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Gay Marriage in the New South: What's New About It?

Laurel Holland
Georgia Gwinnett College, lholland@ggc.edu

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Cover Page Footnote

All correspondence should be directed to: Laurel Holland, Ph.D. at Georgia Gwinnett College, lholland@ggc.edu. Cover Page Gay Marriage in the New South: What's New About it? Laurel Holland, Ph.D. Georgia Gwinnett College, lholland@ggc.edu

Gay Marriage in the New South: What's New About It?

The mainstream media has been the principal venue for the introduction of the LGBT¹ community into American homes. When the television show *Soap* premiered in 1977, Americans were presented with the first openly gay television character (Jodie), played by Billy Crystal. Jodie was hotly contested by social and religious conservatives and declared by gay rights activists as too stereotypical. Russo (1981) noted that popular media created exaggerated homophobic portrayals of gays and lesbians from the sissy man to the vindictive lesbian, exacerbating negative cultural stereotypes. Ellen DeGeneres set off a wave of controversy when her sitcom character, Ellen Richmond, came out as a lesbian on the *Ellen* television series in 1997. The public backlash was so fiery that ABC executives decided to place a parental advisory at the beginning of each new episode. After the “coming out” scene, the show’s ratings dropped and it was cancelled the next year. It seemed that Ellen’s career might be coming to an end. However, five years later Ellen was the host of her own talk show, *Ellen: The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, which has now been on the air for 12 consecutive years and received 12 Daytime Emmy Awards. Using mainstream media as an indicator of cultural acceptance of the gay and lesbian community, progress can be seen with the debut of the successful sitcom *Modern Family* in 2009 where Cameron and Mitchell, an openly gay couple in a committed relationship with a child, are no more quirky than their heterosexual counterparts. The success of the show is evidenced by its status as the tenth-highest revenue generating show for 2012 and the numerous awards it has received including a Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) Respect Award for its positive portrayal of a gay couple.

Support for Marriage Equality

While there is no data to support that increasingly positive media coverage of gays and lesbians has impacted real-world attitudes, we do know that Americans are becoming more accepting of the gay community. One indicator of this acceptance is the increasing number of Americans who support marriage equality. In 1996, only 27 percent of Americans favored same-sex marriage while 65 percent opposed it. By 2014, the number in favor of same-sex marriage rose to 54 percent and those opposed was only 39 percent of Americans (Pew Research

¹ Throughout this work the terms gay, lesbian, and LGBT community are used interchangeable. The author recognizes that there are vast and important differences among these groups but intentionally focuses on gay and lesbian marriage or marriage equality which may include individuals with a variety of sexual identities.

Center 2015b). In 2015, when marriage equality went to the Supreme Court of the United States, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) conducted a survey of likely 2016 voters and found that support for marriage equality was at 60 percent, an all-time high. According to a Public Research Religion Institute (PRRI) poll released in June 2015, 65 percent of Americans expected the Supreme Court to rule in favor of same-sex marriage for couples in all 50 states. Only one-quarter of Americans believed that the court would not overturn the state bans on same-sex marriage.

Although an increasing number of Americans support marriage equality, such increases are not evenly distributed among the states. Instead, as Swan (2014) pointed out, support for same sex marriage has been generated in a limited number of states. He identified the “hard-core” or “dis-empowered” states as the real challenge, including the South (Mississippi, Florida, North Carolina, Georgia, South Carolina, Kentucky, West Virginia, Tennessee, Louisiana, and Virginia). A 2012 report by the Pew Foundation found that “[p]eople in the South express greater opposition [to marriage equality]. A majority of residents in Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas oppose same sex marriage” (Swan 2014: 196).

Sociological Context

In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed homosexuality as a mental disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*. The decision to remove the term from the *DSM* and thus “de-classify” homosexuality as a mental illness was largely influenced by the Gay Rights Movement and signaled a shift in the way that homosexuality was both presented and perceived. Since 1973, sociological researchers have written prolifically about the LGBT community across many dimensions including the relationship between homosexuality and race, religion, political ideology, health, age, and other socio-demographic variables. The competing frames of the gay marriage debate help inform the various discourses surrounding the issue.

