

RESEARCH THAT MATTERS

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# PERSPECTIVES ON MARRIAGE EQUALITY IN 2024

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This year marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of legal marriage for same-sex couples in the United States, starting with Massachusetts on May 17, 2004. In recognition of this 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, this report provides a portrait of married same-sex couples based on survey responses from 484 LGBTQ+ Americans. These couples come from all 50 states and Washington, D.C. They are diverse racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically. On average, they have been together for over 16 years and married for over nine years. Over 60% were married after the Supreme Court's 2015 decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that brought marriage equality to all 50 states. Over 30% of these couples have children, and 25% want children in the future.

This report focuses on these couples' reasons for getting married, how marriage has impacted their lives, and the ways they have come to rely upon their spouse and their spouse's family for support. It also addresses the experiences that some of them have had with discrimination, the impact of the Supreme Court's decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* on them, and their concerns that *Obergefell* might be overturned.

Overall, these couples appreciate the ways that marriage has strengthened their relationships with their partners, provided security for their children, and provided legal protections, financial security, and greater acceptance by family, friends, and the broader community. They are also worried about the future of marriage equality and the increasingly hostile climate for LGBTQ+ people in many parts of the country—so much so that some are considering moving to another state.

In sum, two decades after the first state in the United States permitted same-sex couples to marry, they report that marriage equality has had a profound positive impact on their lives but are concerned about the future security of their families.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Why same-sex couples got married

- When asked why they got married, the vast majority of same-sex couples said love (93.0%), companionship (74.0%), and legal protections (75.0%).
- Almost two-thirds said they married for the symbolic value and meaning of marriage (63.8%), and almost half said they married for increased financial security (49.4%).
- Couples in longer relationships before marrying were more likely to cite legal and financial reasons for marrying.
- Some also married to protect their current (3.5%) or future children (12.4%).
- When asked about the positive impacts of marriage in general, members of same-sex couples also strongly endorsed:
  - marriage as a symbol of love and commitment (89.3%),
  - the ability to access rights and benefits (76.0%), including health insurance (66.7%),
  - financial benefits more generally (74.4%), and
  - societal (62.2%) and family (66.7%) recognition and acceptance.

## How marriage has changed same-sex couples' lives

- **Relationship and life satisfaction.** When asked how marriage changed their lives, 83.1% of participants reported positive changes in their sense of safety and security, almost three-fourths (74.6%) reported positive changes in life satisfaction, and almost two-thirds (61.0%) reported becoming closer to their partner.
- **Stability and security in their relationship.** About two-thirds (66.9%) of participants said that marriage provided more stability to their relationships, including legal protections, financial stability, mutual support, long-term planning, and a stronger sense of security and commitment in the relationship.
- **Shared life planning.** Many couples reported that marriage had profoundly changed how they made life plans.
  - **Where to live.** Over 60% of participants (61.4%) affirmed that marriage affected their life planning in terms of making decisions about moving and where to live, including moving for their partner's job or to be near their partner's family.
  - **Work and income.** Over 60% of participants (61.0%) felt that marriage affected their life planning in terms of working and earning income. Many said that marriage enabled partners to designate one to work at a steady job so the other could take career risks, pursue satisfying but less lucrative work, go back to school, or stay home with children.
  - **Financial planning.** Almost 60% (59.3%) said marriage affected their financial planning in terms of saving, investing, and planning for retirement, the ability to care for each other in case of illness, buy a house, and afford to have children.
- **Workplace benefits.** Over half (51.9%) of married same-sex couples said that marriage equality provided them access to workplace health insurance benefits previously unavailable to them.
- **Parenting.** Almost one in five (19.8%) reported that marriage affected their plans about whether or when to have or adopt children and how many children to have. For many, marriage was a "prerequisite" to becoming parents.
- **Stability and security for children.** Of those who had children, almost 60% (58.1%) reported that marriage provided more stability or security for their children, including by providing legal protections, offering a greater sense of legitimacy for their children, and conveying a sense of stability in their family to their children.
- **Caretaking.** Over one-fourth of participants reported they were living with a disability, and over one-fourth reported that their partner had a disability. Just one partner had a disability in 112 couples (23.1%), and both partners had a disability in 73 couples (15.1%). Regarding caregiving, 14.5% of respondents reported that they were a caregiver for their partner, and 12.4% reported that their partner was a caregiver for them. More specifically, in approximately one out of six couples, one or both partners were caregivers: one partner was a caregiver in 50 couples (10.3%), and both partners cared for each other in 28 couples (5.8%).

- **Greater family and social acceptance.** Participants reported that marriage increased acceptance the most from their in-laws, including their partner's immediate family (42.1%) and extended family (36.3%). They also reported that marriage led to greater acceptance from their co-workers (29.0%), extended family (28.6%), immediate family (25.2%), and their neighbors and greater community (25.2%).

## Reliance and Mutual Support

Many of the ways that marriage has impacted couples are related to how partners within a marriage support and depend on one another. For many same-sex couples, this mutual reliance did not start with their wedding but long before and extended not only to their partners but their in-laws.

### Reliance prior to marriage

- Most (93.4%) participants lived with their spouses before getting married, with 69.7% seeing living together as a step towards marriage. Participants lived with their partners for an average of 3.83 years before getting married.
- Almost three-quarters (70.9%) were engaged to their partners before they got married. They were engaged to their spouses for an average of 2.3 years. Among those who were engaged, almost all (96.2%) saw being engaged as a step towards marriage.
- Some forms of mutual support were high at each stage in these couples' relationships. For example, while they were living together, engaged, and married, approximately one in five of these couples helped pay for each other's education costs; provided caregiving to the other when they needed help due to a health condition or aging; or moved when the other got a job in a different location. In all three stages of these relationships, over 60% shared savings goals, like buying a car and a house.
- Some forms of mutual support dramatically increased when couples got married. For example, married same-sex couples were more likely to buy a house together (47.1%) and have a shared bank account (68.2%) than when they were living together or engaged.
- Compared to when they were living together or engaged, married same-sex couples were more likely to have or adopt children (11.6%), share child-raising responsibilities (18.0%), and decide to have one partner not work to devote more time to childcare (11.6%).

### Reliance on family and in-laws

In addition to members of the couple relying upon one other, marriage also meant that the couple had two families—or sets of in-laws—that they could rely upon.

- Over 40% (40.9%) of participants and their partners relied on each other's families of origin in times of crisis, such as to help meet financial or health care needs
- For example, of couples with the following needs, over three-fourths (76.1%) reported that their families had helped out during a health crisis, 60.5% had relied upon their families for financial support, 31.3% had relied on their families for occasional help with childcare, and 14.5% had relied on their families for regular help with childcare.
- Of those who had a wedding (77.3%), 35.8% said their family helped pay for the wedding, and 29.4% said their partner's family helped pay for the wedding.

## Discrimination

- Participants reported experiences of discrimination both when planning their weddings and as married couples.
- 10.7% of those who had a wedding said they experienced discrimination while planning their wedding, with another 7.2% indicating that they were unsure of whether they experienced discrimination. Types of discrimination included discrimination by participants' churches or synagogues, city officials, and wedding vendors.
- Some participants said they believed they avoided discrimination because they only sought out vendors and officiants known for being LGBTQ+ friendly, lived in an LGBTQ+ friendly area, or did not disclose that they were having a same-sex wedding to certain vendors.
- In response to an open-ended question, several participants indicated concern about the increased visibility that marriage had brought to their relationship, which made them more vulnerable to discrimination.

## Impact of *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision

In 2015, the Supreme Court extended marriage equality to all fifty states through its decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*.

- Almost all participants indicated that the *Obergefell* decision (94.2%) made a difference to them. In fact, most participants were married post-*Obergefell* (62.8%), even though their relationships started before 2015.
- Approximately three-fourths of those in married same-sex couples reported that what made a difference to them was full legal recognition in terms of rights and responsibilities (79.5%), that marriage would be recognized in all 50 states (74.6%), and having marriage equality validated as a constitutional right (72.5%).
- For over a third (34.7%), *Obergefell* made a very practical difference: they lived in one of the states that didn't have marriage equality until the case was decided.

## Concerns about the future of *Obergefell*

- Almost 80% (79.3%) of married same-sex couples said they were very (40.9%) or somewhat (38.4%) concerned about the *Obergefell* decision being overturned.
- Being trans or having a trans partner, being older, and having less education were associated with being concerned about the future of *Obergefell*.
- About one-fourth said they had pursued various actions out of concern that marriage equality might be challenged. Some sped up their timeline for marriage to make sure it would still be available, and others sought second-parent adoptions to ensure that their legal relationship to their children is protected. Others sped up their timeline for having children to ensure both parents had a legal relationship with their child.
- Concerns about the future of marriage equality, as well as the current anti-LGBTQ+ climate in many states, are prompting many couples to consider moving to another state or another country.

- Asked about whether they currently wanted to move out of state, over one-quarter (29.0%) indicated that they did.
- Considering just those participants who indicated that they very much or somewhat wanted to move, their top three reasons for wanting to move were related to the socio-political climate (52.9%), concerns about anti-LGBTQ+ laws (48.6%), and fears about losing rights as an LGBTQ+ person or as a person in a same-sex marriage (43.6%).



## BACKGROUND

The issue of marriage equality has been debated for longer than 20 years—but the debate reached an apex in 2003 when the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled that the state must let same-sex couples marry, becoming the first state in the United States to have marriage equality. Many LGBTQ+ advocates and their allies celebrated the decision, while some religious and political leaders and their allies expressed anger and dismay over what they saw as an attack on their moral and religious values (Pew Research Center, 2009, 2022; van der Toorn et al., 2017). The debate over same-sex marriage was, at this time, far from over. Over the next decade, many states passed state laws or constitutional amendments that prohibited same-sex couples from marrying. However, other states extended marriage to same-sex couples through court decisions, state laws, and the ballot box.

By 2015, there was a patchwork of state laws regarding marriage equality, such that some states allowed same-sex couples to marry, and others did not. Not only did the uneven legal landscape create inequities for same-sex couples in terms of what rights were available to them, but it also created challenges when same-sex couples moved since their marriages were not necessarily recognized. For example, parental rights established by marriage equality in one state might not be recognized if a same-sex couple moved to another state. Such unevenness also created problems when same-sex couples wished to divorce (Goldberg & Romero, 2019).

The landmark US Supreme Court decision *Obergefell v. Hodges* established that the fundamental right to marry must be extended to same-sex couples throughout the United States and helped to address the complex and confusing legal landscape vis-a-vis marriage equality. Nationwide marriage equality also helped to address various inequities faced by members of same-sex couples that had important consequences for their economic stability, life planning, and mental health (Ogolsky et al., 2019). For example, marriage equality ensured that members of same-sex couples, no matter where they lived, could file taxes jointly and access health insurance and other spousal benefits.

Supporters of marriage equality argue that not only does extending the right to marry to same-sex couples carry obvious legal and financial protections and benefits, but it is simply the right thing to do. Many same-sex couples have been together for many years and deserve the right to honor their relationship, love, and commitment with the legal act of marriage. Marriage, after all, carries enormous symbolic value in contemporary society. As a respected cultural institution, it signals mutual commitment and care, represents a cause for celebration, and may invite (increased) acceptance from family, colleagues, neighbors, and community members (Badgett, 2011; Pew Research Center, 2009). Further, because of marriage's societal significance, children with married same-sex parents may benefit from having their parents' relationships be treated as equally legitimate and meaningful as those of many of their peers (Goldberg, 2022). They also may benefit as a function of being afforded the material benefits associated with marriage (e.g., inheritance).

Opponents of marriage equality argue that marriage is fundamentally intertwined with heterosexuality and the ability to reproduce—and, in turn, is foundational to family building. Extending the right to marry to same-sex couples, they argue, represents a serious deviation from the function of marriage and will effectively weaken an already threatened institution—marriage—and, therefore, is a threat to societal stability more broadly (see Bernstein, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2009, 2022).



Existing research has examined the effects of marriage equality for members of same-sex couples on an array of outcomes, including economic stability, relationship quality and stability, mental health, and physical health. This research has documented that the many material, emotional, and symbolic benefits associated with marriage do indeed appear to have consequences for the lives and well-being of LGBTQ+ people. For example, married LGBTQ+ people appear to experience protections in the areas of (a) increased social acceptance and “validation” (from society, family, and others); (b) the ability to make joint decisions about key life events and issues, such as medical care and having children; (c) greater sense of security regarding financial (e.g., taxes) and legal (e.g., hospital visitation) benefits; and (d) less stress surrounding issues such as travel and immigration (Drabble et al., 2021; Ogolsky et al., 2019). These material, emotional, and symbolic benefits also appear to directly benefit their children (Goldberg, 2022).

The current report is based on data from 484 LGBTQ+ Americans in same-sex marriages collected from October 2023 through February 2024. It focuses on their reasons for getting married, their perspectives on marriage equality, and how their lives—relationships, family, work, finances, health, and sense of security—have been impacted by marriage. Participants were recruited from the Community Marketing and Insights’ (CMI) LGBTQ+ research panel. CMI’s 50,000-person LGBTQ+ research panel was developed over two decades through partnerships with over 100 LGBTQ+ media, events, and organizations in the United States. This study recruited participants from known panel members in a same-sex legal marriage. Special effort was made to invite potential participants who were trans/nonbinary, lower income, of color, and in diverse regions across the U.S.

## FINDINGS

### DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

**Sample selection.** The larger sample was  $N = 589$ . Our sample consisted of 484 individuals. We included all individuals who were currently married and characterized their current marriage as a same-sex marriage. Excluded were individuals who had been divorced or widowed and were not currently in what they viewed as a same-sex marriage.

