Proposition 8: *The Divide of Faith and Politics*?

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Executive Summary

Organizing efforts to gain wide-spread support for marriage equality in the State of California picked up force after Proposition 8 passed in November 2008. An important contributing factor for the constitutional ban on gay marriage was the influence of religion and faith in the realm of politics concerning marriage equality for homosexual couples. In this research paper, I take a look at the underlying factors of what happens when people of faith are conflicted with political activism needed for marriage equality. Through several in-depth interviews with congregational members from a conservative, small church and Occidental's religious organization, I come up with recommendations for Vote for Equality, the organizing arm of the Gay and Lesbian Center in Los Angeles.

My findings suggest that people of faith can be swayed to support marriage equality if the right relationships are built with members of the Lesbian, Gay, Transgendered, and Bisexual community. Additionally, my findings also suggest that Vote for Equality has potential to build relationships with students of faith on Occidental's campus through internship opportunities and relationships with Occidental's interfaith group.

Introduction

"This is a day of immensely conflicted feelings. We are profoundly disappointed the court has upheld Proposition 8. Banning the fundamental freedom to marry for same-sex couples is unfair, unjust and flies in the face of progress occurring throughout the country, from the Iowa heartland to the rocky shores of Maine. That California is taking a step backward at this moment in history is disconcertingly out of step with society's growing support for equality, and personally painful to committed couples who will be blocked from marrying in California. It is a travesty that the court has, for the first time in California history, permitted a simple majority to use the initiative process to strip a fundamental right from a minority group."

-Rea Carey, Executive Director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

On November, 2008 I walked into my voting center and voted Yes on Prop 8. Since 11th grade in high school to my current time at Occidental College, my beliefs have been ever changing from conservative to less conservative. I have found myself grappling with what I have been taught since I was five to what I have been exposed to in more liberal environments, like Occidental. This struggle was made even more apparent to me when Prop 8 was put in the ballot, and I soon began to see stickers, posters, protestors, media coverage, and commercials surrounding Prop 8. When it came to deciding on what to vote for, it was even more difficult for me because I had conflicting viewpoints from church, family, and media.

I grew up the Christian Reform Church which is traditional, Dutch-based church with strong theological teachings. Since the age of 5, I spent Sundays at church, Wednesdays at the Christian girls' club, and other days in church events. Additionally, I spent most of my education, from preschool to 10th grade in a conservative, Christian school. Most of my childhood was spent in conservative, Christian environments, and most of my beliefs have been formed by my faith. But, when it came to voting for Prop 8, I found myself in an internal state of conflict.

At home, homosexuality is never spoken of in a positive way. My parents immigrated to the states in the late 1980s and both came from traditional, Hispanic families. Once in the states, they came to Bethel Christian Reform Church because of its conservative teaching. Additionally, both of my parents have never known someone who is homosexual, and have viewed being gay as being "wrong." I will even admit to saying that my dad could be labeled as homophobic. For example, when he meets someone that he senses could be gay, he will poke fun at their sexuality. When he sees gay men walking on the street when we go out, he will start laughing and keep his distance. He makes fun of my uncle who came out as being gay last year. And, when it came to Prop 8, he could not understand why it had become a big issue. He told me, "Why do *they* need a paper saying they are married? Can't they just be happy and live their lives. They are making such a big deal about something that is not important." I also have my mom telling me that "God created marriage. I'm not going to vote to support gay marriage because it should be between a man and woman."

In addition to being surrounded by my church's conservative teaching and my parents' stance on marriage, the conservative media increased the internal struggle I was having. Days before the election, I remember seeing commercials for "Vote Yes on Prop 8" that stated "We need to restore traditional marriage" and that 96% of schools are required to teach about marriage. Another commercial shows a young girl being confused about how her two fathers cannot have a baby together. And, the preservingmarriage.org website put out a video on how just because one does not support gay marriage, does not mean that person is intolerant or homophobic. One woman states that "tolerance means love and forgiveness of one another, not tolerating transgression." Voters on Yes on 8, in this video, also state that "in recent years we have seen unrelenting pressure from activists for the freedom of speech, but equally fast to

criticize those with a different view." I had felt this kind of pressure, and with the combination of my church and family, I voted Yes on Prop 8.

After the results, I felt I had made a decision based on many external factors, but most importantly, my faith did not seem to coincide with my decision. The Prop 8 results brought a lot of disappointment and sadness for supporters against Prop 8. Keith Olbermann, of the news station MSNBC, spoke out on Prop 8. He asked voters of Yes on Prop 8 if they could compromise on the importance of "spreading happiness…a tiny, symbolical grain of happiness" to people who want to have the same kind of happiness that is afforded to a man and woman in a marriage. His overall message is that Prop 8 "is not a question of politics, not a question of religion, not a question of gay or straight, but a question of love." For the first time before and after the voting, I knew that my decision was not congruent with my personal beliefs. The external factors outweighed my decision, but they were not based on my faith that teaches me to love. By voting yes on Prop 8, I contradicted my faith, and failed to support "that ember that is the sign of my love for my fellow person" (Olberman 2009). Additionally, November 2008 was the first time in the history of the United States that the constitution was changed and the rights of a group of people were taken away because of a simple majority in California. Because I now understand the context of Prop 8 and the negative impact on gay couples, I have decided to conduct in-depth interviews with people of faith, and to cement by new view of marriage by canvassing with Vote For Equality (VFE).

For this research paper, I will focus on individuals that voted in against gay marriage and in support of Prop 8 by conducting in-depth interviews at my church and at Oxy's evangelical organization. My intention is that my analysis of my findings will be useful in the efforts for Vote for Equality (VFE), the organizing arm of the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center in

Hollywood, California. After the November 2008 election, VFE has stepped up its organizing efforts to "find out whether and how minds can be changed." VFE teaches volunteers how to have effective one-on-one conversations with supporters and non-supporters of Prop 8 with the purpose of restoring marriage equality. VFE is currently canvassing in all parts of Los Angeles County with precincts of 45% to 75% unsupportive voters. VFE is currently doing a lot of work studying the messaging of Prop 8 across a broad range of voters. Laura Gardiner, the field organizer for VFE stated that "we [at VFE] are not concentrated on one population, like religious communities; rather we are canvassing to all kinds of people."

While VFE's efforts to reach out to a broad base of voters, other reports point to particular religious affiliation as a key constituency that voted against gay marriage. According to a Prop 8 summary report by David Binder Research, 66% of 800 California individuals who voted yes on Prop 8 are protestant. Additionally, the David Binder Research found that 94% of these voters were influenced by religion and were more likely to vote yes on Prop 8. While these studies point to general voting patterns of faith-based constituents, I wanted to conduct interviews with conservative church members to gain perspective on these religious views on gay marriage. For this reason, I am focusing on interviewing individuals in my church and in the college-based evangelical organization at Oxy. Through these interviews with people of conservative faith backgrounds, I identify recommendations for how to best gather support for marriage equality. Although generalizations based on my study cannot be made, I will examine what happens when faith intercedes political decisions and how these underlying factors can help proponents of marriage equality.

Vote for Equality Canvassing

"There is more than a verbal tie between the words common, community, and communication.... Try the experiment of communicating, with fullness and accuracy, some experience to another, especially if it be somewhat complicated, and you will find your own attitude toward your experience changing." – John Dewey

Vote for Equality (VFE) is an education and outreach project at the Gay and Lesbian Center in Los Angeles. Field organizers and volunteers have been canvassing in areas of Los Angeles where voters overwhelming voted Yes on Prop 8. In the words of Laura Gardiner, one of the field organizers for VFE, "we [VFE] are talking to voters, and it's about picking people's brains and trying to see why and where they stand." I decided to canvass to get to know what other voters thought about gay marriage, but I really wanted to surround myself by gay and lesbian individuals because I'm not close to anyone who is gay. In other words, I wanted to put a human face to the social issue of marriage equality. Even though my view of gay marriage is different, as John Dewey a famous social psychologist stated, by being in community with others about an issue that is complicated to me, I would find my attitude towards my new experience changing. Within the VFE canvassing, the importance of knowing someone who is gay was a recurring theme. A gay teacher, and transgendered woman, and my canvassing partner changed the minds of unsupportive voters.

