statements emphasizing that homosexuality was an illness and latent homosexuals’ environments could influence their development. Due to *Healy v James*, the University of Missouri had to prove that there was a significant reason why recognition would be dangerous. At that time, they brought out medical testimony on homosexuality and homosexual behavior in an effort to prove that Gay Lib would increase unlawful acts. The district court was convinced, but the appeals court was not. They claimed even if the fears were valid, they were not dire enough to overrule First Amendment rights – placing student freedom over fears of homosexual behavior.

Issues of medical homosexuality may have come up in legal proceedings as the university attempted to prove Gay Lib was dangerous to satisfy the post-Healy demands of the courts. However, language between administrators referring to this danger was comparatively scarce. In their rationale for denial and messages to each other, they rarely voiced fears of a homosexual epidemic. Instead, in an era when administrators had moved their attention from students toward bureaucracy, they were concerned about the welfare of the university and its public image. In a November 1972 letter to Ratchford, Schooling wrote, “On the basis of court decisions reported in recent months, I assume the position of the Gay Liberation Group might be upheld by the court” (Schooling, 1972). Ratchford answered, “If the Gay Lib group wants to take us to court, that is fine. The court may well rule in their favor, and then we are home free. Obviously, I am basing my decision upon public relations concern throughout the State. I think you and I and the Board would be crucified if we recognize Gay Lib, unless the court orders us to do so. I will be perfectly happy to abide by the court’s decision” (Ratchford, 1972). These two men were a far cry from the homosexual witch hunters of the Brady era.

Hutchins also worried about public response. He wrote in his denial, “While we must always keep before us the ideal of a university as an independent, rational, and deliberative body within society, we must recognize as well that the University does not operate independent of the social system that supports it. It is simultaneously cast in the role of a leader in the development of social thought and values and is at the same time an instrument for the transmission of social mores. When we are to determine recognition as a part of the formal university family of an organization whose basic purpose is the study and advocacy of social change in an area of high social sensitivity, we find these two themes in conflict” (Hutchins, 1972). Hutchins knew that the university ought to encourage discussion in progressive areas, but social pressures were keeping it silent. The university still felt a need to uphold social virtues and conservative values. At this point though, at least some administrators did not feel particularly

passionate about their parental mission. Instead, they followed the orders of those who put pressure on them. Letters by Thelen and Schooling both drove this home. Thelen cited “concern for negative reaction from the larger social system within the University exists, a system which is largely responsible for the support of the University” and reiterated that “the University has many publics to serve” (Thelen, 1972). When it came to groups that needed service, latent homosexuals had not made the top of the list. Schooling upheld Thelen’s decision, saying “I agree with Dean Thelen that it would not be in the best interests of the University to extend such recognition” (Schooling, 1973). University administration did not phrase their rejections suggesting they were deeply concerned about the welfare of the students. Instead, they feared for the university itself, particularly its image.

In a letter to Ratchford, the Gay Lib Executive Board claimed that public opinion on campus and in the media was swinging in their direction. Certainly scathing editorials appeared in *The Maneater*, arguing that the university had denied recognition due to fear of budget cuts from the state legislature and accusing administrators of pandering to outside groups rather than promoting free speech. The Gay Lib Board insisted that this issue went beyond their specific case. They wrote, “Gay Lib recognition has passed the point of being strictly a Gay issue, if it ever was one. It is now a case not only of violation of constitutional rights, but also of abridgment of the right of assembly and of the lack of academic freedom on the UMC campus. As such, this issue transcends Gay rights and is becoming a matter of irritation to a large and growing segment of the UMC academic community at all levels”. Gay Lib cast this struggle as one of many characterizing the university’s attempt to stifle student rights and freedoms, an attempt they believed many students had had enough of. Certainly the reaction to Papish’s expulsion and agitation for greater student rights throughout the late sixties and seventies backed them up (Gay Lib Board, n.d.).

Ratchford, however, resisted linking the issue to student rights in a letter to Gay Lib, where he wrote, “The organization of Gay Lib by applying for recognition is attempting to obtain the tacit approval of homosexuality by the University of Missouri. Homosexuality is generally treated in the State of Missouri as being a socially repugnant concept as is evidenced by the criminal statutes of the State of Missouri. The University of Missouri protects the rights and freedoms of all members of the educational community but it is felt that non-recognition of an organization promoting such a concept is not an infringement of any rights or freedoms” (Ratchford, 1973). He attempted to cast the debate as an issue of morals and criminal behavior. Unfortunately for him, the era where that interpretation flourished had been left behind.

Conclusion

The Gay Lib controversy arose at the perfect time, which played a large part in why it succeeded. Greater student activism, strides in LGBT+ rights, a diminishment in university control over their charges, and legal upheavals created an environment where a homosexual club on an American college campus could fight for their recognition and win. No longer could universities shut down students who they did not want to hear from – students had rights too. In a concurring statement for the appeals court ruling, a circuit judge wrote, “I have no doubt that the ancient halls of higher learning at Columbia will survive even the most offensive verbal assaults upon traditional moral values; solutions to tough problems are not found in repression of ideas” (Open Jurist, n.d.). The university is a place where those assaults are expected and should be welcomed as part of its role as a place of social progress and educational exploration, a role various university administrators acknowledged even as they sought to stifle it. Repression of dissenting ideas, as has been shown time and time again, is not enough to make them go away. As the university navigates a new era of social protest, it must again evaluate its position in relation to social progress versus social norms and decide on which side of history it belongs.

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