



THE CULTURE AND POLICY INSTITUTE

**Attitudes about Same Sex Marriage in
San Antonio, TX**

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UTSA

Attitudes about Same Sex Marriage in San Antonio, TX

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Abstract

Previous research and questions in previous San Antonio Surveys indicated that civil liberties for homosexuals are more positively viewed than in the nation. Research by Vega, et al. (2003) indicated that while people favor homosexual civil liberties, they are not tolerant towards sexual behavior. For this research we investigated whether there is evidence available to support the proposition that a social diverse urban context, such as that of San Antonio, TX, which is a majority minority city, liberalizes attitudes and perceptions towards same sex marriage. Our findings suggest that for the most part respondents are not ready to support same sex marriage in spite of the fact that this issue has frequently been framed in terms of civil liberties. Findings indicate that women, English Speakers, those who have never been married, those who describe their political views as liberal or very liberal, younger respondents and those with higher levels of education all express more support for the idea of allowing same sex individuals to marry.

Introduction

Among most members of society today, individuals are categorized into the confines of the two gender roles (masculine and feminine) that are constructed to correspond perfectly with the two sexes (male and female). These clearly defined gender roles are instilled and reinforced throughout our lives during various gender socialization processes. Based on stereotypical gender role expectations, we raise our female children to be passive, docile, and dominated by men, while we raise our male children to be the opposite: active, aggressive, and dominant over women and over other men. As a part of this process heterosexuality is “taught” as a requisite of gender-appropriate behavior. When a woman or a man does not yield to heterosexuality by taking a husband/wife and, instead, either chooses to couple with a fellow woman or man, his/her lifestyle is then viewed as “alternative” to the lifestyle associated with stereotypical gender roles. Rich (1980) labeled this process “compulsory heterosexuality.” That is, “[lesbian existence, and by extension gay male lifestyles] has been treated as exceptional rather than intrinsic...” while the assumption that most women and men are intrinsically heterosexual persists largely without question (Rich, 1980: 238). Within this social context, the current controversy surrounding same-sex marriage in the U.S. has become an important political and social issue.

Review of Literature

Data from the 2000 Census suggest that about 11% of the 5.5 million couples who were living together but not married are same sex couples (Simmons and O’Connell, 2003). Recent survey data indicated that of those latter couples, between 18% and 28% of gay men and 8% and 21% of lesbians have lived together 10 or more years (the *Advocate* sex poll, 2002; Falkner and Garber, 2002; Kurdek, 2003). Furthermore, given the prejudice against same-sex couples, the actual percentages are likely to be higher than those reported in the literature. Other research

indicates that gay and lesbian couples are as likely to indicate they are in love with their partners and generally as satisfied in their relationships as heterosexuals (Bohan, 1996; Kurdek, 1995; Alderson, 2004; Kurdek, 2004). Jepsen and Jepsen (2002) found assertive mating patterns among homosexual couples to be similar to heterosexual couples, and hypothesize that this process would become stronger if same sex couples received the same economic benefits as other married couples.

Recently some gay and lesbian individuals are arguing that they are entitled to the same privileges as heterosexual couples who can legalize their status as couples through marriage (Adam, 2003). From this perspective, the issue is considered one of civil liberties, and proponents argue that being deprived of civil liberties is unjust and counters prevailing ideologies promoting anti-discrimination against minority groups (Adam, 2003; Machacek and Fulco, 2004). In addition Frank and Mceneaney (1999) indicated that transformation about attitudes towards sexuality in the U.S. has occurred with traditional views prohibiting same-sex relationships declining, in part because sex has been increasingly associated with pleasure as well as reproduction. This suggests that the U.S. population could become more open towards same sex marriage.

In response to those favoring same sex marriage, some legislators and religious leaders have argued that same-sex marriages violate the sanctity of marriage as a recognized union between a man and a woman. Thirty-eight states to date have approved “Defense of Marriage Acts” which insures that those states need not recognize the legality of same sex unions Adam, 2003). In addition there has been some political support for an amendment to the Constitution that will define marriage as the legal union of a man and a woman. Glenn (2004) argues that the position that all couples deserve the rights and privileges of marriage should not be supported

because its acceptance would harm marriage and could be used against advocates of same sex marriage (see also, shell, 2004). Alternatively, Machacek and Fulco (2004) argue that using the language of civil liberties to frame support for same sex marriage is the only way to prevent a rigid definition of marriage being included in the constitution. Of course, the issue of same sex marriage encompasses both the issues of legal rights and sexual behaviors. For example, research by Vega, et al. (2003) indicated that while people favor homosexual civil liberties, they are not tolerant towards sexual behavior.

