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**ATTITUDES TOWARD GAY MARRIAGE IN STATES UNDERGOING
MARRIAGE LAW TRANSFORMATION**

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Attitudes toward Gay Marriage in States undergoing Marriage Law Transformation

This study examines attitudes toward gay marriage within the context of debates over the declining vitality of heterosexual marriage as an institution. We use data from a three-state survey conducted in 1998-2000 and designed to explore attitudes toward marriage and divorce reform (N=1324). We find that gender and race significantly affect attitudes toward gay marriage, but marital status and state of residence do not. A core finding is that heterosexual marriage preservation attitudes are pivotal predictors, net of religiosity. Cohabitation and parenthood are also key, but opposing determinants. 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.

This project explores contemporary attitudes toward gay marriage within the context of attitudes toward marriage and divorce reform. We explore three major perspectives about attitudes toward gay marriage. First, we explore the effects of sociodemographic characteristics. Much previous research indicates that younger people, women, and whites are more supportive of gay marriage. Second, we explore the relationship between religiosity and political attitudes and attitudes toward gay marriage. Past research demonstrates that the more religious, particularly the more extrinsically religious and of more fundamentalist backgrounds, and those who are more politically conservative are more opposed to gay marriage. However, this paper 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 examine the effects of religiosity and political conservatism, but also attitudes about marriage and divorce, attitudes about the sources of blame for perceived contemporary “family breakdown,” and, finally, attitudes toward heterosexual marriage promotion policies.

Last, we explore how marriage, cohabitation, and parenthood histories are associated with support or opposition for gay marriage. We argue that those with a greater vested interest in the institutionalization of marriage, via experiences of marriage and parenthood, are more likely to oppose gay marriage than those who are willing to form relationships outside the bounds of legal marriage, such as cohabitators. We situate these three goals 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 explore whether the

currently married, parents, the more religious, and those with more permissive attitudes about policies to strengthen and promote heterosexual marriage are less supportive of gay marriage.

Two key strengths of these analyses illuminate the relationship between attitudes about the nature of modern heterosexual marriage and attitudes toward gay marriage. The first key strength of our data are the numerous questions about attitudes toward marriage, divorce, marriage and divorce law reforms, and the desirability of social policy initiatives to promote heterosexual marriage. The second strength is that we derive our analyses from data 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. These three states were on the vanguard of marriage promotion debates by their consideration of covenant marriage laws in their state legislatures. Covenant marriage is a noteworthy family law innovation because it creates two forms of marriage within a state, the covenant option with stricter entry and exit requirements, and the no-fault divorce option with minimal entry and exit requirements (Sanchez, Nock, Wright, & Gager, 2002). Covenant marriage requires premarital counseling, and marital counseling if troubles arise, with limited fault-based, extended waiting period restrictions on divorce. 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.

In this study, two states, Louisiana and Arizona, had just passed this law in the previous year, and the other state, Minnesota, debated, but failed to pass this heterosexual marriage strengthening law. We thus consider not only the individual-, micro-level effects of attitudes

toward heterosexual marriage on attitudes toward gay marriage, but also the larger macro-level context of residence within states undergoing major struggles over initiatives to bolster heterosexual marriage. The policy implications of this work address the interrelationships between concerns about marriage and family, attitudes toward heterosexual marriage promotion policies, personal attachment to marriage as an institution, and the wider policy context on potential opposition or support of gay marriage.

Background

Academic interest in gay marriage, gay relationships, and gay families is growing apace. A significant strain of research explores how gay relationships fit within the scope of heterosexuality and heteronormative marriage and family relationships. Much of this research covers bread and butter social science concerns, addressing union quality, stability, and social support in gay and lesbian relationships, with a focus on the commonalities and differences between gay and lesbian and straight unions (Allen & Demo, 1995; Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007; Julien, Chartrand, & Begin, 1999; Kurdek, 2003, 2001, 1994, 1993; Patterson, 2000). An important branch of research explores the corrosive effects of anti-gay stigma, discrimination, and blatant hostility by wider family and community members and co-workers on intimate gay relationships and self-esteem (DiPlacido, 1998; Meyer & Dean, 1998; Smith & Ingram, 2004). Not surprisingly, a fast growing, sometimes controversial body of literature addresses the well-being and outcomes of children raised in gay as compared to heterosexual households (Chan, Brooks, Raboy, & Patterson, 1998; Chan, Raboy & Patterson, 1998; Herek, 2006; Patterson, & Redding, 1996; Stacey & Biblarz 2001; Sullivan, 1996).

