

April 1999

Alternatives to Marriage Update:

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First Anniversary Editon!

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After existing in our hopes and dreams for years, last April the Alternatives to Marriage Project became a real live organization. It's been an amazing year. We've been contacted by hundreds of unmarried people seeking information or support, journalists interested in our point of view, sociologists and therapists pleased to see recognition of the family diversity they see in their work, and lots of married people who share our vision. Thanks for being part of it! Check out the We Need You! section below for ways you can help us in the year ahead.

Out and About

Washington Times Quotes Us

A Washington Times article about a focus group on cohabitation included analysis from us. The focus group was conducted by the National Marriage Project, the same conservative group that drew significant media attention when they released an anti-cohabitation report earlier this year. In the Times, Dorian described the report as "part of the backlash against today's vibrant, thriving diverse families." Let us know if you'd like us to e-mail you the full text of the article.

Speech at Boston Rally

Marshall spoke about the importance of inclusive domestic partner benefits at Boston's Equality Begins at Home rally in front of the Massachusetts State House. The event was part of a nationwide week of events to advance equal rights for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people at the state level.

Recent & Upcoming Workshops

Recent: Princeton University

We gave a workshop as part of Princeton's Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Pride Week. Our workshop, Freedom Rings, Wedding Rings: Exploring Queer Relationships, was warmly received, and students considered the numerous ways to create and find support for healthy relationships, married or not.

Upcoming: Boston, MA: June 13

We'll be speaking at the Ethical Society of Boston, a liberal religious and educational fellowship without formal creed or dogma, on Sunday 6/13 at 10:30 a.m. Our short talk will be called Marital Status and Social Justice: Supporting Today's Diverse Families. For more information, you can contact the Ethical Society at (617) 739-9050 or <http://www.bostonethical.org>.

The Future

It's always wonderful to continue the conversation about the issues facing unmarried people with different groups around the country. We would love to speak in your city, at your college, or at an upcoming conference you know about! E-mail or call us to discuss the possibilities.

Online

ATMP-Talk Available On the Web

It's now possible to subscribe to and read ATMP-Talk, our online announcement and discussion list, on the Web (for people without access to e-mail). You'll find our list at <http://www.topica.com> .

ATMP-Talk has about 150 subscribers and is generally low-volume (a few messages each week). To subscribe to ATMP-Talk, send a message that says, "sub atmp-talk" to listserv@netspace.org.

We Need You!

Do You Work in a Library?

From time to time we need quick research assistance, often when we are responding to a media report about unmarried people. We need a few volunteers who have easy access and skills so we could contact you to ask you to look up some fact or statistic. We expect this to be a minimal time commitment, but could make a real difference in our speed and effectiveness. Contact us if you're willing to be hit the books in times of need!

Are You Willing To Talk to the Media?

We are occasionally contacted by reporters who want to interview (and sometimes photograph or film) people in unmarried relationships. This can be a great opportunity to educate people about our relationships and families. The reporters who contact us are usually looking for people in their state or region. We're finding there is a particular interest in people who:

- are in a long-term male-female relationship and have chosen not to get married
- are in a long-term gay or lesbian relationship and do not wish to get married
- are in a long-term unmarried relationship and are raising children.

If you would be willing to consider talking to the media about your experience (you can always decide on a case-by-case basis), please contact us with your city and state (very important), phone number, and basic information about your relationship.

Announcing Our Professional Network

Do you work in a field related to our work? Do you share our belief that all relationships and families deserve equal treatment and support regardless of marital status? We need sociologists, therapists, demographers, psychologists, social workers, and supportive students of

these and other related professions to join our professional network. The network will:

- allow you the opportunity to connect with others in your field who share your views and interests
- provide us with experts "on our side" to work with, especially in our continuing work with the media
- help students find professionals and academics who may be mentors
- advance research that considers unmarried relationships from an unbiased perspective, rather than the married/single either-or categories that render us invisible
- help therapists explore ways to support unmarried relationships
- build a framework for us to learn from each other.

To join the network, contact us and tell us about your field and interests.

Book Buzz

Book on Gay Marriage Helpful for Anyone Planning a Ceremony

We saw an earlier edition of *The Essential Guide to Lesbian and Gay Weddings*, by Tess Ayers and Paul Brown, in an Amsterdam bookstore several years ago. Although we fell in love with it immediately, we decided to wait and buy it in the U.S. We were crushed to return and find it had gone out of print. Luckily for us and anyone else who dreams of celebrating their relationship publicly (even without legal marriage), a new edition has just been released.

