

The Myth of the Harmless Wrong

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The New York Times:

SOCIAL conservatives who bemoan the immorality of same-sex marriage typically also decry the harm it wreaks on society. The pundit Alan Keyes calls gay marriage a “social weapon of mass destruction,” while the North Carolina pastor Michael Barrett argues that widespread gay marriage would be “equivalent to a nuclear holocaust.”

To liberals, the claim that same-sex marriage is socially harmful is uninformed at best (granting gay rights actually appears to improve a country’s gross domestic product) and shameless fear-mongering at worst. Either way, liberals contend that opponents of gay marriage are inventing victims that they don’t actually see.

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The technical name for this psychological link between judgments of immorality and perceptions of harm is “dyadic completion.” Whether liberal or conservative, people understand immorality through a universal template — a dyad of perpetrator and victim. Most immoral acts have a “complete” dyad, such as murder (murderer and murdered), theft (thief and thieved) and abuse (abuser and abused). But with many morally controversial acts, such as those involving adult pornography, prostitution, drugs or homosexuality, the victims seem less obvious or absent altogether.

Read the whole story: [*The New York Times*](#)