Moving beyond family sociology and family psychology, we can draw from a fascinating literature on the uniqueness of gay men's and lesbians' family lives and intimate relationships (Carrington, 1999; Weston, 1991). This often ethnographic literature seeks to articulate the qualities and substance of gay and lesbian relationships in the 21st century and what they imply about our understandings of the meanings of family commitments (Stacey, 2006, 2005; Warner, 1999). On the heels of these anthropologies and qualitatively-driven philosophies are the growing number of social, political, and legal histories of international struggles to attain or ban gay marriage (Eskridge, & Spedale, 2006; Ferguson, 2007; Mello, 2004; Moats, 2004; Murdoch & Price, 2001). For those regions in Europe which successfully implemented legal gay marriage, we are now seeing demographic studies which are firsts of their kind. They present empirical accounts of the demographic characteristics of legally-marrying gay couples, their union stability, and ultimate divorce rates (Andersson, Noack, Seierstad, & Weedon-Fekjaer, 2006).

Of course, legal scholars too are weighing in on the changing relationships between gay and lesbian individuals and marriage. A dizzying array of legal literature addresses Defense of Marriage Acts and their constitutionality in light of the Full Faith and Credit clause (Butler, 1998; Kersch, 1997; Kramer, 1997; Rensberger, 1998; Ruskay-Kidd, 1997; Shuki-Kunze, 1998; Strasser, 1997), the consequences of covenant marriage as an instance of legal marriage pluralism (Spaht, 1998a, 1998b; Spaht & Symeonides, 1999), and whether this pluralism will lay the groundwork for gay marriage (DiFonzo, 2000). Further legal literature address possibilities inherent in law to promote gay marriage (Chambers, 1996; Coolidge, 1998; Hull, 2001; Polikoff, 2000; Strasser, 2000), and contrasting possibilities that law can restore heterosexual marriage as

an institution at the expense of gay marriage and other non-marital relationship alternatives (Spaht, 1999).

Each of these burgeoning literatures expands our knowledge about changes in contemporary gay life and the connections between gay and lesbian relationships and gay marriage and the now much-challenged social ideologies of compulsory heterosexuality and hegemony of normative marriage. But we know little about how individuals' attitudes toward heterosexual marriage and their own personal stakes in marriage as a social institution are related to their attitudes toward gay marriage. This project explores these important, but understudied links.

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' (2001) analysis of 25 years of the GSS 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 found 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 which 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. Craig, Martinez, Kane and Gainous (2005) suggest that this ambivalence in attitudes, with Americans demonstrating relatively high hostility, negativity and disapproval about gay marriage, but more positive attitudes toward other civil liberties, arises from some basic conflicts over core values. The average American is 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. (2005, p. 6) argue that the American public is literally “of two minds on gay issues.”

We expand this perspective by tying these observations about public ambivalence over core values to a potential underlying cultural anxiety about the deinstitutionalization of straight 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, 2004, 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. 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 which regulates social relationships and obligations to family and community (Amato, 2004).

This paper explores how public policy efforts to bolster heterosexual marriage, and attitudes about the desirability of shoring up the perceived weakening of heterosexual marriage,

are related to contemporary attitudes toward gay marriage. We know through research that gay and lesbian organizations and individuals are effectively using legislatures and courts to advance their case for gay marriage, while opponents are effectively using ballot initiatives to subvert the possibility of gay marriage (Werum & Winders, 2001). However, we know little about the relationship between the general public's attitudes toward heterosexual marriage and gay marriage.

We address whether and how attitudes toward heterosexual marriage, and especially heightened anxiety about the perceived declining vitality of conventional heterosexual marriage as an institution, are associated with greater hostility and negativity toward 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. We advance this basic question from three vantage points: individual attitudes toward heterosexual marriage and policies toward promoting heterosexual marriage, the individual's relationship to marriage via marriage, parenthood, and cohabitation, and the individual's state-level social and policy context.

Previous Research on Attitudes toward Gay and Lesbian Persons

Sociodemographic Characteristics

Gender. Studies routinely find that heterosexual men have more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians than heterosexual females (Aberson, Swan, & Emerson, 1999; Finlay & Walther, 2003; Herek & Glunt, 1993; Larsen, Reed, & Hoffman, 1980; LaMar & Kite, 1998; Lottes & Kuriloff, 1992; Louderback & Whitley, 1997; Wills & Crawford, 2000). In a 1988 national survey of 15-19 year old male youth, Marsiglio (1993) found high levels of anti-gay sentiment, with 89% reporting that sex between two men is "disgusting," and only 12%

reporting an ability to form a friendship with a gay person. Steffens and Wagner (2004) found that heterosexual men were more negative toward gay and lesbian persons than heterosexual women, and that heterosexual men differentiated between gay men and lesbians, expressing less hostility toward lesbians. Heterosexual women were both less hostile and did not differ significantly in attitudes toward gay men as compared to lesbians. Kane and Schippers' (1996) analysis of a national probability sample of women and men found women showed significantly more acceptance of "homosexual lifestyles" than heterosexual men.