Marriage equality in the U.S. has two competing frames: religion and civil rights. For some, marriage equality is a matter of civil rights and comparisons are made to the challenges that African Americans faced prior to the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. Others see this issue from a religious framework, quoting biblical mandates for the love between a man and a woman as central to the foundation of a successful society. Ryan and Gamson (2006) define a frame as “a thought organizer, highlighting certain events and facts as important and rendering others invisible” (p.13). They suggest that:

Like a picture frame, an issue frame marks off some part of the world.
Like a building frame, it holds things together. It provides coherence to an

array of symbols, images, and arguments, linking them through an underlying organizing idea that suggests what is essential—what consequences are and values are at stake. We do not see the frame directly, but infer its presence by its characteristic expressions and language. Each frame gives the advantage to certain ways of talking and thinking, while it places others “out of the picture” (2006:14).

Goffman’s (1974) work is important to an understanding of the opposing viewpoints on marriage equality. His frame analysis stressed how one’s social experiences structure their perception of society and thus guide their actions and shape their ideologies. His goal was “to try to isolate some of the basic frameworks of understanding available in our society for making sense out of events and to analyze the special vulnerabilities to which these frames of reference are subject” (1974:10).

Religious Frame

One of the strongest factors that determine views of homosexuality and same-sex marriage is religion (Herek 2006). In this work, Christianity, particularly Fundamentalism and Evangelical Protestantism, will be the focus of the religious frame used to oppose same-sex marriage. It is important to note that there are differences between Fundamentalists and Evangelicals although their cultural values are often aligned.

Fundamentalism, a movement in American Protestantism, emerged post World War I in response to shifts in American culture. The term, fundamentalist, originated in the U.S. when the first of a 12-volume collection of essays, *The Fundamentals*, was published in 1910 (Brasher 2001). The Bible is considered by Fundamentalists to be divinely inspired and thus shapes how the group constructs their identity and worldview. From a Christian Fundamentalist perspective, the state has no right to interfere with the divine relationship that individuals have with God and each other (Bluhofer 2004) and homosexuality is in direct conflict with their Biblically based worldview (Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1992). According to a 2014 Gallup Poll, 28 percent of Americans believe that the Bible is the actual word of God and should be taken literally while approximately half of Americans say that the Bible is the inspired word of God. In total, then, about 75 percent of Americans believe that the Bible is in some way connected to God. As the primary holy text for Christians, the Bible holds significant cultural relevance (Gallup Inc. 2014). Whitley (2009) found that most forms of religiosity are more strongly related to prejudice against lesbians and gay men than to racial and ethnic prejudice. He also found higher Fundamentalism was related to both forms of prejudice, but the effect size for prejudice against lesbians and gay men was 2.6 times higher than that for racial/ethnic prejudice.

The term “evangelical” comes from the Biblical Greek “euangelion” meaning “Gospel” or “good news” and became prominent during the Reformation. An evangelical is distinguished from Catholics or Orthodox Christians who emphasized the sacraments. In more modern times the term is to refer to those who center on the authority of the Bible, the need to be “born again,” and the need for a spiritually transformed life incorporating moral reform and bringing others to the faith (Clarke 2005). After the 1920s, Evangelicals began building an organizational structure for the movement, paving the way for their resurgence in the 1970s. The central figure of this resurgence was the Rev. Billy Graham, an Evangelical minister who took advantage of media technologies, especially television, to spread the message for Christian conversion. More recently, Evangelicals became associated with politics and made their mark by way of a politically active and conservative organization known as the Religious Right.

According to the Pew Research Center (2015a), 70.6 percent of Americans describe themselves as Christian. Of that number, 46.5 percent are Protestant Christians with the following breakdown: 25.4 Evangelical Protestants, 14.7 percent Mainline Protestants, and 6.5 percent are found in the Historically Black Protestant Churches. When considering religious tradition by region, 47 percent of Protestants, 49 percent of those from the Evangelical tradition, 37 percent from the mainline tradition, and 62 percent from historically black Protestants live in the South. Among White Evangelical Protestants, only 27 percent favor allowing gays and lesbians to marry while 62 percent of white mainline Protestants support same-sex marriage. Of those churches classified as Evangelical Protestant, the Baptist in the Evangelical tradition accounted for 9.2 percent and the Southern Baptist Convention accounted for 5.3 percent.