Variables Impacting Attitudes about Homosexuality

Previous works have explored the relationship between various demographic indicators and attitudes and perceptions towards lesbians and gays. Factors like religiosity, gender, ethnicity, political party, political ideology, income, educational attainment, age and urbanization tend to be associated with varying attitudes towards gay and lesbian issues. Typically, females are more tolerant than males, whites and Latinos are typically more tolerant than African Americans. Liberals, moderates, Democrats, higher educated, younger and those residing in urban areas tend to be more tolerant and open to lesbian and gay issues than their counterparts (conservatives, Republicans, less educated, older (with intolerance increasing with age), suburbanites and people from rural areas (Millham, et al., 1976; Irwin and Thompson 1977; Nyberg and Alston 1977; Bonilla and Porter 1990; Seltzer 1992; Herek 1994; and Yang 1998.) In as much as attitudes about same sex marriage are an extension of attitudes about homosexuality, we expect our results to reflect similar relationships.

In spite of these liberalizing attitudes towards homosexuality among some groups, Yang (1996: 481) reports that “large, stable majorities (more than two to one) have remained opposed to gay marriage... during the 1990s...roughly two-thirds opposition to gay marriages, with

disapproval rates consistently in the 60-68% range.” On the one hand, given the literature, it is reasonable to expect that San Antonio will not vary markedly from the other areas in opposing same sex marriage. On the other hand, given the political and socioeconomic diversity of the city, San Antonians may be more tolerant toward gay and lesbian issues, especially issues which can be framed in terms of civil liberties, such as same sex marriage, compared to other areas in the U.S. Specifically, we expect that females, higher educated, those with higher incomes, “progressives” (younger, Democrats, non-conservatives) to exhibit more willingness to extend marriage rights to gays and lesbians.

San Antonio’s ethnicities should exhibit similar national patterns--Whites exhibiting more tolerance, Mexican Americans some tolerance and African Americans the least tolerance to issues of same-sex sex marriage. However, given the civil right histories of Mexican Americans and African Americans in Texas and in San Antonio, one might expect these ethnicities to be more willing to extend civil liberties to similarly perceived “political minorities” (Vega, et al., 2003).

Data Source and Variables

The **San Antonio Survey 2004 (SAS 2004)** is an annual survey conducted by UTSA students in the combined research methods courses of sociology and public administration, in conjunction with the university’s Culture and Policy Institute. Surveys were conducted during the weeks of October 17-24th, 2004.

The **SAS 2004** data are based on a random probability sample of individuals with telephones and consist of eleven hundred (1100) responses from the Bexar County metropolitan area. The standard error of the entire sample is +/- 2.95% with a 95 percent confidence level.

In the San Antonio Survey (SAS) 2004, we use a question from the National Election Surveys regarding attitudes towards same sex marriage as our dependent variable. Specifically, we asked:

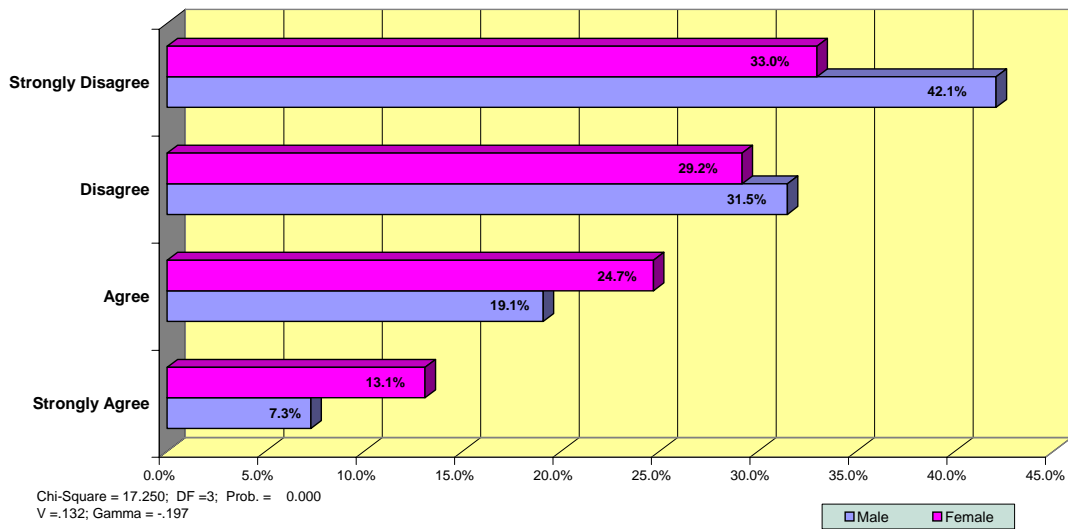
Do you agree or disagree that homosexual couples should have the right to marry one another? Respondents were further probed to find out how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement.