Jose is a 30 year old Hispanic teacher who teaches at a local public high school. As he was in conversation with an unsupportive 74 year old man about gay marriage, the elderly man told Jose that he does not know of any gay people. Jose never told the man that he himself was gay but talked to this voter about Prop 8. Jose spoke about his role as a teacher in a high school and how much he enjoys it. This teacher made a profound impact on the elderly man in two ways: Jose broke the stereotype of "gay" man, and he drew himself as a positive member of

society. At the end of the conversation, Jose was able to tell the old man that he now knows a gay person, and the old man was astonish to find out that he had been speaking to a gay man. As Jose told the rest of the canvassers, the elderly man told him he could not believe that this young, productive member of society was gay. The old man took a step further to get to know about gay people as he asked Jose if he could ask a personal question. The old man asked Jose if gay men get erections. Although VFE found this question comical, this experience also shows how getting to know a gay person can break down social barriers that voters who oppose gay marriage are afraid to do. At the end of the conversation, the voter had told Jose he would vote in favor of marriage equality next time it showed up on the ballot.

Sam is a transgendered woman who spoke to a Hispanic family during one of the canvasses in East Los Angeles. As Sam spoke to an older Hispanic man about gay marriage, he told her that he was not in support of gay marriage because no one in his family is gay. It did not pertain to him and his vote did not affect anyone in his family. Sam opened up to this man and told him about her experience as being a transgender. The voter did not turn away from her, but rather called his whole family, including his children, out to meet Sam. He told his children, "This is a transgendered woman… I want you to see her because you need to know that gay, lesbian, and transgendered people are just like you and me, and it's not fair to discriminate against them." Once again, Sam had been able to get another unsupportive voter to reconsider his position just by showing this man that members of the Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, and Bisexual community are human beings like everyone else.

Lastly, Curtis is a young volunteer with VFE who was my canvassing partner. Before my first canvass in February, I had mixed feelings about my decision to canvass. It was extremely difficult for me to step out of my comfort zone and precede to talk to voters about Prop 8

because I was still conflicted with my faith. But, I still went to canvass and met Curtis. I soon found out that Curtis and I had graduated from the same high school. He is a young, Christian gay man who comes from a strict, traditional Chinese family. When he decided to come out to his family when he was 21 years old, he was extremely tormented with not being certain about how his parents would react. When he came out, his mother did not want to talk about it, and his sister did not speak to him for several months. He told me, "People still think that being gay is a choice…They truly believe that gay people choose into the hardships, trials, and ostracization of coming out. Coming out is a choice, but being gay is not." For the first time since I had made my decision to support gay marriage, I felt that I had had a sincere experience with someone who is gay. Hearing his story about how scared he was to come out, I realized that gay people are constantly being shunned from society and being told they are "wrong." For the first time, I recognized how wrong Prop 8 really was.

Proposition 8

"If you are concerned about marriage and how it gets to be defined, this is where it will be decided." –Frank Schubert, Campaign Manager for Yes on 8

Proposition 8, the ban on gay marriage, has been the costliest and one of the most controversial ballot initiatives in California; campaign contributions for both supporters and non-supporters was more than $83 million (Moore and Garvey, 2010). The high number of contributions for this ballot initiative was the result of two differing views on gay marriage. Post November 8th surveys describe the breakdown of voters as a separation based on cultural, religious, and generational differences. Proposition 8 banned same-sex marriage in California, and passed with a 4 point margin, with 52% of Yes voters and 48% no voters (Public Policy Institute of California 2008). The Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) gathered voter demographics from a post-election survey and found the following breakdown:

- Evangelical Christians were 85% more likely to vote in support of Prop 8 compared other voters (PPIC 2008).
- 77% of Republicans voted in support of Prop 8 whereas 65% of Democrats voted no and 48% of Independents voted no (PPIC 2008).
- 61% of Latinos were more likely to vote in support of Prop 8, and in general, 57% of Latinos, Blacks, and Asians together were more likely to vote yes on Prop 8 (PPIC 2008).
- 67% of voters over the age of 65 voted in support of Prop 8 (Egan 2009).
- Lastly, 62% of voters without a college degree were more likely to support Prop 8 compared to 43% of individuals with a college degree who voted yes on Prop 8 (PPIC 2008).

Prop 8 made its way to the November 2008 ballot when the California Supreme Court ruled that Proposition 22 was unconstitutional. Proposition 22 was an initiative that banned same-sex marriages in California and defined marriage as an union between a man and woman (NPR, 2000). After Prop 22 passed in March 2000, two bills that supported gay marriage were vetoed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Several lawsuits were also in the courts from gay couples who believed that banning them from the legal rights that come with marriage was a constitutional violation. Then on May 17th, 2008, the California Supreme Court ruled that the ban on gays to marry was unconstitutional because the ban discriminates on the basis of sexual orientation (Dolan, 2008). After the Supreme Court Decision, in 2004 San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom began issuing same-sex marriage licenses. Thousands of gay couples fled to San Francisco, even outsiders, where gay couples and activists celebrated their victory. The overturn of Prop 22 sent a surge of anger among opponents of gay marriage. Supreme Court Justices Marvin R. Baxter and Justice Ming W. Chin did not rule in favor of overturning Prop 22 and stated that the overturning of Prop 22 "creates the opportunity for further judicial extension of this perceived constitutional right into dangerous territory" (Dolan, 2008). Conservatives and religious groups were angry that their decision in 2000 was overturned by the courts. These groups soon began organizing and campaigning to bring Prop 8 to the 2008 ballot which would make the ban on same-sex marriage in California a constitution amendment (Dolan, 2008).

Proposition 8 was organized by ProtectMarriage which is a "broad-based coalition of California families, community leaders, religious leaders, pro-family organizations and individuals from all walks of life who have joined together to defend and restore the definition of marriage as between a man and a woman" (ProtectMarriage.com, 2010). This broad-based coalition is made up religious organizations, conservative individuals, and other opponents of

same-marriage who felt that the Supreme Court's ruling to overturn Prop 22 demeaned the voice of the thousands of voters who did not support gay marriage in 2000. Individuals who make up ProtectMarriage include President Ron Prentice of the California Family Council, Board Member Rosemarie Avila of the Santa Ana School District, and Director Bishop George McKinney of the Coalition of African American Pastors (ProtectMarriage.com, 2010). These individuals come from religious-affiliated organizations and conservative backgrounds who helped shape Prop 8 as a campaign not as one to take rights away from gay couples, but rather as one whose purpose is to protect marriage by restoring the definition of marriage, protect the institution of marriage in society, to protect children from being taught about gay marriage, and to overturn "the outrageous decision of four activist Supreme Court judges who ignored the will of the people" in March 2000 (ProtectMarriage, 2010). The Yes on Prop 8 campaign was successful because the amount of support it received in organizing efforts, in financial contributions, and the amount of support it received from church organizations in the short months between the CA Supreme Court ruling to the November 2008.

Several of the religious organizations involved in the Yes on Prop 8 campaign included Pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Ranch, California Roman Catholics, the Catholic Knights of Columbus, the Church of Latter Day Saints, Evangelical Christians, Southern Baptists, California Family Council, and Coalition of African American Pastors (ProtectMarriage.com, 2010). Of the nearly 70,000 contributors to ProtectMarriage, a majority of the contributors were from churches including the Catholic Church, the Mormon Church, and other Evangelical Christians. Additionally, proponents of Prop 8 recognize that "the grassroots effort by the churches and the cooperation of the churches was unprecedented," which included an impressive turnout of black and Hispanic voters, 70% and 53%, respectively due to Obama's popularity

among minorities (Foust, 2008). These churches supported ProtectMarriage because they believed that Prop 8 upholds traditional marriage and strengthens the institution of marriage (ProtectMarriage.com, 2010).

