

Same Sex Marriages in America  
By Jay Topham

A rising issue within the institution of marriage today is same sex marriage. Homosexuals across America are vying for the opportunity to enter monogamous marriages with their partners and some people perceive this as a threat to the traditional concept of marriage. This paper will take a look at the population of homosexuals across America and in Michigan, states' laws regarding gay marriage, the views of both proponents and opponents of same sex marriage and the strengths and weaknesses of families with same sex parents. In the end a potential solution to the issue of granting same sex couples rights while respecting everyone else's values will be presented.

In America there are approximately 105.5 million households. Of these 105.5 million households approximately 595,000 are same sex couples. This can be interpreted to mean that there are 1.2 million gay people living with a same sex partner in America. This is a huge increase from the 1990 census, which identified only 145,000 same sex unmarried households (Avert).

One section of the 2000 US Census gathered information in the following way: First it asked about people living in the home with the primary resident (that is, the person filling out the census form). One choice was "unmarried partner." Then it asked for the sex of that person. From this one could count:

Total households:

- Unmarried-partner households.
- Male householder and male partner.
- Male householder and female partner
- Female householder and female partner

-Female householder and male partner (Homosexual Statistics)

This does not however, take into account underage homosexuals (those under the age of eighteen), single homosexuals, couples not living together, or those who are homosexual but who live a “straight” lifestyle with an opposite sex partner. Most importantly, it tells us nothing about gays who choose not to reveal their sexual preference on census forms. It does, however, give us some idea of the demographics (Homosexual Statistics).

The 2000 Census information provided on the population of gay and lesbian couples on not only at the state level but at the county level as well. According to the data gathered no state has more than 5.14% gay couples within its total population. New York, Vermont, Massachusetts, and California have the highest percentage of same sex couples. The states with the lowest percentage of homosexuals are Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Iowa (Gay Demographics).

The U.S. Census Bureau allows individuals to search for the population of same couples county by county as well. The total number of households in Washtenaw County is 125,327. Of these, 6,689 are unmarried couples. 371 of these 6,689 are males living with male partners and 547 are females living with female partners (The U.S. Census Bureau). Altogether that adds up to 918 same sex couples living with each other in Washtenaw County. This equals thirteen percent of all unmarried couples in Washtenaw County. An amendment to Michigan’s Constitution passed by voters in 2004 to outlaw same sex marriage in this state, so those unwed same sex couples are not allowed to get married anywhere within this state and their marriages in other states are not recognized

by the state of Michigan, thus they also do not receive the governmental benefits that come along with marriage (The Washington Post).

Laws effecting same sex couples stem back a long way. In May of 1996 Republican Representative Bob Barr of Georgia introduced the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) which is a federal law designed to give states the right to refuse recognition of a same-sex marriage approved by another state. It also defines marriage as a union between a man and woman for the purposes of federal law (PBS). The bill passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 342-67 and the Senate by a vote of 85-14. President Clinton signed the bill on Sept. 21, 1996 (PBS). Since the bill's passage people have constantly criticized the constitutionality of DOMA. Due to this act, marriages are only recognized as between one man and one woman on a federal level, but the states have the right to choose what they want to define as marriage and one state does not have to recognize another state's view of marriage or same sex marriages as legal.

Since then a lot of action has occurred on a state level regarding rights for same sex couples. As of 2004, same sex couples can marry in Massachusetts. In late 2008 Connecticut gave same sex couples the right to marry. Same sex couples will be able to marry in Iowa starting April 27, 2009 and in Vermont starting September 1, 2009 (The Des Moines Register). Vermont was the first U. S. state to enact same sex marriage by legislation (The Burlington Free Press). From June 2008 until November 2008, California also authorized same sex marriages, until voters enacted Proposition 8, which banned same-sex marriage (The Los Angeles Times).

