

BEYOND BELIEFS²

Gay Marriage

Leanne M. Sigvartsen
Jan A. Sigvartsen
Paul B. Petersen

Gay Marriage?

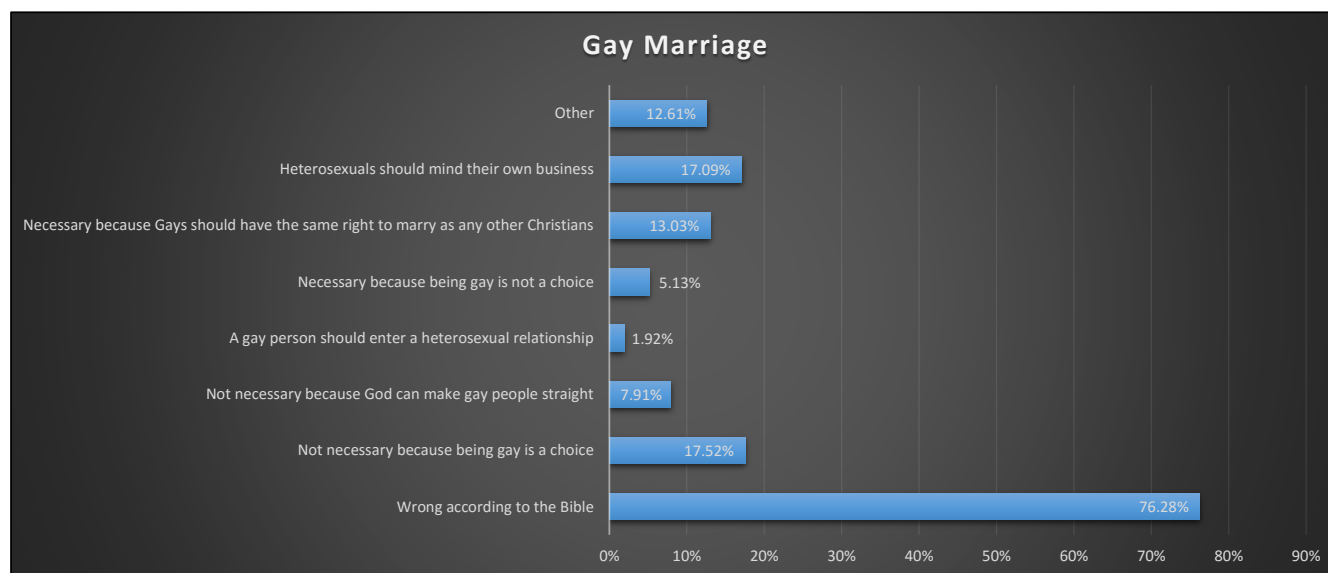
What Seventh-day Adventist Millennials really think of Gay Marriage

Report prepared by Leanne M. Sigvartsen, Jan A. Sigvartsen, and Paul B. Petersen

How do Seventh-day Adventist Millennial young adults (aged 18-33 in 2014) really feel about Gay Marriage? Are they in support of it? Do they think it is wrong according to the Bible? How informed are they with relation to LGBT issues? The Beyond Beliefs study conducted by ClergyEd.com and the Religion and Biblical Languages Department at Andrews University asked 468 young adults aged between 18 and 32 their views on Gay marriage with some noteworthy results. This article does not endeavor to support one side of the debate or the other, but rather, objectively reports the responses from the Beyond Beliefs Millennial participants.

So, what do they really think?

When asked the question, “Gay marriage?” in a 90 question survey,¹ the participants could select as many responses that applied to them from a list provided by the survey. They were also provided an “other” option where they could add their own response should they feel so inclined. The 468 Adventist Millennial Young Adults who participated in this section of the Beyond Beliefs study answered:



¹ The 90 question Beyond Beliefs 2 survey was constructed in response to issues that were identified in 921 Millennial young adult responses collected during the first phase of the Beyond Beliefs project - Beyond Beliefs 1. Many of these issues had not previously been explored within a Seventh-day Adventist Millennial population. The Beyond Beliefs project focused on allowing young adults to identify relevant areas of investigation, rather than older, non-Millennial researchers just selecting areas of research interest which may not adequately investigate or explore an issue – and may not even be relevant to Millennials. Given the 921 responses from Beyond Beliefs 1, the Beyond Beliefs 2 survey was able to use the words of the Millennials in a number of its questions, thus using the voice of Millennials and allowing researchers to investigate very relevant issues in language salient to this demographic group. The resulting survey for Beyond Beliefs 2 was administered to over 700 Millennial young adults in North America. Researchers are currently in the process of replicating this study model globally.