The California's Roman Catholic bishops urged all Catholic parishioners to help proponents heading the Yes on Prop 8 campaigns through financial contributions and volunteering (Advocate.com, 2008). At a California Catholic Conference many archdioceses included Los Angeles, San Francisco, Fresno, Monterey, Oakland, Orange, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Jose, Santa Rosa, and Stockton, all asked parishioners to consider the well-being of children by supporting Prop 8 which will ensure that children will be raised in homes with a married man and a woman (Advocate.com, 2008). Supporting California's Roman Catholic bishops were the Knights of Columbus, an effective Catholic family fraternal service organization that has had a history of supporting civil and religious rights for everybody (Kerns, 2008). Patrick Korten, the spokesperson for Knights of Columbus, stated that they support Prop 8 because they believe that marriage is "the indispensable institution in which children are conceived, born and raised to adulthood by a loving father and mother is vital to a healthy society. It is also the most favorable environment in which to protect the rights and best interests of children" (Kerns, 2008).

California's Catholic organizations were not alone in supporting the organizing efforts of Prop 8. The church of Latter Day Saints (LDS) is reported to have contributed nearly 30% of the total donations to ProtectMarriage (Pyrah, 2008). The call to rally support for Prop 8 came from across the borders of California in Salt Lake City, Utah. The First Presidency of the LDS told their leaders in California to tell their congregations to "do all they can to support the proposed constitutional amendment" in California (Pyrah, 2008). The Church of the LDS sent a letter to be

read to all LDS congregations in California stating that "marriage between a man and a woman is ordained by God, and the formation of families is central to the Creator's plan for His children [and] children are entitled to be born within this bond of marriage" (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2010). The spokesperson for ProtectMarriage, Jennifer Kearns, said that the LDS church had a significant role in helping their campaign efforts where individual donations from members of the LDS church reached nearly $5 million (Pyrah, 2008). In addition to financial contributions, the LDS church also helped ProtectMarriage by creating advertisements and videos that showed young Californian adults who talked about the importance of protecting the institution of marriage. These advertisements and videos had a powerful affect on individuals, like myself, who were grappling with their faith and the politics behind marriage quality. These young adults counteracted many of the arguments of the opponents of Yes on Prop 8; they highlighted the proposed harm of gay marriage on children in schools and families, the rights that gay couples have in civil unions, protecting religious freedoms, the importance of making Prop 8 a constitutional amendment to avoid any future court overturn decisions, and emphasized the broad-based support Prop 8 campaign had gathered (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2008).

Another support for the Yes on 8 campaign efforts came from Evangelical churches like Pastor Rick Warren's Saddleback mega-church in Lake Forest, California. In an email sent to members of his church, Pastor Warren wrote "For 5,000 years, every culture and every religion - not just Christianity - has defined marriage as a contract between men and women…there is no reason to change the universal, historical definition of marriage to appease 2% of our population" (Gallagher, 2008). He also made a statement that the issue of marriage is "not just a Christian issue, it's a humanitarian issue that God created marriage for the purpose of

procreation" (Warren, 2008). He supported the Prop 8 campaign, and urged his congregation to do the same, because he believed taking a stand on Prop 8 was taking a stand on a moral issue (Warren, 2008). Pastor Rick Warren's position on Prop 8 was influential considering that his church is the 8th largest church in America, and one of the largest in Southern California, averaging 20,000 congregational members in attendance (Outreach, Inc., 2010).

The organizing efforts of ProtectMarriage highlighted how the majority of proponents of Yes on Prop 8 came from religious organizations, mainly churches. This included support from the Black community which saw an unprecedented amount of black voters, 70%, who supported Prop 8 (Foust, 2008). ProtectMarriage counted on then Presidential candidate Obama to bring African-American voters to the polls and vote Yes on Prop 8. Moreover, the president of the California chapter of the National Association For the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Alice A. Huffman, said that the California NAACP tried to mobilize voters against the gay marriage ban but found that many African-American voters were divided between what the Bible said and the right of gay couples to marry as one woman expressed, "I don't have a problem with civil unions, but when it comes to marriage, and the holy sanctity of marriage, that's where I'm conflicted" (CBS Evening News, 2008). Black churches faced a dilemma when it came to Prop 8. Kim Lawton, a reporter for PBS, stated that "within the African-American community, the national debate over gay marriage is pitting two deeply held values against each other. Historically, black churches have interpreted Scripture as condemning homosexuality. But given their own history, African-American congregations have also traditionally empathized with oppressed minorities" (Lawton, 2004). Although some African-Americans, like Alice Huffman, believe that the gay community is going through the same civil rights struggle that

African-Americans went through, results showed that nearly 60% of African-Americans supported the ban on gay marriage (Equality California Institute, 2009).

The Yes on 8 campaign was also depending on the turnout of Hispanic Obama voters in addition to African-American voters. Weeks before the November election, ProtectMarriage presented two Spanish television advertisements (Haro, 2008). The Yes on Prop 8 emphasized the importance of family and the belief that children should be raised by a mother and a father (Haro, 2008). The Yes on 8 campaign was thankful for the Hispanic turnout who was more likely to vote for Obama and vote based on their religious beliefs. Similar to the turmoil that African-American voters found themselves in, Hispanic voters empathized with gay couples because of the continual struggle that Hispanics face when trying to obtain basic rights (Haro, 2008). The Edison Media Research took an exit poll on Prop 8 and found that:

- 53% of Hispanics voted Yes in Prop 8 compared to 52% of the electorate that voted Yes on Prop 8.
- 54% of Hispanic males voted Yes on Prop 8.
- 60% of Hispanics between the ages of 30-44 voted Yes on Prop.

Given the enormous support and success that ProtectMarriage was able to gather in the short months from the time of the California Supreme Court Ruling to the November 2008 elections, marriage equality proponents recognized that to overturn Prop 8 in the future called for immediate organizing efforts. Vote for Equality (VFE), the organizing arm of the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center, began rallying supporters for marriage equality in 2004. VFE was co-lead by Tawal Panyacosit, the Senior Field Organizer, and Robert Blackmon, the Project Organizer. Although a fairly new organization, VFE picked up momentum after Prop 8 passed in

November 2008. Specifically, VFE's "main focus is having one-on-once conversations with voters at their doorsteps, to try to learn more about why they oppose marriage for gay and lesbian couples-and to figure out how to get them to reconsider" (vote4equality.org, 2010). VFE model of canvassing to talk to voters is being used in other national gay rights organizations such as Equality California and Marriage Equality USA. The purpose of canvassing to voters in precincts that predominately voted Yes on Prop 8 is to look at both sides of the marriage campaign and how to develop effective messages to gather support for marriage equality in the future (vote4equality.org, 2010). VFE organizing and canvassing efforts are vital for marriage equality in California because 25% of Yes on 8 voters are situated in Los Angeles (vote4equality.org, 2010). Currently, canvassers with VFE have "begun to move 25% of undecided and unsupportive voters to reconsider, or become more supportive of marriage equality" (vote4equality.org, 2010).

