

COMMENTARY

Tuesday, February 24, 2004

EDITORIAL

Parking fix is a swerve in the right direction

Parking at the University can be a real challenge. On a good day, finding a parking spot somewhere near your destination can be something of a challenge. On a bad day, looking for a space is a fool's errand.

As if drivers to the campus area — faculty, staff and students alike — didn't face enough vehicular challenges already, the Department of Public Safety's current parking permit program is a sticky mess. Literally.

You see them on the backs of cars all around campus: Fading orange stickers, crackling cyan stickers, and half-removed green stickers with streaks of dried white adhesive.

Sometimes they're pasted on top of each other five or six layers thick. Sometimes they cover an entire rear bumper, an intricate tapestry of parking permission slips reminding passersby of this sticky situation.

The University's ugly permits are designed to come off in pieces to prevent theft and sharing, DPS Parking and Transportation Manager Rand Stamm said. The trick, though, lies in removing the too-durable stickers at all. Stamm says he uses boiling water to remove his permits; other home-brew solutions he's heard of include vinegar and WD-40. But all of that is simply too much work for something that's intended to facilitate a convenience like parking on campus.

The problem at the heart of this goopy mess is that the permanent sticker parking permits are just that — permanent. Besides the issue of removal (and thus that of aesthetics), permanent stickers present a logistical problem. If your car (with parking permit attached) is in the shop, you need to visit DPS for a temporary permit — not a major inconvenience, but not a necessary one, either.

Similar issues apply to people who drive more than one car to campus, or to people who buy cars mid-term.

Fortunately, Stamm and DPS are looking into replacing the unsightly stickers with removable adhesive or static-cling permits. The Emerald Editorial Board praises DPS for exploring this issue, and strongly encourages the department to replace the stickers with more user-friendly permits. (Rear-view mirror permits, though probably more convenient for most drivers, aren't a viable option, as EPD needs stickers to be on cars' backs.)

Removable permits solve all of worst problems associated with the current system: Is your car in the shop? Peel it off and put it on your rental or a friend's car you're borrowing. Do you regularly switch cars with a spouse? Peel it off and put it on. Buying a new car? Peel it.

Unfortunately, this change would likely bring with it a price increase, Stamm explained. If the University changed to transferable permits, the demand for additional permits would decrease, increasing the price per permit to maintain revenues. But that's a small price to pay for this much convenience.

EDITORIAL POLICY

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DIRE STRAIGHTS

Americans idealize heterosexual marriages because of homophobic beliefs ...

San Francisco is issuing marriage licenses to gay couples despite a California law that prohibits same-sex marriages.

It figures.

I should mention here that I not only grew up in San Francisco, but I lived just three blocks from Castro Street, the gayest street in the gayest city in the country, if not the world.

Walking home from grade school, I regularly saw men holding hands. Going to the grocery store, I passed men necking outside a bar. And when my mother was going to be late getting home, I often stayed with our downstairs neighbors, Allen and Jim — did I mention they had a fabulous apartment?

Despite the years of extensive exposure that I had to all that unnaturalness, here I am today — distressingly heterosexual and disgustingly normal.

Of course, I'm sure what saved me and my normalcy from all that exposure to alternative lifestyles was the absence of a state-sanctioned marriage license.

Right.

Conservative groups battling against the legalization of same-sex marriages pound on their pulpits as they declare that such marriages endanger The Family (insert appropriate trumpet sounds).

Huh?

I suppose if your notion of family means that you have exactly one mother (female), one father (male) and 2.4 kids (one boy, one girl, and four-tenths of your choice), then yes, same-sex marriages threaten The Family.

Of course, if you actually live on this planet, it might have come to your attention that many of us can't define family in such a limited way.

We have single parents. We have step-mothers, step-fathers, and step-siblings. We have live-in boyfriends and live-in girlfriends. Grandparents raise their grandchildren while aunts and uncles



Jessica Cole-Hodgkinson
Huh? What? Really.

raise nieces and nephews.

We also have same-sex parents.

Whether they are raising an adopted child, or the biological offspring of one partner, homosexual parents are a reality. Notables such as Rosie O'Donnell and Melissa Etheridge have helped put a face on the concept of gay parenting, but it was not so very long ago that the city of Springfield was removing "Heather Has Two Mommies" from its library shelves.

So, perhaps it's time to acknowledge that our concept of The Family is capable of evolving.

Doesn't it follow, then, that our notion of marriage is also capable of evolution?

Left to my own devices, I'd define marriage as simply a loving committed relationship. I would leave the details to the individuals to determine for themselves. I do understand, however, that our laws require a bit more than that to go on when determining rights and legal protections.