As of November 2008, twenty-nine states had passed constitutional amendments explicitly barring the recognition of same sex marriage, nineteen of which prohibit the

legal recognition of any same-sex union. Eighteen additional states and the territory of Puerto Rico have legal statutes that define "marriage" as a union of two persons of the opposite-sex (The Human Rights Campaign). New Jersey and New Hampshire offer civil unions with all the same legal rights and responsibilities on the state level as a marriage. Oregon, the District of Columbia and Washington have domestic partnership laws that grant *most* of the state-level rights and responsibilities of marriage. Maine, Colorado and Maryland grant certain *limited* state-level rights and responsibilities of marriage through domestic partnerships, and Hawaii has reciprocal beneficiary laws, which also has a few certain, limited, state-level rights and responsibilities of marriage (The Human Rights Campaign).

It is also important to note that on Thursday, March 26, the New Hampshire House voted to legalize same sex marriage (CNN). The decision was sent to the New Hampshire Senate on Friday, April 10, but the decision is still being worked on (Andrew Martin).

After looking at the statistics and legal information regarding same sex marriage it was important to go amongst the people who are actually affected by this issue, the homosexuals, and understand how they feel about the matter. Joshua Hill, 23, of Canton, Michigan, has been an "out of the closet" homosexual for three years. He believes that the definition of marriage as it stands today (a union between one man and one woman) should not be changed because the American people as a whole are not ready for such a drastic change. He believes that civil unions should be opened up for gay people because two people who are in love with each other should be able to show their love and have the same benefits and opportunities as straight people. Joshua also believes

that states should not have to recognize the same sex unions other states put in place until the entire country becomes more accepting of homosexuals in general. He also believes that it should be up to the people of the nation to decide which kind of unions are acceptable and which are not (Joshua Hill).

Andrew Martin, 18, of Exeter, New Hampshire has been out of the closet since he was 14. His views differ slightly from Joshua's. Andrew believes that marriages are religious institutions and thus the definition of marriage should be left up to religious institutions, not the government. He believes that the government should not give any benefits to married couples since marriage is a religious institution and government benefits would skew the line between separation of church and state. If people still want benefits from some form of union, then he believes that civil unions should be opened up for everyone: you can still get married and have the religious ceremony, but if you want governmental benefits you would have to get a civil union as well. Andrew also believes that deciding such matters should be up to Congress and the Supreme Court and should be decided on a federal level (Andrew Martin).

To provide a contrasting point of view from a homosexual, Matthew Lush, 20, of Minnesota talks of his beliefs on same sex marriage in blogs on his Myspace page. Being an internet personality known alternatively called "Gay God," Matthew is very vocal on the matter of same sex marriage and his roughly 300,000 followers listen intently to him and agree with him. Matthew Lush believes that marriage is an inherent right and that gay people deserve the same rights as straight people. He believes that same sex marriage needs to be legalized on a federal level so that the marriages of same sex people

can be recognized throughout the nation and they can enjoy the same benefits no matter where they may travel in life. (Matthew Lush).

Jonathan Ettinger, 29, of Linden, Michigan, and staunch Libertarian had similar views to those of Andrew Martin. Jonathan is straight and has been a member of the Mormon Church his entire life and believes that marriage is meant to be a union between one man and one woman. However, he also believes that religion has no place in legislation other than to state that people should have the right to worship as they please without interference from the government and vice versa. He believes that marriage is a religious institution and the government should not interfere and that civil unions should be opened up to everyone should any couple, married or not, want any type of governmental benefits ranging from tax breaks to two partners being on the health care plan of one partner (Jonathan Ettinger).

The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod is very clear on their view of homosexuality. The LCMS website specifically states “Lord teaches us through His Word that homosexuality is a sinful distortion of His desire that one man and one woman live together in marriage as husband and wife. God categorically prohibits homosexuality” (LCMS). They base this belief on passages in Leviticus, Romans, 1 Timothy and Corinthians which specifically speak against relations between members of the same sex. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod treats homosexuals just like other people, calling them to repentance and to believe the Gospel (LCMS)

A statement regarding homosexuality from the Lutheran Church in Australia summarizes the church’s response to homosexuality in a very helpful way: “The Church, while rejecting on the one hand the movement which claims tolerance of homosexual

behavior in the name of freedom of the individual and of moral progress, must also resist the popular reaction of persecution and ostracism. The Church must exhibit understanding and sympathy for the homosexual, show love and pastoral concern, being ready to give help and encouragement in whatever way possible. It must proclaim to homosexuals, as it does to all men, the judgment of God against sin, above all the forgiveness of sin for Christ's sake, and the possibility of new life through the power of the Holy Spirit..." (LCMS).

