

## Attitudes Toward Gay Marriage in States Undergoing Marriage Law Transformation

*This study examines attitudes toward gay marriage within the context of concern over the weakening of heterosexual marriage. We use data from a three-state survey conducted in 1998 – 2000 and designed to explore attitudes toward marriage and divorce reform (N = 976). We find that women, Whites, and younger persons are more approving of gay marriage than men, Blacks, and older persons. Nonparents with cohabitation experience are most approving, whereas parents with no cohabitation experience are most opposed. Heterosexual marriage preservation attitudes are key predictors, net of religiosity and political conservatism. We interpret these findings with theories about vested interest in upholding marriage as an institution and ambivalence resulting from conflicting core values of the sanctity of marriage versus the valorization of individualism.*

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The majority of Americans view homosexuality as morally wrong, but a growing majority are unwilling to restrict the civil liberties of gay and lesbian people (Loftus, 2001; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). In fact, Loftus's analysis of 25 years of the General Social Survey indicates shifting attitudes about the perceived immorality of homosexuality, with growing negativity in the early 1990s and increasing liberalism more recently. Uniformly throughout this time span, the desire to restrict gay and lesbian persons' civil liberties declined steadily. Frank and Mceneany (1999) examined this liberalization in attitudes toward gay civil liberties from an international perspective. They concluded that, over the past half century, an upswing in individualization, or concerns with individual rights and choice, gave rise to active women's and gay rights movements that reciprocally reshaped the public's attitudes toward greater support of gay rights. Despite this liberalization in attitudes about some civil rights, only one third of the American public felt gay marriages should be recognized by law (Yang, 1997). Thus, we are at an unique moment of public ambivalence about attitudes toward the rights of gay men and lesbians to marry.

We know through research that gay and lesbian organizations and individuals are effectively using legislatures and courts to advance their case for gay marriage, whereas opponents are effectively using ballot initiatives to subvert the possibility of gay marriage (Werum & Winders, 2001). Not coincidentally, the late 1990s also reflected

a period of intensifying policymaking and legal reforms to strengthen and promote heterosexual marriage (Bogenschneider, 2000) along with growing grassroots movements to restore heterosexual marriage to an honored status in society. Among the heterosexual marriage promotion and strengthening efforts, several states promoted premarital and marital counseling initiatives and marriage promotion among low-income and young couples (Besharov & Sullivan, 1996; Bogenschneider). As a centerpiece, a handful of states passed covenant marriage legislation, effectively pushing back no-fault divorce and establishing stricter marriage requirements intended to promote lifelong marriage.

We examine attitudes toward gay marriage against this backdrop. These marriage-strengthening efforts are an attempt to counteract the perceived "deinstitutionalization" of marriage (Cherlin, 2004), often in direct response to the threat of gay marriage as a potentially destructive influence on the institution of marriage. In addition to capturing attitudes toward marriage and divorce, and gay marriage in particular, our data also capture attitudes toward covenant marriage legislation. Within its legal features, covenant marriage contains most of the provisions currently considered by federal and state legislative bodies to promote and strengthen heterosexual marriage. Thus, we use it as a proxy to indicate individuals' attitudes toward macrolevel efforts to strengthen traditional marriage.

Covenant marriage is a noteworthy family law because it creates two forms of marriage within a state, the covenant option with marginally stricter entry and exit requirements and the no-fault divorce option with minimal entry and exit requirements. Covenant marriage requires premarital counseling and marital counseling if troubles arise, with limited fault-based, extended waiting period restrictions on divorce. Thus, these marriage promotion efforts were intended primarily to encourage marriage as a gold standard relationship and reduce the deleterious economic and social consequences of divorce. But these policies are perceived and received by the wider public through the lens of their social, cultural, and religious interests and certainly through their own personal interests and stake in marriage as an institution (Sanchez, Nock, Wright, & Gager, 2002). This paper therefore explores attitudes toward gay marriage with sensitivity to the policy context surrounding the promotion of heterosexual marriage.

Previous research on attitudes toward gay marriage has mostly been limited to the effects of sociodemographic characteristics, especially gender and race, and the effects of religiosity. This study extends previous research by examining directly the relationship between willingness to strengthen marriage for heterosexuals and opposition to gay marriage. Thus, we explore the relationship between attitudes representing a number of policy-relevant marriage and family domains and attitudes toward gay marriage. We also uniquely examine the relationship between individuals' personal marriage and family histories and their attitudes toward gay marriage. We situate this within a larger threat model in which those who may feel more threatened by what is perceived as a cultural weakening of heterosexual marriage are more likely to oppose gay marriage. Hence, we also explore whether the currently married, parents, the more religious, the more politically conservative, and those with more permissive attitudes about policies to strengthen and promote heterosexual marriage are less supportive of gay marriage. We will refer to concerns over the decline or weakening of conventional heterosexual marriage as attitudes toward the perceived deinstitutionalization of heterosexual marriage.

The data used in this study were drawn from three states that were undergoing significant debates about marriage and family law reforms to strengthen and promote heterosexual marriage, in the immediate aftermath of the 1996 federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act and the 1997 federal Defense of Marriage Act. Louisiana, Arizona, and Minnesota were on the vanguard of marriage promotion debates by their consideration of covenant marriage laws in their state legislatures. Thus, our data from these three states are uniquely situated to examine not only the individual, microlevel effects of attitudes toward heterosexual marriage on attitudes toward gay marriage but also the larger macrolevel context of residence within states undergoing major struggles over initiatives to bolster heterosexual marriage.