While overall support for same-sex marriage is moving toward acceptance, there are still significant demographic differences. Finlay and Walther (2003) found that acceptance of same-sex relationships is least likely among Christian religious institutions. They note that while attitudes toward gays and lesbians have improved overall, “many Christian churches have responded by adding anti-homosexual statements to their official policies” (p. 370). Religious fundamentalism is a significant predictor of homophobia (Laythe, Finkel, Bringle and Kirkpartick 2002) and higher levels of conservative protestant religiosity are correlated with lower levels of acceptance of the LGBT community (Dejowski 1992; Herek 1984, 1988).

Conservative Christians, especially Fundamentalists, became increasingly politically active following the *Scopes v. Tennessee* trial of 1925. After the desegregation of public schools and *Roe v. Wade* (1973), the Religious Right promoted the idea that America was losing its morality. As the Gay and Lesbian Movement grew, more individuals publically proclaimed their homosexuality,

another loss for the Religious Right. Their resulting “homosexual agenda” framed homosexuality as a threat to social institutions and the erosion of American values and culture. While the Religious Right has lost the bulk of its political credibility, it still has a following. As recent as March 2014, Pat Robertson stated on his Television show, *The 700 Club*, “Satan is behind homosexuality and that Jesus wouldn’t have served gay couples since they would have been stoned to death.” The remarks were made following the decision of a Colorado baker to refuse service to a same-sex couple and Arizona’s controversial “religious freedom” bill (rightwingwatch.org). Ryan and Gamson (2006) point out that, “[p]olitical conservatives did not build political power merely by polishing their message in ways that resonate effectively with broader cultural values. They also built infrastructure and relationships with journalists and used their abundant resources to amplify the message and repeat it many times” (p.15).

Civil Rights Frame

The importance of the decades-long work of activists in the Gay and Lesbian Movement cannot be overlooked in the growing shift from the religious frame to the civil rights frame. Much research has focused on the similarities of the struggle for marriage equality and the Civil Rights Movement. Some support the analogies and others find them problematic. Stone and Ward (2011) offer an extensive review of the “ways in which rhetorics of Blackness and civil rights have been deployed by Whites positioned on both sides of modern gay rights discourse in the United States” (p. 605). In an analysis of gay rights referendums and initiatives from 1977 to 2000, the authors show that white, religiously motivated, anti-gay activists used divisive arguments about the parallels between homosexuality and race to legitimize their campaigns while the early gay movement avoided the “like race” analogy but later used racist arguments in service to White gay rights.

“Gay is the New Black” became culturally significant following California’s passage of Proposition 8 (Prop. 8)—banning same-sex marriage in the state—and the subsequent protests. Michael Gross (2008) noted in *The Advocate* that the same day that Prop. 8 was passed, November 4, 2008, the U.S. elected our first African-American president. Gross expressed his regret over speculations that while 70 percent of gays voted for Obama, only 70 percent of African-Americans voted for Prop. 8: a comparison that Gross called, “race-baiting” since Prop. 8 won with only 10 percent of Californians voting.

Thus, while it is possible to blame almost any group of voters, the Black community was the scapegoat. Gross further suggests:

History compounds the insult and suggests hypothetical scenarios rendering the mixed results of this election even more absurd. If the California Supreme Court and the U.S. Supreme Court decisions overturning anti-miscegenation laws -- *Perez v. Sharp* and *Loving v. Virginia* -- had been blocked by popular vote, Barack Obama might never have been born. His parents would not have been able to marry in several states (advocate.com).

Still, significant parallels between the two movements are salient. In the February 24th issue of *On Top Magazine*, Georgia Representative John Lewis stated that he sees the movement to legalize gay marriage as a civil rights issue. The Civil Rights Movement leader appeared in a video for the Freedom to Marry organization. Lewis says:

“I fought too hard and too long against discrimination based on race and color not to stand up and speak against discrimination against our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters. I see the right to marriage as a civil rights issue. You cannot have rights for one segment of the population, or one group of people, and not for everyone” (freedomtomarry.org).