**Sample description.** All participants were in a same-sex marriage. On average, participants had been in their relationships with their married partners for 16.63 years ( $Mdn = 14.00$ ,  $SD = 10.61$ ). When they were legally married, they had been in their relationships for an average of 9.1 years ( $Mdn = 6.0$ ,  $SD = 8.5$ ). Most participants indicated that they had only been married, once to their current same-sex partner (95.5%).<sup>1</sup>

Most participants (72.3%) were married in their own state; 118 (24.4%) were married in another state, and 16 (3.3%) were married in another country, most often in Canada. When they first married their partner, most (89.0%) said their marriage to their partner was legal in the state where they were married. Among those who traveled to get married in another state or country, the most frequent reasons were that was legal there but not in their own state (47.0%), to celebrate/get married at a specific venue (.9%), to celebrate with family/it was closer to family (18.7%), it was spontaneous/we happened to be there (7.5%), and something else (9.7%) (e.g., were on vacation; wanted a destination wedding; eloped).

The participants in the sample ranged from 22 to 80, with an average age of 48.01 years old ( $Mdn$  age = 48.00,  $SD = 14.00$ , range 22-80). Their married spouses were of similar age ranging from 21 to 83, with an average age of 48.13 ( $Mdn$  age = 46.00,  $SD = 14.93$ , range 21-83).

Regarding gender identity, participants in the sample were predominantly cisgender men (39.7%) and cisgender women (38.4%). The rest were transgender (9.3%) and nonbinary (12.6%). Regarding participants' partners, they were also predominantly cisgender men (41.1%) and cisgender women (44.4%). The rest were transgender (5.4%) and nonbinary (9.1%). When considering participants' gender identities in relation to their married spouses' gender identities, most participants were in male same-sex couples (39.0%) or female same-sex couples (32.2%), with the remaining in same-sex marriages comprised of a cisgender partner and a trans/nonbinary identified individual (20.1%) or two trans/nonbinary individuals (7.9%).

Almost half of the sample was of color, including biracial/multiracial individuals (48.6%); 249 (51.4%) were white only. Participants could indicate as many racial/ethnic categories that applied to them. A total of 334 (69.0%) indicated white, 73 (15.1%) Hispanic, 51 (10.5%) Latino/a/x, 87 (18.0%) African American/Black, 40 (8.3%) Asian, 25 (5.2%) American Indian or Alaska Native, 6 (1.2%) Native Hawaiian

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<sup>1</sup> This study recruited participants from known panel members in a same-sex legal marriage, including trans/nonbinary individuals who identified themselves as being in a same-sex marriage. This approach may undercount cisgender community members that identify as bisexual in part because it excludes people in different-sex marriages.

or Other Pacific Islander, and 18 (3.7%) something else (e.g., Caribbean, Chicana, and Middle Eastern). More than two-thirds of participants' married spouses were white ( $n = 342$ , 70.7%), with 142 (29.3%) of color, including biracial/multiracial. Participants lived in all 50 states in the US plus DC, with > 2.5% in California (11.4%), Florida (6.0%), Georgia (4.9%), Illinois (3.7%), Massachusetts (3.3%), Michigan (3.3%), New York (6.4%), North Carolina (3.9%), Pennsylvania (2.9%), Tennessee (2.7%), Texas (7.9%), and Wisconsin (2.9%). In terms of region, 146 (30.2%) lived in the South, 138 (28.5%) lived in the Midwest, 111 (22.9%) lived on the West Coast, and 88 (18.2%) lived on the East Coast.

Using Movement Advancement Project (MAP)'s LGBTQ+ state policy data (MAP, 2024), which tracks 50 different LGBTQ+-related laws and policies and categorizes states by their level of protection (positive to negative) for LGBTQ+ people, we determined that over 40% of the sample lived in a state with poor protections for LGBTQ+ people. Specifically, 127 (26.2%) lived in a state with a negative overall policy tally (poorest climate); 77 (15.9%) lived in a state with a low overall policy tally (poor climate); 24 (7.0%) lived in a state with a neutral overall policy tally (fair climate); 48 (9.9%) lived in a state with a moderate overall policy tally (somewhat positive climate); and 198 (40.9%) lived in a state with a high overall policy tally (positive climate).

Most lived in urban (40.9%) or suburban (39.5%) communities, with 62 (12.8%) indicating that they resided in a rural community and 33 (6.8%) indicating "something else," which most specified to be small towns or college towns. In terms of the LGBTQ+-friendliness of their community, over one-third described it as very LGBTQ+-friendly (37.4%), and over one-third described it as somewhat LGBTQ+-friendly (37.9%). Almost one-fifth (18.8%) indicated that it was neutral/mixed, 37 (7.6%) reported that it was not very LGBTQ+-friendly, and 6 (1.2%) said that it was not at all LGBTQ+-friendly.

In terms of children, 148 respondents (30.6%) had one or more children. Of those with children, 50 (10.3%) had one child, 59 (12.2%) had two, and 39 (8.1%) had three or more children. A total of 33 (6.8%) had children < 6, 48 (9.9%) had children 6-18 years, and 95 (19.6%) had children over 18 years. Fifty-one (10.5%) were parents to at least one child via donor insemination, 42 (8.7%) were stepparents to at least one child, 41 (8.5%) had at least one child conceived via intercourse, and 23 (4.8%) were adoptive parents. Small numbers were parents through surrogacy (6), reciprocal in vitro fertilization (6), or foster parenting (5).

In terms of the highest level of education obtained, 1 (.2%) had less than high school, 32 (6.6%) had a high school diploma or GED, 158 (32.6%) had some college/an associate's degree, 178 (36.8%) had a college degree, 81 (16.7%) had a master's, and 34 (7.0%) had PhD/MD/JD. Thus, almost 40% of the sample had less than a college degree.

Regarding income, 78 (16.1%) made less than \$25K/year; 125 (25.8%) made \$25K-50K; 123 (25.4%) made \$51K-\$75K; 67 (13.8%) earned \$76K-\$100K; 37 (7.6%) earned \$101-\$125K; 18 (3.7%) earned \$126-\$150K; and 36 (7.4%) made over \$150K. Regarding family income, 53 (11.0%) reported a family income of under \$50K, 155 (32.0%) reported a family income of \$50K-\$100K, 141 (29.1%) indicated a family income of \$101K-\$150K, 68 (14.0%) indicated \$151K-\$200K, 31 (6.4%) reported \$201K-\$250K; and 36 (7.4%) indicated over \$250K in family or household income. A total of 15 (3.1%) described themselves as lower-class, 125 (25.8%) described themselves as working-class, 246 (50.8%) said middle-class, 89 (18.4%) indicated upper middle class, 3 (.6%) reported upper class, and 6 (1.2%) said "something else" (e.g., lower middle class; just over broke).

In terms of employment status, 258 (53.3%) were employed full-time, and 51 (10.5%) were employed part-time. A total of 22 (4.5%) were unemployed, 20 (4.1%) identified themselves as homemakers, 19 (3.9%) were students. Sixty-six (13.6%) were retired, and 14 (2.9%) were disabled.

Regarding their present religion, almost one-quarter identified with a specific faith (26.7%), while just over one-third (35.1%) indicated “nothing in particular.” Additionally, 77 (15.9%) identified as atheists, and 64 (13.2%) identified as Agnostic. More specifically, a total of 58 (11.6%) were Protestant, 36 (7.4%) were Roman Catholic, 12 (2.5%) were Jewish, and 7 (1.4%) were Buddhist. The remainder of the participants identified in a range of ways, including non-denominational Christians, Baptist, Lutheran, Spiritual, Pagan, Wiccan, Unitarian Universalist, and New Age. Lutheran, and New Age. When asked if they would describe themselves as a born-again or Evangelical Christian, 21 (4.3%) said yes.

Regarding political affiliation, most (76.9%) were Democrats, 78 (16.1%) were Independents, and 8 (1.7%) were Republicans, with 26 (5.4%) indicating something else. Most of the latter group indicated they were non-affiliated; others identified as Democratic Socialist, Socialist, Green Party, Working Families Party, Moderate, Leftist, and Progressive.

## WHY COUPLES MARRIED

When asked why they got married, the vast majority of respondents said love (93.0%), companionship (74.0%), and legal protections (75.0%). Half or more also said they married for the symbolic value and meaning of marriage (63.8%) and financial security (49.4%). See Table 1. Some also married to protect their current (3.5%) or future children (12.4%), cited their religious beliefs (3.5%), or for immigration reasons (5.0%). Write-in responses included marrying for very specific reasons, such as needing support for health care and anxiety about marriage equality being repealed or overturned, as occurred in California with the passage of Prop 8.

Figure 1. Reasons for getting married

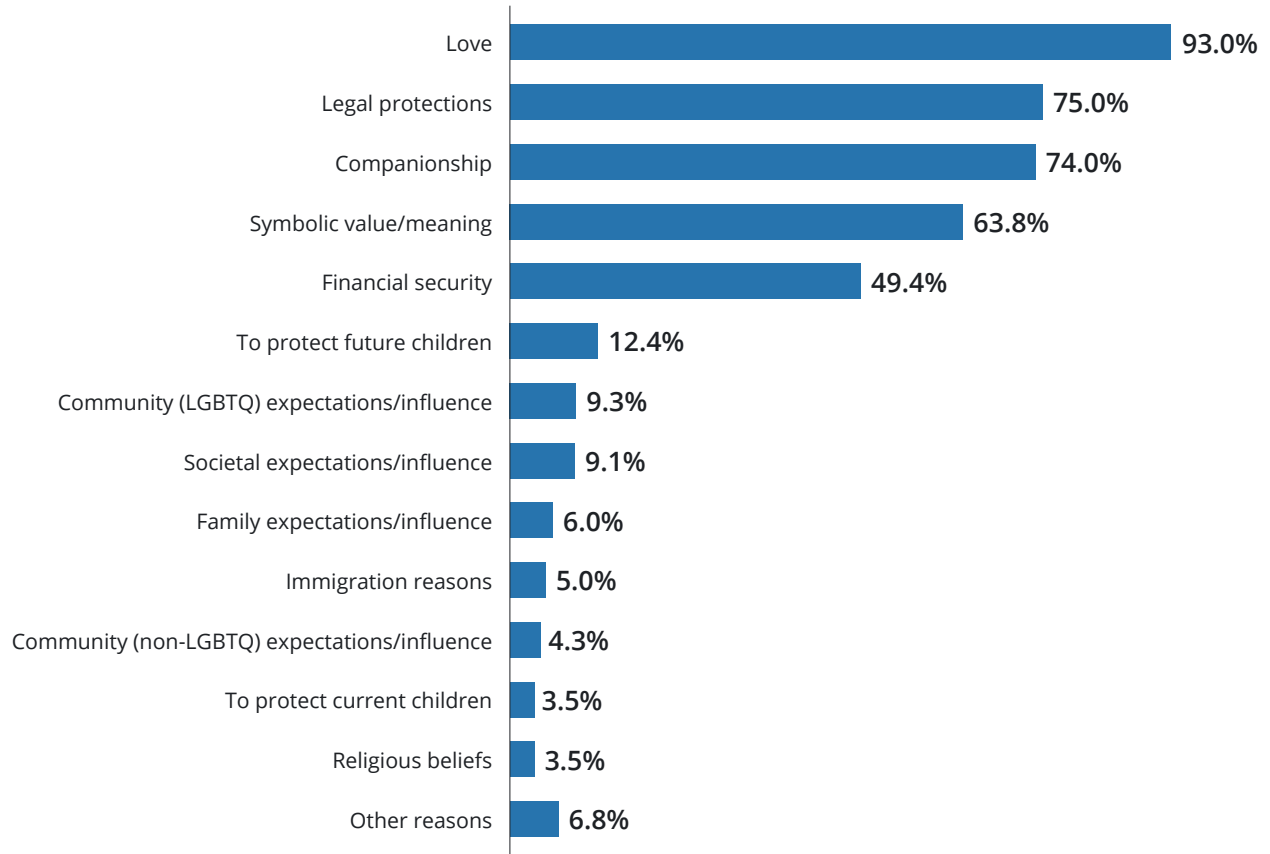


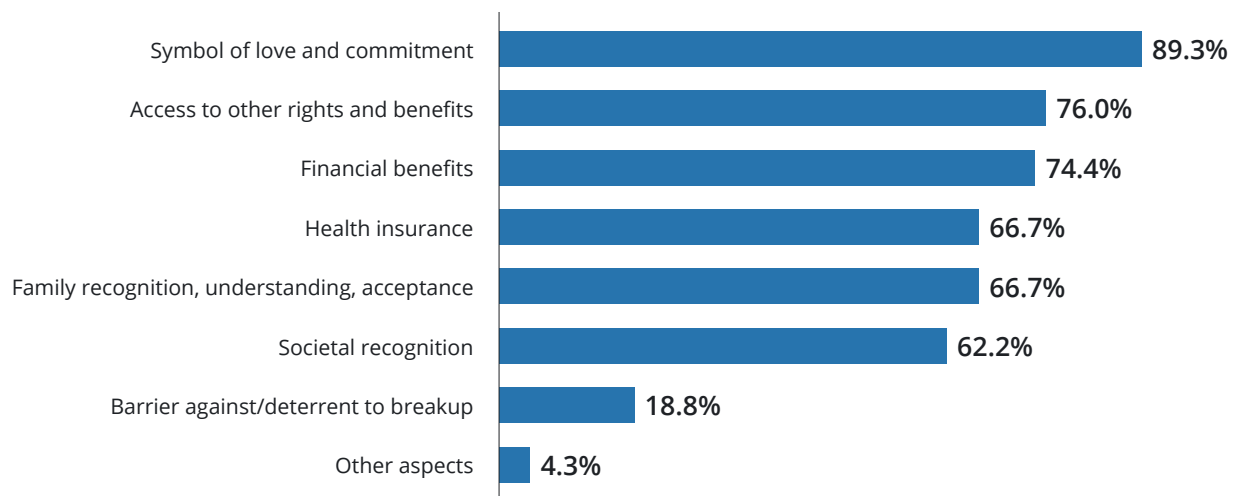
Table 1. Reasons for getting married

REASON	N	%
Love	450	93.0%
Companionship	358	74.0%
Legal protections	383	75.0%
Financial security	239	49.4%
To protect current children	17	3.5%
To protect future children	60	12.4%
Symbolic value/meaning	309	63.8%
Societal expectations/influence	44	9.1%
Community (non-LGBTQ+ ) expectations/influence	21	4.3%
Family expectations/influence	29	6.0%
Community (LGBTQ+ ) expectations/influence	45	9.3%
Religious beliefs	17	3.5%
Immigration reasons	24	5.0%

