

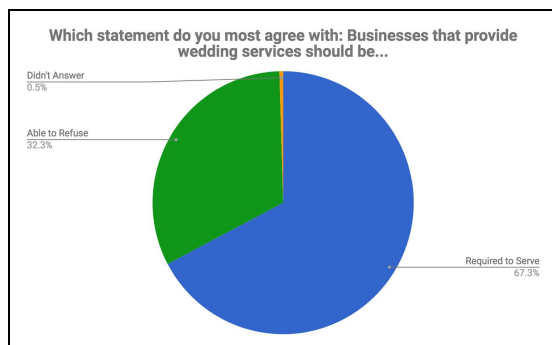


## Study On Wedding Service Refusal

*Where Wedding Vendors Stand on Religious Liberty vs Nondiscrimination<sup>1</sup>*

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### Majority of Wedding Professionals (67%) believe businesses should be required to serve same-sex couples



In [2014](#), and again in [2016](#), the Pew Research Center found that [an almost equal split of Americans believed that wedding-related businesses should be required to serve same-sex couples](#) (49%) as should be allowed to refuse services for religious reasons (48%). A valuable finding, but one that does not provide key insight into what wedding professionals--the group of small business owners most directly impacted by this question--think about the question of religious liberty vs. nondiscrimination.

Although the Supreme Court may have settled the [question of marriage equality in 2015](#), it, like the wedding industry itself, did not resolve the simmering debate about whether or not wedding professionals should be compelled to serve same-sex couples if they oppose same-sex marriage. With the *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. the Colorado Civil Rights Commission* decision pending at the Supreme Court, this study asked wedding professionals to weigh in on the question the Pew Research Center asked: “Should wedding-related businesses be able to refuse to provide services to same-sex couples based on religious objections or required to provide those services to same-sex couples as they would all other couples?”

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<sup>1</sup> Phrasing “Religious Liberty vs Nondiscrimination” references the Pew Research Center’s Survey of U.S. Adults (Aug 16 - Sept 12, 2016), [Where The Public Stands on Religious Liberty vs Nondiscrimination](#).

## Summary

- A majority of wedding professionals (67%) believe that wedding-related businesses should be required to serve same-sex couples; a minority of vendors (32%) support service refusal.

### Majority of wedding professionals believe businesses should be required to serve same-sex couples

Where Wedding Vendors Stand on "Religious Liberty vs Nondiscrimination"

Study On Wedding Service Refusal. MBKInsights / Equality Institute (May 4-17, 2018)

| Category (N= )             | Able to refuse | Required To Serve | Didn't Answer |
|----------------------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|
| All Respondents (654)      | 32%            | 67%               | <1%           |
| "Artistic Pros" (189)      | 41%            | 58%               | 1%            |
| Officiants (128)           | 23%            | 77%               |               |
| Wedding Planners (139)     | 38%            | 61%               |               |
| DJs (57)                   | 61%            | 39%               |               |
| Wedding Photographers (82) | 35%            | 65%               | <1%           |
| New England (35)           | 13%            | 87%               |               |
| West South Central (60)    | 48%            | 52%               |               |
| East North Central (60)    | 25%            | 75%               |               |
| Middle Atlantic (82)       | 41%            | 59%               |               |
| South Atlantic (132)       | 31%            | 69%               |               |
| Pacific (123)              | 32%            | 68%               |               |

- Wedding professionals (67%) are much more likely than the general population ([49%](#)) to believe wedding-related businesses should be required to serve same-sex couples.
- Eighty-five percent (85%) of wedding professionals report that they have provided products or services to a same-sex couple. Only 14 percent of respondents say that they have never done so, and 1 percent aren't sure.
- Wedding professionals who have provided services or products to a same-sex couple are more likely to support the requirement that wedding-related business serve same-sex couples as they would all other couples. Conversely, wedding professionals who have not provided services or products to same-sex couples are more likely to say that businesses should be able to refuse services.

- Officiants, wedding planners and photographers/videographers are more likely to support the requirement to serve than the opportunity to refuse to serve same-sex couples. DJs are more likely to believe that wedding-related businesses should be able to refuse service.
- Wedding businesses based in New England (ME, NH, VT, MA, RI, CT) overwhelmingly support the requirement to serve (87%). Those based in West South Central US (TX, OK, LA, AR) are most closely split, with a slim majority supporting the requirement to serve (52%).
- A majority (58%) of wedding-related services that involve some artistry (photography/videography; florists; lighting/decor designers; invitations; DJs; ceremony music; bands; and wedding cakes) support the requirement to serve same-sex couples.
- One third of all respondents opted to leave an open-ended comment. Of those, 21 percent reinforced their opinion in favor of service refusal and 40 percent reinforced their opinion in favor of a requirement to serve all couples. Notably, the 25 percent of those respondents commented that, though they support the right to refuse to serve a same-sex couple, they also think same-sex couples should be served.

## Methodology

This [MBKinsights](#) / [Equality Institute](#) survey was conducted online via SurveyMonkey from May 4 - 17, 2018 among a national sample of wedding professionals through social media and industry association recruitment. Respondents (N= 654) represent more than 20 major categories of wedding service offerings from nine U.S. regions representing all 50 states. The survey, which consisted of six questions, was developed to mirror the structure of the question of “religious liberty vs. nondiscrimination” on the Pew Research Center’s report in order to provide a comparison of opinions of U.S.-based wedding vendors to the general population of adults in the United States. All questions required a response, with the exception of an optional comment box (Q6) and the central question (Q3) -- “Should wedding-related businesses be able to refuse to provide services to same-sex couples based on religious objections or required to provide those services to same-sex couples as they would all other couples?”

