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Comparison of Same-Sex Couples Who Were Married in Massachusetts, Had Domestic Partnerships in California, or Had Civil Unions in Vermont

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This study compared 55 men and 78 women who had same-sex marriages in Massachusetts, 101 men and 120 women who had domestic partnerships in California, and 35 men and 86 women who had civil unions in Vermont, all in 2004. Couples were surveyed on demographic and relationship information, conflict, contact with family of origin, social support, politics, and leisure activities. There were few interstate differences, although couples in Massachusetts were more politically liberal and more sympathetic toward feminism than were couples in other states. There were, however, a number of gender differences. As compared to women, men were older and had waited longer to legalize their relationships; they were also more exclusively gay and less likely to have children. More than 90% of all couples were registered to vote and had voted in the last national election.

Keywords: *lesbian couples; gay male couples; same-sex marriage; same-sex civil unions; same-sex domestic partnerships*

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Same-sex marriage is not a new concept. Vanita (2005) describes words related to marriage being used as far back as the 4th century to describe sexual relationships between two women or two men in India. Lewin (1998, 2001) has been a leading researcher of same-sex commitment ceremonies, which range from traditional weddings to new rituals that reflect lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) identity and culture. Long before same-sex marriage or similar legislation was enacted anywhere in the world, same-sex couples were creating their own rituals and ceremonies to celebrate their relationships (e.g., Hull, 2006). These rituals partly reflected traditional weddings and consisted of novel, counterculture, and creative aspects that mirrored the LGBT communities. Couples debated whether to include family of origin and how to combine or exclude various religious traditions. As Lewin (1998) stated,

in short, our ceremony turned out to have the classic attributes—socially standardized, dramatic action wrapped in a web of symbolism that links the present, past, and future, and that generates powerful emotional reactions among participants—that have long made ritual a key area of concern for anthropologists. (p. xix)

Same-sex marriage, however, has suddenly become a focus of the mainstream media. For example, the Web search engine Google News cites over 700,000 media links for “same-sex marriage, gay marriage.” In the United States, mostly from the year 2000, over 60 books have been published that focus on same-sex marriage from an affirmative stance. Nations in Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas are debating legal rights for same-sex couples (for an international review, see Wintemute & Andenas, 2001).

Four countries now have legalized same-sex marriage at the federal level: Belgium, Canada, Spain, and the Netherlands. In addition, some countries have federal legislation for same-sex couples that is not called *marriage*, including Australia, Brazil, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greenland, Hungary, Iceland, Israel, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Sweden, and Switzerland. Finally, some cities, states, and provinces have same-sex legislation in countries with no federal legislation (e.g., Buenos Aires, Argentina).

The United States falls into this latter category. Vermont, New Jersey, and Connecticut have legalized civil unions for same-sex couples. California, Maine, Hawaii, New Hampshire, and the District of Columbia have registered domestic partnerships for same-sex couples. In 2004, Massachusetts became the first U.S. state to legalize same-sex marriage. In

all cases, same-sex couples receive benefits at only the statewide level, and these relationships are not legally recognized by the majority of other U.S. states (over 40 U.S. states have legislation prohibiting recognition of same-sex marriages from other states). Thus, same-sex couples in the United States do not have access to federal benefits, such as inheritance, retirement, social security, sponsoring a partner from another country for U.S. immigration, and filing joint income tax (Cahill, Ellen, & Tobias, 2002).

Do Same-Sex Couples Want to Get Married?

The general public is aware that there are opponents to same-sex marriage, most notably, conservative religious institutions. However, there has been little focus in the mainstream media on the fact that marriage is a controversial issue within the LGBT communities. Yep, Lovaas, and Elia (2003) have presented a model of two competing sexual ideologies in the United States. The assimilationist position argues that all people have the right to get married and that marriage results in stable relationships. In contrast, the radical position asserts that marriage is an oppressive institution and that same-sex relationships should be unique and freely chosen, not mimicking heterosexual norms. Books such as *That's Revolting! Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation* (Mattilda, 2004), *I Do, I Don't: Queers on Marriage* (Wharton & Philips, 2004), and *Same-Sex Marriage: Pro and Con: A Reader* (Sullivan, 2004) argue that mainstream issues such as marriage have drained LGBT communities of power and cultural identity. As Canadian gay magazine editor Mitchel Raphael stated about gay marriage in Canada,

I'd be for marriage if I thought gay people would challenge and change the institution and not buy into the traditional meaning of 'til death do us part' and monogamy forever. We should be Oscar Wildes and not like everyone else watching the play. (quoted in Kraus, 2003, p. 1)

When Vermont became the first U.S. state to legalize same-sex relationships, we conducted a project that compared couples who had civil unions in Vermont during the first year of that new legislation (July 2000-June 2001) with same-sex couples in their friendship circles who did not have civil unions and with their heterosexual siblings who were married (Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2004, 2005). We focused on demographic factors; length of relationship; social support from family and friends;

contact with family of origin; social and political activities; degree of *outness*; and division of housework, child care, and finances. In addition to analyzing between-couple factors, we examined within-couple factors (Todosijevic, Rothblum, & Solomon, 2005) and compared couples with and without children (Henehan, Rothblum, Solomon, & Balsam, in press). This was the first study to look at same-sex couples in the United States who were recruited from a population instead of a convenience sample.

It was also the first study to compare same-sex couples who did or did not choose to legalize their relationship, given the debate about marriage in LGBT communities. Results indicate few differences between same-sex couples in civil unions and those not in civil unions, particularly for women. Women in civil unions were more *out* about their sexual orientation and more likely to consider themselves married than were women who were not in civil unions. Men in civil unions were more likely to have children, have joint bank accounts, have mutual friends, have more connection with their families of origin, and consider themselves married. They were less likely to have seriously discussed ending their relationship than were men who were not in civil unions (Solomon et al., 2004). In contrast, both types of same-sex couples differed from heterosexual married couples in numerous ways. Same-sex couples were in their current relationships for shorter durations, and they were less religious, less likely to have children, more likely to share housework and finances, and less close to their families of origin than were heterosexual couples. Women in same-sex relationships were more highly educated and perceived less social support from their families of origin than heterosexual married women were. Men in same-sex relationships lived in larger cities, were less monogamous and more likely to agree that nonmonogamy was acceptable, and perceived more social support from their friends than did heterosexual married men. In sum, whatever civil union legislation means for couples who choose it, same-sex couples are quite different from heterosexual married couples.