Although Prop 8 highlights the struggle for marriage equality in California, the efforts of the gay rights movement and organizations like VFE date back to June 27th, 1969 (Wright, 1999). Prior to 1969, police raids in gay bars was a common sight. But, on this night at the Greenwhich Village in New York, after policeman had raided a gay bar and thrown a couple of gay men and lesbian woman into a van, the bar's customers fought back. According to articles, hundreds of gays and lesbians took to the streets and began shouting "Gay Power!" (Wright 1999). As the large crowd gathered around the Stonewall Inn outside, the crowd and the police pelted each other with rubber bullets, rocks, and bottles. The riots broke out for five days as thousands of gays and lesbians protested the oppression and violence the police had embarked on them in countless bar raids. The importance of what was called the Stonewall Riots was that for the first time the gay community took a "stand against oppression and demand[ed] full equality

in every area of life" (Wright, 1999). The Stonewall riots is said to be when the gay rights movement took force. To this day, the Stonewall riots is known as the turning point for the Lesbian, Gay, Transgendered, Bisexual (LGBT) Community these outcasts took a stance and became "a courageous group of citizens who resisted harassment and mistreatment" (Dunlap, 1999). After the Stonewall Riots, the gay rights movement began. The following represents the major accomplishments that LGBT activists have carried out (Carreras, 2009):

- 1970- The first gay marches are held in New York City, Los Angeles, and San Francisco after one year of the Stonewall riots.
- 1971- The first openly gay candidate runs for the D.C. seat.
- 1972- East Lansing and Ann Harbor become the first cities in the U.S. to pass homosexual rights ordinances.
- 1973- The National Gay Task Force becomes the first LGBT rights organizations founding in the U.S.
- 1973- The American Psychiatric Association removes homosexuality from its list of mental disorders.
- 1978- The rainbow flag is designed by Gilbert Brake as a symbol of gay pride.
- 1979- The first gay rights march is held in Washington, D.C.
- 1982- The Gay Men's Health Crisis is founded due to the AIDS epidemic that began the year before.
- 1990- The Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency Act is signed by Congress to increase research and treatment for AIDS.
- 1998- A young, gay man, Ryan Shephard is murdered. The LGBT community began to push for anti-bullying legislation.

- 1999-California adopts a domestic partnership law.
- 2003- Homosexual acts become legal in all 50 states.

The gay rights movement has made tremendous progress since the Stonewall Riots, but gay marriage began to stir controversy when gay activists began efforts to strive for marriage equality. In 1999, California adopted a domestic partnership law (Carreras, 2009). But, gay activists have been pushing for marriage equality that provides all the legal protections and benefits that are awarded to married heterosexual couples. A majority of the states in the U.S. have opted out of issuing gay couples the right to marry, and have instead issued civil unions that still limit homosexual couples from receiving the full benefits and federal rights of marriage (Vestal, 2007). Activists for marriage equality have been actively pursuing marriage because "civil unions are separate and unequal" (Vestal, 2007). The following table, adapted from Craig Rimmerman's book *The Lesbian and Gay Movements*, shows the differences between a domestic partnership, a civil union, and civil marriage (2008, pg 121):

	Civil Marriage	**Civil Union**	**Domestic Partnership**
Federal Protections	Offers Federal protections such as Social Security, federal taxation, family and medical leave, and immigration policy.	Offers no federal rights, responsibilities or protections.	Offers no federal protections.
Benefits	Offers Federal and state benefits such as Social Security, inheritance to a will, right to file joint taxes, right to sponsor a partner for immigration.	Offers equality at the state level and eligibility for health insurance through private employers.	Offers some state benefits such as health care.
Availability	Available in all states, unless the couple is homosexual.	Available to same-sex couples in Vermont and New Jersey.	Available in a range of cities and states with provisions varying widely.

Marriage Equality Timeline

As the table able shows, controversy over Prop 8 stems from recognition that gay couples do not receive the legal protections and benefits that come with marriage. Prior to Prop 8, the United States has had a history of prohibiting gay and lesbian couples the institution of marriage. Gay rights activist have been fighting for the right to marry, declaring that "whatever the state is handing out when it issues a marriage license, whatever approval or endorsement it is providing, will have to ultimately be made available to all Americans (Baird, Stuart, and Rosenbaum, 2007, pg 84). The United States began changing the definition of marriage beginning with the federal ruling in 1967, allowing interracial marriage. Historically, the United States views marriage as "A contract made in due form of law, by which a free man and a free woman reciprocally engage to live with each other during their joint lives, in the union which ought to exist between husband and wife. By the terms freeman and freewoman in this definition are meant, not only that they are free and not slaves, but also that they are clear of all bars to a lawful marriage" (Bouvier 1856). Thus, 1967 marks the beginning of how the U.S. first changed its definition of marriage.

June 12, 1967

In Loving v. Virginia the Supreme Court ruled that states could no longer prohibit interracial couples from getting married. It began when Milfred Jeter, a black woman, and Richard Loving, a white man were arrested one night after returning from their honeymoon for committing "the crime of evading their state's discriminatory law and violating Virginia's same-race restriction on marriage" (www.freedomtomarry.org 2009). The Supreme Court declared that "the freedom to marry has long been recognized as one of the vital personal rights essential to

orderly pursuit of happiness by free men." Although 90% of the public did not agree with the Supreme Court's ruling, the ruling was passed. (www.freedomtomarry.org 2009).

July 1984

Berkeley, California became the first city in the country to pass legal rights for domestic partners for school employees (Link, 2008). Just prior to this victory for gay couples, California was involved in lawsuits pertaining to legally recognizing gay partners in households and relationships. Larry Brinkin was an employee for the Southern Pacific Railway. When his partner of 12 years died, his employer did not allow him to take time off for bereavement because Brinkin's partner was not legally recognized as family (Link, 2008). But, the Berkeley school board adopted the term, domestic partnerships, and gave all school employees the benefits of a domestic partnership. This marked the first time that gay couples were given the some of the same benefits of heterosexual couples (Head 2010).

May 5, 1993

A case in Hawaii began the national controversy in the United States about same-sex marriage. Three-same sex couples, in Hawaii, were denied marriage licenses. Although the Hawaii Supreme Court ruled "there is no good reason for denying marriage to committed same-sex couples, who share the same mix of reason for wanting marriage as non-gay couples," the Hawaii Supreme court was obstructed from ending marriage discrimination when a constitution amendment banning same sex marriage was passed by Hawaii's legislature (Head 2010).

September 21, 1996

The United States Congress passed The Defense of Marriage Act, also known as DOMA, which was signed by former President Bill Clinton. Under this act, Federal law allows each state to choose for themselves to legalize gay marriage, but the Federal government will not recognize these marriages. Under DOMA, states are also given the choice to not recognize gay and lesbian marriages from other states (www.freedomtomarry.org 2009). Currently, there are 30 states that protect traditional marriage, including the most recent California (www.domawatch.org 2008).

The Year 2000

During this year, Vermont became the first stated to issue civil unions to same-sex couples. Similar to the case in Hawaii, three same-sex couples sued the state of Vermont " for denying them the right to marry… [but this time], the state's highest court agreed" (Head 2010). For the first time, a state agreed that barring gay couples from marriage was a violation of equal protection on the constitution.

March 7, 2000

In the same year of the Vermont decision, Californians voted in favor of Proposition 22 which supported California's DOMA's definition that "only marriage between a man and woman is valid or recognized in California." This proposition won with 61.2% majority of voters, with 52 of the California's 58 counties in favor of banning same-sex couples from marriage (www.marriagewatch.org 2001).

May 17, 2004

Massachusetts declared in a the case titled Goodridge v. Department of Public Health that "marriage itself must be made available to same-sex couples" (Head 2010). For the second time, a state recognized that barring same-sex couples the right to marry was a violation of the constitution, but Massachusetts Supreme Court went a step further by legalizing gay marriage. This stance allowed the same, full protections and benefits of heterosexual couples to gay couples (Family Education Network 2009).

