

REFUTING SAME-SEX MARRIAGE MYTHS

Why Anti-Marriage Arguments Aren't Valid

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Acknowledgements

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In a bizarre way, I would say that this ebook exists partly because of the way I was taught to think by Francis Schaeffer, the evangelical Christian theologian and philosopher. Many of today's fundamentalists, in politics and churches in North America, would gnash their teeth at the very thought. But following Schaeffer's methods did teach me to evaluate arguments by pushing their premises and assumptions to their logical conclusions. So I am grateful that he helped train my mind to find the flaws in the anti-equal-marriage arguments.

The greatest thanks, though, must go to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered friends who changed my own mind through the years. I myself, as an evangelical/fundamentalist Christian, once used these very arguments against such people and their aspirations to equality. But it took just a year or so of getting to know these friends to discover that everything I had been taught about them was wrong. And that started me wondering just why I had been taught those false things in the first place. That's another thread that led directly to this ebook.

Two friends stand out in particular ways, though. Michael Mele, whom I first met on the Table Talk discussion forum of Salon.com, was one of the most rational thinkers I knew, and a passionate defender of equal rights for himself and other homosexuals. Chapter one belongs to him, because he taught me almost all of it.

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Introduction: Why the Fuss About Same-Sex Marriage?

The above question might make gays and lesbians drop their jaws in shock, at the idea that anyone could even ask it. Meanwhile, it might seem a perfectly straightforward question for people who don't think same-sex marriage should be legalized. After all, they think, marriage as it currently exists has gone on for centuries as it is. Why change it now, even if a small minority of people in the society finds it inconvenient?

For gays and lesbians, the simple answer is that they are equal citizens in a democratic society, and should have precisely the same rights as every other citizen. As things stand at the moment, each of them is denied the legal right to marry the partner they love and form a family in the same way that any heterosexual, anywhere, is allowed to do. This seems like a fundamental injustice, and a denial of the equality of all citizens.

Many heterosexuals counter with the fact that certain inequalities do happen even in a democratic society. Of course it's a great ideal that everyone is treated equally, yet sometimes there are good reasons for denying rights to certain people. These reasons usually involve the greater good of the whole society.

And so gays and lesbians are bombarded with all the "good reasons" that heterosexuals have for denying them the legal right to marry. And many of these reasons actually seem quite plausible at first glance.

But are they, really?

That's what this ebook is all about: demonstrating that despite how plausible the various anti-marriage arguments might sound, they crumble to pieces when you look at them closely. And as it turns out, there are really only two real motives behind all these arguments, one of those religious and the other decidedly less religious. And behind both of those lies one impulse that has nothing at all to do with reason and rationality. And these two motives and that one impulse provide no justification whatsoever for denying homosexuals the equal legal right to marry.

Because of that one underlying gut impulse, and its lack of a rational basis, some people who oppose same-sex marriage will simply never change their minds, even if it can be demonstrated that not a single one of their reasons for opposing gay marriage is valid. On the other hand, there are a lot of people of good will who accept those reasons, not realizing how flawed they are. These people in particular

are the most likely to change their minds if they are given detailed explanations of how the common anti-marriage arguments are mistaken.

For gays and lesbians who are working for their equality rights, especially when it comes to marriage, this ebook will give them the explanations they need. Even they may be unsure where the flaws and holes are, in the major arguments used against them, but this ebook will show them what they need to know. Each of the first six chapters deals with one of the main arguments against same-sex marriage. Chapter seven covers a few more, while chapter eight talks about that one underlying gut impulse behind everything else. And finally, the Conclusion summarizes the flaws in the anti-marriage arguments, for easy recollection and reference.

I should note the different ways that I will be referring to same-sex marriage in this ebook, so there is no confusion. Often the term itself, “same-sex marriage,” will be used, but I frequently also use “equal marriage.” This term stresses the fact that gays and lesbians are fighting for equal, legal citizenship rights that correspond to the marriage rights all heterosexuals simply take for granted. I may also use “homosexual marriage” or “gay marriage” from time to time. But all four of these terms, in this ebook, are interchangeable and are meant to refer to the same thing.

Gays and lesbians have been fighting for equal rights for a long time. Many thought it would take much longer than it has, to arrive at the point where they could even think about trying to achieve equal marriage status with heterosexuals. And of course, in some countries where simply existing as a homosexual is considered a crime, sometimes punishable by death or a long prison term, the idea of legal marriage really is unthinkable right now.

But in the past few years, some more democratic societies have actually begun legalizing domestic partnerships, civil unions, and now, finally, marriage between homosexuals. Once that started happening, the possibility of achieving marriage rights suddenly loomed much larger in democratic countries that haven’t yet legalized equal marriage. This not only means that a big political push has started, to help achieve those rights, but it also means that opposition has gotten louder too. And those opposing equal marriage have certain favorite arguments they consistently trot out, to “prove” that it’s wrong and immoral to legalize same-sex marriage.

With this ebook, those who are fighting for their rights now have detailed answers and proofs of their own against that bombardment of arguments used against them.

Chapter 1

EQUAL MARRIAGE HARMS THE “SANCTITY” OF MARRIAGE

You stand humbly before the panel of judges, awaiting your fate. The head judge leans forward from behind his desk, fixing a stern glance on your face. You rub sweaty, nervous hands on your pant legs or skirt. And as your heart pounds, the judge takes a breath and solemnly decides on your sentence:

“I hereby sentence you to refrain from eating pork for the rest of your life.”

“Don’t forget,” says another judge, “that they have to wear a cross at all times.”

And, if you’re female, a third judge adds, “She must also cover her head and face with a veil, and never go outside without a man’s permission and accompaniment.”

The guards come and grab your arms, and no matter how you struggle, they lead you away. That pork roast you’d been thawing out for supper that evening? In the garbage it goes! You may be Sikh or Buddhist, but that cross goes around your neck to stay. And if you’re a woman, enjoy the scenery through the car window on the way home, because you’ll never see it again without looking at it through a veil. If the men in the house ever let you outside again, that is.

What madness is this? Such a thing could never happen in a democratic country where everyone is treated equally before the law!

Or could it?

Well, that’s the theory, of course: this is a scenario you’ll never have to live through, because you live in a democracy. But do you have any idea what needs to happen in the government and laws of your country, to keep some judge or lawmaker with a different religion than yours from legally forcing you to live by their religious requirements?

And anyway, what does any of this have to do with the question of equal marriage? Frankly, it has everything to do with it. Because the moment you begin to speak of disallowing equal marriage under the law because somehow it harms the “sanctity” of marriage, using that kind of religious terminology, you have started using religion to create the laws of your land. And you have just provided all the justification a Muslim judge would need to force your women to wear a

veil, or a Jewish judge to forbid you to eat pork, or a Hindu judge to force you to become a vegetarian.

Does that sound far-fetched? Let's have a peek at the idea of democratic government, and find out just how far-fetched it really is. Or isn't.

Just how much religion should there be in a democratic government?

First, does anyone need reminding that we are not the Greeks of twenty-five centuries ago? In fact, we aren't even the Americans of more than two centuries ago, or the British of five or six. We live today, and not in 500 BC, 1967 AD, or 1776 AD. Why should anyone need to be reminded of this? It's because some people get too hung up on what the "founders" of any democratic society originally thought about how their democracy should work.

Remember that the Greeks were just fine with slavery, and the women of Athens had no freedoms or legal standing whatsoever. In fact, they weren't regarded as fully human. Even a century ago, women in the North American countries couldn't vote, and had no legal standing apart from their fathers or husbands. Canadian women in 1929 actually had to take a court case all the way across the ocean to the Privy Council of England, which was essentially Canada's Supreme Court at the time, just to force their own democracy to recognize them – fifty percent of all Canadian citizens! – as "persons" under the law.

Not many people today really want to turn back to the very beginning practices of any democracy. We live in the twenty-first century, not the eighteenth, and it's our job to take the marvellous ideas that were created in Athens, London, Philadelphia, and even Ottawa, all those centuries ago, and apply them more and more consistently today.

So what has happened, over those many long years, to develop the ideas of democracy so they'll be applied consistently and equally? In the centuries since the Greeks decided that all Greek men of a certain socio-economic class were equal under the law, and since the Americans progressively agreed that all white male property owners and finally all men – and eventually all women too – were equal under the law, one idea has grown in strength.

And that idea is that a genuinely democratic government that guarantees equality is *secular*. Non-religion-based. Treating all citizens equally under the law, regardless of their religion (or lack of it). Making no laws based on any particular religious viewpoint.

We're kidding here, right? No religious influence at all in lawmaking? Is that crazy, or what?

It can feel like that, especially to people in North America who have strong religious beliefs. In fact, forget "crazy" – the idea of a totally secular government can feel downright threatening. Not to mention insulting to people whose faith infuses their ideas of justice and equality.

But let's keep in mind our example from the beginning of this chapter, where the judges could legally sentence someone to vegetarianism or the wearing of a veil. When it's "other people's" religions, having a country's laws be secular is actually a protection. No Muslim judge can require a Buddhist to abstain from alcohol and no Mormon judge can forbid a Jew to drink coffee. If people are honest, they'll admit that the only time they actually get squeamish about these protections is when the law isn't protecting them from other people's religions – but is protecting other people from theirs.

Keeping all branches of a democratic government secular makes sure that nobody is granted or denied citizenship or legal status because of what particular religion they practise or, for that matter, don't practise. When it comes to their status as a citizen of a democracy, and how their government looks at them and treats them, religion is irrelevant. There's no single religion that is preferred, and no religion is legally penalized.

You're probably rolling your eyes right now, because everyone's heard of plenty of examples that contradict this idea. Democratic governments have violated this principle more than a few times, and you know many of them will make that mistake again. But still, remember how far we've come since ancient Athens. Working to make the principles of democracy consistent is exactly how democracy evolves, and we've been refining our human rights practices for a long time. And we're going to keep doing that.

This is the goal toward which all democracies are striving: to make a person's religious beliefs irrelevant to whether or not their government treats them with justice and equality.

However, it's just as important that people remember the other great advantage to keeping our governments and legal systems completely secular. If we do this, it actually guarantees that people are free to practise their religion, and doesn't hinder them. It prevents someone of any faith from imposing a religion-based law on someone of any other faith.

Think about that. You are free to be Christian, Buddhist, Wiccan, or even Jedi — and the law is not supposed to care one way or another. It doesn't matter, if you're challenging a parking ticket or charging someone with trespassing, whether you're Muslim or an atheist. If someone murders your brother, the murderer should not be treated differently in the courts because they are Christian or Hindu. And that example from the beginning of the chapter? Absolutely can't happen.

No law and no judge can require you to engage in a religious practice from a faith you don't follow. No Christian judge can legally require you to wear a cross, no Jewish judge who keeps kosher can insist that you can't eat pork, no conservative Muslim judge can require all women to wear the hijab. No vegetarian Hindu judge can forbid anyone, by law, to eat meat.

If you feel that your religious status might be in jeopardy because people of your faith aren't in control of the laws or the judicial system, try to imagine if those systems were controlled by people of a different faith instead. Surely it's a great thing, in a democracy, to keep the government and the judicial system secular, because it provides protection for everyone. The same legal and governmental system that prevents me from imposing my beliefs on others (even if I'm convinced it's "for their own good") also prevents other religious people from imposing their beliefs on me. For my own good, as they see it.

This is especially beneficial if a person is from a religious minority in the country. A majority of citizens from another religion cannot impose their beliefs and practices upon that person. She or he is protected.

If the government and the law maintain a strictly secular relationship to all citizens, none of them can impose their beliefs on any of the others. But the minute a government favours one religion above all the others, it means that all citizens of any other religion, or those with no religion at all, are potentially in jeopardy and have lost their equality under the law. This is no longer democracy, but borders on a tyranny of one group (convinced it has "the only truth") over all others. All genuine democracies have deliberately set up safeguards against this.

So what's the answer to the question that begins this section, "Just how much overt religion should there be in a democratic government?" Well, obviously the answer is: None.

But we circle yet again to the even earlier question, which is what any of this has to do with equal marriage. Are we any closer to answering that question?

You bet we are, if we remember that when we use that word, "sanctity," we are really pulling religion back into the legal mix.

So...can the state “sanctify” a marriage or not?

Okay, what does everything in the last section mean when we’re talking about legal marriage of any sort? It means, to be blunt, that the government is not a church. Period.

Your government is all about legal status. Think of the boring stuff, all the mechanics about getting married, and that’s where you’ll find the government standing, checklist in hand. There’s nothing exalted or divinely meaningful about a government granting legal status to a marriage partnership and deciding what legal obligations go with it. And there’s certainly no vast spiritual force at work when the government also sets up and adjudicates the mechanisms that dissolve this partnership, and determines what legal obligations stem from its being dissolved.

No democratic government requires the partners in a marriage to be of any particular religious viewpoint, or even religious at all. Frankly, the government simply doesn’t care and it doesn’t ask. That’s not its job. All the state cares about is how this partnership is going to function, legally, in the general society.

Does this mean that all religious meaning and significance is stripped from marriage altogether? Why should it mean that? Ask any person of faith if it’s true that they would bestow no spiritual meaning whatsoever on their marriage if all they could afford was the secular ceremony down at City Hall. Though if you ask that question, be prepared for them to look at you like you’ve lost your mind.

They’ll know that the spiritual significance in their marriage never did come from City Hall, but stems from them and their own commitment to their covenant before their God. This is true for all married people who view their marriage from a spiritual perspective. Any religious element they believe is a part of their marriage is brought to it by the interpretation of the couple involved, and by anyone whose spiritual opinion they consider valid, from whatever family, group, coven, church, temple, mosque, synagogue, or meeting house that they adhere to.

It’s a big mistake to try to insist that the “sancity” of marriage is somehow determined by any action of the state. How many people truly want the government deciding whether or not their marriage is “sanctified?” Most people in a democratic society would prefer that the government just keep out of that part of their marriage, thank you very much.