Independent variables include traditional socio-demographic indicators (sex, race, party id, political ideology, age, family income, educational attainment) as well as geographic indicators for area of the city where respondent lived. For the logistic regression model, dummy variables were created from the nominal and ordinal measures, while interval ratio level variables were categorized for crosstabulations.

Descriptive Analyses

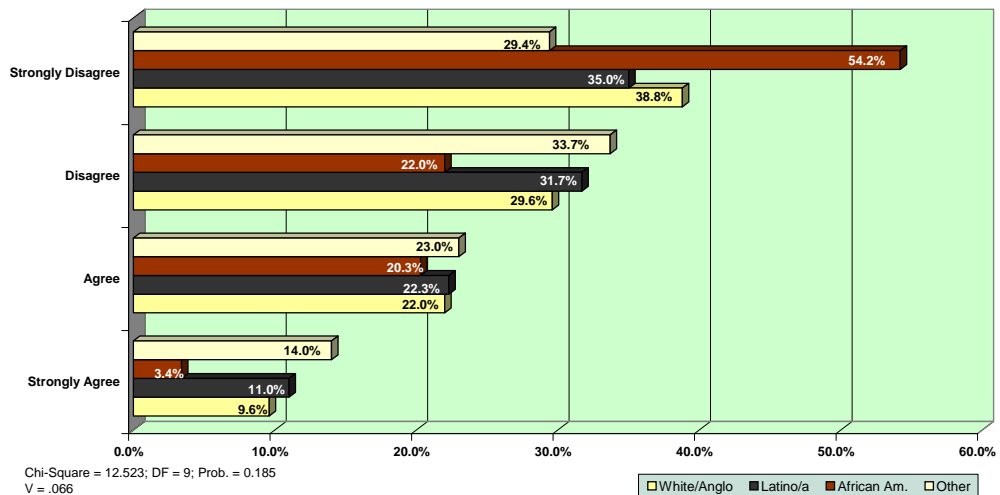
Several crosstabulations were completed testing relevant ideas about the impact of group membership on likelihood of supporting same sex marriage (see Figures 1-8). Figure 1 displays the impact of respondent's sex on view about same sex marriage. Our findings support previous research indicating that women are more tolerant than men related to attitudes about homosexuality. As indicated, women are both more likely to agree and strongly agree than men with allowing same sex couples to marry, and less likely than men to agree or strongly disagree. The relationship is statistically significant ($p=.000$), although low in strength ($V = .132$; $\text{gamma} = -.197$).

Figure 1: Homosexual Couples Should be Allowed to Marry by Sex



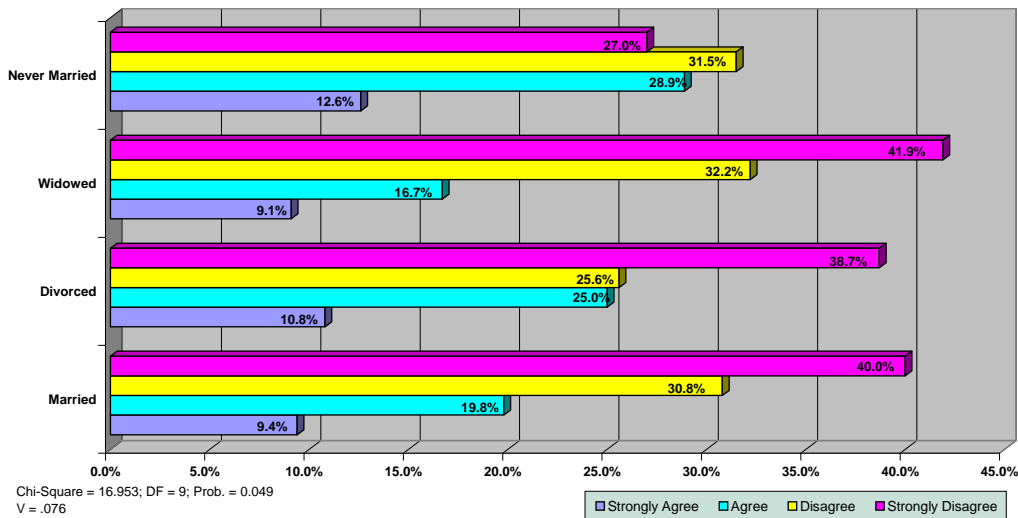
While previous literature indicated that Whites and Latinos/as typically express more tolerant attitudes than African Americans toward homosexuality, our results suggest no impact on attitudes about same sex marriage based on race/ethnic background (see Figure 2). Although a larger percent of African American said they strongly disagreed with same sex marriage than did the other race/ethnic groups, the difference is not statistically significant ($p = .185$) and quite low in strength ($V = .066$).