As the title suggests, the book is designed for same-sex couples who can't legally marry, to help them plan a wedding ceremony that is as traditional or non-traditional as they desire. It's chock full of practical suggestions on things like what to call your ceremony; how to explain it to your mother; how to incorporate different religious, spiritual, or cultural traditions (including Native American, Wiccan, African American, Jewish, and many more); how to write your own vows; suggested poetry, blessings, and songs of love (that won't leave you gagging); and how to involve your guests in your ceremony. In a friendly tone, interspersed with funny and poignant stories from a wide variety of people, the authors coach the reader about the traditional way to do things (so that, at the very least, you'll know what your guests might expect) and make suggestions about how to add personal touches or make radical paradigm shifts.

Not all of us feel a need to have a wedding or ceremony. But some of us, even if we don't want legal marriage, appreciate the power of ritual and the simple joy of a party. We may want to bring together our families and friends to celebrate our lives, regardless of whether we want our relationships on file at City Hall. We may be daunted by the idea of opening a bridal magazine for suggestions on how to plan such an event.

The Essential Guide to Lesbian and Gay Weddings won't do the work for you

-- creating a conscious celebration is a massive undertaking. But at least the brides in this book aren't airbrushed -- and some of them wear tuxes.

If you've read a book about marriage and its alternatives (non-fiction or fiction) that you'd recommend (or not), please send us your short review and we'll include it in this section!

News From Around the World

Half of United Kingdom Babies Conceived by Unmarried

Half of all conceptions now take place outside marriage in England and Wales, compared with just over a third in 1986, according to government statistics. Teenage pregnancy rates fell during the same period, while there was a large increase in conception rates for women over 35. It is estimated that by 2006, less than half of people in the UK will be married.

Canada to Consider DP Benefits for Federal Employees

According to federal officials, the Canadian government intends to introduce legislation in Parliament to provide spousal pension benefits to same-sex partners of federal government employees. The government has been encouraged to take the legislative initiative by a recent poll, which showed that 84% of Canadians felt that gays and lesbians should be protected from discrimination in matters such as social-security benefits. The government also has been encouraged by the equanimity with which Canadians received a recent government decision to allow the foreign partners of Canadian gays and lesbians to immigrate to Canada under the immigration law's family category. The Canadian Finance Minister is also working on amending the Income Tax Act to extend to same-sex couples the same treatment accorded unmarried male-female couples.

Canadian Province To Consider Partners' Rights After Death

The British Columbian Attorney General announced plans to introduce legislation that would give rights to gays and lesbians who outlive their partners. He's targeted four laws which currently recognize only surviving opposite-sex spouses, children and in some cases parents: the Cemetery and Funeral Services Act governing the disposal of remains; the Estate Administration Act governing the handling of the estates of those die intestate (without leaving a will); the Wills Variance Act governing amendments survivors may wish to make to a will; and the Family Compensation Act governing collection of damages and benefits in event of a death through negligence.

Study Finds Couples with Children More Likely to Break Up

A new study based on a survey of 5,500 British households found that the more children a couple had, the greater their likelihood of ending the relationship. The study also found that finances play a major role in relationships' continuation or end: couples whose finances improve are more likely to stay together than those whose financial situation gets worse. The study also found that cohabitators are more likely to break up than married couples. However, this is to be expected since couples who live together may or may not consider their relationships serious or long-term, so it is difficult to make a neat comparison to married couples.

Czechoslovakia Considers Giving Rights to Same-Sex Couples

The cabinet of the Czech Republic March accepted a gay-partnership bill. The proposed legislation will permit same-sex couples to execute a contract before a notary that will grant most of the property and social rights of matrimony. Other nations with gay-partnership laws that grant nearly every right of marriage include Denmark (and Greenland), Hungary, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

Spanish Law Validates Unmarried Couples

The parliament of the Spanish region of Aragon enacted an "Unmarried Couples Law." Under the law, unmarried same and opposite-sex couples will be treated the same in most respects, except that adoption rights are denied to gay and lesbian couples. Couples are defined as two unmarried, unrelated individuals of legal age in a relationship of mutual affection who have lived together for two years, who register with the regional administration.