REASON	N	%
Other reasons	33	6.8%
Health insurance, health care, medical decision-making		
<i>I was diagnosed with MS in 2022, and my wife wanted to make sure if I was ever hospitalized, they had full rights. We wanted to be able to have a say over end-of-life stuff for each other and be able to make decisions for the other one posthumously if needed. It was scary to think that we wouldn't be allowed to have control over the death stuff when one of us dies and that our relatives might not honor our pronouns or names in funeral stuff when we die.</i>		
Worry about the right to marry going away		
<i>It was important to me as a marriage equality activist--we only had a 5-month window after the 2008 CA Supreme Court decision during which we knew our marriage would be legal in CA. We expected that ballot proposition 8 would pass and nullify that right (which it did, mere weeks after our wedding). In lieu of wedding gifts, we asked our guests to donate to the No on 8 campaign, but the anti-marriage proposition passed anyway.</i>		
<i>The descent after the Dobbs decision indicated that the conservative justices would review marriage equality. So we got married one week after that decision to ensure we could secure our right to marriage in case the Supreme Court overturned Obergefell v. Hodges.</i>		
<i>We were not sure if what happened in 2013 would be taken away, so we wanted to move forward with marriage in case it was taken away like they did with Prop 8.</i>		
<i>[We hoped] to be "grandfathered in" if marriage between same-sex couples became no longer sanctioned.</i>		

When asked about the positive impacts of marriage, members of same-sex couples also strongly endorsed marriage as a symbol of love and commitment (89.3%), accessing rights and benefits (76.0%), including health insurance (66.7%), financial benefits more generally (74.4%), and societal (62.2%) and family recognition (66.7%). See Table 2.

Figure 2. Positive aspects of marriage





**Table 2. Positive aspects of marriage**

POSITIVE ASPECT	N	%
Symbol of love and commitment	432	89.3%
Barrier against/deterrent to breakup	91	18.8%
Financial benefits	360	74.4%
Health insurance	323	66.7%
Access to other rights and benefits	368	76.0%
Societal recognition	301	62.2%
Family recognition, understanding, acceptance	323	66.7%
Other aspects (companionship, immigration, stability for our children, normalizes and validates queer relationships, including for LGBTQ+ youth)	21	4.3%

**Predicting financial and legal reasons for marrying.** Of interest was understanding who was especially likely to marry partly for the practical (i.e., financial, legal) benefits of marriage. Table 3 contains the results of logistic regression models predicting whether or not participants endorsed these two practical or instrumental reasons for marriage. Predictors included individual demographics (race: people of color vs. not, age, education level, participant disability status: disability vs. not), relationship/family demographics (type of couple, relationship length, family or household income, presence of children < 18), and contextual variables (LGBTQ+ state policy context, according to Movement Advancement Project [MAP] data, 2024; and perceived LGBTQ+-friendliness of one’s community).

Findings revealed that participants of color had .45 times lower odds of marrying for legal protection than white participants. Older participants were less likely to have married for financial security. More educated participants were more likely to marry for legal protections. Specifically, more educated individuals had 1.35 times greater odds of indicating legal reasons for every additional level of education (less than high school, high school, some college, college degree, master’s degree, PhD/MD/JD), such that those with doctorate or equivalent had 4.48 times greater odds than those without a high school education of citing this as a reason. Those in longer relationships before marrying were more likely to cite both legal and financial reasons for marrying. Additionally, the more LGBTQ+-friendly participants perceived their communities, the more likely they were to cite financial and legal reasons for marrying. For each additional level of perceived friendliness, participants had 1.30 greater odds of saying they married for financial reasons and 1.40 times greater odds of saying they married for legal protections.

Table 3. Predicting marrying for financial security and legal reasons

PREDICTORS	FINANCIAL SECURITY		LEGAL PROTECTION	
	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>e<sup>B</sup></i>	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>e<sup>B</sup></i>
Race (of color vs. not)	-.38 (.19)	.69	-.80 (.23)***	.45
Male Couple vs. Trans	-.14 (.27)	.87	.15 (.32)	1.16
Female Couple vs. Trans	-.34 (.27)	.71	-.08 (.30)	.92
Age	-.02 (.01)**	.98	-.01 (.01)	.99
Relationship Length	.05 (.01)***	1.05	.08 (.02)***	1.08
Education	.10 (.10)	1.11	.30 (.12)*	1.35
Family Income	.06 (.07)	1.06	.10 (.09)	1.11
Presence of Children < 18	-.23 (.28)	.79	-.32 (.32)	.73
LGBTQ+ State Policy Context (+ = more positive)	-.09 (.06)	.91	.03 (.07)	1.04
LGBTQ+ Friendliness of Community	.26 (.11)*	1.30	.34 (.12)**	1.40
Disability (self)	-.15 (.23)	.87	.31 (.27)	1.36
Constant	-.34		-1.66	

Note: To test for differences between participants in male and female couples, all models were refit, replacing trans couple with male couple as the default variable. \*p < 0.05. \*\*p < 0.01. \*\*\* p < 0.001.

## HOW MARRIAGE HAS CHANGED SAME-SEX COUPLES' LIVES

### In general

When asked how marriage changed their lives (Table 4), the majority of respondents described no change or positive changes in all areas, with over 60% of participants describing positive changes in their sense of safety and security (83.1%), life satisfaction (74.6%), and becoming closer to their partner (61.0%). Frequency of sex and exercise habits were the only areas perceived as negatively affected by over 10% of participants: 13.0% and 11.8%, respectively, indicated that these areas were negatively impacted by marriage.

Figure 3. Change in relationships and well-being after getting married

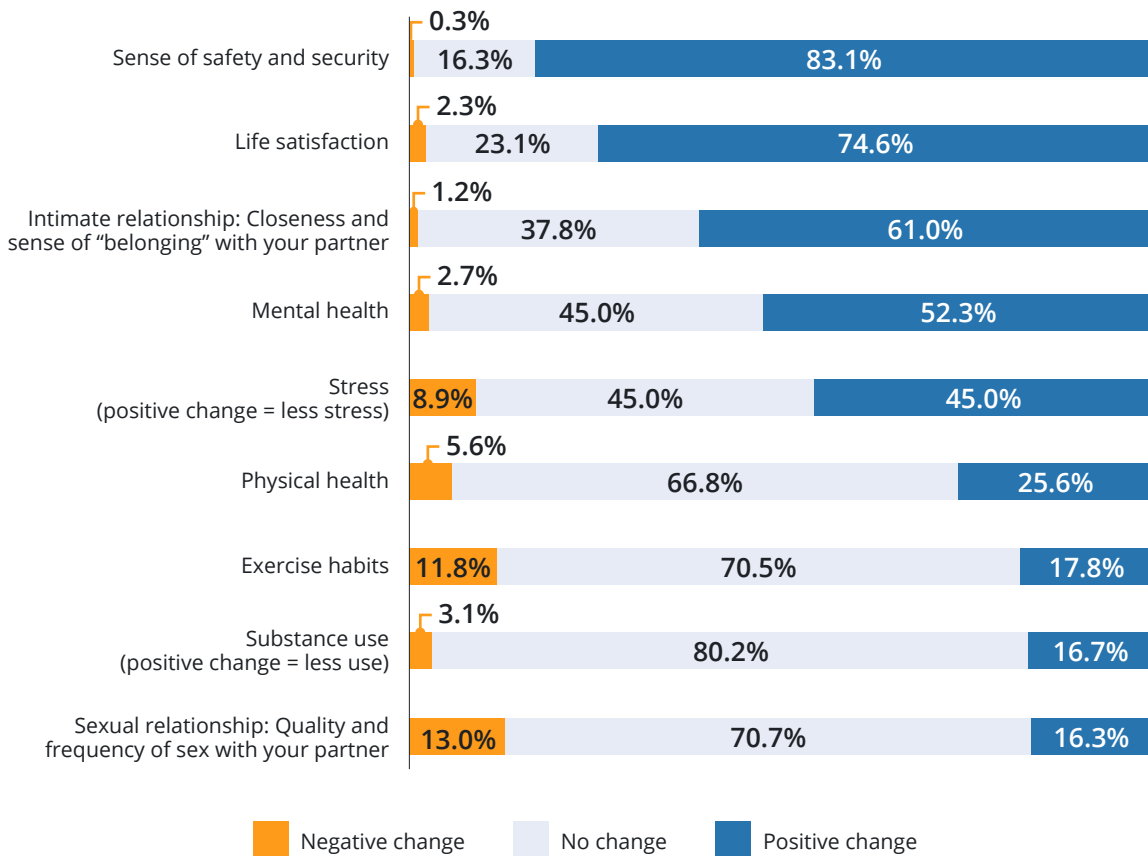


Table 4. Change in relationships and well-being after getting married

	NEGATIVE CHANGE		NO CHANGE		POSITIVE CHANGE	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Intimate relationship: Closeness and sense of "belonging" with your partner	6	1.2%	183	37.8%	295	61.0%
Sexual relationship: Quality and frequency of sex with your partner	63	13.0%	343	70.7%	79	16.3%
Mental health	13	2.7%	218	45.0%	253	52.3%
Stress (positive change = less stress)	43	8.9%	219	45.0%	218	45.0%
Physical health	27	5.6%	333	66.8%	124	25.6%
Exercise habits	57	11.8%	341	70.5%	86	17.8%
Substance use (positive change = less use)	15	3.1%	388	80.2%	81	16.7%
Life satisfaction	11	2.3%	112	23.1%	361	74.6%
Sense of safety and security	3	.6%	79	16.3%	402	83.1%

**Additional positive changes.** When asked about other areas that may have changed, participants volunteered a number of related domains, including increased social recognition for their relationship, experiencing less discrimination on the basis of marital status, and having a deeper sense of security and connection with their partner.

Many noted that they had an enhanced sense of social recognition of their relationship: it was easier to explain their relationship to others, and they experienced greater social acceptance. For example, participants shared that they felt “more comfortable and legitimized talking about [their] wife” and that they experienced a “sense of broader societal legitimacy.” Relatedly, some felt a sense of enhanced understanding by family. One participant said, “It clarified our relationship in the way family and society saw us.”

The sense of validation and social recognition that they experienced from society was personally healing, as well, for some participants. Specifically, they felt that it helped to alleviate their own or their partners’ internalized homophobia. One respondent explained, “It helped normalize our relationship, which is important because my Jamaican partner suffers with some degree of internalized homophobia herself. We struggle with her inability to integrate me into her family. And that is our hardest (only) significant struggle.”

A few, too, felt that they were less likely to be discriminated against due to the legal protections marriage offered—which was especially appreciated given the broader sociopolitical climate. One participant, for example, perceived marriage as resulting in “less discrimination due to having increased legal protections. We do now have access to lawyers and the courts, thankfully, and have, in fact, filed a lawsuit that we won through settlement. However, White Nationalism, domestic terrorism, and the near-constant oppression across society and in our community are still soul-crushing, anxiety-producing, and financially burdensome.”

Other positives mentioned included shared goals, happiness, fulfillment, feeling less alone, financial stability, expansion of their social circle and support system, and increased family closeness. For example, one participant said, “It helped us buy a house.” Another explained, “I feel like I am a part of a family. My spouse’s family has welcomed me with open arms, and it feels really nice.”

Finally, several participants noted that they were surprised by the deeper sense of security and connection they felt in relation to their partner as a result of getting married. One said, “I was (pleasantly) surprised by how much being legally married felt like a positive change in my relationship—I actually didn’t expect to feel any different, but I felt more connected to my partner.” Another said, “I feel secure in our relationship in a way I never thought would be possible. This is despite the occasional problems and issues we have. I love being married.”

**Additional negative changes.** A few mentioned some negative changes they had observed as a result of marriage. Specifically, several noted that they became less social when they got married, and one noted that they had been “discriminated against while renting because we are lesbians, which wouldn’t have come up if we weren’t legally married.” A few also mentioned increased financial stress (e.g., due to partners’ debt) and additional financial burdens due to the tax implications of marriage. A few participants noted that they traveled less now that they were married.

**Predicting positive changes.** Table 5 contains the results of logistic regression models predicting the various positive changes (i.e., whether they were present or not), with individual demographic predictors (race: of color vs. not, age, education level, disability status), relationship/family predictors (type of couple, relationship length before marriage, family income), and contextual variables (LGBTQ+ state policy context; and, perceived LGBTQ+-friendliness of one's community).

Findings revealed that participants of color were more likely to report positive consequences of marriage in the areas of sex (with 1.76 times greater odds of doing so), physical health (with 1.77 times greater odds), and exercise (with 1.71 times greater odds), than white participants, highlighting how certain benefits of marriage may disproportionately affect some groups more than others. Similarly, participants with disabilities were more likely to report positive impacts of marriage on mental health (with 1.66 times greater odds of doing so), physical health (with 2.77 times greater odds), and exercise habits (with 1.82 times greater odds), again highlighting how more vulnerable members of the LGBTQ+ community may derive particular benefits from marriage. Interestingly, older participants were more likely to report positive impacts in physical health and lower substance use than younger participants. For every additional year of age, participants have 1.02 times greater odds of reporting positive changes in physical health and lower substance use.

However, these additional benefits for more marginalized group members did not extend to all demographics. Individuals in male couples and female couples were more likely than couples with at least one trans/nonbinary individual to report positive impacts in the areas of physical health, with 2.31 times greater odds for male and 2.30 times greater odds for female couples to report positive physical health changes than trans couples. When the default category was changed from trans to male couples to test the difference between female and male couples, it showed female couples to be less likely than male couples to report lower substance abuse due to marriage, with .48 times lower odds ( $B = -.73, SE = .32, Wald = 5.18, p = .023$ ).

