

## July-August 1999

Alternatives to Marriage Update:

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Out and About

Utne Prints Our Letter

The July/August issue of the Utne Reader printed our letter to the editor commenting on their series of articles about marriage. Our letter pointed out that although their articles explored marriage from a variety of "alternative" perspectives, there was no mention of the fact that growing numbers of people are enjoying life \*without\* marriage.

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NPR Mention Draws Throngs of Supporters

Co-Founder Dorian Solot called in to a Talk of the Nation show on National Public Radio where the topic was "What Is Marriage For?". She mentioned the views of the Alternatives to Marriage Project and the perspectives of the people who contact us, and she said our web address on the air (repeated by host Ray Suarez). In the first week since the radio show, about 1,100 people visited our website (normally we receive about 400 visitors per month), and we have received dozens of e-mails and letters from people excited to learn about ATMP. It's wonderful to watch our community grow!

#### Dr. Nora Radio Interview

Dorian was interviewed by Dr. Nora Baladerian for her radio program about sex and relationships, which aired in Arizona and Rhode Island. Dr. Nora was supportive and enthusiastic about ATMP's work.

#### Attacks on Our Families

The National Marriage Project, a conservative organization whose mission is to "revitalize marriage," again received widespread media coverage this month for its latest report about the "social health of marriage in America." The alarmist report pointed to statistics showing that married people today are less likely to say their marriages are very happy, a growing number of people are never marrying during their lifetimes, and young women are more accepting of living together and having children without marriage.

A different perspective on the same numbers and related statistics might point out that times have never been better for family diversity. There is significantly more acceptance today for the wide range of ways people choose to live: single people; unmarried couples; step-families; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered couples with or without children; adoptive and foster families; people with multiple partners; people choosing to live childfree. It should not surprise us that as women's opportunities and freedoms continue to increase, growing numbers of young women see husbands as a choice rather than a necessity for survival. The "weakening" of "traditional marriage" may look tragic to the National Marriage Project, but we believe the expansion of options it represents is a positive sign for today's families.

#### Tidbits

#### National Gay Organizations Reveal Different Stances on DP Benefits

The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), both national organizations working for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people's rights, have different positions on domestic partner benefits.

According to Thomas Coleman, Executive Director of the American Association for Single People, HRC's Director for Health and Family Policy, Seth Kilbourn, says HRC's goal is "to achieve domestic partner benefits for same-sex couples." He adds that if employers prefer a more inclusive, gender-neutral plan, HRC would support, not oppose, an inclusive plan.

Coleman says that NGLTF, however, actively supports gender-neutral plans and openly criticizes sexist plans.

## Sizzling Statistics

### Nearly Half of Puerto Rican Babies Born to Unmarried Parents

A new study found that 46% of births in Puerto Rico in 1997 were to unmarried parents, up from 43% in 1995. In 1995, the unmarried parents lived together in three-quarters of the unmarried births. In the other quarter, the mother was the sole head of the household.

From the National Marriage Project's report:

In 1960, there were 439,000 unmarried male-female couples living together in the U.S.

In 1998 there were 4,236,000 unmarried male-female couples living together.

In 1960, 5.3% of live births in the U.S. were to unmarried women.

In 1997, 32.4% of live births were to unmarried women.

In 1960, 197,000 cohabiting male-female American couples had a child under age 15 living with them.

In 1997, 1, 520,000 of these couples had a child living with them.

The percentage of American high school seniors who said they agreed or mostly agreed that most people will have fuller and happier lives if they chose legal marriage rather than staying single or just living with someone.

1976-80: 38% of boys, 39% of girls

1995: 40% of boys, 30% of girls

Tasty Morsels Online

The latest additions to our website include:

The Ten Most Common Ways  
Unmarried People Introduce Their Partners

A new online survey: tell us who you are!

Our article,  
"Demystifying Common Law Marriage" is also online.

Book Buzz

What Is Marriage For? The Strange Social History of Our Most Intimate Institution,

by E.J. Graff

In last month's announcements we mentioned this book was out, but now that we've had a chance to read it ourselves we thought it was worthy of an additional mention.