The Year 2005 to the Present

Following the Massachusetts ruling, states such as Connecticut and New Jersey offered gay couples limited benefits through civil union in 2005 and 2006, respectively (Family Education Network 2009). The U.S. continued to change the momentum of granting same-sex couples some rights and benefits through civil unions or civil marriages. On May 15, 2008 the California Supreme Court ruled to legalize gay marriage. For the first time in California, gay couples like Del Martin, 87, and Phyllis Lyon, 83, felt that "marriage as an institution has been strengthened today…This is the first day we are providing marriage- fully and fairly- to everyone" (www.freedomtomarry.org 2009). In the short months following, more than 18,000 same-sex couples were married (Family Education Network 2009).

November, 4 2008

Proposition 8 banning same-sex marriage in California passed with a narrow margin. Specifically, 5,125,752 voters supported Prop 8 (52%) compared to 4,725,313 voters who did not support Prop 8(48%) (Duray 2008). In June 2008, the state of California brought to question "whether the failure to designate the official relationship of same-sex couples as a marriage

violates the California Constitution" (Supreme Court of California 2008). The Supreme Court of California brought into question whether California's decision to deny marriage equality same-sex couples was constitutional (Supreme Court of California 2008). The court stated:

> "We conclude that, under this state's Constitution, the constitutionally based right to marry properly must be understood to encompass the core set of basic substantive legal rights and attributes traditionally associated with marriage that are so integral to an individual's liberty and personal autonomy that they may not be eliminated or abrogated by the Legislature or by the electorate through the statutory initiative process. These core substantive rights include, most fundamentally, the opportunity of an individual to establish — with the person with whom the individual has chosen to share his or her life — an officially recognized and protected family possessing mutual rights and responsibilities and entitled to the same respect and dignity accorded a union traditionally designated as marriage. As past cases establish, the substantive right of two adults who share a loving relationship to join together to establish an officially recognized family of their own — and, if the couple chooses, to raise children within that family — constitutes a vitally important attribute of the fundamental interest in liberty and personal autonomy that the California Constitution secures to all persons for the benefit of both the individual and society."

The Supreme Court of California goes even further to explain that similar to a person's race or gender, there is no legitimate reason to deny same-sex couples the equal rights and responsibilities of legally, recognized marriage based on their sexual orientation (Supreme Court of California 2008). The judges of the Supreme Court challenged California's legislature on banning marriage to same-sex couples, but also stated that this civil rights case is different than "the rights to education, to vote, to pursue office or occupation, and the other celebrated civil

rights" because supporters of marriage equality are seeking to transform the traditional definition of marriage (Supreme Court of California 2008).

The Years Following Prop 8

Following 2009, several states legalized same-sex marriages including Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont, New Hampshire, and the District of Columbia. These state's ruling declared that "[we] cannot deny gay and lesbian couples the freedom to marry in [our] constitutions, and that the civil unions laws do not provide same-sex couples with the same rights as heterosexual couples" (Family Education Network 2010). To date, only six states have legalized gay marriage.

Churches in the LGBT Movement

The passing of Proposition 8 was attributed to the campaigning and organizing efforts of ProtectMarriage. This broad based coalition included numerous religious organizations and churches. But, there are various churches in the United States who have begun supporting the efforts of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered (LGBT) community. Efforts to help the LGBT community move towards equality began in 1960 with the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) in Hunting Park, California (Rogers, 2009, pg 138). Today, the MCC has 44,000 members in 22 countries. The MCC is labeled as the first church in the world with a "primary, positive ministry to gays, lesbians, bisexual and transgender persons" (Rogers, 2009, pg 138).

On July 1970, the Unitarian Universalist Association became a strong ally for the LGBT movement. Many of the Unitarians and Universalists were leaders in the abolitionist movement and were the first people to make the connection between the civil rights movement and the gay movement ((Rogers, 2009, pg 139). In 2002, Reverend Sean Dennison was the first transgender person called to serve as a parish minister (Rogers, 2009, pg 138).

The United Church of Christ (UCC) has a strong history of supporting LGBT rights. The UCC became the first church in the U.S. that opposed "all laws which [made] private homosexual relations between consenting adults a crime" (Rogers, 2009, pg 139). Additionally, the UCC took an important stance on gay marriage in 2005 where 80% of its members voted in favor of full marriage equality (Rogers, 2009, pg 139).

The Episcopal church has made more recent headlines in the news when the Los Angeles Diocese elected openly gay bishop, Reverend Mary D. Glasspool (Stammer and Pringle, 2009). A couple years before, the Episcopal church ordained its first openly gay priest, Gene Robinson

(Rogers, 2009, pg 140). Glasspool said that she believes the Episcopal church "went beneath skin deep, went beneath the superficial characteristics and boxes into which we put people to really look at individual people" (Stammer and Pringle, 2009).

Jack Rogers, a Presbyterian and a professor of theology, wrote in his book '*Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality'* that conservative churches are taking a step towards LGBT equality. The conservative Roman Catholic Church has taken a strong stance in opposing gay marriage. Yet, in 1977 Reverend Robert Nugent and Sr. Jeannine Gramick founded New Ways Ministry (Rogers, 2009, pg 144). New Ways Ministry, in conjunction with other Catholics, provides "gay-positive ministry of advocacy and justice for lesbian and gay Catholics." In 1996, the National Coalition of American nuns stated that "the State's failure to recognize same-sex marriage is an unambiguous discrimination based on the sexual orientation and is politically and morally wrong" (Rogers, 2009, pg 144).

Although some churches are moving towards LGBT equality, advocates for marriage equality still face huge opposition from churches and religious organizations that want to protect the traditional definition of marriage. For this reason, my research focused on gathering the perspectives from a conservative church in California.

Profile of the Christian Reformed Church

The Christian Reformed Church (CRC) of North America developed from the Protestant Reformation in 1517 where it was formed under the teachings of John Calvin. The CRC has a strong history that began in the Netherlands where the CRC rejected the "moral decay and theological liberalism [of the Enlightenment era]…an intellectual movement that idolized human reason at the expense of Bible-based faith." The CRC maintained its conservative view of biblical teachings by moving to North America. Although the CRC of North America began as a mainly Dutch-based church, today it embraces Korean, Navajo, Southeast Asian, French-Canadian, Hispanic, and African-American churches all throughout the U.S. (Christian Reform Church of North America, 2010).

The CRC's began to take a position on issues of homosexuality in 1967. Since that time, the CRC has kept its same position on homosexuality which is "homosexuality is a condition of disordered sexuality…homosexualism is incompatible with obedience to the will of God as revealed in Scripture" (Christian Reform Church of North America, 2010). Additionally, the CRC holds a conservative view on marriage; it has continuously dealt with matters pertaining to divorce and remarriage, and how to best treat those individuals. The CRC has also noted that marriage was created by God to be established between a man and woman (Christian Reform Church of North America, 2010).

The specific CRC I attend is located in a predominately Hispanic community in the San Fernando Valley. This specific CRC is a small congregation made up of approximately 70 individuals. About 10 years ago, the church was made up of Dutch immigrants and American-Dutch families. Today, the demographics have changed to include people of many different heritages including Indonesian, Chinese, Filipino, Hawaiian, African, and Hispanic. As noted

previously, the CRC teaches from a conservative view regarding the Bible. While this specific church has undergone demographic transition, the conservative teachings have not changed. A basic assumption based on the history of the CRC and pertinent to my research is that this congregation maintains the conservative, traditional view on marriage that it is a union between a man and woman.

Perspectives on Morality and Gay Marriage

"Political issues are not abstractions. They ways in which they are presented affect the ways human beings think about themselves." –Former Senator John Danforth

Overview

My research focused on gathering answers from individuals within my church and individuals involved in Oxy's Office of Religious and Spiritual Life. I focused on interviewing 9 individuals and three individuals from the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life. The interview questions focused on getting individuals' views on marriage, gay marriage, Proposition 8, and how their faith influences their political decision on this issue. I contacted potential subjects through emails. Subjects were chosen based on one important criteria which was what was the level of trust between the subject and I. Since my questions are based on a sensitive issue it was critical that my subjects felt they could answer the questions truthfully without being judged. Additionally, each subject interviewed had two options to answering my question based on their level of comfort; they could do face-to-face interviews or answer my questions through emails.