### *Theoretical Framework*

Craig, Martinez, Kane, and Gainous (2005) suggest that the growing ambivalence in attitudes, with Americans demonstrating relatively high hostility, negativity, and disapproval about gay marriage, but more positive attitudes toward

other gay civil liberties, arises from some basic conflicts over core values. Americans are conflicted over their core values surrounding the perceived sanctity of family and marriage and their own rising individualism and efforts to tailor their life experiences to their personal choice. In effect, Craig et al. argue that the American public is literally “of two minds on gay issues” (p. 6).

We expand this perspective by tying these observations about public ambivalence over core values to a potential underlying cultural anxiety about the deinstitutionalization of heterosexual marriage (Popenoe, 1993; Whitehead, 1996). Cherlin (2004) provides evidence of a demographic and social reality in which formal legal marriage fills a much smaller, less normatively circumscribed, and far less “institutional” place in American lives. He argues that “personal choice and self-development loom large in people’s constructions of their marital careers” (Cherlin, p. 853). However, the increase in non-traditional family structures poses a potential threat to many Americans who are concerned about the declining significance of traditional heterosexual marriage as a normative institution in the governance of intimate relationships (Coontz, 2004). In this context, we may expect a tension or conflict in our wider culture over views about marriage as an individual, private experience versus marriage as a public institution that regulates social obligations and relationships (Amato, 2004).

We suggest those who feel more threatened by the perceived cultural weakening of heterosexual marriage are more likely to oppose gay marriage. Those who have a greater personal stake in the institution of marriage perhaps feel a greater need to “protect” marriage from the threat of gay marriage. Thus, we explore whether married people, parents, religious people, and the politically conservative are more opposed to gay marriage. We can also expect those who are less concerned with upholding marriage as a normative governing institution to be less threatened by gay marriage. Those who have stepped outside the bounds of traditional marriage themselves may be more likely to approve of others doing the same through gay marriage. Thus, we explore whether those who have previously cohabited or divorced are less opposed to gay marriage. Further, we can also expect those who hold more traditional attitudes about marriage and divorce are willing to assign blame for the deinstitutionalization of marriage and are willing to promote policies that strengthen heterosexual marriage to be more likely to

perceive gay marriage as a threat to the marriage institution and oppose it as such.

#### *Previous Research on Attitudes Toward Gay and Lesbian Persons*

*Sociodemographic characteristics.* The following paragraphs discuss sociodemographic characteristics in previous research.

*Gender.* Studies have routinely found that heterosexual men have more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians compared to heterosexual females (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Steffens & Wagner, 2004). Kite and Whitley (1998) suggested that this gender difference is rooted in people’s broader gender ideologies.

*Race.* Research that addresses race differences in heterosexuals’ attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals has been more inconsistent than that of gender differences. In his study of young males’ willingness to befriend a gay person, Marsiglio (1993) found that Hispanics were more willing than their White counterparts to befriend a gay person. However, the vast majority of this research has been limited to comparisons between Blacks and Whites. The general picture suggests that Blacks are more homophobic and anti-gay in attitudes than Whites (Lewis, 2003; Marsiglio). In one exception, Finlay and Walthers (2003) found that Whites are more homophobic than racial minorities. This basic portrait is sensitive to other dimensions, however. Lewis found that even though Blacks are more negative about homosexuality than Whites, they are significantly more supportive of gay civil liberties and laws prohibiting anti-gay discrimination. Negy and Eisenman (2005) found no race differences once socioeconomic status, church attendance, and religious commitment were controlled. Lemelle’s (2004) study supported this finding, showing that religious Black men were more negative in attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals than nonreligious Black men. Lewis and Negy and Eisenman concluded that the religious culture and concern for civil rights that undergirds Blacks’ attitudes toward gay men and lesbians resulted in a more ambivalent set of attitudes for Blacks compared to Whites. Thus, Blacks combine greater homophobia and hostility toward homosexuality with greater support for gay civil liberties and legal protections against anti-gay discrimination.

Other sociodemographic characteristics. Research also indicates that age, education, and socioeconomic status influence attitudes toward gay and lesbian persons in predictable directions. Among heterosexuals, the younger, more educated, and those with higher socioeconomic status report greater approval of gay and lesbian persons and more support for gay civil liberties (Lewis, 2003; Negy & Eisenman, 2005; Steffens & Wagner, 2004).

*Marital, cohabitation, and parenthood histories.* Remarkably little research addresses the effects of marriage, cohabitation, and parenthood histories on attitudes toward lesbians and gay men or gay marriage. Thus, we draw tentative conclusions about the effects of marriage, cohabitation, and parenthood on attitudes toward gay and lesbian persons from literature on gendered family-role attitudes. With data from a national probability sample, Kane and Sanchez (1994) found that marriage is associated with more traditional attitudes toward marriage and family, and that marriage draws women's more liberal attitudes closer to men's. Similarly, though not explicitly about attitudes toward gay marriage, Herek and Capitanio (1995) found that the unmarried have more favorable attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals compared to the married. Research on attitudes concerning gendered familial expectations routinely finds that those who have cohabited are more liberal in attitudes than those without cohabitation experience and that parents are more traditional, net of other sociodemographic and economic characteristics (see Casper & Bianchi, 2002).

*Religiosity, political orientation, and marriage and family policy attitudes.* We discuss religiosity, political orientation, and marriage and family policy attitudes below.

