

Literary and Historical Society (L&H)

Debate: That This House Supports Gay Adoption

4 speakers in favour; 3 against

Speaker #3 against the motion:

Dónal O'Sullivan-Latchford

Choice and Equality

(Children's needs versus adults' rights)

Many children today, even in the Ireland of 2008, continue to be discriminated against. The present day situations of so many children mean that their ability to exercise real choice as adults will sometimes be severely curtailed.

A whole host of childhood circumstances can of course lead to ... *poverty, health problems, low income and poor educational outcomes*, which in turn limit one's horizons and ability to make choices as an adult.

Children can grow up in environments which are either physically or psychologically unhealthy.

An all too common example of the latter is where the child is the target of incomplete, misleading or unbalanced information.

Imparted, to her, by the media -- in either an implicit or an explicit manner - - such 'facts', without the truth, can lead her, eventually, to make decisions which will often have unwelcome consequences for her, before very long. These consequences will sometimes be quite difficult to undo when she becomes an adult.

Making bad decisions because you've received incomplete information doesn't stop when you're an adult of course -- an obvious example is the way millions of people in the last century exercised a choice to start smoking, simply because the facts about the link between smoking and lung cancer were suppressed. Women, in particular, were targeted by smoking manufacturers; and, BBC's excellent Adam Curtis documentary, *The Century of the Self* makes for compelling viewing in this regard.

Poverty, health problems, low income and poor educational outcomes brought about by sometimes preventable childhood causes are a scandal; and, because children are concerned, this is doubly the case -- children, more than adults, depend on the rest of us to look out for their interests and needs. And I emphasise "*needs*". Rights are one thing but needs come before rights; and, the needs of the *most* vulnerable come before the rights of others. Children are clearly more vulnerable than adults; and, it is my belief *that **the measure of the civilisation of a society is the degree to which it looks after its most vulnerable members.***

All well and good; but, what could that have to do with gay adoption? To answer this, first of all, we need to ask another question: "do different types of family arrangements matter to children?"

Perhaps, in fact, it is the case that the type of family structure a child is brought up in is not important to her -- a view well expressed by Gabriele Conen, the former head of the Family Department at the Ministry for Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth in Germany. She said, and I quote,

"The family can be lived in manifold ways. There is no ideological discussion any longer about what a family is. We don't put up a model, but orientate our policy towards what exists."

Interestingly, **this is not the view of UNICEF!** In a 2007 report, entitled *An Overview of Child Wellbeing in Rich countries*, UNICEF said,

[quote] “The use of data on the proportion of children living in single-parent families and stepfamilies as an indicator of wellbeing may seem unfair and insensitive. Plenty of children in two-parent families are damaged by their parents’ relationships; plenty of children in single-parent and stepfamilies are growing up secure and happy. Nor can the terms ‘single-parent families’ and ‘stepfamilies’ do justice to the many different kinds of family unit that have become common in recent decades. But at the statistical level there is evidence to associate growing up in single-parent families and stepfamilies with greater risk to well-being – including a greater risk of dropping out of school, of leaving home early, of poorer health, of low skills, and of low pay. Furthermore such risks appear to persist even when the substantial effect of increased poverty levels in single-parent and stepfamilies have been taken into account”.
[unquote]

So, clearly, family type matters to children.

But, what is it about family type that matters; and, what has that got to do with gay adoption?

To answer the first part of this question, I would simply observe that ***children do better in a stable marriage. ‘It’s the stability, stupid!’***. To cite one statistic, children of divorced parents, even after they are grown up, are significantly more vulnerable to depression compared to those of intact families. I could also add that children of divorced parents perform worse in school compared to children from intact families and that family income is severely impacted, for the worse, by divorce. ***Where children are concerned, stability is vital***; and – in answer to the second part of my question: ***there are extremely strong reasons to believe that children will not, generally, receive this stability in the context of gay adoptive parents.***

For the 40th anniversary of the 1967 Homosexual Reform Act, Channel Four ran a series of programmes ‘imaginatively’ called *Forty Years Out*. The series included a late night debate which was hosted by Matthew Parris.

One of the contributors to this programme made the following point which went unchallenged: To paraphrase, gay marriage is not the same as heterosexual marriage in that, in general, it does not involve an exclusive committed sexual relationship. **The suggestion was that promoting gay marriage is simply a clever sales ploy, targeting a heterosexual community which doesn't know any better!** I was surprised to hear this – presumably because I was one of the heterosexual community who didn't know any better!

Then on CNN, last year, homosexual “conservative” pundit Andrew Sullivan spoke sympathetically, about “gay male couples’ understanding of the need for extramarital [sexual] outlets” and suggested such “honesty” and “flexibility” could “undoubtedly help strengthen and inform many heterosexual bonds.” ***But this is not stability. And, in addition, the behaviour being recommended by Andrew Sullivan puts a child more at risk of being deprived of one or more of her parents at an early age, due to ensuing illness.***

More clearly, perhaps, the well known and clearly controversial gay Commentator Mark Simpson – writing in the Independent newspaper (13 may 2001) said, ***“Heterosexual relationships last longer and seem to go deeper than male homosexual ones.”*** By the way, he didn't think this was a bad thing because he went on to say, *“Some might say this is actually an argument against heterosexuality, but I refuse to listen.”*

Yes of course there are also problems in heterosexual relationships, they're just not as bad, on average!

There are also concerns about domestic violence

In 1996, Susan Holt, coordinator of the domestic violence unit of the Los Angeles Gay Lesbian Center, said that **“domestic violence is the third largest health problem facing the gay and lesbian community today and trails only behind AIDS and substance abuse... in terms of sheer numbers and lethality.”**

Statistically, it would also seem to be the case that **homosexuals die younger, on average; and, the early loss of a parent can, of course, have an utterly devastating effect on children.**

The importance of maintaining heterosexual marriage as the exclusive basis for protecting children was also brought up by the French *Mission d'Information*. The French, who generally pride themselves on progressive thinking and who have historically taken the lead on social issues, consulted far and wide and examined the situation in other countries before decisively recommending that gay marriage not be legalised. Why? Because what they viewed as the inevitable adoption of children by gay adoptive couples was simply not in the best interests of children.

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A child has a right to a mother and father and it is not just the children of a gay adoptive parents which are affected by a decision to allow gay adoption

Gay adoption changes heterosexual adoption – its not just limited to the gay people adopting and the child they have adopted. In England, new guidelines given to teachers mean that they can't use the words 'mother' and 'father' any more.

Up until recently, it was perfectly acceptable to say that it is a tragic thing for a child to be deprived of his mother. Sadly, this is no longer the case. It is really an insult to say to a Father, you are expendable, your role can easily be taken over by someone else; or, to a mother, you are not important, a man can do just as good a job as you!

We must not discriminate against the next generation of children. In the emerging clash between adults' rights and children's needs, we must choose the child. Poverty, discrimination and a lack of real choice are profound problems facing many Irish children today. We must not make this situation worse.

I move to oppose the motion.

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[Link: The views of Ronald G Lee on monogamous gay relationships](#)