Figure 2: Homosexual Couples Should be Allowed to Marry by Race/Ethnicity



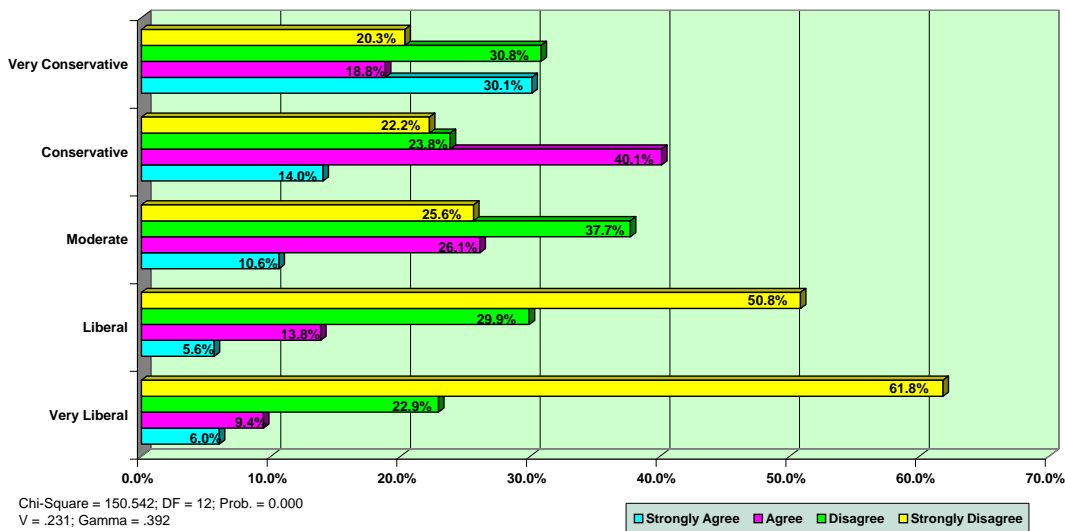
As we might expect given the backing of the Defense of Marriage Act, marital status did have a statistically significant impact on attitudes about same sex marriage ($p = .045$). Married individuals, along with those widowed and divorced were far more likely than those never married to strongly disagree that same sex couples should be allowed to marry, although again the strength of the relationship is low ($V = .076$). Interestingly close to thirty percent (28.9%) of those never married, and one quarter (25%) of those divorced supported the idea of marriage for same sex couples (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Homosexual Couples Should be Allowed to Marry by Marital Status



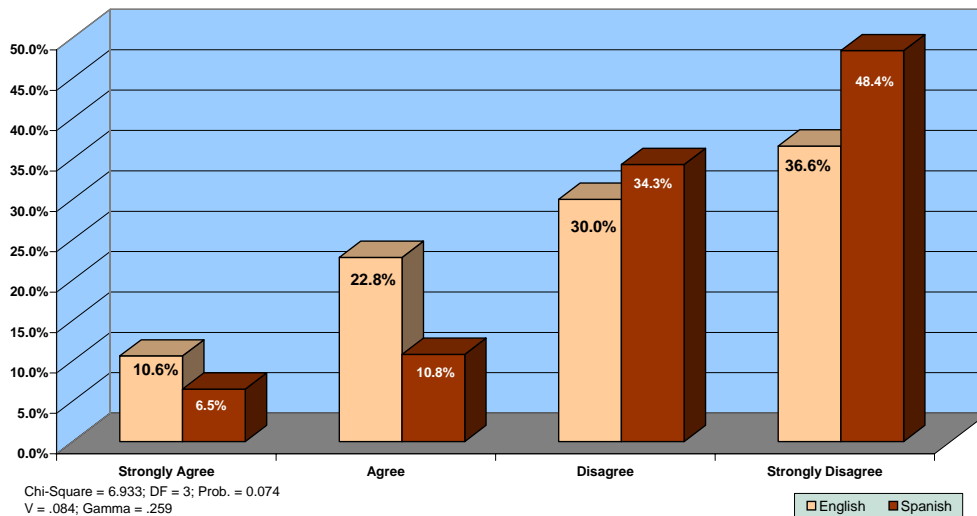
In this particular survey, we did not ask religiosity, but in past research we have found this variable to be closely related to political views. In addition because political views are so strongly affiliated with Political Party membership, we did not complete separate bivariate analyses of both. Figure 4 illustrates that those expressing more liberal political views were far more supportive of same sex marriage. This relationship is statistically significant ($p = .000$) and moderately strong ($V = .231$; $\gamma = .392$).

