

Gay Marriage

Putting a Face on Gay

Dale Madison

GAY MARRIAGE

The year is 2008. Please raise your hand and snap your fingers if you do not know at least one gay person. How many Americans know someone in their immediate family who is gay? It is generally argued that one person in ten is gay. The 2000 census report says 2-3% of the United States population live in same sex co-habitation. Gay people have existed since the beginning of recorded time. I believe gay people should have the right to marry and be afforded the same exact privileges as heterosexuals. In order to convince you, I ask that you put a face on gay. Try to put aside religious convictions, political affiliations or stereotypical images (rumors, falsehoods, urban legends). If a gay family member or gay friend you love wants to get married - but can't - how would it make you feel? Put their face on your image of gay marriage.

Same gender loving people from across the country have been calling for the right to form legally recognized unions. Such unions would give gays the same rights that straights have. Those who oppose gay marriage do so out of a fear of the loss of traditional family values combined with homophobia. It's not simply that they would rather not see it exist, but rather that they regard gay marriage as perhaps the greatest moral and social evil to occur since the legalization of interracial marriage and abortion.

There are key advantages for society to support gay marriages. A reduction in promiscuity and sexually transmitted diseases would happen as a result. Gay couples are able to care for each other in times of adversity rather than relying on the state. Healthy same sex marriages provide positive role models for young gay people. Recognizing

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those images could reduce the number of gay teen suicides. Gay sons and daughters will feel more involved in the activities of adult family life.

Marriage is an important heterosexual cultural symbol and a good example of how white heterosexuals are privileged. Marriage is the last legally sanctioned discrimination in America. It was not so long ago that interracial marriage was forbidden. The Supreme Court of the United States struck down laws banning interracial marriage in 1967. That same civil right should be extended to gays today. The opponents of interracial marriage hid behind religion and “family” values to justify denying mixed couples the right to marry. Since that ban has been lifted, we see the institution of marriage has hardly crumbled. Ask a mixed race person today how they would feel if their parents had not been allowed to marry. Civil rights and gay rights are deeply rooted in the same principles. *The Los Angeles Times* recently supported the cause of gay marriage by educating its readers to vote no on Proposition 8:

“...the very act of denying gay and lesbian couples the right to marry -- traditionally the highest legal and societal recognition of a loving commitment -- by definition relegates them and their relationships to second-class status, separate and not all that equal.”

In fact, multiple marriages by celebrities make one wonder whether marital laws should limit the number of marriages for all people – gay and straight! This glorious game of “I do” and “I don’t right now” has been played out numerous times by celebrities like Elizabeth Taylor who had eight husbands and Zsa Zsa Gabor who married nine times. Lana Turner said “I do” eight times, while Billy Bob Thornton bought five wives wedding rings. Joan Collins and Geena Davis had five husbands each, while Star Trek’s William Shatner only married four times. Liza Minnelli married four men as well, but

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two of her husbands were gay, which is okay because the gay person married a person of the opposite sex. Jerry Lee Lewis had six wives, and one of them was his underage cousin (which is legal in some states). Sometimes the number of heterosexual marriages pales in comparison to the length of the marriages.

Banning gay marriage can actually hurt traditional marriage, because allowing gays to marriage can help alleviate lies and deception. Men on the “down low” will not feel obligated to lead double lives, because viable options will be available. This could also result in lower HIV infection rates. These men would not be taking risks in multiple sexual encounters with males and then going to the beds of women who they feel forced to marry in a double life. They can choose the closet or a lifestyle with the same benefits given heterosexuals. Gay marriage is not just about marriage, it is about acceptance and equal rights. Gay marriage brings people out the closet instead of forcing people into the closets of heterosexual relationships because of the pressure of society. The result will be fewer divorces due to alternate lifestyle choices.

According to Gary Remafedi, author of Male Sexuality: The Adolescent Perspective, 50% of all gay and lesbian youth report that their parents reject them due to their sexual orientation (Remafedi 326). Lack of acceptance pushes our gay children away from loving support of their homes. According to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, over 30% of all reported teen suicides each year are committed by gay and lesbian youth. This percentage would go down with wider acceptance of homosexuality. The emergence of the gay family unit goes beyond gay teens. The need for adoptive homes of children in general would benefit from gay marriage. Gay couples

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seek to adopt children because they cannot conceive in the traditional sense. The result is more children get to find homes of loving families.

Gay marriage would allow same sex couples with the same basic rights heterosexual people take for granted. Gay people have children and those children need the stability and economic security provided by legal marriage. Both partners will have equal shares in legal and health decisions. Families headed by same-sex couples would then have equal access to employer-provided health and retirement benefits. Gay spouses would be entitled to the same sick and bereavement leave to care for a legal partners and non-biological/adoptive children. Equal access to pensions, workers compensation, Social Security death benefits and spousal benefits would be taken for granted. How does it feel to have a civil right denied your sister or her children from a gay union, because of her sexual orientation or lesbian relationship? Put your most beloved family member's face in that situation.

That is exactly what happened when an amendment was introduced to the state of Massachusetts in 2007 to ban same-sex unions, the effort to defeat the measure was led, in large part, by Governor Deval Lardine Patrick, the first African-American to hold that office. Governor Patrick did not know it at the time, but his own daughter was about to come out the closet. He put a face on gay in his behavior and it was a good thing because it turned into reality when his daughter would be able to benefit from his actions later.

Katherine Patrick was quoted in a recent article:

“So, for someone so publicly to fight for something that doesn't even affect him was just like, ‘That's my dad,’ you know? That's all I could think. I was very, very proud to be part of this family, and this state in general.”

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As the law currently stands a gay partner does not have the right to sue for wrongful death or make medical decisions for an ill or incapacitated partner. If a home is purchased together and one partner goes to a nursing home, they receive no protection under the Medicaid spend-down provision.

In closing, I ask you to imagine three best friends and one is gay. Put the face of the friend who means the most to you in the world in the place of the gay person. You grow up with these two childhood friends who have seen you through thick and thin. The three of you go off to different colleges, but you keep in touch via emails and phone calls. You finally see each other after four years. Everyone is a successful contributing member of society. What if those two childhood friends come to you to share the exciting news of their upcoming nuptials? You are absolutely thrilled for them both. Your mind imagines wedding showers bridal gowns and bachelorette parties. Suddenly you discover one of your friends was marrying a person of the opposite sex and the other was marrying a person of the same sex? How would you feel? They are your childhood friends. How could you celebrate the union of one and not the union of the other? Would you want to deny your dearest friend the right to have a legalized union? When you put a face a gay it makes a difference.

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