The Present Study

This first study was conducted when Vermont was the only U.S. state to have legalized relationships for same-sex couples, and a great deal of media attention has focused on the fact that civil unions are not “real” marriages. For example, the home page of the Freedom to Marry Task Force Web site states,

Why marriage matters: Civil unions . . . are unequal in the security, clarity, and status they provide, unequal in the legal protections that flow from them, unequal in fact as well as in name—and names or words, of course, matter. (www.freedomtomarry.org, accessed February 20, 2007)

Additionally, same-sex couples in states that have civil union legislation but not same-sex marriage are continuing to fight for real marriage. For instance, Corbin (2004) wrote about Vermont's civil union law:

But the civil union law resulted from a painful and difficult compromise between genuine equality and no rights at all. As we celebrated civil unions in our community we embraced what we had, instead of what was missing. The civil union law embodies "partial equality"—a concept as bizarre as "partial pregnancy." Freedom to marry advocates grudgingly supported the law only as a first step, but by no means as the end. The law represented a step forward from where we were, but relative to where we should be, the law still falls woefully short. (p. 1)

Furthermore, critics of civil union laws often blame homophobic legislators who do not want to vote for same-sex marriage.

In the mainstream heterosexual marriage literature, marriage is considered the ideal. In their book *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially* (2000), Waite and Gallagher make the following statement:

Marriage is not only a private vow, it is a public act, a contract, taken in full public view, enforceable by law and in the equally powerful court of public opinion. When you marry, the public commitment you make changes the way you think about yourself and your beloved; it changes the way you act and think about the future; and it changes how other people and other institutions treat you as well. (p. 17)

For decades, large national surveys on heterosexual couples have viewed marriage as the factor that leads to greater health, mental health, and longevity (e.g., Adams, 1979; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994).

Since our first study was conducted, the State of Massachusetts has legalized marriage for same-sex couples. Consequently, the purpose of the present study is to compare couples who in 2004 had same-sex marriages in Massachusetts, domestic partnerships in California, and civil unions in Vermont. We had several reasons for doing this comparison. First, states with same-sex relationships are similar at the legal level, yet this comparison

allowed us to examine similarities and differences among couples who are actually married and those who have other forms of legalized relationships. The question became, does the ability to call one's relationship *marriage* make a difference?

Second, the advantage of using couples in legalized relationships is that marriages, civil unions, and domestic partnerships are matters of public record, so we have access to a population instead of a convenience sample. Third, Vermont is a small rural state, and 90% of those who had same-sex civil unions in 2000-2001 (80% from out of state) identified as European American. By including two states with large populations, we hoped to have not only a larger pool of participants but also one that was more ethnically diverse. There has been little research on same-sex couples of color, including interracial and interethnic couples.

Finally, this is the first study to examine gender differences of same-sex couples in legal relationships. Our prior research compared women in same-sex relationships with women not in civil unions and with married heterosexual women, and then it compared the three corresponding groups of men, but it did not compare women with men. Thus, there are no data on how women and men compare in legalized relationships.

According to 2000 U.S. Census data, Vermont ranks first, California second, and Massachusetts fourth in the Gay and Lesbian Index—the ratio of the proportion of same-sex couples living in the state to the proportion of households in general (Gates & Ost, 2004). Additionally, the 2000 U.S. Census ranked Vermont first, California second, and Massachusetts sixth in gay and lesbian supportive laws (this ranking was before Massachusetts had same-sex marriage, so that state is likely to rise in rank by the next census). Thus, same-sex couples living in these three states are fortunate to live in progressive regions.

However, couples cannot be randomly assigned to live in certain U.S. states, and there are some other methodological limitations to an interstate comparison of this sort. From the beginning, Vermont drew couples from all over the United States to have civil unions; as such, 80% of the couples in our original data set were from out of state. In contrast, Massachusetts requires that same-sex couples who get married reside in-state, and nearly all couples who have domestic partnerships in California are from that state.

Furthermore, there were some administrative challenges: The Secretary of State's office in California provides an Excel file with names and addresses of all couples who had same-sex domestic partnerships. The Vermont Office of Vital Records of the Vermont Department of Health provides photocopies of civil union certificates of all couples who had civil unions. However, the system in Massachusetts is more cumbersome. Each

city keeps records of marriages, including same-sex marriages, and it can take over a year for these data to get to the Secretary of the Commonwealth's office. Consequently, by 2005, only data from Cambridge and Somerville were complete, and so we obtained names and contact information from these two Massachusetts cities. Even in early 2006, there was still no statewide database of all same-sex marriages (Mary Bonauto, personal communication, January 20, 2006). Thus, this study is the first to have access to even a limited population of same-sex marriages in Massachusetts, but it cannot be representative of the entire state.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Vermont. All 641 civil union certificates from the year 2004 were obtained from the Vermont Office of Vital Records of the Vermont Department of Health. On the basis of the information on the certificates, only 24% of the couples were from Vermont. We sent a letter to each couple, congratulating them on their civil union and asking them if they were willing to participate in a research project that focused on "demographic information, your relationship, your connection to your family of origin, and social supports available to you in your community." This letter was accompanied by a reply form. This study had institutional review board approval, and return of the reply form indicated consent.

Of the 641 civil union couples who were sent letters; 30 addresses were incorrect; 3 had dissolved their relationships; 1 person's partner had died; and 20 couples replied after the study was complete. Out of the remaining 587 couples, 197 (33.6%) agreed to participate. We mailed questionnaires to these 197 couples (394 participants). Each couple received a packet with two questionnaires (with an ID number and the letters *A* and *B* so that we would know which questionnaires came from members of the same couple) and two postage-paid reply envelopes. We received 235 completed questionnaires (59.6%). Of these, 68 were from men (28.9%) and 167 from women (71.1%).

California. The Office of the Secretary of State of California sent us an Excel file with names and addresses of all couples who had had domestic partnerships in California since the legislation began. There were 10,780 couples who had domestic partnerships in 2004, and we sent letters to the first 400 couples. These letters were identical to the ones sent to Vermont couples, except that these referred to *domestic partnerships*.

Of the 400 couples who were sent letters, 56 addresses were incorrect; 4 had dissolved their relationships; 3 people notified us that their partners had died; 6 said that they were heterosexual couples; 10 were not used because they were friends of the research team; and 24 replied after the study was complete. Out of the remaining 297 couples, 337 (74.8%) agreed to participate. We mailed questionnaires to these 337 couples (674 participants) and received 431 completed questionnaires (63.9%). Of these, 196 were from men (45.5%) and 235 from women (54.5%).

Massachusetts. The director of programs and operations of the Freedom to Marry Coalition of Massachusetts sent us a diskette with names and addresses of all couples who had same-sex marriages in Cambridge and Somerville in 2004. This included 422 same-sex couples, and we sent letters to all of them. These letters were identical to the ones sent to Vermont couples, except that these referred to *marriage*.

Of the 422 couples who were sent letters, 9 addresses were incorrect; 1 person's partner had died; 2 said that they were heterosexual couples; and 5 replied after the study was complete. Out of the remaining 405 couples, 218 (53.8%) agreed to participate. We mailed questionnaires to all 218 couples (436 participants) and received 258 completed questionnaires (59.2%). Of these, 109 were men (42.2%) and 149 were women (57.8%).