Findings

Since my research focused on the accounts of people of faith, I interviewed my pastor to get an overall understanding of where the local CRC stands on the issue of gay marriage. Please note that all names have been changed to maintain anonymity. Pastor Bryan grew up in Southern California and became part of the CRC in his late teens. His beliefs are strongly rooted in the teachings of John Calvin and the beliefs of the CRC, including the position the CRC takes on gay marriage.

Pastor Bryan's stance on gay marriage is congruent with the belief that homosexuality is a sin. Although he acknowledges that church and state should be separated, he believes the

church should take a stand when legal action is not moral. According to Pastor Bryan, "civil government has the right declare those relationships [homosexual marriage] as legal and illegal, but it does not, or should not, claim them as moral or immoral." If marriage equality was to pass in California, Pastor Bryan does not mind civil unions, but he would not perform civil marriages. Pastor Gary commented that civil government needs to clarify that "the church shouldn't be required to acknowledge civil marriages" if it passes in the future.

Inherent to the belief that homosexuality is a sin, Pastor Bryan concludes that being gay is a choice. "Even though the American Medical Association and the American Psychological Association have acknowledged that homosexuality is physiological, they don't have evidence. Studies don't show physical and mental difference, they only declare these differences." And, Pastor Bryan stated that to compare the gay marriage movement to the Civil Rights movement is only demeaning the Civil Right movement. He believes these two movements cannot be associated because "the Civil Rights movement was about judging people based on differences [racial differences] that cannot be helped."

Kathy is a 48 year old, Hispanic woman who grew up in a Catholic house. When she immigrated to the U.S. in the early 1980's, she was drawn to the CRC because of its conservative teachings of the Bible. The CRC also served as a second home where she met many other immigrants, where she met her husband, where she and her husband married, and where she brought up her children.

Kathy has always believed that God mandated marriage to be a union between a man and woman. She expressed to me that marriage is "sacred and traditional, and [gay marriage] is not honored by God." Furthermore, Kathy's stance on gay marriage is that she is not against gay

people, but she does not feel she can support gay marriage when it is not congruent with her beliefs. Additionally, one of Kathy's main concern is the confusion that children of gay couples will endure if gay couples are allowed to marry and adopt. "How are these children going to be taught about same-sex parents, and how are they going to react when they notice that their other friends' parents are different from their own parents?" Kathy also found the tendency of gay-marriage activists to compare the gay marriage movement to the Civil Rights movement troublesome because "this [gay marriage] is not a civil rights issue, it's not about race, and it's not about being equal…[and] gay marriage should not be combined with a historic issue about granting rights to black people." She also stated to me that not all of society approves of gay marriage, and that gay marriage activists need to stop forcing everyone to believe it's okay. She ended the interview by stating that gay marriage is not a priority, at least not for her, when there are many more obligations and internal conflicts within our small church. In summary, she told me that the church's priority is looking for ways to financially sustain itself in these hard economic times, not to preoccupy themselves with who can get married or not.

Another subject, Danny expressed to me his past experiences and his current view on homosexuality. Eddie is a young Mexican-American from a working poor family. His father is a hard-working construction worker and his mother stays homes to take of his siblings and the house. Since I have a close relationship with Danny, he felt he was able to share with me sensitive information. He told me that when he was younger, he was sexually abused by male figures in his life that he really trusted. He never understood the concept of homosexuality, and stated that "I [Danny] do like gay people and if I would voted [for Prop 8], I would have said Yes to Prop 8 without a doubt. Homosexual marriage to me is a new thing…I do not care for them [gay people] much, for the simple reason that that is how I grew up, and [never] got it."

Danny also stated his concern about teaching children about gay marriage when he believes that the concept of a man being with a man is wrong. Another concern he expressed to me is his level of discomfort if gay couples could get married: "They [gay people] will be running the streets flaunting, showing off, and bad things could happen due to that." Despite his opposition to gay marriage, Danny communicated to me that as much as he hesitated to admit that gay marriage activists are probably in a civil rights movement, "everyone should get rights…even the gays."

Erick, a young Hispanic male expressed how his religious beliefs are incongruent to the politics of gay marriage. Erick is also an immigrant who was brought up in a conservative, traditional household. He went to Calvin College in Michigan founded by the CRC. He was surrounded by conservative Biblical teachings on a regular basis. When he returned to the San Fernando Valley after graduation, he became friends with gay and lesbian people. He also expressed to me that he is comfortable being around his gay friends and supports them by every once in awhile going to gay bars with them.

Erick also recognizes that "Californians have always been more liberal and open-minded than other states. The majority of Californians have lived with open homosexuality and are generally more tolerant and accepting than other states." But, his decision to vote Yes on Prop 8 was based on his faith as he told me that "the bible is clear that it [homosexuality] is a sin…though I will never understand homosexuality in its entirety, I can still accept (but not agree) others for their beliefs." Although Erick communicated to me that he understands and empathizes with gay marriage activists, he also stated that he relies on his faith and believes his faith is clear about homosexuality.

Amy is young biracial women who shared her strong feelings about gay marriage. Amy grew up in a traditional, Christian home and attended a Christian school from elementary to High School. She went to missionary school after her high school graduation and is extremely dedicated to her church. Although she know acquaintances that are gay, she is not close to anyone is from the LGBT community. Her family experienced some troubles when her father walked out on her and her mother after several years of being married. She stated that today's society takes divorce lightly; "we [society] just want to be married to be married, but when you make that life-long commitment you should be sure."

On the topic of gay marriage, Amy espressed frustration with how gay marriage has come to the political arena very suddenly. "Why is it [homosexual marriage] such a big deal now? What does marriage mean?...Today we have made it 'okay'…[when] it actuality it is wrong. We were created to reproduce and populate the world, and how can two men or women do that naturally?" Amy's main concern with gay marriage is the problem she believes will arise about the traditional concept of a family and its impact on children. She stated to me that "how can a woman find a good husband if she didn't have a good father figure when she was younger? And, a man, how does he know what to look for in a wife if he had no mother-figure?" Her last concern she articulated with me was about how she felt that gay marriage activists are pressing a sensitive issue on society, including people who don't believe gay marriage is right. She believes that the concerted efforts of gay marriage activists is going to cause more problems "because [they] are being selfish and want what they want [marriage] instead of trying to help society as a whole." Individuals who voted Yes on Prop 8, like Amy, feel that an agenda they do not agree on is being forced upon them are being characterized as unfair, judgmental people for not having the same political view.

Although the above interviews showed an opposition to marriage equality, the following interviews provide an insight into how faith and politics sometimes can be congruent. Not all the subjects voted No on Prop 8, but their answers denote how proponents for gay marriage can gather support.

Chrissy is a young, Mexican-American woman who grew up in the CRC. She is currently attending Calvin College in Michigan, which as noted before, was founded under the teachings of John Calvin who taught that the idolizing human reasoning and theological liberalism was straying from the Biblical-based teachings of God (CRC of America, 2010). At Calvin College, Chrissy has come to know gay people who have become her friends. She supports her gay friends that are in relationships, but still found herself debating on how to vote on Proposition 8.

