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What's so Hard to Understand? A Loving Family Has Everything a Child needs -- Loads of Love!

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It's the family, stupid!

Of all the political statements in the current surge of political statements, my favorite has to be from New York's Democratic Governor Eliot Spitzer on his plans to introduce legislation that would legalize same sex marriage.

"We will not ask whether this proposition of legalizing same-sex marriage is popular or unpopular," he said. "We will not ask if it's hard or easy. We will simply ask if it is right or wrong."

That's exactly the right question.

When you are part of the thicket of legalities and political calculations, what you find is a family. And when that family has taken full responsibility for a child's sense of well being and belonging, lawyerly debate and political maneuvering seem absurdly beside the point.

The U.S. Census shows that almost 30 percent of same-sex couples in this nation have a child under 18 living with them in their home. You'll find same-sex couples raising children in 96 percent of all of the 3,141 counties in the U.S.

All evidence from studies of these families points clearly to the same conclusion: good parents and the kids they produce have nothing to do with being straight or gay. It has everything to do with care, affection and involvement.

For the children of same-sex marriages, that sense of their place in the world is greatly influenced by the current laws that say: There are real families. And then there is your family."

I've spent my life studying families of all kinds. As a gender scholar at Stanford

University, I met with many single parents and same-sex parents, and their sons and more intensively with a subgroup of these families on a monthly and biweekly over a two year period.

I found what other researchers in the field have found: dedicated parents and kids who were smart, confident and - if anything - more in touch with their feelings and more concerned with the feelings of others.

The children I met were well aware of the difference between married parents and life partners.

Here are some verbatim quotes from the boys I got to know:

- "You wouldn't think that my mothers being legally married would be that big a deal. But it is. It's important to them. It's important to me, too. We're a family. We've been a family for a long time. Why not treat us like anybody else?"
- "My parents being legally married makes us something bigger than we are now. The law says we're just three people living in the same house. If the law says we're not really a family, then why should anybody else consider us a family?"
- "I really don't think it would change things that much. I guess there are some legal things that would be easier. But it bothers me that there are kids I know whose parents fight all the time. I have a friend who hates to even go home. I know kids whose dads just left and never came back. I don't really know anybody who has been abused, but you know it happens. But nobody cares about that. You've been around us enough to know that we really like each other. But nobody cares about that either. It's like - if you're one kind of family, you can't do anything wrong. If you're another kind of family, you can't do anything right. We're a great family that is not treated the same as a terrible family."

The cynics will say that it's easy to keep a tough campaign promise when you know it isn't going to pass. Maybe. But this is the first Governor in history to introduce gay marriage legislation. It's a statement that the pursuit of happiness in marrying the one you love and raising children is open to everyone.

The same-sex parents and children I studied will tell you that families are what you make them. It's really not that complicated.

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