Table 1 shows the gender and race/ethnicity composition of all 924 participants from the three states. The sample was overwhelmingly European American (83.1% in California, 88.8% in Massachusetts, and 93.3% in Vermont). Only 72 participants from California, 29 from Massachusetts, and 18 from Vermont identified as African American, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Latino/Latina, Native American, biracial, and other.

Measures

In the original civil union study (Solomon et al., 2004, 2005), we wanted to focus on variables that would provide a demographic and relationship profile of couples (length of relationship, leisure activities, conflict, thoughts about ending the relationship). We included a measure of outness because we thought that couples who chose to legalize their relationships publicly would be more open about their sexuality. We also speculated that couples who legalized their relationships would be closer to families of origin and perceive more support from them.

In the present study, we wanted to focus on the same variables as those of the original civil union study (Solomon et al., 2004, 2005). We did add

Table 1
Gender and Race/Ethnicity of Same-Sex Couples
in Total Sample (N = 924)

Variable	CA (n = 431)		MA (n = 258)		VT (n = 235)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender						
Male	196	45.5	109	42.2	68	28.9
Female	235	54.5	149	57.8	167	71.1
Race/ethnicity						
African American/Black	6	1.4	7	2.7	3	1.3
Asian American/Pacific Islander	16	3.7	8	3.1	1	0.4
Latino/Latina	26	6.1	4	1.5	5	2.1
Native American/American Indian	4	0.9	1	0.4	2	0.9
European American/White	355	83.1	230	88.8	217	92.3
Biracial	5	1.2	1	0.4	2	0.9
Other	15	1.2	1	0.4	5	2.1

Note: CA = California; MA = Massachusetts; VT = Vermont.

in one new section to assess the extent of political participation among same-sex couples in legalized relationships—namely, asking participants about their political affiliations, whether they are registered to vote, and whether they voted in the last national election.

As such, the questionnaire included the following measures (again, the Massachusetts version referred to *marriage* and *spouse*, whereas the California and Vermont versions referred to *partner*):

Demographics and relationship information. This section included year of birth, race/ethnicity, years of education, individual income, religion while growing up, current religion, importance of religion, frequency of attending religious services, size of city or town, years lived in current location, distance of last move, and military service. Respondents were asked whether they identified as lesbian/gay, bisexual, or heterosexual. They were also asked to rate their sexual orientation on the 7-point Kinsey Scale (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948) where 0 = *exclusively heterosexual*, 3 = *bisexual*, and 6 = *exclusively lesbian/gay* (scores of 1, 2, 4, and 5 did not have terms assigned to them).

Respondents were asked to indicate the year that they met their current partners, began going out with their partners, and began living with them. They were also asked if they had ever been heterosexually married. Finally,

they were asked if they have children, the number and ages of children, whether their children were from their current or prior relationships, how much time per year their children live with them, and what percentage of the child care they did.

Home ownership and housework. Respondents were asked if they own their own homes and, if so, whether the house is in both couple's names. They were also asked if they have joint bank accounts and how many hours they spend each week on housework.

Conflict. This subscale consists of 17 areas of conflicts (e.g., how the house is kept, social life, sex outside the relationship) scored on 9-point Likert scales where 1 = *daily or almost every day* and 9 = *never*. Items can also be marked *does not apply to my situation*.

Ending the relationship. Respondents were asked whether they had ever seriously considered ending their relationships and seriously discussed ending their relationships. These were scored on 4-point Likert scales where 1 = *never* and 4 = *more than 3 times*.

Social support from friends and family of origin. We assessed social support with Procidano and Heller's measures (1983) of perceived social support from friends and perceived social support from family. These scales measure the extent to which respondents believe that friends and families of origin fulfill their needs for support, feedback, and information (e.g., "My friends give me the moral support I need"). Respondents are asked to circle *yes*, *no*, or *don't know* to 20 statements about friends and 20 statements about family. Items are scored as +1 if they are circled in the direction of perceived social support (*don't know* answers are not scored), and a high score indicates high perceived social support. The perceived social support measures are internally consistent and so measure constructs that are separate from each other and from measures of social networks (e.g., number of friends).

Contact and closeness to parents. There were a number of items about relationships with parents and partner's parents, including contact with mother and father and initiating contact with partner's mother and father (9-point Likert scales where 1 = *daily* and 9 = *never*). Respondents were asked about the degree to which their partner's mother and father make them feel like part of the family (1 = *very much* to 9 = *not at all*) and how often they bring their partner along when visiting their mother and father.

Vermont and California couples were asked if they consider themselves *married*. At the beginning of this section, respondents were asked if either or both parents were deceased. If both parents were deceased, they were asked to omit this section. Each item had the choice *does not apply in my situation* for respondents with one deceased parent.

Outness. Level of outness about sexual orientation was assessed with the Outness Inventory (Mohr & Fassinger, 2000), which is an 11-item self-report measure designed to measure the degree to which individuals are open about their sexual orientation in different spheres of their lives (e.g., to one's "mother or stepmother," "work peers"). Items are scored on 7-point Likert scales where 1 = *person definitely does not know about your sexual orientation status* and 7 = *person definitely knows about your sexual orientation status, and it is openly talked about*. Total scores range from 11 to 77 and means from 1 to 7.

Discrimination. Three items focused on whether participants had ever had problems at work as a result of being lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB); had lost or been refused a job as a result of being LGB; or had been refused a place to live as a result of being LGB.

Politics. This section had three items not included in the original study (Solomon et al., 2004, 2005). Respondents were asked if they are registered to vote and, if yes, under which political party (Democrat, Republican, or Independent). They were asked if they voted in the last national election. In addition, respondents were given three 9-point Likert scales: how they would describe their political outlook (1 = *extremely liberal* to 9 = *extremely conservative*), how sympathetic they feel toward the feminist movement (1 = *extremely sympathetic* to 9 = *extremely unsympathetic*), and how active they have been in the gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer rights movement (1 = *very active* to 9 = *not at all active*).

Leisure activities and friends. Respondents were asked the degree to which they do leisure activities alone versus with their partner and whether they attend social events alone versus together (1 = *always together*, 9 = *always alone*). They were asked how often they go to LGB bars and clubs, how often they go to LGB bars and clubs alone, and how often they go to LGB bars and clubs with their partner or friends (1 = *daily or almost daily*, 9 = *never*). They were asked how many of their friends were also friends of their partner (1 = *all*, 5 = *half*, 9 = *none*) and how many current friends used to be lovers. Finally, they were asked if there are LGB people where they live (1 = *all*, 9 = *none*).