Australian Police to Offer DP Benefits

Australia's Federal Police extended workplace benefits to employees' same-sex partners. The decision resulted from the request of an employee's partner. The Australian Council for Lesbian and Gay Rights said it hopes Australia's military will follow suit.

Afghanis Lashed for Unmarried Relationship

In Kabul, Afghanistan, thousands watched as the Taliban's religious police lashed a 25 year old woman and her mother, both convicted of "immoral

behavior" over the daughter's unmarried relationship. The woman recently gave birth to a child as a result of the relationship; the child's father was punished earlier. The woman's mother, who was beaten with 39 lashes, was punished because she was aware of the relationship and did not report it to police. Women who commit adultery are stoned to death under Taliban law, but because this woman was unmarried she instead received 100 lashes. The official who gave the beatings slammed Western criticism of the Taliban's treatment of women, saying that its laws protect their honor.

Pressure Mounts for Japan's Princess Sayako To Marry

The pressure is on for Japan's Princess Sayako, who recently turned 30, to find a husband and move out of the Imperial Palace. The Japanese royalty are much more tradition-bound than most of Japanese society today, and it is very unusual for a princess not to be married by age 30. If she wed, Sayako would lose her title, her rooms in the palace compound, and her place on the official family register, although her married brothers are provided for life. Princess Sayako has expressed no sense of urgency, repeatedly saying in her annual birthday statements that she will give the matter "careful thought."

California Protesters Against DP Benefits

In Santa Ana, CA, eighteen people held a candlelight vigil to protest pending state legislation that would expand gay rights, including a domestic partnership bill. If passed, the bill would allow state and local government employers to extend health benefits to domestic partners of their employees.

State of Florida, Nevada College, Cities of Portland & Pittsburgh, Idaho County Consider DPs

A Florida senator has sponsored the state's first domestic partnership legislation, which would allow unmarried people who live together to register as partners and be covered by each other's health insurance. The bill includes same and opposite-sex couples as well as blood relatives.

The Community College of Southern Nevada Faculty Senate voted overwhelmingly to support a campus human rights task force that is developing a proposed domestic partnership policy. Portland, Maine's proposal to offer health insurance to same and opposite-sex partners of city employees would take effect in July. The plan is said to have the support of most city councilors and the unions representing the city's 1,350 employees.

A Pittsburgh Councilperson is introducing a bill to offer the city's 500

nonunion employees health benefits for same-sex partners. The administration has already worked out deals with two unions to offer the benefits. The University of Pittsburgh has refused to provide benefits to partners of its gay and lesbian employees, but a Pitt employee challenged the university last year, saying it must provide the benefits under a 1990 city ordinance prohibiting sexual discrimination. Pitt officials attacked the authority of the ordinance and noted that the city itself did not offer the benefits to its gay and lesbian employees. But in a recent hearing, lawyers disclosed that the city had begun offering the benefits. In Latah County, Idaho, commissioners decided to move forward with their plans to include domestic partnership in the county's insurance policy. The proposed plan would allow same and opposite-sex couples to reap the same insurance benefits married couples do. If adopted, Latah County would become the first municipality in Idaho to offer DP benefits.

Florida Judge Won't Stop DP Ordinance

A Broward Circuit judge Friday denied a petition from to stop Broward County from implementing its controversial new domestic partner law. The lawsuit, filed by a member of Concerned Citizens for Broward, claims the law violates the Florida Constitution. The ordinance offers health benefits to the same and opposite-sex partners of unmarried county employees, gives companies that do the same an advantage in bidding for county business and allows any unmarried couple to register with the county as domestic partners. Registration would give domestic partners the right to be treated as immediate family for such as hospital visits, jail visits and the designation of health-care surrogates.

California Counties and City Create DP Registries

County supervisors in Los Angeles have approved a program that would allow unmarried couples to register as domestic partners, becoming the largest such registry in California. DP registries already exist in Long Beach, West Hollywood, Sacramento and Laguna Beach, California. The goal of the registry is to create a uniform way to define domestic partnerships, so private employers wishing to offer DP benefits need not create their own criteria.

Santa Barbara, CA county supervisors voted their initial approval of the creation of a domestic partner registry. There will be a final vote in late April. The county registry would be similar to the city of Santa Barbara's registry, created in 1997, and would be inclusive of same-sex and opposite-sex couples.

The city of Petaluma also created a domestic partner registry where same and opposite-sex couples can recognize their union at City Hall. It will open this summer.