## Background

On June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court of the United States granted same-sex couples the fundamental right to marry in all states when its 5-4 decision settled the case of [Obergefell v Hodges](#). The decision punctuated the steady advancement of legal marriage opportunities for same-sex couples in the U.S., which began at the state level in Massachusetts in 2004, and included a dramatic assist with the federal recognition of marriage in [Windsor v. the United States](#) in 2013.

While advocates and lawyers were debating the right to marriage and its benefits at the state, appellate and federal level, the wedding industry was supporting and celebrating the unions, ceremonies and marriages of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) couples who were “coming out” in increasing numbers to celebrate their life-long commitments in the company of family and friends.

Economic promise, particularly with the increasing frequency of same-sex weddings coinciding with the market downturn in the fall of 2008, may have garnered the attention of some wedding professionals, but many chose to serve same-sex couples as a means of supporting and celebrating love in honor of their clients, friends, family, and colleagues. Thus, well-before the *Obergefell* decision, the small, dedicated group of professionals who began openly serving same-sex couples in the early 2000s grew to include the majority of professionals in the industry. In 2011, for example, a [WeddingWire and GayWeddings collaboration launched an industry-leading vendor directory of 20,000 wedding professionals](#), which grew exponentially to [more than 150,000 wedding professionals](#) by 2016. Further, the willingness of wedding professionals to work with same-sex couples was well-represented by a 2015 survey by WeddingWire, which revealed that [the vast majority of the industry -- 89% of its respondents -- reported being “ready, willing and able” to serve same-sex couples](#).

In 2014 and again in 2016, the Pew Research Center found that [an almost equal split of Americans believed that wedding-related businesses should be required to serve same-sex couples](#) (49%) as should be allowed to refuse services for religious reasons (48%). A valuable finding, but with the *Masterpiece Cakeshop* case on the immediate horizon, this study more narrowly asks wedding professionals -- the segment of the population most immediately impacted by the ruling -- to weigh in on the question: “Should wedding-related businesses be able to refuse to provide services to same-sex couples based on religious objections or be required to provide those services to serve same-sex couples as they would all other couples?”

Many wedding professionals identify strongly as small business owners and seek education at national, regional and local industry conferences to learn how to better serve same-sex couples. Larger national online wedding planning resources and corporate groups (like [Marriott International](#) and [Hilton Worldwide](#)) have openly embraced inclusive policies. [WeddingWire](#), a global online marketplace, signed the [Human Rights Campaign and Steptoe & Johnson’s amicus brief](#), supporting the arguments of the respondents in the *Masterpiece Cakeshop* case: the Colorado Civil Rights Commission and Charlie Davis and David Mullins. It stands to reason that wedding professionals and the other related national organizations that are most immediately impacted by the question of denial of service or a requirement to serve have an important perspective to share on the matter.

In the fall of 2017, MBK Insights conducted a study on [Representation in Wedding-Related Media](#) with SurveyMonkey Audience of more than 1,400 U. S. Adults seeking more clarity on attitudes about inclusion in the wedding market. The question of service refusal (“Do you think wedding professionals [i.e., photographers, planners, florists, etc.] or wedding venues should be allowed to

refuse to serve same-sex couples?”), which was asked in a more general manner than the Pew question, revealed that a majority of Americans (60%) and wedding professionals (64%) believe that businesses should be required to serve same-sex couples.

The question of religious liberty vs nondiscrimination has continued to be debated in the court of public opinion. Meanwhile Americans, and especially, wedding vendors and LGBTQ couples, eagerly await the decision for [\*Masterpiece Cakeshop v. the Colorado Civil Rights Commission\*](#) (arguments were heard at the Supreme Court on December 5, 2017) to learn more about what legal guidance may impact, respectively, how they conduct their business or what they might expect if a wedding vendor refuses to serve them.

## Results

A majority of wedding professionals (67%) believe that wedding-related businesses should be required to serve same-sex couples; only 32% support service refusal.