Participants in longer relationships before marriage were less likely to report positive impacts in closeness, sex, mental health, physical health, exercise, and substance use. For every additional year of marriage, participants have .96 times lower odds of positive changes in closeness, .95 times lower odds of positive changes in sexual relationships, .97 times lower odds of positive changes in mental health, .94 times lower odds of positive changes in physical health, .97 times lower odds of more exercise, and .95 times lower odds of lower substance use. These findings must be understood in the context of the fact that age and length of relationship before marriage are highly correlated ( $r = .48, p < .001$ ); in other words, people in longer relationships are also older.

Participants who reported an LGBTQ+-friendly community climate reported a greater sense of safety. The odds of reporting greater safety increased by 1.39 times for every additional level of LGBTQ+-friendliness from 1 (not at all friendly) to 5 (very friendly), such that those reporting a "very friendly" climate have 3.73 times greater odds than those reporting "not at all" friendly.

Table 5. Predicting positive changes in relationship and well-being after marriage

PREDICTORS	CLOSER TO PARTNER		SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP		MENTAL HEALTH		LESS STRESS		PHYSICAL HEALTH		EXERCISE		LOWER SUBSTANCE USE		LIFE SATISFACTION		SENSE OF SAFETY	
	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>e<sup>B</sup></i>	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>e<sup>B</sup></i>	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>e<sup>B</sup></i>	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>e<sup>B</sup></i>	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>e<sup>B</sup></i>	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>e<sup>B</sup></i>	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>e<sup>B</sup></i>	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>e<sup>B</sup></i>	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>e<sup>B</sup></i>
Race (of color)	.27 (.20)	1.32	.57 (.26)*	1.76	.23 (.19)	1.26	.06 (.19)	1.07	.57 (.22)*	1.77	.54 (.25)*	1.71	-.07 (.25)	.94	.31 (.22)	1.36	.00 (.25)	1.00
M v T couple	-.38 (.28)	.69	.32 (.36)	1.37	-.17 (.27)	.85	-.21 (.27)	.81	.84 (.33)*	2.31	.64 (.36)	1.89	.44 (.35)	1.55	-.21 (.31)	.81	-.65 (.37)	.52
F v T couple	.04 (.28)	1.04	.23 (.35)	1.25	-.05 (.26)	.96	.19 (.26)	1.21	.83 (.31)**	2.30	.64 (.34)	1.90	-.29 (.36)	.75	-.04 (.31)	.96	-.27 (.38)	.77
Age	-.01 (.01)	.99	.02 (.01)	1.02	.00 (.01)	1.00	.00 (.01)	1.00	.02 (.01)*	1.02	.01 (.01)	1.01	.02 (.01)*	1.02	.01 (.01)	1.01	-.01 (.01)	.99
Relat length	-.04 (.01)**	.96	-.05 (.02)**	.95	-.03 (.01)*	.97	-.02 (.01)	.98	-.06 (.02)***	.94	-.04 (.02)*	.97	-.06 (.02)**	.95	-.03 (.01)	.97	.00 (.02)	1.00
Education	-.01 (.10)	.99	-.09 (.13)	.91	-.02 (.10)	.98	.03 (.10)	1.03	-.07 (.11)	.94	-.14 (.13)	.87	-.05 (.13)	.95	.10 (.11)	1.11	.19 (.13)	1.21
Family income	.02 (.07)	1.02	-.12 (.10)	.89	.05 (.07)	1.05	-.09 (.07)	.91	-.09 (.08)	.91	-.01 (.09)	.99	-.05 (.09)	.95	.02 (.08)	1.02	-.01 (.09)	.99
LGBTQ+ state policy context	-.02 (.06)	.98	.02 (.08)	1.02	.00 (.06)	1.00	.10 (.06)	1.11	.07 (.07)	1.07	.09 (.08)	1.10	.05 (.08)	1.05	-.02 (.07)	.99	-.00 (.08)	1.00
LGBTQ+-friendly community	.03 (.11)	1.03	-.02 (.14)	.98	.10 (.11)	1.10	.02 (.11)	1.02	.02 (.12)	1.02	-.08 (.14)	.92	.15 (.14)	1.16	.14 (.12)	1.16	.33 (.13)*	1.39
Disability	-.04 (.23)	.96	.25 (.30)	1.29	.51 (.23)*	1.66	.29 (.22)	1.34	1.02 (.26)***	2.77	.60 (.28)*	1.82	.48 (.29)	1.61	.33 (.27)	1.40	.29 (.32)	1.34
Constant	1.13		-1.98		-.39		-.50		-2.59		-1.95		-2.87		-.29		.31	.71

Note: To test for differences between participants in male and female couples, all models were refit, replacing trans couple with male couple as the default variable. \*p < 0.05. \*\*p < 0.01. \*\*\* p < 0.001.



## Stability for married couples

About two-thirds (66.9%) of participants said that marriage had provided some stability to their relationships, including by providing legal protections, financial stability, mutual support, long-term planning, and a stronger sense of security and commitment in the relationship. Key themes (i.e., frequently mentioned ways that marriage had provided stability) are further explored in Table 6.

**Table 6. Impact of marriage on relationship stability**

THEME	SAMPLE QUOTES
Legal protections and security	<i>It really sews everything up from a legal standpoint and does make things feel more stable.</i>
	<i>We are legally protected from numerous and massively discriminatory policies in the U.S., and this alone is stabilizing. For example, being fired for being LGBTQIA is very destabilizing and havoc-wreaking when a person is single. I know this first hand—you lose health insurance, income, etc. Being married builds in ... a safety net that provides safety and stability.</i>
Financial stability	<i>Marriage allowed us to purchase a home.</i>
	<i>We combined income to share expenses.</i>
	<i>All life decisions are made with each other, jointly; we are responsible to and for each other.</i>
	<i>We are more focused on long-term planning.</i>
	<i>All plans are made looking to a future together.</i> <i>We focus more on mutual caregiving and health care (e.g., who will take care of whom, ensuring we are set up in case one of us is disabled/has caretaking needs).</i>
Mutual support and life/ long-term planning	<i>Being married has made me feel whole. I know that when I make decisions it is not only about me. It is about us.</i>
It is a relationship constraint/ harder to break up	<i>Dissolving a legal marriage is tough, more reason to work through issues to prevent the end of the relationship.</i>
	<i>Cannot just run away from each other if something goes wrong.</i>
	<i>Getting divorced has more consequences than breaking up; we have immigration, money, pets, and whole lives made together that are hinged on our marriage.</i>
We/I/partner feel(s) more secure and safe in our relationship	<i>Marriage has eased my anxiety around being “left,” which has increased stability for both of us.</i>
	<i>It felt safe and more permanent.</i>
	<i>Since I’m less worried about losing my partner, I have more energy to spend on myself and other relationships. It’s paradoxical, but I love it!</i>
	<i>I was diagnosed with cancer shortly after our marriage. I didn’t fear my husband leaving me during my treatment, the way some of my friends ended our relationship.</i>

THEME	SAMPLE QUOTES
It strengthened our relationship (quality, commitment)	<i>I'm less afraid to fight.</i>
	<i>Fights are resolved quicker.</i>
	<i>I feel more connected and prioritized in my wife's life.</i>

## SHARED LIFE PLANNING

Participants responded that marriage had changed their life plans in a number of ways, including plans related to becoming a parent, where to live and work, and investments and savings—both in general and in planning for retirement.

### Where to live and moving

Almost two-thirds of participants (61.4%) affirmed that marriage affected their life planning in terms of making decisions about where to live. Many elaborated that marrying meant “moving for one another whenever necessary” and “we are even more conscious of the impacts of possible moves on the other person.” One said: “Before marriage, my husband was living and working in another state. He changed his work location and moved once before moving in with me before we were married.” Another said, “Even before marriage, we were committed to staying together, but once married, we make all plans together on where to move to next and what the future will look like.” Many also noted that marriage impacted where they lived inasmuch as they had moved for each other’s jobs or to be closer to family. Said one, “We have to choose a house that’s close to both our families.”

Sometimes, issues of where to live and/or possible relocation were complex and required compromise and sacrifice. One participant, for example, explained how he stayed in his current state for his husband even though he wanted to move: “I’m more of a warmer climate person... he prefers his home state of Michigan. I live in Michigan because I love him and our marriage, but we have plans to buy a home somewhere warm and sunny for the winters.” Another shared: “Prior to marriage, I planned to and more easily could move and live in different locations and bring my work with me. Now that I’m married, the flexibility of moving isn’t as easy. It’s still possible for us, but less easy because my partner prefers to stay where his family lives.” Another “gave up my condo because my place wasn’t big enough for us and our combined pets.” Several participants had relocated (which sometimes involved selling their homes) to move in with their partners once they got married

### Working, income, and benefits

Almost two-thirds of participants (61.0%) felt that marriage affected their life planning in terms of working and earning income. Asked to elaborate, many participants articulated that marriage meant greater work/career flexibility. That is, being married enabled partners to designate one to work at a reliable or steady job so that the other could take career risks, pursue satisfying but less lucrative work, go back to school, stay home with children, or take turns being the “steady earner” to allow each other freedom to pursue new, lower-paying, or less predictable work opportunities. In a few cases, participants highlighted how one individual was able to retire early because they could count on the other’s income. Sample quotes include:

*Having a husband means I can use his insurance, and he has consistent pay which makes it easier to work for myself with inconsistent payments from clients.*

*I am able to work only once a week in a job I enjoy, being financially supported by my wife. I would not be able to financially support myself ... because of disability.*

*I was able to change careers and pursue additional education due to the stability of marriage.*

*I would not have started my own consulting business if I was single.*

*My stable job has allowed her to take time to think through her future career options.*

*There was a period of time when my spouse was working, and I was a student, and they supported me through that. Now, I am working, and my spouse is a student, and I support them. To us, part of marriage is supporting each other through these life events and using our shared finances to do so.*

*It gave me the freedom to make a career change and eventually decide not to work for pay to support both my mental health and our family.*

In addition, many explained that being married enabled them to be on their spouses' work-based health insurance (or vice versa). Some also noted that marriage meant financial security, as they now had two incomes and/or could count on the fact that if one partner was not working for some time, the other could/would support them.

In a few cases, participants spoke about how being married inspired them to work harder, more, and/or be more ambitious in their professional goals to better support their families and plan for a shared future. Said one, "Our marriage inspired me to be more ambitious in my career so that I could be a financial equal to my partner."

## **Saving, investing, and financial planning for retirement**

About 60% (59.3%) of participants said marriage affected their life planning in terms of saving, investing, and planning financially for the future (e.g., retirement). They noted that marriage pushed them to develop and work towards shared financial goals—which in turn were facilitated by (a) hiring a financial planner, (b) investing, (c) combining bank accounts and retirement savings, and (d) engaging in more long-range planning. Sample quotes include:

*We focused more on investing and retirement planning after getting married.*

*After getting married, we combined our bank accounts and committed to saving for things jointly.*

*Since we are married, I am able to contribute to my wife's 401k, and I have done that because she is currently a student and only working part-time*

*We combined accounts after we married and make all our investing decisions based on planning for retirement together. Sometimes, that means putting our combined incomes into one person's retirement accounts first, then another. Because I am 10 years younger*

*and make less income on average, being married has significantly increased my ability to save, pay off my student loans, etc. My spouse, in general, has been able to cover rent/mortgage and essentials, which has been a gift.*

Many participants, too, shared how marriage had prompted them and/or their partners to be more judicious in terms of saving and investing now that they had another individual to think about. In some cases, one partner took over the finances or supported the other in becoming more financially savvy. Said one participant, “I had to show my wife how to save for the future.” Another explained, “My wife is much more financially minded and has imparted that on me.” In other cases, it meant working together towards retirement goals and/or ensuring financial stability for the surviving partner should one partner die. Sample quotes include:

*Have to carefully make financial plans for the whole family instead of just myself.*

*I am more careful with money and more interested in saving and investing.*

*I never really cared too much about [saving and retirement]. However, marriage changed all of that. We both want to make sure we are taken care of while alive and when we pass.*

Saving, too, was mentioned not just concerning retirement and the possibility of illness or the death of one spouse but also in family planning:

*I was less into saving and planning financially before getting married, but now we are both very dedicated to putting thoughtfulness and intention into planning for the future, especially since we want to have a baby.*

*[We are] planning and saving for two and future children as opposed to living for one.*

*We are coordinating together when developing our savings plans for upcoming expenses like buying a house, saving for IVF treatment, saving for future children, and saving for retirement.*

A few participants mentioned negative aspects associated with marriage vis-a-vis saving. Namely, a few said they worried more about money, and others said they now had more bills/debt. One said, “Now, all debts, gains, and plans are ‘ours,’ not ‘mine’ and ‘yours.’”

## Access to workplace spousal benefits

Participants were asked whether they had been able to access workplace benefits that were previously unavailable to them. Over half (51.9%) said that marriage equality provided them with access to workplace health insurance benefits that had previously been unavailable. Table 7 displays their responses to this question.

**Table 7. Workplace benefits after marriage**

SINCE GETTING MARRIED ...	YES		NO		UNSURE	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Have you been able to access workplace health insurance benefits previously unavailable to you?	251	51.9%	233	48.1%		
Have you been able to access <b>other</b> workplace benefits previously unavailable to you? (e.g. dental, vision, life insurance; employee assistance programs, family discounts, airfare discounts death benefits, education benefits, invites to holiday parties)	134	27.7%	277	57.2%	85	17.6%

## Parenting

Almost one in five (19.8%) participants reported that marriage affected their plans about whether or when to have or adopt children and how many children to have. Among those under 50 years old ( $n = 263$ ), almost one in three reported this (30.4%). In some cases, they explained that adoption was finally an option (i.e., you had to be married to adopt), that they were motivated to become a parent after getting married as it seemed like the “next step,” and that marriage made parenthood more socially acceptable, and therefore it felt like a real possibility. Said one participant, “The idea of adopting/having children is more on the table now than it was before getting married.” For many, marriage was a “prerequisite” to becoming parents. As they said:

*I have been waiting to be married to have a child, so marriage allowed this to even begin.*

*I wanted to be married before adopting.*

*We plan to have children in the future and would not do so if not married. My choice of partner means we are more comfortable waiting to have children non-biologically instead of trying to conceive within a certain safe age window.*

Many elaborated on their “no” response to say that they (a) never wanted children or, less frequently, (b) brought children into the marriage.

