

# The Daily Pennsylvanian

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## OPINION

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### *Straight folks have closets, too*

**Rev. Beverly Dale** says anyone dishonest with himself — whether gay or straight — is closeted.

On October 11, as the gay, lesbian and bisexual communities pressed the importance of “coming out” of the closet, they rightfully focused on the closet of sexual repression, closets where one can hide one’s sexual orientation and pass for a heterosexual. The freedom to be oneself and to live with integrity eventually compensates for any trauma experienced in coming out.

But straight folks have closets, too. The rest of the community would do well to ask “Are we out of our closets?”

#### Guest Column

Ever hear of a student who has one personality at school and a second one, a totally different one, at home? Then there are students who pursue a particular career path because others want them to do so, even though they know their interests lie elsewhere: the doctor who wanted to be an artist, the lawyer who wanted to teach children.

There is the student who brown-nosed an exploitive

**Rev. Beverly Dale** is executive director of the Christian Association.

uncle, choosing to be the nephew his uncle wanted rather than who he really was because he stood to gain a substantial inheritance. Never bothering to ask “What do I really want in my life? What will make me the happiest in the long run?” we simply choose the nearest closet, sell our integrity and let others define us.

On the train to the suburbs recently, I saw a young woman with a really punk hair style. As she approached her stop she unfastened the perky little ponytail atop of her head and brushed this smattering of hair to cover the punk style completely. Perhaps she did this to placate parents who already knew about her hair and her very non-suburban lifestyle.

More likely, however, she was making a

conscious choice to avoid letting her parents know how different and unique she really is.

Quite possibly, she was returning to the suburbs to assume an identity they wanted her to have.

If so, she wasn’t just returning home — she was returning to a closet.

I remember when I couldn’t understand why gays and lesbians just didn’t stay in the closet where it was safe, where they would not be open to criticism and where they wouldn’t be bashed. It seemed a logical choice to me. That was before I realized I was living in my own closet.

After taking a number of sociology and feminist theology classes, I realized I had sold my soul to play societal roles. I had not acknowledged my own talents. I had not really become *me*. I was living the way others wanted me to live, passing for someone else — and I was dying on the vine. It was a slow spiritual death, and at that point I knew my life lacked integrity. I had to “come out” of *my* closet to grow. Nothing grows for very long in a closet except mushrooms.

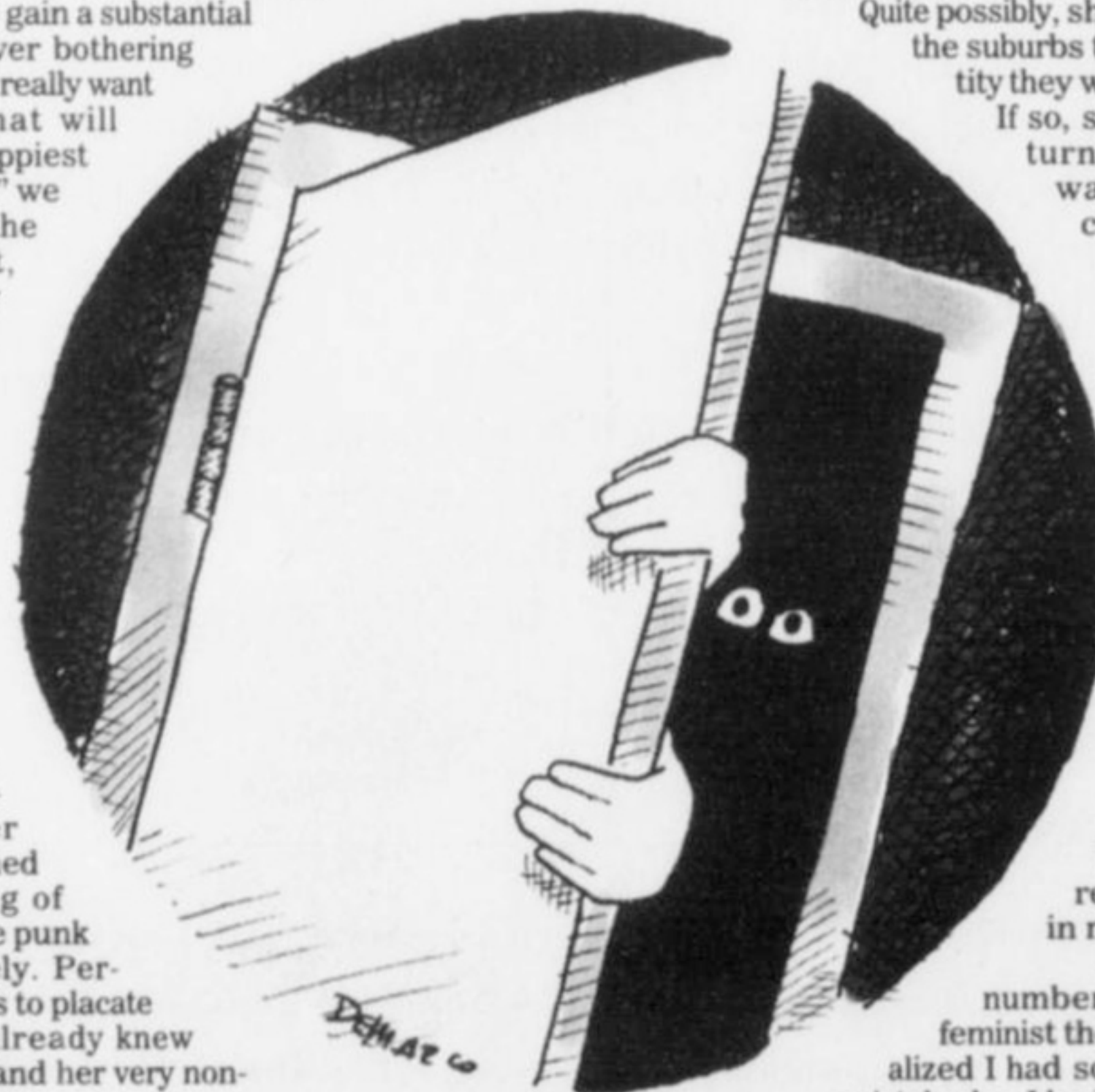
“Coming out” of any closet means choosing to step into the open, into the sunlight. It means saying, “Here I am, world — now deal with it.” This stance is not unlike that taken by NBA star Dennis Rodman, who continually keeps the media in a tizzy because he can’t be pinned down to a simple category.

There are always those who don’t like who we are and who we are becoming, but they exist whether we live in the closet or not. Whenever we sell our soul for others’ approval or affirmation, for financial or political reasons, we are living in a closet.

Furthermore, there are always people in our lives who are willing to control or manipulate us into their own image, especially if we abdicate responsibility for defining ourselves. Mothers. Bosses. Professors. Mentors. Preachers. Rabbis.

Coming out of *your* closet is a choice to live with integrity, to live a life you have defined as appropriate for yourself, to live a life that offers plenty of breathing room and growing space. Billy Joel has it right in the song “My Life,” whose lyrics include these lines: “First they tell you can’t sleep alone in a strange place/ Then they tell you can’t sleep with somebody else/ But sooner or later you sleep in your own space/ Either way it’s OK if you wake up with yourself.”

If you can’t wake up with yourself, then whose life are you living?



MIKE DEMARCO

The Daily Pennsylvanian or developed my own person, my own skills or