

# [For as long as the institution of marriage has bee](https://assignbuster.com/for-as-long-as-the-institution-of-marriage-has-bee/)

[Family](https://assignbuster.com/essay-subjects/family/), [Marriage](https://assignbuster.com/essay-subjects/family/marriage/)

n around, so too has the belief that itrepresents the union of one man and one woman. Now gay men and lesbians are challenging that
institution. They believe that their relationships mean the same in their sphere as heterosexual
marriages do in our sphere. Homosexuals would like to see their marriages legalized.
In 1991 three gay couples filed a lawsuit, in Hawaii, for denying them marriage licenses.
They claim that the refusal amounts to gender discrimination, which violates the Equal Rights
Amendment. Judge Kevin Chang ruled, in 1996, that same-sex couples have the right to legally
marry. This ruling makes Hawaii the first state to recognize that gay and lesbian couples are
entitled, by law, to the same privileges as heterosexual married couples (CNN). Under the Full
Faith and Credit clause of the Constitution, this also forces all states to recognize these marriages
as far as federal benefits are concerned. Congress has approved a bill, the Defense of Marriage
Act, that will allow states to decide whether to recognize homosexual marriages. The second part
of the bill would define " for federal purposes" as the union of a man and a woman. Under such a
definition gay and lesbians, even if they win the right to marry in Hawaii or elsewhere, would not
be able to file joint federal tax returns, claim federal pension, or survivor's benefits, or be allowed
to file for green card status (Gallagher 21).

I don't feel that marriages between gays or lesbians should be given the same status as
heterosexual marriages. Since when do gay people think they can broaden the institution of
marriage to include themselves? They shouldn't be able to. The institution of marriage is
recognized by the church, homosexuality isn't. I don't feel that gay people have given a reason
that carries enough weight for the government to legalize same-sex marriage.

Should gay people fight for the right to marry? Gay rights activists say absolutely. Gay
couples should be afforded the same benefits as heterosexual couples. The legal status of
marriage rewards the two individuals with substantial economic and practical advantages.
Married couples can file joint tax returns. Social security provides benefits for surviving spouses
and their dependents. They can inherit money and property from one another without a will.
They are immune from testifying against a spouse, and marriage to an American citizen gives a
foreigner the right to residency in the United States. Another advantage would be health
insurance provided by employers. These benefits usually include the employee and their spouse.
Employers generally will not include a partner who is not married to an employee, whether of the
same sex or not. Very few insurance companies will extend benefits to domestic partners' who
are not married (OUT/LOOK 234-235).
Gay marriages are highly emotional topics in the 90s. Many people feel that gay marriages
would show heterosexual people how much two people can love each other even if they are of the
same sex. Homosexual relationships are more than just sex with someone of the same gender.
Homosexual relationships include feelings and being able to share those feelings with the person
you love. " People have become used to the idea of defining gay people solely in terms of sexual
acts," says Gregory Herek, a research psychologist at the University of California, Davis.
I think many heterosexuals get very nervous when they have to think of gay
people in terms of relationships, because it challenges the way they have always
thought about gay people. I find it interesting that the same people who condemn
homosexuality as being a promiscuous lifestyle also say they're against gay
marriage because they wouldn't want to recognize stable gay relationships, says
Herek (Gallagher 24).

Rep. Barney Frank asks, " How can you argue that a man and woman in love are somehow
threatened because two women down the street are also in love?" Later, he put the question in
more personal terms. Frank said he respects the marriages of fellow committee members but
added, " I don't understand for a minute how I demean them by living with a man" (U. S. House).
Most people, when asked the question " What is your opinion of gay relationships?", their first
response encompasses sex, promiscuity and AIDS. When asked about heterosexual relationships
they generally answer with love, companionship, and families. If same-sex marriage is made legal,
the next generation won't think of it as taboo. It will just be another way of life. All of the
controversy has opened the door to discuss families, parenting, and equality for lesbians and gays.
They believe that they will be able to raise children in a stable, loving household as most children
have with heterosexual marriages. The law generally favors marital relationships as they will do
everything to enhance the rights of individuals who enter into it. And marriage will end a
negative: their sexual lives no longer will be considered felonious, which negatively affects fights
ranging from child custody to civil rights (Graff 12). Lesbian and gay men do not seek a special
place in America but merely to be a full and equal part of America, to give back to society without
being forced to lie or hide or live as second-class citizens. Andrew Sullivan, senior editor of The
New Republic says, " At some point in our lives, some of us are lucky enough to meet the person
we truly love. And we want to commit to that person in front of our family and country for the
rest of our lives. Gay marriage seeks to change no one else's rights or marriages in any way. It
seeks merely to promote monogamy, fidelity and the disciplines of family life among people who
have long been cast to the margins of society" (Sullivan 26).