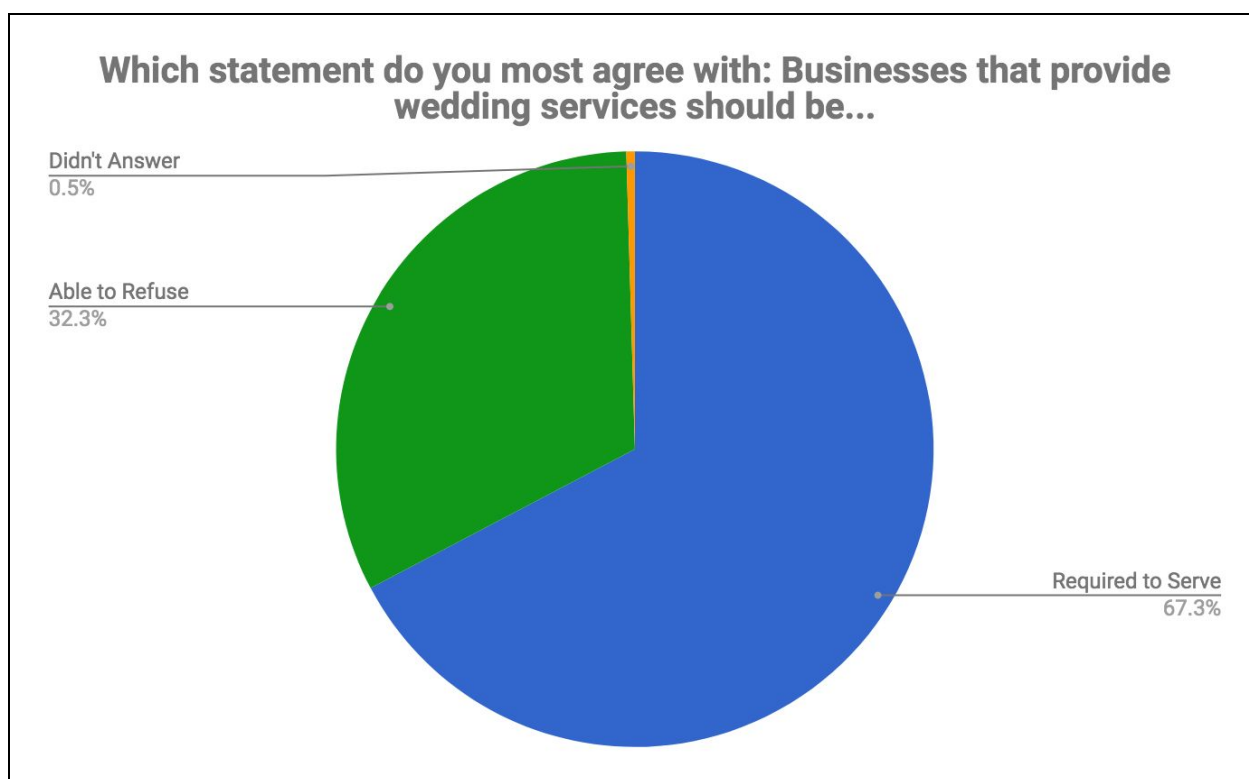


Fig. 1. Source: MBKinsights/Equality Institute. Study On Wedding Service Refusal (May, 2018).

Roughly 7 in 10 wedding professionals (67%) believe that “businesses that provide wedding services should be required to provide those services to same-sex couples as they would any other couple” (See Fig. 1). This result (determined by a larger sample size, N=654) is slightly higher than [the result of 64 percent of wedding professionals](#) favoring a service requirement in the fall of 2017 (Survey of Wedding-Related Representation, N=197). Only 3 in 10 wedding professionals (32%) responded that they believe that businesses that provide wedding services “should be able to refuse to provide those services to same-sex couples if the business owner has religious objections.”

Wedding professionals (67%) are much more likely than the general population (49%) to believe wedding-related businesses should be required to serve same-sex couples.

Wedding professionals (67%) who responded in this survey are much more inclined than the general population surveyed by the Pew Research Center in 2016 (49%) to say that businesses that provide wedding services should not required to provide services to same-sex couples as they would to any other couple (see Fig. 2 and 3). Conversely, a minority of wedding pros (32%) believe that businesses that provide wedding services “should be able to refuse to provide those services to same-sex couples if the business owner has religious objections,” whereas almost half of the general population (48%) supported service refusal.

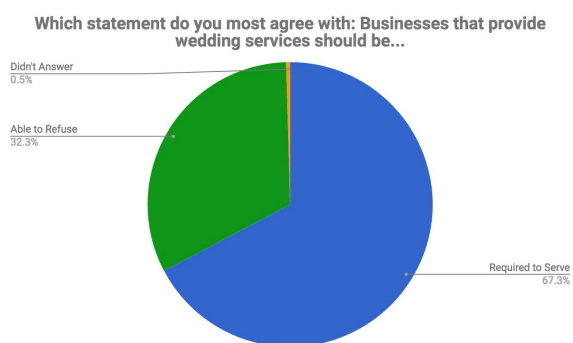
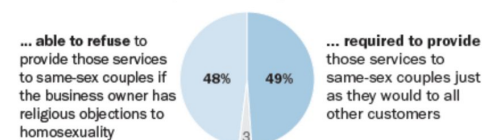


Fig. 2. Source: Study On Wedding Service Refusal (May, 2018).

#### U.S. public divided over whether businesses must provide wedding services for same-sex couples

If you had to choose, which comes closest to your view?

Businesses that provide **wedding services** should be ...



Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Aug. 16-Sept. 12, 2016.  
"Where the Public Stands on Religious Liberty vs. Nondiscrimination"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Fig. 3. Source: Pew Research Center (Aug 16-Sep 12, 2016).

Eighty-five percent (85%) of wedding professionals report that they have provided products or services to a same-sex couple. Only 14% of respondents say that they have never done so, and 1% aren't sure.

The vast majority of respondents (85%) report having worked with at least one same-sex couple (see Fig. 4). Fewer than 2 percent are unsure, most likely because they offer a product for which they do not interact directly with their clients or do not necessarily know the gender of the partner of the client. Examples might include stationers who create a shower invitation, a florist who offers a set of boutonnieres, a pastry chef who provides a wedding cake or desserts through a caterer, an event equipment rental company who provides tables and chairs, etc.