Race/ethnicity. Research that addresses race/ethnic differences in attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals is more inconsistent than that of gender differences. (In this review, we focus primarily on Blacks' and whites' attitudes toward gays.) The general picture suggests that Blacks are more homophobic and anti-gay in attitudes than whites (Lewis, 2003; Marsiglio, 1993). In one exception, Finlay and Walthers (2003) found that men and whites are more homophobic than women and minorities. This basic portrait is sensitive to other dimensions, however. Lewis's (2003) review of 31 studies found that, controlling for religiosity and education, Blacks are significantly more negative about homosexuality than whites, but significantly more supportive of gay civil liberties, and much more supportive of laws prohibiting anti-gay discrimination. Lewis (2003) further found that religion, education, gender, and age had stronger effects on whites' attitudes than Blacks' attitudes. Negy and Eisenman's (2005) study of Black and white college students found that Black students expressed greater anti-gay hostility than whites, but race differences were eliminated once SES, church attendance, and religious commitment were controlled. Negy and Eisenman (2005) concluded that immersion in African-American culture, which often is imbued with greater religiosity, fueled

greater homophobia and negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians among Blacks.

Lemelle's (2004) research with the National Black Politics Study data supported this finding, showing that religious Black men were more negative in attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals than non-religious black men. Lewis (2003) also concluded that Blacks' and whites' attitudes toward gay men and lesbians had different root cultural dimensions which resulted in a more ambivalent set of attitudes for Blacks. 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 gays in predictable directions. 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 (Herek & Capitanio, 1995; Kane & Schippers, 1996; Lewis, 2003; Negy & Eisenman, 2005; Steffens & Wagner, 2004).

Personal Relationship to Family Institutions.

Remarkably little research addresses the effects of marriage, parenthood, and cohabitation histories on attitudes toward gays or gay marriage. Thus, we draw tentative conclusions about the effect of marriage, parenthood, and cohabitation on attitudes toward gay and lesbian persons from literature on gender and family role attitudes.

Ties to marriage as an institution. Kane and Sanchez's (1994) research with a national probability sample 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, while not explicitly about attitudes toward gay marriage, Herek and Capitanio (1995)

found that the unmarried have more favorable attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals than the married.

Parenthood and cohabitation histories. Again, we found no studies that explicitly address parenthood or cohabitation status differences in attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals or gay marriage. However, research on gender role and family attitudes routinely find that those who had 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.

Religiosity. The research on the effects of religious commitment on attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals is voluminous. These studies are also among the few which directly explore attitudes toward gay marriage (Olson, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006; Waugh, Plake, & Rienzi, 2000). The findings can be organized into four major patterns. First, religiosity and frequency of religious participation are associated with significantly greater disapproval of homosexuality (Beatty & Walter, 1984; Fisher, Derison, Polley, Cadman, & Johnston, 1994; Herek & Glunt, 1993; Larsen, Reed, & Hoffman, 1980; Lewis, 2003). Second, denominational and affiliation status significantly affect attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. Some studies find conservative Protestant denominations the most anti-gay (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Glenn & Weaver, 1979; Lottes & Kuriloff, 1992; Olson et al., 2006; Wills & Crawford, 2000), with Baptist and other fundamentalist Protestants demonstrating more anti-gay prejudice than Catholics and Jews (Fisher et al., 1994). Across studies, the non-religious routinely had more favorable attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals than individuals from any denomination

(Herek & Capitanio, 1995), including denominations with gay-tolerant teachings (Fisher et al., 1994). Among religious Blacks, Muslims were the most negative in attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, and Catholics the most positive, but the non-religious showed the significantly highest approval of homosexuality (Lemelle, 2004).

Third, fundamentalism has powerful effects on negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, net of intrinsic and extrinsic forms of religiosity and socioeconomic status (Kirkpatrick, 1993). In fact, Fulton, Gorsuch and Maynard (1999) found that, controlling for intrinsic religiosity and theological ideology, the negative effect of fundamentalism on attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals indicates an “excess antipathy” disproportionate to their professed religious ideology. Fourth and last, effects of religiosity on attitudes were generally larger for attitudes concerning activities tolerated by secularists, such as premarital sex. However, when both secular and religious traditions condemned an activity, such as homosexual relations, the effects of religiosity on attitudes were less evident (Cochran & Beeghley, 1991). 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 orientations regarding marriage and family issues and their attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals. We found no research which explored the effects of attitudes toward the deinstitutionalization of marriage, attitudes about the perceived blameworthiness of specific actors for the cultural decline of marriage, nor attitudes about the perceived necessity to use law and policies to strengthen and promote heterosexual marriage on receptivity to gay marriage. This study is the first to redress this lacuna in the literature.

