“Honey, Pack the U-Haul”: The Impact of Same-Sex Marriage on LGBTQ Residency Choices

Amy C. Rose

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Prerequisite for Honors
in Economics
under the advisement of Professor Kyung Park

April 2023

© 2023 Amy C. Rose
Abstract

This paper explores the impact of same-sex marriage legalization on migration choices of same-sex couples. I employ American Community Survey (ACS) data from 2000-2019 to evaluate the impact of legal access to marriage on the residency choices of same-sex couples using an event-study version of a two-way fixed effects model. I observe that individuals in same-sex couples live in their state of birth at a lower rate than their counterparts in different-sex couples, which is consistent with previous literature. While about 60% of individuals in different-sex couples live in their state of birth, only 45% of men and 52% of women in same-sex couples do so. This suggests that people have a tendency to live in their state of birth, though this is lower for same-sex couples. I find no impact of the legalization of same-sex marriage on the share of same-sex couples who reside in one of their states of birth. This implies that access to marriage in a state of birth may not be compelling enough to move home for same-sex couples. I find heterogeneous effects based on differences in geography and gay tolerance. For example, in the least tolerant states there is evidence that marriage legalization may increase the share of same-sex couples who were born in state, though I interpret this cautiously since there is not enough precision to reject that these coefficients are equal to 0. This suggests that legalization of marriage may have had more of an impact on the state of birth share in less LGBTQ-friendly states.
Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Kyung Park, for his guidance throughout this thesis. I am extremely fortunate to have been his student for the past three years, largely in part to his mentorship and willingness to share his own research. It is in his courses that I have been the most challenged, ultimately helping me to grow as a student, a thinker, and an economist. Without his encouragement and support, I would not have been able to partake in such a meaningful project.

Thank you to the professors I have had throughout my time at Wellesley that have cultivated my intellectual curiosity, both within and outside of my interest in economics. Specifically, I extend my appreciation to Professor Robin McKnight, Professor Dan Sichel, and Professor Andy Schultz. Many thanks to Professor Courtney Coile and Professor Tavi González for serving on my thesis committee.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Professor Eric Hilt and the Economics Research Seminar: Beatrice Chen, Eshika Kaul, Julie Ma, Mariela Duran, and Nuzaina Faisal Khan. The feedback from Professor Hilt and my peers throughout the thesis process was invaluable. I am especially grateful for the community and support that ERS provided me during one of the most challenging endeavors of my academic career thus far. From bonding over late nights in the final stretch of the thesis process, to enthusiastic discussions about Taylor Swift’s discography and the American Girl Doll franchise, I have found a community of peers without whom the process of writing a thesis would have been extremely bleak.

This thesis would not have been possible without my friends. I could not possibly list all of my peers that provided me with support throughout this project, but I’d like to especially thank Corrin Day, Hailey Sweeney, Mary McMahon, Colleen Boggs, Cami Bianchi, and Abby Lucier. It feels good to be known so well.