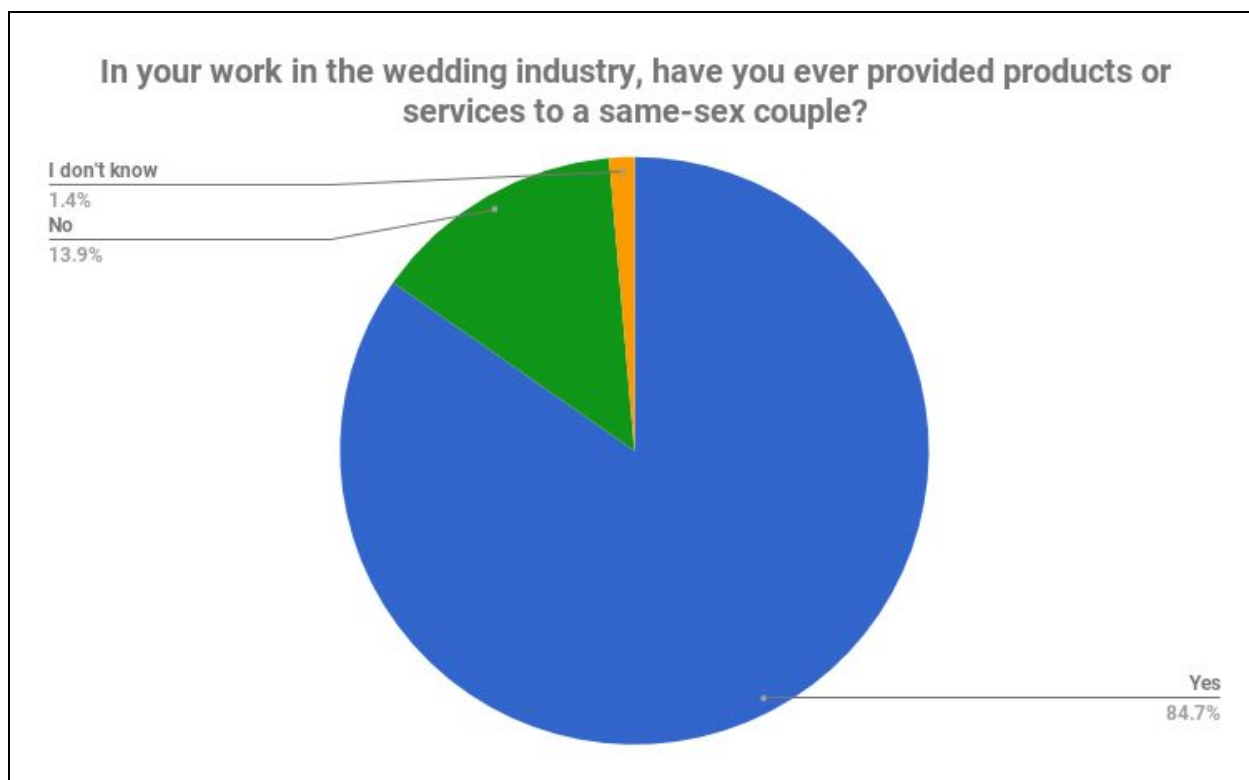


Fig. 4. Source: MBKinsights/Equality Institute. Study On Wedding Service Refusal (May, 2018).



Wedding professionals who have provided services or products to a same-sex couple are more likely to support the requirement that wedding-related business serve same-sex couples as they would all other couples.

Direct experience and interpersonal relationship continues to suggest an increase in understanding and support (see Fig. 5). Wedding professionals who have not worked with a same-sex couple (whether it is by choice or circumstance is unclear) are more likely to say that they believe a business should be able to refuse service to a same-sex couple if the business owner has a religious objection (64%) than to agree that business should be required to serve a same-sex couple (36%). Those who have provided a service to a same-sex couple (73%), however, are more likely to support the requirement that a wedding-related business be required to serve same-sex couples. Those who were unsure about having served a same-sex couple in the past were closely split on the question.

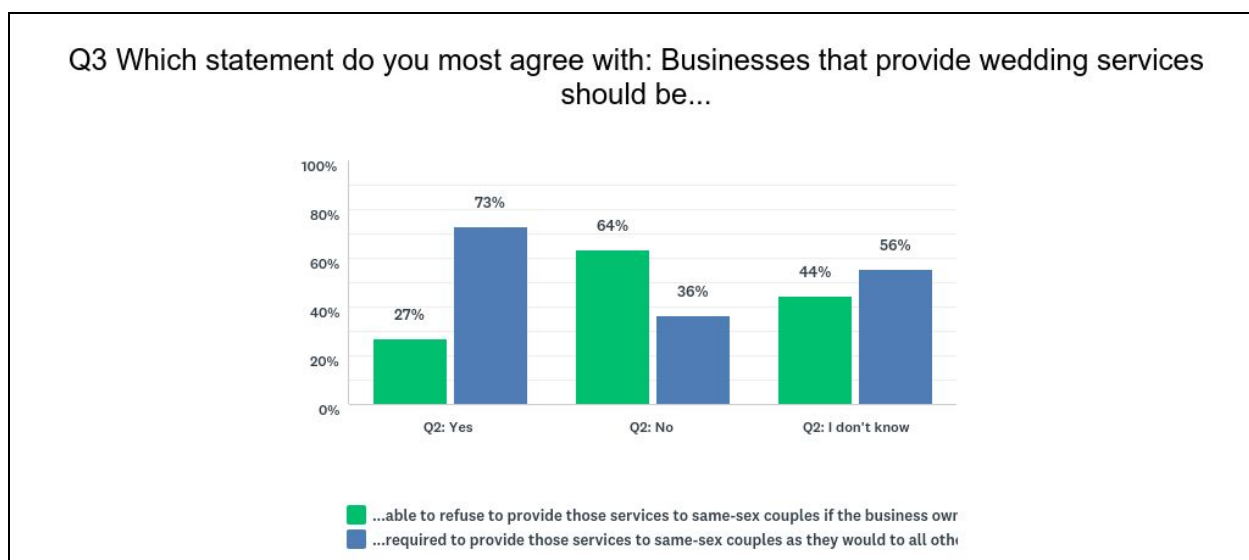


Fig. 5. Source: MBKinsights/Equality Institute. Study On Wedding Service Refusal (May, 2018).

Officiants, wedding planners and photographers/videographers are more likely to support the requirement to serve than the opportunity to refuse to serve same-sex couples. DJs are more likely to believe that wedding-related businesses should be able to refuse service.