It's true that the roots of most of our marriage laws came originally from one or two particular religions. But remember again that our democracies are gradually working toward treating all citizens absolutely equally under the law. We don't retain the "original" ideas about slavery or women's legal status, and there's no reason we should retain a religious interpretation of marriage in a democratic legal system. We've already seen that it's not the job of a government to impose any religion's customs and requirements on its citizens. So even if the original ideas about marriage had a religious beginning, what matters now is that the laws of the land should be secular, to protect all citizens equally.

But don't marriages utterly collapse, even legally, if they lack some kind of religious foundation? Nope. Think of civil marriages, performed outside any religious context, but given the exact same legal status as any marriage performed in a religious context. This shows that the legal status of a marriage does not depend on any religion, or the lack of it.

If you remember nothing else from this chapter, remember this most important fact: *The religious status of a marriage and the legal status of a marriage are two separate things.*

Okay, then. What should we think of this argument that so many people use, saying that equal marriage (that is, marriage between two men or two women) should not be allowed because it harms the "sanctity" of marriage? It carries the implicit demand that the state ought to function religiously. And in a democracy, that's an absolute no-no.

But there are a bunch of other absurd implications that also stem from the argument, if someone is going to be consistent and carry it to its logical conclusions.

For starters, if we require the government to legalize just the marriages that are "sanctified," we have to prevent any weddings of atheists. And we pretty much have to annul such marriages that already exist, especially if they were performed by a Justice of the Peace or at City Hall. After all, none of these atheists' marriages are "sanctified," in the sense meant by the people using the "sanctity" argument. The marriages aren't sanctified either by the beliefs of the participants or the beliefs of the officiating body. So according to this argument, they cannot possibly be "sanctified," since they have no allegiance to any kind of deity or existing religion.

Oh, and we've also just single-handedly annulled every heterosexual marriage ever performed by any officially atheist state in the twentieth century, as well as

the remaining officially atheist states in the twenty-first. All those Soviet, Eastern European, and Chinese marriages? Not sanctified, and therefore not valid.

That's an awful lot of marriages annulled by one statement. Especially when the "sanctity" argument is used most often by self-proclaimed "pro family" groups.

One reason religious people are afraid of legalizing same-sex marriage is that they're afraid their own religious institutions will be forced to perform equal marriage ceremonies, even if their religion teaches that homosexuality is a sin. We'll have a look at those fears in more detail in chapter 6.

But this, again, is where the secular state actually protects them. Even as things stand now, religious institutions already have the freedom to deny a couple's request to have their marriage performed in the sacred spaces of those faiths, if the couple doesn't meet that religion's requirements. That right doesn't change, in a democratic society. No secular governmental system can require such a change.

A religious governmental system, on the other hand, could do so. Put the government under the control of any particular religious organization, and people who don't belong to that religion have nowhere to turn to protect themselves.

Maybe, in the end, it's a lot more sensible – and democratic – to recognize that people who want their marriages to be "sanctified" are perfectly free, under the laws of the land, to marry in the religious institution of their choice, and to live an example of sanctity in their own marriage. No law in the land is preventing two religious people from making their own marriage as sanctified as it can possibly be within the requirements of their own religion.

No government can possibly sanctify their marriage for them. And it should never be asked to do so.

The real root of the "sanctity" argument

A very odd thing happens, though, as soon as we get to this point in the argument. Even though the people who use it often talk about democracy, legal equality, and liberty, they still sidestep all the implications of those words when it comes to the "sanctity of marriage" and the nature of government. And we begin to discover that there's something more going on under the surface.

These people are not ready to acknowledge that the state is secular, is not a church, and has no business "sanctifying" anything. Because the "sanctity"

argument, even though they partially believe it, is actually a smokescreen for what they really want government to be.

People from all religions who complain about equal marriage “destroying the sanctity of marriage” are, in fact, not complaining about the gay or lesbian marriages at all. What really bothers them is that their country isn’t a one-religion country ruled by their version of a god, imposing their spiritual vision on everyone else, whether everyone else believes in their god or not.

These are frequently the same people who insist that their version of god be given primacy in the legal system (given preference over anyone else’s version of god, if other versions of god are even allowed to be referred to at all). Yet incongruously, these same people tend to shout loudest about democracy, and often want to impose it (oddly, by force!) on people in other countries.

Yet this “sanctity” argument is undemocratic to the very core. We see that it is in fact an argument attempting to undercut democracy itself, trying to use the state as a religious instrument to impose a religious interpretation on everyone’s marriage, whether they adhere to that religion or not.

But the fact remains that for those people’s own protection, as well as the protection of everyone else in society, the state is secular and has to remain so. These individuals, and not the government, are in charge of making their marriages “sanctified.” And what happens in anyone else’s marriage, as far as “sanctity” goes, is neither the state’s business nor – frankly – any of theirs either.

There's no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation
(Pierre Elliott Trudeau, former Prime Minister of Canada)

Chapter 2

MARRIAGE PARTNERS SHOULD BE COMPLEMENTS

I'll let you in on a little secret: *most people who raise objections to equal marriage are obsessed with sex.* Well...at least strongly preoccupied by it. But this preoccupation is usually so disguised that sometimes they themselves don't even recognize it.

Let's have a little demonstration, shall we? Let's look at the objection we're dealing with in this chapter: that marriage partners are not supposed to be the same, but should complement each other. In this argument, people usually say that men and women are essentially "different," and a true marriage is a union of complements and differences.

But what "differences" do they mean, exactly, when they say this?

It always boils down to some sort of claim that men in general have certain attributes, and women in general have certain other attributes. And those sets of attributes supposedly complement each other in a heterosexual marriage, in a way that you'll never find with two men together, or two women. But even that still doesn't make it clear what the "differences" are supposed to be.

Okay, perhaps the one big difference is obvious. But aside from that one, proponents of keeping marriages only for heterosexuals always speak very eloquently about the other differences too. In fact, they often claim that those are the "real" differences, and that they have pre-eminence even over physical ones. So let's have a look at those.

Differences in Temperament

This is where the "complements" argument primarily focuses, and it relies heavily on sweeping generalizations about men and women. Men are said to have certain attributes, for example being supposedly more aggressive, hard-nosed, and logical. Other attributes, meanwhile, are allotted to women: sensitivity, a nurturing nature, the ability to build consensus, and stronger emotions. When you combine these opposite-but-complementary attributes in a relationship, says the argument, this makes a stable, happy, workable marriage, especially for any children who are raised inside it.

After all, the argument reminds us, if you have two aggressive, hard-nosed men trying to form a relationship, it can't possibly go well. The men are likely to end up with either a sort of cold, rational machine of a marriage, or an endless contest of testosterone-fuelled one-upmanship. And the combination of two sensitive, emotional women would result in a relationship that was either a happy-but-naive cocoon with no mechanism for dealing with the hard realities of the world, or something wildly unstable with emotions flying back and forth without an anchor.

In marriage men are needed, people say, to provide the firmness, drive, and stability, while women supply the care and nurturing, and keep everyone human. A perfect combination, making a complete whole.

Except, of course, for the exceptions.

The problem is that there are as many different temperaments as there are people in the world. Everywhere we look, we see independent, hard-nosed, driving women and also sensitive, nurturing, consensus-building men. And we see a lot of people who can go either way, depending on the circumstances (e.g. women who can go toe-to-toe with any man in a business context, and then bake cookies later with the kids at home).

It's true that many medical and sociological studies seem to suggest that the two genders really may have different innate characteristics, with men being more aggressive and assertive (all that testosterone), and women more caregiving and conciliatory. It's also true, though, that other studies suggest that even if you agree that the two genders start out with these inherent qualities, much of our behavior in society is still learned rather than innate.

But even when we've got these very general qualities vaguely applied to men and women, we still find heterosexual relationships in which those stereotypes simply don't fit. An awful lot of supposedly "aggressive" women have to be taught to be docile and compliant and "agreeable," while many men considered "weak" have to be taught to be assertive and aggressive and "manly."

I myself saw this enterprise going on, for example, at a religious post-secondary school I attended, where people firmly believed in the male-female innate gender characteristics. In spite of the confidence with which the teachers stated this assumption, for some reason these qualities had to be learned with considerable effort, by people of both genders. Why was it so hard for so many people to learn to live in a way that was supposed to be entirely natural to them?

I have also had strong, naturally independent female acquaintances who believed the theological teaching that their husbands were meant to be the leaders in the

marriage – and who spent years maintaining this fiction while trying to force their gentle, nurturing husbands to be the “head of the family.” These women have never been docile and submissive, but have always been the leaders in their relationships, despite all claims to the contrary. And I’ve known gentle men who tried to adopt the “manly man” model themselves, because they also believed in it, but they remained nurturing and non-assertive no matter what they did.

None of these people have ever succeeded in changing themselves to fit the stereotypes. And frequently, the insistence on the partners playing their “proper” role in the marriage relationship did nothing more than put stress on the marriage. It would seem that these stereotypes don’t come nearly as “naturally” as we are told, if men and women have to work so hard to learn and live up to them.

What’s even more important, this struggle shows that even if you can apply some vague, average characteristic very broadly to one gender, there are so many exceptions, and so many variations within that characteristic itself, that you simply can’t paint the entire gender with one single-colored brush.

This means every individual male-female marriage is going to be very different from all other male-female marriages when it comes to the temperaments of the couple and how they are able to “complement” each other. In fact, very often the temperaments of the two people will clash vehemently. But it’s a funny thing...in those cases, even when the people clash rather than “complement” each other, we don’t deny them the right to marry, nor do we deny them the right to parenthood.

It’s only same-sex marriages, apparently, in which a clash of similar temperaments is considered such a horrendous bar to marriage.

As stated before, there are as many different temperaments as there are people. Meaning that there are as many possible temperament combinations among gays and lesbians as there are among heterosexuals.

Meaning, in fact, that “differences in temperament,” or the “complements” argument, doesn’t carry any weight. Not unless there are other differences more crucial than these.

The real objection

What about trying to think of other differences between men and women, aside from their supposedly innate temperaments? Think of things like personality, outlook, or nurturing impulses. Wouldn’t those count? Not really, because every

one of those is really a subset of temperament. That means they all run into the same problems as the “temperament” or “complements” argument.

What about other things like the individuals’ ultimate values? Do we really expect that the members of a couple should have great differences there? Wouldn’t that lead to the sorts of clashes that could be harmful to the harmony of a marriage? Nobody who tries to use the “complements” argument ever tries to say that a couple’s internal value systems should be that different. In fact, most people using this argument would want the couple to have pretty much the same value system.

And nobody who genuinely believes in genuine democracy and freedom of choice would argue that the two people in a marriage should base their marriage on either a similarity or difference of racial identity or skin colour, or other matters of physical appearance. So these can’t possibly be part of the “complements” argument either.

Where does that leave us, then, when it comes to something inherent to a man and a woman that meets the “complementary” requirement and can be used to allow them to get married? Something that’s lacking between two women, or between two men?

Guess.

Surprise, surprise

You know what it is, of course. If differences in temperament, values, or other physical characteristics aren’t really enough to prevent two men or two women from getting married, there’s really just one obvious “difference” that’s left, between men and women. Just one indisputable “complementary” factor that could lead anyone to decide a man and woman should be able to marry, but two men or two women should not.

And so we return to the claim that opened this chapter. The “complements” objection, at its root, is about nothing but genitals. There is absolutely nothing else that is distinct *enough* to provide a clear dividing line between men and women. When it comes to the real crux of the matter, this argument boils down to the idea that only male and female genitals should bump together, and never male-male or female-female genitals.

This argument takes no account of anything else that makes a good marriage – commitment, shared values, dedication, love, the desire to form a family of support and nurturing – nothing. Even people whose genitals don’t work are

allowed to create a marriage when those other qualities are present. But make those genitals similar to each other, and those values apparently mean nothing.

This objection to same-sex marriage – the “partners as complements” objection – is based entirely on genital sex, and nothing else. The surprise is that the people who use this objection are often the same people who claim that it’s the homosexuals who are sex-obsessed, and that all their own objections are based on higher values.

Yet all the arguments homosexuals make for *wanting* marriage are based on how much they value the institution with all its traditional responsibilities and characteristics, including the support, dedication, love, shared values – and especially the commitment. And yet the “complements” argument made against them ignores those truly great values and is based solely on genitals instead.

Underlying reason?

After learning the underlying reason beneath the “complements” argument, a sceptic might begin to wonder which side in the equal marriage battle actually is sex-obsessed, and which side really seeks the supposedly “higher values.”

This isn’t a sarcastic or snarky question either, because we’ll find, as we continue exploring the other arguments used against same-sex marriage, that the “genitals” argument is at the root of most of them. This troubling truth leads to another big question: *Why?*

There needs to be further study on this. But some have advanced the theory that the reason for the big push against equal marriage, and against homosexual people in general, is that their very existence seems to threaten the masculinity of the men who oppose them.

We have all known men whose concept of their own masculinity seems to be centred in their genitals and virtually nowhere else.

We have also known men who believe that all that’s needed to turn a lesbian into a straight woman is a good dose of hard sex with a man – and the men who say this are usually imagining that they are that man. They regard the very existence of the lesbian as a personal affront to themselves, and insist that the threat must be removed, forcibly if necessary.

And the last thing they can tolerate is a man who “acts like a woman.” This claim – that gay men are “like women” – is immune to all the evidence that contradicts

it, for example the fact that a large percentage of gay men work out in a gym or are in such good shape and have such great muscles that they'd make an average straight man weep with envy. The fact that there is as wide a range of aggressive versus conciliatory behavior among gay men as there is among heterosexual men is completely ignored. No, gay men are "like women," and this claim is repeated and repeated by those who oppose equal marriage, even though it's easily demonstrated not to be true.

