

Defending Gay Marriage

Debates over gay marriage involve both legal and social arguments, for and against. Legal arguments on behalf of gay marriage tend to get more attention because it should be a matter of basic civil and equal rights. Even if gay marriage were harmful, the equality and dignity of gay couples should be respected, though it's not true, or at least not demonstrable, that gay marriage would be harmful. On the contrary, there are good reasons to think that legalized gay marriage would benefit us all.

Gays as Individuals Will Be Better Off:

Studies repeatedly demonstrate that people who marry tend to be better off financially, emotionally, psychologically, and even medically. Marriage is not universally an improvement (women, for example, can actually be worse off in some ways), but it generally is. Because of this, it stands to reason that legalized gay marriage will ultimately prove beneficial for gay individuals. This, in turn, will be better for gay couples, the families of gays, and communities where gays live.

Gay Couples Will Be Better Off:

Perhaps the most important aspect of marriage is that it establishes a legal and social relationship which makes it easier for people to "be there" for each other — economically, emotionally, and psychologically. Most of the rights and privileges that go with marriage are, in fact, ways to help spouses support each other. Married couples are thus much better off than unmarried couples, giving relationships the ability to grow stronger and deeper.

Families with Gay Members Will Be Better Off:

Because gays can't marry, it's very difficult for partners to help each other in difficult situations like medical crises. The burden of support and decision-making typically falls in the laps of other family members when it should fall to one's chosen life partner. If people know that they can rely upon their relative's spouse, they can be far less anxious about what will happen to their loved one — not just in the context of a crisis, but in general, too.

Children of Gay Couples Will Be Better Off:

The Christian Right would deny gays the ability to adopt or raise children, but that's an impossible goal. Children are already being born to, adopted by, and raised by gay couples in increasing numbers. Children in stable, married households can be better off than those who aren't because both parents can handle decision-making and parenting without worry. Opponents of divorce often cite the negative effects on children; the same can be said against bans on gay marriages.

Communities with Gay Couples Will Be Better Off:

Married couples can help and support each other in a variety of ways because laws and regulations are written to help that happen — for example, people are able to take time off to help their hospitalized spouse. Gay couples who cannot marry don't receive the same help, so much of what gay partners would do for each other must be shouldered by the community at large, unnecessarily draining resources. By solidifying relationships, gay marriage can help stabilize a community overall.

Gay Marriages Will Help Stabilize Society Generally:

Conservatives who usually oppose gay marriage argue, correctly, that stable families are a cornerstone to a stable society. Families are the smallest social unit in society and trends in the family inevitably affect trends in society as a whole — and vice-versa, of course. Allowing gays to marry will help better integrate them and their relationships into society. Ensuring that gay relationships are stable and receive support will benefit the stability of society overall.

Gay Marriage Could Benefit Marriage Generally:

Opponents of gay marriage argue that it would undermine the institution of marriage, but it's hard to see how more marriages would be bad for marriage. If anything harms marriage, it is bad marriages where people don't take marriage seriously — and that's already too common with heterosexuals. If gay couples in committed relationships are able to formalize their unions as marriages, that can only serve to improve marriage overall by providing more positive role models.

Marriage is Better than Civil Unions:

Some opponents and supporters of gay marriage support civil unions as an alternative, but that's a mistake. For marriages to continue as a stabilizing force in society, they must be genuine marriages — not "marriage lite" that carries some benefits without all the responsibilities. Equality before the law means that creating civil unions for gays will lead to civil unions for everyone else and this "marriage lite" will be more of a threat to marriage than gay unions could possibly be.