Results

For the present analyses, we used only questionnaires with the letter *A* (from one member of the couple) to avoid nonindependence of data. If only one member of a couple returned a questionnaire, we included it if it had the letter *A* but not if it had the letter *B*. This ensured that we did not overly represent questionnaires from the member of the couple more likely to respond or to respond in time. This resulted in 221 participants from California (101 men and 120 women), 133 participants from Massachusetts (55 men and 78 women), and 121 participants from Vermont (35 men and 86 women).

We performed 2 (gender) \times 3 (state) comparisons for continuous variables and chi-square analyses for categorical variables. Because of the large number of analyses, we used a Bonferroni correction of $p < .001$. Table 2 indicates the effect for all significant main effects for gender or state. There were no significant Gender \times State interactions.

Demographic Information

There was a significant gender difference for age, with men being older than women (on average, 46 years versus 42 years). The sample was overwhelmingly European American across states (over 80% in California and Massachusetts and over 90% in Vermont, though the difference was not significant).

Over 90% of the participants in each group identified as lesbian/gay. On the Kinsey Scale, there was a significant effect for gender, with men identifying more toward a score of 6 (*exclusively lesbian/gay*) and women closer to a score of 5.

There was a significant interstate difference on level of education, with couples in Massachusetts being more educated (having completed a college degree, on average) than those in California or Vermont (who had come close to a college degree, on average). There was also a significant interstate difference for income, with couples in Vermont earning lower incomes (by about \$20,000 lower, on average) than those of couples in Massachusetts or California. Men also earned significantly higher incomes than did women.

Groups did not differ in religion while growing up: Over 70% of each group had been raised Catholic or Protestant. Groups also did not differ in current religion, although the percentages had changed. Now less than 40% of the sample reported that they were still Catholic or Protestant, whereas about one third reported that their spiritual beliefs did not fit a formal religion and another one third had no religion. Groups did not differ in their ratings of the importance of religion and in the frequency of attending religious services.

(text continues on p. 68)

Table 2
Interstate Comparisons by Gender

	CA		MA		VT		Statistic
	Men <i>n</i> = 101	Women <i>n</i> = 120	Men <i>n</i> = 55	Women <i>n</i> = 78	Men <i>n</i> = 35	Women <i>n</i> = 86	
Age	47.58 (10.87)	43.13 (12.00)	43.27 (10.25)	43.87 (10.10)	46.44 (9.80)	40.10 (10.41)	Gender (m > f), $F(1, 471) = 13.39^{**}$
Race/ethnicity (%)							ns
African American/Black	0	1.7	2.6	1.2	0	0	
Asian American/Pacific Islander	6.0	1.7	7.3	3.8	0	0	
Latino	2.0	7.5	1.8	1.3	2.9	1.2	
Native American/American Indian	0	0.8	0	0	0	0	
European American/White	87.0	82.5	81.8	92.3	91.4	95.3	
Other	2.0	5.0	5.5	0	2.9	1.2	
Biracial	3.0	0.8	0	0	2.9	1.2	
Sexual orientation (%)							ns
Lesbian/gay	98.0	90.8	98.2	94.8	97.1	91.9	
Bisexual	2.0	8.4	1.8	5.2	2.9	7.0	
Heterosexual	0	0.8	0	0	0	1.2	
Kinsey Scale ^a	5.74 (0.54)	5.46 (0.88)	5.80 (0.65)	5.32 (0.88)	5.77 (0.73)	5.31 (1.13)	Gender (m > f), $F(1, 474) = 23.73^{**}$

Years of education	15.79 (1.52)	15.61 (1.69)	16.22 (1.20)	16.49 (0.94)	15.46 (1.76)	15.20 (1.90)	State (MA > CA, VT), $F(2, 473) = 13.26^{**}$
Annual individual income (\$) ^a	77,180 (4,604)	61,131 (4,166)	75,843 (6,284)	62,891 (5,148)	58,636 (7,812)	39,488 (4,956)	
Religion while growing up (%)							ns
Buddhist	0	0	1.8	0	0	0	
Catholic	44.0	37.5	38.2	48.7	47.1	40.5	
Jewish	6.0	7.5	10.9	16.7	2.9	1.2	
Protestant	33.0	37.5	38.2	26.9	35.3	47.6	
None	11.0	11.7	5.5	5.1	5.9	8.3	
Spiritual beliefs do not fit formal religion	6.0	5.0	3.6	2.6	5.9	2.4	
Other	0	0.8	1.8	0	2.9	0	
Religion now (%)							ns
Buddhist	4.0	1.7	2.0	0	0	0	
Catholic	11.0	12.6	4.0	8.7	10.7	5.2	
Jewish	5.0	5.0	4.0	11.6	3.6	1.3	
Protestant	15.0	12.6	22.0	24.6	28.6	33.8	
None	33.0	22.7	36.0	24.6	10.7	24.7	

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

	CA		MA		VT		Statistic
	Men <i>n</i> = 101	Women <i>n</i> = 120	Men <i>n</i> = 55	Women <i>n</i> = 78	Men <i>n</i> = 35	Women <i>n</i> = 86	
Spiritual beliefs do not fit formal religion	31.0	42.9	30.0	30.4	35.7	33.8	
Other	1.0	2.5	2.0	0	10.7	1.3	
Religion	2.39 (1.34)	2.88 (1.55)	2.46 (1.53)	2.78 (1.36)	2.86 (1.29)	2.99 (1.44)	ns
Importance ^e							
Frequency of attending services ^d	5.12 (1.27)	4.66 (1.68)	4.85 (1.62)	4.77 (1.39)	4.57 (1.70)	4.64 (1.56)	ns
Location: Live in large city (%)	52.0	37.8	65.5	53.8	25.7	14.1	State, χ^2 (10, <i>N</i> = 473) = 80.05***
Years in current location	12.44 (11.21)	13.27 (12.28)	13.78 (13.58)	13.00 (11.31)	16.53 (15.91)	10.48 (11.36)	ns
Distance of last move ^e	3.64 (1.63)	3.17 (1.62)	3.15 (1.79)	2.55 (1.60)	3.70 (1.42)	3.02 (1.63)	Gender (m > f), <i>F</i> (1, 458) = 12.37***
Ever been in the military (%)	17.0	5.0	7.3	1.3	22.9	5.8	Gender (m > f), χ^2 (1, <i>N</i> = 474) = 17.55***
Relationship							
Years known partner	15.05 (10.98)	10.14 (7.62)	13.49 (8.43)	13.36 (7.45)	12.23 (9.64)	8.67 (6.94)	Gender (m > f), <i>F</i> (1, 471) = 11.19***
Years since dating	14.84 (11.03)	8.55 (6.64)	12.98 (8.26)	11.92 (7.07)	12.00 (9.56)	7.29 (6.37)	Gender (m > f), <i>F</i> (1, 471) = 23.93***
Years living together	13.37 (11.07)	7.62 (6.68)	11.59 (8.06)	10.96 (7.10)	11.56 (9.54)	6.34 (6.34)	Gender (m > f), <i>F</i> (1, 467) = 21.86***
Ever been heterosexually married (%)	18.8	26.9	3.6	15.4	22.9	25.6	ns