This leads to another issue: that those who oppose equal marriage for gays and lesbians frequently tend to be the same people who oppose equal rights for women. Men who believe they should dominate women, and women who believe they should be dominated by men, all similarly oppose women's rights and gay rights.

It's very possible that these people look at homosexuals as some kind of threat to the ongoing dominance of men over women. At the very least, homosexuals are a kind of visible betrayal of that supposed ideal. Lesbians are not dominated by men (which is why they can supposedly be "cured" by some enforced sex with a dominant man), and gay men have no interest in dominating women. In fact, since the dominant-male/submissive-female idea of marriage is what these opponents have in mind, then in their view, some gay men even "take the place of" women in a marriage relationship.

If such theories are true (and as I say, there may need to be further study), then it would not be surprising if men who oppose equal marriage feel genitally-threatened or betrayed by that idea of marriage, and by the existence of homosexuals themselves.

Support for this idea will be found, as we continue, in the fact that this "genital" basis appears again and again as the root of so many other supposed arguments against equal marriage.

Chapter 3

MARRIAGE IS AN INSTITUTION FOR PRODUCING AND RAISING CHILDREN

This is a very powerful argument – that is, if you want to mow down massive swaths of heterosexual marriages, all in the hope of preventing equal marriage for homosexuals. People trying to keep equal marriage out of the hands of gays and lesbians need to be careful about these double-edged swords. Remember, in Chapter 1, how they single-handedly annulled every marriage ever performed in the former Soviet Union or the People’s Republic of China?

One begins to wonder just how much “collateral damage” people are happy to cause, just to keep homosexuals from marrying each other.

The “children” objection goes something like this: only males and females can combine to produce children, and the man-woman marriage has historically been the most stable institution in which children have been raised. So since the mother-father (married) family is the best place to raise children, and male-only or female-only couples can’t create children, those couples have no business being married.

Making and raising children is the primary purpose of marriage, according to this argument. And since gays and lesbians can’t make babies, they can’t fulfill the main purpose of marriage, and therefore should not be allowed to marry. Sounds simple and straightforward, doesn’t it?

But despite the talk about children in this argument, it actually has nothing to do with kids. In fact, as we will see in this chapter, countless children are blithely sacrificed in this view, with not even the blink of an eye. This argument against equal marriage is about something else altogether, and children are a mere smokescreen. Collateral damage, wherever necessary.

There goes the marriage of that man and woman next door...

The obvious problem with this argument is that it single-handedly (again!) annuls every heterosexual marriage that does not produce children. That couple that’s been living next door for five years, just the two of them in that house, with no kids? Marriage over.

And if people who use this argument really mean what they say, they have to look you in the eye and agree that it also forbids the marriage of every heterosexual

couple that deliberately *plans* not to have children. Such people not only shouldn't be married if they already are, but if the logic of this argument is going to be consistent, they shouldn't be granted marriage licences at all. Heterosexual or not.

Indeed, people who could produce children but plan not to do so are much more "at fault" than gays and lesbians. After all, gay and lesbian pairings are automatically infertile, even if they do want kids. They "can't help it." Homosexuals are in a situation where they *can't* produce children together, as opposed to heterosexuals who actually could do it, but prevent themselves on purpose.

So if the "children" argument is applied to everyone, and not just gay or lesbian people – in other words, if all citizens are treated equally and one group or another isn't singled out while others get to be exempt – then every heterosexual couple who applies for a marriage licence should have to fill out a form certifying that they plan to produce children, before they are granted their license. In fact, they had better be tested for fertility, so the state can be sure that the marriage really will result in children. Oh – and naturally the state will set a deadline for them to churn out those kids. If they don't have babies by the deadline, their marriages should automatically be dissolved by the state.

Totalitarianism, much? Of course any person in a democracy is going to shrink in horror from this scenario – rightly – because it does smack of totalitarianism. No citizen living in a democracy would stand for such a thing.

But the "can't have children" argument does, undemocratically, single out one group of people even when another group of people aren't required to live up to the same supposed standard. Male-female couples who are infertile (whether deliberately or for reasons beyond their control) are never subjected to the same laws and outright refusals as childless homosexual couples – even though they stand on an identical footing.

Married heterosexual couples are just fine, even if they can't have children. Married homosexual couples that can't produce children are not. The only difference seems to be symbolic – that heterosexuals "could if they wanted to."

Apparently, the totalitarianism only applies to gays and lesbians.

But guess what!

The pesky, inconvenient flaw in this "children" argument is that many gay and lesbian couples really do have kids of their own. And these are not adopted kids.

In a large percentage of cases, these children are biological, produced in exactly the same way as the offspring of heterosexuals.

Oops!

There are many gays and lesbians who have married or had sexual relationships with members of the opposite sex, for all sorts of reasons. For example, some of them have tried to hide and deny who they are, and tried to convince either themselves or the world that they were not actually gay. Some may not have understood their own sexual orientation, only figuring it out once and for all sometime after they had already married. Others may even have hoped that marrying someone of the opposite sex would “fix them” and “make them straight.”

It doesn't actually matter what the many reasons are. It is simply a fact that a large number of gays and lesbians have produced biological children by exactly the same means as heterosexuals. Others, again just like their heterosexual counterparts, have resorted to other means to have biological children: surrogate mothers, artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, or even the “turkey baster” method.

Whatever the method was, the biological children exist as contradictions to the “children” argument. They are there. It doesn't even matter if the kids are biological children of only one member of the couple. This certainly doesn't count against the countless cases of heterosexual spouses in the same situation, where one of the people has already had children in a previous relationship, and now marries someone who is not the biological parent of the children.

So okay, the children exist after all. It's simply not correct to say that homosexuals can't have children. You'd think, knowing this, that people who use the “can't have children” argument would now just admit that they made a mistake when they made this claim. Surely they will acknowledge that it's probably not a very good argument, after all, against the marriage of homosexuals. After all, the glaring contradictory evidence is visible all over the place.

So do we see people dropping this argument? Not a chance. The actual, real existence of the children of gays and lesbians takes no steam whatsoever out of the continued use of this argument. The “childless” claim just barrels right along unhindered, and it's as though those children don't even exist. Their real presence is often not acknowledged at all.

This means that the complete argument really goes something like this: “Homosexuals can’t have children – except when they do – *but when they do, those children don’t count.*”

Sometimes, though, the children of homosexuals are acknowledged to exist, but is this a positive thing? Not really. In cases like that, instead of negating this argument, the consequences often become even worse. In those cases, the argument goes like this: “Homosexuals can’t have children – except when they do – *and if they do, we want to take those children away from their biological parents.*”

So biological parenthood is a good thing. Except, it seems, when it’s not.

And clearly, there is nothing whatsoever “pro-family” about this argument.

Either way, the children themselves are utterly irrelevant. For the sake of propagating this argument, the actual, real, genuine, physical, biological children of gays and lesbians are completely discounted. Usually ignored. Which, when you think of it, is pretty odd, when the whole argument is supposed to be about them.

But this is another sign that this argument is a mere smokescreen for something else. We’ll figure out what it is shortly. But first...

What about adoptions?

Here comes more collateral damage!

This claim – that marriage should be denied to homosexuals because they “can’t produce children” – is also a massive slap in the face to all adopted children, and to their adopting parents. And again we’re not just talking about gay couples here, but about thousands and thousands of heterosexual couples and their families as well. This argument mows them down indiscriminately, all for the sake of denying homosexuals their own marriages and families.

What this claim tells all adopted children is that they aren’t “real” children of their adoptive parents, and the adoptive parents aren’t “real” parents. It doesn’t matter how committed the couple is or how much they wanted the children. Their parent-child relationship simply isn’t real. It is not valid. *It doesn’t count.*

That is where this claim leads, logically, when we decide that the passing on of genetic material is the only criterion for parenthood, which is then the only basis

for marriage. If this idea is applied consistently to every citizen, there is no other conclusion.

And remember, too, that if the couple adopted the child because they themselves couldn't produce children, their marriage ought to be annulled and the children returned to their actual biological parents.

But suddenly we see proponents of this argument making an exception – again. Of *course* they don't mean to negate all adoptive relationships; nor do they want to break up adoptive families of heterosexual couples who can't have kids. They only want to negate the adoptive relationships of gay people, and break up their families instead. The heterosexuals who are in exactly the same boat get a pass.

Real “pro-family,” the people who make this argument.

And in this case, as before, the children themselves are utterly irrelevant to the argument. Yet again, they are clearly just a smokescreen. But for what?

Real marriage is more than “baby-making”

The presupposition underlying the “can't have children” argument is that the sole purpose for marriage is simply baby-making. It ignores all the other things that go into a good marriage: commitment and love, compatibility, the desire to form a family of nurture and support, common values, and so on. All that really counts is that those two married people can make a baby.

The flaw in that belief, of course, is that any two strangers can have sex once, and make a baby. But few rational people are ever going to claim that one session of sex between strangers, even if it results in a baby, qualifies them to be married. And yet, if baby-production is the criterion for marriage, these strangerse not only qualify to be married, but they *ought* to be married.

The idea that the real purpose of marriage is baby-making is a narrow, joyless, clinical, even mechanical definition of marriage.

And of course, the people who are pro-heterosexual-marriage immediately rush in to say that naturally they don't mean that baby-making is the *only* prerequisite for marriage. It's just one of them. The other prerequisites are exactly what you would expect: the commitment, values, and so on, that were mentioned above.

But a gay couple is capable of experiencing every single one of those things, just as much as any heterosexual couple. And many of them already have the children,

biological or adopted. The homosexual and heterosexual couples, in this case, stand on exactly the same footing. Off to the wedding chapel!

And yet not. Still not! So what, exactly, is the problem?

The real agenda

The “can’t have children” argument really has nothing whatsoever to do with children. This is obvious because any time a heterosexual couple is seen to be in an identical situation to a homosexual couple, for some reason the argument isn’t applied to them. Exceptions are made routinely for heterosexuals. The “must be able to produce children” rules never seem to apply to them.

If this was a valid argument, it would apply to everyone equally. But the fact that it only ever gets applied to homosexuals means that the aversion to equal marriage came *first*, and the “can’t have children” argument was then thought up as a rationalization for that aversion. It is not the other way around.

It’s the same for the “children” argument as it is for so many other arguments against equal marriage. The real purpose of all these arguments seems to be that heterosexuals want to keep marriage as a private club that only they can join. It’s very likely that this argument, too, is genital-based, simply because in general, only the combination of male-female genitals produces children. That underlying factor isn’t as clear in this case, but since the genital issue is going to show up again and again as the real reason behind most of the anti-equal-marriage arguments, it wouldn’t be surprising if it’s the secret reason behind this one too.

But keeping marriage as a heterosexual-only club seems to be the crucial thing. And if this means people have to deny the very existence of thousands of children of gays and lesbians – if it means they logically have to annul thousands of marriages which either can’t or won’t produce biological children – if it means they have to negate the parent-child relationships of thousands and thousands of adoptive families – so be it.

Collateral damage? Tough luck.

Chapter 4

EQUAL MARRIAGE WILL CHANGE SOCIETY TOO DRASTICALLY Or “Time for Heterosexuals to Grow Up and Share Their Toys”

Give sudden, total equality to gays and lesbians, and the entire society will collapse!

At least, that's what you'd think, from the way some people talk. And they might have a point, too. Making changes really quickly and suddenly in a society can create chaos, and take years to clean up. So isn't this a reasonable argument against sudden legalization of same-sex marriage? Do we want to create havoc? Think of the anarchy!

So how about doing it gradually instead? Let's keep going the way we've already started. We've created domestic partnerships and civil unions, at least in a lot of regions. Let those become more commonly accepted, and then we can add gradual increases in equality. And one day, all citizens in the country will have equal marriage status and the job will be done. What could be a more perfect alternative to a drastic change that could create anarchy.

But you know, it's funny. Even when people suggest this slow and steady approach, it just doesn't seem to do away with the “too drastic” fears of the people who use this argument. Even when someone wants to change the marriage laws in a way that isn't drastic at all, those people keep talking about “drastic changes” anyway. Why is that? Why do they keep talking about this as though the more gradual alternative has never even been mentioned?

It's because gradual, careful change is not what these people actually want. Their mantra of “drastic change” is just another smokescreen for what they're really after. They don't want any change made to the idea of marriage at all. Ever. Period. But they hide behind the scare tactic of “drastic change.” They know that a lot of people are afraid of creating big upheavals in society – even people who might otherwise have favored the idea of same-sex marriage.

Those who use this argument make sure nobody mentions or remembers that every law ever made has created some kind of change in the culture. “Changing society” is no argument at all against creating a new law. That's what laws *do*. It's the whole point.

And many countries have survived quite nicely even after they've made some pretty big changes over the years. Women have acquired the vote. Slavery has been made illegal. Abolishing slavery, especially, meant the country's entire economic structure had to be remade. But these laws were still created, because they were the right thing to do. And no one today would seriously try to say that either of those developments turned out badly or should be undone. At least...they'd never say this in public.

Funny, though, how the arguments used to oppose both of those changes were so similar to arguments against equal marriage!

But you might think, anyway, that granting equal marriage to a new group of couples wouldn't actually create that many changes in how society is put together. You don't have a whole new group of voters disrupting the political balance, and there won't really be any large-scale economic changes either. But granting marriage rights equally to all citizens is still resisted with great energy, and "drastic change" is one of the loudest battle cries. So why is this extension of marriage considered so very radical that it should never, ever be done?

Well, there are all those "adverse effects" on marriage...

The "drastic change" argument seems to depend on the idea that any changes that come from equal marriage will be bad ones. Or at least that the bad changes would be so many, or so bad, that they would outweigh any possible good that could come from altering the marriage laws.

So let's have a look at some of these claims about adverse effects. We've got a prime example of someone using this argument during a relatively recent public debate.

