



## REVIEW

A review on Macedo's book in the Dutch Magazine for Sexology, December 2017

By Mathieu Heemelaar, lecturer social work

Heemelaar, M. 2017. Just married. Same-sex couples, monogamy & the future of marriage. Literatuurbulletin. *Tijdschrift voor Seksuologie*, 41, 4, 191-192.

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Macedo, S. (2015). **Just married. Same-sex couples, monogamy & the future of marriage.** Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 320 pages, €26,99.

A book about 'gay marriage' could be updated every month. In the summer of 2017 Angela Merkel created an opening for gay marriage in Germany for electoral reasons, there were initiatives in China and when this review is printed, the outcome of the referendum in Australia will be known<sup>1</sup>.

Macedo's book on the introduction of same-sex marriage in the U.S., became obsolete two days after the publication due to societal development. The book of Stephen Macedo (Professor of Politics and Human values at Princeton University) came out flat before the 2015 Supreme Court decision that facilitated gay marriage in all States of the US.

I asked Macedo by email about his thoughts on the Supreme Court ruling in 2015. He, together with many Americans, was happy that years of 'criticizing conservative anti-gay rights arguments', together with the very important fact of people coming out of the closet and also positive media depictions had led to a fundamental social change (Macedo 2017).

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<sup>1</sup> Positive. Nov, 14, 2017. Of 12.7 million Australians who took part in the government survey, 61.6 percent voted yes and 38.4 percent voted no.

In the USA, the fight for same-sex marriage (SSM) is known by its gradual steps backwards and forwards. SSM was conquered state by state and sometimes through referenda, legislation and regulations reversed again. A crucial Supreme Court ruling in 2013 took away the possibility for States to prohibit SSM, but did not yet give all Americans the civil right to marry a person of the same gender. In 2013 this was still a State by State decision.

The Supreme Court decided in 2015 that SSM should be recognized and allowed in all States. As President Trump seems to be an opponent of equal rights for LHBTI, the American LHBTI movement is alert to the possibility that this decision is reversed again by means of an amendment to the Constitution on his initiative. This threat ensures that the book retains its topicality.

The main question of this book is: what does the recognition of SSM have in store for the future of marriage as an institution? In the first part Macedo describes and extensively analyses the public and academic debate both in favor and against SSM of the last decades. He starts his argument with acknowledging the concerns of conservative opponents on developments over the past few decades. As family structures weakened, marriage became unstable (also in terms of mutual involvement of the partners), the public domain has become more sexualized and there is a correlation between mental disease among young people, divorce of their parents and growing up in single-parent families.

Numerous lines of reasoning from political conservative and orthodox-religious angles are described and analyzed in the book. For example: Macedo discusses the argument against SSM that reproduction is at the core of human nature. Homosexuality is not natural and immoral, because it goes against human nature (=reproduction) and is hence a threat for human nature.

Macedo also points out orthodox believers' stance on vaginal coitus as 'organic physical unification' which is the basis for a stable 'real' marriage where baby-making sex produces the fruit of procreation: children. Homosexuality is a social problem, because it is a selfish choice. In these arguments of opponents of SSM Macedo detects inconsistent thinking: infertile heterosexual partners may get married, even if they are not able to procreate. He also clears up that homosexuality is not so much a choice as rather a given.

Macedo also writes about children growing up within an SSM. He acknowledges that children who grow up with their biological parents can benefit from that. But this does not mean that

everything else can be condemned as immoral. "If ever there were a case of the best being the enemy of the good, this would be it" (p. 49).

In the second part of the book, Macedo examines the importance of marriage. He refers to research about the positive effect of happy marriages for mental and physical health and social importance (less violence, addiction and crime). In addition, he notes that these outcomes are based on averages: children of single mothers also often function well. Based on the positive effect of happy marriages, he calls for the opening of marriage for people with the same sex. Legal recognition allows for reduction of social stigma and associated minority stress. He focusses on the advantages for children to grow up in a family with a promise of "unparalleled intimacy, companionship, emotional support and security".

In the third part, he discusses opening marriage for more than two partners (polygamy). Where earlier critics of polygamy had morality-based arguments, later critics added that polygamy enforces patriarchal relations and status hierarchy (a man may have several women, not the other way around).

Macedo concludes that monogamy is important for equal rights, status and a good family life. He points out that very little research has been conducted into polyamory as a social form. Macedo would want to discourage polygamy, but rejects prosecution of adults who maintain polyamorous contacts with mutual consent. For the time being he sees polygamy as a blocker for a relationship based on mutual commitment. He considers that the time is not yet ripe to build legal structures and that more research is needed. Nevertheless, the academic Macedo offers an open end: "sexually open egalitarian communities have been tried before, and no doubt they will be tried again. My skepticism may turn out to be misplaced." (p. 203)

Macedo concludes at the end of his book that SSM poses no threat to the future of marriage. Good marriages are based on commitment, where partners and their children feel good and SSM offers ample possibilities for commitment.

Macedo has written a very readable and comprehensive book in which he shows respect for the concerns of conservative Americans and at the same time dissects (fillets) one-sided arguments provided by both sides in a very effective way. The book is a must-read for politicians, LHBTI-activists and anyone who wants to know more about the context of the emergence of legislation in this area. For practitioners in practice it is less relevant.

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### Literature

Barclay, S. 2016. A discussion of Stephen Macedo's Just Married: Same-sex couples, monogamy and the future of marriage. *Perspectives on Politics*, 14, 793-794.

Macedo, S. 2017. *Personal announcement*. Email-correspondence 16-08-17, 16-10-17 en 17-10-17.