**Religiosity.** The research on the effects of religious commitment on heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals is voluminous. These studies are also among the few that directly explore attitudes toward gay marriage (Olson, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006; Waugh, Plake, & Rienzi, 2000). The findings can be organized into three major patterns. First, religiosity and frequency of religious participation are associated with significantly greater disapproval of homosexuality (Fisher, Derison, Polley, Cadman, &

Johnston, 1994; Lewis, 2003). Second, denominational status influences attitudes toward homosexuality. Some studies find members of conservative Protestant denominations the most anti-gay (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Olson et al.), with Baptist and other fundamentalist Protestants demonstrating more anti-gay prejudice than Catholics and Jews (Fisher et al.). However, compared to those with no religious affiliation, affiliation with any denomination is associated with less favorable attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals (Herek & Capitanio, 1995; Lemelle, 2004), including denominations with gay-tolerant teachings (Fisher et al.). Third, fundamentalism, most commonly conceptualized as belief in the authority and literal interpretation of the Bible (Emerson & Hartman, 2006), has powerful effects on negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, net of intrinsic and extrinsic forms of religiosity and socioeconomic status (Kirkpatrick, 1993). Allport and Ross (1967) defined extrinsic religiosity as religiosity used for self-serving ends and intrinsic religiosity as an end in itself. Fulton, Gorsuch, and Maynard (1999) found that, controlling for intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity, fundamentalists' negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals are in excess of what is consistent with their theological ideology. In sum, across all studies and types of conceptualization and measurement strategies, religiosity is associated with more negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian persons.

Political orientation and marriage and family policy attitudes. The research on political orientation and attitudes toward gay men and lesbians is less abundant, but clear in focus. The effects of political liberalism and being registered to vote are associated with more favorable attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals and less homophobia (Herek & Capitanio, 1995; Steffens & Wagner, 2004). Authoritarianism is associated with more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (Larsen, Reed, & Hoffman, 1980). To date, we have no research on more subtle distinctions between people's political and social attitudes regarding marriage and family issues and their attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals. This study is the first to redress this lacuna in the literature.

### *Present Study*

We explore heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay marriage from three vantage points. First, based

on previous research we explore the effects of sociodemographic characteristics with controls for socioeconomic status. Second, based on our threat model, we explore how marriage, cohabitation, and parenthood histories are associated with support or opposition for gay marriage. Third, we explore the relationship between religious, political, and social attitudes and attitudes toward gay marriage. Five main hypotheses guide these analyses.

First, on the basis of the findings of previous research we hypothesize that gender, race, and age influence attitudes toward gay marriage, net of socioeconomic characteristics (i.e., education, income, and employment). Women, Whites, and younger people should have more supportive attitudes toward gay marriage than men, Blacks, and older people. Also based on previous research, we examine whether the effect of race is accounted for by other predictors such as socioeconomic status and religiosity. Second, we hypothesize that state context affects attitudes toward gay marriage, such that individuals residing in states that passed covenant marriage law are more negative toward gay marriage, as compared to individuals from a state that considered but failed to legislate covenant marriage. We presume that state legislatures reflect, to some degree, the positions and values of the citizens of that state.

Third, we hypothesize that an individual's vested interest in marriage as an institution influences attitudes toward gay marriage. We argue that parents and the married are more likely to oppose gay marriage compared to non-parents, the never married, and those who are divorced or separated. The experiences of marriage and parenthood may clearly establish an individual's personal interest or stake in marriage as a traditional cultural institution, whereas the experience of divorce may decrease personal interest in the marriage institution. Similarly, openness to cohabitation may not only reflect greater liberalism, but also greater ease with the deinstitutionalization of marriage and the rise of alternative choices for the organization of intimate relationships. Thus, we expect those with previous or current cohabitation experience to be more accepting of gay marriage. We also test for possible interactions between parenthood and cohabitation history and parenthood and marital status. In recent years, childbirth within the marriage institution has lost some of its normativity as childbirth by single and cohabiting women has

become much more common (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). We expect parents with no cohabitation experience and married parents to be the most conservative in their attitudes toward gay marriage. We also expect nonparents with cohabitation experience and childless nonmarried persons to be the most liberal in their attitudes toward gay marriage.

Fourth, we hypothesize that religiosity has a negative independent effect on attitudes toward gay marriage. Past research demonstrates that the more religious, particularly the more extrinsically religious and of more fundamentalist backgrounds, are more opposed to gay marriage. Fifth and relatedly, we hypothesize that political conservatism is associated with more negative attitudes toward gay marriage. Our unique contribution to the exploration of this global hypothesis is to focus on a cascade of attitudes about the importance of marriage as a cultural institution and bulwark for society, support for legal and policy initiatives to bolster heterosexual marriage, and perceived blameworthiness of target social actors for the decline in marriage. We expect that those who hold more traditional views about marriage are willing to support marriage strengthening efforts, and especially those who are ready to place blame for the weakening of marriage are also likely to oppose gay marriage as a threat to traditional marriage.

Additionally, we use nested models to determine whether these religious, political, and social attitudes account for some or all of the effects of marriage, cohabitation, and parenthood histories. Based on our threat model, we hypothesize that religious, political, and social attitudes, especially attitudes regarding the deinstitutionalization of marriage and marriage promotion efforts, mediate the effects of marital, parenthood, and cohabitation histories on attitudes toward gay marriage. However, with our cross-sectional, nonexperimental data, this mediation hypothesis is tentative, given that we are not able to examine definitively whether mediating effects, as opposed to selection effects, are operating.