Children: Have children (%)	13.9	29.4	12.7	30.8	14.3	31.4	Gender, $\chi^2(1, 474) = 17.78^*$
Number of children	1.50 (0.76)	1.80 (1.16)	1.71 (0.95)	1.79 (0.66)	2.20 (0.84)	2.48 (1.55)	ns
Mean age of children	23.29 (3.22)	14.65 (2.04)	9.81 (4.55)	16.01 (2.51)	12.50 (5.39)	18.53 (13.65)	ns
From current relationship (%)	1.0	11.7	7.3	17.9	8.6	8.1	ns
From prior relationship (%)	9.9	19.2	5.5	11.5	5.7	25.6	Gender, $\chi^2(1, 475) = 11.46^*$
Mean time children live with them during the year ^a	4.67 (2.45)	2.54 (2.13)	2.57 (2.70)	2.42 (2.19)	3.25 (2.63)	3.47 (2.27)	ns
Child care (%)							ns
Do all or most	0	11.8	0	12.5	20.0	3.8	
Do more than partner	7.1	17.6	14.3	12.5	40.0	15.4	
Share equally	14.3	23.5	57.1	25.0	20.0	26.9	
Partner does more than me	7.1	14.7	0	16.7	0	11.5	
Partner does all or most	0	2.9	0	0	0	3.8	
Not applicable	71.4	29.4	28.6	33.3	20.0	38.5	
Own home (%)	83.2	76.7	78.2	76.6	82.9	69.8	
Home in both names (%)	75.3	65.9	74.4	86.0	75.9	60.0	ns
Joint bank account (%)	68.3	73.3	70.9	84.4	71.4	76.7	ns
Hours per week on housework (%) ^b							ns
None	1.0	0	0	0	0	0	
5 or less	20.8	18.3	22.2	28.6	17.1	24.4	
6-10	37.6	44.2	37.0	35.1	22.9	45.3	
11-20	30.7	25.8	37.0	28.6	31.4	19.8	
21-30	5.9	8.3	3.7	7.8	22.9	7.0	
More than 30	4.0	3.3	0	0	5.8	3.5	

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

	CA		MA		VT		Statistic
	Men n = 101	Women n = 120	Men n = 55	Women n = 78	Men n = 35	Women n = 86	
Conflict ^b	7.33 (1.16)	7.34 (1.22)	7.46 (1.04)	7.36 (1.08)	7.63 (1.07)	7.39 (1.30)	ns
Ending relationship (%)							ns
Seriously considered	54.1	39.5	38.2	50.6	42.9	29.1	
Seriously discussed	37.4	35.0	34.5	46.2	31.4	29.1	
Social support ^c							ns
From friends	14.45 (4.90)	14.37 (5.03)	14.63 (4.77)	16.33 (4.18)	16.63 (4.12)	15.60 (4.24)	
From family of origin	10.97 (6.76)	11.36 (6.77)	11.45 (6.38)	11.51 (6.65)	11.23 (7.14)	12.64 (6.61)	
Contact with ^d							ns
Mother	4.51 (2.80)	3.60 (2.57)	3.73 (2.23)	3.84 (2.53)	3.39 (2.89)	3.44 (2.09)	
Father	5.93 (3.10)	5.84 (3.08)	5.73 (3.14)	5.97 (3.09)	5.75 (3.52)	5.74 (3.16)	
Initiate contact with ^e							ns
Partner's mother	7.63 (2.10)	7.47 (2.42)	7.19 (2.13)	6.88 (2.45)	7.11 (2.31)	6.80 (2.67)	
Partner's father	8.25 (2.09)	8.32 (2.07)	8.04 (1.91)	7.92 (2.20)	8.62 (2.15)	7.76 (2.43)	
Partner's mother makes you feel like family ^k	2.66 (2.47)	3.04 (2.66)	2.23 (2.04)	2.60 (2.39)	2.81 (2.53)	2.71 (2.49)	ns
Partner's father makes you feel like family ^k	3.23 (2.84)	3.30 (2.66)	3.03 (2.68)	2.59 (2.37)	3.31 (3.11)	3.16 (2.73)	ns
Always bring partner when visiting mother (%)	23.3	23.9	26.8	25.9	16.7	33.8	ns
Always bring partner when visiting father (%)	24.5	27.1	30.0	27.9	20.0	38.8	ns
Consider themselves married	77.0	83.9	N/A	N/A	88.2	94.1	

Registered to vote (%)	95.0	95.8	100	98.7	97.1	94.2	ns
Voted in last national election (%)	94.0	93.3	96.4	100	97.1	91.8	ns
Political party (%)							ns
Democrat	81.3	81.3	83.3	78.7	85.3	69.1	
Republican	8.3	5.4	0	0	5.9	6.2	
Independent	10.4	13.4	16.7	21.3	8.8	24.7	
Political outlook ¹	2.87 (1.71)	2.87 (1.65)	2.04 (1.15)	2.16 (1.23)	2.85 (2.08)	2.85 (1.58)	State (MA more liberal than CA and VT), $F(2, 469) = 10.82^{**}$
Sympathetic toward feminism ^m	2.75 (1.69)	2.53 (1.61)	2.07 (1.09)	1.88 (1.32)	2.36 (1.52)	2.72 (1.53)	State (MA more feminist than CA and VT), $F(2, 469) = 8.16^{**}$
Active in LGB or queer rights movement ⁿ	5.25 (2.35)	5.88 (2.40)	4.51 (2.14)	4.82 (2.47)	5.24 (2.54)	5.72 (2.44)	ns
Problems at work due to being LGB (%)	24.2	12.7	20.0	17.9	31.4	15.3	ns
Lost or refused job because LGB (%)	15.0	10.8	16.3	14.3	22.9	10.6	ns
Refused place to live because LGB (%)	1.0	2.5	5.5	1.3	0	2.4	ns