Project Goals

The late 1990's reflected a period of intensifying policymaking and legal reforms to strengthen and promote heterosexual marriage (Bogenschneider, 2000), as well as intensifying state and federal ballot initiatives and legislation to ban gay marriage. We also witnessed growing grassroots movements to restore heterosexual marriage to an honored status in society, as well as countervailing gay rights movements and court cases to promote gay marriage. 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. As a centerpiece, a handful of states passed covenant marriage, effectively pushing back no-fault divorce and establishing stricter marriage requirements intended to promote lifelong marriage. Covenant marriage was meant to have the additional societal benefit of promoting a cultural dialogue about the centrality of marriage as a bedrock social institution for heterosexual families and their children (Spaht, 1999).

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. This paper therefore explores attitudes toward gay marriage with a sensitivity to the policy context surrounding the promotion of heterosexual marriage.

Five main hypotheses guide our analyses. First, we hypothesize that gender and race/ethnicity will influence attitudes toward gay marriage, net of socioeconomic characteristics and other focal independent controls. Women and whites should have more supportive attitudes toward gay marriage than men and Blacks. Second, we hypothesize that an individual's vested interest in marriage as an institution will influence attitudes toward gay marriage. Thus, we expect that the experiences of marriage and parenthood will be associated with more negative attitudes toward gay marriage, while the experience of cohabitation will be associated with more positive attitudes. The experiences of marriage and parenthood may more clearly identify an individual's personal interest or stake in marriage as a traditional cultural institution. Alternatively, 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.

Third, we hypothesize that religiosity will be tied to more negative attitudes toward gay marriage. Fourth and relatedly, we hypothesize that political conservatism, and especially political conservatism about the perceived deinstitutionalization of marriage, will be 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, perceived blameworthiness of target social actors for the decline in marriage, and support for legal and policy initiatives to bolster heterosexual marriage. Fifth, we hypothesize that state context should affect attitudes toward gay marriage, such that individuals residing in states which passed covenant marriage will be more negative about gay marriage, as compared to individuals from a state which 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.

Additionally, we explore how these sociodemographic, marriage, cohabitation and parenthood, and attitude domains mediate each other, but we also address specific moderating effects. Thus, we explore interactions between gender and race; race, gender and marriage, cohabitation, and parenthood histories; race, gender and political attitudes; and marriage, cohabitation, and parenthood histories by political attitudes.

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 lower completed response rates than the Louisiana study. The total completed interviews numbered 527 in Louisiana, 413 in Arizona, and 384 in Minnesota, for a total sample

size of 1,324 respondents. In these analyses, the effective sample size is 974. The majority of the respondents were white (about 81%), about two-thirds were women, and about two-thirds were married. The education levels of the respondents were evenly distributed among the three mid-range categories (high school, some college, and college); with only 8% reporting less than high school and roughly 11% reported post college education.

Dependent Variable: Attitudes Against Gay Marriage. We measure attitudes against gay marriage with a 5-point Likert scale item which asks whether “homosexuals should be allowed to marry.” Responses range from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Sociodemographic Controls. Our sociodemographic controls are gender, race/ethnicity, 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/ethnicity* with two dummy variables, one representing identification as Black and another representing any 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 which passed covenant marriage laws). The excluded comparison category is Minnesota which considered a covenant marriage bill, but failed to pass a law.

Human Capital. We measure the respondent’s human and social capital with three measures of educational attainment, current employment status, and current family yearly income. We measure *education* categorically with four dummy variables which represent high school completion, some post-high school education, a completed baccalaureate degree, or some post-baccalaureate schooling. The excluded comparison category represents respondents with

less than 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 from homemaking and not in paid 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 income, we recoded them at the mean and created a control dummy variable measuring respondent's refusal of an income report. We natural logged the income measure 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 measure *cohabitation history* with a dummy which measures 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 cohabitation experience. This measure roughly captures cohabitation experience, leaving previous non-marital relationships unaddressed. Last, we measure *parenthood* with a dummy which represents whether the respondent ever bore or fathered a child.

Religious, Political, and Social Attitudes. We measure political conservatism with a continuous Likert scale item which ranges from very liberal (1) to very conservative (5), with a moderate/middle of the road (3) option. Religiosity is measured with an 8-point item which

measures how often the respondent attends religious services, ranging from never (1) to several times a week (8).

We measure attitudes about marriage, divorce, and family policy with three specific scales. The first *attitudes toward divorce* index consists of four Likert scale items which address perceived 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 to capture increasingly disapproving attitudes.