Chart 1 – Gay Marriage

As can be seen in the graph above, the most prominent response was “Wrong according to the Bible” (76.28%). However, given participants could answer more than one response, a different trend starts to emerge when only considering the 76.28% of participants who selected “Wrong according to the Bible.”

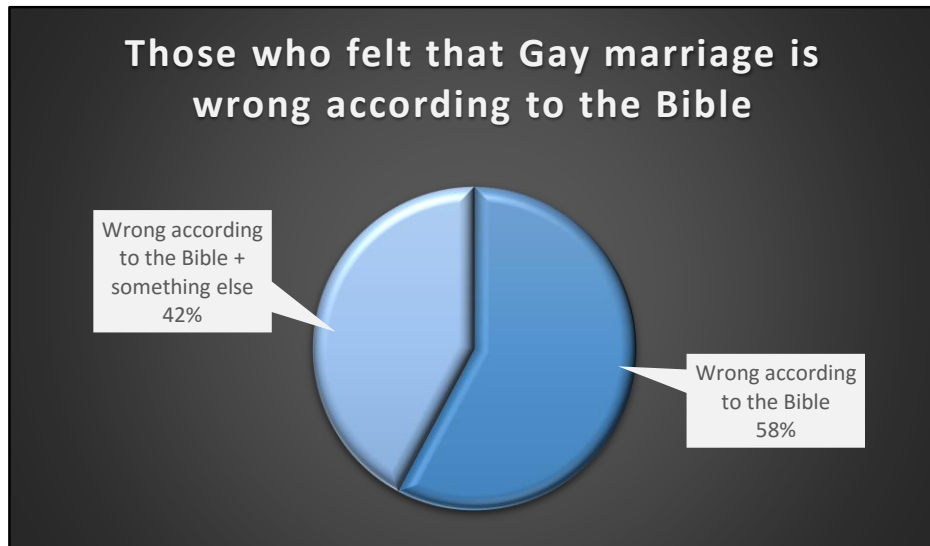


Chart 2 – Wrong according to the Bible respondents

Of those who selected “Wrong according to the Bible” 42% (32.26% of total participants) did not singularly select this response, but rather, selected other responses as well that nuanced their view a little more.



Chart 3 – Wrong according to the Bible nuances

Although they felt it was wrong according to the Bible, 33% also suggested that being gay was a choice; 18% suggested that God could make gay people straight; but most noteworthy was 23% of this group believed “Heterosexuals should mind their own business.” Interestingly, 12% said Gay marriage was still necessary because Gay people should have the right to marry like any other Christian, despite also believing it was “Wrong according to the Bible.”

Conservative versus Liberal

The Millennial young adults who participated in Cohorts 1-6 of the Beyond Beliefs study (n=679, a third of whom were born outside of the United States) were also asked if they identified as conservative or liberal.

Only 10% stated they were conservative, 15% said they were liberal, the remaining 78% stated that they were either both, neither, they didn’t really know what those terms meant, or they did not like those terms. This suggests that ideology may not play a strong part in these findings relating to Gay marriage. In fact, this suggests that the predominantly American socio-political terms of conservatism and liberalism may be inadequate for describing Seventh-day Adventist Millennial young adults, even in the United States.