Shifting Frames

Ryan and Gamson (2006) note that people can have more than one frame and that while one frame may be more easily triggered, another may be part of one's cultural heritage. They use the example of same-sex marriage and the vulnerability of the Defense of Marriage frame. It defends an idea; but, for advocates, this is a sacred idea: “that a man and a woman vow commitment to each other until death parts them and devote themselves to the raising of a new generation” (p.14). Same-sex couples, like heterosexual couples, enter into relationships that fit the idea of sacred. They are also committed to each other for life and to raising a new generation. With this recognition, the frame can shift from a religious one to a legal one. Why should same-sex couples be denied legal recognition of their commitment with all of the associated rights and responsibilities? This legal or civil rights frame becomes even stronger when it is less abstract and more personal. Social contact correlates positively with acceptance of LGBT individuals. The more contact one has with gays and lesbians, the more likely they are to support their relationship (Eldridge et al. 2006). Personal contact with gays and lesbians strongly predicts same-sex

marriage support although the contact effects are weaker for individuals with stronger ties to religious conservatives (Merino 2013).

The changing nature of religiosity is also pivotal to the shift from the religious to the civil rights frame. The groups most supportive of same-sex marriage include young, white, the religiously unaffiliated, Democrats, and self-described liberals (pewforum.org). Prior to the Supreme Court ruling, the public remained divided: the majority of both supporters and opponents of same-sex marriage believed that gay marriage was inevitable. According to the Pew Research Center, the rising sense of inevitability is most notable among some of the groups that tend to be least supportive of gay marriage including Republicans and white, Evangelical Protestants. Interestingly, the two frames (religious and civil rights) are not necessarily mutually exclusive. While marriage is often a religious event, no religious rituals are required and no religious institution is required to perform any marriages.

Legal Context

Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA)

The landmark Windsor v. United States Supreme Court Case resurrected the most favorable political climate for legal gains in the Gay and Lesbian Movement since the 1960s. The passage of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was the single most important political event that helped the movement to gain momentum. In September of 1996, President Bill Clinton signed the DOMA into law denying married same-sex couples some 1,138 federal benefits and protections enjoyed by heterosexual couples, including Social Security survivor benefits, family and medical leave, insurance benefits, and immigration rights. The federal mandate was challenged by President Obama in 2011 when his administration announced that Section 3 of DOMA was unconstitutional and that the law would be enforced while it existed but would no longer be defended in the courts. Advocacy groups worked tirelessly to overturn DOMA and Edie Windsor, the widowed partner of Thea Spyer, became the media image associated with the cause. Edie and Thea were wed in Toronto in 2007 after 40 years of romantic partnership. Upon the death of Spyer in 2009, Windsor was responsible for \$363,053 in federal taxes for the inheritance of her wife's New York estate. Had the couple's marriage been legally recognized in the state of New York, Windsor would have qualified for a spousal deduction and paid no taxes. Windsor took her claim for a refund to the courts in 2010 when the case was first filed in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. Upon review, Attorney General Eric Holder stated that the court could no longer defend the constitutionality of DOMA's Section 3 but that the law would continue to be enforced until it was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. On June 6,

2012, Judge Barbara S. Jones ruled for a rational basis review of Section 3 of DOMA showing it to be unconstitutional and a violation of Windsor's rights to equal protection guarantees under the Fifth Amendment. She further ordered that Windsor receive a tax refund. On June 26, 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Section 3 of DOMA was unconstitutional and that the federal government cannot discriminate against married lesbian and gay couples for the purposes of determining federal benefits and protections (freedomtomarry.org).

Beyond DOMA: Legalization of Same-Sex Marriage

By the 21st century, the Gay and Lesbian Movement was primarily focused on marriage equality. Massachusetts became the first state to legally allow same-sex marriage in 2004 and over the years other states responded with a host of legal compromises including domestic partnerships, recognition/non-recognition of same-sex marriages performed in other states, and constitutional bans on same-sex marriage. On October 6, 2014 the Supreme Court made the decision not to hear any cases striking down same-sex marriage bans, essentially allowing same-sex marriage in states where cases were filed including Virginia, Indiana, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, and Utah. The decision created a domino effect when the remaining states in the 4th and 10th districts followed suit. Prior to the Supreme Court decision legalizing same-sex marriage, 37 states and the District of Columbia had legal same-sex marriage (Barnes 2014).