## METHOD

### *Data*

The data are from three separate telephone surveys of adults in Louisiana, Arizona, and Minnesota recruited from a representative sample of

households with telephones in those states. Respondents from Louisiana and Arizona were interviewed about a year following the passage of a covenant marriage law in those states, in 1998 and 1999, respectively. The Minnesota survey was conducted during legislative hearings on covenant marriage in 2000. The Louisiana survey was conducted by the Gallup organization and attained a 59% response rate. The Arizona and Minnesota surveys were conducted by a university-based survey research center with slightly lower completed response rates than the Louisiana study. The total completed interviews numbered 540 in Louisiana, 413 in Arizona, and 384 in Minnesota, for a total sample size of 1,337 respondents. After 37 nonresponses on the dependent variable and 324 nonresponses on the independent variables were excluded, the effective sample size for these analyses is 976. The majority of the respondents were White (about 81%), about two thirds were women, and about two thirds were married. The average age of the sample was 44. The education levels of the respondents were evenly distributed among high school, some college, and college, with only 9% reporting less than high school and roughly 11% reporting postcollege education.

### Variables

*Dependent variable: Attitudes against gay marriage.* We measure attitudes against gay marriage with a 5-point Likert scale item that asks whether "homosexuals should be allowed to marry." Responses range from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*.

*Sociodemographic characteristics.* Our sociodemographic predictors are gender, race, age, and state of residence. We measure *gender* as a dummy variable coded as 1 for a woman, 0 for a man. We measure *race* with two dummy variables, one representing identification as Black and another representing any other non-White racial/ethnic identity. The excluded comparison category is identification as non-hispanic White. We measure respondent's *age* continuously in years, ranging from 18 to 90. We measure the *state of residence* with two dummy variables representing Arizona and Louisiana (the states that passed covenant marriage laws). The excluded comparison category is Minnesota, which considered a covenant marriage bill but failed to pass a law.

*Socioeconomic status.* We measure the respondents' socioeconomic status with three separate measures of educational attainment, current employment status, and current family annual income. We measure *education* categorically with four dummy variables that represent high school completion, some post-high school education, a completed baccalaureate degree, or some postbaccalaureate schooling. The excluded comparison category represents respondents with less than a high school education. We measure *employment status* with a dummy variable coded as 1 for full-time employment. The excluded comparison category includes all other options including homemaking and unpaid employment, combinations of part-time employment and current school enrollment, formal retirement, and layoffs or disability leaves. We measure *current annual family income* in total dollars. Respondents who refused to report a dollar value were offered an opportunity to select a range in which their family income fell. We recoded these reports to the midpoints of the selected ranges. For respondents who refused to report an income, we recoded them at the mean and created a control dummy variable measuring respondent's refusal of an income report. We natural logged income to reduce skew.

*Marriage, cohabitation and parenthood histories.* We measure *orientation to marriage* with two dummy variables representing current marital status. The excluded category is currently married, and two dummies capture the statuses of currently divorced/separated and never married. We include widowers, who make up 8% of the sample, with the excluded currently married category because exiting marriage via widowhood should not decrease personal investment in the marriage institution in the same way we expect divorce to do so. We measure *cohabitation history* with a dummy measuring whether the respondent ever cohabited with the current or previous spouse or, if unmarried, whether they currently live with a romantic partner. The excluded category is no recent cohabitation experience. This measure roughly captures cohabitation history, leaving previous nonmarital relationships unaddressed. Last, we measure *parenthood* with a dummy that represents whether the respondent has ever borne or fathered a child.

*Religious, political, and social attitudes.* Religiosity is measured with an 8-point item that

indicates how often the respondent attends religious services, ranging from 1 (*never*) to 8 (*several times a week*). We measure political conservatism with a continuous Likert scale item that ranges from 1 (*very liberal*) to 5 (*very conservative*), with a *moderate/neutral* (3) option. We measure attitudes about marriage, divorce, and family policy with three specific scales. We used factor loading analyses to determine which items to include in each scale. The first *attitudes toward divorce* index consists of four Likert scale items that address disapproval of divorce ( $\alpha = .61$ ). The four items measure agreement with the following: "When married people realize that they no longer love each other, they should get a divorce and get it over with"; "Sure divorce is bad, but a lousy marriage is even worse"; "Society would be better off if divorces were harder to get"; and "If a couple has children, they should stay married, no matter what." The first two items were reverse-coded.

The second *perceived blameworthiness for family breakdown* index consists of five items identifying the respondent's willingness to assign specific blame for divorce to various social actors' selfishness and irresponsibility. The index measures attitudes about whether society faces a culture of divorce ( $\alpha = .65$ ). For each item, respondents reported whether the proposed situation is *not a reason at all* (1) to *one of the most important reasons* (4) for high divorce rates. The items include: "One reason for the increase in divorce is that there has been a rise in irresponsibility, selfishness, and the loss of family values in our culture"; "Women have gotten more interested in careers and self-advancement than in families and children"; "Men can't make commitments anymore to their families, wives, and children"; "People have little respect for the spiritual importance of marriage"; and "People put too much emphasis on their own self-interest and not enough emphasis on the needs of their partners and children."

The third and last *attitudes toward covenant marriage* index addresses approval of covenant marriage law to bolster heterosexual marriage ( $\alpha = .85$ ). The five Likert scale items range from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* and include the following: "Covenant marriage will strengthen family life"; "A covenant marriage will be better for children than a standard marriage"; "Covenant marriages will last longer

than standard marriages"; "Spouses in a covenant marriage will be less likely to cheat on one another"; and "Covenant marriage is a good idea."

## RESULTS

We begin our analyses by exploring the distribution of attitudes about gay marriage among these Louisiana, Arizona, and Minnesota residents. The vast majority report opposition to gay marriage. Twice as many disagree as agree. Fully 60.9% report some disagreement with gay marriage, compared to less than one third who reported some agreement that gay men and lesbians should be allowed to marry. The intensity of disagreement is also stronger for those who disagree compared to those who agree. One third of all respondents reported strong disagreement compared to only 5% who reported strong agreement with gay marriage. Table 1 presents these statistics and the descriptive statistics for all independent variables.

