

### Editor's Note

In this essay, Alex Prah! analyzes the rhetoric of the opposing argument in an attempt to persuade readers to "repeal Proposition 8." Note how the author employs the classical strategy of explicitly identifying a logic problem, the slippery slope fallacy, in order to refute one opposing claim. How does this argument balance *logos*, *pathos* and *ethos*? How do the author's assumptions about the topic, the opposing side, and audience affect your response as a reader? Consider how the discussion employs rhetorical questions to directly engage the audience and serve as transitions between ideas.

The essay's thesis is stated at the end of the opening paragraph and then restated, almost verbatim, as the essay's final sentence. Does this use of repetition improve clarity and emphasis, or would a more varied closing sentence carry more rhetorical power?

## A Question of Individual Liberties? Or a Fight to Protect Children? An Analysis of the Twisted Campaigning of Proposition 8

Alex Prah!

On Tuesday November 4, 2008 our country took yet another great step forward in its enduring quest for equality and diversity. Barack Obama was elected the first African-American President of the United States of America. Millions of Americans are now proud and hopeful, as they should be, but they are also forgetful of the other major part of the past election: Proposition 8. Lack of equality in diversity has become a nationwide epidemic. It is important that we do not forget our roots as Americans. Centuries of development toward a more accepting society lay behind us, inspiring to push through this stalemate of ignorance. I realize that propositions may not be the most immediate worries next to the economic crisis and the new President Elect, but that does not entitle us to forget our responsibility as citizens of the "free" country to support equality. In order to protect our history, our reputation, our people, and our rights, it is absolutely crucial that we repeal Proposition 8.

When approved, Proposition 8 eliminated the right of same-sex couples to marry. It instituted that "only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized" (Bowen 56) in the state of California. It is safe to say that Proposition 8 was one of the most controversial election pieces and certainly the most expensive to date. Californians were nearly divided in half; 52% approved the proposal and 48% opposed (Kornblum). Proponents fought with the slogan "Protect Marriage," claiming that

the amendment in question would restore the original, intended, definition of marriage. In addition, they advertised that Prop 8 would protect children, and that it was in no way an attack on the gay lifestyle. Opponents, however, preached for a guarantee of equality under the California Constitution. They claimed that the Proposition would clearly deny homosexuals dignity and respect, emphasizing that it would create a separate set of rules and standards for same-sex couples than anyone else. Therefore, designating them to a lower social class. "Equality under the law is a fundamental Constitutional guarantee" (Bowen 56). Despite one's feelings about marriage, it is doubtful that they may deny this. In a debate about personal freedoms and the basic rights of a minority, why were families and children such a heated aspect of the Proposition 8 campaigns?

In a "Yes on 8" pamphlet that I received, the main argument was that Prop 8 represented a pro-marriage and pro-children stance. How are these relevant to same-sex marriage? Well, proponents again and again emphasized that the "ideal" situation for children is to be raised by a married mother and father. Of course, the proposition would ensure this "ideal" for every Californian – even those who do not believe it. Although there is a much more expansive database of research on the success of traditional parenting, gay parenting has recently come out with a number of its own discoveries. For example, same-sex parents are proven to use a more authoritative parenting style (as opposed to, and preferred to, authoritarian or passive parenting styles). Studies by the American Psychological Association have also found that same-sex parents use less corporal punishments like spanking, and more often emphasize accepting behavior toward diversity. When compared to children of traditional marriages, studies show that children of either situation "...have similar levels of self-esteem, similar IQ, and even peer relations" (*No on 8*). Coming from a traditional parenting background, I can rightfully state that my parents were very successful and I would not know how to adapt to losing either a mom or a dad. It would seem very unbalanced, but do we as a society really know that one family model is better than another?

Despite Proposition 8 focusing on gay rights, the most controversial issue by far was the possible effects of inaction on public education. Proponents warned voters in the Official Voter Information Guide: "teachers *could* be required to teach young children that there is no difference between gay and traditional marriage." This scare tactic alone pushed many frenzied voters to automatically assume that there was no other explanation to the matter. However, when one refers back to the original summary of Proposition 8, they will find that it never mentions a single word about education. Supporting organizations of the amendment cleverly used a slippery-slope type of reasoning to convince their willing audience of irrelevant and hypothetical situations.

In addition to their original claims, supporters suggested that parents would have no say in the matter of their child's education. Most voters would agree with their belief that parents should have a say in when, where, and how their students learn of controversial issues like gay marriage. Surprisingly though, a majority of "Yes" on 8 voters were under the impression that schools would teach such lessons whether parents "like it or not" (*Protect*). On the contrary, it is strict California law that parents have full authority and the ability to exemplify (or "opt-out") their child from any Health or Family Issues education. Therefore, I fully congratulate "Yes on 8" campaign organizers for their utter success in scaring voters to the polls. Unfortunately, the slim margin that the amendment passed through may have been in favor of the other position if more voters were aware of these facts beforehand.

In my research I also discovered a very interesting article about the Protect Marriage campaign: "Family is Sacred: Protect Children's Education." Not only does this specific ad draw on the mother-father family model, but also, it is combined with the public education scare in an attempt to snatch California's Latino vote. Family is the fulcrum of the Latino culture, it is no surprise that they would stoop in order to secure this huge voting population. This ad states that California State Education Codes require teachers to instruct about marriage. (*Protect*). In order to make their point more effective though, it is added that only Proposition 8 could possibly prevent children from learning about gay marriage. Frank Schubert, the "Yes on 8" Co-Campaign Manager himself advised that the proposition alone protects children from "same-sex marriage" and other devastating materials like the "King and King" children's book that has been used in Massachusetts elementary education. (*Family*). Family is an important influence on voters whether they support gay marriage or not, I am in disbelief that so many were fooled by the manipulative campaigning performed by the "Yes on 8" crowd.

By early morning on Wednesday November 5, 2008, it was clear that ignorance had succeeded. By a mere 4% margin, Proposition 8 had officially passed. Since the legalization of gay marriage in May of the past year, over 18,000 same-sex couples have been married. Now, it all hangs in jeopardy. Recently, the ACLU and few other prominent organizations have filed suit against the new amendment to the California State Constitution. Their main argument: "Proposition 8 in itself undermines the point of the Constitution – to ensure equal protection and rights to all." (Kornblum). My question is simple: in a conflict over an individual's personal liberties at the altar, why did a hypothetical danger to children decide the outcome of Proposition 8?

In analyzing the number of under-publicized issues that influenced this election, I have come to a conclusion about American politics. In highly controversial topics such as this, stem cell research, and abortion, the enduring battle between religious

influences and opposition will always lead to surprising and sometimes illogical outcomes. Proposition 8 was an amendment that was formed to overturn Supreme Court judges' decision to allow same-sex marriage in California's boundaries. Instead, it passed because voters across the state were led and abused into believing their children were in danger. The most basic way to understand what really happened is to realize that the proponents of the amendment did not have a valid reason for objecting gay marriage, so they targeted Californians where none could ignore: children.

In a world as modern and advanced as ours it is embarrassing as an American citizen to see such legislation pass. It is crippling to see our political foundations manipulated as child's play. Our nation's history is tainted with similar situations like our war against racism, and the fight to end sexism, but we were able to overcome such obstacles through development and cooperation. In the end, it becomes a matter of who we want to be as individuals, as a state, as a country. Will we continue to back step and deface the great advancements that have been made toward equality? Or will we take our one chance at redemption? It is absolutely necessary that we repeal Proposition 8.

*Alex Prahl is a liberal studies major.*

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