In May of 2005, Canada's members of parliament (MPs) were discussing whether or not the country should change its own laws to allow all of its citizens to have equal marriage rights. Parliamentarian John McKay was a Liberal MP, and it was his own governing party that proposed the bill that would change the marriage laws. But McKay planned to vote against his party, and he made several points in his remarks. (You can see all of his comments, as well as the arguments for and against by many other parliamentarians, at this official government record of that day's proceedings in the House of Commons:

[<http://www2.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?pub=hansard&mee=71&parl=38&ses=1&language=E#T1245>])

Reading the transcript of McKay's speech, we see that he uses some of the arguments we've already discovered to be outright harmful or at least to carry no weight. One example is the claim that biological children of a male-female couple need to be given privileged treatment over mere "legally recognized" children (meaning adopted kids). There's that collateral damage again.

But he also takes the "marriage of complements" argument and gives it a pretty bizarre twist. Here's what he says will happen if we allow equal marriages: "...marriage will no longer act as a unique forum for interplay between men and women in which the gender gap is bridged to create stable bonds between men and women. Marriage is easily the best way in which men relate to women and is easily the best way in which women relate to men."

Do you get what Mr. McKay says there? Marriage is supposed to be a way for men and women to "bridge" the gender gap between them. In fact, it's actually the *best* way for men to relate to women, and for women to relate to men.

Mr. McKay is actually pretending that there is no such thing as a gay man or a lesbian woman. Because unfortunately for him, no gay man is ever going to have that stabilizing "interplay" with a woman that a straight man would have in a marriage. Just not going to happen. For that gay man, it is not the "best" way to relate to a woman at all. McKay is completely correct when he says marriage is "easily the best way" for a man to relate to a woman – at least, if the man *already* "relates" to women in that way. Put a gay man in that sort of relationship with a woman, and it could be "easily the *worst* way" for them to try to relate to each other.

This is, in fact, where you can see the effects of people's sexual orientation. Heterosexuals are oriented in such a way that attraction to the opposite sex is their default attraction. Many of them are repulsed by the thought of sexual intercourse with someone of their own gender. But it's the same for gays and lesbians. Unless they are bisexual, their default sexual orientation is to be attracted to someone of their own gender. So to expect a gay man to "relate" to a woman in a marriage in the same way a heterosexual man does is absurd. It's the same as if you simply demanded that a heterosexual man form a relationship with a gay man, and make himself "relate" as if he's gay. It just doesn't work.

But McKay never makes that distinction. For him, marriage is "the best" way for a man to relate to a woman, or a woman relate to a man. End of story. And by golly, that either means all men and women, no matter what their sexual orientation – or else gays and lesbians don't count. Or (which sounds like McKay's implicit preference) don't exist at all.

If this “interplay” is so important, McKay blithely ignores the fact that it also happens inside a male couple or within a female couple, if the people happen to be homosexual. His argument seems to be backed up by the idea that if you force gays and lesbians into traditional male-female marriages, somehow they will straighten out and start behaving like they “should.” Either that, or he is simply refusing to acknowledge even the very existence of gay couples, and the “interplay” within them. He’s assuming that only straight couples actually matter.

But even then, he doesn’t explain how same-sex marriage would have any effect on straight marriages. If you let those two men next door get married, is the “interplay” in your own male-female marriage somehow going to stop? McKay can’t possibly believe that all men in heterosexual marriages are going to look at that male married couple – or might not even know any gay married couples – but will think, for some reason, “Well, that settles it. I’m never going to relate to women again.” How can the homosexual marriage next door or around the block have any effect whatsoever on the heterosexual marriage in your own house?

It can’t, of course. Unless the heterosexuals are so insecure in their marriages that letting a few more people get married will make them stop working properly at their own marriage. But nobody is that childish and immature. Surely...?

But...but...the Netherlands!

But Mr. McKay was only warming up, with that argument. As we keep reading his remarks, we see that he goes on to make a much more plausible connection between the idea of losing “gender interplay” and the decay of heterosexual marriage. This time, he does appear to have some statistics on his side. Even if he does a bit of fancy footwork as he uses them.

McKay’s statistics seem to show that he’s right: in places where equal marriage has been introduced, heterosexuals appear to get married less. Here’s what he says:

The Netherlands has had same sex marriage for the last five years. It should be noted that in the first three years of that bill, marriage declined among heterosexuals by 10% each and every year, and in the last year of 2004 it declined between 3% and 4%. There seem to be no other factors to explain this sudden drop in heterosexual attachment to the institution of marriage. Marriage is now dead in Denmark and 61% of children are born outside of marriage.

Let's just give Mr. McKay the benefit of the doubt when he says "Denmark," even though he started with the Netherlands. That was probably just a slip of the tongue. It would be rather embarrassing if a Canadian parliamentarian were ignorant of the fact that the Netherlands and Denmark are two different countries. It might cast doubt on other things he says.

But when you read the rest of what he's saying, maybe you noticed that McKay leaves out something that's really pretty important. He hasn't told us what the statistics for heterosexual marriage were *before* equal marriage was legalized in the Netherlands. Why is that?

Was the number of heterosexual marriages really stable and then took a sudden plunge after the legalization of equal marriage? Or had it already been going down steadily, and 2003 and 2004 just continued the existing trend? McKay doesn't tell us. And by the way, that decline of ten percent...what is that ten percent *of*?

Does Mr. McKay mean there were ten percent fewer marriages by number count, compared to number count in previous years? (For example, having only ninety marriages one year, compared to one hundred the previous year?) If the numbers themselves were down, it could just as easily mean that in those years there were simply fewer heterosexual people of the right age to get married. That would bring the numbers down all by itself, even if no gay people at all got married. We don't know, and McKay doesn't give us that context.

Or does he mean that out of all the heterosexual people who were available to be married, only ninety percent of them did get married that year, whereas one hundred percent married the previous year? We don't know, and again, Mr. McKay gives us no context.

And that's the problem. It's only in the context of what was happening before equal marriage was legalized that Mr. McKay's numbers could have any meaning at all. But for some reason he hasn't bothered to provide the information we'd really need. His numbers sound pretty drastic, but we don't know if they really are. Why is that?

We're lucky, though. Shortly after Mr. McKay made his eloquent plea, someone else did the sort of research that he didn't. Corporate attorney and public policy expert Darren R. Spedale, along with historian and Yale lawyer and professor William Eskridge, Jr., wrote a book called *Gay Marriage: For Better or For Worse?: What We've Learned From the Evidence*. (Have a peek at the website for the book, and read some of that evidence: <http://islandia.law.yale.edu/GayMarriageBook/>)

And as Spedale and Eskridge studied the actual numbers from the Scandinavian countries, whether it was Denmark with the first registered partnership law in 1989, or Norway and Sweden with their similar laws in the 1990s, they discovered that what happened in those countries after these laws were passed was the exact opposite of the dire results that Mr. McKay predicted.

In Denmark especially, the marriage rate had actually been falling since the 1970s when divorce got easier and cohabitation was recognized. (“Cohabitation” would describe what Americans and Canadians think of as “common-law marriages.”) The Danish divorce rate rose steadily between 1971 and 1989. But a funny thing happened when that registered partnership law for gays and lesbians was passed in 1989: the divorce rate plunged down to its lowest level in thirty years. Remember that. The divorce rate went *down*.

In the same way, the rate of births outside of marriage had streaked upward very drastically in Denmark between 1971 and 1989. But when that registered partnership law was passed? That rate, too, began to fall. In other words, far from destroying marriage as so many opponents of equal marriage want to claim, the evidence is that the opposite happens. Marriage is strengthened by the addition of a large new group of people who are committed to it, who value it.

Back in the Netherlands, meanwhile, the first big jump in the rate of children born outside of marriage happened in 1985. This, incidentally, was about fifteen years before equal marriage was legalized. Well...maybe they saw gay marriage coming? A long time later?

It’s true John McKay of the Canadian parliament didn’t have Spedale and Eskridge’s book to read at the time he made his speech, because it was published a year later. But the same published government statistics that they used were available to him if he had taken the time to investigate.

His remarks, though, suspiciously echo those of the American Stanley Kurtz, a pundit from the Hoover Institute, a right-wing think tank. Just a few months before McKay made his remarks in parliament, Kurtz published a theory claiming that marriage was destroyed in the Netherlands, and more out-of-wedlock babies were born, after equal marriage was legalized.

Slate Magazine published an article by M.V. Lee Badgett, in May of 2004, demonstrating how Kurtz misused the statistics to draw the conclusion that John McKay may have relied on in the Canadian parliament a year or so later. Badgett *did* look at the same statistics as Spedale and Eskridge, though, and appears either to have ignored or even deliberately misrepresented them. Not good.

But let's not be hasty. McKay might still have had some evidence that came from a little closer to home. So let's see if things become clearer as we read more of what he says in his speech. Let's see what other examples he comes up with for the "drastic changes" that happen in society if you legalize equal marriage.

Think of the Poor Children in Quebec!

Mr. McKay, being a true Canadian, uses the experience of the province of Quebec as an example of what can go horribly wrong. In this particular case, he drags the children back into the argument against equal marriage. Here's what he says:

Quebec has had a form of civil union for a number of years now. Fewer and fewer heterosexuals are marrying. Fifty-eight per cent of children in that province are now born outside of marriage. All evidence suggests that children born outside of marriage have poor socio-economic outcomes and require far greater intervention by the state to compensate for parenting shortfalls. The birth rate in Quebec is demographically not sustainable and its population is contracting as in the Scandinavian countries. Absent in immigration, the contraction would be catastrophic: few marriages, fewer children; fewer children, fewer marriages.

There are so many arguments intermixed here that it takes a bit of work to pry them apart and look at them separately. It's as though McKay wants his listeners to feel the full impact of all of them going full blast together, but the different ideas in this statement aren't necessarily related to each other, despite what Mr. McKay wants us to think. So let's take them apart.

When he says, "Fewer and fewer heterosexuals are marrying," he resurrects the same problem that he had with the Netherlands. Fewer in comparison to *what*? Are there simply fewer heterosexual people in the population? Is the average age of the population getting older, so there are fewer people to marry in the first place? Was the heterosexual marriage trend already heading downward even before the legalization of equal marriage? Or none of the above? McKay just doesn't give us any context for his statement.

But after he sweeps past that remark, he zooms in on his next preoccupation: the children. And suddenly it sounds as if his big complaint about Quebec really is that marriages are not acting as proper baby-making machines. For some reason, not as many babies are being born in the province. But again, we don't know what the comparison is. If you look at Statistics Canada tables for absolute numbers of births in the different provinces, Quebec is one of the few provinces whose birth numbers have risen since McKay's speech.

And StatsCan actually says that after a decline in the number of births all over Canada in the 1990s, reaching its lowest level since the Second World War in 2000/2001, the number of births has increased every year in the country. And had been increasing steadily – *especially* in Quebec and Alberta – even by the time Mr. McKay made his speech. He must have missed those numbers for some mysterious reason.

The point is that McKay’s speech is wrong in its claims. The decline in birth rate took place, like it did in Denmark, fifteen years before equal marriage or any form of domestic partnership was legalized. And by another odd coincidence, it has risen after that legalization.

Mr. McKay’s real problem is revealed to be somewhat uglier than those married gays and lesbians ruining marriage and driving the birth rate down. Because even if the population was going down, there would be another way of sustaining both the general population and the birth rate. That way is through immigration. But does McKay want that? Read the above quotation again and you’ll notice that he doesn’t sound all that enthusiastic.

In fact, he acts as though the immigrants aren’t there. In the last sentence of that quotation, he happily dismisses them, so that he can say, woefully, “few marriages, fewer children; fewer children, fewer marriages.” What he really wants to see, then, is the population increased by native Quebecers, not by those...immigrants. And he doesn’t want it increased by children of married gays or lesbians either.

McKay thinks he’s painting a not-very-pretty picture in his speech. And he’s right. Except it’s not the gays and lesbians who are looking ugly.

He never mentions anywhere in his remarks that the problem of the population decreasing had actually existed in Canada for a while before he ever got up to make his speech in parliament. But he makes sure to lump the population issue into his argument as though it’s another of those “drastic changes” that might come from equal marriage. When in fact, same-sex marriage wasn’t the cause of that problem at all, since it didn’t even exist when the population started dropping. So why does Mr. McKay make this false connection, do you suppose?

Another point he makes in that statement is that “children born outside of marriage have poor socio-economic outcomes and require far greater intervention by the state to compensate for parenting shortfalls.” This is one argument where some studies do seem to support the claim that, for the most part, children raised by a stable couple have fewer problems than those raised by a single parent.

So what does he want, for the children of gays and lesbians? He wants to make sure that they *are denied the stability of being raised inside of marriage*.

Mr. McKay lists all these “drastic changes” that he thinks will happen if we allow same-sex marriage. But when there’s a way for some of those problems to be solved, by legalizing equal marriage, does he say, “Oh good, that’s one less problem, then”? Not by a long shot.

If children growing up with two married parents is what helps society be stable, two married gay parents can fill that bill just fine. What a lovely solution! But no. Mr. McKay wants heterosexual married parents, period.

Once again, the children of gay parents simply do not count. And McKay doesn’t want gay and lesbian relationships to be legalized so that those couples’ homes can be as stable as any married heterosexual relationship. He assumes that there is an intrinsic difference in how a gay married relationship functions, compared to a heterosexual marriage relationship.

But what could this difference be? We’ve run into this question before, haven’t we? You already know what difference he’s thinking about. The only difference that is different *enough* for someone to insist that a male-female relationship can be a marriage while a male-male or female-female relationship can’t is...

Genitals. Here we go again. Those children of gays and lesbians don’t get to grow up in a stable marriage setting because Mr. McKay prefers that opposite sets of genitals bump together in the marriage.

Collateral damage? Seems to be no big deal, to the fervent but absolutely misinformed Canadian parliamentarian, Mr. John McKay.

