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### Homosexuals: They're Americans, Too, You Know

Equality. The concept is simple, but important enough that the founding fathers included it in the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." Alas, in practice, that wasn't the case. In the Constitution, the founders wrote that black people were considered three-fifths a person, and women were seen as unfit to vote. But through time, society spoke out against these injustices and eventually assured equality for people of both sexes and all racial minorities. Why, then, in such a civilized country, are homosexuals considered lesser beings, unfit to wed, adopt, or receive equal rights? In the enlightened society of current times, it is baffling that such injustice still prevails. Gay couples deserve the same marital, legal, and adoptive rights as straight couples, and those rights should be awarded without delay or question.

First and foremost, the right to marry the person of one's choice is fundamental and guaranteed to all by the Constitution (Gerstmann 67). However, until 1967, interracial couples were not allowed to marry in several states. And yet, America moved past that and progressed as a nation. Jon Stewart of the Daily Show spoke of this progression in an interview with Fox News pundit Bill O'Reilly on November 13, saying that "the tradition in America is a progression of individual freedom. You know what the tradition of America would say? Gay marriage is the next step in the progression." If America is to continue to follow the words of its Constitution and the pattern of its own history, it must make gay marriage legal.

Opposition to this notion of progression and civil rights is largely based on the belief that allowing gay couples to marry would require the redefinition of marriage. The definition of marriage, according to the religious journal First Things, is a union between a man and a woman with the main purpose being procreation. Gay couples do not fit this definition. However, this definition is flawed. Many heterosexual couples live out their marriages without ever having kids. Others, for varied reasons, turn to adoption, fertility treatments, and other alternative methods of reproduction in order to have children. One can deduct from this, not only that children are not essential to a marriage, but also that there are many ways to have children practiced regularly by heterosexual couples that same-sex couples could use.

The other issue of the definition debate focuses on the tenet that marriage consists of the union between one man and one woman. This definition gets much of its support from religious doctrine that states that a man should not lie with another man as he does a woman (Leviticus 18:22). While there is no debating what is written, it seems an unconvincing argument. Chauvinists and racists have thrown the Bible at civil rights activists for years, saying that certain verses forbade true equality from coming to pass. However, those arguments came to be considered outdated or based on poor interpretation. Why would the religion-based arguments of homophobes be any different? Furthermore, in a country where church and state are to exist independently, denying the legalization of gay marriage based on religious ideas would be wholly unconstitutional regardless of the stability of the arguments.

Many gay marriage opponents also believe that changing the definition to allow same-sex marriage would do away with the definition's inclusion of the words "*one* man and *one* woman." Polygamy appears to be a huge fear. Almost every article denouncing gay marriage mentions the inevitable acceptance of polygamy if gay marriage is legalized. This fear is an irrational one that

is based on faulty logic. Andrew Sullivan of the New Republic states that gay men have more frequent sexual encounters with a higher number of partners largely because they are “men in an all-male subculture.” However, gay men that are unwilling to give up that sexual freedom are not the ones that would be getting married. Just like a high percentage of lesbians, many gay men appreciate the “social stability, anchors for their relationships, the family support and financial security that come with marriage” (Sullivan). Therefore, the sometimes “polygamist” tendencies of gay relationships would not disturb the monogamy of marriage. As a result, the inclusion of same-sex couples in the institution of marriage would do nothing but strengthen it.

Another reason that homosexual couples are fighting for the right to marry is because they currently receive none of the legal benefits that come with marriage. Even in places where civil unions are legal for gay couples, the rights received are meager in comparison to those that straight couples receive. Kareem Fahim of the New York Times states that these rights include workman’s compensation, child support, and parental rights regardless of whether or not one is the child’s birth parent. The attainment of these and many other rights would benefit both the couples and their families. As such, the standard of living would go up for a large number of people, which could help America as a whole. When viewing all the facts, there really is no downside to gay couples receiving equal legal rights. This is backed up by the fact that, after searching through several hundred articles pertaining to gay marriage, I found only one argument that gave solid legal evidence that equal rights for homosexuals was illegal: The Defense of Marriage Act.

Based on the belief that marriage should be defined as a relationship between one man and one woman, the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) “prevents same-sex couples from receiving any of the federal rights or benefits of marriage” (Gerstmann 5). As the Constitution

provides equal protection to all under its jurisdiction and the right to marry the person of one's choice is a fundamental right, the Defense of Marriage Act is highly unconstitutional. The fact that it exists, therefore, is some sort of bizarre legal anomaly that will hopefully be corrected in the near future. If same-sex marriage is legalized, it appears that the American government will have no choice but to do away with the DOMA. As the act barely has a feeble leg to stand on, people who use it as support for an argument have little legal ground to stand on themselves.

Finally, there is the issue of gay couples adopting. The number of children currently living in foster care and orphanages in America is staggering. If permitted to adopt, homosexual couples could provide stable living environments and loving homes for a sizable portion of these children. In fact, many supporters feel that some gay couples could provide these children with more stable homes than some heterosexual couples ("Pros"). By doing so, a financial burden is lifted from the government, the children are given the chance to live much better lives, and the country as a whole is better off because fewer children are left without parents. However, the ability for all same-sex couples to adopt is being fought tooth-and-nail by a large number of naysayers.

Opponents of gay adoption stand largely on the belief that it would be a severe detriment to the children. Some believe that having parents of both sexes serve as role models in a child's life is very important and impacts the development of a child ("Pros"). While this theory has a valid point, thousands of children would be left un-adopted if this logic were turned into law. Growing up in homes with same-sex couples is leaps and bounds better than growing up in an orphanage. Other denouncers of gay marriage believe that children who grow up with gay parents are more likely to be gay themselves ("Pros"). While there is no arguing the fact that these children will grow up more tolerant of homosexuals and people who are different, science

has proven that being homosexual is not a choice that one makes but rather a harmless genetic mutation. Just as people can't choose whether or not they grow up with webbed feet, people can't choose whether or not to "become gay." Therefore, there is no reason to believe that children who grow up with same-sex couples are at any risk of growing up less normal or well-adjusted than other children.

In conclusion, there is no reason why homosexual couples shouldn't be allowed to marry and live out their lives just as heterosexual couples do. The rights they gain through marriage will better America, and having same-sex couples take part in marriage will better that institution. Allowing gay couples to adopt would take children out of orphanages and foster homes and provide them with loving families. Gay couples have the capacity to make America a better place... if we'll let them. So, I leave you with a quote from MSNBC reporter Keith Olbermann in which he addresses opponents of gay marriage. In it, I believe he expresses a very compassionate and genuine notion that brings all of humanity under one umbrella, putting aside the differences and asking opponents to consider what makes us all the same: "In a time of impermanence and fly-by-night relationships, these people over here want the same chance at permanence and happiness that is your option. They don't want to deny you yours. They don't want to take anything away from you. They want what you want—a chance to be a little less alone in the world."

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