More generally, while most participants did not want children or additional children in the future (75.4%), those who did (24.6%) typically wanted one child (42.0%) or two children (47.9%); just 10.1% wanted three or more future children. There was some discrepancy among what they felt was the most IDEAL versus most LIKELY parenting route for future children (Table 8).

Figure 4. Ideal versus likely parenthood routes (N = 119)

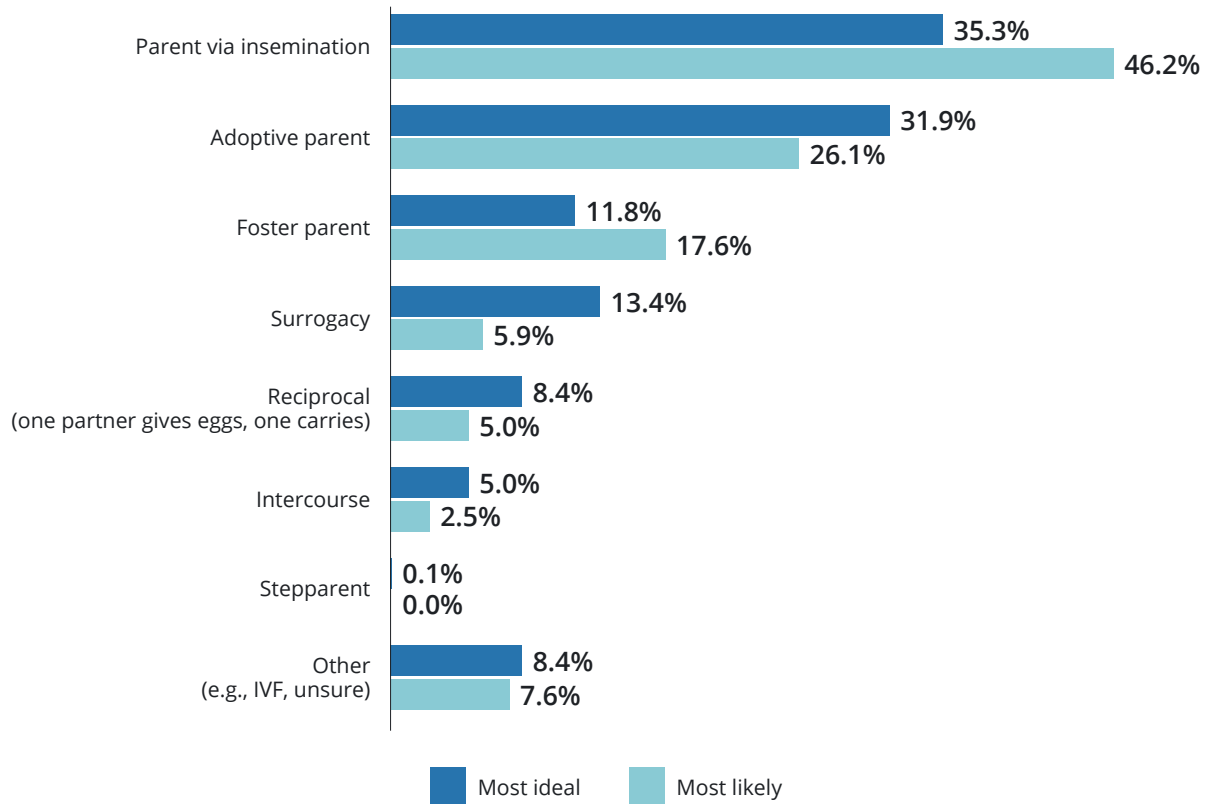


Table 8. Ideal versus likely parenthood routes (N = 119)

	MOST IDEAL		MOST LIKELY	
	N	%	N	%
Parent via insemination	38	31.9%	31	26.1%
Adoptive parent	42	35.3%	55	46.2%
Foster parent	14	11.8%	21	17.6%
Surrogacy	16	13.4%	7	5.9%
Reciprocal IVF (one partner gives eggs, one carries)	10	8.4%	6	5.0%
Intercourse	6	5.0%	3	2.5%
Stepparent	1	.08%	0	0%
Other (e.g., IVF, unsure)	10	8.4%	9	7.6%

A little less than one-third (30.8%) of participants thought they *might* want children in the future. These participants were asked about barriers or challenges that might prevent them from becoming parents via their ideal method. Endorsed barriers or challenges appear in Table 9.



Figure 5. Barriers and challenges to parenthood (N = 149)

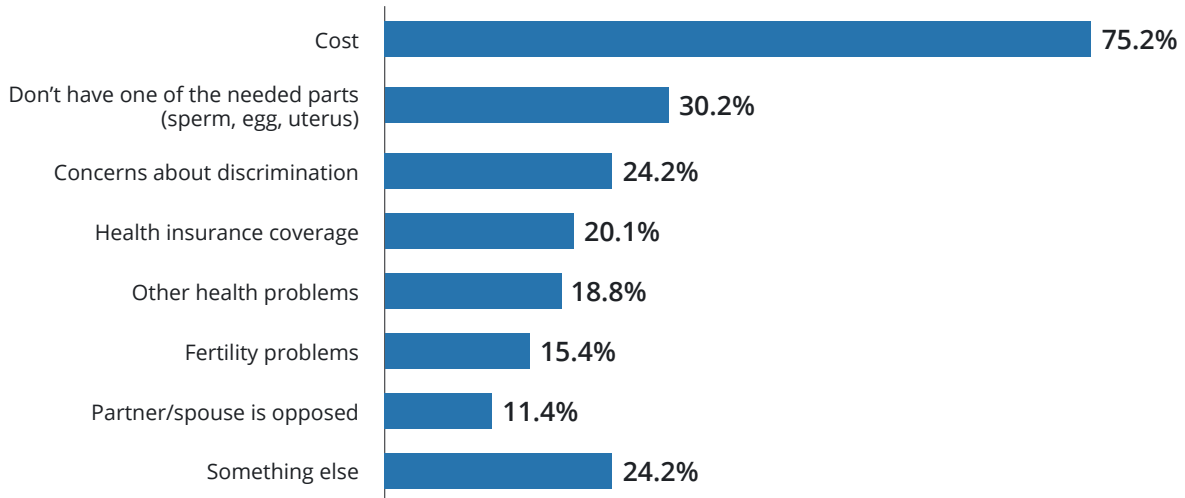


Table 9. Barriers and challenges to parenthood (N = 149)

BARRIER OR CHALLENGE	N	%
Don't have one of the needed parts (sperm, egg, uterus)	45	30.2%
Fertility problems	23	15.4%
Other health problems	28	18.8%
Health insurance coverage	30	20.1%
Cost	112	75.2%
Concerns about discrimination	36	24.2%
Partner/spouse is opposed	17	11.4%
Something else	36	24.2%
Age/too old	10	6.7%
Discriminatory laws re: adoption/foster care for same-sex couples	5	3.4%
Cost of raising children, lack of financial stability	4	2.7%
Traumatic experiences (e.g., pregnancy loss, death of child)	3	2.0%

### Stability and security for children

Participants were also asked whether they believed marriage provided stability or security for their children. Out of those with children, almost 60% (58.1%) believed marriage provided stability or security for their children. They noted that marriage provided legal protections, a greater sense of normalcy and legitimacy to the children, their friends, and others, and conveyed a sense of permanency and stability to their children. See Table 10 for further exploration of key themes and sample quotes.

**Table 10. Impact of marriage on children’s sense of stability or security (N = 148 parents)**

THEME	SAMPLE QUOTES
Legal protections and security	<i>Being married provides security to our children (i.e., no one can call into question both of our rights to make parenting decisions).</i>
	<i>Being married takes [care] of all of the extra, required proof needed to take our child to the doctor or pick her up from school.</i>
	<i>Nonbio parent can be on birth certificate of nonbio child since we are married, and all benefits like health insurance can then be shared.</i>
	<i>We felt more confident about the financial security of our kids after we got married.</i>
Conveys sense of normalcy and legitimacy to children, children’s peers	<i>Most of their friends’ parents are married, so we are the same.</i>
	<i>I think they felt better because it was the ‘normal’ thing to do around us socially.</i>
	<i>I think marriage normalized our family structure for our child.</i>
	<i>Our child can more easily communicate our relationship to people and institutions and organizations.</i>
	<i>Mentally, our kids felt safer and more equal to their peers after we got married.</i>
	<i>She was 14 when we got together, and she was very happy for us. But I think that marriage showed her and her friends that we’re just like everyone else and want the same things. She invited her friends to the wedding. She loves calling my wife her mom.</i>
Conveys sense of stability and permanence to children (emotionally beneficial)	<i>It let him know that we would always be there for him and no one was leaving.</i>
	<i>My kids knew that we were serious but this made it more serious to them.</i>

### Disability and caretaking

Participants were also asked whether they or their partner had any disabilities and how they had engaged in caregiving for their partners and/or their partners had provided caregiving for them. See Table 11. Over one-fourth of participants reported they were living with a disability, and over one-fourth reported that their partner had a disability. Just one partner had a disability in 23.1% of couples, and both partners had a disability in 15.1% of couples. In terms of caregiving, 14.5% of participants reported that they were a caregiver for their partner, and 12.4% reported that their partner was a caregiver for them. More specifically, one partner was a caregiver in 10.3% of couples, and both partners cared for each other in 5.8% of couples.

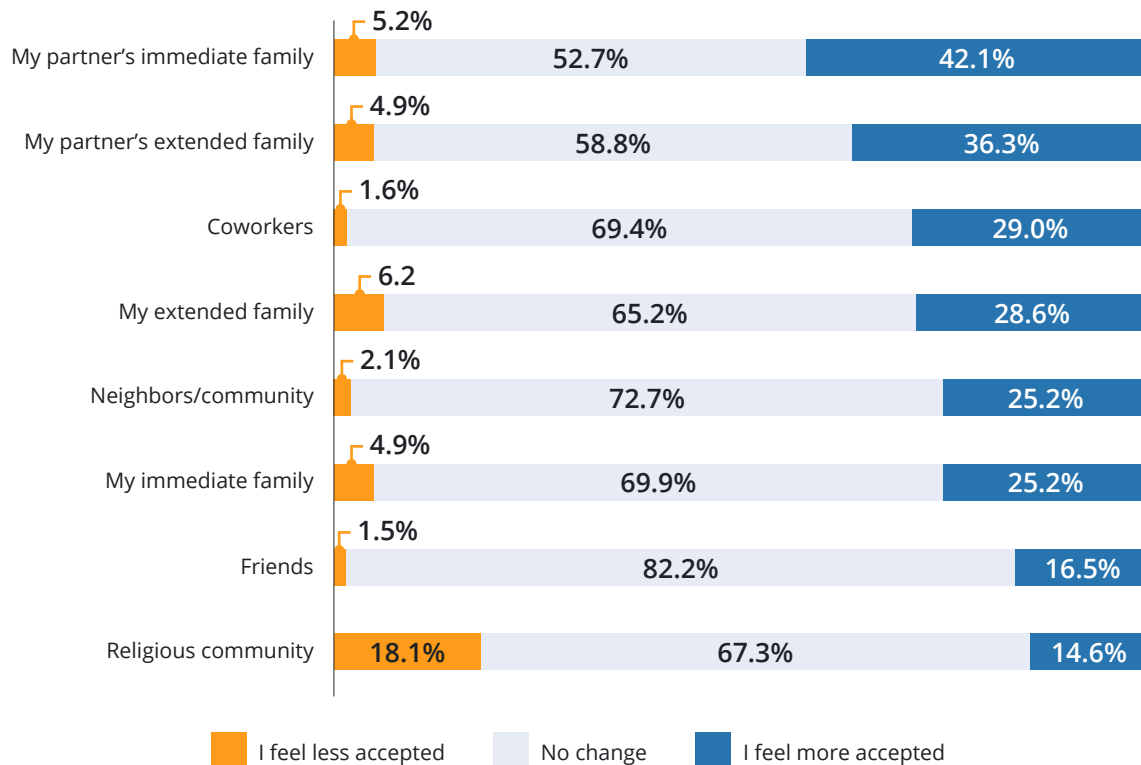
Table 11. Disability and caretaking

	YES		NO		N/A, NO DISABILITY	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Are you living with a disability?	132	27.3%	352	72.7%		
Is your partner living with a disability?	126	26.0%	358	74.0%		
Are you a caregiver for your partner?	70	14.5%	210	43.4%	204	42.1%
Is your partner a caregiver for you?	60	12.4%	248	51.2%	176	36.4%

## GREATER SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE

Participants were also asked about changes that they experienced in terms of acceptance (Table 12). Notably, most participants reported increased acceptance or no change from most sources (family, friends, neighbors, coworkers). Over a fourth of participants felt more acceptance by their partner’s immediate family (42.1%) and extended family (36.3%), co-workers (29.0%), their extended family (28.6%) and immediate family (25.2%), and their neighbors/community (25.2%).