On April 28, 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court Justices heard oral arguments in the *Obergefell v. Hodges* case, a consolidation of three same-sex cases in Tennessee, Michigan, and Kentucky that challenged a refusal to recognize same-sex marriages from other jurisdictions or the refusal of a state to license same-sex marriages. The case was named for an Ohio couple who filed a lawsuit alleging that the state discriminated against same-sex couples who were lawfully married in other states. The couple married in Maryland in 2013 and was compelled to file the suit by the terminal illness of one partner and their desire to identify the other partner as his surviving spouse on the death certificate. Central to the oral arguments was whether the Constitution requires states to allow same-sex marriage. About 90 minutes into the argument, the focus of the Court shifted to the role of the states. Specifically, the Court debated the ability of states to prohibit same-sex marriages and be required to recognize them when they legally took place outside that state.

When gay marriage went before the U.S. Supreme Court on June 26, 2015, there were two essential questions: (1) are state bans on same-sex marriage unconstitutional and (2) if such bans are constitutional, are states that ban same-sex marriage required to recognize such marriages performed in other states? The Supreme Court voted "yes" on the first question thus also requiring states to

recognize legal same-sex marriages performed in other states. The 5-4 majority decision was authored by Justice Anthony Kennedy and was followed by dissents from Chief Justice Thomas Roberts and Justices Antonin Scalia, Clarence Thomas, and Samuel Alito.

Kennedy's ruling read:

No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family. In forming a marital union, two people become something greater than once they were. As some of the petitioners in these cases demonstrate, marriage embodies a love that may endure even past death. It would misunderstand these men and women to say they disrespect the idea of marriage. Their plea is that they do respect it, respect it so deeply that they seek to find its fulfillment for themselves. Their hope is not to be condemned to live in loneliness, excluded from one of the civilization's oldest institutions. They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right (advocate.com).

Social media sites responded to the ruling almost instantaneously. Kennedy's words became the trending topic on Twitter and supporters changed their Facebook profile picture with the use of a rainbow filter. President Obama posted on Twitter: "Today is a big step in our march toward equality. Gay and lesbian couples now have the right to marry, just like anyone else. #LoveWins" (Somanader 2015). Detractors were also quick to make their own statements about the ruling, emphasizing the fact that the issue remains a contentious one for Americans and that we are still divided along religious and civil rights frames.

Cultural Backlash

Marriage equality is now the law of the land but cultural resistance to same-sex marriage is an ongoing battle, especially in the Southern states. Will married same-sex couples be treated equally in the South as in other parts of the nation? Based on our cultural heritage, the answer is "no."

Like interracial couples of the 1960s, same-sex couples have only gained equality by federal intervention. In the meantime, they must continue to struggle with the legal and emotional difficulties of being treated as second-class citizens. On the same day that a same-sex couple is legally married, they may face legal discrimination in the workplace, housing, organized religion, healthcare facilities, as potential jurors, in adoption services, in the foster care system, and others. Additionally, the new legal status of these families will not protect them from potential physical harm.

Will the South rise again and heed the call for marriage equality or will history repeat itself? When African American Mildred Jeter and her white boyfriend, Richard Loving were married in 1958 in Washington D.C., they returned to a less than welcoming cultural climate in their home state of Virginia where they were charged with unlawful cohabitation and subsequently jailed. Judge Leon Bazile used his own religious beliefs to condemn the couple and said that:

Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, malay and red, and he placed them on separate continents. And, but for the interference with his arrangement, there would be no cause for such marriage. The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix (Legal Information Institute 2015).

When the Lovings returned to Virginia to visit family five years after their sentence, they were arrested for traveling together. This event inspired Mildred Loving to write to Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy to ask for help. They were referred to the ACLU which represented them in their Supreme Court case. In 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down bans on interracial marriage but these unions were still illegal in 16 states. It took 33 more years for the State of Alabama to be in line with the rest of the union, becoming the last state to officially legalize interracial marriage following a November 7, 2000 ballot referendum. The religious frame used by the Virginia judge to condemn the Lovings is familiar to the gay and lesbian community.

