

Opinion: U.S. families need same-sex parents

By Gary J. Gates

Opponents of marriage for same-sex couples have made dire predictions of marital instability, falling birthrates, and increases in children being born outside of marriage if the U.S. Supreme Court rules that same-sex couples can marry throughout the nation.

But an examination of the data – particularly as it relates to children most in need of stable families – does not support those predictions.

Today, nearly 1.4 million men and women are part of the estimated 700,000 same-sex couples living in this country. About 350,000 of them are married couples and 122,000 are raising more than 200,000 children under the age of 18. Michigan couple April DeBoer and Jayne Rouse, plaintiffs in one of the Supreme Court cases, have adopted four children, two with developmental disabilities who require special care. U.S. Census Bureau data show that April and Jayne are not alone.

Same-sex couples are three times more likely than their different-sex counterparts to be raising adopted or foster children. Among married couples, same-sex couples are five times more likely. In states where same-sex couples can legally marry, more than 3 percent of adopted or foster children have same-sex parents. Since only about 0.3 percent of all children in those states have same-sex parents, it means that adopted and foster children there are nearly 10 times more likely than children in general to have same-sex parents.

As marriage becomes more widely available for same-sex

couples, they will likely expand their already disproportionate role as parents to some of the nation's neediest children. In 2013, 19 percent of same-sex couples without children were married compared to 33 percent of those with children. If they had adopted or foster children, the figure was 41 percent. In states where same-sex couples can marry, 60 percent of those with adopted or foster children are married. Clearly same-sex couples raising kids, especially adopted and foster kids, have a strong preference for marriage.

Opponents of marriage for same-sex couples argue that children do best when they are raised by their married biological parents. They reason that reserving marriage only for different-sex couples promotes that ideal. But that's a false read of social science research. A more careful review of the literature shows that children tend to do better when they are raised by two parents who are in a stable and committed relationship. Marriage offers a way for many couples to strengthen and support their desire for stability, love, and commitment. Kids with married parents, regardless of the sexual orientation or gender of those parents, benefit from the security that marriage offers to many couples.

What about the argument that reserving marriage for different-sex couples encourages them to raise children within marriage? The notion that the marriages of same-sex couples could alter the behavior of the other 99 percent of married couples seems ludicrous on the face of it. It turns out that the research agrees.

Two studies published last year in *Demography*, the premier academic journal in the field, find no evidence that allowing same-sex couples to marry has altered the marriage rates of different-sex couples in the U.S. or in the Netherlands, the country that has allowed same-sex couples to marry longer than any other in the world. In 2013, the portion of children being raised by married different-sex parents in the U.S. was

actually a little bit higher in states where same-sex couples could legally marry (65 percent) compared to states where marriage was restricted to different-sex couples (64 percent).

A Supreme Court decision bringing marriage for same-sex couples to all parts of the nation won't end political conflict associated with LGBT rights. But it will improve America's families. The nation will have more married couples, more kids with married parents, and more stable homes and families for the country's most vulnerable children. It's hard to understand how that could ever be a bad thing.

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