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OPPOSITE-SEX CIVIL UNIONS: MOTIVES FOR NOT MARRYING

A law to allow gender-blind civil unions in Illinois was implemented beginning June 1, 2011.¹ The law allows both same-sex and opposite-sex couples to obtain civil union licenses under state law. It does nothing with respect to federal law—for instance; a surviving member of a civil union would not be eligible to receive a deceased partner’s social security benefits.

Between June 1, 2011 and September 19, 2011, 1,470 couples obtained civil union licenses at the Cook County Clerk’s office. Eighty-seven of these couples were opposite-sex couples.² The Clerk’s office conducted a telephone survey to explore why opposite-sex couples, who could legally marry, would choose a civil union over marriage. The survey was administered to one member of each couple who was reached, or a total of 46 individual respondents.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- ✓ Half of all respondents said they still plan on getting married at some point.
- ✓ In a significant gender difference, 65 percent of women surveyed said they still plan on marrying, but only 38 percent of men said that they do.³
- ✓ The most common response to an open-ended question about motives for obtaining a civil union rather than a marriage license was ideological or political. The responses included “solidarity with the gay community” and/or support of equality, fairness and inclusiveness.
- ✓ When asked if health or medical benefits played a role in their decision to get a civil union, more than half (27 of 46) of those surveyed said yes.
- ✓ When asked if they had religious or personal convictions against marriage, almost one-quarter (11 of 46) answered yes.

¹ The goal of the act was to provide same-sex couples in Illinois with the same rights and benefits enjoyed by opposite-sex couples under Illinois law.

² In the first six months of civil unions, from June 1 to Nov. 30, the Clerk’s office issued 1,856 civil union licenses, 138 of which were issued to opposite-sex couples.

³ Since only one partner from each couple was interviewed, these men and women were never from the same couple.

“POLITICS”, “OBTAINING BENEFITS” TOP REASONS FOR PREFERRING UNIONS TO MARRIAGE

Question 1, *Why did you decide to obtain a civil union instead of getting married?*, was an open-ended question aimed at finding why couples chose to obtain civil unions rather than their other legal alternative. Many respondents cited more than one reason, but they were categorized by the reason they emphasized the most (See Table 1).

Of the 46 respondents, 12 volunteered reasons such as “solidarity with the gay community” and/or support of equality, fairness and inclusiveness. These were the most frequently-given answers and were categorized as political or ideological. Obtaining benefits was the second most common answer, volunteered by nine of 46 respondents.

Since couples rarely make decisions with only one motive, the interviewer also asked a series of yes and no questions. Later in the survey, when asked if a need for health or medical benefits also played a role in their decision to get a civil union, half of the 12 “political/ideological” respondents said yes.

When asked if they still planned on marrying, eight of the nine “benefits” respondents said yes, and one was not sure. Only two of the 12 “political/ideological” respondents said yes.

“Why did you decide to obtain a civil union instead of getting married?” is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Reasons Volunteered	Percentage	Number
Political/Ideological ³	26%	12
Obtaining Benefits ⁴	19.5%	9
Legal Status ⁵	15%	7
Commitment/Label Issues ⁶	11%	5
Religious Issues ⁷	9%	4
Stronger Commitment ⁸	6.5%	3
Financial/Planning Wedding ⁹	6.5%	3
Legal Rights ¹⁰	6.5%	3
Total	100%	46

³ “Political/Ideological” included solidarity, support of equality, fairness, and inclusiveness.

⁴ “Obtaining Benefits” included those who wanted health, insurance or tax benefits.

⁵ “Legal Status” included those who cited social security status, pension status or aid status which marriage may have forfeited.

⁶ “Commitment/Label Issues” included those who said marriage was too big of a commitment, felt too permanent, did not want a husband or wife, or did not want the marriage label.

⁷ “Religious Issues” included lack of religious attachment, lack of belief in marriage due to the religious connotations and lack of belief in religion.

⁸ “Stronger Commitment” included those who cited a desire for a stronger commitment.

⁹ “Financial/Big Wedding” included those who were not financially ready for marriage or were postponing marriage to plan a big wedding.

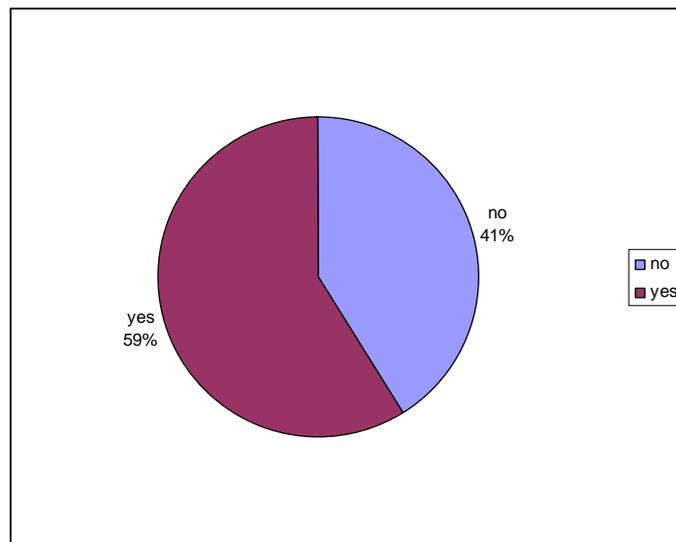
¹⁰ “Legal Rights” included those who cited legal rights or legal standing.