The Supreme Court ruling to legalize same-sex marriage was met with resistance in several states across the South. Same-sex marriages in Mississippi were halted on Friday, June 26th, by an order from Attorney General Jim Hood. In Alabama, marriage licenses were being issued in most of the major population areas but a few probate judges stopped issuing licenses, saying that they did not want to violate their religious beliefs. Ken Paxton, the attorney general of Texas released a statement on Sunday, June 28th that local officials could refuse to issue marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples on religious grounds. The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals did not issue immediate orders for states to comply with the Supreme Court ruling but sent letters to the state attorneys general in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas asking for opinions on how to proceed in the resolution of pending same-sex legal cases. Though Georgia was one of the 15 states where a ban on same-sex marriage existed, Gov. Nathan Deal announced prior to the ruling that Georgia would follow the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Republican presidential hopefuls spoke out against the ruling in short order. While on the campaign trail in Iowa, presidential candidate Mike Huckabee told the crowd that the Supreme Court tried to “unwrite the laws of nature and the laws of nature’s God when it legalized same-sex marriage.” Former Texas Gov.

Rick Perry scorned the ruling and stated that the decision should have been left to the states. Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker called for a constitutional amendment to undo the marriage ruling. And, former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum said that gay marriage was “based on a lie that gay-marriage opponents are motivated by discrimination” (Wyatt 2015).

Resistance to the ruling in the religious community was strong with opponents claiming that the law endangered the free exercise of religion. Chief Justice John Roberts, Jr. supported this claim in his dissent: “Hard questions arise when people of faith exercise religion in ways that may be seen to conflict with the new right to same-sex marriage, when, for example, a religious college provides married student housing only to opposite-sex couples, or a religious adoption agency declines to place children with same-sex married couples.” Though conservatives have complained that the ruling forces religious people to perform same-sex weddings, clergy still have the right to refuse to perform these ceremonies and the Constitution makes it clear that places of worship don’t have to perform marriages. Roger Oldham, spokesperson for the Southern Baptist Convention, a group that strongly opposed the Court’s decision noted that, “We do believe that the whole landscape has changed. There’s a lot of uncertainty about the future. But no, we have not seen a threat to an individual pastor.” University of Virginia law professor Douglas Laycock noted that, “The state and its counties are bound by the decision, and they do not have religions.” These constitutional distinctions open the door for same-sex marriage conflicts to exist in the legal and cultural arena for years to come (Savage 2015).

Summary and Discussion

From a legal perspective, we are a nation that has achieved marriage equality. But the battle for equality is not over. Advocates of the LGBT Movement are now focused on the need for a federal law that would prohibit discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. The Center for American Progress reported that 28 states lack explicit sexual-orientation non-discrimination protections. All Southern states are included in this number. They note that while same-sex married couples may be legally wed, they can also be legally denied a hotel room for their honeymoon, legally fired from their job, legally evicted from their apartment, legally denied a loan, or have a child legally expelled from college (americanprogress.org).

Successful cultural integration will be vital to the health of same-sex marriages and families. Whitehead (2013) noted that:

The participation of gays and lesbians in all aspects of society is continually disputed in the United States. Religion is one of the key

battlegrounds. The extent to which religious congregations include lesbians and gays in congregational life is vital to the wider debate over homosexuality because congregations consistently influence more Americans than any other voluntary social institution (P. 297).

Most religious groups have seen an increase in support for same-sex marriage. The greatest level of support comes from Jewish Americans at 83 percent in favor of marriage equality. A slight majority of white and Hispanic Catholics and white mainline Protestants now favor same-sex marriage. But among black and white Evangelical Protestants, located primarily in the Southern states, the majority still opposes a universal right to marry (csmonitor.com). Prior to the Supreme Court ruling, almost half of Southerners said that they favor same-sex marriage, while only 37 percent say that sex between two adults of the same gender is morally acceptable (Jones 2014).

If there truly is something new in the “New South,” then it is time to embrace marriage equality both legally and culturally. Much research was conducted on gay and lesbian relationships prior to the legalization of same-sex marriage. Now researchers are met with the charge of measuring social attitudes and rates of acceptance following the Supreme Court ruling. Whitley (2009) found that most forms of religiosity are more strongly related to prejudice against lesbians and gay men than to racial and ethnic prejudice. Higher fundamentalism was related to both forms of prejudice, but the effect size for prejudice against lesbians and gay men was 2.6 times higher than that for racial/ethnic prejudice. Will this divide remain now that same-sex marriage is legal? Will same-sex married couples face more discrimination in the South than in other parts of the nation? Will there be an increase or decrease in acts of housing discrimination? Will the children of same-sex married couples fare better socially when their parents are married? All of these questions and more need to be addressed by researchers to truly understand the social and cultural ramifications of the legalization of same-sex marriage.

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