

## Talking About: AAA Response to Proposed Constitutional Amendment

In February 2004, US President George W. Bush called for a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage. His speech, reproduced on [CNN.com](http://CNN.com), claimed that “millennia of human experience” made it “natural” that marriage should be limited to one man and one woman as “the most fundamental institution of civilization.” Several days later, the American Anthropological Association (AAA), the largest organization of anthropologists in the world, released the following statement in response.

“The results of more than a century of anthropological research on households, kinship relationships, and families, across cultures and through time, provide no support whatsoever for the view that either civilization or viable social orders depend upon marriage as an exclusively heterosexual institution. Rather, anthropological research supports the conclusion that a vast array of family types, including families built upon same-sex partnerships, can contribute to stable and humane societies” (American Anthropological Association Executive Board, 2004).

The AAA strongly opposed a constitutional amendment restricting marriage to heterosexual couples, as successful partnerships and stable

families come in many forms across the world. Claiming that monogamy between one man and one woman is the only “natural,” or correct, way to marry is a severely limited, and fundamentally incorrect, view. The term “natural” is often invoked without evidence to promote the view that something is “biologically normal” for the human species. Because an idea is culturally acceptable to those in power in a particular society does not mean that it is the default for humans throughout time. Anthropologist Laura Nader at the University of California, Berkeley called President Bush’s proposal one that “serves the views of the religious right” (Burress 2004).

In 2013, the US Supreme Court agreed that such an amendment limited people’s rights as citizens in the landmark case *United States v. Windsor*. Citizens’ rights, including marriage equality, are preserved under the Fifth Amendment’s guarantee of equal protection of personal liberty. After this decision was reached, the United States joined a growing list of other countries that legally recognize same-sex marriages, including Canada, France, Spain, Britain, Belgium, Sweden, Iceland, Brazil, and South Africa, among others. Nonetheless, challenges persist for marriage equality in the United States, since not all states accept this ruling.