Figure. 6 Changes in acceptance since being married



**Table 12. Changes in acceptance since being married**

	I FEEL LESS ACCEPTED		NO CHANGE		I FEEL MORE ACCEPTED		MISSING (N/A)
	N	%	N	%	N	%	n
My immediate family	23	4.9%	327	69.9%	118	25.2%	16
My extended family	29	6.2%	303	65.2%	133	28.6%	19
My partner's immediate family	24	5.2%	243	52.7%	194	42.1%	23
My partner's extended family	22	4.9%	264	58.8%	163	36.3%	35
Friends	7	1.5%	388	82.2%	78	16.5%	11
Coworkers	7	1.6%	309	69.4%	129	29.0%	39
Religious community	41	18.1%	152	67.3%	33	14.6%	258
Neighbors/community	9	2.1%	306	72.7%	106	25.2%	63
<b>Other areas/sources you perceive more/less acceptance from?</b>							
Greater acceptance: medical system/providers, colleagues, professionals in general, society							
Less acceptance: Republicans, Evangelicals							

## RELIANCE AND MUTUAL SUPPORT

Many of the ways that marriage has impacted couples discussed above are related to how couples within a marriage support and depend on one another. For many same-sex couples, this support did not start after the wedding was over but long before. Many couples spent years living together and engaged to one another in anticipation of marriage. They began blending their lives together and relying upon each other during those years. Wedding planning and cost-sharing were notable moments of pre-marriage reliance upon one another. Finally, this mutual support extended beyond the two members of the couple. When marrying, individuals gain support from in-laws as well as their spouses (Drabble et al., 2021; Sprecher & Feilmlee, 2000).

### Reliance before and during marriage

Most (93.4%) participants lived with their spouses before getting married, with 69.7% seeing living together as a step toward marriage. Participants lived with their partners for an average of 3.83 years before getting married (*Mdn* = 2.0, *SD* = 5.84). Of those who lived together, 17.7% had a domestic partnership, and 5.3% had a civil union during their time of cohabitation.

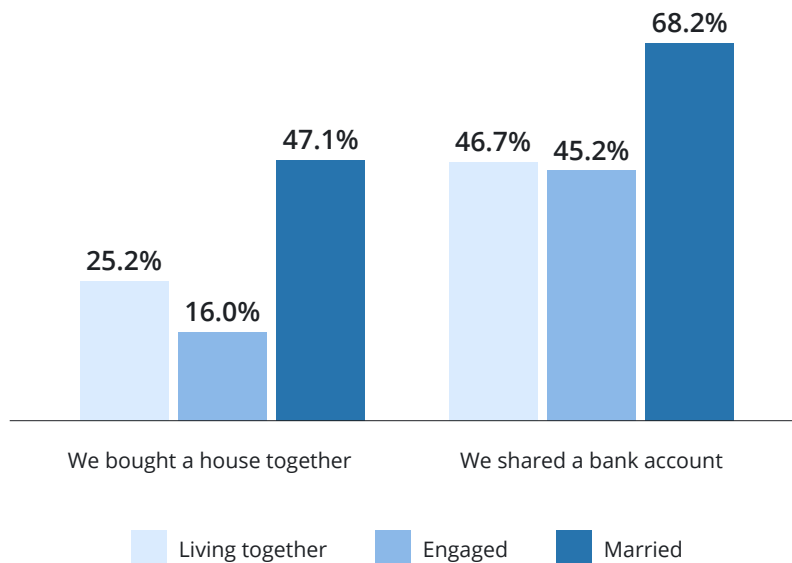
Almost three-quarters (70.9%) were engaged to their partners/spouses before they got married (regardless of whether they were living together). They were engaged to their spouses for an average of 27.3 months or more than two years (*Mdn* = 11 months). Among those who were engaged, almost all—96.2%—saw being engaged as a step towards marriage. Interestingly, living together and getting engaged were not significantly related. Of the 452 participants who lived with their spouses before marriage (93.4% of the sample), 70.8% were engaged to them; of the 32 participants who did not live with their spouses before marriage, 71.9% were engaged to them,  $X^2(1, 484) = .897, p = .54$ .

Participants were asked about various ways they had combined their lives with their partners during various possible stages of their relationship, including while living together, engaged, and married. See Table 13.

Some forms of mutual support dramatically increased when couples got married. For example, much higher percentages of these married same-sex couples bought a house together (47.1%) and shared a bank account (68.2%) than when they were just living together or engaged. For almost all of the actions that were related to parenting, the rates were higher for married same-sex couples than for those who were living together or engaged, including having or adopting children (11.6%), sharing child-raising responsibilities (18.0%), and one partner deciding not to work to devote more time to childcare (11.6%).

Other forms of mutual support were high at each stage in these couple’s relationships. For example, while they were living together, engaged, and married, approximately one in five of these couples helped pay for each other’s education costs; provided caregiving to the other when they needed help due to a health condition, disability, or aging; or moved when the other got a job in a different location. In all three stages of these relationships, over three-fourths shared responsibility for household tasks; over 60% shared savings goals, like buying a car and a house; approximately 40% had both partner’s names on the lease of a home they rented; and in approximately 10% of the couples, one partner took a lower paying job or decided not to work to devote more time to the household. Like many couples, these couples began combining their lives long before they were married.

**Figure 7. Select ways participants combined their lives with their spouses during various relationship stages**



**Table 13. Ways participants combined their lives with their spouses during various relationship stages**

BEHAVIOR/ACTION	LIVING TOGETHER (N = 452)		ENGAGED (N = 343)		MARRIED (N = 484)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Both of our names were on the lease of the home we rented	188	41.6%	143	41.7%	194	38.0%
We bought a house together	114	25.2%	55	16.0%	228	47.1%
We shared a bank account	211	46.7%	155	45.2%	330	68.2%
We had shared goals for saving, like buying a car/house	271	60.0%	207	60.3%	314	64.9%
At least one of us helped with other's education costs	98	21.7%	76	22.2%	133	27.5%
At least one of us provided caregiving to the other when they needed help due to a health condition, disability, or aging	100	22.1%	77	22.4%	142	29.3%
At least one of us moved when the other got a job in a different location	102	22.6%	50	14.6%	87	18.0%
At least one of us took a lower paying job or decided not to work to devote more time to the household	46	10.2%	34	9.9%	66	13.6%
At least one of us took a lower paying job or decided not to work to devote more time to childcare	13	2.9%	11	3.2%	38	7.9%
We shared responsibility for household tasks	403	89.2%	267	77.8%	370	76.4%
We had or adopted children	12	2.7%	5	1.5%	56	11.6%
We shared child raising responsibilities	52	11.5%	36	10.5%	87	18.0%

### Reliance on family and in-laws

In addition to members of the couple relying upon one other, marriage also meant that the couple had two families—or sets of in-laws—that they could rely upon. About 40% (40.9%) of participants and their partners relied on each other’s families of origin in times of crisis, such as to help meet financial or health care needs. Participants indicated specific types of support they had received from family (see Table 14) and provided examples of each (e.g., childcare, health care, pet sitting).

Of couples who found the need applicable to them, over three-fourths (76.1%) reported that their families had helped out during a health crisis, 60.5% had relied upon their families for financial support, 31.3% had relied on their families for occasional childcare, and 14.5% had relied on their families for regular childcare.

Notably, those who said they did not depend on family for support tended to explain this by saying that they were estranged from their families, their families lived too far away to be helpful, they did not need their help or money, their families could not afford to support them, or they simply preferred to be independent and not rely on their families.

*I have no family, and her family doesn't recognize us.*

*Luckily, we have not needed assistance.*

*We don't carry a tradition in our family to overextend financially for each other since we all have bills to pay—a classic working-class Hispanic story.*

**Table 14. Instrumental support from family of origin**

	YES		NO		N/A	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>At least one of our families of origin provides regular childcare</b>	17	3.1%	117	21.1%	420	75.8%
<i>For a period of three months, my sister-in-law provided once-a-week child care for our child when they were between 1 and 2 years old.</i>						
<b>At least one of our families of origin provides occasional childcare</b>	42	7.6%	92	16.6%	420	65.8%
<i>Both grandmothers helped with childcare.</i>						
<i>Both grandmas babysit occasionally.</i>						
<b>At least one of our families of origin has given us money</b>	286	51.6%	187	33.8%	81	14.6%
<i>Both our families of origin have helped financially with helping get our business off the ground and running.</i>						
<i>His family has lent us money to cover immediate expenses when I was out of work for a few months.</i>						
<i>My family has provided financial support to purchase a home and has supported my half of the mortgage during my time in graduate school.</i>						
<i>My father-in-law loaned us money for the down payment on the house which my husband paid back.</i>						
<i>We've needed financial help a lot, especially since the pandemic, so we've had to rely on our families for help.</i>						
<i>Both my mother-in-law and my mother have supported us financially during the process of acquiring and moving into our current home.</i>						
<i>Although my parents are against same-sex marriage due to religious beliefs, they paid off my vehicle after we got married.</i>						
<i>Both of our families have helped us during times where we were financially strained, and we have done the same for them.</i>						



	YES		NO		N/A	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>At least one of our families of origin has helped us during a health care crisis</b>	166	30.0%	218	39.4%	170	30.7%
<i>[They] assisted with travel to and from doctor's appointments after major surgery.</i>						
<i>When we have had health issues both some individuals on my wife's side have helped us with car rides and doctor appointments or cleaning our house or caring for our pets.</i>						
<i>Her mother supported me through top surgery and was my caretaker.</i>						
<i>My family of origin is more financially secure than my wife's, so they've given us financial support at times. But my wife's family is also more physically present and available to help us when we need it in person, like when I broke my leg five years ago and my mother-in-law helped with housework and meals.</i>						
<i>My husband had two heart attacks and two brain stem strokes. I take care of him 24/7. When I need a break, sometimes his family is available to stay with him so I can get some rest or medical care; otherwise, we rely on our health care to provide us with respite care for him.</i>						
<i>My wife was recently diagnosed with terminal brain cancer. Her mom has moved in with us to be the care giver while I work outside our home.</i>						

## WEDDINGS

While weddings serve many purposes and can have different meanings for different people, they are also a specific event where each of a couple's family and friends come together, committing time and resources not only for the wedding ceremony but for the months of planning and events that often precede it.

Over three-quarters of participants (77.3%) said they had a wedding. Of these, one-quarter (25.9%) said they had a religious wedding. The type of religion was most often Christian, Protestant, and non-denominational. Participants noted that it took an average of 6.07 months to plan their wedding (*Mdn* = 4.0 months, *SD* = 5.51). Among those that did not have a wedding, most said they had a justice of the peace or "city hall" wedding and/or chose to forgo a wedding because of COVID and/or aging or ailing older relatives. Sample responses were "A close friend married us in a ceremony at a swanky restaurant" and "We got married in City Hall in Seattle on the first day [they allowed them]."

Participants reported having an average of 44 guests at their wedding (*Mdn* = 25, *SD* = 49.9). Among those who held weddings, about half (48.4%) said that they invited all members of their immediate family, one-quarter (25.4%) said they invited some members of their immediate family, one-quarter (25.1%) said that they did not invite any members of their immediate family, and 1.1% indicated that because their celebration was small, they did not invite any family. Likewise, 42.8% said that all family members they invited attended, 27.0% said that some of the family members they invited attended, 5.3% said that none of the family members they invited attended, and 24.8% stated that they did not invite any family and/or this was not applicable due to having a small celebration.

Regarding their partners' immediate family, 43.9% invited all, 28.1% invited some, 26.5% did not invite any, and 1.6% said that their celebration was small/they did not invite family. Likewise, 40.4% said all

invited members attended, 26.2% said that some invited members attended, 6.1% said that no invited members attended, and 27.2% said that they did not invite any of their partner’s family and/or this was not applicable due to having a small celebration.

In terms of participants’ explanations for their families’ non-attendance, some highlighted travel-related challenges, which sometimes intersected with finances. One participant said, “My family lives in Alaska, and we got married in Colorado, so they did not attend because they didn’t have enough time off work or money to travel.” Others highlighted aging or health-related issues. Said one, “My immediate family lives out of the country and did not feel comfortable traveling due to health conditions.” Some noted estrangement and/or rejection from family. One participant explained, “Family members who did not believe we should be married due to religious or other reasons were not invited. Some family members who were invited made excuses for why they couldn’t attend, but it was likely also due to not believing we should be married.” Others cited COVID restrictions, few living relatives, and/or it was small, private, and/or last minute to highlight why family were not invited or did not attend.

Regarding who contributed to paying for the wedding, 91.4% said themselves, 86.4% said their partners, 35.8% said their family, 29.4% said their partner’s family, 14.2% said their friends, and just under 1% indicated that they received donations and/or volunteer help within the LGBTQ+ community.

### Experiences of discrimination

Participants reported experiences of discrimination both when planning their weddings and as married couples. About one in ten couples who had a wedding (10.7% of those who had weddings) said they experienced discrimination while planning their wedding, with another 7.2% indicating that they were unsure of whether they experienced discrimination. Types of discrimination included discrimination by participants’ churches or synagogues, city officials, and wedding vendors. See Table 15. Notably, some participants said they believed they avoided discrimination because they only sought out vendors and officiants known for being LGBTQ+ friendly, they lived in an LGBTQ+ friendly area, or they did not disclose that they were having a same-sex wedding to certain vendors (e.g., tent rental place).

