

The meaning of man

Masculinity in 21st Century is confusing



Dear God,
I know we don't talk much. I haven't been to church regularly since my parents made me years ago, but you already knew that. You also know that when I talk to you, I have a pretty big problem. You see, I'm trying to figure something out, and for the life of me, I can't.

Being a man in the 21st century is so confusing. There are all sorts of mixed messages and complexities. First, I have read writings attributed to your followers.

"Men are in charge of women ... Hence good women are obedient ... As for those whose rebelliousness you fear, admonish them, banish them from your bed and scourge them."

From the Koran, cited by Kaufman in 1976, but you knew that.

I've looked for an obedient wife who relies upon me for her every morsel of information, but I haven't found one. They all want to speak and have their own ideas and theories. Sometimes they even tell me I'm wrong and get mad at me for being too condescending or controlling. Imagine that.

You know, God (and you know everything), that a few years ago I thought I had this manhood stuff all figured out. I had role models, but now they're all falling into disgrace. They are not being gunned down like so many rap stars. They are dying the slow, pointless deaths of mercenaries in a war of liberation no one cares about.

You remember the men I idolized. Al Pacino in "The Godfather Part II," Michael Douglas in "Wall Street." I vividly remember sitting in history class as the professor described the attitudes of the men of

ancient Sparta. How they were aggressive, proud and arrogant. That's me, I thought. I'm a throw-back to an earlier age. When I act like this, women just look at me and say, "Take me home!"

It seems like there are places in this world for aggressive people like me. The business world, for example. Of course, your omnipotence heard Benjamin Graham put forth his two rules.

"The first rule is don't lose. The second rule is don't forget rule No. 1."

Business seems to be one place where masculinity can still rule. It's a winner-take-all game. Sure, business professors talk about teamwork and whatnot, but you know that profit is all that matters. If you make a company money, they'll keep you around. If you cost them money, you are gone.

But what about these women? I mean, a woman even runs e-Bay. Women are taking on that aggressive attitude more and more.

So what do we men do, God? I mean, do we throw out our fathers' ideas of masculinity? Do we band together and form fraternities, like a bunch of cowards? Instead of individualism, are we relegated to strength in numbers? I can't do that.

As if there wasn't enough stress involved with being a man these days, my professors have another idea about how I should treat women: equally. Equally? I will make a lot more money than my future wife. I have more strength and more aggression. And she is my equal? Sounds scary.

These are crazy days, but if nothing else, I live in interesting

times. Thanks for that. It seems like there are some good things about the traditional ideas about masculinity along with the bad. But do I open a door for a lady? Are there such creatures as ladies anymore? These are my questions, oh Lord. I would appreciate it if you could give me a call, an e-mail or even a sign. Just let me know.

Until I hear from you, I think I'll just keep on doing what my daddy taught me. I'll provide what help she needs, always tell her the

truth and treat her like someone's daughter. It's a little vague, but I'm still learning.

Thanks for listening, God. Please bless and keep the Huskers through the summer. And I'll talk to you soon.

Michael Donley is a senior sociology major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Skeletons in the closet

Coming out may be scary, but life-long concealment is worse



"Your silence will not protect you."

—Audre Lourde

I remember it with a smile now, but at the time of course, it wasn't very funny.

I had been trying all summer to tell my parents I was bisexual, but I could never find the right opportunity.

Something like, "It's almost 8 o'clock, we should watch 'Seinfeld.' I'm bisexual. That Kramer guy sure is funny, huh?"

Just didn't seem right.

I even started leaving Advocate magazines around the house and watching "Will & Grace" whenever possible, hoping they would get the hint. But my efforts were to no avail.

I finally got an opportunity when I received a letter from the Red Cross. They have a policy that forbids men

who have ever had sex with a man, or women who have ever had sex with a man who has had sex with a man, from donating blood. This letter contained a notice that I was "permanently deferred" because I had answered the pre-donation questions truthfully.

My mom asked me what the letter was about, and I knew I had my chance. I told her, with probably more of a tremor in my voice than I remember, that I was bisexual.

"Well just ... just don't DO that anymore!" she said, stunned. She started busying herself with chores around the living room while lecturing me about the dangers of AIDS. She was simply positive I was going to contract HIV.

My dad, however, took the news much better than I had expected. He was only worried that a future career in law or politics would be ruined if word got around. It was, I think, too late to worry about that. I had already been out for over a year at Chadron State. In fact, I was one of the few active members of the tiny Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgendered student organization.

This story ends happily; my parents got used to the idea pretty quickly, and now we can talk about it with-

out any problems.

Of course, every openly queer person has a coming-out story. I sometimes feel guilty that mine was so painless. I've heard far too many that involved a loss of friends, torment throughout high school or being kicked out of the house.

Some closeted queers are only rationalizing their fears.

"My grandfather is elderly, and if I told him, he'd have a heart attack." "I can't risk losing this job." "My kids will never speak to me again."

Others have very realistic fears as to what could happen if they came out.

Yet as scary and painful as coming out may be, the alternative is far worse: to live a life of lies and secrets, devoid of a love you can be proud of and share with those you care about.

Not only does staying in the closet make you miserable, it makes things worse for all GLBT people. Our ability to resist oppression and discrimination is directly related to our visibility.