### *Bivariate Analyses*

Table 2 presents bivariate statistics for the relationships between each predictor and attitudes toward gay marriage. We present the means and standard deviations for each variable. For the continuous variables, means and standard deviations are reported for the median value, along with the correlation coefficients and their corresponding significance levels. For each categorical variable, we indicate significance levels for differences between category means. Each mean indicates more disagreement with gay marriage than neutrality or agreement, but the means vary greatly. For example, the never married and child free are only marginally opposed to gay marriage, on average, with means only slightly greater than 3 (the neutral category).

These bivariate associations indicate support for some of our core hypotheses. Blacks and men report more disagreement with gay marriage than Whites and women. Age is positively associated with attitudes against gay marriage. Those who have never married or parented and those who have cohabitation experience are significantly more favorable in their attitudes toward gay marriage than those with greater structural ties to marriage. In fact, those who are currently married, parents, and those without cohabitation experience have means substantially greater than

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of All Variables (N = 976)

Variable	Frequency	Mean	SD
Gay marriage approval			
Strongly agree	5.1%		
Agree	23.2%		
Neither agree nor disagree	10.9%		
Disagree	29.2%		
Strongly disagree	31.7%		
Sex			
Male	37.2%		
Female	62.8%		
Race			
White	81.1%		
Black	12.4%		
Other race group	6.5%		
Age	N/A	44.28	16.18
State context			
Louisiana	43.9%		
Arizona	28.7%		
Minnesota	27.5%		
Education			
Less than high school	7.8%		
High school	28.9%		
Some college	31.9%		
College	20.5%		
Postcollege	11.0%		
Employment			
Full time	56.9%		
Less than full time	43.1%		
Income			
Family income	N/A	\$62,359	\$98,437
Log family income	N/A	10.64	0.84
Income missing	8.0%		
Marital history			
Married or widowed	61.0%		
Divorced or separated	18.2%		
Never married	20.8%		
Cohabitation history			
No recent cohabitation	70.9%		
Recent cohabitation	29.1%		
Parental history			
No children	28.1%		
Child or children	71.8%		
Religiosity (1 = never, 8 = several times per week)	N/A	5.30	2.04
Political conservatism (1 = very liberal, 5 = very conservative)	N/A	3.23	0.97
Attitudes toward divorce <sup>a</sup>	N/A	11.42	3.05
Perceived blameworthiness for family breakdown <sup>b</sup>	N/A	13.94	3.08
Attitudes toward covenant marriage <sup>c</sup>	N/A	16.96	4.34

<sup>a</sup>Attitudes toward divorce is a four-item scale (range: 4 – 20). Higher scores indicate greater disapproval of divorce. <sup>b</sup>Perceived blameworthiness for family breakdown is a five-item scale (range: 5 – 20). Higher scores indicate greater concern over people's individualistic attitudes toward marriage. <sup>c</sup>Attitudes toward covenant marriage is a five-item scale (range: 5 – 25). Higher scores indicate positive attitudes toward covenant marriage.

the former groups by at least 0.5 on the 5-point scale. Of particular interest are the divorced and separated, whose mean falls midway between the never married and currently married, possibly suggesting that the experience of the institution of marriage made them more negative toward gay marriage, but their exit from marriage dampened that negativity. As predicted, political conservatism, religiosity, and attitudes about divorce, willingness to place blame, and approval of covenant marriage are all positively associated with disapproval of gay marriage.

### *Multivariate Analyses*

We use multiple linear regression models to test our five hypotheses. In determining which domains shape people's attitude toward gay marriage, we not only explore the statistical significance of the regression coefficients, but also the effect sizes of the correlates. These are measured with the squared partial correlation coefficients and indicate the percent of remaining variance explained. Table 3 presents a series of nested regression models of attitudes against gay marriage with both the unstandardized coefficients and the squared partial correlation coefficients as effect sizes. The four nested models coincide with our hypotheses. We build on tests of the basic effects of sociodemographic characteristics and state context by subsequently adding socioeconomic status, followed by marital, parenthood, and cohabitation histories, and then religious, political, and social attitudes to the models. This allows us to test whether the effects of race and other sociodemographic characteristics are accounted for by other predictors, whether or not the inclusion of marital, parenthood, and cohabitation histories significantly improves the model fit, and whether or not these effects are accounted for by religious, political, and social attitudes. Because the distribution of the dependent variable is skewed (61% disapprove of gay marriage), we explored various specifications of our dependent variable using tobit, logit, and multinomial logistic regression techniques. Our results with these alternative specifications were largely robust (analyses not shown), and thus we present the ordinary least squares regression models in order to preserve the continuous nature of the dependent variable.

Model 1 strongly supports our initial hypothesis about the effects of gender, race, and age. Each has an independent effect on attitudes toward gay

marriage in the predicted direction. Men are significantly more opposed to gay marriage than women are Blacks are significantly more opposed than Whites. The older are more opposed than the younger. Additionally, the effect of residence in Louisiana, the first state to pass covenant marriage, a comprehensive law designed to strengthen heterosexual marriage, is associated with significantly more negative attitudes toward gay marriage compared to the effect of residence in Minnesota, a state that considered but failed to pass covenant marriage.