On November 8th, 2008 Chrissy decided to vote No on Prop 8 based purely on her belief on biblical teachings. As Chrissy explained to me, she stated that "it was hard for me to admit that I could not support gay marriages... I can see how others might be concerned about preserving our traditional values and role, but honestly I think that society is moving in way that we cannot stop those changes." As a sociology and history major, Chrissy understands the impact of political decisions like Proposition 8 on society because she believes that "people of the same sex can have strong emotions for each other and the same desire to marry in order to legally join two lives." Despite her belief that homosexuality is a sin, Chrissy also described how it is unjust to deny marriages to same-sex couples. The questions she found herself asking were are homosexuals required to "deny every want in their body to form a relationship? Are they not allowed to act on their human desire for love? Can they help it that they are attracted to the same sex?" Chrissy was challenged by her view of a just, secular society in contrast to a just, Christian society.

Carry also had a similar conflict to Chrissy when it came to voting on Proposition 8.Carry is 30 years-old and grew up in Montana before arriving to the San Fernando Valley. She grew up in a Christian home and came to California to pursue her studies in multiculturalism and religion at Fuller Seminary. She was also drawn to the CRC because of the Calvinist teachings and liked the idea of living in a diverse community compared to her racially homogenous hometown of Montana.

Her concerns with gay marriage are shaped around her faith, the effects on children, and the role of paternal and maternal figures in a child's life. Carry believes that marriage is a God created union between a man and woman with one of the many purposes being to procreate. When it comes to the issue of children being taught about gay marriage she is concerned about the type of confusion they might entail on. She adheres to the traditional family and concerned about the effects of gay marriage on children such as "the confusion and identity crisis which cannot add to the health of the child."

Although Carry raises concerns about gay marriage, she gave a perceptive response to the importance of knowing someone who is gay. Carry told me that "ideas [on gay marriage] can change when you have relationships with gay people…and it [the issue of gay marriage] becomes more of a grey area." She told me about how she found out about one of the spiritual writers that she admires, Henri Nouwen, was possibly gay. In short, the realization that an admirable, influential Christian man could be gay changed her perception on gay people in general. Carry acknowledged that if she had any friendships with gay people, perhaps she would be more conflicted about the topic of gay marriage. Lastly, Carry spoke about how gay marriage is a complex issue for people of faith because there are two sides: the secular view and the

religious view, and when it comes to gay marriage she stated, “from a secular point of view, are we going to be fair?”

Eduardo is a 48 year-old Hispanic immigrant who came to the U.S. during a civil war in his country in the 1980s. He comes from a traditional, Hispanic family and grew up viewing homosexuals as being different. Once in the U.S. he was introduced to the CRC through a mutual friend and has been attending the same church ever since. He told me he is not close to anyone who is gay although he is acquainted with people who identify as being gay.

Eduardo spoke of many of the same beliefs, issues, and concerns as the previously noted responses. His answers were hesitant and brief when referring to his faith and why he voted Yes on Proposition 8. He disagrees with civil marriages because his faith acknowledges homosexuality as being a sin and cannot comprehend why gay couples “have to compare themselves to heterosexual human beings.” Additionally, he comes from the position that views homosexuality as being immoral, but he believes that gay marriage activists are embarking on a human rights issue because everyone does have the right to get married. On the other hand, Eduardo communicated to me even though it might be a human rights issue, it is definitely not a civil rights issue because, in essence, “we all have the right to get married...Homosexuals can get married, but they are choosing to get married to the same-sex, [and] no one is telling them that’s what they should do.”

The turning point in the interview occurred on the topic of children. One argument for banning gay marriage has been the concern of adverse affects on children being taught about gay marriage and being adopted into same-sex households. Eduardo gave me an unexpected response about how the only way he would ever consider supporting gay marriage is if same-sex couples

could adopt children. Specifically, he told me "I hate seeing and hearing about children being left on the streets by women who can't care for them. In this aspect, I know that a gay couple could provide that child with everything he/she needs. I don't how the child will grow up referring to the concerns people have that these children might grow up being gay or confused. All I know is that there are a lot of children who need a home, and these gay couples could provide that for them…I don't believe my faith supports gay marriage, but I believe gay people are good, sincere people and that adoption would do more good than harm. Just look at all the kids we see on streets and in foster care…."

One of my last interviews from the CRC congregation was with Sam, a 65 year-old Caucasian man that has been part of the CRC tradition since he was born. He married an Indonesian woman that he met at church and has been open to the changing demographics of the CRC has been a part of. Sam does not know people who are gay, but he comes from a family that believes same-sex couples can be embraced in the church and have the right to marry.

Sam expressed his view on same-sex marriages in regards to people of faith and the church. He considers marriage to be between two people that love each other and are committed to each other for life. He also believes "that a marriage is stronger if they commit themselves to God in that relationship. That relationship may be between a different sex and same-sex couples." His stance to support same-sex marriage is supported by the U.S. Constitution's 14th Amendment that guarantees "the same rights, benefits, and privileges to everybody [which] includes the right to marry." Apart from his political belief that same-sex marriage is a right, he also acknowledges how some churches, including the CRC, has taken a hypocritical stance on gay marriage. He responded to me by saying "The church has yet to come to an agreement on sexuality. Yet, some have singled out this issue of gay marriage as an error of faith and sin that

they should campaign against." Sam supports same-sex marriage based on his own commitment to God and how his faith is congruent to this political issue.

Interviews with Oxy's Office of Religious and Spiritual Life

Reverend Susan Young grew up in a Presbyterian household. She was ordained as a reverend in the Presbyterian church in Los Angeles. She knows very well how the church can be divisive when it comes to changing church traditions. Currently, the Presbyterian church is being divided over the issue of ordaining women, like Reverend Susan Young, into leadership positions in the church. The Presbyterian church is conflicted over the topic of same-sex marriage. To date, the church is debating whether homosexuality is a sin, and Reverend Young belongs to the part of the Presbyterian church that supports gay marriage.

Reverend Young assumes the position that homosexuality is not a sin, and the marriage equality activists are dealing with a civil and human rights issue. She makes note of the conflict pro-gay marriage activists are facing when it comes to conservative Christians. "Conservative Christians don't see marriage equality as a civil rights issue…it's a moral issue because society is making judgments about who gets God's grace, and imposing our beliefs on society which we don't have a right to do." Reverend Young understands that Conservative Christians's minds cannot be changed about gay marriage "if their minds are not first changed about how homosexuality is not a sin…but, I don't believe that one strand of religion should dictate who gets married…and each state should not decide who gets married and who doesn't… this is a civil rights issue that crosses state borders."

Although Reverend Susan Young has a clear understanding of where she stands on the issue of gay marriage, Ryan who is involved in Oxy's evangelical group, Intervarsity, was not

sure about his decision on Prop 8. Ryan expressed that he doesn't understand homosexuality and is unsure if it's the intention of marriage to include homosexual marriage. He feels there are certain limitations when it comes to interpreting homosexuality in the Bible, but senses that his faith seems to suggest that there is something wrong in the homosexual lifestyle. When it came to Prop 8, Ryan did not vote because he was uncertain about what his role was when it came to supporting or not supporting gay marriage. He also stated that although he chose to withhold from voting because "[he] is unsure if gay marriage is a right, [he does] not know if withholding from the vote [was] encouraging."

On the other hand, Monica who is also involved in Oxy's Intervarsity chose to vote No on Prop 8 despite her struggle to fully accept homosexual marriage based on her faith. Monica's situation about how to vote was incongruent with how she views gay marriage in the Bible:"Believe it or not, this was one of the most difficult I've had to make. I walked in thinking I would vote to ban gay marriage, and spent 20 minutes struggling with the issue. Standing there, I realized I loved my roommate too much to vote against the homosexuality played out in her life, so I voted No on Prop 8." In addition to her relationship with her roommate, Monica also stated that secular society and religious society are distinctly different, and her religion should not impose their beliefs on society. Lastly, Monica also made it clear that it seems that gay marriage has come to be a huge "current-day mess," but has overshadowed the larger issues at hand such as homelessness, world hunger, and the clean water crisis.