What Is Marriage For? is a fascinating read, especially for those of us who have pondered marriage's complex cultural and personal meanings. Graff traces the ever-changing history of marriage to pre-Christian times, arguing beyond a shadow of a doubt that there is no such thing as what people today call "traditional marriage."

She points out, for instance, that when Jesus lived, procreation was such a fundamental obligation of marriage that his followers' dedication to celibacy was seen as a serious rebellion from marriage. She explores the once-radical suggestion that marriages should be monogamous. And she points out that Martin Luther (famed for nailing his theses to the church door in the 1500s) was appalled that Europeans were waiting until their late 20s to marry -- making Luther sound remarkably similar to today's conservatives who fret about the rising average age of newlyweds (actually, it's only been rising since the '50s and '60s, when the average age temporarily dropped).

Graff is a smart, likable writer, weaving her personal relationship with her female partner into the text as she argues that there's no reason to continue to exclude same-sex couples from the institution of marriage. We agree whole-heartedly that she and her partner should be able to have the legal marriage they deeply want -- but we also disagree with her unwillingness to consider any valid reasons why people might not want to marry. She calls all people who choose not to marry "utopians" and sets up a few failed utopian communities as straw men she can easily knock down. Yet within the pages of her book she argues that marriage is an arbitrary construction, a sometimes inaccurate shorthand to determine who is meaningful in a person's life. She even points out that the health benefits (longer life, less depression, etc.) oft-attributed to marriage actually come from simply living with another person with whom you get along (a partner, a relative).

Graff's goal is to legalize same-sex marriage. Even though she's not an advocate for people who choose not to marry, we support her objective. Our hope is that all people -- including Graff and her partner -- will be able to choose the kind of relationship that works best for them.

Bookstore

Buy Books Online, Support Our Work

We have recently become partners of Powell's Books, an independent bookseller that sells new and used books online. By linking to Powell's through our website, we receive 10% of the price you pay. Many times, Powell's gives you the option of buying the book new or used, for different prices.

Nearly all of the books listed on our Resources page are available through Powell's, including:

What Is Marriage For? The Strange Social History of Our Most Intimate Institution

Financial Fitness for Living Together

The Lesbian and Gay Book of Love and Marriage

Loving More: The Polyfidelity Primer

Marriage Shock: The Transformation of Women into Wives

We hope you enjoy these books as much as we did!

### Upcoming Workshops

Upcoming: August 14th, East Coast Loving More Conference (Parksville, NY)  
Beyond Monogamy; Beyond Marriage?

For many monogamous people, relationships follow a predictable pattern: a period of dating, a marriage proposal, an engagement, a wedding, and monogamous married life. Fairy tales, media, a wedding industry, and family expectations help solidify this path. For many polyamorous people, though, the path is less automatic. This workshop will explore what you want from relationships, overcoming societal barriers to getting what you want, and how to find the tools to make it a reality.

For information about Loving More's conferences, visit [lovemore.com](http://lovemore.com) or call (303) 543-7540.

### 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.

### Heaps of Thank Yous

We are deeply grateful for a \$1000 grant we just received from an anonymous Haymarket donor. This is in addition to a \$1500 Haymarket People's Fund grant we received earlier this year. We are delighted that Haymarket and its donors share our belief that that supporting diverse families is one step toward building a better world.

Many thanks, also, to Mike Mirarchi for writing the script that allows our web page to have forms and surveys. Within hours of putting the new forms on the site, people started using them to get in touch with us!

If you'd like to help ATMP create a society in which diverse relationships are supported and valued, send your donation to ATMP, P.O. Box 991010, Boston, MA 02199. Thank you!

## News From Around the World

If you would like more information about any of these news items, let us know. In most cases we have full articles by e-mail.

### British Expert Says There's No Golden Age of Marriage

The British Home Secretary, speaking at a London conference on the Government's family policy, said it was a myth that "living in sin" was once rare and families stayed together happily. He said unmarried relationships had always existed along with formal wedlock and urged those working with families to accept that one could not "legislate people into marriage." He also pointed out that in the 19th century, the average marriage lasted only 12 years because of the high death rate.