Officiants (77%), wedding planners (61%) and wedding photographers (65%) are the professionals most likely to be most intimately involved with the couple during the planning and ‘day of’ service process. And, a majority of respondents from each of these categories indicated that they support the requirement that businesses serve same-sex couples (see Fig. 6).

DJs, whose services are generally essential to receptions are, as a group, more likely to believe that wedding-related businesses should be able to refuse service (61%). This finding raises interesting questions, which should be explored in greater depth. DJing, as a rule, is known as a largely male-dominated industry. [The DJ List](#), for example, lists its membership by gender as 76% male, 24% female. The Pew Research Center found that a [majority of men \(60%\) support same-sex marriage](#), but slightly less than women do (64%). Is it possible that small business owners who are men might have a different lens through which they consider questions of their business autonomy compared to women? Is there another characteristic or belief system shared by wedding DJs that can explain this trend? A larger sample and broader range of questions than asked in this survey might reveal more insights into why DJs have responded to the question so differently than other categories of wedding professionals.

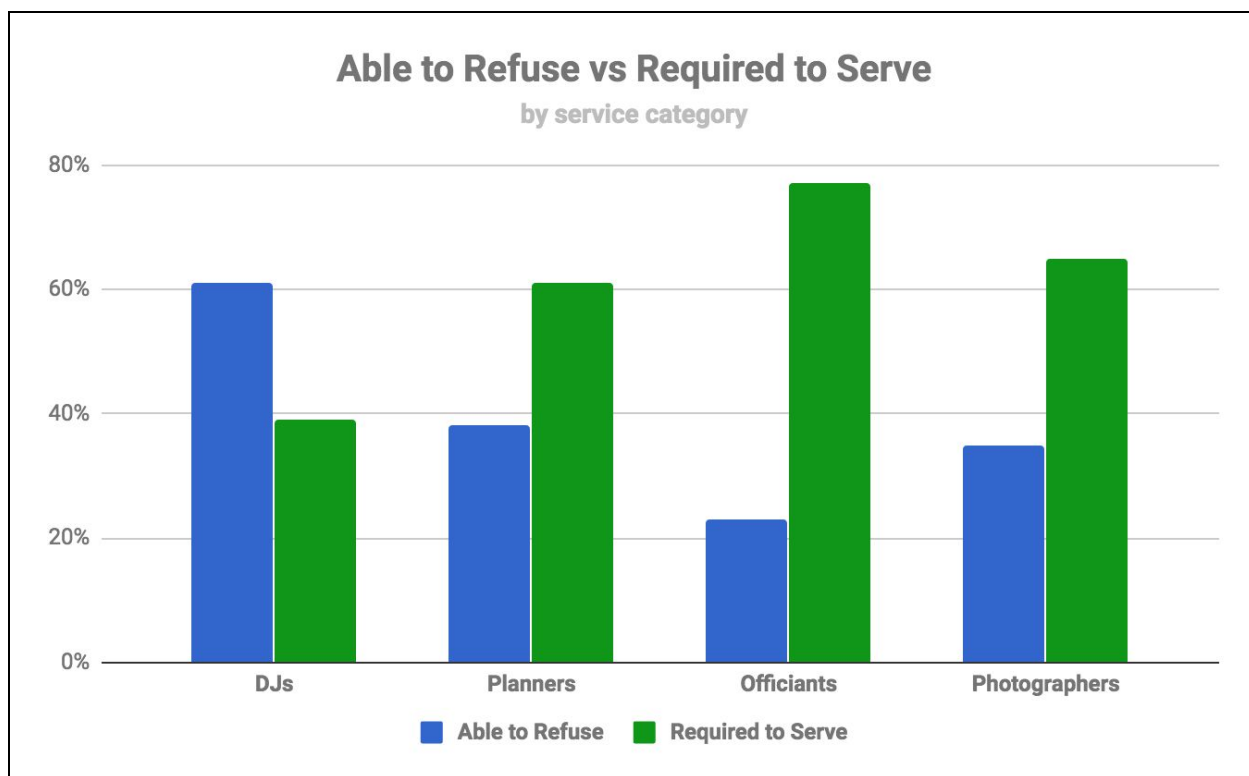


Fig. 6. Source: MBKinsights/Equality Institute. Study On Wedding Service Refusal (May, 2018).

Wedding businesses based in New England (ME, NH, VT, MA, RI, CT) overwhelmingly support equal access to service (87%), and those based in West South Central US (TX, OK, LA, AR) are most closely split, with a slim majority supporting the requirement to serve (52%).

In the [Survey of Wedding-Related Representation](#) (2017), respondents from New England were the strongest supporters of the notion that business should be required to serve same-sex couples (see Fig. 7). Although the sample size for New England in this survey was relatively small (N=35), the trend appears to be holding in this study as well. Similarly, respondents from West South Central also offer a consistent value judgment across studies; in 2017, 49 percent said that they did not support service refusal and, in this study, 52 percent say that they support a requirement to serve. (Note: the Survey of Wedding-Related Representation and the current survey offered variations on the question of service refusal thus the inconsistency in the framing language.)