The second *perceived blameworthiness for family breakdown* index consists of 5 items which identify the respondent’s willingness to assign specific blame to various social actors’ selfishness and irresponsibility as causes for divorce. The index measures attitudes about whether society faces a culture of divorce ($\alpha=.65$). For each item, respondent’s reported whether the proposed situation is “not a reason at all” (1) to “one of the most important reasons” (4) for recent elevated 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 a covenant marriage law to bolster heterosexual marriage ($\alpha=.80$). The six 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;” “covenant marriage is pointless because people who want to get divorced will always find a way to do so” (reverse coded); and “if a state is going to be serious about covenant marriage, the state should offer free or low-cost counseling for married couples who cannot afford it.”

Appendix table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for all measures.

[Appendix Table 1 about here]

Results

We begin our analyses by exploring the distribution of attitudes about gay marriage, among these Louisiana, Arizona, and Minnesota residents. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for responses to the question of whether gay and lesbian individuals should be allowed to marry. The vast majority report opposition to gay marriage. Twice as many disagree as agree. Fully 60.9% report some disagreement with gay marriage, as compared to approximately one-third who report some agreement that gay men and lesbians should be allowed to marry.

[Table 1 about Here]

The intensity of disagreement is also stronger. One-third of all respondents strongly disagreed, as compared to only 5% who strongly agreed that gay and lesbian persons should be allowed to marry. This six-fold larger percentage with strong disagreement suggests that those

who oppose gay marriage do so with greater intensity and feel that the issue is more salient than do those who agree with gay marriage. However, note that 11% of respondents were neutral about gay marriage, suggesting a sizeable potential “swing” population.

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the bivariate relationships between the focal demographic variables of interest, gender and race, the marriage, cohabitation, and parenthood histories, and attitudes toward gay marriage. For each group, the mean indicates more disagreement with the right to gay marriage than neutrality or agreement, but the means vary greatly. For example, on average, the never married and childfree are only marginally opposed to gay marriage, with means only slightly greater than 3 (the neutral category).

[Table 2 about Here]

These bivariate associations indicate support for some of our core hypotheses. Blacks and men report more disagreement with gay marriage than whites and women. Those who are never married or childfree or who have cohabitation experience are significantly more favorable toward gay marriage than those with structurally greater ties to marriage as an institution. In fact, those who are currently married, parents, or without cohabitation experience have means that are substantially greater than the former groups by at least .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, tentatively suggesting that the experience of the institution of marriage made them more negative toward gay marriage, but their exit from marriage dampened their negativity.

Multivariate Results

We turn now to tests of our five hypotheses, using multivariate analyses. Table 3 presents a series of nested regression models of attitudes against 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). The four nested models match our hypotheses. We build on tests of the basic effects of sociodemographic characteristics and human capital, by subsequently adding marriage, parenthood, and cohabitation histories, and then religious, political and social attitudes to the models.

[Table 3 about here]

Model 1 strongly supports our initial hypothesis about the effects of gender, race, and state of residence (i.e., policy context). Women are significantly less negative toward gay marriage than men, and Blacks are significantly more negative than whites. 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 than the effect of residence in Minnesota, a state which considered, but failed to pass covenant marriage.

Model 2 includes human capital characteristics, such as education, employment, and current total family income. The effects of gender, race, and state of residence remain significant. Neither employment status nor family income has significant effects. However, counter-intuitively, education is associated significantly with attitudes against gay marriage. Those with a high school education, some post-high-school education, or a college degree are

more likely to disagree with gay marriage than those with less than a high school degree, net of the other sociodemographic indicators.

Model 3 includes the marriage, parenthood, and cohabitation histories. These results strongly support our hypotheses. Compared to the currently married, the effects of being divorced, separated, or never-married are associated with a significantly less negative attitude toward gay marriage. Similarly, cohabitation experience is associated with significantly less hostility toward gay marriage. Last, parenthood is associated significantly with greater disagreement with gay marriage, as compared to being childfree.

Model 4 incorporates indicators of religiosity, political conservatism, and the full set of political attitudes about marriage and family. Each of these measures has strong significant effects, net of all other controls. As expected, religiosity and political conservatism are associated strongly with attitudes against gay marriage. These effects are noteworthy given our inclusion of indices measuring the respondent's 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.

Further, we find that religiosity, political conservatism, and political attitudes mediate some of the previous significant effects. Most important, the effects of state of residence and marriage experience become non-significant. Religiosity and political attitudes also dampen the effects, but not significance of race, education, parenthood, and cohabitation experience. Note

that these attitude dimensions strongly improve the overall model. The adjusted R-squared doubles from .15 to .33 between the third and final models.

