

Q: Would the legalization of gay marriage result in a net benefit to heterosexuals?

YES: Divorce rates triggered by fraudulent marriages will go down and more children will grow up in stable homes.

By **MICHAEL ALVEAR**

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As outrageous as it may sound, gay marriage will greatly improve the lives of heterosexuals. It will reduce the number of divorces caused by fraudulent marriages, ensure that more orphaned children grow up in stable and loving homes, raise the standard of living for children with gay parents, make neighborhoods safer for families and boost the economies of struggling communities.

It is not the license to marry that will create these benefits; it is the massive shift in attitude that will result from it. Allowing gays to marry will do to homophobia what civil-rights legislation did for racism — reduce it substantially over the years.

The more gays are accepted as equal citizens, the more stable heterosexual marriage will become. Why? Because there are an untold number of traditional marriages that break up because one spouse comes out of the closet.

Homophobia drives gay men and women into fraudulent marriages. Pressure to conform, the weight of discrimination, potential loss of cherished dreams — serving in the military, worshipping in church, getting job promotions, raising kids — propels many into marriages to which they otherwise wouldn't commit.

Take my friend Cooper. Cooper is 64. He was married for 38 years. The divorce is pending. He leaves behind him a woman whose life was shattered by a truth that tunneled its way out of the mounds of shame, hostility and hatred that society heaped on it. Homophobia has a way of wounding gay and straight alike. It creates two classes of victims: people who are forced to lie and the people to whom they lie. As homophobia decreases, so will the pressure for gays and lesbians to enter into fig-leaf marriages — which, in turn, prevents children from being hurt by divorce and helps heterosexuals, such as Cooper's wife, create authentic, stable marriages.

Could gay marriage be a solution for the many children in foster care? There are plenty of gay and lesbian families willing to adopt some of the 568,000 kids languishing in institutions, but statutory bans and local judiciaries refusing to grant gay-adoption petitions impede them. According to the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute's latest national survey, only 40 percent of public and private adoption agencies have placed children with gay adoptive parents. The same survey showed that a majority of childless gay men and women would like to become parents.

Would children in foster care be better off living in loving gay homes or institutions that shuffle them from one home to another until they reach 18 years of age and "age out" of the system? Ask the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Child Welfare League of America, the North American Council on Adoptable Children, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association and the National Association of Social Workers. Their conclusion: Gay and lesbian homes would be good for many of these kids.

What's the best way of making that happen? Giving gay couples automatic adoption rights. And the most effective way to do that? Allow them to marry. Gay marriage wouldn't just improve the lives of orphans; it also would improve the lives of children who have parents that happen to be gay.

Let's say two women with average incomes have a child together; we'll call him Billy. Because the women aren't allowed to marry, Billy doesn't get the financial and emotional safety nets other children get. For example, if Billy has a serious accident while his biological mother is away, the hospital can deny him the right

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NO: Heterosexual society will not be made healthier or safer by legalizing homosexual unions.

By PAUL CAMERON

Cameron earned his doctorate from the University of Colorado and was the first scientist to document the harmful effects of secondhand tobacco smoke and the first to document the brevity of the homosexual life span. He is chairman of the Family Research Institute in Colorado Springs.



The Massachusetts Supreme Court has decreed that the state constitution guarantees the right of homosexuals to marry. And the political left not only has approved the decision on egalitarian grounds, but also predicts that gay marriage will hold all sorts of beneficial effects for the rest of us.

Such arguments — designed to shore up an absurd decision in an increasingly absurd nation — fail to recognize the true nature of marriage. It is a community institution, and its very existence verifies the old truth that sex is not just a private matter between consenting adults, as gay activists maintain.

Marriage, whether in ancient Israel, Greece, Rome or in modern America, is designed to control sexual behavior and bring children into the community. Sex is a highly significant and volatile drive: It can create life as well as spread death. In a broad sense, it is everybody's business. Thus marriage always has been the norm: a man and a woman living together and confining their sexual activity to each other for life. In the past divorce was rare because people believed the institution was more important than the two people involved, so couples stayed together. More recently, men and women have tended to enter into marriage for "self-fulfillment," Hollywood-style. However, with the inevitable abatement of sexual excitement, partners increasingly have decided to divorce, shuttle the children between households and seek new sexual adventures.