### Australia Extends Rights to Same-Sex Couples and Relatives

The Australian state of New South Wales passed a law that will grant same-sex couples and blood relatives who live together the same property, inheritance, alimony and medical-decision rights that male-female domestic partners already receive in that country. The law covers areas as broad as property transfer taxes, insurance contracts, trustee property, wills, probate and administration, protected estates, judges' pensions, family provision, organ donation, coroner inquests, decisions about bail for arrested persons, guardianship in regard to mental health, rights in retirement villages, and accident compensation.

### Sanctions Reduce Iraqi Marriage Rate

Economics and marriage are closely tied in the U.S. and around the world. In Iraq, the United Nations' sanctions, and the resulting fall in wages, have forced most young people to think of marriage as a luxury. Although there are no reliable statistics, one Iraqi newspaper estimates that 70 percent of Iraqis between the age of 18 to 40 are unmarried. In interviews, women of all social classes said they knew of almost no young people who had gotten married in the last eight years or were planning to do so.

## French Senate Stalls on Vote Affecting Unmarried Couples

The right-dominated French Senate put off a scheduled vote on the Civil Solidarity Pact, which would give same-sex and different-sex unmarried couples tax and inheritance rights similar to those married couples receive. The vote is now scheduled for October.

## European Union May Recognize Unmarried Relationships

A gay and lesbian advocacy group is trying to get equal treatment for the unmarried same or different-sex partners of staff of European Union institutions. EU regulations forbid discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and unmarried couples from countries that have a special legal status for them are already eligible for the same benefits as married couples. The group wants the rights to be extended regardless of each country's laws.

## Netherlands Could Become First Country With Full Same-Sex Marriage Rights

The Dutch Cabinet will consider bills that would give same-sex couples equal marriage and adoption rights, though approval could probably not take place until the end of 2000. If the marriage bill passes, marriage would exist as an option along with the country's registered partnership, which currently provides many rights to registered same-sex and different-sex couples.

## Scotland Considers Unmarried Stalkers

The Scottish Parliament is considering changing the country's definition of "stalker," which currently only protects a woman from a stalker if she is married to him. A recent case in which a woman was killed by a stalker to whom she was not married has drawn attention to the law. The woman's mother says that if the law had defined stalker more broadly, the police would have been able to prevent her daughter's death. Some say the change is unnecessary since this type of behavior is covered by "breach of the peace" laws.

## Quebec Extends Rights to Same-Sex Couples

Quebec's National Assembly unanimously passed a law that gives gay and lesbian couples the same rights as common-law heterosexual couples, making

it the first province in Canada to do so.

### Scotland Gives Travel Allowances to DPs

Scotland's parliament granted travel allowances to the domestic partners of gay and straight members. Previously only married spouses were eligible to receive the allowances. Some conservative groups accused the parliament of undermining "family values."

### Volunteer Groups in Iran Enforce Marriage, Sex Codes

An Iranian corps of volunteers called the basij enforce Islamic morality by locating unmarried couples who are holding hands, mixed-gender parties, alcohol and drug consumption, and violations of women's Islamic dress codes. After being warned, violators may be beaten or taken to a police station where they may be humiliated, fined, or prosecuted. There are believed to be between 300,000 and 1 million basij.

### Hong Kong Apartments Discriminate Against Unmarried

The Tung Wah Group of Hospitals may be illegally discriminating against prospective tenants for its residential properties. Only single people or those living with their immediate family members are allowed to rent apartments, even though the country's laws define "family" more broadly and forbid discrimination when renting properties. The Equal Opportunities Commission says it plans to investigate.

### Canada Explores Extending Rights To More Cohabitators

After the Canadian Supreme Court ruling that extended equal rights to same-sex domestic partners as to different-sex partners and married couples, lawmakers are considering whether to extend rights to other cohabitators in economic dependency. For instance, a mother and adult daughter or two army buddies who live together could be eligible to share a health benefits plan or designate each other as beneficiaries.

### 1999 a Popular Year for Marriage in China

Marriage rates are up in China this year according to those who work in wedding-related industries. The word for "nine" sounds the same as the

word for "long-lasting" in Chinese, making people believe it will be a lucky time to get married. In addition, next year is the Year of the Dragon, so babies born next year will be "little dragons," a creature believed to bring good luck.