The Real Crux of the Matter

Putting aside the question of children growing up in stable homes, which Mr. McKay of the Liberal Party of Canada does not want to deal with, what is the main point he’s trying to make in his rather rambling parliamentary speech? It’s the big issue that every opponent of equal marriage really has in mind whenever they use the “drastic changes” objection.

That big issue is the idea that if gay people get married, heterosexuals don’t want to.

Of course, *actual* evidence from *actual* countries where domestic partnership or equal marriage are legalized contradicts this idea. But just for the moment, let's say that John McKay and others like him are right: if gay people get married, fewer heterosexuals want to. What's the answer to this?

The only important answer to this is: *So what?*

Before your jaw drops in shock at such a casual answer, think about what Mr. McKay is really saying. He's telling us that heterosexuals have such a flimsy commitment to the idea of marriage that if they allow even more citizens of their country to get married, it will blow their own commitment right out of the water. The only way that heterosexuals can maintain the illusion of being strong on marriage, it seems, is for homosexuals, their fellow citizens, to sacrifice their own citizenship rights of marriage.

In short, heterosexuals want to be babysat.

To which gays and lesbians should respond: *So what?* Is it the fault of homosexuals that their heterosexual fellow citizens' commitment to marriage is so fragile and uncertain? Can people really expect homosexuals to sacrifice themselves on the altar of heterosexuals' weakness, so those people can tell themselves how strong they are?

Is that democracy? Not on your life.

The people who promote the male-female exclusive marriage club appear to have the attitude that if they can't keep every toy in the box, they won't play at all. What if it's true that a heterosexual couple can look next door at the two men married to each other, and think, "Well that does it, I won't bother with my own marriage at all, then"? That is not the gay men's problem, nor did they cause this immature, self-centered, foot-stomping, pick-up-your-toys-and-go-home attitude. That childish way of looking at the world lands right in those particular heterosexuals' laps, where it belongs.

This is worth repeating. The immature attitude of the heterosexuals toward their own marriages is not the homosexuals' problem. In fact, gays and lesbians have no problem whatsoever in recognizing the supreme value of marriage. That's why they want to get married; they *know* how important it is, or they'd be satisfied with mere civil unions or domestic partnerships. It is the heterosexuals who refuse to value marriage, and who treat it like a toy they'll throw away if they're forced to share.

There is no reason to deny this citizenship right to homosexuals because the heterosexuals can't grow up and view marriage in a mature way. Let the heterosexuals deal with their own problem attitudes, and stop blaming everyone else for it.

This argument, that legalizing equal marriage would create “drastic changes” in society, is just a smokescreen, trying to hide the fact that a great many heterosexuals appear not to value marriage nearly as much as gays and lesbians do.

Chapter 5

JUST USE A DIFFERENT WORD THAN “MARRIAGE” Or “Quack! Quack! Quack!”

This doesn't exactly sound like an argument against equal marriage, but we're going to see that beneath everything, it actually is.

People usually put the “different word” objection like this:

“If you really have to give legal status to same-sex relationships, fine. But at least use a different word for them, like ‘Civil Union’ or ‘Domestic Partnership.’ Because traditionally, the word ‘Marriage’ has always referred to a one man/one woman relationship. [And you can add the implied argument for many people: ‘And we'd like to keep it that way, because, well, a man/woman relationship is different, and furthermore, implies a sanctified relationship.’]”

You can probably already see the different sorts of other arguments that are behind this one. There's the “sanctity” argument, that we've already looked at. No democratic government can or should do anything to try to “sanctify” a marriage, so that argument, hovering in the background, carries no weight.

And we've also looked at the “differences” argument and shown it to be a smokescreen for something else. But it returns here in a slightly different disguise, because that underlying preoccupation tends to rear its head over and over, pretending to be different arguments. We'll get to that in a moment.

But first, there's one other little matter that we need to clear up.

“Marriage” has *always* described a one man/one woman relationship

Sorry, but no.

It may be true that one man/one woman has been the general rule in marriage in the majority of cases, but we can't actually say that for sure. We do know, though, that “marriage” has also referred to a one man and *several* women in a relationship, in many different cultures and ages. And this definition of marriage, which is now called “polygamy” by most people, hasn't been confined to one country or one religious group. These marriages have routinely existed in Judaism,

in Islam, in Hinduism, in Mormonism (an offshoot of Christianity), and in other religious systems, from China to India to Arabia to North America and beyond, and throughout all centuries. In fact, it still exists in some countries today.

It isn't even true that same-sex marriage hasn't been officially recognized. William Eskridge, Jr., who we met in chapter 4, wrote another book in the 1990s, *The Case for Same-Sex Marriage*. In one chapter he goes through some of the historical evidence suggesting that same-sex couples were recognized as married at certain times in ancient Egypt, Canaan, Crete, and Lesbos (which is where the word "lesbian" comes from). Spanish explorers found cultures in what is now South America where the *berdache*, a person who took on some characteristics and responsibilities of the opposite sex, married someone of their own sex.

Some military unions, like certain samurai warrior-lovers in Japan, took vows in which they committed their love in the present life and the one to follow, and were given what Eskridge calls "a marriage-like status." Other ancient mythical male figures have had their devotion to their male partners described in terms that are modeled on sexual attraction. These include pairings such as Gilgamesh and Enkidu in the myths of ancient Sumer, or Achilles and Patroclus in Homer's *Iliad*.

There are examples of this "marriage-like status" in almost all cultures and mythical systems of the world.

So what about it, then? These different definitions of "marriage" aren't just archaic forms that no longer exist. In some societies, the traditional one man/several women form of marriage is still practised. So people who object to equal marriage by suggesting that marriage has "always" been a one man/one woman affair are not just incorrect, but are playing favorites with the definition. The meaning of the word "marriage" isn't nearly so cut-and-dried as it's made out to be.

Do the people who want to argue for "traditional" marriage ever argue for the "tradition" of one man being allowed to marry several different women at a time? Never. It's because they are picking-and-choosing which kinds of historical, "traditional" definitions they favor, and which ones they'll quietly slip under the rug.

There are Financial "Traditions" Too

There's another "traditional" form of marriage that not very many North Americans argue for. That's the one that's a financial or business transaction where the bride is just a way to provide some financial profit for the groom's

family. In this “traditional” form of marriage, the bride is really just a piece of property herself, passed from one family’s ownership to another’s. The bride’s family buys her a husband (and gets her off their hands) with a sizable dowry of money, goods, or land. And the groom’s family agrees to take the woman (who has no value in herself) as long as she is accompanied by that land, money, jewels, or other forms of property.

Sometimes these marriages have been made for political reasons, so the two families would be allied, or so some major political difference could be smoothed over. The transfer of land and titles – always for the men, of course – has often played a role in such alliances. So the woman was usually nothing more than a sort of conveyor belt, transferring all this value from her own family to the family of her new husband.

And of course, another purpose that went along with this exchange of property was dynastic. It wouldn’t matter all that much if the lands and property got transferred to the new family if there wasn’t an heir to inherit it, and continue the oh-so-noble family line. And naturally that heir had to be male. We just have to look at the life, and many marriages, of the notorious King Henry VIII of England to see this sort of “traditional” marriage in action.

In other cases, when property transfer is not such a big factor, the sole purpose for a woman’s existence as a bride is simply to be a “brood mare,” to incubate (male) children who will extend the family line of the groom. In this version of this marriage “tradition,” the males of the family want somebody who will produce more males. And unfortunately they require a woman to do that.

But even when a woman is necessary, the new husband’s family doesn’t surrender lightly – they expect to be paid, and usually paid very well, for the inconvenient necessity of taking this new woman into their home. They get new (male) children, and they get money and valuable goods on top of it. What a great tradition!

Yet for some reason, most people who want to argue for the “traditional” form of marriage forget to mention this type of business/marital/dynastic transaction. And they tend to leave out another long-standing marriage tradition, which often carries that same financial element: the tradition of an arranged marriage.

All these forms of “financial marriage” still take place today in many cultures and countries. In fact, even though we claim to be so enlightened, modern, or secular, North Americans and Europeans, too, still often use marriage as a financial transaction. Have you ever met a young woman with a list of criteria for a potential mate, with one item high on the list being that he has to make a certain

amount of money? Ever hear of a fairly well-to-do family, or one with a famous lineage, that strongly disapproves of their son bringing home a girl from a poor family as a fiancée? These people may talk about love being the basis of a marriage, but they're only willing to love people with enough money or social standing.

As it turns out, people who want to insist on the “traditional” forms of marriage end up being very particular about which marriage “traditions” they actually want. It seems that what they really mean by “traditional definition of marriage” is “marriage as it is practised by men and women in modern North America and Europe.”

And even then, they shy away from acknowledging that money is a very big part of “traditional” marriage.

The Essential Things About a Marriage

But maybe we're being too hard on people who just want to use the word “marriage” for the “traditional” form of the relationship. Let's say they're right, and we don't have to count the long-standing traditions of polygamy, arranged marriages, and the exchange of whopping amounts of property as compensation for having to allow a new woman into a bridegroom's family.

Let's pretend that the one man/one woman marriage *is* the only “traditional” kind of marriage. Now we have to figure out what happens in that sort of legally binding relationship that can't happen in a two-man or two-woman legal relationship. In a legal marriage, what sorts of things go on that mean only one man and one woman can qualify to use the word?

Remember that there's a difference between what we'd consider a “marriage” and something we'd just think of as a “platonic room-mate” situation, even if the room-mates are a man and a woman. The difference between the two lies in how the relationship actually functions.

What is it that has to be part of a relationship before we'll consider it a marriage? Apart from the fact that it's a legal contract of some kind, it tends to be a relationship of commitment, nurturing, support, and sharing, in good times and bad. And then you have the daily round of things, where you might have a family with children and pets, mortgages, taking out the garbage and doing the dishes, driving the kids to school and sports, going to the spouse's office Christmas party, and even the white picket fence. And married people usually share at least some values, interests, and goals too.

That pretty much covers what people think of as a marriage. So now, if you use all that as your description of what makes a genuine marriage in this culture, the big question is this: what part of that description cannot possibly apply to two men living together, or two women living together? What do we find in that description of marriage that can only apply exclusively to the man/woman combination?

Can't two men or two women do those exact same things in their own love relationship?

Those who watch a gay or a lesbian couple functioning in this way — functioning in the identical way to a heterosexual marriage — and yet don't want to call this relationship a marriage, have got to be thinking of a marriage as something else. Their definition of what is “essential” to the definition of marriage doesn't seem to include all that love, commitment, nurturing, shared goals, daily living, and the picket fence. Because gays and lesbians can — and do! — do all of that, as much as any heterosexual couple can and does.

So what other possible difference can there be, that results in our calling the heterosexual relationship a “marriage,” but having to call the homosexual relationship a “domestic partnership”?

Oh no, Not That Again!

You must already have guessed what the only remaining difference is. It's not like we haven't seen it before, and it's always there, ready to make its presence known again whenever it gets the chance.

We're talking about genitals again, aren't we? This is yet another instance of the obsession with genital sex that those who oppose equal marriage of gays and lesbians seem to have.

What else could it be, since gays and lesbians can do absolutely everything else heterosexuals do in a marriage? Their form of genital sex is the only real difference in the two types of relationship. All of the other stuff – the commitment and the love, and taking the kids to school, and paying the bills and planning the family's future – apparently this isn't the “real” marriage, or it would be acknowledged in gay and lesbian relationships too.

Nope, it's the genitals that make the marriage — not any of those other things. All of those things appear to be irrelevant. If two male sets of genitals are bumping together in the bedroom, then according to the people who use this argument, this

relationship is nothing like a heterosexual marriage. Even if 99.999% of everything else functions identically.

These people concentrate on a single word, “marriage,” and use only a shallow, superficial definition (it’s all about the sex, baby!), while they literally exclude all the actual *content* of the relationship. All of that content of the relationship is nothing. All that matters is the genitals. Almost all that ever matters in the arguments against equal marriage is the genitals.

It’s a sad thing that people who oppose same-sex marriage, and who oppose homosexuals in general, like to say that it’s the gays and lesbians who are obsessed with sex, and a very perverted form at that. Yet who is it who can’t seem to base their arguments on anything but an obsession with the genitals? For the most part, it’s not the gays and lesbians, but the heterosexuals themselves.

One begins to wonder if this is a problem that really ought to be talked through with a therapist.

So. The “use a different word than marriage” argument? It doesn’t stand scrutiny at all, and has no validity. Logically – and honestly – you can only say that if a relationship walks like a marriage, looks like a marriage, and quacks like a marriage — it’s a marriage.

Chapter 6

ALLOWING EQUAL MARRIAGE MEANS THE STATE CONDONES HOMOSEXUALITY

This is one of the Biggies. In fact, it's where the opponents of equal marriage are right.

Does that shock you? It shouldn't, because they are only right about one small thing that everyone agrees with. But they're wrong about everything else.

In one way, this argument partly rehashes the argument in chapter 1, about equal marriage harming the "sanctity" of marriage. We learned back then that no government is in the business of "sanctifying" anything. But remember how we also noticed that the argument was really a smokescreen for people who want their religion to be in control of the government and the laws of the country?

Well, that same wish for control rushes back in with this argument. But you might be surprised to know that this time, these people do have a small reason for worrying. Even though they are making a mistake about the idea that the government is "condoning" homosexuality by legalizing equal marriage, they are also afraid that the government is going to tell them how to live their religious lives. And on that point, they are right to worry. Remember that courtroom scene in chapter 1? In a democratic society, that's a big no-no.

Remember that the wall that stands between religion and government is supposed to stop control from being exerted, and that means control going in either direction. We already saw, in chapter 1, that religions aren't supposed to be able to control the government or tell it what laws to make. That's one direction. But the government isn't supposed to turn around and tell the religions how they should operate either. In countries that value the freedom of individuals, this freedom from religious control goes both ways, and that's what protects the democracy.

So we can't just sweep these worries under the rug if people think that legalizing equal marriage might start affecting their own religious freedoms. Since they believe their religion condemns homosexuality, they live in fear that their religious freedoms will be compromised by the government if it "approves of" homosexuality.