**Table 15. Discrimination in wedding planning**

TYPE OF DISCRIMINATION	SAMPLE QUOTES
Religious	<i>I called roughly 10 “Christian” churches in Houston that flat-out refused to host our wedding.</i>
	<i>We were not able to immerse ourselves in the mikvah because of transphobia from an official. We likely could have been allowed by jumping through some hoops, but we weren’t willing to work with someone who was disrespectful of our gender identities.</i>
	<i>Our church still won’t perform LGBTQ weddings.</i>
	<i>We were not allowed to hold the ceremony in my church.</i>

TYPE OF DISCRIMINATION	SAMPLE QUOTES
City Officials	<i>We were going to be married at Justice of the Peace, but he was so hateful talking that we just left and found a minister to marry us.</i>
	<i>The local court clerk/registrar would not sign papers for us to have our wedding in Maryland (we live in Virginia). We called up the clerk/registrar in the town over, and they helped us with the appropriate paperwork.</i>
	<i>We had issues getting our marriage license with our preferred hyphenated last names. Two separate times a clerk told us different and conflicting information that we couldn't do that despite the law in our state and county stating no such thing.</i>
Vendors	<i>It wasn't overt, but while looking for a venue, we kept getting told there was no availability or they "didn't typically do things like that," which didn't seem to be the case. We were trying to marry at an apple orchard/cider mill.</i>
	<i>My wife and I experienced discrimination when buying her dress and my suit. A few places would not give us their best efforts with assistance.</i>
	<i>Some venues that we emailed about availability stopped responding once we told them there would be two brides getting married.</i>
	<i>Three photographers said no to being hired for a lesbian wedding and the one who showed up wouldn't take bridal photos of my masc wife.</i>
	<i>A conservative guitarist refused to be hired for a lesbian wedding because it "didn't align with his religious views."</i>
	<i>We went in and spoke with a florist about providing flowers for our wedding. They were excited about it and scheduled us to come back three weeks before the wedding to finalize our flowers. As we were leaving, the gentleman asked me my name. I replied, "Laura," and I thought he was going to pass out from shock. When we called back to come in for our appointment, we were told that they had overbooked and could not do our wedding.</i>

In response to an open-ended question about the impact of marriage equality, several participants wrote in responses about being discriminated against while married. Others mentioned concern about the increased visibility that marriage has brought to their relationship, making them more vulnerable to discrimination. These examples include:

*I was fired (for being married to a woman) from a job I loved shortly after I married my wife, but I soon got another job where I was not openly discriminated against.*

*My wife had a "friend" in church who called a church meeting the week after we got married to discuss whether to put my wife out of the church BECAUSE we were married.*

*While we were engaged, people would often assume that our use of "fiancé" indicated a heterosexual couple. Being married allows us to share our relationship more securely but also "outs" us in some situations.*

*Wife is a gendered term, and fiancé is not. Girlfriend can also be read platonically. So, if I'm making a nail appointment for her or I'm talking to an Uber driver, I'll hide it. You never know how someone else feels and could react badly.*

Finally, when asked about how marriage changed the level of acceptance that participants face across a variety of people and settings (family, friends, coworkers, etc.), the number of individuals who perceived a negative change in acceptance (18%) by members of their religious community outnumbered the number of individuals who perceived a positive change in acceptance (15%). See Table 12, earlier.

## IMPACT OF OBERGEFELL DECISION

In 2015, the Supreme Court extended marriage equality to all 50 states with its decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*. Almost two-thirds of participants were married post-*Obergefell* (62.8%), with 37.2% indicating they were married pre-*Obergefell*. When asked what year they legally married their partner, meaning that the marriage was legal in the state where they married, the most common (modal) year was 2015 (*Mn* = 2015, *Mdn* = 2016, *SD* = 5.72.)

Participants were asked whether and how the legalization of marriage in all 50 states made a difference to them, and almost all indicated that it did (94.2%). Approximately three-fourths of respondents affirmed that what made a difference was full legal recognition in terms of rights and responsibilities (79.5%), that marriage would be recognized in all 50 states (74.6%), and that have marriage equality validated as a constitutional right (72.5%). For over a third (34.7%), the *Obergefell* decision made a very practical difference: they lived in one of the states that didn't have marriage equality until *Obergefell* was decided.

Table 16 displays how marriage made a difference to participants from high (frequently endorsed) to low (less frequently endorsed).

**Table 16. How marriage made a difference**

	N	%
Full federal recognition in terms of rights and responsibilities made a difference to me	385	79.5%
It made a difference would be recognized in all 50 states	361	74.6%
Having the validation of marriage equality as a constitutional right made a difference to me	351	72.5%
The widespread public discussion of marriage equality and increased public support around the time of <i>Obergefell</i> made a difference to me	192	39.7%
I lived in a state that didn't have marriage equality until same-sex marriage was legalized nationwide in June 2015	168	34.7%
I did not want to get married until after marriage equality was legalized nationwide	41	8.5%
My friends started asking if we were getting married	31	6.4%
My family members started asking if we were getting married	24	5.0%
My partner did not want to get married until after marriage equality was legalized nationwide	13	2.7%
<b>Other ways it made a difference</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>10.7%</b>
<b>Taxes (filing, returns, income tax)</b>		
<i>Getting married meant that we had the right to be on each other's health insurance and taxes, which made a big difference in our quality of life.</i>		

	N	%
<b>Protection of assets (social security, inheritance)</b>		
<i>My wife is a police officer, and if something were to happen to her in the line of duty, I would be able to receive her benefits as her wife.</i>		
<b>In case of emergency, medical/hospital visits</b>		
<i>Earlier in the year, I had a medical emergency, and without the legal recognition, some of the hospital staff were hesitant in allowing my now wife access to me. So, after I was discharged, we became legally married so we didn't run into these issues again.</i>		
<b>Ability to move to a state we wouldn't have lived in pre-Obergefell, broader range of places I could live</b>		
<i>Having my marriage validated in all 50 states was a great change. It makes it easier to live in a more conservative state.</i>		
<b>Immigration</b>		
<i>We looked forward to the immigration impact of marriage being legalized nationwide. It gave my husband a path to citizenship.</i>		
<b>Family acceptance</b>		
<i>I come from a somewhat evangelical Christian family. It was tough to gain acceptance from them, and their treatment of us as a couple greatly changed for the better after we got married. They clearly had more respect for my partner and my partnership.</i>		
<b>Legal protections for current/future children</b>		
<i>Legal marriage lowers some of the scariest hurdles for queer couples who want to have children and have both partners recognized as legal parents of those children.</i>		
<b>Could stay married after gender transition</b>		
<i>We were legally opposite genders when we were married, then later my spouse legally changed gender marker.</i>		
It did not make a difference to me at all	28	5.8%

When asked in an open-ended manner how marriage made a difference, the participants' qualitative responses echoed and nuanced the quantitative items they endorsed, highlighting additional areas of note. Participants emphasized both the symbolic and practical aspects of marriage as valuable to them, as illustrated by Table 17 and the following quotes:

*The court ruling in 2015 gave me hope that if/when I got married, we would be legally recognized as married, even if local governments tried to pass legislation against it. Having legal precedent at a national level made me much more comfortable.*

*Our getting married was not anything we saw as a necessity since he was at retirement age, and I was a great deal younger then. In fact, we lose out on federal support now because I'm disabled [and] early retired ... but the sacrifice is worth it to us as a statement that we can be legally same-sex married.*

*We did not necessarily view legal marriage as a "confirmation" of our commitment to each other since we don't need the state to approve of our relationship for us to understand our dedication and love for each other. We married after we had already bought a house together (and took out a 30-year loan!) and because it made legal/financial sense. But we were already emotionally and personally committed before our legal marriage.*

Table 17. Open-ended responses regarding how marriage equality made a difference

KEY THEME	SAMPLE QUOTES
Federal recognition helped address various problems with leaving marriage equality rights to the state	<p><i>After the on-again/off-again marriage situation in California (with Proposition 8), federal recognition was the only way the issue was going to be taken out of the hands of bigoted state and local politicians.</i></p>
	<p><i>I was pleased once gay marriage was codified into national law as I feared our marriage in New York State would not be recognized in Ohio/could be invalidated by some Ohio law.</i></p>
	<p><i>My home state of Tennessee would never have legalized same-sex marriage, so the Obergefell decision was really impactful for me.</i></p>
	<p><i>My wife and I met in Oklahoma and lived there until 2014. Part of why we moved was because we wouldn't be able to marry in that state legally and because of the uncomfortable public opposition to marriage equality in our community.</i></p>
Medical and financial protections, security	<p><i>It gave us protection in the form of decisions about our lives; it gave us access to benefits we hadn't had before (like spousal access to health insurance, life insurance, etc.), and it protected us.</i></p>
	<p><i>No more worries about greedy kin swooping in and making me homeless if she dies first. No more being kept from my beloved in the hospital because I wasn't "family." Those indignities are now a thing of the past</i></p>
	<p><i>Before we were married, my husband needed urgent medical care, and I was very concerned that the hospital would not permit visitation or other access even though we were domestic partners at the time. Thankfully, this concern was unfounded. Being married has given us the assurance that we have protections in place that we might not otherwise have had.</i></p>
Protections amidst shifting sociopolitical climate	<p><i>We ... wanted to make sure that we got married BEFORE the rising fascism in this country stripped it away again.</i></p>
	<p><i>At first, we didn't care about the piece of paper but when Roe vs Wade got overturned, we got nervous.</i></p>
Greater choice in where to live and travel	<p><i>It was a relief when we could get married in a neighboring state.</i></p>
	<p><i>Knowing that we love to travel, we wanted to have that sense of security.</i></p>
	<p><i>My home state of Tennessee would never have legalized same-sex marriage, so the Obergefell decision was really impactful for me. It made me feel seen and recognized even in my primarily Republican state.</i></p>
Validation and legitimacy	<p><i>Glad to have the same equality as straight people. So many have fought for that, and now we actually get to live it.</i></p>
	<p><i>Using the right names creates visibility and makes it difficult for those who prefer to ignore us and put us back in the closet. Today, that legal standing bears a power that we never felt before, that only heterosexual partners could, and it does change our outlook on what a future might look like together.</i></p>



KEY THEME	SAMPLE QUOTES
Validation and legitimacy (continued)	<i>It increased the legitimacy of my relationship and sexual identity in our culture as a whole, as well as my professional career.</i>
	<i>Banks, loan officers, tax preparers, doctors, hospitals ... all treated us as spouses. We were never denied access because our marriage wasn't recognized.</i>
	<i>Our relationship to each other is taken much more seriously by people who don't know us well. For example, while traveling together or checking into a hotel, we encounter fewer questions/less suspicion when we say, "my wife" versus "my partner." My wife has an easier time helping me out in medical settings (checking me in for doctor's appointments, etc.) now that we're married than when she was my partner.</i>
	<i>From 2003-2009, [I was with] my partner of 7 years. We had what could be considered a marriage, but I could socially call it a partnership. Separating from him felt like a divorce, but I could only call it a break-up. There was no legality to what we had.</i>
Family acceptance and inclusion	<i>My wife's extended family started inviting me to their family gatherings (ex., Christmas parties) after we got married. They had those parties for years while we were dating, but I was not invited prior to marriage.</i>
	<i>Because my wife and I are both asexual, our families didn't take our relationship seriously until after we got married, despite being together for a very long time. However, once we got married, my parents began treating her with the same respect they do my brother-in-law and sister-in-law.</i>
	<i>Family members take my relationship more seriously now that we are married.</i>
Protections amid gender transition	<i>We were married as a heterosexual couple. I transitioned in 2019 legally/ name/birth certificate. So, the above endorsements make our marriage now as a same-sex couple seem more secure and less likely to be dismissed.</i>
We are a role model to LGBTQ+ youth, young adults	<i>I love that the rings on my fingers can do a lot of talking for me. I love being able to talk with LGBTQIA youth and their parents and prove that there's a path forward that is joyful and not strange. The things my mother feared for me—being alone, being mistreated—Mom's been able to see me with my wife and be happy/relieved about it ... that took a long time!</i>
Protection against racism	<i>As a Hispanic gay man whose first language isn't English, I am less and less "corrected" when I say something that might not be grammatically correct [now that I am married].</i>
	<i>As an interracial couple, I find I am more apt to be considered and/or recognized. I am less likely to be questioned 'why' when he is with me.</i>

### Concerns about the future of *Obergefell*

Asked about whether they anticipated a challenge to *Obergefell* (either invalidation of their marriage or inability of future couples to get married), more than half of the sample said yes (53.7%), with almost one-third (29.5%) indicating that they were unsure, and only 16.7% stating that they did anticipate such a challenge.

**Predicting expectation of challenge.** A logistic regression was conducted to predict which participants were most likely to anticipate a challenge to the *Obergefell* ruling. The outcome was yes, expects challenge vs. no, and unsure. Race (of color vs. not), education, age, disability status, type of couple, family income, LGBTQ+ state policy context, and LGBTQ+ friendliness of one’s community were included as predictors. Findings revealed that male couples and female couples were less likely than trans couples to expect a challenge. The odds of individuals in male couples expecting a challenge were .53 times less than individuals in couples with at least one trans or binary member, while the odds of individuals in female couples were .55 times less than individuals in trans couples. The higher an individual’s family income, the more likely they were to expect a challenge, with the odds of expecting a challenge 1.15 times more likely for every additional \$50,000 of income (up to \$300,000). Thus, individuals with family incomes  $\geq$  \$300,000 would be 2.31 times more likely to expect a challenge than those with family incomes  $<$  \$50,000.

**Table 18. Predicting expectation that marriage equality will be legally challenged or threatened**

PREDICTORS	B (SE)	e <sup>B</sup>
Race (of color vs. not)	-.28 (.19)	.75
Male couple vs. trans	-.65 (.27)*	.53
Female couple vs. trans	-.59 (.26)*	.55
Age	.00 (.01)	1.00
Education	-.01 (.10)	.99
Family income	.14 (.07)*	1.15
LGBTQ+ state policy context	-.01 (.06)	.99
Community LGBTQ+ friendliness	-.14 (.11)	.87
Disability	.27 (.23)	1.31
Constant	.74	

Note: To test for differences between participants in male and female couples, all models were refit, replacing trans couple with male couple as the default variable. \* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Asked how concerned they were about the possibility of marriage equality being overturned, almost 80% (79.3%) said they were very (40.9%) or somewhat (38.4%) concerned; 5.2% indicated neutral, 11.6% said not very, and 3.9% said not at all concerned.

**Predicting concerns about challenge.** A multiple regression model was fit to predict which participants were most likely to be concerned about a challenge to *Obergefell* (very/somewhat versus neutral, not very, and not at all). Race (of color vs. not), education, age, disability status, type of couple, family income, presence of children under 18, LGBTQ+ state policy context, and LGBTQ+ friendliness of one’s community were included as predictors. See Table 19.

