

# For better or worse – at last: same-sex marriage in Canada

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## Abstract

On July 20<sup>th</sup> 2005, Canada became the 3<sup>rd</sup> country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage. Considering that the first Canadian census to take into account this new fact occurred less than a year later (in may 2006), one could metaphorically ask: who rushed to the altar?

The 2006 Canadian census enumerated 45.345 same-sex couples– of which 16.5% were legally married. The objective of this article is to stress the picture of those couples who got married the first year it was legal to do so, and to compare them with their non-married counterparts as well as to opposite-sex couples.

For the first time in history, Canadian same-sex couples have to choice to tie the knot... or not. Who are the early adopters? Are they long-time activists who gained their cause? Are they young people with traditional views on romantic life? Those are the questions we aim to answer.

*Keywords: Canadian 2006 census, Same-sex marriage, Legislations*

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## Extendex abstract

Legally speaking, the definition of ‘marriage’ in Canada is a prerogative of the federal (central) government, and since July 20<sup>th</sup> 2005, marriage can be celebrated across the country between two adults, regardless of their gender. Before that, marriage was defined as the union between two opposite-sex persons, thus countervailing to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 9<sup>1</sup> out of 13 provinces and territories had already (since 2003 or 2004) granted their citizens the right to marry whoever they wanted. Only a year passed between the official legalization of same-sex marriage and the census, but for most provinces, the change occurred in 2004.

The 2006 census was the first in Canadian history to acknowledge the existence of same-sex married couples (the 2001 census only admitted same-sex partnership), giving demographers and sociologists the opportunity to examine theirs households, earnings, and other characteristics available through the census questionnaire.

This paper aims to examine the profile of same-sex married couples (by gender and by province) and to identify the similarities and discordance between those couples and the non-married-same-sex ones, as much as the opposite-sex couples.

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<sup>1</sup> Excluding Alberta, Prince-Edward-Island, Northwest Territories and Nunavut

We will use descriptive methods to study the census data. Preliminary results from Statistics Canada show that same-sex couples represent 0.6% of all couples in 2006. Of them, 16,5% were legally married; 53,7% of spouses were men and 46,3 were women. Almost 72% of Canadians in same-sex unions were aged 35-64 years old.

The release of these data took place on September 12<sup>th</sup> 2007 – further analyses will give a better and more complete portrait of the question.

Although data is still scarce, we can wonder if the rapid increase of same-sex couples (+32% between censuses) is due to a greater tolerance and better laws or if the tendency is doomed to stabilise itself (or decline?) as the couples who waited a long time legitimate their union but cannot reverse the decreasing popularity of marriage in Canada?