

What's in a Word? Plenty, If It's Marriage

—February 18, 2004, with some updates in 2014—

The original version of this chapter was written over a decade ago, before the major advances in the acceptance of gay marriage. The successful strategy used what was recommended in this chapter in the first edition of this book: the stress on love and commitment and the generalization to everyone, not just gays.

More than half of Americans now support gay marriage. It is legal in nineteen states. But there is still a long way to go in the other thirty-one states. The conservative framing has not changed: It's against the Bible; it threatens the very definition of marriage; it's a lifestyle choice; children will be lured into it; it's all about sex. Conservatives these days repeat the word homosexual, which contains the word sex and the slur homo.

For example, Texas Governor Rick Perry was reported as saying, "Whether or not you feel compelled to follow a particular lifestyle or not, you have the ability to decide not to do that . . . I may have the genetic coding that I'm inclined to be an alcoholic, but I have the desire not to do that, and I look at the homosexual issue the same way."

For all of that, conservatives are fighting a losing battle against love and commitment, family and community. The younger generation is overwhelmingly accepting.

President Obama entered the presidency not being in favor of gay marriage but being open to "evolving" on the issue. He has now "evolved." The evolution metaphor suggests an adaptation to the changing political context.