

The difference between discrimination and telling the truth about Prop. 8

A gay person's decision to come out of the closet is difficult. An opponent of gay marriage's decision to voice support for an apartheid system of unequal rights is apparently not difficult enough. As Allysia Finley's error-ridden and offensive column in The Daily's Dec. 3 issue demonstrated, gay marriage opponents still think they have a legitimate argument (see "The Right Angle: Prop. 8 opponents need to show tolerance").

It's time for them to realize they're wrong. It's also time for them to stop drawing equivalencies between the oppression faced by the queer community and intolerance they feel as "out" bigots.

Finley's words and attitude are the framework for a culture that has denied gay people basic civil rights and a sense of belonging for years. Although Finley claims that gay people "are not discriminated against in employment and education," no federal protection against discrimination exists for gay employees, and 30 states fail to include LGBT workers as a protected class in nondiscrimination statutes.

Most companies enumerate a list of groups they will protect regardless of state laws. But guess which group is still absent from the lists of 28 Fortune 500 companies despite several years of lobbying? I'll give you a hint — this group of people can no longer adopt kids in Arkansas, thanks to the efforts of the same forces who passed Prop. 8 in California.

Obstacles to LGBT inclusion in education are slightly more subtle because we take heteronormativity for granted. I've worked in LGBT rights since 11th grade, and I still make mistakes. Before my house's special dinner last year, I asked a new resident what "lucky lady" he'd be taking to our party. I felt like an ignorant jerk when he responded with, "I'm gay."

Forget malicious intent for a second. Gay youth feel pressure to deny their sexuality because the people around them innocently as-

sume everyone's straight. Too many students find something disgusting, uncomfortable, annoying or stupid and label it "gay," not realizing the associations they are creating. Even well-meaning people at Stanford ignore, gloss over or marginalize gay people's identities on a daily basis. Those who deny the educational challenges LGBT youth face are deluding themselves.

When we factor in the overt prejudices and discrimination gay people face, it's no wonder gay youth without supportive parents, peers and teachers are far more likely to suffer from depression and commit suicide than their straight counterparts.

Despite these realities, Finley still wants to compare her suffering as a Prop. 8 supporter to the suffering in the gay community. There is a big difference, however, between the LGBT minority in the United States and the anti-gay marriage minority at our university.

One group is defined by sexual orientation, a personal characteristic they force on no one. The other group, the anti-gay marriage faction, is defined by a public stance used to deprive gays of equal treatment under the law and maintain apartheid marriage in California. I wish, as Finley contends in her article, that views on gay marriage were "private beliefs." But political donations and votes that deprive people of legal benefits are about as private as my disdain for Finley's column.

There is no non-bigoted reason to oppose same-sex marriage. Arguments about definitions are thinly veiled disguises for the belief that gay people are inferior in some way. You can't coherently reason that you like gay people and believe in equal rights for Americans but don't support gay marriage. At the federal level, civil marriage guarantees couples 1,138 benefits. In most states, married couples receive over 1,000 additional benefits. Legislation like Proposition 8 deprives gay people of

OPED

Continued from page 5

privileges guaranteed to other Americans.

Calling a Prop. 8 supporter a bigot is neither narrow-minded nor cruel. It's the truth. I'd call a supporter of Jim Crow laws, unequal pay for women and the Nazis a racist, sexist and anti-Semite, respectively. These labels, far from being prejudicial, all describe an evaluation of character based on someone's behavior. Like the fight for black equality was 40 years ago, gay marriage is a simple question of civil rights. Until gay marriage opponents renounce the cruelty they have inflicted on the LGBT community, I will call their bigotry what it is.

BEN SPIELBERG '10