

## What's Best For The Kids

By LESLIE K. WOLFGANG

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Mr. Maher may be relieved to know that defending against divorce and unwed parenting is what motivates me and others to come out against same-sex marriage in Connecticut.

It's not easy. The climate of debate on this topic is hot. It involves labels including "backward," "ignorant" or even "bigoted." Before starting a family, I made similar remarks toward defenders of "traditional" marriage. But now that I have children and realize the importance of Daddy in the lives of families, I am willing to speak out against attempts, however unintentional, to institutionalize fatherless-ness as just another option for raising healthy children.

(Full disclosure: My husband is the director of public policy at the Family Institute of Connecticut, the nonprofit that is leading the debate against same-sex marriage.)

Inherently, when the state removes gender as a requirement for marriage, it institutionalizes and approves of the absence of a man for the prospective care and raising of families.

Set aside your concern for the obligatory fatherless-ness of children of female gay couples. If it were only them, same-sex marriage could be largely ignored. What concerns me and others is that same-sex marriage will, in the long term, further discourage men from becoming responsible parents through the social institution of marriage. Statistics show that this fatherless-ness hurts children and their mothers by making them more likely to be poor, sexually abused, under-educated and engaged in illegal behavior.

As Maggie Gallagher, president of the Institute for Marriage and Public Policy, stated during her testimony last week at the Capitol, "When a child is born, there

is bound to be a mother somewhere close by. If we want fathers to be involved in raising their children and supporting the mothers of their children, there's a cultural process by which we teach the next generation of men and women that fathers have an obligation to children and their mothers, and the word for that is `marriage.'"

Consider young men: Their societal conditioning to provide for children and their mothers is already weak. Their delicate cultural indoctrination to marriage will be further eroded if, as Sen. Edith Pruge said, "it could be Adam and Adam, it could be Eve and Eve." Our youngest generations, relying on the rule of law to help them form their minds as to what society expects, will take the senator's suggestion to its logical conclusion that because they are optional, fathers don't really matter for marriage and children.

We have forgotten as a society that the state's interest in marriage is not to validate mutual affection. If that were so, the state would issue friendship certificates or mutual-admiration badges. The purpose of licensing marriage is to encourage the most stable environments for raising well-adjusted future citizens. By licensing marriage without regard to gender, the state will present absentee fatherhood as an equally good alternative for raising children. It wasn't long ago The New York Times reported that "from a child's point of view, according to a growing body of social science research, the most supportive household is one with two biological parents in a low conflict marriage."

In a self-centered, adult-centric world, however, marriage has become a political weapon and a tool to influence public opinion. Gay activists have not hidden their agenda to use marriage to increase tolerance. I and others are not unsympathetic to the young children of gay parents paraded at the Capitol, their small, illiterate hands holding signs pleading for "equality" under Connecticut law. What goes unseen, however, and is impossible to calculate for generations, is the compounding effect the state's removal of gender from marriage and parenting will have.

Don't think for a moment that changing Connecticut's matrimonial laws will only create a different form at the local clerk's office. The consequences of gay marriage - intended and unintended - will trickle into every part of life touched by government.

Indeed, the well-heeled, pro-gay marriage lobbyists at our Capitol are counting on it. Not untouched will be our permits, tax-exempt charitable status for religious entities, insurance premiums, contractor requirements - and not least of all, our children's curriculum, their activities and school environment.

Polyamory and polygamy advocacy groups monitor our headlong stampede to gay marriage because when marriage becomes defined by only a number, numbers are easy to change. The truth is, the effect on marriage, cohabitation, unwed births and absentee fathers will be unknown for many years.

I was a preschooler when Connecticut passed its laws permitting unilateral divorce; a teenager when it seemed no marriage was safe from separation. As a young adult, I observed young women, distanced from the protection of their fathers, fall into serial sexual relationships, promiscuity and single parenthood. As a mother, I weep for single parents and their children, struggling against the statistical undertow of violence, addiction and poverty.

Are gay people responsible for all this? Certainly not. But fatherless-ness is no small contributing factor. The state has a responsibility to promote fatherhood within marriage in every possible venue; not deinstitutionalize it, abrogate it or equalize it into something meaningless, so that a politically savvy few can more quickly gain wider acceptance for their adult affections.

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