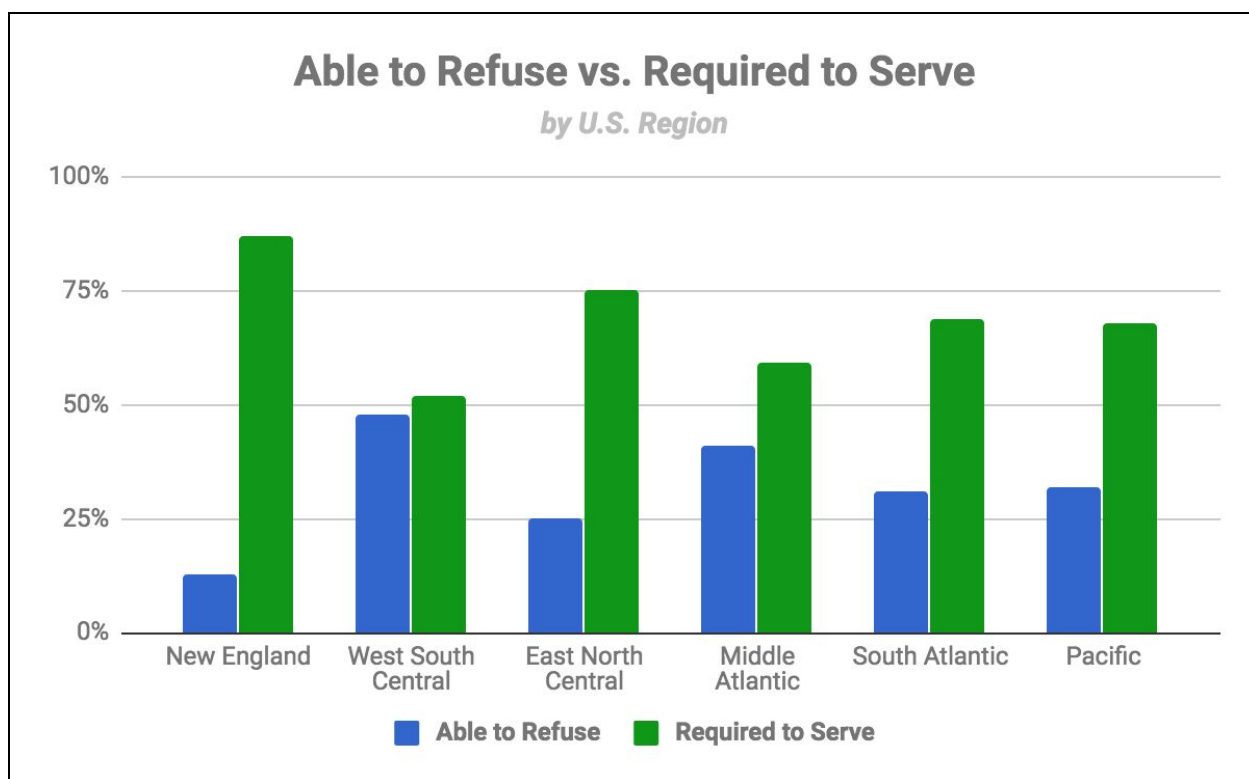


Fig. 7. Source: MBKinsights/Equality Institute. Study On Wedding Service Refusal (May, 2018).

A majority (58%) of wedding-related services that involve some “artistry” support the requirement to serve same-sex couples.

Determination of which wedding products or services may be labeled as art is a subjective--and potentially, depending on the outcome of the *Masterpiece Cakeshop* case, a legal--judgment. In order to shed some light on the collective opinion of those professionals most likely to consider their service offering as “artistic,” the following categories were grouped together: Photography / Videography; Florist; Lighting/Decor Designer; Invitations; DJs; Ceremony Music; Bands; and, in the spirit of Jack Phillips’ claim, Wedding Cakes (see Fig. 8). (*Note: this survey included categories labeled “Unique Services” and “Other,” so there may be some wedding professionals who provide one of the ‘artistry’ services listed above, but have not identified themselves within that category.*)

Even with the categories stacked with those who perform artistic services (N=189), the majority of vendors from this group (58%) responded that they believe that businesses should be required to serve same-sex couples as they would all other couples. Forty-one percent (41%) felt that businesses should be able to refuse to serve same-sex couples based on religious objection and 1 percent skipped the question.