### British Couples Can Divorce on the Internet

A new company called Desktop Lawyer allows couples to download divorce documents and save about \$500 over the cost of getting an old-fashioned paper divorce. Religious groups are concerned that people who get divorces online are less likely to get counseling or consider reconciliation. About 300 couples downloaded the documents in the first week.

### Unmarried Candidates Attacked in Australia and U.S.

In the Australian race for the prized Liberal seat of Brighton, Louse Asher has been attacked because she is in a long-term relationship but not married. There has been an outcry from those who believe the candidates' personal lives should not be relevant. Some suggest that Asher's private life has faced unfair scrutiny because she is a woman.

Republican Rep. Rick Hill told Democrats at a state convention that Democratic U.S. House candidate Nancy Keenan would make a poor choice for Congress because she is unmarried and has no children. Her campaign manager says that the comments had backfired. Since they were made, Keenan's fundraising has been particularly successful, and her manager they thank Rep. Hill for the boost.

### Russian Region Allows Men Four Wives

Russia's Moslem southern region of Ingushetia has authorized its men to marry up to four women each, but the move may face hurdles in federal law. The decree is based on a traditional Islamic practice allowing men to have up to four wives. In the Ingush capital Nazran, polygamy was decidedly popular among both men and women interviewed on the streets. Russia's justice minister said the new law is unconstitutional.

### News From the United States

#### Methodist Officials Ponder Ministers Who Married Lesbians

United Methodist church officials are trying to decide whether to subject to trial the 68 ministers who blessed the union of a lesbian couple in

January. Although church law explicitly forbids these same sex "marriage" ceremonies, the ministers invited the press, spelled their names for the papers, and sent a video of the proceedings to the local bishop. The ministers could risk losing their ministerial credentials, homes, health insurance, and pensions.

### More Unmarried Fathers Acknowledging Paternity

The number of fathers acknowledging paternity when they are unmarried has nearly tripled in six years, from 512,000 in 1992 to 1.5 million in 1998. The number has increased even as the rate of unmarried births has declined by 6% from its peak in 1994. Much of the increase is credited to a 1993 law that requires states to ask unmarried mothers and fathers to sign a form declaring parenthood at the hospital when their children are born.

### Florida Man Challenges Sex Laws

A 65-year-old man willfully broke three of the state's sex laws: "open adultery," "lewd and lascivious cohabitation" and "performing unnatural and lascivious acts." He held a news conference flanked by five hired models in bikini bottoms and "Sex Instructor" t-shirts, turned himself in to the police station, and filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of the laws. The man, Howard Fletcher, is the executive secretary of the National Sexual Rights Council. The lawsuit has been thrown out for technical reasons but will be refiled.

### Massachusetts Says Unmarried Partners May Receive Visitation

The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court agreed with a lower court that a non-relative who is a child's "de facto parent" may be granted visitation by the court. This means that a parent's same-sex or different-sex partner who has been acting as a child's parent can continue to have contact with the child if the couple separates.

### California May Give Out Marriage Info with Marriage Licenses

California Assemblywoman Hannah-Beth Jackson is pushing for a state law that would require clerks to hand out an informational pamphlet about marriage with each marriage certificate. Jackson says that her years practicing family law convinced her that many people don't understand the legal and financial rights and obligations that come with marriage. Some opponents think the pamphlet will cast marriage in too negative a light.

## United Church of Christ Says Marriage Isn't Only Answer

The General Synod of the United Church of Christ backed away from a resolution that would have declared marriage the first and primary covenant of human life, instead approving a statement that affirms marriage as "one important covenant" of the church. The committee that proposed the alternate language said the original language would have suggested that same-sex relationships were not worthy or sacred.

## Conservative Group Buys Radio Ads Against Marriage Penalty

The Family Research Council bought 60 second radio ads on Christian, country and talk stations around the country. In the ads, a couple who just exchanged vows at the altar is confronted by "The Tax Man," who demands "cash, check or charge" for the so-called "marriage penalty." ATMP questions why government should reward or punish anyone for the personal decision of how to structure their relationship. The tax cut proposals currently being debated reduce but do not eliminate the marriage penalty, which affects some but not all married couples.