Some religious leaders are the most forceful advocates of same-sex marriage. In Hawaii
alone, many faiths such as the Reform and Reconstructionist branches of Judaism, Quaker,
Buddhist, Episcopal and many individual Protestant congregations are involved in the
pro-marriage campaign (Rotello 16). On the opposite side of the coin there are many faiths that
condemn gay marriage. They feel that these people defy the Bible.

Ultimately the battle may not be so much about winning the right to marriage as about
winning new levels of respect for gay relationships. Evan Wolfson, senior staff attorney for the
gay group: Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund says, " Winning or losing any particular
battle over marriage is not all that's at stake here. What's at stake is a historical moment to
change the position of gay people in society. If we do the work right, all kinds of gains will come
from it, apart from the outcome of any particular battle," he says (Gallagher 36).

Opponents of same-sex marriage feel that giving recognition to this new way of life will
break down the value system set up by heterosexuals. " We need to strengthen, not weaken, the
institution of marriage," said Governor Pete Wilson (Capps G9). Ministers say marriage is one of
the most impenetrable institutions in modern society. It provides the ultimate form of acceptance
for personal intimate relationships in our society. People in today's society can talk about
homosexuality with a group of friends without feeling like the issue has been dropped in their lap.
When faced with the situation, many people don't know how to act in the presence of gay or
lesbian couples. They tend to walk on eggshells for fear that they will say something to offend
that person or their lifestyle.

For example, my Uncle Steve is a gay man that lives in San Francisco. My immediate
family knew of his lifestyle many years prior to this incident. He came to California for the
holidays in 1990. The entire family was invited to my mom and dad's house for Christmas dinner.
My Uncle showed up with his boyfriend Troy. Some of my extended family and friends weren't
aware of his lifestyle; therefore, were extremely offended when they saw them hug each other. I
even had to remind myself not to stare at them because I'm not exposed to this behavior. It made
most of us very uncomfortable. Both of them felt the tension at the dinner table so they tried to
lighten up the mood by explaining how they met and their subsequent relationship, however the
conversation quickly turned into an argument about morals; nevertheless, they went back to their
hotel early.
Children are influenced by their parents and peers on issues such as divorce and
inter-racial marriage. They hear negative responses to inter-racial marriage from parents from the
" old school". Children of divorced parents have formed opinions of how marriage should be. If
we allow same-sex marriage, children will be more confused by social relations than they already
are. " Children do best in a family with a mom and a dad," said House Majority Whip Tom Delay,
(R-Texas). " Accepting same-sex marriage," he said, " will only take us further down the road to
social deterioration" (Weitzstein G14). " Government recognition of same-sex marriage," wrote
Martin Mawyer, President of Christian Action Network, " will forever change the American family
as we know it. Forced homosexuality will be thrust upon America in public schools, homosexual
marriage will be taught as a normal, healthy relationship" (Rotello 16+).

Gay activists have been fighting for many years against discrimination based on sex and/or
sexual preference. Many of us didn't look twice at their protests and literature about what they
believe. Now that they want the same recognition religiously and financially, as heterosexual
couples, the silent community speaks out. " There is no other issue on the American landscape
where there is such a strong political consensus - Americans oppose homosexual marriages," said
the Rev. Lou Sheldon, chairman of the Traditional Values Coalition (Gray E2). A survey
conducted in June 1995 found that only 33 percent agreed with the persuasively phrased
statement, " If two people love each other, they should be able to get married even if they are of
the same sex" (Gallagher 36).

Randy Thomasson of the Christian group called Capitol Resource Institute says that
sanctioning gay marriage in California could cost " Hundreds of millions of dollars for businesses,
and potentially above one billion dollars a year," through health care coverage alone (Capps G10).
This would be from claims filed by partners that were previously not covered.