So we're going to have to take a good look at how to protect their religious freedom. But before we can discuss that worry, first let's get the "condoning" business out of the way. Because once again, this argument tries to tie spiritual

beliefs to secular government. And a secular democratic government simply isn't supposed to work on that basis.

It's just a contract

The fact is that the government doesn't "condone" any relationship when it issues a marriage licence. This is a false impression, and we really need to clear it up. No democratic government is *ever* saying, as it issues a license, "Gosh, I really like the two of you together, so I'll let you get married."

You may strongly disapprove of that biker from out of town marrying the sweet young lady next door, or that older woman marrying the twenty-two year old guy. But if either of these pairs applies for a licence and fulfills just a few minor legal requirements, both of these couples can get married. Even if it's obvious to everyone that somebody's marriage is going to fail spectacularly, the state allows them to marry if that's what they want. All the government is doing is giving legal status to the contract the people are making with each other.

That's the important part: the government looks at this as a contract, and when it legalizes the contract, all it does is set up all the rules for how the partnership functions in the society. Of course it's true that this contract isn't looked at in quite the same way as a sales or construction contract. This is because a marriage contract has a stronger emotional basis than other sorts of legal transactions. So if the contract goes sour, there's a higher risk of possible personal harm, either to a spouse or to children in the marriage.

But at the root of everything, unless the state needs to step into this relationship and send in the police because a spouse or child is being harmed, its only interest in the marriage relationship is that it's a legal contract. And it has the same attitude it has with any other contract. It doesn't care who decides to sell something to whom, who gives agreed-upon services to whom, or who decides to marry whom. It just sets up the legal environment for the contract, and the rules for how it's enforced. Or, if necessary, dissolved.

Just take a minute to remember some of the people who are allowed to get marriage licences in most states. Convicted child molesters. Deadbeat dads who are already avoiding paying child support to their previous family. People convicted of rape. People in jail. Convicted murderers and spouse abusers.

Think of the implications, if moral approval and "condoning" is really what the government is using to decide who it allows to marry and who it doesn't. Is the state really "condoning" how the two people live, when it grants a marriage

licence? The people using the “condoning” argument would have to say, then, that the state condones murder, rape, and spousal abuse because murderers, rapists, and spouse abusers are allowed to marry.

And if you follow this logic, it also has to mean that homosexuality is *worse* than murder, rape, and spousal abuse, because that’s the one criterion that means a person is *not* allowed to legally marry their partner.

Is that really what people who use this argument are trying to say? A previous wife-abuser or a murderer can skate, but a man who loves another man has to be stopped cold? A woman who falls in love with another woman is worse than a murderer?

Instead, what the state approves of, if you want to use that terminology, is not how the individuals lead their lives. All the government approves is the *fact* that they’re making this legal contract. As long as the services or relationships provided in a contract don’t break any laws, the government doesn’t really care what’s actually contained in it. So the state is not “condoning” the relationships set up in the contract. Instead, it’s only “condoning” the mere existence of a contract. Period.

It condones the institution of marriage. It makes no judgements about the individuals entering the institution. Except, for some odd reason, gays and lesbians.

What about incest?

We have to pause to have a look at this one case, because it really does seem, at least at first glance, to be an example where the government disapproves of a certain type of relationship, and will not “condone” it by granting a marriage licence. Without getting deeply into how distantly two people can be related and still be considered a case of incest, let’s look at the simple example of a brother and sister who want to get married.

Our first reaction tends to be that this kind of relationship shouldn’t be allowed to be formalized in marriage because, well, it’s just “icky.” And since many people in society also think of homosexual relationships as “icky,” they treat the two things the same way. If incest is “icky” and people committing incest shouldn’t be allowed to marry, then those “icky” gays and lesbians shouldn’t get married either.

But “ickyness” isn’t a valid reason for a democratic government to forbid anything. After all, remember how we all reacted when we first realized our parents had sex! If we’d been in charge of the government, they’d have been

celibate for the rest of their lives. There are other much better reasons for a government to refuse to grant marriage licences to an incestuous relationship. People who developed the original taboos may not have known them, but medical science certainly knows them now.

Yet even people in the past, who didn't have this medical knowledge, might not have been basing their longstanding taboos just on "icky" feelings. Many evolutionary biologists and medical researchers think there's a biological mechanism in almost everyone, designed to desensitize a person against sexual attraction to those they grew up with in their early family life. Evolution would have favored this mechanism because it would suppress inbreeding and allow the wider spread of genetic materials, bringing about a stronger, healthier population. Populations that didn't have this mechanism would eventually have inbred so much that their society was weakened and would have died off. So the taboo against incest, which led to a stronger society, would have come to dominate.

When modern medicine and genetic research were developed in more recent times, people finally understood why this close breeding was not recommended. It was more a matter of their catching up with an evolutionary Good Idea than discovering something new, though. It was like, "I always had a hunch, and now I know why."

So the laws made by governments against incestuous marriage are for good reasons: the state has an interest in preventing the weakening of the society itself, as well as the hope of preventing widespread biological harm. The limits different states set might be a bit arbitrary – some just forbid sibling or parent-child incest, while others also deny marriage to first cousins – but they are trying to draw a manageable legal line against something that is known in the long run to be biologically harmful to the wider community.

But remember. Just because people always "had a hunch" about incest, it doesn't mean that every hunch people have is automatically correct. The prohibition against incest may have had some innate biological basis, and in the end, it was justified by the growing knowledge of genetics. That was a hunch that was finally backed up by scientific evidence. No mere hunch should ever be the basis of a law unless it is backed up by this kind of factual support.

The "hunch" which people have about preventing marriage between gays and lesbians does not have similar evidence behind it. Allowing equal marriage for homosexuals does not have the same effect that you'd see with allowing marriage between brothers and sisters. There is no passing on of biological harm to offspring, for example. Even if the two partners could produce children together,

there would be no more likelihood of inherent biological harm than with any heterosexual couple, for all the same reasons.

As we've already seen in previous chapters, the "hunch" that people use to forbid gays and lesbians the right to marry is usually based on one thing, and only one thing: a preoccupation with genitals. And this says a lot more about the anti-gay-marriage people than it does about the gays and lesbians who want to marry.

Oh no, forced gay marriage in a Baptist church!

So that takes care of the "condoning" idea. In short: the government does not "condone" anyone's particular relationship when it gives a marriage license to a couple. All the state is doing is giving legal status to a contract between the two people.

But once you've got laws that give gays and lesbians the same marriage status, what does that do to religious institutions that strongly disagree with that marriage? If equal marriage is legalized, does that mean churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples *themselves* will now be forced by the power of the law to condone homosexual marriages? Wouldn't that be an infringement of their right to hold and practise their own religious beliefs?

You can actually answer that question very simply by looking at how religious institutions operate right now. Some churches preach a very strict definition of marriage, and don't believe that divorced people have the right to remarry. And yet, under the laws of the land, divorced people get married again all the time.

Are those churches forced to marry divorced people? *No*.

The Roman Catholic church believes that a faithful Catholic person should not marry someone who wasn't born Catholic, or who has not converted to Roman Catholicism. Yet the state allows Catholics and non-Catholics to marry all the time. Is this church forced, by the law, to marry Catholics and non-Catholics? *No*.

The list goes on and on. Every church, synagogue, mosque, and temple in North America has certain beliefs about who should and should not get married. And every priest, rabbi, pastor, imam, or other minister enforces those beliefs for his (or her) particular institution, when they decide who they will – or won't – marry.

To take this question out of the marriage realm, so it will be even clearer, let's look at the example of stores that sell pornographic videos. This type of selling is a perfectly legal business in the society, even if most churches are wildly and very

loudly against it. Can a church force the shutdown of such businesses because it disapproves of them so heartily? *No*.

And – here’s the crux of the matter – can the fact that this business is legal under the law be used to force those churches to allow pornographic videos into their libraries? *No*.

Everything comes back to the distinction between sacred and secular, and the division between church and state. No church can impose its beliefs as legal requirements on a secular society. And in a democratic state where the right to practise one’s own religious beliefs is protected, no government can force a church to do something it believes is morally wrong.

There is one potential exception to this division, however, and it applies to employees of the state. We have already seen this issue coming up in a different realm, where pharmacists who don’t believe in abortion and sometimes contraception refuse to sell the Morning After Pill to people, or even refuse to sell the Pill. A similar thing is now happening in Canada when it comes to legalized same-sex marriage. Some devoutly religious employees of the state are refusing to marry same-sex couples.

The argument is that these people’s religious rights are being infringed, so they have the right not to follow the law. This is a cousin to the worry that the state will require churches to perform gay marriages, except that these people are taking their religious beliefs out into the public sphere. They are convinced that their personal religious beliefs should trump the law of the land.

Within a church, a preacher, priest, rabbi, or imam has the right to refuse to marry anyone who doesn’t conform to the standards of that religious institution. But once a citizen is employed by the state to perform a state function in the public sphere, that right changes. Remember that the citizen has no right to impose their personal religious beliefs on fellow citizens. Imagine if they themselves went to a Justice of the Peace to be married, and the person refused to marry them because the JP was a very traditional Hindu and they weren’t part of an arranged marriage! Wouldn’t they be outraged?

To demonstrate this principle with a less volatile example, think of a police officer who was a conservative Muslim finding a young woman being bothered by a couple of guys on the street. If the police officer refused to help the young woman, based on his religious beliefs, because she was unaccompanied by a male family member, wouldn’t the society get up in arms?

Of course it's up to the society to decide just how far this "public" obligation goes. Most pharmacies are privately owned, for example, so there might be a bit of leeway for their employees. And yet maybe not, because their obligation depends on what the employer's philosophy is on the matter. If the person is defying even the employer's public policies, then they shouldn't work in that place. Yes, they have the legal right to their beliefs, and to practise their beliefs. But they don't have a "right" to work for that particular employer.

And employees of the state, serving a public function, cannot be allowed to pick and choose which laws they will follow. Even in the religious sphere, the government steps in to save the life of a minor; think of the religious groups that would want to deny life-saving medical treatment to a child, based on religious beliefs. The state does step into even the religious context, in some cases.

But if a person is explicitly hired to represent the state, they cannot decide to deny anyone their legal rights based on personal religious beliefs. If they can't fulfill their complete job description, they need to find another job. Period.

Sneaking in again through the back door

Despite the fact that, really, no religious group or institution is ever going to be forced to marry gays and lesbians or to condone such a marriage inside their religious context, people keep insisting on trying to link their own religious and spiritual values with government. The "condoning" objection at first sounds like an argument about the state's responsibility to allow only the "right" kinds of relationships to be formalized in marriage. But we just have to look at the cases of rapists and murderers getting married to know that this objection is another smokescreen. There is clearly something else behind this argument.

The only other possible rationale behind an argument like this is religious. The fact that religious people fret about the infringement of their religious rights if equal marriage is allowed is what gives it away. Yes, they are absolutely correct that in a democracy, they should be able to practise their faith as they wish. Yet once again, the same people are trying to get their own religious views on homosexuality codified into the laws of the land.

Democracy, and the separation of church and state, seems only to apply to them, and only when it benefits them. When it might benefit others they disapprove of, they want their own religious views to rule everyone else.

This is a "have your cake and eat it too" sort of argument. And as we saw in previous chapters, it's totally unacceptable in a democratic, secular state.

So how much weight does the argument that if the government legalizes equal marriage it is “condoning” homosexuality carry? Absolutely none. The government is never approving any two people’s specific relationship when it grants a marriage licence. It doesn’t “condone” homosexuality if it issues that licence to gays or lesbians, any more than it “condones” murder or rape by granting a marriage licence to a murderer or rapist. Or, for that matter, to a serial adulterer who also happens to be a respected deacon of a church.

If the murderer or rapist’s citizenship rights are recognized by allowing them to marry the person of their choice, then all citizens’ rights should equally be recognized. And that includes lesbians and gays.

*It is fanciful to think that the state’s issuance of a marriage license
is a signal of anything beyond
the couple’s ability to fill out a form.*

(William N. Eskridge, Jr., *The Case for Same-Sex Marriage*)

Chapter 7

DRASTIC CHANGES IN SOCIETY, REDUX

Do you feel like wiping the dust off your hands, like everything is settled? After everything we've seen so far, it's pretty clear that there is no major argument against equal marriage that carries any genuine weight. But that doesn't mean the story ends here. This is because there are still a few loose ends that need taking care of, and a couple more arguments that are sometimes used, that need to be answered.

We also need to try, one last time, to figure out what is really behind all this loud, almost frantic opposition to legalizing same-sex marriage. We'll worry about that in chapter 8, but right now, let's think about a few final things about what effect equal marriage might have in society.

What about Psychological Harm?

When we talked about incest in chapter 6, we saw that the “hunch” about making incest a taboo had some evidence to support it. But we also saw that there was no similar evidence to support the “hunch” about homosexuals. (And the source of that “hunch” is talked about in chapter 8.) Certainly you don't find any more physical harm coming to children raised in gay and lesbian families than you do for those raised in families with heterosexual parents.

But that idea relates mostly to physical effects of genetic mutation and inbreeding. What about the psyches of children raised by lesbian or gay parents? Some people might argue that if kids suffer psychological harm, it would actually provide more reason to deny homosexuals the right to marry than to deny siblings that right. After all, at least the siblings tend to be male-female pairings, which is supposedly the “right” mix for psychologically healthy children.

So while there may be no possibility of genetic harm being done, what about the potential psychological harm? What *about* those children being raised by gay parents? What if they are suffering psychological and social difficulties? Isn't that as real as the genetic harm suffered by children of incest? Shouldn't we deny gay marriage too, because of this potential?