Findings revealed that trans couples were more concerned than both male couples and female couples. Older participants were more concerned than younger participants. Finally, less educated participants were more concerned than more highly educated participants.



**Table 19. Predicting concern about a challenge to marriage equality**

PREDICTORS	B (SE)
Race (of color vs. not)	-.09 (.10)
Male couple vs. trans	-.79 (.14)***
Female couple vs. trans	-.62 (.14)***
Age	.01 (.004)**
Education	-.14(.05)**
Family income	.04 (.04)
Presence of children < 18	.00 (.15)
LGBTQ+ state policy context	-.02 (.03)
Community LGBTQ+ friendliness	-.01 (.06)
Disability	.10 (.12)

Note: To test for differences between participants in male and female couples, all models were refit, replacing trans couple with male couple as the default variable. \* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

When asked if they had taken any steps and/or made any decisions out of concern that marriage equality might be challenged, one-quarter (25.2%) said yes. Asked to explain or elaborate, participants offered various examples and illustrations of actions they had taken to protect themselves and/or their families. As Table 20 illustrates, some sped up their timeline for marriage in part due to concerns about marriage equality being challenged and/or the changing political climate. Several mentioned the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, as well as the election of President Trump, as key events that prompted them to marry. Others sought second-parent adoptions to ensure that their legal relationship with their children was protected, independent of marriage.

**Table 20. Steps taken out of fear of challenge to *Obergefell***

THEME	SAMPLE QUOTES
We got married (prompted by the changing political climate, Trump, <i>Dobbs</i> )	<i>After Roe v. Wade, we decided not to wait until fall and got married over the summer.</i>
	<i>We got engaged the day that the Supreme Court ruled on the <i>Dobbs</i> decision and got married one week after.</i>
	<i>We got married six months earlier than planned due to fear of the Supreme Court overruling [marriage equality].</i>
	<i>We had my wife (non-biological parent) do a second-parent adoption for both kids even though we were married when they were born, and she's on the birth certificates.</i>
	<i>The changing political environment probably influenced my decision to marry sooner rather than later.</i>
	<i>The decision to get married was heightened due to Trump being in office.</i>
	<i>We chose to get married as soon as Trump was elected because we feared that our right to get married would disappear if we didn't do it before he took office in 2017.</i>

THEME	SAMPLE QUOTES
<p>We sought to protect our legal relationship to our children (e.g., via second-parent adoptions)</p>	<p><i>We completed second-parent adoptions for both of our children in case of any legal concerns. We hadn't done one for our second daughter, but after the Supreme Court overturned Roe, we moved quickly to complete it.</i></p>
	<p><i>I'm less concerned with marriage equality itself and more concerned with parental rights. I know they go hand in hand—but since parental rights aren't the same around the country, I feel like it would be much easier to erode those rights.</i></p>
<p>We completed/updated legal documents (powers of attorney, wills, trusts, etc.)</p>	<p><i>When we got to Ohio in 2019, and the cultural climate was turning more broadly fascist, we immediately got our life planning documents done (POS, Healthcare living will, revocable trust, etc.).</i></p>
	<p><i>Our legal documents—wills, POAs, health directives—are written to still be valid if the legality of our marriage is changed.</i></p>
	<p><i>We got additional legally binding documents created (e.g., right of attorney) that were made separately from our marriage, just in case our marriage would be considered invalid in the future. Basically, all the documents that come automatically with marriage, we did again after being married to make sure the legal status of our marriage would not matter for other rights/documents.</i></p>
<p>We sped up the timeline for parenthood</p>	<p><i>We've decided to start having children earlier than we otherwise might to ensure when our children are born, they will be born with legal connections to both parents because of marriage.</i></p>

Concerns about the future of marriage equality, as well as the current anti-LGBTQ+ climate in many states, caused many participants to consider moving to another state or another country. For example, they shared:

*We have been vacationing in other cities to explore potential places to move to in the event that the current politicized Supreme Court strikes down marriage equality or leaves it to individual states to decide. We would anticipate Texas enacting homophobic laws and would move somewhere safer (most probably somewhere in California).*

*We are talking about moving to a state where [marriage equality] would not be challenged.*

*My husband is a dual citizen of another country and has two passports. We have secured dual citizenship and passports for our children. We have made initial arrangements to deal with finances and immigration should it be necessary for us to move out of the United States.*

*We've planned with a relative the possibility of moving to a country that's LGBTQ+ friendly*

Participants were asked a number of questions about moves and moving, reasons for and barriers to moving, and future potential moves. Participants reported an average of 4.3 moves in the past 20 years (*Mdn* = 3.0, *SD* = 3.78). Just over half (51.4%) said they had moved since they were married. They were asked to consider their most recent move (to the state where they now resided) and their reasons for moving. As Table 21 indicates, the most prominent reasons for their most recent moves were employment, financial, and family-related. Only approximately 5% of the couples had already

moved because of concerns about LGBTQ+ laws or because of fears of losing rights as an LGBTQ+ person or as a person in a same-sex marriage.

**Table 21. Most recent move: reasons for moving**

REASONS FOR MOVING	N	%
Employment reasons	165	34.1%
Cost of living	114	23.6%
Be closer to family	108	22.3%
Social-political climate	72	14.9%
Weather	60	12.4%
Tourism/things to do	42	8.7%
Concerns about anti-LGBTQ+ laws	25	5.2%
Fears of losing rights as an LGBTQ+ person/person in a same-sex marriage	22	4.5%
<b>Other reasons</b>		
Housing-related (e.g., bought a house, moved to a larger home, downsizing), education (e.g., college, graduate school), school district, illness/death (e.g., of partner, of parent/s), more prominent LGBTQ+ community		

However, concerns about anti-LGBTQ+ laws and fears about losing marriage equality are motivating a number of couples to consider moving in the future. Asked about whether they currently wanted to move out of state, over one-quarter (29.0%) indicated that they did. Specifically, 11.0% indicated they very much wanted to move, and 18.0% indicated they somewhat wanted to move. A total of 17.4% said neutral, 18.0% stated that they did not really want to move, and 35.7% indicated that they did not want to move at all.

Considering just those participants who indicated that they very much or somewhat wanted to move, we asked them about their reasons for wanting to move and perceived barriers to moving. See Table 22 for reasons and Table 23 for barriers. Among those who indicated that they very much or somewhat wanted to move, the top three reasons for wanting to move were related to the socio-political climate (52.9%), concerns about anti-LGBTQ+ laws (48.6%), and fears about losing rights an LGBTQ+ person and/or as a person in a same-sex marriage (43.6%). Of note is that when asked about the likelihood of moving in the next two years, from 0-100%, participants generally felt that there was a 47% likelihood (*Mn* = 47%, *Mdn* = 47%, *SD* = 35.6%).

Figure 8. Reasons for wanting to move (N = 140)

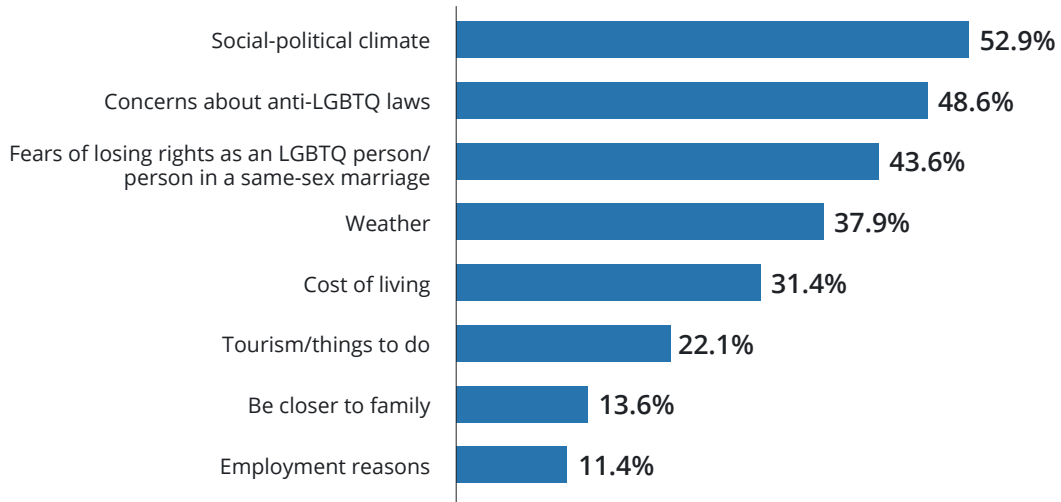


Table 22. Reasons for wanting to move (N = 140)

REASONS FOR WANTING TO MOVE	N	%
Social-political climate	74	52.9%
Concerns about anti-LGBTQ+ laws	68	48.6%
Fears of losing rights as an LGBTQ+ person/person in a same-sex marriage	61	43.6%
Weather	53	37.9%
Cost of living	44	31.4%
Tourism/things to do	31	22.1%
Be closer to family	19	13.6%
Employment reasons	16	11.4%
<b>Other reasons</b>		
Fear of losing access to trans-affirming health care	4	
<i>As a trans person, Utah is becoming unsafe for me.</i>		
Scared, disgusted about the anti-LGBTQ+ political environment, government in my state	3	
For retirement	3	
Climate change	2	
Want to live in a city	2	

**Table 23. Barriers to moving (N = 140)**

BARRIERS TO MOVING	N	%
Family is here	78	55.7%
Hassle of moving	78	55.7%
Cost of living	69	49.3%
We love our home	38	27.1%
We love our community	34	24.3%
Concerns about anti-LGBTQ+ laws	21	15.0%
Caregiving responsibilities (e.g., for older family members)	19	13.6%
Social-political climate	15	10.7%
Fears of losing rights as an LGBTQ+ person/person in a same-sex marriage	12	8.6%
Weather	10	7.1%
Don't want children to have to move schools	8	5.7%
Tourism/things to do	3	2.1%
<b>Other barriers</b>		
Finding a job, career considerations	15	
Cost of moving, starting over, finances	14	
Partner does not want to	3	
No equity in house yet	2	
Health care challenges/finding new providers	2	
Friends are here/existing social support	1	
Climate change	1	
Waiting for partner to finish education	1	

**Predictors of desire to move.** Table 24 reports the findings of a logistic regression predicting desire to move (somewhat or very much). Individual-level demographics (of color vs. not, age, disability vs. not, education, employed vs. not), couple-level demographics (type of couple, family income, presence of children < 18), and contextual variables (LGBTQ+ state policy context, perceived community LGBTQ+ friendliness) were included as predictors. Findings revealed that older participants were less likely to want to move. For every year of age, the odds of wanting to move are .98 smaller. Those with disabilities were more likely to want to move, with odds of 2.34 times greater than those without disabilities. Individuals living in states with more positive climates were less likely to want to move. The odds of wanting to move were .68 times lower for each additional level of climate positivity from 1 (negative overall policy) to 5 (most positive overall policy), such that those in states with the most positive policies had .21 times lower odds than those in states with the least positive policies. Those who were in more LGBTQ+-friendly communities were less likely to want to move. For each level of perceived LGBTQ+ friendliness from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very friendly), they have .74 times lower odds of wanting to move, such that those in “very friendly” communities have .30 lower odds than those whose communities are “not friendly at all.”

**Table 24. Predictors of desire to move**

PREDICTORS	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>e<sup>B</sup></i>
Race (of color vs. not)	-.14 (.23)	.87
Male couple vs. trans	-.01 (.31)	.99
Female couple vs. trans	-.41 (.31)	.66
Age	-.02 (.01)*	.98
Education	-.18 (.12)	.84
Family income	.09 (.09)	1.09
Employed	.18 (.26)	1.19
Presence of children < 18	.05 (.33)	1.05
LGBTQ+ state policy context	-.39 (.07)***	.68
Community LGBTQ+ friendliness	-.30 (.12)*	.74
Disability	.85 (.26)***	2.34
Constant	2.59	

Note: To test for differences between participants in male and female couples, all models were refit, replacing trans couple with male couple as the default variable. \* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

## CONCLUSION

It is worth noting that many of the open-ended responses to the final survey question, “Is there anything else you want to add?” centered on the gratitude and delight participants experienced in relation to being married. Some admitted that growing up, they did not consider marriage a key life goal and/or something they would aspire to. And yet, they took the time to emphasize what a profound difference it had made in their life:

*As a gay person, I don't like to admit the effect legal marriage has had on my life, but it's hard to deny. I am cognizant that, not at all long ago, this was not an option for a person in my type of relationship. And I am eternally grateful for those who suffered so my path was not so difficult. I am optimistic but realistic about the current climate in our country ... But whatever the legal framework may be, my wife and I are committed to each other and our family and will ensure our protections.*

*Growing up, marriage was never an important “goal” or expectation. In fact, the prospect of marriage was something I kind of dreaded before I became comfortable with being gay. When Massachusetts suddenly (to my way of thinking) was on the verge of legalizing same-sex marriage, at first, I saw no reason to get married. But then it seemed more and more important to bolster the legitimacy for others to whom it was crucially important, should the powers that be determine they wanted/could rescind the legality. Having been legally married for close to 20 years now, I have no regrets but also don't see that this hetero “stamp of approval” has changed my life and relationship with my husband in anything but relatively minor ways (tax benefits, easing perceptions of more rigid neighbors, etc.). That said, I can honestly say I'm delighted to be married to this particular partner.*

*I never thought I would be married. I was queer and single for so long I just thought that that was the way things would always be. When I met my spouse, my world changed. I now—for the first time—have love in my life, regardless of the challenges. I love being married.*

*When I was younger, I was in long-term relationships, but lack of access to marriage and/or lack of desire affected my decisions on the topic. As I aged, I realized a “traditional” marriage could be something I desired. My decision to marry at an older age has worked out well.*

*We love each other deeply and are committed to staying together and sharing our lives.*

*Marriage is an amazing lifelong journey that no one should ever be deprived of!!!!*

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