Figure 4: Homosexual Couples Should be Allowed to Marry by Political Views



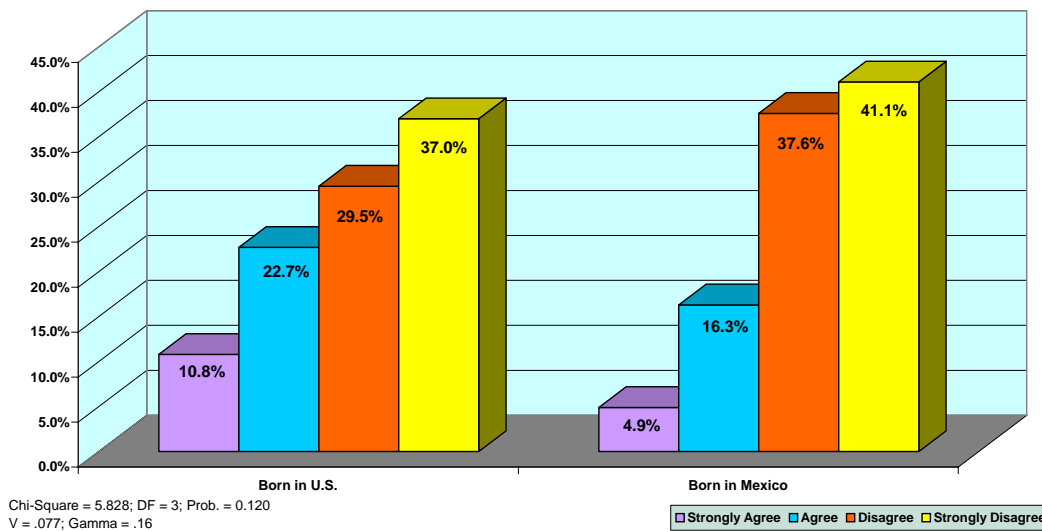
Because the population of San Antonio is a majority Latino/a, we always have both English and Spanish language surveys available. Figure 5 indicates that respondents who answered the survey in Spanish were more likely to disagree that homosexual couples should be allowed to marry. The relationship is statistically significant ($p = .074$, one-tailed test) and low in strength ($V = .084$; $\gamma = .259$).

Figure 5: Homosexual Couples Should be Allowed to Marry by Language of Interview



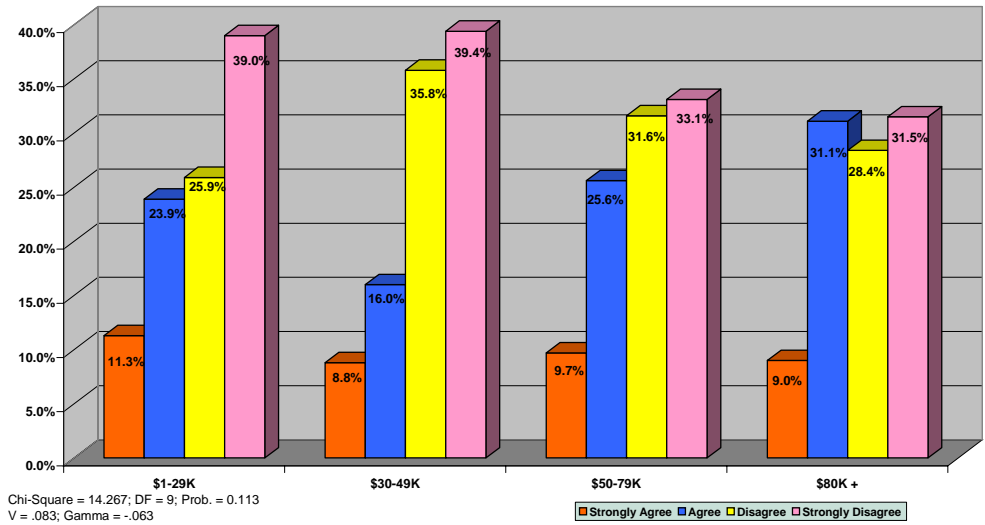
In further investigating whether the previous relationship was perhaps related to Latino/a cultural views (predominantly Catholic, lower levels of education and income), we compared the views of individuals based on whether they were born in the U.S. or born in Mexico (see Figure 6). Results for the two groups were very similar indicating no statistically significant differences ($p = .120$), and low in strength ($V = .077$; $\text{gamma} = .160$).

