

Gays, lesbians deserve civil rights protection

Today at the University, nothing officially prohibits overt and explicit discrimination against gay and lesbian students, staff and faculty. Homosexuals here may be denied scholarships, fellowships, research funds and sabbaticals.

Jobs and professional advancement may be withheld solely on the basis of sexual orientation. Housing, medical care, insurance and the equal protection of the law all can be officially denied to lesbians and gays at Mr. Jefferson's University.

Why? Because the administration repeatedly has refused since 1972 to include sexual orientation in its University-wide anti-discrimination policy. In the last several years, a few departments and organizations on Grounds, such as Student Council and the Admissions Office, have amended their policies to include sexual orientation for protection under the anti-discrimination clause.

Resident Staff and the Dean of Students Office also have been generally supportive. Consequently, openly gay students are offered admission and their concerns are fairly addressed by Student Council, but these are recent de-

velopments. This simply was not the case in the 1970s and early 1980s.

Subtle forms of homophobia and overt acts of hatred against gays are not uncommon today. Last semester we saw several attacks on both lesbians and gays, threats and ugly phone calls to the LGSU Helpline. Discrimination against us continues.

Virginia state law refuses to acknowledge the legal legitimacy of homosexuality, criminalizes consenting sexual relations among lesbian and gay adults and provides no civil rights protection.

Consequently, many gay and lesbian students, staff and faculty here remain in the closet. They do so out of fear for what might happen to them if they were to be openly gay.

We mention all of this to explain why some men have, in the past, reportedly resorted to using Cabell Hall late at night as a clandestine meeting place. We want to respond specifically to the concerns expressed in the letter to the editor which appeared in *The Cavalier Daily* ("Cabell bathrooms no place for sexual acts," Feb. 3).

First of all, using bathrooms or any other public place as a venue for sexual acts makes many gay

people uncomfortable. People who participate in such activities are often deeply closeted, and do not identify themselves as being homosexual.

People who participate in public sex are often the ones most in need of safe-sex education and support services, but are among the least likely to respond to them.

The furtive meetings and public sex that may have been going on in Cabell Hall shows just how painful, desperate and dangerous staying in the closet can be. The fact that very few other people are around late at night invites an escape from society's censure.

The "loitering men, who appeared to be students" in Kier and Binkley's account have been forced by their social conditioning and by society's homophobia to meet other men the only way in which they feel able to.

We must protect and help them. Simply arresting people for trespassing, indecent exposure or sodomy will not address this problem. Police action will not stop public sex, especially when loving relations between two consenting adults of the same gender in the privacy of their own home remains technically illegal in this state.

The world is not a perfect place.

And the University can be less than hospitable to "known homosexuals." Until gay and lesbian students, staff and faculty are accorded the same civil rights protections as all other citizens, and until the University as an institution completely overcomes its tradition of blatant and overt homophobia, then incidents such as those that allegedly occur will exist.

If straight students "worry about being a witness" to sexual acts in a bathroom, then they should help work to eliminate the forces that drive some men to such desperation.

If Kier and Binkley's friend was "mortified" by what he saw, imagine how the "two startled men" felt as they "ran out of the restroom." And if you see two men, or two women, innocently cuddling on the Lawn on a warm day, what will you do?

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