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NEWS

Panelists Discuss Gay, Asian Issues

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by Ana Li-Carrillo
Sun Staff Writer

"Gay or Asian vs. Gay AND Asian?" was the controversial question many Cornellians from the on-campus LGBT associations and Asian-interest associations were asked last night. MOSAIC, an on-campus organization which provides social support catering to the issues of "same gender-loving People of Color," invited four panelists from the Gay Asian and Pacific Islander Men of New York (GAPIMNY) to discuss the issue of being gay in the Asian community and being Asian in the gay community.

"We're stuck ... being over-generalized by two different communities" said Alain Dang, lead researcher for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, panelist and member of GAPIMNY.

The event started with the showing of a brief video on the 15th anniversary of GAPIMNY, a volunteer non-profit organization which provides support and educational space for gay people of Asian and Pacific Islander heritage in the Greater New York Metropolitan Area.

The panelists started the discussion with the subject of coming out to their Asian families and the difficulties Asian family traditions sometimes posed to the open expression of their sexuality.

"A very real experience of family in Asian-American families ... often we make the decision that for the good of the family we will put out individual issues aside" said Glenn Magpantay, staff attorney for the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, panelist and member of GAPIMNY

The issue of religion was also briefly discussed, with the panelists' message being that their religion had not influenced or conflicted with their sexual orientation.

The main issue to be discussed however was the controversy regarding a feature which appeared in Details magazine titled "Gay or Asian?" which was accused by many Asian-interest groups of being racist and of playing on the stereotypes which Asian-Americans have been trying to overcome.

"They're exoticising male Asian bodies, denigrating male Asian bodies -- de-sexualizing Asians is a problem which has been going on since the beginning of popular culture," Dang said.

The panelists expressed how playing on stereotypes was not the only problem regarding the feature; they also complained about the lack of support from non-Asian gay communities and heterosexual Asian communities.

"We saw we needed to educate Details magazine and we also needed to educate our contributors, the non-Gay Asians" Dang said.

The major concern addressed by the panelists was the issue of gay Asians not feeling welcome by either gay communities or Asian communities, either because of racism from the part of gay communities, or homophobia from the part of Asian Communities.

"My parents said being gay is not a Korean thing, it is a white thing." said Eugene Yoo '97, a panelist, to give an example of how racism was a major issue Gay-Asians had to confront.

The discussion inspired many questions from the audience and the passion with which the panelists expressed their points of view resulted in many ovations from the audience.

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A special applause was given to Greg Holm '06, MOSAIC member, who made the panel discussion possible.

"I wanted to bring [the panelists] up because it's an issue which isn't usually brought up ... as a gay Asian I've experimented homophobia and racism myself".

The members of the Cornell Community who attended the discussion made a cheerful and supportive audience, gladly coming forward at the end to collect the stickers given out by the panelists and further discussing their thoughts over the free dumplings provided by MOSAIC.

"MOSAIC's goal is to reach out to as many minority communities as we can ... the issues of religion and ... sexist issues that were brought up are important issues that needed to be addressed." said Stacey Tiamfook '05, vice-president of MOSAIC.

In the end the panelists stressed that the main point of the discussion and GAPIMNY's goal was to help Gay-Asians deal with the perceptions of the rest of the world.

"It is actually O.K. to be gay and Asian and to object to fighting racism with homophobia," Dang said.

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