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Contact: Ann Whidden,
Communications Director
415-425-5157, annw@sfsu.edu

Research Reveals: When it comes to Marriage, Separate is not Equal

New findings establish benefits of marriage for same-sex couples; uncover harms that ballot initiatives and marriage-denial can cause

San Francisco, October 21, 2008: Denial of marriage and exposure to negative messages during ballot initiatives affect all gays and lesbians—not just those seeking marriage—say new findings released today by the *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* journal, a project of the National Sexuality Resource Center. Three research studies, two of which were to be published in March 2009, came to striking conclusions that moved the authors to release the data early. Findings show that same-sex couples want marriage more than other forms of partnership; that exposure to negative messages in states in which marriage amendments are on ballots negatively impact lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons; and that the lack of legal recognition for same-sex relationships creates fears for and uncertainty about the future among lesbian and gay persons—both single and coupled.

The outcomes of marriage amendment votes may have an impact beyond just restrictive legislation; they may serve to alienate persons from democratic participation and serve to impair public health. “The absence of recognition for same-sex relationships conveys a sense of second-class citizenship and a stress associated with such an unwelcomed status,” concludes journal editor and contributor Dr. Brian deVries. “All gay, lesbian and bisexual persons—not just those who want to get married—can experience negative impacts when initiatives like this get put on the ballot.”



Brian deVries, PhD

- Without marriage, the choices of committed same-sex couples are not necessarily or automatically respected. Brian deVries' article, "State Recognition of Same-Sex Relationships and Preparations for End of Life Among Lesbian and Gay Boomers", established that without marriage, fears of the future and one's independence for gay men and lesbians far exceed national averages. In states in which same-sex relationships are not formally or legally recognized, gay men and lesbians were more likely to have created a will and living will. They were also more likely to report fearing a death in pain, and fear of discrimination at the end of their lives because of their sexual orientation. These effects were evident for both coupled and single gay men and lesbians—an important finding highlighting the role that relationship recognition has on one's sense of well-being as lesbian or gay person whether or not one is in a relationship.



Ellen D.B. Riggle, PhD.



Sharon S. Rostosky, PhD.

- Negative messages become even more pronounced during state elections in which there is voting on constitutional amendments that restrict marriage rights. "Marriage Amendments and Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Citizens in The 2006 Election," by Ellen D.B. Riggle, Sharon S. Rostosky, and Sharon Horne, reveals that lesbian, gay and bisexual persons report higher levels of exposure to negative messages about lesbian and gay issues with associated higher levels of reported negative affect, stress and depressive symptoms. Anti-gay and lesbian and marriage initiatives have a negative impact on the well-being of lesbian, gay and bisexual state residents. Lesbian, gay and bisexual state residents report increased political participation and increased voting behaviors, and simultaneous feelings of political alienation.
- The research of Gary Gates, M.V. Lee Badgett, and Deborah Ho in "Marriage, Registration and Dissolution by Same-Sex Couples in the U.S." (released July 2008), establishes that same-sex couples, like opposite-sex

couples, prefer marriage. In fact, 37% of same-sex couples in Massachusetts married during the first year that marriage was offered—this is compared with the 12% of same-sex couples having entered in civil unions and 10% having entered domestic partnerships during the first year in which states have offered these forms of recognition.



Gary J. Gates, PhD

One survey respondent decried effects of initiatives, saying that “These amendments make you feel like less of a person. They make you a second class citizen and make it seem that you aren't worthy of having the same rights as other people,” and NSRC Director Gil Herdt agrees, “The physical and mental health benefits of marriage for heterosexual adults have been firmly established—benefits derived, at least in part, from the tangible resources, federal benefits and legal protections offered to spouses by society. Clearly, society favors marriage over other forms of intimate relationships—and all gays and lesbians suffer without it.”



Gilbert Herdt, PhD.

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About the NSRC

The mission of the National Sexuality Resource Center is to equip advocates, academics and researchers with the knowledge, skills and resources to improve lifelong sexual literacy and sexual well being for all Americans. The National Sexuality Resource Center, the Center for Research on Gender and Sexuality and the Department of Sexuality Studies comprise the National Centers on Sexuality at San Francisco State University. Visit us at nsrc.sfsu.edu.