First of all, we shouldn't think it's a coincidence that this is a very sudden and handy preoccupation about kids' safety, for people opposed to equal marriage. Remember that those same people were quite willing to completely write off

adoptive or even natural children of gays and lesbians for the “homosexuals can’t have children” argument. Even John McKay, in his argument about equal marriage changing society too drastically in Quebec, never even *considered* legalizing equal marriage to give Quebec children of gays and lesbians the same stable family environment that other kids have.

So it’s a little rich now, that people who use the “psychological harm” argument are suddenly terribly concerned about these children’s welfare. They appear to be concerned about the children only when that concern will help them deny these children’s parents the right to marry and give them a stable home and all the benefits it would bring.

But back to the argument itself. Countless studies from the past decades have shown that there is no more harm done to the psyches of children of homosexual parents than of heterosexual parents. When there are any differences, they can just as plausibly be laid at the door of society’s treatment of gay families in general. When the whole structure of a society seems to be designed to deny your family’s existence, and see to it that your family doesn’t receive the same services or respect as other families in your region, you could very easily suffer psychologically because of it. But who is really at fault then?

There is just no evidence that children in families with gay and lesbian parents suffer any more psychological damage than children of heterosexuals. People may argue that without a father in the family, some children, particularly boys, might suffer in a certain way. It’s true that having both a female and male role model is one of the best ways for a child to grow up. But lesbian parents can help supply a male role model in the same way single mothers do: having male friends, getting the children into a Big Brother program, and so on. The same sort of thing can apply in families with two male parents.

If society refuses to penalize single mothers or single fathers because their children don’t have both gender role models in the family, there is absolutely no reason to penalize gay and lesbian parents either.

But this question may be irrelevant anyway. In 2006 there were many public statements based on research about homosexual parenting. For example, several medical doctors, in a paper presented in *Pediatrics* magazine, stated that three decades’ worth of evidence showed no significant differences in children parented by lesbian or gay couples, compared to those parented by heterosexuals. If anything, children of heterosexuals tended to be more aggressive, while children of homosexuals were slightly more nurturing.

Nor was there any higher likelihood of these children ending up gay or lesbian themselves. There was the same proportion of gay or lesbian children in these families as there were in families with heterosexual parents.

The Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) also made a position statement in 2006, saying the same things. But they pointed out another interesting detail, though, about the studies that opponents of equal marriage use to show that children of these marriages suffer psychological harm. The children who seemed to experience adverse effects tended to be children who had lived through either a divorce or the death of one of their parents.

The CPA said that differences between kids from homosexual families were “more accurately attributable to the effects of death or divorce, and/or to the effects of living with a single parent, rather than to parents’ sexual orientation. These studies do not tell us that the children of same-sex parents in an intact relationship fair [sic] worse than the children of opposite-sex parents in an intact relationship.”

And what does that mean? That the opponents of gay marriage are comparing apples and oranges rather than apples and apples. They stack the deck in favour of the conclusion they want to reach, and then they reach it. But this is not a valid conclusion. Children in families with same-sex parents don’t experience any more psychological problems than those in families with male-female parents.

I can marry my dog now!

This is an extreme argument constantly trotted out by the anti-gay-marriage spokespeople. It seems harmless, and even a little amusing and entertaining, especially since there’s no great clamor at the gates of the political establishment demanding the right to marry a pet. Yet it actually betrays a very, very ugly underside to people who oppose equal marriage.

This is the usual way they put this argument: “Now that we’re allowing gays and lesbians to get married, the idea of ‘marriage’ means so little that people might as well marry their dog.”

We saw in chapter 4 that the real issue in a statement like that is that it is the *heterosexuals* who value marriage so little that they’ll abandon it if someone else is allowed to join their elite club. That statement is, very simply, immature tantrum-throwing by people who don’t seem to be responsible or grown-up enough to marry anyone in the first place. “If I have to share my toys, then I’ll abandon them, so there!”

We have seen that marriage isn't devalued in any way by allowing people to participate who value it as highly as gays and lesbians do. But even though anti-gay-marriage people claim that the "dog" argument defends the value of heterosexual marriage, it actually reveals something extremely disturbing about the heterosexuals who use it.

It demonstrates that the opponents of equal marriage *think gays and lesbians are no better than dogs*. They make a direct connection between the two. Some have even gone further, saying that if you allow gays and lesbians to marry, you might as well marry your computer or your pillow. So homosexuals are made equal to *objects that have no life at all*.

This demonstrates a dehumanizing attitude that should make society tremble at its core and fall to its knees. It's well established that when genocide is committed, the reason the murderers are able to kill so many people is that they convince themselves that those people are not really human. Now, that's a connection that should *really* make people worry.

People who use this "dog" argument are refusing to recognize gays and lesbians as human beings with feelings, aspirations, and values, people who might have the same need for family and intimacy that they do. It's this dehumanizing that allows opponents of equal marriage to dismiss the well-being of adopted children, or talk about being "pro family" while cheerfully trying to destroy the families of gays and lesbians and their kids.

This may sound like too strong a response to the "marry your dog" argument, but in fact it is not. The tendency to dehumanize gays and lesbians is a thread that runs through every argument used against them. Make them less than human, and you don't have to give them the same human rights as every other citizen. It's very handy. It's also very totalitarian.

And while people using this argument may never even dream of walking all the way down the dehumanizing road toward genocide, it still lies fully open before them. Every argument they use that happily tears lives apart takes them farther down the path.

They like to think that the argument, "If gays can marry, then you can marry your dog" demonstrates the "thin edge of the wedge." Well, they're right. It is indeed the thin edge of the wedge. But not in the way they think it is.

Yes, but surely polygamy...?

Another “thin edge of the wedge” argument is the one that says if you allow the definition of marriage to be changed from one man/one woman, the next thing people will want is to change the definition to include polygamy too.

Ah, polygamy. You mean the form of “traditional marriage” that people so conveniently forgot in chapter 5? The fact is that this form of marriage already exists today, in many countries. And like it or not, some communities even still practise it in North America.

That says nothing about whether it’s “right” or “wrong.” All this means is that this is not something that is going to be “caused” by allowing gays and lesbians to marry, because it’s already around in various forms. This argument is, to some degree at least, a red herring, and very convenient for the anti-gay-marriage people to throw into the arena as a distraction.

However, it’s true that having same-sex marriage legalized might encourage some people who now want to push to have polygamy legalized. So it’s not a complete red herring, but might hint at a future possibility.

But that’s the key word: future. There are no groups pushing for this type of marriage yet. And again, we have to realize that we can’t insist that gays and lesbians be sacrificed for a problem that doesn’t relate to them. It’s not right to expect them to sacrifice their rights so that heterosexuals can maintain the illusion that their marriages are strong. And it’s also not right to demand that they sacrifice themselves so we can prevent the legalization of polygamy.

If polygamy isn’t legalized, it will be because there are good reasons not to do it. This was what happened with incest, and it’s likely to happen with polygamy too. There are all sorts of possible social arguments against polygamy, like the differences in power in the relationship, and the fact that it tends to be only one-way. (That is, one man, several women, but seemingly never one woman, several men.) It’s possible that evidence might show that a polygamous marriage would infringe on certain rights, or might have certain adverse psychological effects.

It’s also possible that the evidence will point in the other direction too, and show polygamous marriages to be stable and nurturing, and to produce a great deal of good in the families and in society. We still need to do the studies, and see what the evidence demonstrates.

But whichever direction the studies go, that has nothing to do with the citizenship rights of gays and lesbians. They, at least, fit society’s current assumptions about a

marriage being for two people. The big significant difference between how same-sex marriages and heterosexual marriages operate is in the genital mix. And we've already dealt with that, and will look even further into it in chapter 8.

If the issue of polygamy is going to come up in the future, it's going to come up no matter which direction the same-sex marriage question goes. The gays and lesbians who want the right to marry are not "causing" polygamy. And their right to marry should stand on its own.

Not "Civil Unions," but Civilizing

One of the arguments people use when they complain about the very existence of gays and lesbians is that homosexuals are supposedly immoral and promiscuous. They are all about the sex, and don't have any of the same values as their detractors do.

We've already seen just how plausible the idea is that it's the gays and lesbians who think of nothing but sex, while the heterosexuals dwell in higher, nobler realms of thought. The percentages of teen and other unwanted pregnancies in North America might also have some bearing (pardon the pun) on the topic, not to mention the high incidence of adultery in heterosexual marriages. Things like this cast a wee bit of doubt on the heterosexuals' claims of sexual moral superiority to gays and lesbians. Nor does the homosexuals' clamouring for the equal right to marry support the idea that en masse they are wild and promiscuous, either.

And you'll notice that the "promiscuous, wild lifestyle" argument is never used against a heterosexual person, to *refuse* the right for him or her to marry, even if that person has also lived that sort of lifestyle. This is another case where an argument is used against gays and lesbians, but heterosexuals get a complete pass in the same situation.

But even if the detractors turn out to be right, and gays in particular are pretty promiscuous, at least for some period of their lives, that isn't an argument against equal marriage at all. In fact, it's actually a demonstration of the *necessity* of same-sex marriage. And it's the equal marriage critics themselves who supply the reasons why.

Our friend John McKay from the Canadian parliament gives us our first hint. Remember when he talked of marriage as the location of "interplay" between men and women? One of the things in the back of his mind was the well known "civilizing" influence marriage has on people. When people claim that marriage is the fundamental unit of society, they are talking about all the ways that the

institution settles people down, gives them stability, and turns them into productive members of society rather than constant party-goers. This is why governments favor families over other arrangements of people, and gives families all sorts of helping hands, tax breaks, and so on.

This is also why a family unit is thought to be the best place for children to grow up in. When the two parents have committed themselves to each other, abandoning what was perhaps a wild, multi-partnered single life, they form a secure, stable human organization, a family, that theoretically helps every one of its members prosper.

So. Heterosexuals complain about the wild, barely civilized lives of some homosexuals. (Even if this wildness isn't actually manifested by every gay or lesbian, but never mind.) Why, then, wouldn't they leap at the chance to bestow the one institution that has demonstrated, through all of history, the ability to turn promiscuous partiers into solid citizens?

Instead of being a privilege that should be denied to gays and lesbians because of promiscuity and a rather wild, out-of-the-mainstream lifestyle, marriage is actually one of the solutions to those things! Heterosexuals, if they are so worried about the promiscuity they believe occurs in the homosexual population, and the instability it might produce in society, should be *begging* gays and lesbians to accept the honor of being married.

William N. Eskridge, Jr., another person we met in previous chapters, adds an almost amusing facet to the "civilizing" aspect of same-sex marriage. He points out that one of the arguments thoughtful gays and lesbians use *against* the idea of equal marriage is precisely that if too many of them get married, they could be "domesticated and tamed."

Eskridge also discusses how, as decriminalization of homosexuality progressed, gays and lesbians were integrated more and more into the wider society, as functioning members. They became business people, teachers, doctors, religious practitioners, you name it. In any business, on any subway train, in any political gathering, or any activity people engage in, you find a certain percentage of gays and lesbians contributing to the larger enterprise.

This is why, says Eskridge, it's important to extend equal marriage rights to homosexuals. Society becomes better and more stable when this happens. If it's the good of society people are worried about, when they want to deny marriage to gays and lesbians, they have got things completely backwards.

So why would they remain so firm against equal marriage, when it would produce so much good for the society? Chapter 8 suggests a possible explanation.

Chapter 8

THE “ICK” FACTOR Or “How Juvenile are We?”

There is something going on. There is a reason why people who oppose equal marriage stay firm in their opposition even when their arguments are shown to carry no weight. The arguments they use are clearly not based on reason, because they never change their minds when reason shows them the mistakes they’ve made. They either cover up the contradictions or simply ignore them.

So the only conclusion we have left is that all their arguments – every last one of them – are smokescreens for something else. And that something is irrational.

Let’s summarize the two main reasons that support all the arguments people use to oppose same sex marriage. And then we’ll have a look at what really seems to be behind even those two reasons, the irrational force that may be pushing all the opposition people have for same-sex marriage.

My god doesn’t like homosexuality

The first reason people oppose equal marriage is religious. This is where they are certain their religious writings or traditions declare homosexuality to be morally wrong. And they want what they perceive as the truth, based on these religious beliefs, to dictate the laws of the land.

We already know the logical conclusion of that, though, don’t we? We saw it at the beginning of chapter 1. It’s all fine, for one’s own religious group, anyway, if it’s their religion that’s in control of the laws. If the government is Christian, they can eventually force everyone to live their lives according to what they think Christianity requires. And eventually they might even go all the way, as many of their forebears did, and as most religious groups in charge of governments seem inevitably to do: some day they could force actual conversion to Christianity on all citizens, at the point of a sword. Or, in our modern updated version, at the end of a gun barrel.

The descendants of Jews who faced this choice all through Europe over the centuries would probably have some interesting things to say about that idea. As would Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims in Pakistan and India, as well as any other religious group that has been persecuted by another one.

But imagine that one's own religious group doesn't "win" this contest, and it's a different religion that gets to make the laws of the land. Do the people whose religion doesn't control the government really want their women to be forced, by law, to wear veils? Do they want vegetarianism forced on them or pork forbidden to them by the laws of the land?

If the creation of laws to obey the religious ideas of one group is bad in any particular case, then it's a bad thing for all of them. The better protection, for every religious person and institution in the land, not to mention for atheists and agnostics, is for the government to be entirely secular. This way, the law can't treat anyone differently because of their religion or lack of it. Nor will the law favour people from one religious group over those in a different group. In a secular democratic society, all citizens are protected and treated equally.

That old bump and grind

But the second main objection to equal marriage stems from a preoccupation with whose genitals are bumping together. No matter how this obsession disguises itself, it sits behind almost all of the primary arguments people use against allowing same-sex marriage.

As we have seen earlier, there's some speculation about why this is. It might stem from how some men define their masculinity in terms of being able to dominate women. They may feel threatened at the thought that a few men don't behave in this dominant way, and that other men allow themselves to be dominated by a man instead. And women who aren't dominated by a man may seem just as threatening.

