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The New Face of Gay Marriage

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“Honey, we may be married, but we still know how to have a good time, don’t we?” That statement was made by Joshua Janson, age 25, to his husband, Benjamin McGuire, also 25. The reality of young homosexual men getting married in Massachusetts caught the attention of The New York Times Magazine and writer Benoit Denizet-Lewis.

The magazine’s April 27, 2008 cover article, “Young Gay Rites,” offers a fascinating glimpse into the lives of these young men — and into their understandings of marriage and its place in American life. Reporter Benoit Denizet-Lewis is interested in the story as a journalist who is himself homosexual, but the article deserves attention by a far larger readership. In their own way, these young men are demonstrating something important about marriage in America.

Denizet-Lewis discovered that more than 700 gay men 29 or younger had married in Massachusetts through June 2007, the last date for which data is available.

This confounds the conventional wisdom about same-sex marriage — that young male homosexuals would not be interested in marrying.

The numbers do tell a story. Lesbian couples are still far more likely to marry than homosexual male couples. Furthermore, the early trend among male homosexuals was older male couples getting married. As Denizet-Lewis explains, they had been together longer and were ready for same-sex marriage when it was legalized.

He cites Dan Savage, a sex-advice columnist, who explained, “Women — straight or gay — tend to want to settle down years before men do.” Another observer remarked that “lesbians are more likely to be partnered than gay men, tend to cohabit quicker and are more likely to have children — which is a motivator to get married.”

The stereotypes are made clear in this couplet of jokes cited in the article: “What does a lesbian bring on a second date? A U-Haul. What does a gay man bring on a second date? What second date?”

In other words, younger homosexual men are more likely to engage in sex with more partners and to resist long-term relationships. The men Denizet-Lewis considers were or are resisting those trends — at least up to a point.

Denizet-Lewis goes into great detail about the lives, loves, and expectations of some of these male couples. Some readers will want to look at the romantic details and see the similarities with heterosexual romance and marriage. The mothers of some of these young men wanted to know the details of how the engagement came about. None of the parents seemed to have much of a problem with the fact that their son was marrying another man, but some of the couples chose to marry rather quietly.

One facet of this story is how “normal” some of these couples want to appear. Some of these couples choose the trappings of traditional marriage — rings and all. Others resist anything that appears “heteronormative.” But the very fact that both individuals in the couple are men, the “normal” appearance breaks down in some of the questions these couples face. Will one partner be more stereotypically “male?” Will the marriage be egalitarian? Will one partner be a “gay housewife?”

Monogamy is another interesting aspect of the story. Denizet-Lewis cites Frederick Hertz, author of *A Legal Guide for Lesbian and Gay Couples*, who explains that many older homosexual male couples "make a distinction between emotional fidelity and sexual fidelity." Denizet-Lewis suggested that some of these younger male couples were far more committed to true monogamy.

On the other hand, a couple — both men named Brandon — took a different approach:

But the Brandons suspected they were untraditional when it came to their thinking about monogamy. As they saw it, one enduring lesson of heterosexual marriage is that lifelong monogamy is unrealistic for most people — especially men. "Most straight people like to talk a great game about monogamy," Brandon A. said. "But what are they actually doing? Many of them have affairs at some point or break up because they want to sleep with somebody else. We're two guys, we're in our 20s, we haven't been sexual with that many people, and to pretend like we're never going to want to experience sex with another person until the day we die doesn't make sense to us. We're open to exploring our sexuality together in a way that makes us both comfortable."

"[Young Gay Rites](#)" is itself a noteworthy signal about the future of marriage. If Denizet-Lewis is right, the legalization of same-sex marriage is changing the ways some homosexuals are living their lives. In other words, same-sex marriage in Massachusetts is changing homosexual culture in some unexpected ways.

The Christian concern about marriage is rooted in the picture that marriage provides. Marriage is a covenant and the central institution for human society. The picture of marriage is the bringing together of those who are alike (both made in the image of God) and different (male and female). Out of this picture of difference brought together within covenant comes the gifts that flow from marriage.

The tragedy of same-sex marriage is not the awkwardness and strangeness revealed in this article, but the repudiation of that picture. That repudiation represents a great loss and confusion — but it also represents a violation of God's command concerning marriage.

Denizet-Lewis's article raises at least one final thought. If the legalization of same-sex marriage is changing homosexual culture, is it also changing heterosexual marriage? We can only wonder how long it will take for some heterosexual couples to decide that "emotional fidelity" and "sexual fidelity" can be separated.

We are living in the midst of vast cultural change. It is almost as if an entire civilization is being transformed before our eyes. Reading "[Young Gay Rites](#)" should be sufficient to make that realization hard to miss.

