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## To the Editor

I AM A STRONG SUPPORTER OF PUBLIC school choice and charter schools, and I found your Spring *Quarterly* very informative. The quality of the writing and the depth of research behind many of the assertions were impressive to say the least.

That said, I found Mitch Pearlstein's essay, "A Note on the Same-Sex Marriage Debate" troubling both in the nature of the rhetoric and in the lack of supporting evidence for your claims and concerns. While you made a limited number of reasonable points, including that America does not need another prominent wedge issue, certain aspects of your rhetoric could bolster the argument of those who would call opponents of same-sex marriage "bigots."

You share an experience of feeling uncomfortable discussing your opinions with a college friend whose lesbian daughter and partner have recently had a child. This experience seemed to provide you with an opportunity for an epiphany about the inhumanity of your views. We know from history that you are not the first person to feel uncomfortable voicing your prejudice in front of those you are prejudiced against.

You go as far as to acknowledge that some people are born homosexual, which concedes one of the best arguments for granting same-sex couples the rights of civil marriage. Your only strong argument against same-sex marriage is that it could hurt the traditional family. While you, like the majority of straight people, may be uncomfortable with the idea of two people of the same gender having sex, there is no empirical evidence that the children of same-sex couples suffer any adverse consequences or are any more likely to be homosexual than children of heterosexual

parents. The "yuck" factor, as it is unfortunately named, is a major barrier to elevating this debate to the point where it can be based on facts rather than imagination.

You should visit the FAQs section on the Health and Human Services website ([http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f\\_gay.cfm#issues](http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/f_gay.cfm#issues)) where it says the following:

The studies conclude that children of gay or lesbian parents are no different than their counterparts raised by heterosexual parents. In "Children of Lesbian and Gay Parents," a 1992 article in *Child Development*, Charlotte Patterson states, "Despite dire predictions about children based on well-known theories of psychosocial development, and despite the accumulation of a substantial body of research investigating these issues, not a single study has found children of gay or lesbian parents to be disadvantaged in any significant respect relative to children of heterosexual parents."

Your only strong argument against same-sex marriage relies on your intuition (note that no facts about the harms of same sex marriage were cited in your essay), and your intuition—whatever its roots—is in contrast with the facts.

In explaining your concerns about the nature of the debate on same-sex marriage, you illustrate one of the insurmountable flaws in the argument against same-sex marriage. The flaw is that the argument against same-sex marriage does not recognize the relevant current facts. According to the Health and Human Services website, over 10 million children in this country are being raised in gay and lesbian households. To achieve an end goal of eliminating same-sex parenting, you would have to take these children away from their parents and sterilize gays and lesbians (or

confiscate their children after they are born). I hope you would agree that these actions would be inhumane and ridiculous, but they are the logical conclusion of the position you are defending.

Maybe your instinct to keep your opinion to yourself when talking with your friend was warranted. It is hard to sugar-coat an opinion in favor of a policy that continues to deny benefits to 10 million children and possibly requires sterilization of millions of Americans.

Same-sex parents are doing just as good (or as bad) of a job of raising kids as heterosexual parents, and they deserve full Social Security benefits, visitation rights, and other rights of civil marriage. Whatever problems you imagine might occur from same-sex parents raising children, I doubt they are as severe as a parent being denied the right to visit her child or partner in the hospital, or a child being denied Social Security survivor benefits from a deceased parent.

Same-sex couples are going to have children no matter what the laws. Certain judges have taken the bold step of recognizing the rights of these couples and their children by considering new realities when interpreting old laws. As you point out, such an important shift in policy needs broader support. It is now up to conservative thought leaders like you to do the whole country a service by supporting a national civil unions bill that will provide all of the rights of civil marriage to same-sex couples while leaving traditional marriage up to churches. That would improve the same-sex marriage debate by putting the focus on real solutions, not imagined problems, with an emphasis on rights rather than on religious institutions. It would also allow you to feel proud rather than uncomfortable voicing your beliefs with your friends and family.

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Last bio in the election package

I HAPPENED TO SEE YOUR “NOTE ON THE Same-Sex Marriage Debate” online, the same week that Vice President Dick Cheney disclosed his disagreement with the president on that subject. Your essay and his comments deserve praise. Both are temperate and thoughtful; both seem driven more by the struggle to understand the situation of real human beings than to advance an ideology or political agenda.

Perhaps that’s because Mitch Pearlstein and Dick Cheney actually *know* some gay folks, and are willing to say so. It always impresses me how that simple fact tends to civilize the discourse. When a bumper sticker is replaced by face, a name, a personality—as in the case of Mary Cheney, or the gay couple Shelby Steele mentions in the Wall Street Journal essay you excerpt—it makes the worst case scenarios a little harder to accept.

How to think and talk about gay marriage is a subject that defies analogy and often brings out the worst in proponents on both sides. It’s good to see a conservative journal engage on this question without bias or bile.

It’s regrettable (and I think politically counterproductive) that some in the gay-rights movement have insisted on making a facile comparison between marriage denial and slavery. Steele is, as you say, “penetrating” on this question. In a section of his essay not quoted in your piece, he makes an intriguing point: that embracing traditional marriage “consigns gays to a life of mimicry and pathos. It shoehorns them into an institution that does not reflect the best possibilities of their own sexual orientation.” This take on the subject is both fresh and humane.

As you note, there’s a difference between the substance of this issue and the way we deal with it in law. The immediate

question is whether the Federal Marriage Amendment should be adopted. Many conservatives see the FMA

as the only alternative to judicial fiat that might override the clear popular reluctance to alter the definition of marriage. But there is also reason for caution about the unintended consequences of a constitutional amendment, particularly in a political year. Remember that there is a stark demographic divide on this issue, with polls showing young people considerably more easygoing on gay issues than their elders. Is it wise to terminate debate when popular sentiment is so likely to continue shifting?

We should all concur with your basic point: that we should talk to each other about this issue. To each other, not just to rallies and reporters. Passion has its place in this debate, but so do facts, humor, personal experience, and most of all, civility.

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