Yet even in an era when marriage has fallen on hard times, it still is the most important stabilizing influence in society. Bleak tabloid headlines to the contrary, during any given year more than 85 percent of married couples have sex only with each other. Predictably, married couples experience the lowest incidence of sexually transmitted diseases. And virtually every scientific study indicates that children are more likely to thrive in a family with a biological mother and father.

That's what the institution is all about and, for this reason, the phrase "homosexual marriage" makes absolutely no sense for homosexuals or heterosexuals. Homosexual activity doesn't produce children, so a major reason for marriage is inapplicable to homosexual liaisons — which typically are brief and anonymous couplings, sometimes carried out in public places.

The Massachusetts and U.S. Supreme Courts ignored this aspect of marriage — the importance of rearing children in a home

with a man and a woman — and concentrated instead on a vaguely conceived, vaguely articulated right of homosexuals to exercise their sexuality as a means of expressing their true identity, as if they were a discrete and identifiable category of human being such as women and children. Women have the right to be women. Children have the right to be children. Homosexuals have the right to be homosexuals. And if you're a homosexual, you affirm your identity by engaging in sexual relations with people of the same sex.

This idea, subtle and insidious, has been strengthened during the last 20 to 30 years by the introduction of the concept of "orientation," which gay-rights activists have insisted is as fundamental and as inalterable as left-handedness. Studies show otherwise. Most if not all homosexuals have relations with members of the opposite sex. What defines them as homosexuals is not what they are but what they do — at least that's how researchers from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other agencies have defined them in more recent studies. The CDC has dropped the terms "homosexual" and "bisexual" and now describes them as "men who have sex with men."

Funny thing: No one argues that people smoke because they are smokers. They are called "smokers" because they smoke. Yet gay-rights activists — and now two supreme courts — maintain that homosexuals engage in homosexual acts because they are homosexuals. Thus sex with nearly anonymous partners of the same gender becomes a constitutionally protected means of self-expression — something a homosexual is compelled to do, the way pear trees are compelled to produce pears.

Thus the Massachusetts majority maintained that a marriage statute that applies only to a man and woman "deprives individuals of access to an institution of fundamental legal, personal and social significance — the institution of marriage — because of a single trait: skin color in *Perez* and *Loving*, sexual orientation here."

As a descriptive term, I have no problem with "homosexual." It simply means someone who engages in homosexual acts. However, given the grim medical consequences of such behavior, I also would call it "a bad habit," very much like smoking and drug use, both of which — like homosexual behavior — are unhealthy and damaging to the community as well as to the individual.

A comparison of the three behaviors yields some very significant parallels. In making this comparison, I rely heavily on a 1996 CDC national survey that questioned 12,381 noninstitutionalized adults about their sexual behavior as well as their smoking habits and drug usage. (By the way, the study shows that homosexuals are more likely to smoke and use illegal drugs than are heterosexuals, a fact that links the three bad habits.)

First, let's look at smoking. Smokers mostly injure themselves. The habit cuts their life expectancy by a year or two. They also expose others to secondhand smoke, a modest health risk, and annoy many nonsmokers. But their behavior in other areas indicates the problems they cause to society, including the high cost of medical care (which inevitably is borne by everyone, whether taxpayer or insurance-premium payer).

Smokers require more medical care than nonsmokers and are more likely to be involved in fires and other accidents. According to the CDC study, those who have ever smoked (46 percent of adults) were more than twice as likely as nonsmokers to have

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to see his second parent, effectively torturing the child at the time of his greatest need: If Billy comes home to recuperate, the boss isn't legally obligated to provide sick leave to Billy's second parent, effectively preventing a child from being soothed by his nurturing parent. If Billy's biological mother dies, the surviving parent has no legal rights to Billy, effectively allowing the state to rip him from the arms of a loving mother and throw him into the foster-care system. If Billy's parents separate, the departing parent is under no legal obligation to provide alimony or child support, effectively plunging Billy into poverty.