Figure 6: Homosexual Couples Should be Allowed to Marry by Whether Respondent was Born in Mexico



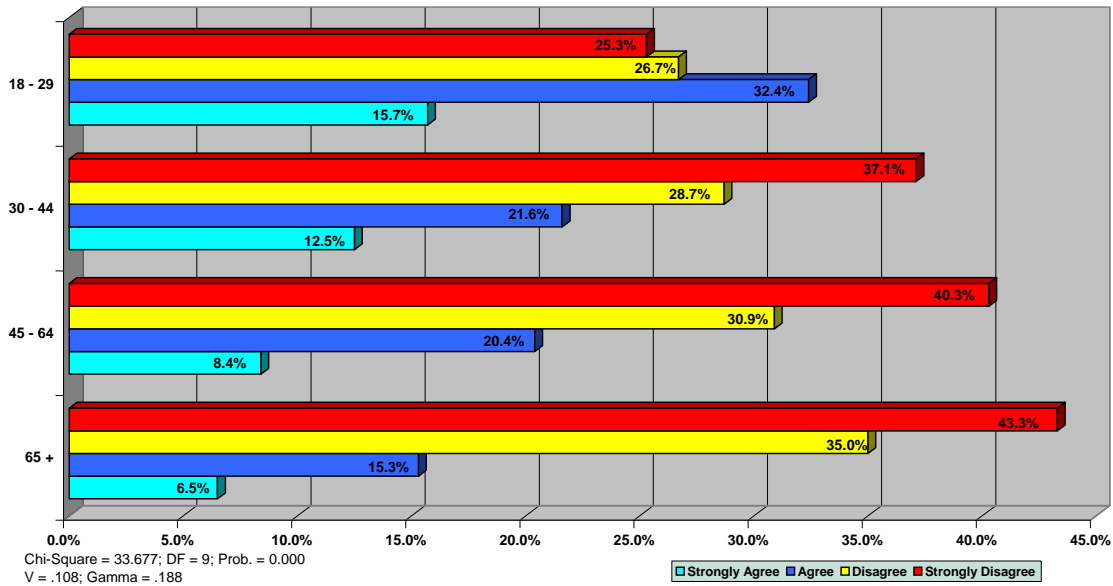
As indicated in Figure 7, family income had no statistically significant impact on attitudes about whether same sex couples be allowed to marry ($p = .113$). While percentages strongly disagreeing are slightly higher for lower income groups, the relationship is very low in strength ($V = .083$; $\text{gamma} = -.063$). Even among supporters of same sex marriage, almost all reported they “agreed” rather than “strongly agreed” that homosexuals ought to be allowed to marry.

Figure 7: Homosexual Couples Should be Allowed to Marry by Family Income, Grouped