And there are some serious rights at stake. Marriage can affect the taxes people pay, the health benefits they're entitled to, and what rules of inheritance and survivorship apply.

There are some basic policy issues behind the government's promotion of marriage. Among them:

(1) Marriage encourages reproduction — before concerns of overpopulation, this was considered a good thing.

(2) Marriage allows the state to hold the fathers responsible for the care of a child — before paternity testing, marriage was an acceptable way of defining fatherhood.

(3) Marriage encourages a fair allocation of assets — where one partner is the breadwinner and the other is a homemaker, marriage gives both an equal stake in the couple's estate.

(4) Marriage encourages monogamy; in theory, this is supposed to discourage the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases.

Notice that there is nothing in these policies that must automatically exclude same-sex couples. In fact, expanding these policies to include same-sex couples would promote the welfare of those engaged in same-sex relationships.

And therein lies the rub.

Far too many people don't want to promote the welfare of homosexuals. They view homosexuality as sinful, dirty, evil, pernicious or some other pejorative-of-your-choice. From that, they figure that any promotion of the welfare of a homosexual person is the same as promoting homosexuality itself. It doesn't quite work that way.

Science is telling us more convincingly every day that homosexuality is not a choice but a biological imperative. No more than a person can control the melanin content of their skin can some people control their sexual identity.

From its inception, our country has dealt with bigotry in many shapes and sizes. It's an ongoing battle, but we are making progress. The way I see it, if people of color no longer have to sit on the back of the bus, I see no reason why same-sex couples should have to go to San Francisco to get married.

Contact the columnist at jessicacolehodgkinson@dailyemerald.com. Her opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

... and have trivialized their 'sacred' notions of marriage anyway

Last week I was surfing around online, and I saw an advertisement for Russian brides. So I made a few clicks, and in 20 minutes I had my very own Russian woman, ready to marry me. She likes knitting and vodka. Her name's Olga.

I told Olga to fly out to Las Vegas, and I met her at the airport. We drove straight to the Little White Wedding Chapel, where Britney Spears got married to childhood buddy Jason Alexander. Their marriage lasted 55 hours. According to Alexander, the two got drunk on New Year's, looked at each other and said, "Let's do something wild and crazy."

"Let's get married. Just for the hell of it."

This isn't anything new for the Little White Wedding Chapel. The chapel has a drive-through wedding service and is open 24 hours a day. Last year, the chapel hosted 38,000 weddings.

After we got married, Olga and I drove to a hotel. We checked in and turned on the television. "Friends" was on. Phoebe was getting married, so of course they made a joke about Ross and his three marriages (and three subsequent divorces). They make this joke at least once an episode.

It's a particularly pertinent quip for the "Friends" audience because millions of Americans get divorced every year. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, the marriage rate was 7.6 for every 1,000 Americans in 2003.



Peter Hockaday
Today is Hockaday

The divorce rate is 3.8 for every 1,000 Americans. That 2:1 ratio has been constant for more than a decade.

Tired of "Friends," I flipped to Fox and "My Big Fat Obnoxious Fiance" was on. On the show, a woman tried to fool her family into believing she was marrying a complete moron. The show follows other Fox classics such as "Married by America," where the protagonists had their spouses chosen for them by viewers, and "Temptation Island," where hot people in serious relationships had those relationships tested by the presence of even more hot people.

Olga seemed confused by this culture of marriage shows, so I turned off the television and said "Hollywood, baby, Hollywood." We hopped in the car and headed west towards La-La Land. When we got there, I took her to the ultimate American entertainment event: a Los Angeles Lakers game.

Those Lakers fans sure are nuts. For some reason, they worship Kobe Bryant

like Buddha. Kobe Bryant, at the very least, committed class-A adultery. He admitted as much and bought his wife — his high-school sweetheart, no less! — a diamond ring the size of Jupiter. But the fans voted him into the NBA's All-Star Game in record numbers. Kobe Bryant is an American hero.

Olga didn't like the Lakers game so much. They only like hockey in her country. Maybe she just didn't like me. In broken English, she asked me for an annulment. So I took her to the nearest courthouse. Within a few hours, she was on a plane back to St. Petersburg.

To ease the pain, I decided to head north to my home town, San Francisco. On the steps of City Hall, hundreds of people were protesting the mayor's decision to allow gay couples to legally marry. These protesters echoed the words of Massachusetts lawmakers who oppose gay marriage and echoed our representative in the White House, President George W. Bush.

"Save the sanctity of marriage!" they shouted.

"Keep marriage civil!" they screamed.

"Keep marriage sacred!" they yelled. They said these things, and I couldn't help myself. I just laughed, and laughed and laughed at the irony of it all.

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