Last, we tested for moderating effects through a comprehensive set of interactions. Contrary to our expectations, none of the interaction tests significantly improved the overall model fit. We tested for interactions commonly addressed in the literature, such as religiosity by race, gender by parenthood, and marital and cohabitation status by parenthood and gender. None of these interactions, nor others with religiosity and political attitudes, were significant. We suggest that sample size constraints perhaps precluded a more thorough test for moderating effects. We thus only tentatively conclude that these conceptual domains do not moderate each other.

However, though the interaction did not significantly improve the overall model fit, the coefficients for the positive interaction of parenthood and cohabitation experience were significant at the .025 level. This interaction test indicates that childfree cohabitators are most supportive in attitudes toward gay marriage (combined coefficient effect of $-.47$) and parents without cohabitation experience are the least favorable (combined effect of $.11$). Childfree non-cohabitators and parents with cohabitation experience fell between these two previous groups, but with combined coefficient effects close to zero. We cautiously interpret this finding as suggesting the countervailing effects of cohabitation and parenthood on attitudes toward gay marriage.

Conclusions

We conclude by emphasizing five main findings. First, as in previous research, gender and race have strong significant effects on attitudes toward gay marriage, net of human capital,

marriage, parenthood and cohabitation histories, religiosity and political attitudes. Note again that gender and race have independent effects on attitudes toward gay marriage; the interaction between gender and race was not significant. Second, in our full model, we find no enduring effects of the macro-level policy context on attitudes toward gay marriage. Once we control for religiosity, political conservatism, and political attitudes, the effects of state of residence become non-significant. Thus, Louisiana's state policy context does not influence attitudes toward gay marriage. Rather, the Louisiana population's generally conservative attitudes about religiosity and perceived desirability of heterosexual marriage promotion have the much stronger influence.

In fact, and third, we find that religiosity, political conservatism, and attitudes about marriage and divorce, perceived blameworthiness for family breakdown, and the personal desirability of heterosexual marriage promotion are key dimensions for understanding attitudes against gay marriage. Our study is the first to demonstrate these direct relationships with these multi-faceted attitude measures.

Fourth, contradicting our hypothesis, we find that marriage experience is associated significantly with attitudes against gay marriage, until religiosity and political attitudes are introduced in the model. These attitude domains entirely mediate the effect of marriage status. Thus, our findings indicate that personal marital status experiences are not important, but rather one's attitudes about marriage as an institution drive attitudes toward gay marriage.

Last, we conclude that two unique personal experiences have powerful effects on attitudes toward gay marriage. Parenthood establishes strong reservations about the desirability of gay marriage. Conversely, the experience of cohabitation, and perhaps the underlying willingness to embrace alternative non-institutionalized forms of intimate relationships that

cohabitation signifies, encourages more supportive attitudes toward gay marriage. Thus, we conclude that one important finding from this study is that it is not an individual's entrance into traditional marriage which significantly explains the crystallization of opposition to gay marriage. Rather, an individual's readiness to step outside of traditional marriage to organize their private and sexual life broadens and enhances their support for gay marriage.

Discussion

We contribute 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). Currently, policymakers actively are considering policies and laws to bolster and strengthen heterosexual marriage (Bogenschneider, 2000). Some clear instances of these efforts are the implementation of covenant marriage in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Arizona, the further passage of components of covenant marriage in other states, and the debates over covenant marriage in the majority of state legislatures in recent years. We explore attitudes toward gay marriage against this backdrop. We specifically address whether the macro-level 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.

A sensible expectation would suggest such associations between state-level policy context, attitudes toward heterosexual marriage and ultimate attitudes toward gay marriage. But ours is the first study to establish just such links. Our data are uniquely suited to the framing of this particular question. We use representative data from three states which either passed and implemented or considered and dropped covenant marriage right around the time frame of the

passage of the federal Defense of Marriage Act. We have unusually rich, multi-faceted items which examine political attitudes and beliefs about the deinstitutionalization of marriage, perceived sources of blameworthiness, and desires for marriage promotion. Thus, we are situated to explore not only the effect of perceived hostility or willingness to assign blame and condemnation for the deinstitutionalization of marriage, but the further effect of willingness to support retrenchment of heterosexual marriage via public interventions on attitudes toward gay marriage. We further 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 marriage, parenthood, and cohabitation histories.

Our main findings are straightforward. First, people's feelings about the vulnerability of heterosexual marriage are extremely important determinants of their attitudes toward gay marriage. However, apparently the larger macro-level policy context has little effect. We suggest that this last finding is probably contingent on the limited way we captured policy context in this study. We simply explore the policy context of residence in a state with covenant marriage versus a state in which the legislature rejected the option. Despite the caution about our rough measure of policy context, the main overarching finding is the powerful demonstrated effects of attitudes toward preserving and promoting heterosexual marriage, independent of sociodemographic characteristics, personal ties to marriage, religiosity, and political conservatism. We discuss the policy implications of this major finding below.

