Column/Kimberly B. Sklar

A new address and 20/20 hindsight

Over the summer when my high school friends were exchanging college addresses, I had nothing to give them.

"What do you mean you don't have an address? When will you get one?" they would ask.

Well, for the first year you can write to me at MIT Room 24-407. That's every freshman's temporary address. After that, I'll be getting new housing.

"Where are you housing yourself temporarily?"

I'll find out when I get there.

"Sounds like a pain," they'd say.

I'd nod. "Yeah."

Then R/O Week started and it was fun. But the moving Shipment seemed so foolish. I could have had an extra week of vacation and avoided the whole thing if MIT had just been like every other school in the country I knew of. It seemed like it would have made more sense to let people roommates and asign their housing.

"In the long run, you'll be glad you did. ""With the university classes would say, I didn't think so. I was sick of long dorms. I sure was that I would have been able to get along with almost any roommate and no living group could be too bad.

Now that I have the 20/20 vision of hindsight, I have to admit I was wrong. R/O Week was more than just a good time. It was MIT's unique, but logical, way of providing housing.

Like my roommate. Sure, it's annoying that she hangs up the phone to eat while we're talking about me in our room. But we chose to be roommates. No computer randomly assigned us the same room. We knew we were going to get along.

We like our dorm and we like our room. And we like the people we like.

Maybe moving around during R/O Week was fun. But living out of a suitcase was barely tolerable. But I think most freshmen will concede now that they really like their housing. They'll tell you it was worth it.

Looking back now, I have to admit like superficialism were right. I'm glad MIT did this way.

Discrimination can be subtle

Last in a three-part series

The other type of discrimination present at MIT which I will discuss is informal discrimination, a more personal sort of discrimination against lesbians and gays. This discrimination occurs on a one-to-one, or small group level, but it accumulates over the entire MIT population to constitute a community problem.

Student-student conflicts occur in the classrooms, the bathrooms, the corridors, and the living groups. Although the housing policy does not permit harassment, dormitory and fraternity residents often harass members of their living group because of their sexual orientation.

Some lesbian and gay students end up leaving their living group as it is hoped that they can find a more suitable living arrangement, a home without harassment. Some transfers at MIT have received reprimands, but later refused to accept them as members of the fraternity because they are gay.

One fraternity even engaged in a practical joke providing a street demonstration in Central Square calling for the extermination of homosexuals.

The abuse may be verbal or physical. Or it may go completely unnoticed.

The most subtle type of discrimination is discrimination most often encountered by lesbians and gays. An old friend or a new acquaintance, upon finding out that you are lesbian or gay, may suddenly decide not to call you up any more, or talk to you. This sort of discrimination occurs, for example, in the ROTC program, military administration, fraternity and sorority groups, and living groups. This sort of discrimination interferes with the fairness of their actions on the job. Such discrimination can range from lower grades for equal work, to verbal and physical abuse.

Not many people realize that the potential for sexual harassment among homosexual faculty, administrators, and students exists, just as the potential for heterosexually-related harassment does. . . . .

Whether or not one believes that the ROTC program, military administration, intelligence agency recruitment, or security clearance requirements should continue to exist at MIT and related institutions, the mandate for equal opportunity regardless of sexual orientation should require MIT to enforce existing policy prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. In the extreme case, MIT may have to end its association with the offending party.

Ten in a three-part series

The problem of informal, and more personal, discrimination is long-term. Prejudice against lesbians and gays, just like prejudice against women and blacks, requires time and the influx of new generations to die down. And although the MIT community has taken significant steps over the last two decades to demonstrate concern and to significantly improve the situation within the MIT community, MIT has yet to rid itself of discrimination against lesbians and gays.