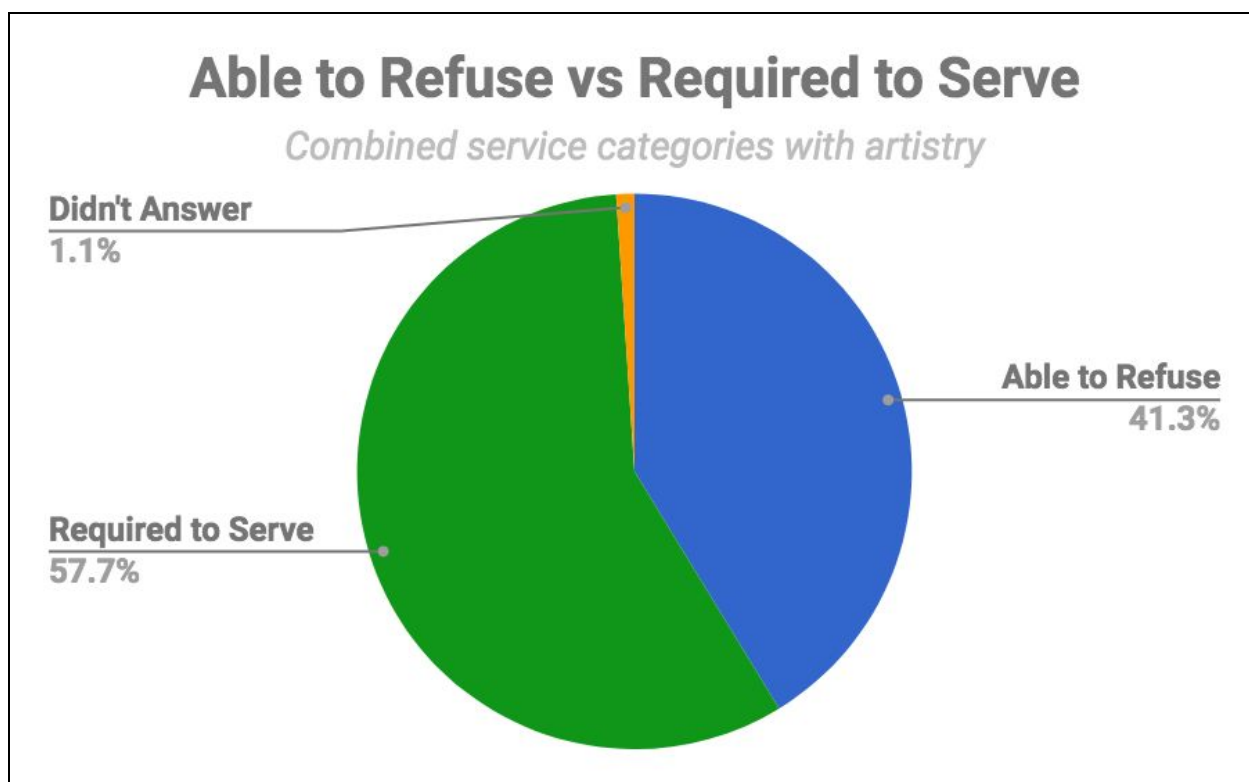


Fig. 8. Source: MBKinsights/Equality Institute. Study On Wedding Service Refusal (May, 2018).

One third of all respondents opted to leave an open-ended comment. Of those, 1 in 5 reinforced their opinion in favor of service refusal and 2 in 5 reinforced their opinion in favor of a requirement to serve all couples.

This survey was constructed to ask respondents to “choose a side” on a question that is complicated for many; especially for wedding professionals who, as a group, tend to appreciate having wide latitude to book business with clients with whom they feel they are a creative and efficient match. Even so, wedding professionals seem to have increasing clarity on their feelings around service refusal when it comes to religious objections and serving same-sex couples.

Respondents had the voluntary opportunity to share an additional comment at the end of the survey. In reviewing the 224 comments submitted, several patterns emerged and the replies were categorized accordingly (see Fig. 9):

- 1) Those who reinforced their opinion in favor of a requirement to serve (40%)
- 2) Those who reinforced their opinion in favor of the ability to refuse to serve (21%)
- 3) Those who revealed that they both supported the ability to refuse to serve, and also think that same-sex couples shouldn't be denied service (25%)
- 4) Other (14%)

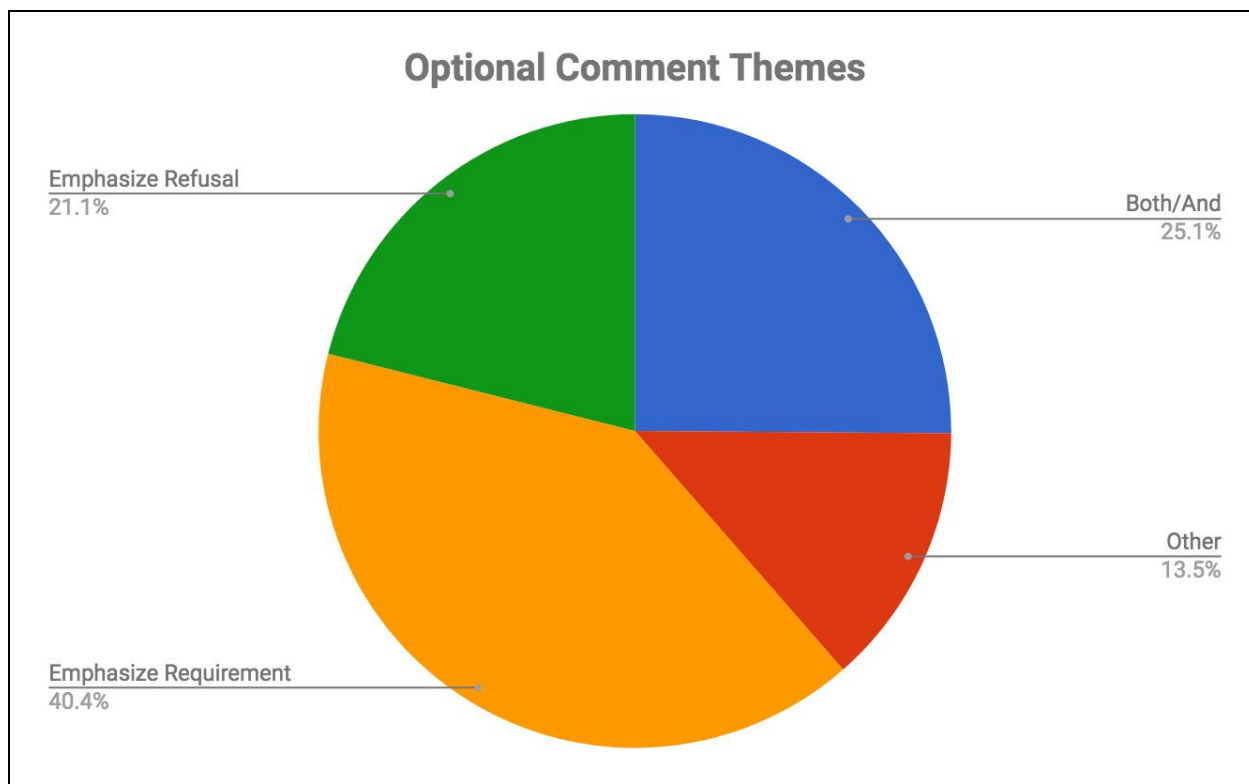


Fig.9. Source: MBKinsights/Equality Institute. Study On Wedding Service Refusal (May, 2018).