Consistent with previous research, gender and race loom large as determinants of attitudes toward gay and lesbian individuals, and nothing seems to mediate women's more positive attitudes toward gay marriage, as compared to men's (Steffens & Wagner, 2004; Lewis,

2003). We see a gap in basic attitudes toward gay marriage between women and men.

However, consistent with previous research (Negy & Eisenman, 2005), while race is a powerful predictor of attitudes toward gay marriage, religiosity and political conservatism mediate this relationship.

A last major finding from our study concerns marriage, parenthood, and cohabitation histories. We find that marital experience does not affect attitudes toward gay marriage, net of attitudes about marriage and marriage policy. In contrast, while personal marriage history has no enduring effects, we find parenthood and cohabitation have significant, powerful and opposite effects on attitudes toward gay marriage. We cautiously suggest that it is not individuals' cultural stake in marriage as an institution which influence attitudes toward gay marriage, but their perceived stake in children's well-being. Finally, 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).

Our findings suggest a wide diversity of public attitudes regarding gay marriage. Admittedly, this conclusion is not particularly surprising, but it is still worth noting. The percentage who strongly disagree that gay and lesbian people should have the right to marry is six times larger than the percentage for those who strongly agree (30% versus 5%). But still one-third of our sample agreed gay and lesbian people should have the right to marry and 10% were "on the fence" or neutral. This variation indicates much room for an absorbing public discourse about the place of gay and lesbian relationships within the processes of family and social change.

Two further features of our findings merit attention. First, we note the salience of political attitudes about bolstering heterosexual marriage. These attitude effects remain strong,

net of other sources of judgments about gay marriage, such as religiosity and educational attainment. Note as well that religiosity strongly affects attitudes toward gay marriage, controlling for a wide variety of marriage and family attitudes. Further, a compelling finding is that marital status does not influence attitudes about whether gay and lesbian individuals should have the right to marry, rather attitudes about marriage, irrespective of one's personal success or failure at marriage, determine support or opposition to gay marriage. We argue that religious, political, and marital attitudes influence attitudes about whether gay and lesbian people have the right to marry, more so than actual marital status, because one's non-entry or failure at marriage 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. A modest policy 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 do not have longitudinal data, so we cannot affirm confidently 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 Americans will become parents and most will cohabit at some point in their life course. Indeed, among cohabitators alone, the percentage of couples who have children in the home went from 28% to 37% between 1978 and 1998 (Casper & Bianchi, 2002). Thus, 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 measure religiosity. Further research should explore the effects of fundamentalism, evangelism, 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/ethnicity, socioeconomic characteristics, and personal ties to marriage and parenthood. Religiosity, however defined, plays a pivotal role in shaping differences in the public's 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 which 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 and personal relationships to gay and lesbian people (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Herek & Capitano, 1995; Steffens & Wagner, 2004). Fourth and last, we have no measure of the respondent's sexual orientation. Among the small percent who might not identify as heterosexual in our sample, we cannot know whether they self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender.

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. Does the question about whether "homosexuals should be allowed to marry" mean anything to these respondents? Is it core to their feelings about gay civil liberties? Is it salient in how they feel about the deinstitutionalization of marriage or only incidental? Does it have flaws because it is multi-dimensional (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 attitudes would benefit from longitudinal research on individuals' complex, possibly shifting feelings about gay marriage.

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Table 1. *Attitudes toward Gay Marriage Sample Distribution (N=974)*

Strength of Agreement	Sample Percentage
Strongly Agree	5.0%
Agree	23.2%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	10.9%
Disagree	29.3%
Strongly Disagree (5)	31.6%

Note: Attitudes toward Gay Marriage measured by strength of agreement with the statement “Homosexuals Should be Allowed to Marry” (5=Strongly Disagree, 1=Strongly Agree).

Table 2. Attitudes toward Gay Marriage Means and Standard Deviations of Focal Independent Variables (N=974)

	Mean	SD
Sex		
Male	3.82***	1.20
Female	3.46***	1.31
Race/Ethnicity		
White	3.59	1.29
Black	3.79*	1.08
Other Race/Ethnic Group	3.24**	1.40
Policy Context/Region/State		
Louisiana	3.75***	1.19
Arizona	3.43**	1.35
Minnesota	3.50	1.33
Marital History		
Married or Widowed	3.80***	1.21
Divorced or Separated	3.40**	1.29
Never Married	3.15***	1.34
Cohabitation History		
Never Cohabited	3.75***	1.23
Ever-Cohabited	3.21***	1.31
Parental History		
No Children	3.16***	1.37
Child/ren	3.76***	1.20

Note: Attitudes Against Gay Marriage based on agreement with “Homosexuals should be allowed to marry” (5=Strongly Disagree, 1=Strongly Agree).

