

A Response to Sally Oswalt's Condemnation of Same-Sex Marriage
Lisa Giddings, La Crosse Wisconsin

Marriage is a social construct.

Social constructs aren't a bad thing. Marriage provides a stable model for families to base their actions and receive social support. This model is steeped into our social lore. You cannot walk by a playground without hearing "Sam and Sally sittin' in a tree..."

Enter Sam and Sully. Theoretically, the model remains uncomplicated: Sam meets Sully/Sam falls in love with Sully/Sam and Sully exchange commitment bands in Key West/adopt a baby from China/... If, in fact, marriage is simply a social construct, then the benefits (stability and social support) can be extended to gay couples thereby making our social fabric even stronger.

The model gets complicated when laws restrict access to social constructs. This debate challenges three American ideas.

First, the notion of fairness. What is innately different about a heterosexual wife of a Wisconsin State Employee that allows her to enjoy her deceased husband's retirement while a lesbian partner of a Wisconsin State Employee cannot?

Second, is the notion of freedom of choice. Ms. Oswalt's concern about the origin of homosexuality doesn't really matter. The truth is that we have gay and lesbian people in our community who are interested in engaging in American civic life. Americans should be treated equally, regardless of their private choices.

Third, the only reason this is even a debate is because the institution of marriage is inextricably linked to religion. If church and state were separated here, it would not be an issue.

Committed gay and lesbian couples are not unlike others: they love, argue, contribute to the GDP, have kids, don't have kids, celebrate 50th wedding anniversaries, and split up after 3 years. They are Americans and deserve not only the same legal benefits, but also the support and stability of our long-held social customs like marriage.