Based on these findings, I found recurring themes throughout the interviews. First, people of faith that have a strong commitment to God either find their faith congruent with their political ideology or feel that both are in conflict with one another. Church goers who found their faith intervening with the issue of gay marriage believe that homosexuality is sinful. On the other

hand, some individuals found their faith overlaps with marriage equality because they do not categorize homosexuality as a sin. Second, I found that church politics can have an impact on how gay marriage is perceived. Internal elements, such as financial troubles, within a small church are prioritized over social issues such as gay marriage. Third, from all the different viewpoints of the interviewees, I found that one-on-one relationships with members of the LGBT community are important. Not only do relationships have the power to change people's minds on gay marriage, relationships have the power to put a human aspect to the issue of gay rights. A majority of my interviewees expressed that they do not know any who is gay. Interviewees that did know people who were gay found themselves in either two positions: completely in support of marriage equality or internally conflicted with how to vote on Prop 8. Lastly, my findings and previous research also suggest that some people of faith do believe in marriage equality for homosexual couples. But, a small church like this particular CRC may not be a potential ally because of its financial priority to sustain itself for the long-run. On the other hand, prior research has found that large churches, such as the Metropolitan Community Church that started in Huntington Park, CA have identified themselves as allies for the LGBT community.

Analysis and Recommendations

I have seen firsthand that most people in the church deeply believe that everyone should be treated equally. They just have not had the information and support they need to counteract the inaccurate things they have been told about the Bible." – Professor and Moderater of the 213th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, Jack Rogers

The following recommendations are based on the findings from my interviews. My interviews are not sufficient to make generalizations about every person of faith, but they do reveal important themes that can be used to help proponents of marriage equality for understanding underlying factors of conservative views on gay marriage.

First Recommendation: Reach Out

According to the field organizer for VFE, canvassers are speaking to voters in precincts that predominately voted to ban gay marriage. VFE is not focusing on canvassing to people of faith, although statistics and my experience canvassing show that the precincts that generally voted Yes on Prop 8 are from minority groups and religion was an influential factor in their voting decision. One of the recurring themes in my findings was that relationships and interactions with gay people have the power to move people's minds or to at least reconsider being supportive of gay marriage. It could be in VFE's best interest to reach out to churches in Los Angeles and have an open dialogue with people in the congregation who are willing to talk about gay marriage. All of my interviews were civil, respectful, and reciprocal in that I wanted to learn more about peoples' faith and its influence on voting on gay marriage, and they wanted to help me out. The notion that trust between people must first be built should not be forgotten when talking about a controversial issue that some people of faith are struggling with. To overcome this obstacle, VFE can recruit individuals of faith, like myself, who are willing to talk

to people in their own congregations to gather more views on gay marriage, and pick out individuals who have the potential to support marriage equality.

Second Recommendation: Find Unexpected Common Ground

During my conversations with canvassers at VFE, there seem to be a general assumption that you can't argue with a person of faith and that there is no common ground with people who believe homosexuality is a sin. The ultimate effect of this assumption can be hindering to the efforts of VFE and its allies because they are missing out on finding common ground with a person of faith, and it might not have to do with what that person believes. Some of my subjects suggested that the reason they did not support gay marriage was the very fact of confusion between their faith and politics. But, they also suggested that they would be in support of gay marriage if they knew someone who was gay or if they had a better understanding of what gay marriage would entail for gay couples. For example, one subject withheld from voting because he does not understand homosexuality and does not know anyone who does understand homosexuality. VFE is full of individuals who understand their identity as a gay person in society and that could express to individuals, like Ryan, what an impact Prop 8 has on their lives. As another example, getting to know someone who at first opposes gay marriage could be beneficial, if the right questions are asked. For example, the man I interviewed, who opposed gay marriage and then told me that he would change his mind if gay couples were allowed to adopt children, can be a potential ally for VFE. The potential to find some common ground, sometimes unexpected, is promising.

Third Recommendation: Partner with Churches

My findings suggest that small, conservative churches may not be the best way to gain support for marriage quality. The internal politics within a small church are more limited than the internal politics of a large church, such as the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC). The MCC has much for feasibility and financial stability than the CRC I attend.VFE should seek to partner with progressive churches that already support LGBT rights. Post election results and studies have found how much influence religious institutions have on their congregations. It would be smart to connect with a large, progressive church in Los Angeles to help expand VFE's canvassing. More importantly, by partnering with a large church, VFE can plug into the religious sector of gay marriage with support instead of the usual opposition they face with people of faith.

Fourth Recommendation: Connect with Oxy's Students of Faith

The Conservative Right has made the issue of gay marriage very divisive; they have set up Prop 8 as Christians vs Supporters of Gay Marriage. VFE and its allies should break this mold and build connections with Oxy's evangelical organization, Intervarsity. Although the findings I gathered from two subjects I interviewed from Intervarsity is not substantial to generalize about Intervarsity as whole, their responses and my informal conversations with other individuals in Intervarsity provide legitimate aspects of how a relationship with VFE can be potentially beneficial for both sides. By providing opportunities for Intervarsity students to explore their own questions of homosexuality, gay marriage, and to build relationships with members of the LGBT community, students who feel that their faith and gay marriage is incongruent might be more open to supporting their potential friends in the LGBT community. And, VFE and its allies could benefit from building relationships with young, people of faith who will have a voice next

time Prop 8 is on the ballot. VFE already has a potential ally within the Religious arm at Oxy, Reverend Susan Young. She expressed to me very clearly her support for marriage equality. Additionally, Revered Susan Young is in charge of the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life Values and Vocations Fellowship that seeks students who want to explore their faith by interning for a semester with a social justice organization. VFE could be part of the Values and Vocations Fellowship, and have a student intern with them allowing more bridges to be built with students of faith at Oxy.

Fifth Recommendation

VFE should try to build a connection with Oxy's Intervarsity group. From my findings, I found that these individuals were deeply conflicted with their faith and Prop 8. My findings also suggest that the individual who voted No on Pro 8 voted to support her gay friends. The other individual did not vote because he did not know anyone who understood homosexuality. VFE can send staff or volunteers who identity with being gay and Christian to speak at Intervarsity's large group meetings. By sharing personal stories with students in Intervarsity, VFE can make a powerful impact on students who feel their faith is incongruent with their view on gay marriage.

Sixth Recommendation

By experiencing first-hand the impact VFE has had on voters who initially supported Prop 8, I feel that VFE needs to continue expanding its canvassing efforts. VFE has been successful in swaying voters and changing people's minds, and continued canvassing is going to yield positive results for marriage equality in the future. Their organizing efforts that began in 2004 and increased in 2008 have already changed the minds of 25% of Los Angeles voters. VFE's non-aggressive and firm stance on gay rights can change the minds of voters who fear the LGBT

community. Additionally, VFE continues to canvass in neighboring precincts in Los Angeles, and this is helpful in putting an abstract idea of gay marriage into the face of many voters who have never met a person of the LGBT community.

Conclusion

"When Christians claim special knowledge of God's truth…when they divide America between 'people of faith' and their 'enemies,' Christians become not the means of peace but the cause of conflict. In that case Christians are far from being powerless. They are powerful contributors to what has gone wrong in American politics." – Senator John Danforth

Proposition 8 passed with a mere majority, many of whom come from backgrounds with strong beliefs in their faith. ProtectMarriage was a powerful factor in the passing of Prop 8 with the purpose of defending the traditional view of marriage between a man a woman. Voters with a strong faith background found themselves either at peace with voting Yes on Prop 8, or felt conflicted with their religious view on gay marriage. VFE has already made powerful strides in changing voters' minds, and has the potential to change minds in the religious sector of politics which includes people from diverse backgrounds. Throughout my research, my experience canvassing with VFE, and my interviews I have found that the human relation that connects all of us is still the most powerful force in the move towards marriage equality for all.

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