From his parents' inability to get joint health-, home- and auto-insurance policies to his own inability to access his second parent's Social Security survivor benefits, Billy suffers. Allowing same-sex marriage would eliminate the unfair penalties children have to bear. Ultimately, the greatest benefactors to gay marriage are children — more than 500,000 of them.

Half a million? Yes, and that may be underestimated. Face-to-face surveys show that 1 percent of people identify themselves as gay. But random telephone surveys, which give more anonymity, produce numbers around 3 percent or 4 percent of the population. And online surveys, which give the most anonymity, consistently show the number to be around 6 percent. If the range is somewhere between 1 and 6 percent of the population, let's split the difference and call it 3 percent. But remember, that figure represents only the people brave enough to identify themselves publicly.

Still, 3 percent of the total U.S. population of adults ages 18 and older (215,474,215) means there are 6,464,226 men and women who self-identify as gay. Apply that figure to a Kaiser Family Foundation study finding that 8 percent of self-identified gays and lesbians are parents or legal guardians of a live-in child younger than 18 and you come up with 517,138 gay and lesbian households with children.

This means there are more than half-a-million children growing up with same-sex parents. It also means half-a-million children growing up with serious disadvantages caused by the prohibition of same-sex marriage.

For every gay man and woman who gets punished by the legal system there are mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters who bear witness to it. The fact is, 57.6 million people are either directly or indirectly affected by homophobia. Only 6.4 million, or 11 percent, are actually gay. That means 89 percent of the people affected by discrimination against gays are heterosexual. Consider these estimated numbers:

- 6.4 million gays and lesbians;
- 6.4 million siblings of gays and lesbians (assuming each gay person has one sibling);

- 12.8 million parents of gays and lesbians (assuming each parent is alive);
- 25.6 million grandparents (assuming two sets of living grandparents);
- 6.4 million uncles and aunts (assuming one per gay person);
- Total: 57.6 million.

No matter how they feel about homosexuality, no parent wants to see their child hurt, no brother wants to see his sister in danger, no uncle wants to see his nephew suffer. One of the intangible costs of homophobia is the excruciating emotional pain felt by everyone related to the gay family member. Lessen homophobia, as gay marriage will, and you lessen the strain on millions of families.

It also turns out that gay couples bring with them economic boons to the larger community. Five years ago Ferndale, Mich.'s downtown was lined with abandoned buildings. Today, after years of courting gays to live and start businesses, it has a vacancy rate of less than 3 percent. Ferndale followed the theories in the best-selling book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*. Civic leaders across

the country pay more than \$10,000 to hear the author, urban planner Richard Florida, talk about the best way to revitalize their communities. His thesis: If cities want to jump-start their economies they must attract the dominant economic group in America — people who think for a living (doctors, lawyers, scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs and computer programmers). Dubbing them the "creative class," Florida points out they're the most dominant economic group, making up nearly 30 percent of the workforce.

Florida produced a number of indexes measuring characteristics of successful cities. There's a high-tech index (ranking cities by the size of their software, electronics and engineering sectors) and an innovation index (ranking cities by the number of patents per

capita). But one of Florida's most talked-about rankings is the gay index. He told *Salon.com*: "Gays are the canaries of the creative economy. Where gays are will be a community that has the underlying preconditions that attract the creative class of people. Gays tend to gravitate toward the types of places that will be attractive to many members of the creative class."

Florida, a professor at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, boils it down to this: If you want economic growth one of the things you must do is attract gays. Not because there are disproportionate numbers of gays in "thinking jobs" but because their presence signals the values to which the creative class is attracted: diversity, open-mindedness, variety, eccentricity.

Examples of Florida's theories: Minneapolis' Lorin Park, Boston's Jamaica Plain, Chicago's Boystown, Atlanta's Midtown, Washington's Dupont Circle and Adams-Morgan. Though each has the reputation of being a "gay mecca," any demographer will tell you that the vast majority of residents are heterosexual.