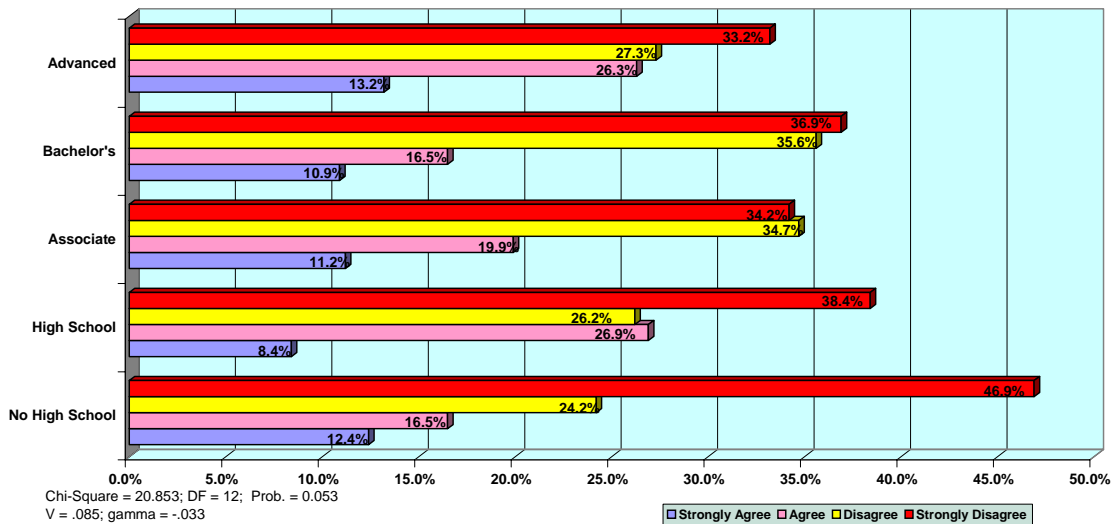
Age had a statistically significant impact on attitudes about marriage between same sex couples, with those 65 and older expressing the strongest disagreement ($p = .000$). Again while only small percentages of individuals were likely to say they strongly agreed that homosexuals ought to be allowed to marry, those between the ages of 18 – 29 were most likely to fall in this category (see Figure 8). The relationship is moderate in strength ($V = .108$; $\gamma = .188$).

Figure 8: Homosexual Couples Should be Allowed to Marry by Age, Grouped



As indicated in Figure 9, the higher the education level, as measured by highest degree completed, the more tolerant individuals were about same sex marriage. The relationship is statistically significant ($p = .053$) and weak ($V = .085$; $\gamma = -.033$) but does not appear to be linear. Note that the percentages of those strongly agreeing that same sex couples should be allowed to marry, while small, were very similar for those with advanced degrees (13.2%) and those without a high school diploma (12.4%). Also among those agreeing that homosexuals should be allowed to marry, the percentages are very similar among those with advanced degrees (26.3%) and those with high school diplomas (26.9%).

Figure 9: Homosexual Couples Should be Allowed to Marry by Highest Degree Completed



Overall our descriptive results are similar to other studies related to attitudes about homosexuality. Women, English Speakers, those who have never been married, those who describe their political views as liberal or very liberal, younger respondents and those with higher levels of education all express more support for the idea of allowing same sex individuals to marry.

Multivariate Analysis

In order to test whether the descriptive results accurately portray the groups likely to support same sex marriage we completed a staged logistic regression. Logistic regression tests which independent factors are likely to lower or increase the odds of respondents supporting same sex marriage. The dependent variable was dichotomized so that a value of 1 represents those who said they strongly agreed or agreed with the idea that same sex couples had a right to marry one another. Those disagreeing or strongly disagreeing were coded 0. Independent variables in the model included family income, measured in dollars, age in years, and a series of

dummy variables identifying whether the respondent was female, lived on the Southside (lower income, predominantly Latino/a), completed the interview in Spanish, was Latino/a or African American (Anglo are reference group), Republican or Democrat (Independent is reference group), Liberal or Conservative (Moderate is the reference category), Born in Mexico, Never Married or Married/ Widowed (Divorced/Separated is the reference category), whether respondent's had not completed high school, had a bachelor's degree or an advanced degree (high school degree is the reference category), and respondent's attitude about homosexuality in general. Results for the logistic regression are presented in Table 1.¹ The independent variables were entered in stages to assess the impact of general social concepts on the belief that homosexuals should be allowed to marry. Conceptual categories included, family context, demographic characteristics, race/ethnicity, education level, political party/ideology, and attitude about homosexual behavior.

As indicated, after controlling for other independent variables, overall attitude about homosexuality has a large impact on support for same sex marriage (Wald = 128.30). Those who believed that homosexuality is always wrong or almost always wrong were also significantly more likely to indicate that homosexual couples should not be allowed to marry ($p = .000$). Age is also importantly related to support for same sex marriage (Wald = 17.41) with younger respondents more likely to express support and older people less likely to express support ($p = .000$).

African Americans are less likely to be supportive of same sex marriage ($p = .01$). While the coefficient for Latino/a is also negative, it is not statistically significant. Compared to those calling themselves Independents, Democrats were significantly more likely to support same sex marriage ($p = .03$). While the coefficient for Republican was negative indicated less likely to

support, the relationship was not statistically significant ($p=.13$). Political liberals were more likely to express support ($p=.06$, one-tailed test), while those calling themselves conservatives were less likely to express support although this relationship was likely due to chance or sampling error.