The LCMS also encourages its members not to fall in line with society and to accept homosexuality as a natural, alternative lifestyle. In addition to this, the LCMS also encourages its members to become informed about laws or statutes that might be passed regarding the legalization of same sex marriage, stating that it is the duty of the Christian citizen to work to enact laws that reflect Biblical truths in regards to homosexuality (LCMS).

However, many homosexuals disagree with this position; they believe that their sexual attraction to members of the same sex is either just how they were wired or a mixture of how they are wired (nature) and the environment in which they were brought up (nurture). Because of this passionately held belief homosexuals stand by their opinions that there is no need to leave a homosexual lifestyle because it is natural to them even if it disagrees with church doctrine and the nature of survival through procreation itself. They believe they can not become straight anymore than a straight person can become gay (Andrew Martin).

Whether or not homosexuality is acceptable is a matter of opinion in most cases. When considering legalizing same sex marriage it is important to consider the facts

regarding the strengths and weaknesses of same sex families to see whether or not they would withstand the social and legal impact of marriage. Some strengths of homosexuals are that they have a high ability to connect emotionally with members of both sexes; they are very flexible in their roles within a relationship allowing them to adapt to each other easily; they have a high ability to negotiate and make decisions in a sharing manner which allows the couple to maintain an equalitarian relationship; since they often have children by choice at a time in life when they choose it, they are often very caring and effective parents; they are very psychologically perceptive, most likely due to their coming out experiences and lifestyles; they have excellent communication skills (Olson and DeFrain).

Despite these strengths every relationship has weaknesses. Because of their taboo relationships in the public eye they are often faced with various forms of discrimination, the stress from which can sometimes manifest as arguments within the relationship; discrimination in the job and housing markets can cause financial problems and they have little political power to effect change in these matters; physical violence could cause homosexual couples to be withdrawn in their relationships; violence and discrimination in the school environment toward children adopted into same sex families; mild embarrassment from teens whose parents are of the same sex (Olson and DeFrain).

Despite all the hardships, same sex relationships are like heterosexual relationships in that they are increasingly moving toward maintaining long term relationships with one person. It is often because of their hardships that could turn into weaknesses that gays and lesbians develop skills and strengths valuable in relationships (Olson and DeFrain).

When it comes to children, studies of personality, self-concept, and behavior problems show few differences between children of lesbian mothers and children of heterosexual parents (studies of children of gay fathers are too few to be definitive). Evidence indicates that children of lesbian and gay parents have normal social relationships with their peers and adults. The picture that emerges from this research shows that children of gay and lesbian parents enjoy a social life that is typical of their age group in terms of involvement with peers, parents, family members, and friends (APA Online).

All sides regarding same sex marriage have very strong views. Despite differences in views, there is one solution that could make both sides happy to some degree: government should fully remove all legalities from marriage, turning it into a truly religious institution in which the government cannot interfere. The individual church bodies and synods could then decide for themselves whom they do or do not want to wed. To compensate for the lost legalities and in order to give same sex couples rights, civil unions would be made available to everyone. Civil unions provide the same rights and responsibilities as marriages currently do. Any couple who wants to receive benefits from the government, whether married or not, straight or gay, would be able to enter a civil union which would legally bind the couple together. This legal certificate would be devoid of any religiosity. This way those who hold a certain standard of what marriage should be would be able to uphold that in their religious body and legal rights would be provided to both same sex and opposite couples, the only difference being the name of the legal certification.

Marriage is changing whether we want to admit it or not. The population of homosexuals is not that large and yet social and legal changes are being enacted on their part across the nation. Proponents of the homosexual lifestyle want homosexuals to have the same rights as heterosexuals. Opponents to the homosexual lifestyle want the traditional definition of marriage to be upheld. Same sex couples have many strengths which shows that they could be a great asset to the married population in America. However, they also have some weaknesses which could tear them apart if they do not rely on their strengths. In the end some form of compromise must be sought if both the proponents and opponents of homosexuality want to be happy. If not the very definition of marriage across the nation could be changed or, conversely, homosexuals may lose many rights in their fight for equality.

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