Model 2 additionally includes education, employment, and current total family income as indicators of socioeconomic status. Neither employment status nor family income has a significant effect. However, counterintuitively, education is associated significantly with attitudes against gay marriage. Diagnostic tests indicate that multicollinearity is not a problem here. When we include education as a continuous variable the overall effect of education indicates less opposition to gay marriage as education increases ( $b = -.05$ ), but the effect is statistically nonsignificant ( $p = .157$ ). Those with less than a high school education have the most favorable attitudes toward gay marriage, but those who have only completed high school have the most negative attitudes toward gay marriage. Movement from high school completion to postcollege education may slightly soften opposition toward gay marriage. Most importantly, the addition of these socioeconomic indicators does not reduce the effects of gender, race, age, or state of residence.

Model 3 includes the addition of marriage, parenthood, and cohabitation histories. These results strongly support our hypotheses. Controlling for sociodemographic and socioeconomic characteristics, compared to the currently married, the effects of being divorced, separated, or never married are associated with significantly less negative attitudes toward gay marriage. Cohabitation experience is also associated with significantly less hostility toward gay marriage. Last, parenthood is associated significantly with greater opposition to gay marriage, compared to being child free.

Model 4 incorporates indicators of religiosity, political conservatism, and the full set of political attitudes about marriage and family. Each of these measures has a strong significant effect, net of all other controls. As expected, religiosity and political conservatism are associated strongly

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlation Coefficients of Attitudes Against Gay Marriage (N = 976)

	Mean	SD	Pearson's <i>r</i>
Total sample	3.59	1.28	
Sex			
Male	3.81***	1.21	
Female	3.46***	1.31	
Race			
White	3.59	1.30	
Black	3.79*	1.08	
Other race group	3.24**	1.40	
Age (median = 43)	4.24	1.09	.215***
State context			
Louisiana	3.75***	1.19	
Arizona	3.43**	1.35	
Minnesota	3.50	1.34	
Education			
Less than high school	3.28**	1.25	
High school	3.79***	1.15	
Some college	3.58	1.28	
College	3.52	1.39	
Postcollege	3.46	1.40	
Employment			
Full time	3.55	1.29	
Less than full time	3.65	1.27	
Income			
Total family income (median = \$45,000)	3.83	1.24	.002
Income missing	3.42	1.33	
Marital history			
Married or widowed	3.80***	1.22	
Divorced or separated	3.41***	1.29	
Never married	3.15***	1.34	
Cohabitation history			
No recent cohabitation	3.75***	1.24	
Recent cohabitation	3.20***	1.31	
Parental history			
No children	3.16***	1.37	
Child or children	3.76***	1.21	
Religiosity (median = 6, "attend nearly every week")	3.74	1.20	.359***
Political conservatism (median = 3, "moderate")	3.46	1.26	.398***
Attitudes toward divorce <sup>a</sup> (median = 11)	3.44	1.21	.318***
Perceived blameworthiness for family breakdown <sup>b</sup> (median = 14)	3.66	1.20	.364***
Attitudes toward covenant marriage <sup>c</sup> (median = 17)	3.69	1.22	.258***

Note: Attitudes against gay marriage measured by agreement with "Homosexuals should be allowed to marry" (5 = strongly disagree, 4 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 2 = agree, 1 = strongly agree).

<sup>a</sup>Attitudes toward divorce ranges from 4 to 20, with higher scores indicating disapproval of divorce. <sup>b</sup>Perceived blameworthiness for family breakdown ranges from 5 to 20, with higher scores indicating greater concern over people's individualistic attitudes toward marriage. <sup>c</sup>Attitudes toward covenant marriage ranges from 5 to 25, with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes toward covenant marriage.

For each continuous variable we use the variable's median and also report the correlation coefficient.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ , one-tailed  $t$  tests for the differences between dummy variables within each categorical variable.

Table 3. Regression Models Predicting Attitudes Against Gay Marriage (N = 976)

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	B	pr <sup>2</sup>	B	pr <sup>2</sup>	B	pr <sup>2</sup>	B	pr <sup>2</sup>
Intercept	2.92***		1.73***		2.88***		-.02	
Sociodemographic controls								
Female	-.42***	(2.7%)	-.42***	(2.5%)	-.44***	(2.9%)	-.42***	(3.2%)
Black	.24*	(0.3%)	.32**	(0.6%)	.32**	(0.6%)	.22*	(0.4%)
Other race	-.18	(0.1%)	-.12	(0.0%)	-.07	(0.0%)	-.12	(0.0%)
Age	.02***	(5.6%)	.02***	(5.7%)	.01***	(0.8%)	.01**	(0.5%)
State context								
Arizona	-.06	(0.0%)	-.06	(0.0%)	-.04	(0.0%)	-.06	(0.0%)
Louisiana	.24**	(0.6%)	.23**	(0.5%)	.22**	(0.6%)	-.04	(0.0%)
Socioeconomic status								
High school			.52***	(1.1%)	.50***	(1.0%)	.44***	(1.0%)
Some college			.36**	(0.5%)	.36**	(0.5%)	.33**	(0.6%)
College			.33*	(0.4%)	.30*	(0.3%)	.21	(0.2%)
Postcollege			.07	(0.0%)	.11	(0.0%)	.17	(0.1%)
Employed full time			-.09	(0.1%)	-.05	(0.0%)	-.00	(0.0%)
Log family income			.08	(0.3%)	.02	(0.0%)	.00	(0.0%)
Income missing			-.32**	(0.5%)	-.21	(0.2%)	-.17	(0.2%)
Marital, cohabitation, and parenthood histories								
Divorced/separated					-.33***	(1.0%)	-.08	(0.0%)
Never married					-.36***	(0.7%)	-.15	(0.1%)
Child or children					.34***	(0.9%)	.24**	(0.6%)
Recently cohabited					-.52***	(3.4%)	-.20**	(0.6%)
Religious, political, and social attitudes								
Religiosity							.10*	(2.6%)
Political conservatism							.27***	(4.5%)
Attitudes toward divorce							.04***	(1.2%)
Perceived blameworthiness for family breakdown							.07***	(3.0%)
Attitudes toward covenant marriage							.02***	(0.7%)
F Statistic	15.80***		9.11***		11.05***		22.85***	
Nested F	N/A		3.18***		15.55***		52.81***	
R <sup>2</sup>	.09		.11		.16		.35	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.08		.10		.15		.33	

Note: In parentheses are the effect sizes, measured by squared partial correlation coefficients (pr<sup>2</sup>), indicating the percentage of remaining variance explained.