Never married individuals were significantly more likely to support same sex marriage ($p = .08$, one-tailed test), as were married/widowed individuals although the latter relationship is not statistically significant. Finally, women were significantly more likely to support same sex marriage than men ($p=.05$).

After controlling for the other variables, none of the education indicators were significantly related to supporting same sex marriage. The dummy variables representing having been born in Mexico, answering the survey in Spanish and living on the Southside were not significantly related to supporting same sex marriage.

The variables included in this model explain between 24% and 34% of the variance in support for same sex marriage (Cox & Snell $R^2 = .240$; Nagelkerke $R^2 = .339$). The model was better at correctly predicting lack of support for same sex marriage (86.27%) than correctly predicting support for homosexual marriage (55.82%). The total percent correctly predicted (76.96%) indicates a reasonable model for predicting whether individuals in San Antonio, Texas would be likely to support allowing same sex couples to marry or not.

Table 1: Logistic Regression Model Of Independent Variables on Attitudes about Homosexual Marriage

	Coefficient	S.E.	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
Family Circumstances					
Family Income	0.00*	0.00	0.31	0.58	1.00
Reside on Southside	0.19	0.18	1.19	0.28	1.21
Demographics					
Age	-0.02***	0.00	17.41	0.00	0.98
Married/Widowed	0.30	0.22	1.84	0.18	1.35
Never married	0.46*	0.26	3.10	0.08	1.58
Female	0.31**	0.16	3.90	0.05	1.36
Race/Ethnicity					
Spanish	-0.65	0.42	2.38	0.12	0.52
Latino/a	-0.30	0.19	2.38	0.12	0.74
African Am.	-0.90***	0.36	6.30	0.01	0.40
Born in Mexico	0.03	0.35	0.01	0.94	1.03
Education Level					
No High School	0.12	0.36	0.12	0.73	1.13
Bachelor's	-0.16	0.20	0.65	0.42	0.85
Advanced	0.04	0.24	0.03	0.85	1.05
Political Party/Ideology					
Republican	-0.33	0.22	2.24	0.13	0.72
Democrat	0.42**	0.19	4.95	0.03	1.53
Liberal	0.36*	0.19	3.54	0.06	1.44
Conservative	-0.28	0.19	2.20	0.14	0.76
Attitude					
Attitude about Homosexuality	-2.06***	0.18	128.30	0.00	0.13
Constant	0.50	0.35	2.04	0.15	1.65

Model Chi Square = 296.065;

P = 0 .000

Cox & Snell R Square = .240

Nagelkerke R Square = .339

Percent Correctly Predicted

Disagree 86.27%

Agree 55.82%

Total 76.96%

* p = .05, one-tailed test; ** p = .05, two-tailed test; *** p = .000

Conclusions

Our findings suggest that for the most part respondents are not ready to support same sex marriage in spite of the fact that this issue has frequently been framed in terms of civil liberties.

Some argue that gay and lesbian citizens are entitled to legal recognition because they deserve

the same rights and privileges as heterosexual citizens. In spite of their histories of political oppression, Latinos/as and African Americans were less likely than Anglos and those of “other²” races to support same sex marriage. While the literature indicates that tolerant attitudes toward same sex couples in general, and towards extending some civil liberties to this minority group are increasing, San Antonio residents maintain traditional views toward marriage. Perhaps the fact that many states have tried to institute laws to prohibit same sex marriage and have couched the arguments against it as an attack on the sanctity of heterosexual marriage has made the public more aware and fearful of the impact of tolerating same sex unions. Indeed, the Defense of Marriage Act is an attempt to clearly differentiate “marriage” between heterosexual couples from the “partnerships” of homosexual couples.

Marriage has long been used to exclude minorities from the rights and privileges of the majority (miscegenation laws for example). Additionally, Kingdon (1995) stressed the importance of policy windows in the introduction of policy formulation. The saliency of this issue during the recent presidential campaign could have opened such a window. Clearly, however, the attitudinal and/or perceptual support for a civil rights policy for same sex marriage is lacking, even in a city where a minority is now the majority. Given the American link of marriage to moral and religious ideologies as well as to its legal reality, it may be the case that respondents are more likely to view same sex marriage in terms of sexual behavior than of civil liberties. As our findings indicate, expressing traditional (negative) views toward homosexual behavior was the dominant factor in predicting opposition to same sex marriage. Given these results, it seems unlikely that a policy window for same sex marriage will open any time soon.

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Notes

¹ Examination of the correlation matrix revealed no problems with multicollinearity.

² In San Antonio, the “other” category includes Native Americans, Asians and those who identified themselves only as other.