

# Closing the Margin: Conversation as Change

On Nov. 4, many of us asked how this could have happened.

The same day we elected a president who promises change, our state and country took steps backward in the fight for equality by passing amendments that limit the rights of same-sex couples.

Along with the shock of Proposition 8 passing in California, we need to ask ourselves what we can do to create equality for all.

Goodwin Liu, an associate dean and professor of law at UC Berkeley, recently wrote in an op-ed in the L.A. Times that the 18,000 same-sex couples and their families who legally married before Proposition 8 are a “potential catalyst for broader acceptance of gay marriage.” He writes that “the more familiar we become with gay spouses and their children — as our friends, neighbors and co-workers — the more gay marriage will become an unremarkable thread of our social fabric.”

Liu’s message should extend to everyone who believes in equality, that we should all work as “potential catalysts” by reframing the debate on same-sex marriage — that it is about our rights, regardless of sexual orientation, and that it’s all our struggle.

In the aftermath of Proposition 8, it’s hard not to feel despair for our state and our future. But if we take a look at recent history, there is hope to be found.

Proposition 22, nearly identical to Proposition 8, was brought before the voters in the 2000 primary elections. Eight years ago, Proposition 22 passed by a margin of 61.4 to 38.6 percent, with about 4.6 million voters supporting and 2.9 million voters opposing it.

Last week, Proposition 8 passed by a margin of 52.5 to 47.5 percent. Californians flocked to the polls in much higher numbers than the 2000 primary. At press time, about 6 million votes had been counted in favor of Proposition 8, while 5.5 million had been counted against it.

Here’s how the math breaks down in comparing the two propositions: 1.4 million more people voted for Proposition 8 than for 22, and 2.5 million more people voted against Proposition 8 than against 22.

These numbers clearly demonstrate the slow, but certain shift in public opinion regarding same-sex marriages. In just eight years, the gap between supporters and opponents narrowed from a difference of 22.8 percent to a mere 5 percent.

One of the biggest differences between these two elections was the so-called “youth vote,” which encompasses voters aged 18 to 29. The under-30 set accounted for just 5 percent of voters in 2000, but made up 20 percent of voters in 2008.

According to CNN’s Proposition 8 exit polls, Californians aged 18 to 29 were split about 60 to 40 percent on Proposition 8, with

the majority opposing it; meanwhile, those aged 65 and older were split 40 to 60 percent, with the majority supporting it.

Though they can’t vote yet, California’s children will play an important role in the future of same-sex marriage.

Two weeks ago, the MyVote California Student Mock General Election polled about 600,000 elementary through high school students from over 900 schools across California. Of those who voted on Proposition 8, 43.5 percent voted to pass and 56.5 percent voted against it.

It’s worth mentioning that only three of these schools were located in San Francisco County; the counties with the highest participation were Los Angeles and San Diego, both of which supported the passing of Proposition 8.

As these children grow up and become the “youth vote” themselves, this fight will become their fight too — and the numbers are encouraging.


Keeping in mind that 30 percent of the voters in Santa Cruz County supported the measure, many of us know at least one person out of the 6 million Californians who voted yes on Proposition 8. Some of them might be our parents, relatives, and friends.

We all come from different neighborhoods and religious communities that might not be as accepting or informed about the inequality. We have to reframe the debate to show that we are advocates of same-sex marriage, and use our social influence to explain to those around us that this is our right as American citizens.

The passage of Proposition 8 showed that the fight for change is long from over. The fight has been taken to the streets, where thousands of same-sex marriage supporters continue to protest. It is being taken back into the courts, thanks to three lawsuits filed after Nov. 4, and 43 Democratic legislators who filed a brief on Monday urging the California Supreme Court to void Proposition 8.

So don’t despair, because equality is going to happen; it’s only a matter of time. As the fight for equality continues in the courts and in the streets in the following weeks, months, and possibly years, we need to become activists and work with those around us to create change.

That doesn’t mean joining a Facebook group or wearing a button — it means actually talking to people who have differing viewpoints, and showing them how this decision affects our lives and our friends’ lives. It means being audible and visible, whether we’re one-on-one with our neighbors or organizing with the masses at rallies and protests.

To borrow a line from Beat legend Allen Ginsberg: America, we’re putting our queer shoulder to the wheel.  [opinions@cityonahillpress.com](mailto:opinions@cityonahillpress.com)

## Column

# Personal Reflections on Proposition 8

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This summer I had the wonderful, albeit unexpected, honor of serving as best man in my brother’s wedding. Today, his marriage hangs in a state of legal jeopardy. My brother’s new husband, the man of his dreams, has become a fully adopted member of my family.

Still, the changes were not immediate. My brother’s coming out forced my family to confront our own prejudices and inbred homophobia, and in turn, we found that we loved him more than we were homophobic. In my own community at the time, middle school, cries of “that’s so gay” were rampant, and I thought nothing of them. My brother forced me to consider such comments, and how damaging they could be.

I know my brother better than anyone in the world, and his homosexuality is the smallest part of his personality. Today, we can see that he has found the love of his life, and my parents fully embrace and celebrate their relationship and all it has brought them.

But even we must recognize the bubble that we are in. Accepting my brother’s homosexuality has not been easy, especially for some members of my extended family in other states. My grandmother, matriarch of the family that she is, worried that my brother would have a harder life as a gay man, and it took countless hours of effort from my aunt, a school counselor, to help our other cousins begin to accept him.

Though this is a depressing and all-too-common occurrence, time and love are the best ways to overcome prejudice and bigotry, and in many families it’s much worse. Now, though at times our visits with our extended family can still be a bit awkward, first and foremost we are a loving family.


The proper stage for the gay marriage discussion is in the family, and with an atmosphere of mutual respect and love. All too many families shun their gay children, disown them, or refuse to accept that they may be “different,” so we appreciate that our family has not chosen this path.

The attack ads from the Proposition 8 campaign targeted these same fears. They assaulted our state’s schools, saying that homosexuality and gay marriage would be “taught in school.”

Though this was the “fear” that so many sought to bring about through the ads, I see it from the opposite perspective. Homosexuality should be taught about in school, just like heterosexuality, before students grow up to share the prejudice of their parents.

My family, as I have come to appreciate all the more, is an oasis of acceptance in the greater homophobic desert. They are up in arms about Proposition 8, in some ways more than my brother is, and are already vowing to do what they can to bring it down.

Our country is moving, albeit at an infuriatingly slow pace, toward acceptance as more open-minded young people begin to vote. Still, there is so much we can do now, talking to our parents and friends about what is important to us.

My parents recently reached their 30th wedding anniversary, and have been an amazing influence on me and my brother about the picture of a family: an affectionate, accepting, caring home. Love is love, and a home is a home, no matter who the people are.  [opinions@cityonahillpress.com](mailto:opinions@cityonahillpress.com)