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001, one-tailed tests.

with attitudes against gay marriage. These effects are noteworthy given our inclusion of indices measuring the respondents' specific attitudes about the seriousness of divorce as a societal problem, the perceived blameworthiness of social actors for family breakdown, and the personal desirability of policy and legal reforms to bolster heterosexual marriage, as evident in the index about support for covenant marriage. Each of these separate indices is associated significantly and positively with attitudes against gay marriage, and their effect sizes are rather large.

Religiosity accounts for 2.6% and political conservatism 4.5% of the remaining variance in attitudes toward gay marriage. Between the three marriage and divorce attitude scales, perceived blameworthiness for family breakdown accounts for the most remaining variance at 3.0%, whereas attitudes toward divorce explains 1.2% and attitudes toward covenant marriage explains 0.7%. These effects are quite large compared to the effects of marriage, cohabitation, and parenthood histories, which each explain less than 0.7% of the remaining variance.

Further, we conducted tests for the coefficient reductions between Models 3 and 4 (Clogg, Petkova, & Haritou, 1995). We find that religious, political, and social attitudes account for some of the previous significant effects. Most important, the effects of state of residence and marriage experience become nonsignificant. Religiosity and political attitudes also dampen the effects, but not significance of race, education, parenthood, and cohabitation experience. Again, to underscore the importance of the religious, political, and social attitudes, note that these attitude dimensions strongly improve the overall model fit, and the adjusted  $R^2$  more than doubles between the third and final models, from .15 to .33.

Last, we tested for moderating effects between parenthood and cohabitation history and parenthood and marital status (analyses not shown). Contrary to our hypothesis, the interaction between parenthood and marital status was nonsignificant. However, the interaction between parenthood and cohabitation was significant. In strong support of our hypothesis, this interaction test indicates that the child free with cohabitation experience are most supportive and parents without cohabitation experience are least supportive in attitudes toward gay marriage.

## DISCUSSION

Our study contributes to research on attitudes toward gay marriage by exploring this topic within the frame of research on the contemporary deinstitutionalization of heterosexual marriage (Amato, 2004; Cherlin, 2004; Coontz, 2004). We specifically address whether the policy context surrounding heterosexual marriage promotion and individual-level attitudes about the perceived deinstitutionalization of marriage and the perceived necessity of public efforts to restore heterosexual marriage influence attitudes toward gay marriage. We also contribute to research on attitudes toward gay men and lesbians by moving beyond an almost exclusive focus on age, gender, race, and religiosity to examine the dynamics of marital, parenthood, and cohabitation histories. Our data are uniquely suited to the framing of this particular investigation. We use representative data from three states that either passed or considered covenant marriage right around the time frame of the passage of the federal Defense of Marriage Act. We have multifaceted items that examine political attitudes and beliefs about the deinstitutionalization of marriage, perceived

sources of blameworthiness, and desires for marriage promotion.

We conclude by emphasizing five main findings. First, consistent with previous research, gender, race, and age are strong determinants of attitudes toward gay marriage, and nothing seems to mediate women's more positive attitudes toward gay marriage (Lewis, 2003; Steffens & Wagner, 2004). Also consistent with previous research (Negy & Eisenman, 2005), religiosity and political conservatism partially account for the relationship between race and attitudes toward gay marriage. Second, we find no enduring effects of the state-level policy context on attitudes toward gay marriage. The religious, political, and social attitudes account for the relationship between residence in Louisiana and attitudes against gay marriage. Thus, Louisiana's state policy context does not directly influence attitudes toward gay marriage. Rather, the Louisiana population's generally conservative attitudes, willingness to place blame for the decline of marriage, and the perceived desirability of heterosexual marriage promotion have the much stronger influence. We suggest that this finding is probably contingent on the limited way we captured policy context in this study.

Third, in addition to religiosity and political conservatism, attitudes about marriage and divorce, perceived blameworthiness for family breakdown, and the personal desirability of heterosexual marriage promotion have powerful independent effects on attitudes toward gay marriage. Among these three, the willingness to blame general others for the weakening of the marriage institution has the largest effect on attitudes toward gay marriage. Those who are most willing to place blame are likely more concerned about the weakening of marriage and thus perceive gay marriage as a threat for its potential to further weaken marriage as a heteronormative governing institution.

Fourth, contradicting our hypothesis, we find that marital experience does not directly affect attitudes toward gay marriage, net of attitudes about marriage and marriage policy. Controlling for religious, political, and social attitudes reduces the effects of marital experience to nonsignificance. Thus, our findings indicate that attitudes about marriage as an institution, not one's personal experience with marriage, drive attitudes toward gay marriage. However, data constraints prohibit our ability to test directly whether these domains of attitudes mediate

marriage experience or capture selection effects. Though contrary to our hypothesis, this finding is consistent with our threat model. We argue that one's marital nonentry or dissolution does not necessarily reflect a rejection of marriage as an ideal institution. Instead, the perceived threat about the potential decline of the sanctity of heterosexual marriage as a broad public institution may drive attitudes toward gay marriage, rather than one's current, sometimes temporary, individual marital status.