MAJORITY NEEDED HEALTH OR MEDICAL BENEFITS

All respondents were also asked, *Did either of you need health or medical benefits, for yourself or for children, leading you to apply for a civil union?*

- ✓ Of the 46 respondents, 27 said yes.
- ✓ This suggests that at least one partner or the children of more than half the civil union couples (59 percent) needed health or medical benefits.

Figure 1:
Did either of you need health or medical benefits, for yourself or for children, leading you to apply for a civil union?



Some respondents were preserving benefits by obtaining a civil union rather than a marriage license.

- ✓ When asked, *Are either of you receiving social security benefits from a previous spouse that you would lose if you remarried?*, three of the 46 respondents said yes.
- ✓ When asked, *Are either of you receiving other benefits from a previous spouse that you would lose if you remarried?*, one of the 46 respondents said yes.

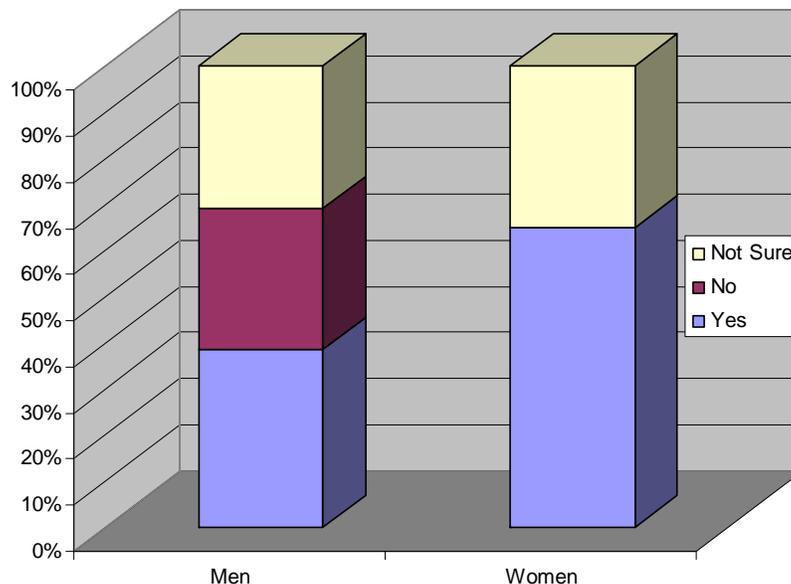
MEN AND WOMEN REPORT DIFFERENT MARRIAGE PLANS

No significant correlation was found between the reasons for choosing a civil union and age, gender, or race of respondents. However, there was a marked contrast between male and female respondents about future marriage plans.¹¹

When asked, *“Are you still planning on getting married at some point?”*:

- ✓ Only 38 percent of men (10 of 26) said they were still planning on getting married.
- ✓ The remaining men were divided, with eight in the “not sure” category and eight in the “no” category.
- ✓ In contrast, 65 percent of women (13 of 20) said they were still planning on getting married.
- ✓ While seven women said they were not sure, none of the women said no to marrying in the future.

Figure 2:
Are you still planning on getting married at some point?



¹¹ These men and women were not from the same couple.

METHODOLOGY

From September 19, 2011 through September 30, 2011 the Cook County Clerk's office¹² called all opposite-sex couples who had applied for a civil union license. Of the 87 opposite-sex couples who applied:

- ✓ One member of more than half of the couples (46) was interviewed.
- ✓ The seven-question survey consisted of six simple "yes" or "no" questions and one open-ended question.
- ✓ We spoke with 26 males and 20 females.
- ✓ We spoke with 37 Caucasian and nine minority respondents.
- ✓ Respondent ages ranged from 19 to 74, with the majority between the ages of 20 and 30 (57%).

¹² Interviews were conducted by Jason Kaminsky, an intern and graduate student from DePaul University's School of Public Service.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Why did you decide to obtain a civil union instead of getting married?

- ✓ 12 respondents came under “Political/Ideological” reasons.
- ✓ 9 respondents came under “Obtaining Benefits.”
- ✓ 7 respondents came under “Legal/Tax Status.”
- ✓ 5 respondents came under as “Commitment/Label Issues.”
- ✓ 4 respondents came under “Religious Issues.”
- ✓ 3 respondents came under “Stronger Commitment.”
- ✓ 3 respondents came under “Financial/Big Wedding.”
- ✓ 3 respondents came under “Legal Status.”

2. Are you still planning on getting married at some point?

- a. Yes-23
- b. No-8
- c. Not sure-15

3. Are either of you receiving social security benefits from a previous spouse that you would lose if you remarried?

- a. Yes-3
- b. No-43

4. Are either of you receiving other benefits from a previous spouse that you would lose if you remarried?

- a. Yes-1
- b. No-45

5. Did either of you need health or medical benefits, for yourself or for children, leading you to apply for a civil union?

- a. Yes-27
- b. No-19

6. Do you have any personal or religious convictions against marriage?

- a. Yes-11
- b. No-35

7. Are you aware that you can't simply dissolve a civil union, but must go to court to end it, much like obtaining a divorce?

- a. Yes-42
- b. No-4