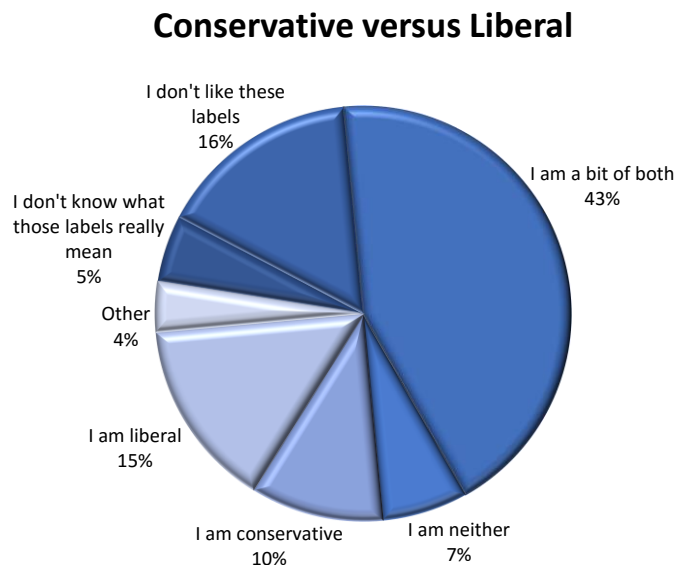


Chart 4 – Conservative Versus liberal

Comparison of Male and Female Responses

When comparing male and female responses, there are some slight differences that emerge when considering the overall results of the Gay marriage question. It would seem that, overall, Millennial young adult women are slightly more tolerant of Gay marriage. Males are slightly more likely to believe Gay marriage is wrong according to the Bible than their female counterparts and slightly less likely to hold the opinion that heterosexuals should mind their own business. Although a very minor view, there were some participants who felt that gay people should enter heterosexual relationships - more males than females endorsed this belief.

Significant behavioral scientific research indicates that homosexuality is inherent and is not merely a phase or a lifestyle choice of individuals who claim they are gay. Yet, 17.52% of Adventist Millennial young adult participants indicated that being gay was a choice, leaving 82.48% who did not select this option. And this is not surprising given one would have to question why an individual would specifically “choose” to be gay if they wanted to be a part of a Christian community where homosexuality is usually not condoned. The majority of participants didn’t feel the need to qualify their answer beyond selecting that it was “wrong according to the Bible” (58%).

