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Same-Sex Marriage May Not Establish Full Citizenship for the LGBT Community

WASHINGTON, D.C.—There are reasons to be cautious about whether access to the institution of marriage will provide the gay community in America with equal citizenship—so claims political scientist Jyl Josephson in a recent study appearing in the June issue of *Perspectives on Politics*, a journal of the American Political Science Association.

In her article entitled “Citizenship, Same-Sex Marriage, and Feminist Critiques of Marriage,” Josephson reviews the legal and political evolution of marriage, its connection to citizenship, and the politics of the current debate over same-sex marriage. The study is available online at <http://www.apsanet.org/imgtest/Citizenship%20and%20Same%20Sex%20Marriage.pdf>.

The institution of marriage creates a right to a realm of privacy, but is defined by public policy—a contradiction not often discussed in public discourse regarding same-sex marriage. “Marriage is a public institution whose current form in the United States results from political choices made by state and federal officials over a long period,” asserts Josephson. Disagreements about this history and the purpose of marriage also shape contemporary debate over same-sex marriage. Moreover, the linkages between marriage and full citizenship are also rarely discussed. The author suggests that examining the impact of the institution of marriage—which assumes a particular form of intimacy and family life, and then reinforces that form with legal, economic, political, and social privileges—on democratic rights should be a focus of the debate over same-sex marriage.

There are notable divisions within the LGBT community regarding same-sex marriage. Many oppose same-sex marriage and view it as undermining their claim to full citizenship by privileging just one form of sexual relationship—a long-term, monogamous one—over others. “If married couples—opposite or same-sex—are provided greater social, economic, economic, and political privileges than nonmarried individuals, the result will be secondary exclusions and reinforcement of an undesirable link between a particular form of intimate association and adult citizenship,” states Josephson. Yet others in the LGBT community see citizenship in egalitarian terms and argue that providing access to marriage for same-sex couples is a matter of equality.

As documented by Josephson, feminist perspectives on marriage are relevant to these questions for several reasons. The feminist critique of gender roles and hierarchy in marriage illuminates the patriarchy in American society which also affects the LGBT community. Feminist scholarship further indicates that the connections among marriage, gender hierarchy, citizenship, and sexuality endure and that marriage is still a central instrument in the denial of women’s status as full citizens.

The debate over same-sex marriage raises important questions about the role of the state in the lives of its citizens, democratic participation, and political rights in a democracy. “Advocates on both sides of the issue agree that there is a deep connection between access to the institution of marriage and full citizenship,” Josephson argues, and “those who care about citizenship should attend to gay marriage, regardless of their intrinsic interest in the topic.”

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The American Political Science Association (est. 1903) is the leading professional organization for the study of political science and has 15,000 members in 80 countries. To read this article, visit <http://www.apsanet.org/imgtest/Citizenship%20and%20Same%20Sex%20Marriage.pdf>. For more news and information about political science research visit the APSA’s media website, www.politicalsciencenews.org.

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