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

	CA		MA		VT		Statistic
	Men n = 101	Women n = 120	Men n = 55	Women n = 78	Men n = 35	Women n = 86	
Frequency of going to LGB bars and clubs ^h	6.23 (1.79)	7.11 (1.36)	6.64 (1.68)	7.73 (1.08)	7.31 (1.37)	7.15 (1.37)	Gender (m > f), F(1, 472) = 16.98**
Frequency go to bars and clubs alone ^h	8.15 (1.54)	8.72 (1.16)	8.60 (1.31)	8.88 (0.38)	8.00 (2.38)	8.74 (0.93)	State (CA > MA and VT), F(2, 472) = 7.48)*
Frequency go to bars and clubs with partner and friends ^h	2.62 (2.40)	2.16 (2.17)	2.26 (2.08)	2.23 (2.32)	2.29 (2.42)	2.50 (2.50)	Gender (m > f), F(1, 365) = 13.08**
Are there LGB people where you live ^o	6.75 (2.00)	7.73 (1.51)	6.91 (1.95)	7.41 (1.43)	7.76 (1.21)	7.92 (1.30)	ns
Are there LGB people at work ^o	7.30 (1.50)	7.26 (1.80)	7.22 (1.67)	7.36 (1.36)	7.72 (1.67)	7.82 (1.32)	Gender (m > f), F(1, 468) = 11.13*
Leisure activities alone versus together ^o	2.62 (1.66)	2.66 (1.68)	2.25 (1.34)	2.70 (1.32)	2.40 (1.40)	2.53 (1.81)	ns
Attend social events with partner ^o	2.62 (1.66)	2.66 (1.68)	2.25 (1.34)	2.70 (1.32)	2.40 (1.40)	2.53 (1.81)	ns
Mutual friends ^o	2.96 (1.93)	3.19 (2.17)	2.36 (1.52)	2.70 (1.72)	2.97 (1.93)	3.31 (2.37)	ns
# Friends used to be lovers	0.33 (0.74)	0.63 (1.38)	0.16 (0.46)	0.32 (0.66)	0.45 (1.21)	0.23 (0.65)	ns
Level of outness ^r	5.26 (1.50)	5.33 (1.35)	5.89 (1.02)	5.66 (1.37)	5.37 (1.25)	5.51 (1.28)	ns

Note: Percentages are given for categorical variables. Means followed by standard deviations in parentheses are given for continuous variables. CA = California; MA = Massachusetts; VT = Vermont; ns = not significant.

- a. 0 = *exclusively heterosexual*, 3 = *bisexual*, 6 = *exclusively lesbian/gay*.
- b. One man earned \$10 million per year and was omitted as an outlier.
- c. 1 = *not at all important*, 3 = *moderately important*, 5 = *very important*.
- d. 1 = *weekly*, 2 = *more than once a month*, 3 = *about once a month*, 4 = *several times a year*, 5 = *rarely*, 6 = *never*.
- e. 1 = *0-20 miles*, 2 = *21-50 miles*, 3 = *51-100 miles*, 4 = *101-500 miles*, 5 = *over 500 miles*.

- f. 1 = full-time, 2 = 7-11 months, 3 = 2-4 months, 4 = less than 2 months, 5 = on weekends only, 6 = visits occasionally, 7 = none, 2-5 hours or less, 3 = 6-10 hours, 4 = 11-20 hours, 5 = 21-30 hours, etc. up to 9 = 61 hours or more.
- g. 1 = daily or almost every day, 2 = 3-4 times a week, 3 = 1-2 times a week, 4 = 2-3 times a month, 5 = once a month, 6 = once every few months, 7 = a few times, 8 = less than once a year, 9 = never.
- h. 1 = daily or almost every day, 2 = 3-4 times a week, 3 = 1-2 times a week, 4 = 2-3 times a month, 5 = once a month, 6 = once every few months, 7 = a few times, 8 = less than once a year, 9 = never.
- i. 20 items, each given 1 point if in the direction of social support.
- j. 1 = daily or almost every day, 2 = 3-4 times a week, 3 = 1-2 times a week, 4 = 2-3 times a month, 5 = once a month, 6 = once every few months, 7 = a few times, 8 = less than once a year, 9 = never.
- k. 1 = very much to 9 = not at all.
- l. 1 = extremely liberal to 9 = extremely conservative.
- m. 1 = extremely sympathetic to 9 = not at all sympathetic.
- n. 1 = extremely active to 9 = not at all active.
- o. 1 = all to 9 = none.
- p. 1 = always together, 5 = half together/half alone, 9 = always alone.
- q. 1 = all, 5 = half, 9 = none.
- r. 11-item Outness Inventory, where 1 = person definitely does not know about your sexual orientation status to 7 = person definitely knows about your sexual orientation status and it is openly talked about.]

* $p < .001$. ** $p < .0005$.

There was a significant interstate difference in the size of city or town in which participants lived. Whereas 59.0% of couples from Massachusetts and 44.3% of couples from California lived in a large city, only 17.5% of Vermont couples did so. There was no group difference in how many years the couples had lived in their current locations. However, there was a gender difference in the distance of the last move. Men had moved a greater distance to their current locations than had women (with average scores of, respectively, 3.5 and 2.9, where 3 = 51-100 miles and 4 = 101-500 miles).

Relationship and Children

There was a significant gender difference in how long couples had known each other, when they first dated, and when they first moved in together. On average, men had known each other longer (13.6 years) than women (10.7 years). Men began dating 13.3 years ago, compared with 9.2 years for women. And men moved in together on average 12.2 years ago, compared with 8.3 years for women.

About 30% of women had children, compared with 14% of men, and this gender difference was significant. Couples with children had between 1.5 to 2.5 children, on average, by group, and there was no group difference in the mean age of children. Overall, 19% of women had children from a prior relationship, compared with 7.9% of men, and this gender difference was significant. There was no significant difference in couples who had children from a current relationship (12.3% of women versus 4.2% of men). Groups did not differ in how much time children live with them each year. Groups also did not differ in the percentage of child care that participants did.

Joint Ownership and Housework

The majority of participants owned their own home, and there were no gender or interstate differences. Similarly, the majority of participants indicated that their house was owned in both partners' names. Participants also generally had joint bank accounts. Participants were asked how many hours per week they spend on housework, and there were no significant group differences.

Conflict and Ending the Relationship

There were no significant group differences on whether participants had ever seriously considered ending the relationship or ever seriously discussed ending the relationship. There were no significant differences in mean level of conflict.

Social Support and Contact With Family of Origin

Groups did not differ significantly in perceived social support from friends and family of origin. Similarly, there were no significant effects on contact with mother or father, the degree to which participants initiated contact with their partner's mother or father, the degree to which their partner's mother or father makes them feel like part of the family, or whether they always bring their partner along when visiting their mother or father.

Politics

The majority of participants were registered to vote, and over 90% had voted in the last national election. The majority were Democrats. There were no significant group differences in these three items.

There was a significant interstate effect for political outlook, with participants from Massachusetts reporting a more liberal outlook than that of those from California and Vermont. Similarly, there was a significant interstate effect for sympathy toward the feminist movement, with participants from Massachusetts being more sympathetic toward feminism than those from California or Vermont. There was no group difference on how active participants had been in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer rights movement.