## Utah Will Allow Unmarried Foster Care to Continue

An effort by the board of trustees of the state Division of Child and Family Services to prohibit same-sex and different-sex unmarried couples from becoming foster parents has stalled at the state office that licenses foster homes. The agency's leadership, children's advocates, and foster care organizations opposed the move to limit who could become a foster parent since there is a chronic shortage of foster homes.

## Religious Bill Passes House, May Threaten Civil Rights

The Religious Liberties Protection Act, a bill that prevents states from restricting religious practices, recently passed in the House. Many groups are concerned that if it became law, the Act could make it legal to claim that it violates one's "religious beliefs" in order to discriminate against people on the basis of marital status, sexual orientation, HIV status, or other factors. The ACLU, gay rights groups, and other civil rights organizations have spoken against the bill.

## Senators Propose Pro-Marriage, Pro-Fatherhood Bill

Senators Evan Bayh of Indiana and Pete Domenici of New Mexico have proposed

the Responsible Fatherhood Act of 1999. The Act's goals include promoting public awareness of the importance of fatherhood and marriage through federal and state grants. The bill would cost over 1 billion dollars. Similar proposals have failed in the past.

#### ACLU Backs Challenges to Utah's Anti-Cohabitation Clause

The American Civil Liberties Union is supporting the Women's Religious Liberties Union, a group that is challenging Utah's clause within its anti-polygamy law that outlaws cohabitation. The ACLU said that living arrangements are intimate decisions, and that people's privacy should be protected.

#### NGLTF Launches Family Policy Program

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force recently announced the creation of a Family Policy program that will secure inclusive definitions of family in national, state and local policy contexts. The program will engage in research, policy analysis, coalition building, strategy development and collaborative work with other organizations. The program will be headed by nationally renowned lesbian attorney and family advocate Paula Ettelbrick, who has long supported broad definitions of family.

#### Domestic Partner News (U.S.)

#### DPs Still Allowed at Pennsylvania Universities

Although the Pennsylvania House of Representatives approved a bill that would cut off state funds to state-related universities if they provide health benefits to domestic partners, the Senate failed to pass the bill.

#### Pittsburgh Commission Says DP Case is Legit

The Pittsburgh Human Relations Commission issued an order refusing to dismiss a sexual orientation discrimination complaint related to domestic partner health benefits for employees of the University of Pittsburgh. The complaint was filed three years ago when a University employee accused the school of violating a city ordinance banning discrimination against gays and lesbians. The American Civil Liberties Union is representing the University's gay and lesbian employees in the lawsuit.

## Chicago Transit Board, City of Milwaukee, College Add Same-Sex DPs

The Chicago Transit Board passed a proposal to extend health coverage benefits to same-sex partners of employees. Qualifying domestic partners will be eligible for the same health care, dental insurance and vision coverage that the CTA currently offers to spouses of CTA employees. The CTA said the domestic partner program will increase the level of fairness and help them attract and retain good employees. Same-sex couples in Milwaukee will be able to register in the city's new domestic partner registry even though it will offer no immediate, tangible benefits. Employers who choose to offer domestic partner benefits may rely on the registry to decide who is eligible to receive the benefits.

Franklin and Marshall College also recently added domestic partner benefits; we are not sure how the college is defining domestic partner.

## Wisconsin, Washington, California Counties Considering DPs

Dane County may offer health insurance coverage to same-sex couples as part of union contracts to be negotiated later this year. Although the union supports extending the benefits to all unmarried couples, members of the Personnel and Finance Committee voted to extend coverage only to same-sex couples. The County Board ultimately will vote on the issue.

Thurston County, Washington officials have drafted a policy providing benefits to domestic partners. The plan will be voted on in the fall.

San Bernardino County, California is also considering providing domestic partner benefits to its employees.

## Atlanta DP Court Case To Proceed

The city of Atlanta has tried to grant domestic partner benefits to same and different-sex couples since 1993 but has been blocked by legal challenges. After winning Supreme Court approval in 1997, it has been unable to offer the benefits because the state's insurance commissioner refuses to approve the policy change. He says the policy would facilitate "meritricious relationships." The city's court case against him won its first legal test recently when a judge refused his request to dismiss the case.