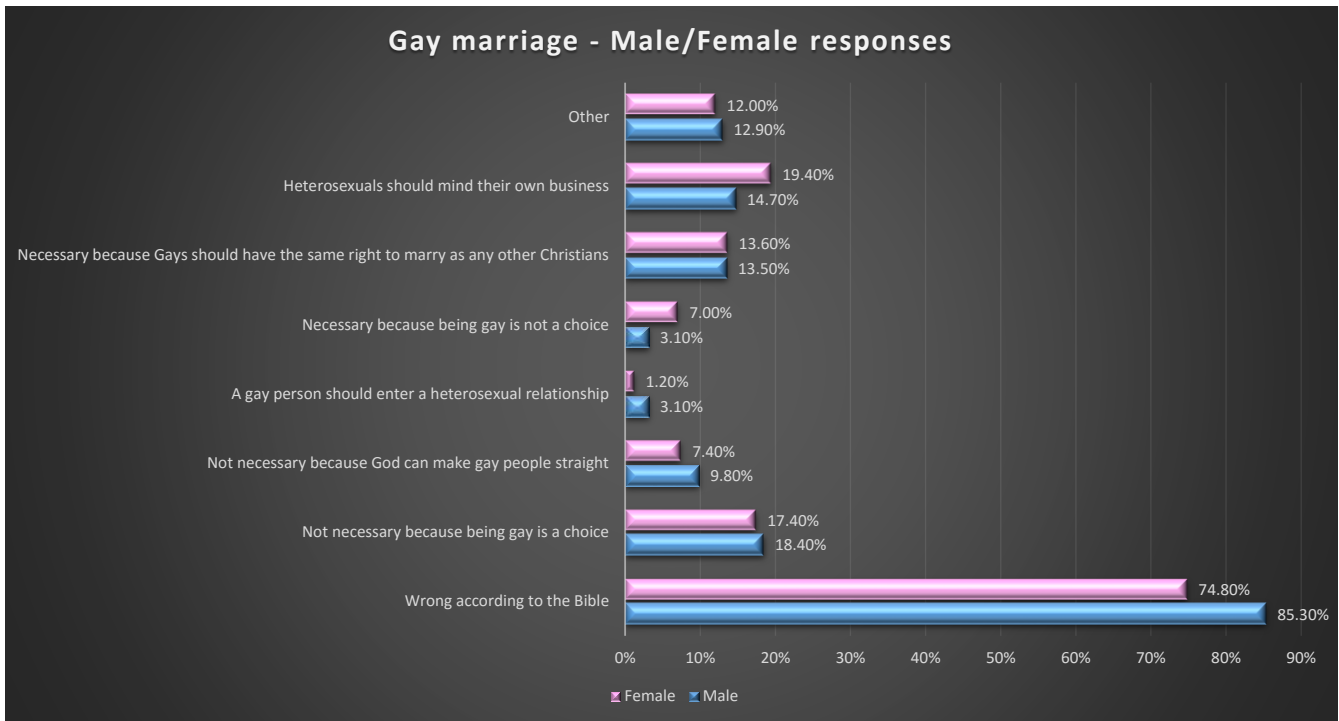


Chart 5 – Male and female responses

Qualitative Component of the Beyond Beliefs study

The qualitative component of the Beyond Beliefs study identified that Millennial young adults hold attitudes of treating people well and some specifically expressed that this positive treatment should be extended to the LGBT community.

In Cohort 1 of the Beyond Beliefs 1 component of the study, Millennial young adult participants were asked to provide a 150-200 word personal response to every single one of the 28 Beliefs of Adventism. With relation to *Belief 23 – Marriage and the Family*, only 19% of participants mentioned homosexuality in their responses. Thus, while young adults believe people should be treated well, their omission of comment relating to the LGBT community may indicate that the issue of Gay Marriage is not something readily on their radar. The majority of responses in this component of the Beyond Beliefs study focused more on the breakdown of marriage in general and the poor treatment of those who are divorced. And this is not surprising as they are probably more likely to know someone who is divorced than someone who is gay. They also expressed that they

themselves want to get married (most participants were unmarried) so their own marriage seemed to be their predominant focus. One participant summed up this sentiment and in doing so presented a more complex view of homosexuality with relation to *Belief 23 – Marriage and the Family*.

“I like this fundamental a lot because marriage is one of my favorite institutions and I can’t wait to get married myself. I don’t really understand what this fundamental is saying about divorce. While I certainly don’t think divorce is a good thing, sometimes it is necessary for at least one member of a marriage who may be suffering from abuse. Because of this, I don’t think it should be condemned so directly. One thing I really dislike about this fundamental is the little blip in the commentary about homosexuality. While I am not arguing that it deviates from God’s original plan, I do not think it is a sin. Death also deviates from God’s original plan, but we don’t condemn those who die. The biggest issue I have with this is the fact that homosexuality is equated with sexual immorality. Homosexuals can be monogamous and sexually moral as well as heterosexual people.”²

For *Belief 23 – Marriage and the Family*, 16% of respondents stated that they believed marriage should exist between a man and a woman, which prompted investigation in subsequent cohorts of the Beyond Beliefs study into the issue of Gay marriage, since so few people even eluded to it.

Conclusion

Given Seventh-day Adventist Millennial young adults rarely raise the issue of gay marriage in their responses relating to their beliefs, could indicate this issue is just not a prominent topic on their mind. Instead, the focus of their responses in the Beyond Beliefs study qualitative component is on their own marriage, or potential marriage, and anything outside that may be considered none of their business. This could explain why a small group suggested that heterosexuals should mind their own business, despite stating gay marriage was contrary to biblical teaching. If young adults do not give much thought to Gay marriage, one could speculate the net effect of that may be that they have not researched the issue of homosexuality or explored the personal narratives of gay people. It is unknown on what evidence they base a belief that being gay is a choice, or not, or that God can make gay people straight. Thus, the dissonance identified by the Beyond Beliefs study relating to Gay marriage may reflect casual opinions and are not indicative of informed or even concrete conclusions. Alternatively, it could reflect the duality of holding both conservative and liberal ideologies simultaneously.

² Leanne M. Sigvartsen, Jan A. Sigvartsen, and Paul B. Petersen, *Beyond Beliefs 1: Full Report, Cohort 1* (Berrien Springs, Mich: ClergyEd.com, 2014), 364. See www.Beyond-Beliefs.com for more information or to obtain a copy of this publication.