Leisure Activities and Friends

There were no significant group differences in the extent to which couples did leisure activities alone versus together, attended social events with their partner, had mutual friends, or had friends who used to be lovers.

Men were more likely than women to go to LGB bars and clubs and to go to LGB clubs and bars alone. Participants from California were also more likely to go to LGB bars and clubs than were those from Massachusetts and Vermont. There was no significant effect for going to LGB bars and clubs with partner and friends. Men were more likely to report that there were LGB people where they lived.

Discrimination

There were no significant gender or interstate effects for having LGB people at work, having had problems at work as a result of being LGB, having lost or been refused a job as a result of being LGB, or having been refused a place to live as a result of being LGB.

Outness

There were no group differences in level of outness. Mean level of outness for all groups fell between a score of 5 (*person definitely knows about your sexual orientation status, but it is rarely talked about*) and 6 (*person definitely knows about your sexual orientation status, and it is sometimes talked about*).

Discussion

Gender Differences

The results of the current study reveal several differences between male and female same-sex couples. A striking gender difference involves the proportion of men versus women who choose to legalize their relationship in California, Massachusetts, and Vermont. In all three U.S. states, there are more women than men in the population of couples with same-sex relationships and in our sample. This is interesting for two reasons. First, although it is impossible to know the actual number of lesbians and gay men in any society, most surveys find more gay men in the United States than lesbians (e.g., Laumann et al., 1994). Consequently, one would expect the gender ratio of legalized same-sex relationships to similarly include more men than women. Second, data from European countries with federal same-sex couple legislation find more men than women have legalized their relationship. Waaldijk (2001) provided the numbers of same-sex partnerships in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Iceland, and the Netherlands for each year since the legislation began. In all of these countries men predominated over women, usually in a ratio of 3 to 1.

What could account for this gender difference between Europe and the United States? Most benefits of marriage reside at the federal level (e.g., inheritance, retirement, social security, sponsoring a partner from another country for immigration, filing joint income tax; Cahill et al., 2002). In the United States, where same-sex legalized relationships affect only statewide benefits, these relationships primarily represent a symbolic act. It is possible that lesbians, like women in general (e.g., Hyde, 2007), are socialized to value the symbolism of marriage and marriage-like relationships more so than men. Rose (1996) has written how literature read by lesbians uses romantic themes whereas that for gay men is explicitly sexual. Men may take advantage of legalized same-sex relationships when the benefits become more tangible.

The results of our study found that men who chose to have a civil union, domestic partnership, or marriage in 2004 were older than women who chose to legalize their relationship. In addition, men had known their partners longer,

dated a longer time ago, and lived together for more years than did women. Taken together, these results indicate that when same-sex legislation becomes available, as it has in the past few years, fewer men than women take advantage of this opportunity. Also, those that do take advantage of it tend to have been in their relationships for quite a long time.

Men in this sample were less likely than women to have children, and it is possible that the presence of children is one reason that women enter into legalized relationships more than men do. Legalizing the relationship might provide symbolic and legal protection for children. When men indicated that they had children, they were more likely to be from prior relationships, and it is likely that these prior relationships were heterosexual. Data from the 2000 U.S. Census include information about same-sex couples living together. Given these data, Gates and Ost (2004) estimated that among adults aged 22-55, 34% of lesbian couples and 22% of gay male couples are rearing children. Those data are comparable to our findings of lesbian couples in legalized relationships, but the gay men in our sample are less likely to be currently rearing children.

In our study, men in same-sex legalized relationships were more exclusively gay than women; few men identified as bisexual. Not surprisingly, men were more likely than women to have served in the military. Unlike our prior research (Solomon et al., 2004), this study revealed that men in same-sex legalized relationships were not more likely than women to live in large cities, but we did find that men had moved further than women did the last time they moved. We also found that men were more likely to live near other LGB people than were women, to frequent LGB bars and clubs, and to frequent LGB bars and clubs alone. Thus, men may in fact live closer to large cities and to locations that have LGB activities. Even within cities, male couples may live in *gay ghettos*, which tend to be expensive. In contrast, lesbians may be unable to afford housing in such neighborhoods, and lesbians with children may assign high priority to neighborhoods with high-quality schools and activities for children. Badgett (1996) has written about economic and wage differences between lesbians and gay men. Men earn higher incomes than women do, and this effect is magnified in the case of two men versus two women who are living together.

In general, however, women and men were similar on many variables, including religious factors, sharing ownership of property and bank accounts, low levels of reported conflict, social support from friends and family of origin, contact with parents and partners' parents, friendships, and level of outness. Thus, it is important to emphasize that male and female same-sex couples are more similar than different on many demographic and gender role variables. Both types of couples appear, on average, to be well

adjusted and well integrated into a social network that is supportive of their relationship and their sexual orientation.

Interstate Differences

There were few significant interstate differences, and some of them can be accounted for by the demographics of the state. Couples in Massachusetts were the most highly educated, possibly reflecting Massachusetts as a center of many colleges and universities. In addition, our Massachusetts sample lived in Cambridge and Somerville, both suburbs of Boston with its high population of college students and faculty. However, couples in all three states had high mean levels of education, similar to other studies of LGBs (e.g., Rothblum, Balsam, & Mickey, 2004; Rothblum & Factor, 2001; Solomon et al., 2004), including studies of LGBs of color—for example, in the Black Pride Survey, over half the respondents had college degrees and an additional 29% had some college (Battle, Cohen, Warren, Ferguson, & Audam, 2002). As compared to couples in Vermont, twice as many couples in Massachusetts and California lived in large cities, probably reflecting the large urban centers in the latter two states. Even though the Vermont sample was more so a national sample, with only 24% of the sample residing in Vermont, many states are more rural than Massachusetts or California.

We asked about leisure activities because we were interested in whether couples do social activities alone or with their partner, how often they go to bars and clubs alone or with their partner, how many of their friends are friends of their partner, how many current friends used to be lovers, and if there are LGB people where they live. Of all these leisure activities, the only one that showed interstate differences was that more couples in California went to LGB bars and clubs. One can speculate that California has more bars and clubs than the other states do, and this is true in absolute terms. According to the listings in the *Gayellow Pages* (2003), there are 275 gay or lesbian bars in California, 53 in Massachusetts, and 4 in Vermont. However, when the populations of these states are taken into account, there are more bars per capita in Massachusetts (population 6,427,801) than in California (36,132,147) and (least) in Vermont (621,394). Thus, it may be that California has more of a bar culture than do the other two states. But this is only speculation because we do not know the ratio of gay bars to GLB residents of these states. Also, the Vermont sample resides in many other states, and Vermont is close to Montreal, a large city with 26 such bars (*Gayellow Pages*, 2003).