## Hawaii To Halt DP Health Coverage

Hawaii's Public Employees Health Fund ended health coverage for the unmarried partners of about 60 public employees and retirees as portions of the state's 1997 reciprocal beneficiaries law expired. State lawmakers this year failed to extend sections of the law that instructed the health

fund to provide coverage to unmarried partners of public workers.

### North Carolina Lawsuit Attacks DPs

A lawsuit filed in North Carolina challenges domestic partner health benefits offered by the cities of Chapel Hill and Carrboro. Although the plaintiffs claim to be defending taxpayers, only two couples receive domestic partner benefits through Carrboro's program (costing 0.6% of the city's health benefits budget) and four through the Chapel Hill program (costing 0.3% of its health benefits budget). In response to the lawsuit, Carrboro police chief spoke publicly about her family for the first time, saying that the benefits make it possible for her partner of ten years to stay home and care for the couple's two children.

### Gore and Bradley Discuss Views on Marriage and DPs

In their presidential campaign speeches, Vice President Al Gore has said that he supports some legal protections for domestic partners but opposes the legalization of same-sex marriage. Bill Bradley also opposes same-sex marriage and voted for the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996. He says he supports civil rights and housing benefits for gays and lesbians but will not comment more specifically about domestic partnership until the fall. According to the Human Rights Campaign, no Republican candidate has discussed these issues so far.

### Businesses Appeal San Francisco's DP Requirements

United Airlines, Federal Express, and the Air Transport Association have appealed last month's federal court ruling ordering them to comply with some provisions of San Francisco's domestic partners ordinance. The ordinance requires all companies that do business with the city to offer the same benefits to unmarried employees in domestic partner relationships as they do to married couples. Since 1997, more than 2,300 companies have taken steps to comply with the city ordinance.

### California Governor Backs Same-Sex-Only DPs

Although California Governor Davis said he supported gender-neutral domestic partner plans while he was running for governor, he is now supporting same-sex-only plans. He wants the state to provide DP benefits to its employees, and he wants to implement a statewide registry for same-sex couples. He said he is against mandating that HMOs make DP coverage available to private employers, but hopes they will follow the state's example.

## Massachusetts Court Throws Out Boston's DP Plan

The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled that an executive order providing domestic partner benefits issued by the mayor of Boston was inconsistent with the state law that gives cities the authority to provide health insurance to employees, their spouses, and dependents. The justices' opinion was sympathetic to domestic partners in need of health insurance, but said that the state law must to be changed legislatively, not by the courts. It is unclear how the ruling will affect other MA cities and towns that offer domestic partner benefits.

## Domestic Partners Being Included in Relocation Deals

According to the Relocation Council of America, the Washington, D.C.-based industry trade group, nearly 80 percent of companies are using relocation assistance as a recruiting tool, and 43 percent have increased their relocation assistance to new hires to sweeten their deals in a tight labor market. Spouse relocation programs, in which a company pays for employment help for the trailing spouse, are becoming more common, as are equivalent deals for unmarried same or different-sex partners.

## Florida County's, California City's DP Laws Take Effect

Broward County, Florida's new domestic partner law gives same and different-sex domestic partners some of the rights previously available only to married couples. The law gives health benefits to partners of county employees and gives bidding advantages to contracting companies that offer the same types of benefits. Domestic partners will agree to be responsible for one another's food and shelter during their relationship and in return they will be treated as immediate family for hospital and jail visitations. Twenty couples registered in the first hour.

Petaluma, California's domestic partner registry also took effect.

## Feds Block D.C.'s DP Plan, Considers Ending Unmarried Adoptions

Although Washington, D.C.'s city council approved domestic partner benefits for city employees several years ago, the city has still not been able to offer the benefits. Because the city is forced to depend on the federal government for the bulk of its budget, the House Appropriations Committee continues to deny D.C. the chance to extend the benefits. The House Appropriations Committee also voted to allow debate on an amendment that would prohibit adoptions by unmarried couples.

