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Gay and lesbian students deal with discrimination on campus

By Wes Swift
THE BATTALION

The writing is on the wall.

"I just kill queers," one says. "Beat the hell outta faggots," another screams. Still another says, "Dykes are unwelcome a) at Texas A&M; b) at all; c) in this restroom."

These comments are not scrawled on the walls of a dirty truck stop. These are scribbled on the bathroom stalls of campus buildings and are only a sampling of the discrimination and prejudice toward homosexuals at Texas A&M.

Jeff Anderson, president of Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Aggies and a graduate student, said discrimination at A&M can take many forms, ranging from the hardly noticeable to the frightening.

"It can be something as subtle as not being able to admit you're gay," Anderson said. "It can also be things like verbal abuse. And there have been some incidents of physical abuse that have been reported, although they're not common."

One homosexual former student said he has experienced discrimination several times on campus.

Sam Stamport, a former horticulture major, said he quit his on-campus job because, among other problems, he was harassed by his boss. Stamport said he has seen discrimination through discussions or lectures about gay topics.

Stamport, who called the prejudiced people at A&M a "vocal minority," said he sees some subtle discrimination when he walks around campus with t-shirts promoting his sexuality.

"Whenever I wear my t-shirts, I get a lot of curious looks," he said. "Of course, most people are polite enough not to say anything to my face, but who knows what they say when I leave."

The prejudice against homosexuality has garnered an infamous national reputation for A&M, Anderson said. A national gay magazine recently published a list of places and activities that homosexual people and heterosexual people take part in.

Texas A&M was listed as a university for heterosexual people.

Anderson said the reputation does not end with the magazine.

"Texas A&M has an image of being a place where you wouldn't want to be a gay person," he said. "There are a lot (homosexuals) here."

Anderson said there have been problems with participation in GLBA because some members are afraid of discrimination.

"I don't know how many times I've heard 'Well, we can't do that here,'" Anderson said.

"The (gay) community here is very cautious, because you never know what may happen."

Wesley Beard, a gay rights activist from Jacksonville, Texas, urged homosexuals to a speech Tuesday to fight and end the discrimination.

"What you're fighting for is not special rights, but equal rights," Beard said. "These are things you deserve."

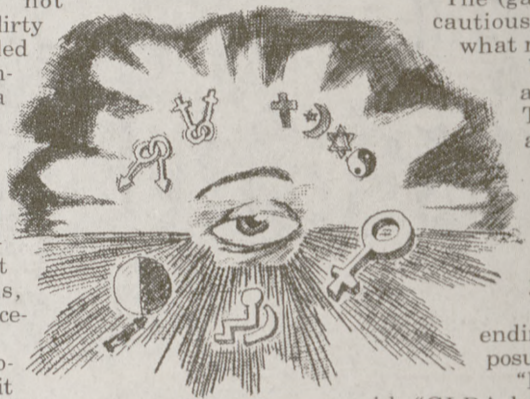
Stamport said the key to ending homophobia is more exposure to the gay community. "Education is the key,"

said. "GLBA has panel discussions and lectures that present the facts versus the myths. When people can see a real, live homosexual, that's very important."

The gay-supporting homosexual population can be another significant weapon to combat discrimination, Anderson said.

"Coming out is not just for homosexuals," he said. "It's for those who support homosexuals as well."

"If all straight people who are sympathetic come out of the closet and speak up when someone tells a homophobic joke, then people may not change their minds, but they will start to think twice before they say something like that."



**DISCRIMINATION
AT A & M**

This article is the second in a series that will run through Friday and explore different kinds of discrimination students experience at A&M.

Skin Deep explores campus racial tensions

By Rachel Barry
THE BATTALION

Skin Deep, a documentary about race relations on college campuses, will be shown tomorrow in Rudder Theater at 7 p.m. Four A&M students are in the film and will be at the premier.

Francis Reid, who was nominated for an Academy Award for the documentary *Straight From the Heart*, wrote and directed the film.

Reid said she wanted to make the film because she had become aware of incidents occurring on college campuses.

"I was disturbed and curious as to why that was happening, and I wanted to explore it," she said.

Sheri Schmidt, coordinator of Diversity Education at A&M said she met Reid at a professional conference about two years ago.

Reid approached Schmidt about finding students at A&M who would be interested in participating in the film. Schmidt said Reid was interested in using students from A&M because the school had been in the news.

"The school had the reputation of talking about this issue," she said.

Reid first came to A&M in the fall of 1993 to scout the campus and to attend a U-ACT retreat. On her second visit, Reid brought a film crew with her and interviewed students.

She also followed students around campus and filmed their interactions with their peers. She even followed one student to an A&M football game.

Tammy Early, a Class of '95 computer science graduate, was one of the students Reid inter-



Students from colleges across the nation allowed their candid conversations to be filmed for the production of *Skin Deep*. The students met in California, where they became acquainted with one another.

viewed. She said it was hard to get used to having a camera follow her.

"I felt silly," she said, "but I felt more normal than I thought I would."

After conducting her interviews Reid invited the students to California for a weekend to meet the film's other participants and to discuss the issues face to face. The students had roundtable and one-on-one discussions about the effects that multiculturalism has had on them and their campus.

"My biggest fear about bringing the students together was that they wouldn't be open to talk to each other and would be afraid of offending someone," she said. "I was pleased to find that wasn't the case."

She said the hardest part of making the film was having to sit back and not participate in the discussions.

"As a filmmaker, you become to a certain extent a voyeur," she said. "You are going through the experience with

everybody, but you're not taking an active role."

Reid said she wanted students who participated in the project to listen to people with different perspectives and learn from them.

"I hoped everybody would come away with an experience that was somewhat transformative," she said.

She said she hopes the film can be used in freshmen orientation programs to help students because they can be affected by campus that is so diverse.

"Suddenly they have to grapple with these issues that they have never had to before," she said.

Duane Thomas, a senior industrial engineering major, was another of the students interviewed for the film. He said he was interested in the opportunity to educate himself and others about the issues discussed in the film.

"I hope that people will watch it, and their minds will be rolling, and they will discuss these issues with everyone around them," he said.

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