Examples of statements wedding vendors who restated their support for a requirement to serve are:

- *“I believe that if you serve the public, you serve the public. There is no grey area.”*
- *“Wedding vendors should AT LEAST be compelled to comply with their state laws regarding discrimination.”*
- *“If your business is ‘open to the public,’ you do not get to discriminate against that public. Offer your services in a buying club or through your religious affiliation if you want to pick and choose who you serve.”*
- *“I don’t think we should be allowed to refuse service based off of race, religion, gender, sexual identity, or sexual preferences. Refusing a same sex couple is akin to refusing a Muslim couple or a black couple and that’s not ok.”*

Examples of statements wedding vendors who restated their support for the ability to refuse service are:

- *“Although I personally do not believe in same sex marriage, all people have the right to make their own choice. If a business does not want to do business with ‘any person’ this is their right.”*
- *“As a business owner, you should be allowed to choose what you sell and to whom you sell it.”*

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A quarter of those who opted to comment explained that they support a right to refuse service due to religious belief, but also say that they do not agree with discrimination against same-sex couples.

Wedding professionals, many of whom work long hours in a very competitive industry, tend to appreciate having wide latitude to book business with clients with whom they feel they are a “good match.” These same wedding professionals tend also to be open-minded and more concerned with the bottom-line than judging others. Thus, there is a segment of respondents who gravitate to a “both/and” approach to the question of service refusal.

The [Survey of Wedding Representation](#) offers more detail into this nuance, but the theme also emerged in the optional comments of this study. A quarter of those who opted to comment (25%) say that they both support a right to refuse service due to religious belief, and also think that same-sex couples shouldn’t be discriminated against.

Examples of statements from wedding vendors who approached the question as a both/and proposition include:

- *“While I personally would not refuse services to any group, I do believe that a small business owner has the right to refuse service based on their own beliefs.”*
  - *“As a business owner, I should be able to refuse services to ANY customer who walks in my door. Would I personally deny service to a same sex couple, NEVER!”*
  - *“I have yet to provide wedding services for a same-sex couple. I look forward to the opportunity to do so. However, I don't think a business should be 'forced' to do business with same-sex couples if they are uncomfortable with doing so. I think this creates an animosity that ultimately reduces the level of service the customer should receive when dealing with wedding vendors.”*
  - *“Although we are a gay-owned company we support freedom however misguided it may be.”*
  - *“We should have the right to choose. Not every couple is the right fit for us, gay or straight, black or white it doesn't matter to me, but I want the right to decide myself who I will be a good fit for in my creative process.”*
  - *“I don't condone bigotry, but I believe in religious freedom.”*
  - *“That business has the right to refuse service, but the couple has a right to share their experiences and hopefully the market will no longer support people who refuse service. I think it's shameful to exclude any couple and I hope the time comes when the rest of us run the bigots out of business.”*
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## Conclusions

The question of wedding-related service refusal was not settled by the wedding industry or the courts with the advent of marriage equality in 2015. If anything, debate became more heated through media reports of vocal opponents on both sides of the question. Meanwhile, the wedding industry and the majority of the general population have quietly come to expect that same-sex couples can and should be served when it comes to wedding planning.

In fact, this study found that a majority of wedding professionals (67%) believe that businesses should be required to serve same-sex couples as they would all other couples. Further, even those

who may have voted in this survey for the ability to refuse to serve a same-sex couples based on a religious objection, also show support for a non-discriminatory environment for same-sex couples.

Because this survey was limited to six questions and 14 days of online recruitment, there are some limits to the conclusions that can be drawn. Based on the survey construction, there is not enough information to reveal differences in response by individual state, gender, religious affiliation, political party or race. A larger sample of respondents in each service category might also have provided additional insights.

Even with those limitations, however, an enlightening conclusion can be drawn from this study. Wedding professionals--the group of small business owners most directly impacted by the question of service refusal--feel much more strongly than the general public about service refusal. Given its collective druthers, the wedding industry prefers that businesses that offer wedding-related services be required to serve same-sex couples as they would all other couples.

*For more information on this report, please contact [Kathryn Hamm](#) or [Bernadette Smith](#).*

## About MBKinsights

[MBKinsights](#) seeks to better understand and explain overlooked trends and attitudes. Analyst and educator [Kathryn Hamm](#) is best known for her work in the wedding industry, where she writes, speaks and consults with wedding professionals about LGTBQ wedding trends, multicultural inclusion, best practices when serving today's couples, and how to think creatively when considering the modern market. She is co-author of **The New Art of Capturing Love: The Essential Guide to Lesbian and Gay Wedding Photography**; Publisher of [GayWeddings](#); and an Education Expert and Diversity & Inclusion Specialist for [WeddingWire](#), the leading online global marketplace serving the \$200+ billion wedding, corporate, and social events industry.

## About Equality Institute

Equality Institute provides turnkey, situational, interactive training and consulting solutions to enhance team members' communication, sales and customer service to employees and clients who are LGBTQ. Bernadette Smith, founder of [Equality Institute](#), is an award-winning author of three books about LGBTQ weddings, most recently **The Business of Gay Weddings: A Guide for Wedding Professionals**. In 2004, Bernadette started [14 Stories](#), a wedding planning firm with an LGBTQ specialty. She then took this passion for equality and started Equality Institute to share her expertise with her peers in the global wedding, travel, and hospitality industries.