

# New study uncovers same-sex couples' opinions about marriage and cohabitation

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As the U.S. Supreme Court prepares to rule on same-sex marriage equality, a University of Cincinnati survey of same-sex couples finds that 90 percent of the respondents felt that the option to marry was important to their relationship. The study is currently published online in the *Journal of Homosexuality*.

UC researchers Stephen M. Haas, an associate professor of communication, and Sarah W. Whitton, an assistant professor of psychology, uncovered the perceived benefits of cohabitation and marriage of same-sex [couples](#) after conducting a national online survey of 526 individuals who reported they were in a committed, same-sex [relationship](#) for at least six months. The survey also found that many same-sex couples view living together as significant because it symbolizes and solidifies their commitment to their relationship, possibly because marriage has never been an option. The researchers say this view differs from previous national research on different sex couples, for whom cohabitation signifies less commitment than marriage.

The researchers uncovered several themes out of responses from two open-ended questions in the

survey:

1. Thinking about your relationship with your partner, what is the significance of living together, to you, in your relationship?
2. Why do you think legal marriage is, or is not, important to your relationship?

Six dominant themes emerged from the second question, "Why do you think legal marriage is, or is not, important to your relationship?" The researchers reported that 90 percent of the respondents felt that the option to marry legally was important to their relationship, with themes including:

- Legal benefits and financial protections (91 percent)
- Relationship legitimacy (36 percent)
- Equal commitment as different-sex couples (34 percent)
- We don't need marriage, we're already committed, but we want equal rights (21 percent)
- Couple validation (17 percent)
- Personally important (6 percent)

"The remarks about the legal benefits and financial protections aren't surprising because we've heard so much about that from news interviews," says Haas. "But that second category of relationship legitimacy - of having societal legitimacy - stood out to me. We received responses such as, 'My partner doesn't get invited on family vacations because we're not married. But if we were married, my partner would be invited.' So in the view of family origin, it was very important."

The researchers add that seven dominant themes emerged from question one, about the significance of living together. Four themes were most commonly mentioned by the participants:

- Symbolizes commitment (40 percent)
- Provides emotional support (36 percent)
- Makes us a family (34 percent)
- Sharing life together (32 percent)

Three lesser mentioned themes were: maximizes time together (10 percent); like any married couple (10 percent); convenience/finances (7 percent).

Same-sex couples' views of cohabitation in the UC study differ from previous research on different-sex couples who have indicated that living together carries less meaning and a lower level of commitment than marriage. "There's published data on different-sex couples that indicate that many of their cohabitation arrangements were a matter of testing the relationship or just convenience, like saving on rental payments," says Whitton. "A very small proportion of same-sex couples reflected those views in our study, but for the majority of same-sex couples, cohabitation carries significance to symbolizing their commitment."

"Respondents who live in states without legal same-sex marriage described living with one's partner as the strongest level of commitment available to those [same-sex couples](#)," the authors state in the paper. "For example, one person explained, 'Because of Ohio's laws, living together is basically the closest thing we have to marriage.'"

Participants in the study represented 47 states, excluding Alaska, Idaho and South Dakota. The majority of the respondents, 67 percent, reported that same-sex marriage was not available in their state (including 92 percent of those who had formalized their relationship in a legal ceremony). The length of relationships ranged from one to 30 years.

The UC online survey was conducted in 2012, with recruitment from LGBT organizations, announcements on Craigslist and flier promotions at several Midwestern Gay Pride events in 2012. The ages of the participants ranged from 19 to 74 with the median age of 41. Participants were 63 percent female; 37 percent male; and 2 percent identified as "other," or "gender queer." The majority of the survey participants were Caucasian (87 percent), followed by Hispanic (7 percent),

African-American (1.5 percent), Asian (1.5 percent), Native American (2 percent) and other/mixed race (1 percent).

Roughly one-third (29 percent) of the respondents had formalized their relationship via a legal ceremony; 16 percent via a non-legal [commitment](#) ceremony and 55 percent reported having no ceremony.

Same-sex [marriage](#) currently is legal in 36 states and the District of Columbia. The U.S. Supreme Court is expected to rule by the end of the month on whether or not to overturn state bans on [same-sex marriage](#). The ruling will follow a review of cases involving bans in Ohio, Kentucky, Michigan and Tennessee, after oral arguments were held in April.

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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