Interestingly, couples from Massachusetts had a more liberal political outlook and were more sympathetic toward feminism than couples were in California or Vermont. All three states are politically liberal, and all group averages were in the liberal and feminist directions. Why would married couples be more progressive on these measures? Most likely, the reason is that the Massachusetts couples in our sample lived near the very liberal city of Boston. But these results refute the arguments of Yep et al. (2003) that same-sex marriage follows an *assimilationist* rather than a *radical* perspective.

Same-Sex Couples of Color

We hoped that including two states with large ethnic-minority populations would increase the racial and ethnic diversity of our sample, yet the majority of same-sex couples who participated in our study identified as White. One possibility involves a sampling bias—that people of color were less likely to complete the survey. However, it appears that couples who choose to legalize their same-sex relationships are overwhelmingly European American. Vermont is the only one of the three states in our study that asks about race and ethnicity on the civil union certificate. In 2004, 92% of civil union participants identified as White, exactly the same as that of our Vermont sample (Richard McCoy, Vermont Department of Health, personal communication, April 21, 2006). Thus, we have reason to believe that our sample was comparable to the overall population of same-sex couples in legalized relationships in regard to race and ethnic composition.

In the Black Pride Survey (Battle et al., 2002), marriage and domestic partnerships were listed as one of three of the most important issues facing Black LGBT people. Yet, only 6% of the sample was married to a same-sex partner; this finding corresponds to the results of our study for African American respondents.

Why are same-sex couples of color less likely to legalize their relationships? It is possible that LGB people of color may be faced with the dilemma of choosing between the LGB communities and the communities of color (e.g., Greene, 1994, 1997, 2000; Walters, 1998). Greene (1994) has referred to lesbians of color as those who are facing a triple jeopardy based on minority gender, race, and sexual orientation—which would logically present gay men of color with a double jeopardy. Consider, for example, the following quote:

If I could take all my parts with me when I go somewhere, and not have to say to one of them, “No, you stay home tonight, you won’t be welcome,” because I’m going to an all-white party where I can be gay, but not Black. Or,

I'm going to a Black poetry reading, and half the poets are antihomosexual, or thousands of situations where something of what I am cannot come with me. The day all the different parts of me can come along, we would have a revolution. (Parker, as quoted in Battle et al., 2002, p. vi)

Thus, same-sex couples of color may prefer not to come out publicly (in the form of a legalized relationship that is a matter of public record) in order to stay close to their communities of origin. Bennett and Battle (2001) have described the role of homophobia in Black churches, for example.

Finally, marriage has been criticized by queer scholars of color. In the chapter "Is Gay Marriage Racist?" (Bailey, Kandaswamy, & Richardson, 2004), the authors state,

In the U.S., race is the strongest determinant of whether or not the state chooses to recognize your parental ties. Black families are the most likely of any racial group to be disrupted by Child Protection authorities, and 42 percent of all children in foster care in the U.S. are black. If being married doesn't protect straight black families from having their children taken away, it's unlikely that it will protect queer black families. It is incredibly important that we organize to have non-biological ties to children recognized and respected. While marriage might offer limited protections to some people, it will not change the racist and homophobic practices through which Child Protection Services determines who is fit or unfit to be a parent. (p. 89)

Politicians, Take Note

This was the first study to ask same-sex couples about their political positions, and the results may interest pollsters and politicians. Over 90% of same-sex couples in legalized relationships are registered to vote (including 100% of the married men from Massachusetts in this sample), and over 90% voted in the last national election (including 100% of the married women from Massachusetts in this sample). The majority are Democrats. These results indicate that same-sex couples in legalized relationships are a strong political presence, which probably explains why same-sex relationships have been legalized in a few states despite the fact that by a strong margin the general public opposes legalizing same-sex marriage. A July 2003 opinion survey indicated that 59% of Americans opposed allowing gays and lesbians to marry, compared with 32% who were in favor (Lochhead, 2003). When asked about support of "legal agreements giving many of the same rights as marriage," 51% were opposed and 41% were in favor. Although LGBs compose a small percentage of the population, their strong political participation makes them a force to be reckoned with.

Does Same-Sex Marriage Matter?

In general, there were few differences between same-sex couples who could get married in Massachusetts and couples who could have only marriage-like relationships in California and Vermont. There are several reasons why couples who (a) live in the few U.S. states where any type of legalized relationship is possible and (b) want to have a legalized relationship are not that different from one another.

First, Massachusetts requires that same-sex couples be in-state residents if they want get married, which means that same-sex couples from all other U.S. states cannot get married at this time. It is likely that some or even most same-sex couples who choose to have civil unions and domestic partnerships would get married if they could. It is possible that in the future, some U.S. states might have same-sex civil unions and same-sex marriages, thereby allowing better comparison research. Such a choice already exists for heterosexual couples in France via *pactes civils* (civil unions) versus marriage (Borrillo, 2001).

Second, marriage in Massachusetts was only in its first year when this study was conducted, and same-sex married couples may differ from other couples over time. This is the first quantitative study of couples who had same-sex marriages in Massachusetts, and that state has been the focus of attention by policy makers, activists, and the media for its groundbreaking legislation. By surveying couples who were married during the first year, we were limited by the recording system in Massachusetts to couples from just two cities. Even now, in 2006, the data for the state as a whole are not yet available. Future research will show how representative our sample is to the entire state.

Third, Vermont, California, and Massachusetts differ greatly in size, population, and geography. Nevertheless, this study is the first to compare three states that, however different demographically, are identical in their same-sex legislation at the legal level. Furthermore, the results indicate that same-sex couples across these three states are more similar than different. Finally, the measures that we selected may not be the best ones to detect important differences.

Same-sex marriages, civil unions, and domestic partnerships are the product of relatively new legislation. Consequently, this study is more about who chooses to have a legalized relationship and less about how being in a marriage, civil union, or domestic partnership changes a relationship—for that, follow-up research is needed, and we plan to continue contact with these couples. This sample will permit long-term observation

of same-sex couples who stay in or terminate their domestic partnerships, civil unions, and marriages.

There were several hundred couples in our sample, and each one has a rich and complex story of how they met, formed a relationship, and decided to marry or legalize their relationship. Qualitative researchers such as Hull (2006) and Lewin (1998, 2001) have interviewed same-sex couples about these issues, and their work points to many facets of same-sex relationships. Some same-sex couples marry or perform commitment ceremonies to be accepted by families of origin; others do so as a form of rebellion. Even when same-sex couples follow the rituals of traditional wedding ceremonies and hold the wedding in a church, it is still an alternative or counterculture version of “the real thing” (Lewin, 1998, p. 160). Not only does the United States not sanction same-sex marriage at the federal level, but even the LGBT communities may be critical of the notion of marriage. In this way, every same-sex couple who chooses to get married or legalize their relationship is making a political and highly personal statement.

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