Every time one of us hides in the closet out of fear, we give strength to the groups who would deny us the right to marry, serve in the military, adopt children or be free from discrimination in housing and employment.

Coming out doesn't require a newspaper announcement; the important thing is to be honest and resist the pressure to conform to the heterosexual norm.

As Stuart Byron said, "Every time one refrains from an act of public affection with a lover where a straight couple would not — in the park, on the movie line — one dies a little."

I remember being apprehensive about holding hands with my boyfriend in public for the first time. I felt very self-conscious and constantly thought, "Is that guy staring at us?" "Is that girl giggling?" But as time went on, it got easier. I rarely think about it anymore, just like when I was in a relationship with a woman.

Queers often speak about what it was like when they came out. Coming out, however, is a life-long process, not a one-time event. Every time you meet someone for the first time and have to introduce your partner or when someone asks if you're married or if you have kids, it's another decision on whether or not to come out.

In the past 30 years, we've seen tremendous progress in the GLBT civil rights movement. We owe these victories to the courageous individuals who were willing to risk anything by

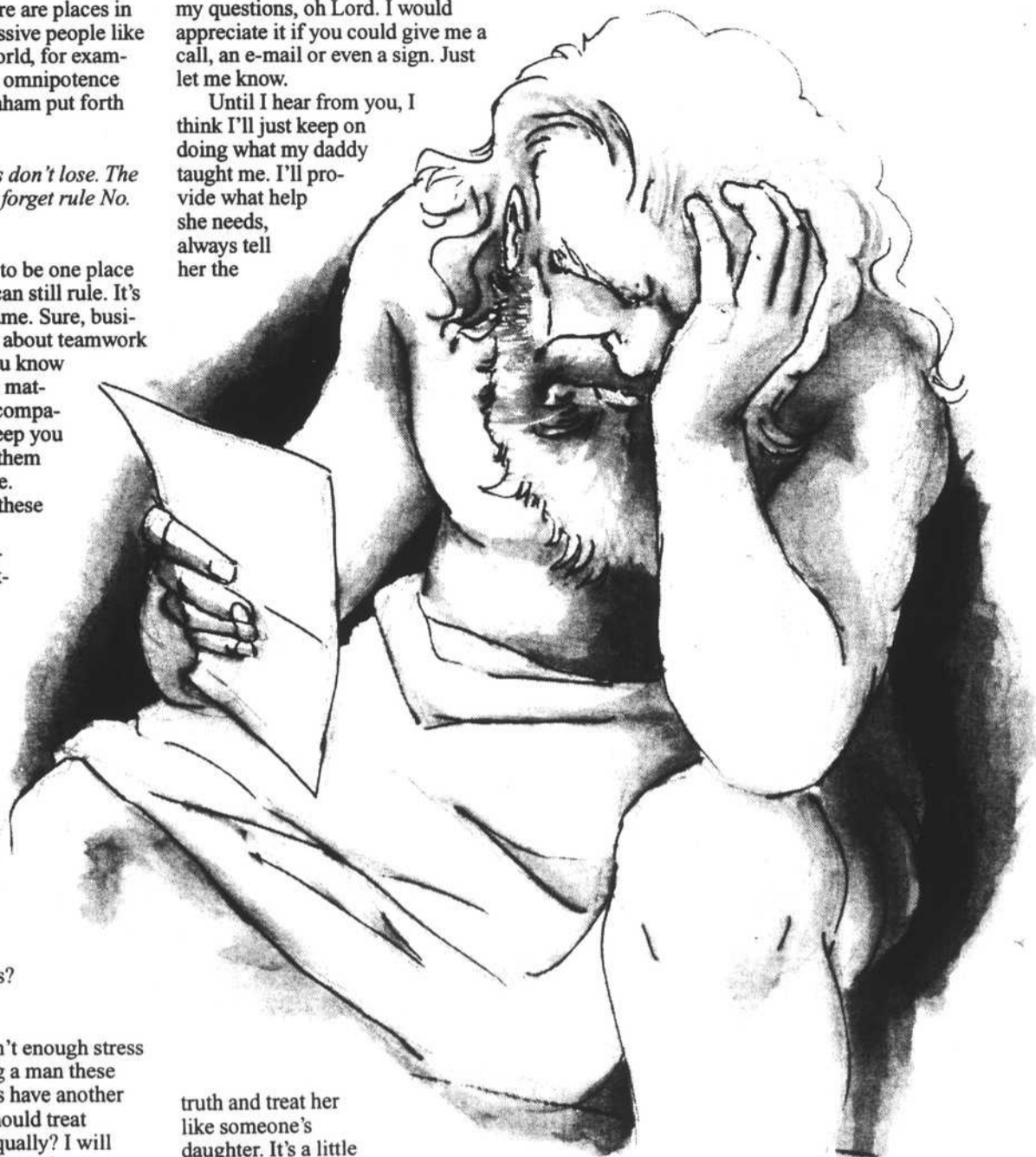
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fighting for equality in the face of a hostile and often violent public.

However, full equality and acceptance will come only when every GLBT person is open and visible; when every demagogue and homophobe has to deal with a queer brother, sister, child or best friend; when no one can say they don't know any gay people.

If you're not out yet, it's time to take the first step. Do it for those who came before. Do it for those who will come after. But ultimately, do it for yourself. You'll be glad you did.

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