That may not be the primary motivation for everyone who opposes equal marriage, and there may be even more compelling explanations that haven't been discovered yet. One other explanation currently in vogue is that men or women who are the most strongly opposed to equal marriage or even the mere existence of gays and lesbians have homosexual desires of their own that they are trying to suppress.

It's too much of a stretch to suggest that this is the universal motivation for everyone, though. But it really does seem to explain many cases, especially among virulently anti-gay male politicians who are discovered to have secret boyfriends, who get caught propositioning men in public bathrooms, or who hire rent boys from male prostitution websites. In certain cases it does seem to be true that suppression of genuine homosexual tendencies is what makes some people yell so

loudly in opposition to equal marriage. They are trying to drown out their own inner voices.

However, the one thing virtually all opponents have in common is that their arguments center around genital sex, to the exclusion of almost anything else. This is especially eyebrow-raising when they claim that it's the gays and lesbians who are all about sex. While homosexuals clamor for the right to marry, raise families, and take on all the responsibilities and commitments entailed by marriage, the heterosexuals who oppose them can only ignore all that and base everything on genitals.

This casts far more doubt on the heterosexuals' motivations than on the motivations of gays and lesbians.

The “Ick” Factor

However, the preoccupation with genitals does hint at something that seems to underly almost all opposition to gays and lesbians and their desire to marry their partners. I call this the “Ick” Factor. It stems from a knee-jerk reaction people have when they first discover how gay and lesbian sex is conducted. We saw this in chapter 6, when we talked about people's “hunch” that both incest and homosexuality are “icky.”

It's very much like what we all feel when we think of our own parents having sex. It makes us go “Eeeeeew!”

You've undoubtedly heard the remarks people make when they first learn about oral – or worse, anal – sex. A fundamentalist woman I know once remarked, about oral sex, “No Christian would ever do that.” And kids, hearing for the first time about how sex works, often feel the same way about it. In fact, I knew one pre-teen who, learning about sex from a friend, said haughtily, “My parents are Christians and would never do something as disgusting as that.”

Eventually, though, these children grow up and learn that sex isn't, in fact, disgusting. Most eventually experience it themselves, and find that it's not such a bad thing after all. They get over their initial disgust, and learn to appreciate it. It's like one's first taste of a good wine, or one's first bite into a chunk of strong cheese. These things may not taste good at first, but eventually the palate is trained and refined, and the beauties of this food and drink are embraced.

But some people never let their understanding be refined like that. Listen to another sort of response that often comes from hearing how two men have sex:

“The guy sticks his thing into the other man’s *what?* Eeeew! That’s so disgusting! They shouldn’t be allowed to do that!”

Never mind that the two men in question find this activity just as fulfilling and satisfying as a man and a woman having sex. The person who objects to gay sex hangs onto their initial disgust and, in fact, often nurtures it and keeps it alive, never trying to learn to respect it the same way they learned to respect heterosexual sex. They respond with the initial “Ick!” and never allow themselves to get beyond that.

In other words, they refuse to grow up. They start out in a place of juvenile grossed-out-ness, and deliberately and voluntarily keep themselves there forever.

Cherished voyeurism

Is that too strong a statement, though? Is the “Ick” Factor really a deliberate and voluntary thing? That first stab of disgust may not be, because almost everyone experiences it when they first learn about sex, whether heterosexual or homosexual. But when we say some people “nurture” that initial juvenile disgust about gay and lesbian sex, it’s not an exaggeration.

We see this preoccupation manifested in its simplest form by people whose main objections to homosexuality appear to stem from the disgust they feel when they use their imaginations to picture two men having sex.

But wait just a minute. This in itself should set alarm bells ringing already. What on earth are these people doing, going around imagining all this gay sex? Is that how they treat their heterosexual acquaintances too? Do they imagine the male-female couples among their friends having sex? Do their friends know about this?

And if they don’t do this when it comes to their heterosexual friends, why are they so preoccupied with trying to picture gay and lesbian sex? Shouldn’t they seek counselling about this? Do they not even notice something odd?

And do they notice no contradiction between this and the claim that it’s the gays and lesbians who are preoccupied with sex, and the heterosexuals who have their minds on higher matters?

However, some people take this juvenile preoccupation even further, and make it the centerpiece of their lives. Most of the founders and public faces of the major anti-gay, “pro-family” groups as well as the loudest anti-gay elected representatives seem to revel in the “disgust propaganda” of people like

discredited pseudo-psychologist Paul Cameron. He and others are disturbingly preoccupied with the idea that men having sex with other men eat “medically significant amounts of feces.” One pundit even tried to calculate the number of pounds of feces an average gay man would supposedly ingest in his lifetime. Many of the criticisms of gay male sex from people like this are neck-deep in similar preoccupations with shit, vomit, urine, and other bodily excretions.

One expects this kind of all-encompassing preoccupation with bodily fluids from a teenager with raging hormones, who perhaps enjoys fart jokes a little too much and is way too interested in his bathroom business. One doesn't expect it from mature adult men who should be able to weigh things based on reason and evidence rather than on scribbles from public bathroom walls.

Does the “Ick” Factor explain everything?

The “Ick” Factor may not explain everything about people's opposition to equal marriage, but it explains a lot. You just have to listen to the arguments for a while before you start to realize that it's usually the gays and lesbians who are arguing on principles – and it's the heterosexuals who always seem to come back to the “ickiness” of gay sex.

Gays and lesbians talk about responsibility, commitment, partnership, and family as reasons why they want to get married. Yet their opponents' arguments dismiss all this, and always boil down to the fact that they don't like same-gender genitals bumping together, even if every other element of the relationship is identical to the marriages of heterosexuals. And the reason they don't like those same-gender genitals coming together always seems to stem from the same thing: “Ick!”

They seem to have gotten past their initial “icky” feeling about heterosexual sex and accepted its validity and enjoyment (or have they?). But when it comes to homosexual sex, they get stuck on it, and don't appear able to think of anything else. Nor do they ever recognize that perhaps gays and lesbians have the same “Ick!” reaction at the idea of having sex with the opposite gender. Instead, the heterosexual critics truly seem to want homosexuals to *stop* being attracted to the same gender, merely because of the disgust the heterosexuals feel. Would they recognize the validity of such a demand going in the opposite direction, because gays and lesbians are repulsed by the way heterosexuals have sex? Not a chance.

It's even possible that the “Ick” Factor explains the religious objections too. Why was a disapproval of homosexuals written into the ancient documents in the first place? Homosexuals have always been a minority in society because they felt and behaved differently than the majority, and minorities are often feared or even

blamed for the misfortunes that befall the majority. Remember how Baptist minister Jerry Falwell blamed gays and lesbians, and other minorities he disliked, for the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks? And the 700 Club's Pat Robertson agreed with him. (The same Pat Robertson who blamed black Haitians from 200 years ago, who threw off the yoke of slavery, for the 2010 Haitian earthquake.)

This is a very speculative idea, and would need to be studied in considerable depth before such a claim could be made in a definitive way. Yet when you ask a religious person *why* their faith disapproves of homosexuality so vehemently, what does that person usually give as an answer? They respond with one of the objections which, when all the disguising layers are removed, really amounts to just one thing: "I don't like same-gender genitals bumping together." Which virtually always boils down to one final underlying response: "*ICK!*"

Conclusion and Summary

It's pretty clear that all the arguments people use to say that same-sex marriage shouldn't be allowed are incorrect. It's sometimes hard to argue against them, though, because equal marriage opponents make them sound really plausible. When you've got all of these arguments coming at you at once, and your ideas about what's wrong with them are vague and hard to express, defending against them can seem overwhelming.

But hopefully, having gone through all the main arguments one at a time, you've now got a better idea of where the flaws are, and what the answers are too. Why don't we do a little summary of what we've talked about in the last few chapters, so you can remember the most important points? Here again are the basic arguments, and the answers to them.

1) Equal marriage harms the "sanctity" of marriage.

- The government is not a church, and cannot "sanctify" anything.
- The government is secular, which protects all religious people from having other people's religious views imposed on them by law.
- Trying to push religious ideas into lawmaking really means one religious group is trying to put itself in control of the government, which is not allowed in a democratic society.

2) Marriage partners should be complements

- Individual temperaments vary as much as human beings do.
- The only "complementary" difference big enough between two male partners or female partners, compared to a male-female partnership, is genitals.
- Even when shown that temperaments vary in both heterosexual and homosexual couples, "complements" always boils down to that genital difference, which seems to trump all similarities in how these couples operate.

3) Marriage is for producing and raising children

- This argument should require the annulment of all heterosexual marriages that can't or refuse to produce children, but for some reason these are exempt from this requirement.

- This is a slap in the face to adoptive children of infertile parents, since these children appear not to “count.”
- This ignores the fact that many gays and lesbians *do* have children, biological and adopted; it pretends they don’t exist and shouldn’t have the same family stability as children of heterosexuals.
- The application of this argument *only* to homosexuals but never to heterosexuals suggests a hidden agenda (probably based on genitals again), and a view of marriage as an elite club.

4) Equal marriage will change society too drastically

- Every law changes society, and some (like giving women the vote or abolishing slavery) changed it quite drastically, yet those laws were made anyway because they were the right thing to do.
- There is no statistical evidence whatsoever, in countries that have already instituted equal marriage, that it produced any adverse effects.
- There is statistical evidence, particularly in Scandinavian countries but also in the Canadian province of Quebec, that after same-sex marriage was allowed, birth and marriage rates rose, and divorce rates fell.
- The real issue seems to be that if gays and lesbians are allowed to marry, heterosexuals don’t want to. This immature reaction, however, is not the gays and lesbians’ fault, nor are they required to sacrifice their rights on the altar of heterosexuals’ weak commitment to marriage.

5) Just use a different word than “marriage,” which traditionally has always referred to the one man-one woman union

- “Marriage” is not a monolithic word that has always described the one man-one woman union, but has historically been applied to several kinds of “traditional” unions, including the one man-multiple women version.
- “Marriage” has also been applied to loveless heterosexual unions contracted only for financial or dynastic purposes.
- Every essential element in a genuine marriage, referring to the commitments and responsibilities, can be done just as well by gays and lesbians as by heterosexuals.
- Since the only thing that’s really different in heterosexual versus homosexual relationships is genitals, that’s the real reason behind this argument.
- It is, therefore, the heterosexuals (not the gays and lesbians) who are thinking of nothing but sex, and not valuing all of the other important things that make a marriage. It is the heterosexuals (not the gays and

lesbians) who have a shallow, superficial, sex-only-based concept of marriage.

6) The lack of a dual-parent family might cause psychological damage to children, or result in a higher probability of gay and lesbian children

- This should mean that any heterosexual who is a single parent should be required to marry an opposite-sex partner, yet heterosexuals appear to be exempt.
- Any psychological difficulties experienced by children in same-sex marriages appear to be more closely related to having experienced the death or divorce of a parent, or having experienced discrimination in the general society for being in a same-sex family.
- The incidence of gay and lesbian children in equal marriage families is the same as in families of heterosexual marriages

7) Equal marriage means people will want to marry their dogs

- This deliberately dehumanizes gays and lesbians, equating them with dogs and denying their humanity.
- This dehumanizing is the same sort of attitude that, in more extreme cases, leads to genocide. At the very least, if you view someone as less than human, you can deny them human rights.
- So far, there doesn't appear to be anybody clamouring for the "right" to marry their dogs, so this is a non-issue, only imagined by same-sex marriage opponents.
- This argument reveals a great deal of ugliness about the character of those who use it, and reveals nothing about the nature and character of gays and lesbians.

8) Legalizing same-sex marriage will open the door to legalizing polygamy

- The definition of marriage has always been fluid and changing, and has not "always" referred to the one man-one woman marriage or even to a love-based marriage.
- Polygamy already exists in the world, and always has, and many governments are already having to deal with how polygamous marriages from other cultures will be recognized in their society; this is not a situation that has been created by the marriage of gays and lesbians.
- Gays and lesbians are not trying to legalize polygamous marriages, and their own marriage rights should be judged on their own merits, and not on a hypothetical situation involving someone else.

- There may or may not be other evidence that can be used to argue against legalizing polygamy. The existence or lack of this evidence has no bearing on the gay and lesbian couples wanting to participate in legal marriage.

9) Gays and lesbians are so promiscuous and have such a wild lifestyle that they are generally disapproved of, and shouldn't be allowed equal marriage with heterosexuals

- For some reason, this argument supposedly disqualifies gays and lesbians, but never disqualifies heterosexuals who themselves lead a wild and promiscuous life.
- The fact that homosexuals are demanding the right to settle down and marry demonstrates that they value the stability, responsibilities, and privileges of marriage as much as any heterosexual does.
- Marriage has always been a stabilizing and settling institution. So rather than being denied to homosexuals because of instability and promiscuity, it should be allowed for them as one of the "remedies" (if one is needed) for the very things people complain about.

10) "Eew!"

- People should be reminded of their own reaction to the idea of their parents having sex.
- It is unhealthy for a person to spend so much time trying to picture other people having sex; this preoccupation suggests more about the unhealthy inner minds of the critics than it does about the gays and lesbians they are thinking about.
- A person's own disinclination to (and dislike of) having sex in the same way as someone else should never be used to oppress a minority and deny them their full, democratic, human rights in a society.

Hopefully this little book has helped clarify exactly what the anti-equal-marriage arguments are, and exactly why they fall flat. In the cacophony of objections to same-sex marriage, it's useful to clear away the audio debris and get down to the bare bones of the matter. Once we do that, we realize how few real "reasons" the opponents are actually presenting. And the answers finally become obvious.

There is no genuine reason for disallowing same-sex marriage. Those who oppose giving gays and lesbians their equal legal and human rights frequently have a hidden agenda, almost always based on sex and a very superficial, shallow understanding of what marriage really is.

A Few Sources and Suggestions for Further Reading

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