

Where's the harm in gay marriage?

All have right to be treated equally

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The state Supreme Court is about to hear a case about gay marriage in Wisconsin. This is an issue that I've thought about in great depth, and my position on it might surprise some people.

There was a time when my position on the subject revolved more around the position of, "We shouldn't let the courts overturn the will of the majority of people, especially relating to a social norm that has existed for so long (that marriage is between a man and a woman). And most people oppose gay marriage here, so a couple people on a judicial body shouldn't overturn that."

Of course, there was always a flaw in that argument because no one would argue that the will of the populace should always be determinative, on every issue, social norm or not, especially relating to legal judgment (think slavery or the previous laws against mixed-race marriage by way of example).

But it's time for me to take a different stand, controversial though it may be. A person who was for gay marriage once challenged me on the topic by asking, "What's the harm from it? Articulate the harm."

I've thought about that a lot. What is the articulable harm? Don't we benefit more as a society if gay individuals are encouraged to have committed relationships? I say, yes. Isn't that better than encouraging transitory ones? Yes, again. I can't imagine that gay marriage would suddenly change anything in a concrete, negative sense, so any reasons to be against it disappear.

It's true that children need fathers and mothers, but I have an associate who is in a committed gay relationship of many years who is trying to adopt a basically abandoned, once drug-addicted baby. As a couple, she and her partner cannot adopt because they are not married. I have watched this mother with this child, and the love is overwhelming. I believe this child would be better off with this couple and would thrive with them.

What's the harm in society acknowledging that relationship? How would that affect my life or the life of anyone else reading this newspaper? It wouldn't. But it would make the life of that baby and that couple a lot better.

Yes, one could argue that, because the majority of the populace opposes gay marriage, society should not create state-sanctioned marriage but should rather carve out another system, such as civil unions (the Gov. Doyle approach at the moment). But the majority of the populace opposes the Iraq war too, right now, and I don't think that should dictate premature withdrawal of our troops from Iraq. Furthermore, majority will should not trump the right of people to be treated fairly and equitably.

So, if gay marriage suddenly became legal in Wisconsin, let me be clear: I won't be upset about it. And when other people run around getting upset about it, these are the questions that I am going to think about:

Why am I supposed to care about this?

Why am I supposed to care if two people who love each other want to have that marriage acknowledged like others' marriages are acknowledged? Why is that my business?

Why is that supposed to be bad?

marriage contributed to the decline of the nuclear family structure.

As for what children would learn? They would learn that gay people, too, want to be in committed relationships. And this is bad why?

I keep going back to that man's comment: What is the harm? And I keep going back to this thought: Why, in a time with so many real problems in the world, am I supposed to care about two people who want to make a relationship they are ALREADY IN official?

Let me also be clear: I do not believe that churches should be forced to marry gay people, since that goes against their religious beliefs, which should be respected. I do believe that the California beauty queen who was subjected to public character assassination because she opposed gay marriage was entitled to her opinion and to hold it without scorn. I get that good people can disagree on this issue.

But I keep going back to that family I know, with the baby born with drugs in his system. To not have their family recognized by society is an issue that causes them great emotional pain. I have, at times, known what it feels like to be the "other" (ideologically, mostly). It's not fun.

So, I have decided to stand up for them. What's the harm? The answer is obvious. There really is none. There is imagined harm and conjured-up harm only, but the institutions that gay marriage opponents claim would be threatened were already threatened. Gay marriage won't change that.

Period.

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