*p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001 (one-tailed tests).

Table 3. *Regression Models Predicting Attitudes Against Gay Marriage (N=974)*

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
Intercept	2.94***	(.14)	1.71***	(.59)	2.87***	(.62)	-.05	(.59)
Sociodemographic Controls								
Female	-.44***	(.08)	-.44***	(.08)	-.46***	(.08)	-.44***	(.07)
Black	.25*	(.13)	.33***	(.13)	.33***	(.13)	.23**	(.12)
Other Race/Ethnicity	-.18	(.16)	-.12	(.16)	-.07	(.16)	-.12	(.14)
Age	.02***	(.00)	.02***	(.00)	.01***	(.00)	.61**	(.00)
State Context								
Arizona	-.07	(.11)	-.07	(.11)	-.05	(.10)	-.06	(.09)
Louisiana	.22**	(.10)	.22**	(.10)	.21**	(.10)	-.05	(.09)
Human Capital								
High School			.54***	(.16)	.52***	(.15)	.46***	(.14)
Some College			.38***	(.16)	.38***	(.15)	.35***	(.14)
College			.35**	(.17)	.32*	(.17)	.24	(.15)
Post College			.11	(.19)	.16	(.19)	.21	(.17)
Full-Time Employed			-.09	(.09)	-.04	(.09)	.01	(.08)
Log family Income			.08	(.05)	.02	(.05)	.00	(.05)
Income Missing			-.29*	(.15)	-.18	(.15)	-.15	(.13)
Marital, Cohabitation, and Parenthood Histories								
Divorced/Separated					-.34***	(.11)	-.09	(.10)
Never Married					-.36***	(.14)	.15	(.12)
Child/ren					.35***	(.12)	.25***	(.10)
Cohabited					-.51***	(.09)	-.20***	(.08)
Religious, Political, and Social Attitudes								
Religiosity							.10***	(.02)
Political Conservatism							.27***	(.04)
Attitudes toward Divorce							.04***	(.01)
Perceived Blameworthiness for Family Breakdown							.07***	(.01)
Attitudes toward Covenant Marriage							.02***	(.01)
F Statistic	16.22***		9.28***		11.22***		22.80***	
R ²	.09		.11		.17		.35	
Adjusted R ²	.09		.10		.15		.33	

Note: Standard Errors are in parentheses.

*p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001 (one-tailed tests).

Appendix Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of Variables*

Means and Frequencies		
Gay Marriage Attitudes	3.59	(1.28)
Sex		
Male	37.17%	
Female	62.83%	
Race/Ethnicity		
White	81.11%	
Black	12.42%	
Other Race/Ethnic Group	6.47%	
Policy Context/Region/State		
Louisiana	44.05%	
Arizona	28.54%	
Minnesota	27.41%	
Education		
Less than High School	8.01%	
High School	28.95%	
Some College	31.83%	
College	20.33%	
Post College	10.89%	
Employment		
Full-time	56.67%	
Less than Full Time	43.33%	
Income		
Family Income	\$62,359.24	(\$98,437.62)
Log Family Income	10.64	(.84)
Income Missing	7.91%	
Marital History		
Married or Widowed	61.00%	
Divorced or Separated	18.17%	
Never Married	20.84%	
Cohabitation History		
Never Cohabited	29.06%	
Ever-Cohabited	29.06%	
Parental History		
No Children	28.13%	
Child/ren	71.87%	
Religiosity	5.30	(2.04)
Political Conservatism	3.23	(.97)
Attitudes toward Divorce	11.43	(3.05)
Perceived Blameworthiness for Family Breakdown	13.94	(3.08)
Attitudes toward Covenant Marriage	20.06	(4.50)

Note: Continuous variables are reported as means with standard deviations in parentheses.

Attitudes Against Gay Marriage based on agreement with “Homosexuals should be allowed to marry” (1=Strongly Agree, 5=Strongly Disagree). Religiosity based on frequency of church attendance (1=Never, 8=Several times per week). Political Conservatism ranges from very liberal (1) to very conservative (5). Attitudes toward divorce is based on a 4-item scale (ranging from 4-20), with higher scores indicating disapproval of divorce. Perceived Blameworthiness for Family Breakdown is based on a 5-item scale (ranging from 5-20), with higher scores indicating greater concern over people’s individualistic attitudes toward marriage. Attitudes toward Covenant Marriage is based on a 6-item scale (ranging from 6-30), with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes toward covenant marriage.

*p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001 (one-tailed tests).