Fifth and last, consistent with previous research, cohabitation's association with liberal attitudes in general continues in the specific realm of attitudes toward gay marriage (Casper & Bianchi, 2002). Though personal marriage history has no enduring effects, and the interaction between marital status and parenthood is not significant, the experience of cohabitation, and perhaps the underlying willingness to embrace alternative noninstitutionalized forms of intimate relationships that cohabitation signifies, encourages more supportive attitudes toward gay marriage. Thus, we conclude that it is not individuals' personal stake in marriage as an institution that explains the crystallization of opposition to gay marriage. Instead, one's readiness to step outside of traditional marriage to organize one's private and sexual life broadens and enhances one's support for gay marriage. Conversely, the effect of parenthood establishes strong reservations about the desirability of gay marriage. Moreover, the interaction between parenthood and cohabitation indicates that the child free with cohabitation experience are most approving of gay marriage, and parents with no cohabitation experience are least approving.

Two main findings merit further discussion. First, our main finding is that feelings about the vulnerability of heterosexual marriage are extremely important determinants of attitudes toward gay marriage, net of sociodemographic characteristics, marital, parenthood, and cohabitation histories, and religious and political attitudes. A modest political implication is that gay marriage advocates must confront directly the question of how gay marriage reshapes or fits within what has heretofore been heteronormatively defined as marriage. A marshalling of this direct dialogue might engage the segment of the public with the most anxiety about both the perceived weakening of American marriage and the perceived threat gay marriage entails.

The second critical feature of our findings concerns the apparent ambivalence that the countering

effects for parenthood and cohabitation imply. Our data seem to indicate that parenthood fosters reservations about gay marriage and cohabitation promotes relative liberalism. We cannot affirm that transitions into either parenthood or cohabitation were causal determinants rather than merely associated effects. However, the findings are suggestive of a problem in contemporary America. Craig et al. (2005) noted an increasing ambivalence about gay marriage because of conflicts in core values between the perceived sanctity of marriage and family and the valorization of individualism and personal choice in intimate relationships. We think our findings are consistent with their conclusions. Ultimately, most young adults will become parents and most will cohabit at some point in their life course (Brown, 2005; Smock, 2000). In fact, about 37% of all births are to unmarried women (Hamilton, Martin, & Ventura, 2006) and nearly 50% of those births are to cohabiting women (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Sigle-Rushton & McLanahan, 2002). Thus, increasingly Americans will bring an inherent ambivalence or tension about gay marriage into their orientations through their conflicting values, beliefs, and emotion about perceived social responsibility for children and the preeminence of personal freedom and civil rights. Sociologists will mark how this ambivalence resolves itself as younger generations enter mature adulthood.

Our study faced four limitations. First, we only had a basic measure of frequency of religious attendance to assess religiosity. Further research should explore the effects of fundamentalism, evangelicalism, ties to grassroots religious organizations with an anti-gay-marriage agenda, and intrinsic forms of religiosity. That said, as in past research, we found that our rough measure of religiosity demonstrated a strong effect on attitudes toward gay marriage. We uniquely demonstrate the strength of this relationship, net of a host of other political attitudes, race, socioeconomic characteristics, and personal ties to marriage and parenthood. Religiosity, however defined, plays a pivotal role in shaping differences in attitudes toward gay marriage. Second, our measure for cohabitation focused on relatively recent partnerships rather than a full relationship history. But our imperfect measure, like that for religiosity, seems to be tapping something about cohabitation that shapes feelings about gay marriage. Thus, further research should explore the life course dynamics of cohabitation histories on attitudes toward gay marriage.

A third limitation is that we did not have access to reports about whether the participants intimately knew any gay persons or whether they believed homosexuality was a matter of personal choice, psychological and social factors, or a biological predisposition shaped at birth. Research clearly shows that attitudes toward homosexuality and approval of gay civil rights are conditioned by beliefs about the cause of homosexuality and intimate family relationships and friendships with gay and lesbian people (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Herek & Capitano, 1995; Steffens & Wagner, 2004). Fourth and last, we have no measure of respondents' sexual orientation. Among the relatively small percent who might not identify as heterosexual in our sample, we cannot know whether they self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered.

Despite these limitations, our current study suggests possible directions for future research. We know that respondents in our study were sensitive to intensity in their responses to the Likert-scale item. Those who felt unfavorably disposed to gay marriage were much more willing to report "strong" disagreement than were the favorably disposed to report "strong" agreement. Thus, an important focus of future research should be the centrality and salience of this attitude question. What does the question about whether "homosexuals should be allowed to marry" mean to these respondents? Is it core to their feelings about gay civil liberties? Is it salient to how they feel about the deinstitutionalization of marriage or only incidental? Does it have flaws because it is multidimensional (Smith, Gager, & Morgan, 1998), conflating issues surrounding gay civil liberties, feelings about marriage as an institution, and other issues?

Another significant line of research should explore more closely how these attitudes toward gay marriage are formed and their stability. We identify two foci for studies on the formation and durability of attitudes toward gay marriage. One line should explore what about cohabitation and parenthood crystallizes more and less tolerance. A second line of research should address why cohabitation is more salient than marriage. A core question is simply whether attitudes toward gay marriage shift over the life course in response to changing personal and historical circumstances. We have good studies on cohort replacement effects on rising liberalism toward gay and lesbian persons (Scott, 1998; Treas, 2002), but our understanding of contemporary at-

titudes would benefit from longitudinal research on individuals' complex, possibly shifting feelings about gay marriage.

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