

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD

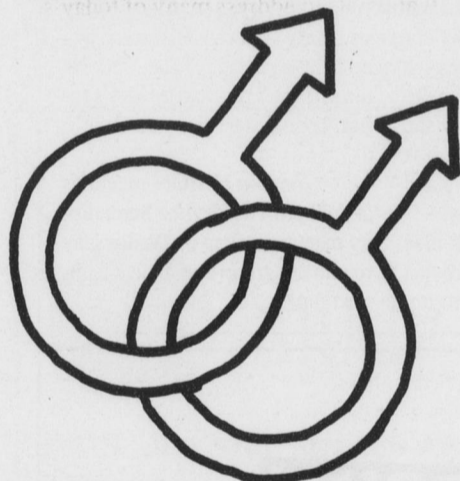
A Look At Homosexual Marriages in 1997

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Currently, throughout the world, marriage is a right only granted to heterosexual couples. In the past few years, much has changed concerning gay marriages. The Netherlands may be the first national government to grant homosexuals the same rights as heterosexuals. Last April, the Dutch house of representatives passed, by a vote of 81-60, a resolution imploring the Dutch government to submit draft legislation legalizing gay marriages by August 1, 1997.

Five European nations already allow gay and lesbian couples to marry, though only with special laws designed for homosexuals. Denmark, Norway, and Sweden have basically identical "registered partnership" laws granting homosexual couples all the rights and obligations of heterosexual matrimony, excluding access to adoption, church weddings, and artificial-insemination services. Iceland's law is similar, except that a gay spouse is allowed to adopt his or her partner's biological child.

In 1989, Denmark was the first nation to pass a registered partnership law. Norway followed in 1993 and Sweden in 1995. Gay partnerships became legal in Iceland on June 27, 1996, Iceland's gay pride day.



Hungary, in 1996, enacted a different concept of gay marriage. In May, the Hungarian parliament

voted to legalize common-law gay marriage, heeding a 1995 constitutional court ruling that mandated the change. The ruling was unexpected and did not result from any gay campaigning. Gay Hungarian lovers, who live together, have all rights of matrimony, excluding the right to adopt children.

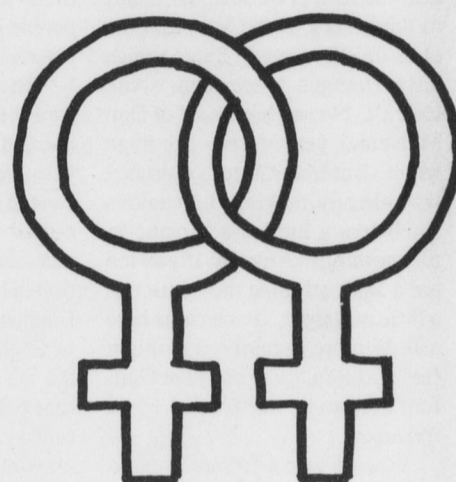
However, these gay marriages are legal only in these nations. They are not legal for foreign couples who travel to these countries to be married. At least one member of the couple must be a citizen of the nation and must be living there at the time of the marriage.

The United States is in heated debate over homosexual unions as well. A Hawaiian circuit court judge ruled in December of 1996 that the state's ban on same-sex marriages was unconstitutional under state law. Kevin Chang, the judge, the next day granted the state's motion to delay the ruling pending one more appeal to the Hawaii state supreme court. If the ruling is upheld, as most predict that it will be, then the only way for Hawaii to prevent same-sex marriages would be an amendment to the its constitution. While a movement to amend the constitution is underway, it could not be effected before the end of 1998. Hence, Hawaii will more than likely begin issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples by the end of this year.

The United States' passage of the Defense of Marriage Act in 1995, which bans federal recognition of same-sex marriages, along with similar legislation in 16 states, does not seem to deter the supporters of homosexual unions and the movement is not confined to the islands. For example, this month in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., almost 200 couples are expected to join together in a mass commitment ceremony as part of the city's Winter Gayla 97.

Guilford College Justice and Policy Studies professor Dr. Richard Kania is unsettled by the decision of the Hawaiian courts. "They have no precedent for their decision to equate same-sex unions to conventional Euro-American marriage patterns. Thus, I do

feel that they are legally wrong and without legal foundation in their rulings. Judges may refine the law, but ought not to make it from



whole cloth. They are obligated to obey the doctrine of *stare decisis*, to go with precedent. Only legislatures can bring about new definitions and arrangements. So I object to what the Hawaiian courts have ruled. If the legislative action of the state decides to redefine marriage, it has the lawful power to do so," states Dr. Kania.

According to Max Carter, Campus Ministry Coordinator, there is no longer a single Quaker stance on marriage. Concerning the issue of same-sex marriages, Carter responded, "It has been a divisive issue in the North Carolina Yearly Meetings, with some monthly meetings within the Conservative Yearly Meeting sanctioning same gender commitment and others not. The main body of Friends in NC has stated that marriage is a relationship of one man to one woman for life."

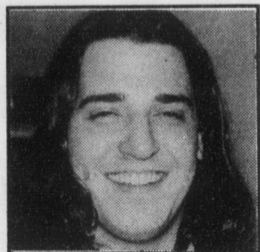
The shape of marriage in the world and the country will change drastically, if developments continue. Organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign and the Christian Coalition will be advocating their respective viewpoints in the coming months. The only definite statement that can be made concerning the condition of marriages in 1997 is that there will be more. Of what type, the future only knows.

What age is the most appropriate to get married?



"As soon as you're ready to feed yourself that damn wedding cake."

- Mari Wilke



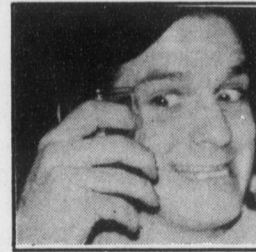
"I'd say 30 because it gives you time to settle down."

- Craig Berube



"27, because any later than that, people start wishing they were married."

- Otis Morgan



"What does appropriate mean?"

- Marc Aaron Bernstein



"12 years old. It should be mandatory to be hitched at a drive-up chapel."

- John Clinton