

report that they experienced some kind of discrimination in housing or employment based on sexual orientation, about 40 percent report being threatened with violence, and about 80 percent say they have been verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation. Terms used for any of these kinds of bias directed at a person because of their sexual orientation are **heterosexism** or **homophobia**; these terms are often used interchangeably. Probably as a result of these various forms of ridicule and harassment they face, gay and lesbian youth are two to three times as likely to commit suicide as heterosexual youth (O'Brien 2000). If one dresses or looks in a way that social norms see as more appropriate for the other sex, one may be stigmatized and sometimes even visited with violence in school or on the street, whether or not one is actually gay or lesbian.

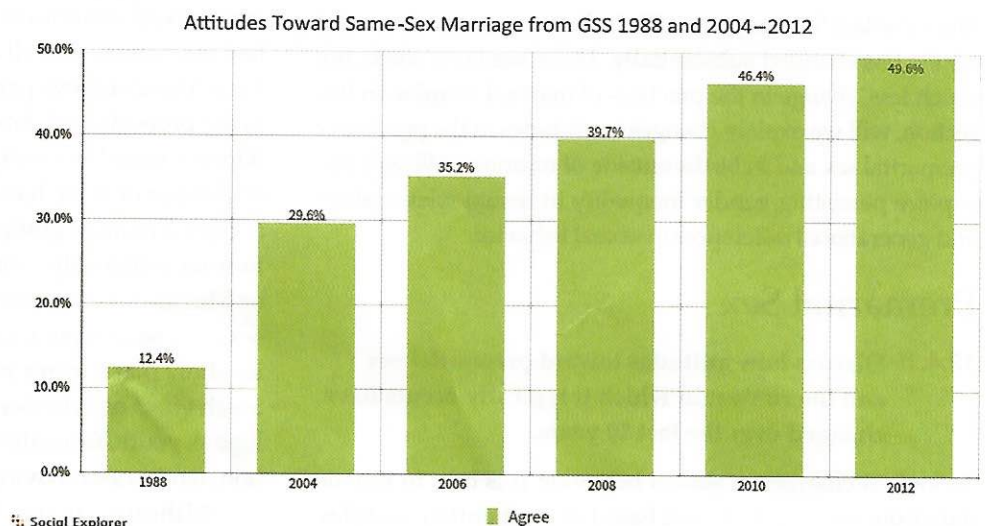
Despite this grim picture of what a young person growing up as a member of a sexual minority has to face, the scene has changed substantially over the last few decades, due in part to a social movement for gay rights (Armstrong 2002) and to a change in public opinion toward more tolerance of sexual diversity. The gay rights movement has sought to make gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people appear as individual human beings rather than as negative stereotypes, to support legislation against various sorts of discrimination based on sexual orientation, and to get rid of legislation that explicitly forbids sexuality or marriage between those of the same sex.

Many things have changed in a way more friendly to the lives of sexual minorities. Some states and municipalities have laws against discrimination in employment and housing on the basis of sexual orientation, although there are no such federal laws. The U.S. military dropped its ban on service by gay and lesbian soldiers in 2011. Most colleges and universities have lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) centers providing services and a place to socialize. Many cities have such centers as well. Some high schools have Gay/Straight Alliance groups. There are newspapers and magazines directed at the LGBTQ community. There are neighborhoods, sometimes called "gayborhoods," with high concentrations of sexual minorities in one area of some large cities. Some gay college and professional athletes have "come out"; in 2013, veteran NBA player Jason Collins announced he was gay, and in 2014 Michael

Sam was the first openly gay football player to be drafted by an NFL team.

Yet these changes have brought about a strong backlash. Some groups oppose public acceptance of gay lifestyles because they challenge their members' ideas of gender and family. Some opposition stems from religious teachings that homosexuality is wrong. Other religions practice tolerance of same-sex love and sex. These conflicting views have coalesced in recent political controversies over same-sex marriage. In 1993, a state court in Hawaii said that the state law limiting marriage to unions of one man and one woman was unconstitutional unless the state could show some compelling reason for it. In response to the possibility that the law would be struck down by the court, political mobilization led to passage of an amendment to the Hawaii's state constitution stating that the legislature could limit marriage to male-female couples. Opponents of gay marriage, afraid that other states would get rid of their restrictions of marriage to male-female couples, lobbied Congress to pass a law stating that states prohibiting gay marriage would not have to recognize the gay marriages allowed in other states. (Prior to this most states had recognized marriages contracted in other states, so that, for example, a couple married in California who moved to Oregon would be considered married in Oregon as well.) In 1996, Congress adopted the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). It said that for purposes of any federal benefits that hinge on marriage, marriage refers only to the legal union of one man with one woman. Under this law, for example, partners in a lesbian or gay male marriage do not have the same right to pass property from one to the other upon death without paying any federal estate tax, a right enshrined in federal law for married couples. In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *U.S. v. Windsor* that DOMA violated the U.S. Constitution; this ruling

Figure 12.8 Percentage of Americans Believing Same-Sex Couples Should be Able to Marry, 1998–2012



SOURCE: Social Explorer (www.socialexplorer.com) based on data from American National Election Studies 2012 survey.