Detroit Fails to Create DP Policy

Although the Detroit City Council passed a resolution one year ago calling on Mayor Dennis Archer to create a policy that would extend domestic partnership benefits to same and opposite sex partners of unmarried city employees, no aspect of the resolution has been implemented. The mayor says he would sign an ordinance if the city council passed one. Local advocacy groups say they believe both the mayor and the council are ducking the issue.

Chicago DP Ordinance Upheld

Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund exulted with its latest victory upholding Chicago's domestic partner benefits law against an anti-gay challenge. The Illinois Appellate Court agreed with Lambda and the City of Chicago that the city has the authority to provide health care insurance and other essential benefits to its lesbian and gay employees and their families. The ruling marked a third defeat for a group of local conservative ministers and others seeking to stop such benefits coverage for city workers since 1997. The court pointed out, "No state statute prohibits private or public employers from offering such benefits."

Einstein College Allowed to Discriminate

A judge ruled that the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York can bar two lesbian students from living with their partners in school-subsidized housing. Einstein, a college of Yeshiva University, permits only students, their spouses and dependent children to live in college housing, which is offered at below-market rates. The students were each offered school-subsidized apartments, but they sued after the school denied their requests to have their female partners live with them. They argued that Einstein violated city and state law against discrimination based on marital status. They said that because they are unable to marry their partners, they are, in effect, barred from school housing and therefore the school's policy is discriminatory. The judge disagreed, nothing in the law prohibits Einstein from distinguishing between married and unmarried couples in deciding who will be allowed to live in college-subsidized housing. The students plan to appeal the decision.

Illinois County and NationsBank To Provide DP Benefits

The Cook County Board of Commissioners passed a controversial ordinance that will extend health, life, and dental insurance benefits to same-sex partners of county employees.

Following the lead of Bank of America, which it swallowed up in a merger, NationsBank has decided to offer domestic partners benefits to employees in all 22 states where it does business. Bank of America has had a policy offering health insurance to domestic partners since January 1997. Bank of America's policy permits employees to enroll in their health plan another qualifying adult in their household: a parent, a grandparent or a sibling

as well as a same-sex or opposite-sex domestic partner. NationsBank has not yet decided whether it will offer the same types of benefits.

Massachusetts Court Considers Legality of DPs

The Massachusetts Supreme Court is considering whether to allow the city of Boston to provide domestic partner benefits to same and opposite-sex partners of city employees. The American Center for Law and Justice, which is also challenging domestic partnership laws in New York City, San Francisco, and Santa Barbara, filed suit against Boston's newly-passed domestic partnership law, claiming the city is illegally trying to redefine marriage. A decision by the court could impact the legality of other domestic partnership laws in the state: Springfield, Northampton, Cambridge, and Brookline already offer DP benefits to municipal employees.

Connecticut to Allow Gay and Unmarried Adoptions

The CT Senate's Judiciary Committee approved a bill that would allow unmarried couples of any sexual orientation to adopt children if the adoption is in the child's best interest. The proposal will now be considered in the House. Single people, some of whom are in unmarried relationships, are already allowed to adopt in Connecticut (and most other states).

Michigan Court Protects Discriminatory Landlords

The Michigan Supreme Court has overruled itself and ordered new hearings on the question of whether a landlord may refuse to rent to an unmarried couple for religious reasons. The court's decision reversed an opinion issued by the court in December that found that two landlords had violated Michigan's civil-rights law by refusing to rent apartments to two unmarried couples. It is still unresolved whether a landlord can use his or her religious beliefs as a reason to discriminate against potential tenants. The issue will be heard by a trial court, and more appeals are expected.

Minnesotans Try to Repeal Discriminatory Laws

A group calling itself RASSL -- for Repeal All Silly and Senseless Laws -- staged a "Turn Yourself In" day at the State Capitol in an effort to show how some laws make average Minnesotans outlaws. The group has targeted ten laws for repeal, including laws against oral and anal sex, and laws against any sex between unmarried people. Unfortunately, the number of reporters and photographers who showed up for the event exceeded the number of people "turning themselves in."

Chocolate-Covered Thank Yous

Many thanks for the generous donations of Tom Coleman, Debbie Deem, Maria Ikenberry, and Arthur Warner.

If you'd like to help us create a society in which diverse relationships are supported and valued, we'd appreciate your support. Make out your check to ATMP and mail it to P.O. Box 991010, Boston, MA 02199. Thank you!