Pressure to conform, the weight of discrimination, the loss of cherished dreams — military service, worshipping in church, job promotions, raising kids — propels many into marriages to which they otherwise wouldn't commit.

Marriage is a stabilizing influence on relationships and a platform for greater prosperity. The benefits of marriage would encourage gays and lesbians to take even more risks in distressed neighborhoods, turning them into places that attract the mostly heterosexual "creative class." The payoff to cities is clear: Encouraging stability and prosperity among gay and lesbian couples results in a bigger tax base that can be used to improve schools, streets and parks for its mostly heterosexual citizens.

Gay marriage won't just benefit same sex couples; it will benefit everyone. It will reduce divorces by preventing sham marriages, provide homes to the orphaned, protect the children of gay parents and revitalize distressed communities. It's one of those queer ironies: Gay marriage will strengthen heterosexual families. ●

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been booked for a crime. In the 12 months previous to the study, smokers were more than twice as apt as nonsmokers to have used one illegal drug, twice as apt to have engaged in homosexual activity, slightly more apt to have had multiple sex partners and almost twice as apt to have driven under the influence.

Next, let's look at illegal drug use, a major problem today and one some say may be the most pressing social problem our society faces. Drug use produces robbery, murder, serious illness and death at an enormous cost to society. So drug users hurt others as well as themselves. Those who shoot up drugs (about 1 percent of the population) reduce their life span by 20 to 30 years and have killed around 1,000 people through HIV contamination of the blood supply. Drug users require more medical care than nonusers and are implicated in an excess of accidents, violence and suicides. In the CDC study, those who used an illegal substance in the previous year (13 percent of adults) were more than three times as apt to have been booked for a crime.

During the 12 months prior to the study, drug users were five times more apt than nonusers to have driven under the influence of alcohol, four times more apt to have had multiple sex partners and three times more apt to have engaged in homosexual behavior. In the month prior to the study, drug users were twice as apt as nonusers to have smoked cigarettes and twice as likely to have missed work.

Those who engage in homosexual acts, as with those who use illicit drugs, injure others as well as themselves. They shorten their own life spans by 20 to 30 years and have caused the death of an estimated 3,000 through HIV contamination of the blood supply. Homosexuals require huge amounts of medical care, and they are implicated in an excess of accidents, violence and suicides.

Other findings of the 1996 study include the following: Homosexuals are five times more apt than nonhomosexuals to molest children. According to the CDC study, those who engaged in same-sex relations within the previous 12 months (2 to 3 percent of adults, 1.3 percent of the noninstitutionalized) were

twice as apt as nonhomosexuals to have been booked for a crime. In the previous 12 months, homosexuals were three times as apt as nonhomosexuals to have used at least one illegal drug, twice as apt to have driven under the influence and four times as apt to have had sex with multiple partners. In the month prior to the study, homosexuals were almost twice as apt as nonhomosexuals to have smoked cigarettes and to have missed work.

In addition to these grim comparisons, the children of smokers, drug users and homosexuals have more troubles than other children. Given the instability reflected in the figures above, these childhood difficulties are predictable.

Obviously the three interrelated groups above cause society enormous problems. The health effects alone are devastating — a statement almost as true of homosexuals as of drug users. Thus far around 500,000 people have died of AIDS at a cost of billions of dollars to American taxpayers.

So, will homosexual marriage change all this and, at the same time, have a happy effect on heterosexual marriage, as has been argued? Obviously not.

With rare exception, men and women with homosexual temptations enter heterosexual marriage with hope-

ful intentions. Indeed, marriage often eliminates those homosexual temptations. At times it doesn't — and those marriages fail. It also is true that most gay men in so-called "married relationships" tend to have multiple sexual partners. This inherent instability of the marital bond — whether between a gay man and a heterosexual spouse or between two gay men — is the main reason that permitting gay marriage will have scant effect upon the number of marriages broken by a spouse pursuing homosexual activity.

Marriage between disturbed and unstable people invariably creates problems rather than solves them. Homosexual couples already are far more likely to commit acts of violence against each other than are nonhomosexual couples. Legitimizing their unhealthy and violent relationships will only exacerbate the problem. ●

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